



Joint area review

Slough Children's Services Authority Area

**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
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Introduction

1. This joint area review was conducted using the arrangements required under Section 20 of the Children Act 2004. It was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of eleven inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), the Adult Learning Inspectorate and the Audit Commission. The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the inspection of children's services*.

2. The review was linked to the contemporaneous corporate assessment of the local council by the Audit Commission and its findings are represented in the relevant part of the corporate assessment report.

3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in the Slough area and evaluates the way local services, taken together, contribute to their well-being. Joint area reviews focus on the extent to which children and young people are healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and are well prepared to secure economic well-being.

4. The review evaluates the collective contribution made to each outcome for children and young people by relevant services in the area. It also judges the contributions made by the council's services overall and, specifically, its education and children's social care services. Particular attention is given to joint action by local services on behalf of those groups of children and young people who are vulnerable to poor outcomes. Two such groups are covered in detail: children and young people who are looked after by the council; and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

5. The review took place in two stages consisting in total of three weeks over a six-week period. The first stage reviewed all existing evidence including:

- self-assessment undertaken by local public service providers;
- a survey of children and young people;
- performance data;
- the findings of the contemporaneous inspections of the youth service;
- planning documents;
- information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision;
- findings from an inspection of the youth offending team; and
- briefings from staff within inspectorates, commissions and other public bodies in contact with local providers.

6. The second stage included inspection fieldwork. This included studies of how far local services have improved outcomes for a small sample of children and young people, some of whom have the most complex needs, and a study of provision in one neighbourhood in Chalvey. It also included gathering evidence on ten key judgements, selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. This included discussions with elected members of the local authority and their equivalents in other public agencies, officers from these agencies, service users and community representatives.

Context

7. Slough unitary authority lies to the west of London in one of the largest commercial and industrial development areas in Europe. It has a population of around 119,000 of whom around 42% comprise members of minority ethnic communities, largely of Indian and Pakistani heritage. Slough has the highest percentage of Muslim and Hindu residents in the South East and the highest percentage of Sikh residents in the country. The area is increasingly home to new arrivals, asylum-seekers and refugees from more than 70 different countries. More than one quarter of the population of Slough are children and young people (around 33,000). Around half of children and young people in Slough schools are from minority ethnic communities. The proportion of primary-aged and secondary-aged pupils in maintained schools whose first language is other than English is considerably higher than national averages.

8. The borough is largely a compact urban environment. It is made up of a range of different types of neighbourhoods, including mixed communities, communities with high minority ethnic populations and communities that are predominantly white. Deprivation varies neighbourhood by neighbourhood within the borough. There are mixed and more affluent neighbourhoods to the east of the town and in the outer edge, such as Upton and Langley St Mary. By contrast, Chalvey, Britwell and Baylis and Stoke are among the most deprived wards in the South East. There are also some additional smaller pockets of deprivation. According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (2004), Slough ranked 88th most deprived council out of 149. The proportion of children entitled to free school meals is in line with national averages.

9. Some of the fabric of the town is poor, and social and privately rented housing is in need of greater investment. A fifth of dependent children and young people live with lone parents, compared to the national average of around 6%. Household and personal crime rates within Slough are in line with the national averages. However, the fear of crime is slightly lower than average.

10. The area is economically buoyant. Despite this, many Slough residents are in low-paid employment, often outside the borough, while a high proportion of those employed in Slough are not local residents. The workforce is multi-

skilled but there is a shortage of higher level skills, especially among younger residents, arising as a result of a shift from manufacturing industries towards the hi-tech, service and distribution sectors. The area also has a recruitment and retention problem of key workers across education, social care and health services. Around a third of residents have limited or no qualifications and basic literacy and numeracy skills are lower than the national average.

11. The pattern of ill health and disease in Slough is very typical of a deprived urban population, with high rates of circulatory diseases, diabetes and significant levels of mental health problems. Life expectancy is lower than the national average and the averages for other areas of Berkshire. For children and young people, the main manifestation of socio-economic disadvantage is a poor high-fat diet, which leads to childhood obesity. Data about vulnerable children indicate a high incidence of substance misuse within their families.

12. The authority maintains 50 schools of which ten are denominational. There are 18 primary, four junior, five infant and five nursery schools. Of the 11 secondary schools seven are non-selective. The four selective schools have sixth forms. There are two schools for pupils with special educational needs and two pupil referral units. There is one single-sex secondary school for girls and all other schools are mixed. The girls' school attracts a high percentage of Muslim pupils and offers choice and diversity for parents. Nevertheless, its existence leads to a disproportionate number of boys in the other non-selective secondary schools. Well over a quarter of children move outside of the borough for their secondary education. Just under a quarter of pupils attending Slough secondary schools are from outside of the borough, and most of these attend the four grammar schools. There are proportionately fewer looked after children than is the case nationally; however, a large proportion of these children and young people are placed and educated outside the borough. Post 16 education and training is provided largely by six secondary schools, the local further education college and a number of work-based training providers.

13. A local strategic partnership comprises all the main public service providers and representatives from the business community. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership operates within this overall framework. The 14–19 strategy is overseen by a group of representatives from the Slough Association of Secondary Heads, Connexions Berkshire, Thames Valley University, East Berkshire College, the Learning and Skills Council Berkshire and Slough local authority.

14. Slough is served by a unitary local authority. The council changed political control in June 2004, and the new administration comprising a mix of Liberals, Liberal Democrats and Independent members, working with the Conservative group, has formed a 'Rainbow Alliance'. There is a lead member for children's services. In January 2005, alongside a major restructuring of council services, all children's services were brought together under a strategic director of education and children's services. The authority has been extremely successful at generating external funding to support priorities and capital projects. A single

primary care trust (PCT) provides health services. The boundaries of the trust are co-terminous with those of the local authority. A single hospital trust serves the area, as well as other neighbouring areas. For policing, Slough comprises the major portion of the Slough and District Police Command Unit.

Summary report

Outcomes for children and young people

15. Outcomes for most children and young people in Slough are good. Most children and young people are healthy. Overall, children and young people are safe and those most at risk are well protected. Most children and young people behave very responsibly and many contribute very positively to school life and to developments in local communities. The educational standards achieved by most children and young people, including looked after children and children with learning difficulties and disabilities, are good overall, although they are lower than the national averages for 11 year olds and in deprived localities such as Chalvey and Britwell. In addition, some Pakistani heritage children and young people and some White heritage boys entitled to free school meals do not do well enough. Most young people are prepared well for working life and the proportion staying on after the age of 16 in full-time education is above the national average. Nevertheless, there is a gap between the skills needed by employers and the skills of young people living in Slough.

The impact of local public services

16. Services are good overall and are having a beneficial effect on improving the outcomes for most children and young people. The local area knows itself well and the findings from this review corroborate the strengths and weaknesses identified in the partnership's self-assessment.

Being healthy

17. The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. Partnership working between agencies is strong and is pursued vigorously to good effect in a number of areas. In particular, healthy lifestyles for children and young people are promoted successfully and real gains have been made in reducing teenage pregnancy. The proportion of schools in Slough achieving awards relating to the Healthy Schools Scheme is high and well ahead of the government target. The need to break the intergenerational cycle of poor health is understood well by all partners. Supporting families, mothers and children to ensure the best possible start in life is integrated fully within plans to develop children's centres and in the well-developed framework for promoting universal child health. Children who are disabled, ill or injured receive expert referrals, and in the main receive timely access to a comprehensive range of assessment and treatment services. There are long waits, however, for speech and language therapy and new ways

of delivering this service are being implemented. Hospital provision for children is good. Those working with children and young people are supported by specialist Children and Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in identifying mental health problems and in making appropriate referrals. However, CAMHS provision does not sufficiently meet the needs of certain users, especially those from black and minority ethnic groups, those in transition and those with substance misuse problems. A satisfactory start has been made in tackling substance misuse but it is too early to see any positive effects from activities.

Staying safe

18. The contribution of services to keeping children and young people safe is good. Those children and young people most at risk are well protected through good interagency collaboration and closely managed procedures. Assessments of risk are carried out thoroughly and promptly. All agencies prioritise child protection and ensure members of staff are checked appropriately before they come into contact with children. Effective measures have been taken to reduce vacancy rates among social care staff and to ensure continuity and consistency of support for the most vulnerable. A range of effective family support services helps to safeguard children and to maintain them within their own and extended families. All children in need of protection are allocated a qualified social worker and well-targeted action is reducing safely the numbers of children and young people on the child protection register. Successful systems are in place to identify the whereabouts of all children. A range of good quality information is provided to children and their carers to help identify and deal with risks. Plans and key information on individual children within some case files are not sufficiently comprehensive, accessible or up-to-date.

Enjoying and achieving

19. The contribution of services to helping children and young people enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good. The local authority and its partners place a high importance on children and young people enjoying and achieving. The quality of provision in the early years is very good, in secondary schools it is mainly good and in primary schools it is satisfactory overall. Support for schools and for pupils is mostly good. In particular, excellent support is provided to improve the lives of young carers, pupils with behaviour difficulties at Key Stage 3 and some young people who arrive in Slough with very little knowledge of English. There is, however, too much variability in the quality of teaching in some primary schools and scope to improve standards of attainment for some minority groups. The provision for children and young people educated other than at school is innovative and is helping a number of older children with behavioural problems to achieve well. Despite school places in secondary schools being very tight, the majority of secondary-aged young people moving to Slough are placed quickly and appropriately. Nevertheless, the support offered to traveller children without a school place is insufficiently integrated into the work of the local authority.

There is a good range of recreational activities and voluntary learning that is accessible to most children and young people. Parents are mostly well supported, with the new children's centres, in particular, helping families to understand the opportunities available to their children and how best to access them. A significant minority of parents from hard-to-reach groups do not receive sufficient face-to-face support.

Making a positive contribution

20. The contribution of services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. The extent to which children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision-making on issues that affect their own lives closely is good, but there are more limited opportunities for them to engage in democratic processes or to influence the work of the council. Children and young people are very well supported in developing emotionally and socially and in managing changes and difficulties. There is a range of well-organised peer-mentoring or peer-training schemes and consequently a growing number of children and young people are skilled in helping others to respond to challenging situations. Concerted action to reduce anti-social behaviour by children and young people is very good. There are some good strategies to support community cohesion and many schools deal effectively with racist incidents, although there is insufficient challenge to schools not submitting reports. Satisfactory action is taken to prevent offending and to reduce re-offending.

Achieving economic well-being

21. The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. By age 19, proportionately more young people than nationally have achieved qualifications equivalent to five or more good GCSE grades, including a greater proportion who have achieved this since age 16. Opportunities to prepare for working life are good. Vocational options have increased at Key Stage 4, and a start has been made in addressing skills in shortage areas such as construction. There are increasing opportunities in the sixth forms for young people to study for vocational and key skills awards below advanced level, and good access to a range of entry to employment (E2E) provision. The number of young people on apprenticeship programmes is low. Despite notable improvements, the provision currently available is not yet sufficient to meet the skill shortages in the area. Support for families is effective in enabling parents and carers to work or study. Community regeneration initiatives are having a positive impact on the lives of some young people, particularly in disadvantaged areas such as Britwell. While housing is found for the most vulnerable young people, insufficient steps have been taken to improve the quality of the housing stock for the many other children and young people affected by the shortage of affordable, adequate housing.

22. Overall, looked after children and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported to achieve

good outcomes. In particular, the looked after children education service provides very good individual support for looked after children up to the age of 16. Strenuous efforts are made to ensure that a change in care arrangements does not necessitate a change of school, and this contributes strongly to high attendance rates and good levels of attainment. The health needs of looked after children are well catered for. The high numbers of children placed outside Slough are well supported, but they are more likely to experience difficulty accessing services such as CAMHS. Advice and guidance for young people leaving care is good but beyond the age of 16 there is limited continuity of support for learning. Looked after children and young people are consulted about their views of the services they receive and are starting to play a bigger role in shaping those services and in contributing to decisions about their futures.

23. Effective joint working contributes to the early identification and assessment of need and to timely referrals and intervention for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Services are working towards a common assessment process. Innovative respite services are increasingly responsive to the different needs of children and their families. Services are working together closely to develop provision within the borough and to reduce dependency on placements outside of Slough. A strong multi-agency focus with dedicated support from Connexions ensures smooth transition to education, employment and training beyond the age of 16, although there are more limited opportunities for young people once they reach 19. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are involved routinely in their own care and education planning, have opportunities to comment on the services they receive, and are encouraged and enabled to take part in wider leisure activities.

Service management

24. Overall, the management of services for children and young people in the Slough area is good. The capacity to improve further is good for local services generally and for council services.

25. Partnership working with a range of agencies including health, the voluntary sector and business is strong. Partners are building on a good record of joint delivery to develop a shared agenda to improve services for children and young people in the future. The five shared priorities form the basis for this agenda and are beginning to be reflected in plans. Capacity to deliver these priorities is good, though the leadership of councillors is under-developed. Value for money is generally high and there is strong financial planning and control. Performance management is effective in driving improvement in services located centrally in the council but it has been less strong in a few jointly delivered services, particularly the youth services¹ and the youth

¹ An inspection of the youth services in Slough was carried out at the same time as the joint area review. A full report of the findings and recommendations for improvement for this service can be found on the Ofsted website.

offending team. Systems for holding information on children and young people are developing, with an integrated assessment system being piloted in one locality. However, the links between the different management information systems of the council and its partners are not sufficiently robust.

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

Recommendations

For immediate action:

- improve schools' reporting of racist incidents by instigating procedures to ensure records of racist incidents and nil returns are sent to the authority by all schools;
- improve the continuity of learning support for looked after children after the age of 16;
- improve the quality of social care case files by ensuring that plans and key information are comprehensive, up-to-date and readily accessible.

For action over the next six months:

- enhance the capacity of councillors to provide a strategic lead by using external mentors to coach and develop lead councillors in their leadership role;
- ensure there are sufficient, suitable and accessible school places for traveller children and improve the arrangements for supporting them while a suitable place becomes available;
- raise further standards of attainment by:
 - improving the progress made by pupils between the ages of seven and 11;
 - securing improvement in the performance of underachieving groups, including children and young people of Pakistani heritage and of White heritage boys entitled to free school meals; and
 - increasing further the proportion of young people achieving qualifications equivalent to five good GCSE passes by age 19.
- improve the provision of child and mental health services by ensuring that it meets the needs of children and young people from black and minority ethnic communities, young people in transition and young people with substance misuse problems.

For action in the longer term:

- improve the quality of information and support received by parents by considering how best to target guidance and support to parents and carers from hard-to-reach groups, especially those whose first language is not English;
- develop information management systems that will support assessment of the impact of joint initiatives by integrating performance information across partners and providers;
- provide more opportunities for children and young people to participate in democratic decision-making processes;
- improve the skills level of the young people living in Slough so that many more possess qualifications and competencies needed in the work place.

Main report

Outcomes for children and young people

26. **Most children and young people are generally healthy and most feel healthy.** By comparison with the national picture Slough faces some significant health challenges related to its socio-economic disadvantage. The proportion of babies with low birth weight is much higher than average but the trend is one of improvement. The infant mortality rate is in line with the national average. Deaths of babies within seven days of their birth have risen recently and are slightly higher than average, but not significantly so. The proportion of women who are smokers at the time of delivery is below average and reducing. The proportion of women initiating breast feeding is similar to the national average.

27. The incidence of childhood illness varies. For example, the proportion of children contracting measles is significantly above the national average and is rising, but that for whooping cough is below average and falling. Immunisation rates at age 2 compare well with the national average, but those for 5 year olds are well below average for all vaccinations. At 5 years old, the proportion of children with decayed or missing teeth is broadly in line with the national average. The death rate for children and young people up to the age of 14 is also broadly in line with the national average. The percentage of children leaving the local children's accident and emergency department within the national target of 4 hours is above the national average.

28. Slough has seen a steady decrease in conception rates and teenage pregnancy rates are now in line with national averages. The incidence of chlamydia (a sexually transmitted disease) is broadly in line with the national average but, as is the case nationally, there is an upward trend for 16–19 year olds. There has been a considerable reduction in hospital admissions for asthma. Admissions to hospital for drug-related mental disorders and for gastroenteritis are below the national averages.

29. **Children and young people appear safe and most feel safe and happy.** Children and young people are provided with a safe environment and those children and young people most at risk are well protected. The proportion of initial and core assessments of risk completed within the given timescales is well above the national rate. Proportionately more children and young people are on the child protection register than the average nationally but the numbers are reducing. The proportion of new children and young people placed on the register is broadly in line with the national average, as are the proportion of de-registrations of children and young people on the register for more than two years. The number of referrals for children in need has risen significantly, to more than double the England average. The incidence of children killed or injured by road traffic accidents has reduced in recent years and at a rate of reduction similar to that of England as a whole.

30. Most children and young people achieve well and most feel that life is enjoyable. Most children and young people consider that they are doing well at school. Attainment in 2004 compared favourably with similar areas and nationally in the early years and for 7, 14 and 16 year olds. For 11 year olds, although broadly in line with similar areas, attainment was below the national average. The unvalidated results for 2005 show a similar pattern, with notable improvement for 14 year olds.

31. Most schools perform well and none requires special measures. The progress made by some children after the age of 7 in just under a third of the primary schools and by some young people in three out of the 11 secondary schools is not good enough. There are also some significant differences in the educational achievements of different ethnic groups and, in particular, some Pakistani heritage children and young people and some White heritage boys entitled to free school meals do not perform well enough. Attendance in primary schools is below that in similar areas and nationally, while attendance in secondary schools is above. Exclusion rates are below those nationally and the number of pupils permanently excluded is very low. The attendance of looked after children is good and these children and young people achieve better than in similar areas and nationally. Attainment by pupils with learning difficulties is generally good, with the percentage achieving five or more grades A*–G at GCSE in 2004 above the national average.

32. Children and young people have a wide range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility and many make a good contribution to their communities. Consultation with children and young people is wide ranging but not yet sufficiently well co-ordinated. Most children and young people in Slough feel that it is easy to have a say in the way things are run at their school and increasingly within their local communities. There are more limited opportunities, however, for children and young people to engage in democratic processes or to influence the work of the council. Most children and young people behave responsibly. Nearly all children and young people have a wide range of opportunities to take positions of responsibility and help others if they choose to do so. Youth crime is reducing in targeted areas. A lower proportion than is the case nationally of young people who offend is in full-time education, employment or training.

33. Most young people are prepared well for working life and are equipped to achieve economic well-being. By age 19, more young people have achieved qualifications equivalent to five good GCSE grades than is the case nationally, including a greater proportion who have achieved this since age 16. The proportion of young people staying on into full-time education at age 16 has increased and is above average, but the numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training are slightly below the national average and have increased in 2005. There is a gap between the skills needed in the work place and the skills available in those young people living in Slough. Accommodation is provided for the most vulnerable, such as care leavers, but many other young people are affected by the shortage of suitable

housing. No families are housed in bed and breakfast accommodation, but the average length of stay in hostels is well above the national average.

The impact of local public services

Being healthy

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

35. There is extensive and successful work in schools and in other settings, including the youth service, Sure Start, the voluntary sector and Connexions, on healthy eating, physical activity and mental health promotion. The proportion of Slough schools achieving Healthy Schools Scheme awards is well ahead of the government target and the PCT is recruiting more school nurses to provide greater support to health promotion in schools. Real gains have been made in reducing teenage pregnancies. The provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and the health education needs of looked after children living in Slough are well catered for. There is a strong commitment to reducing childhood obesity. A comprehensive substance misuse action plan has been produced recently. This encompasses a well co-ordinated and multi-agency approach to tackling substance misuse which recognises fully the scale of the task facing Slough. It is too early to see positive effects of activities but a productive start has been made in establishing some baseline information to support the work.

36. The successes outlined above reflect the approach adopted by much of the health promotion activity within Slough. This, in general, is rooted in a thorough analysis of need, is evidence based, is directed at reducing health inequalities and recognises the benefits of partnership work in delivering services.

37. There is a well-developed framework for promoting universal child health across primary care and community nursing services, which benefits from some well-focused support from the voluntary sector. Health and social care services are being sensibly reconfigured and health activists (local people trained to make health education more accessible to local communities) are being actively recruited. The co-location of children's centres with primary schools is helping to secure a coherent strategy for children and learners, as well as providing parents with ready access on a drop-in basis to midwifery, health visiting, speech and language therapy and social care services. Breast feeding is supported successfully in a number of ways, one of which is the breast feeding café in Britwell, and there has been a noticeable improvement in initiating breast feeding in Slough. A number of effective initiatives are being undertaken to promote oral health. Hospital provision for children and young people is also good. It is child/teenager friendly and age appropriate.

38. Children with complex health needs have good access to multi-disciplinary assessment. Clinical provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is accessible and well co-ordinated, and is provided in such a way as to support inclusion wherever possible. The transition from paediatric care to adult services is raised with young people in good time and is well supported, with pathways in place for most specialities. A good proportion of looked after children have regular health screening and dental checks. A thorough analysis of the health needs of vulnerable groups has recently been undertaken as part of the planning for the Children's Trust.

39. There are particularly long waits for speech and language therapy, although the situation is alleviated to some extent by having dedicated speech therapist posts, such as that within CAMHS. New arrangements to manage the waiting list for speech and language therapy assessment for children under the age of 5 have been implemented very recently and new ways of providing speech and language therapy for school age children are being implemented.

40. A comprehensive CAMHS strategy is being developed as part of the plans for the Children's Trust. Staff working with children and young people, such as teachers, personal advisors from Connexions and the youth offending team, are advised and supported by specialist staff in identifying possible mental health problems and in making appropriate referrals. There is particularly good CAMHS support for looked after children, for children and young people with autism and for those with learning difficulties. Nevertheless, there are a number of under-developed areas for CAMHS, including limited services for young people with drug-related issues, for children and young people from minority ethnic communities and for children and young people from families moving into Slough from other areas and countries.

Staying safe

41. The contribution of services to keeping children and young people safe is good.

42. Children most at risk from abuse are well protected through thorough and well-managed referral systems with good inter-agency collaboration. Robust action has been taken to improve the assessment of risk, especially for those children and young people on the child protection register. As a consequence, children and young people have been removed safely from the register. There remains a high rate of referrals to social services when measured against national figures. There is, however, an improved understanding among agencies of the eligibility criteria for accessing services and this is starting to lead to more appropriate referrals.

43. Child protection arrangements are well established and are a strong aspect of the work of all agencies, including the youth services and voluntary agencies. There is especially good collaboration of agencies across Berkshire to ensure consistency and safeguarding for children and families who move within the county and a highly focused training programme, which is generally well

attended. Planning is well advanced to replace the area child protection committee with a local safeguarding children board, although agreement has yet to be reached about funding for this.

44. There is strong multi-agency collaboration to ensure children and young people are provided with a safe environment. Statutory checks are carried out on all those in contact with children. Multi-agency public protection arrangements to monitor serious offenders in the community are sound. There are good systems in place to establish the whereabouts of children. Secure arrangements are also in place to remove children from school rolls, and transfers between schools operate well, especially considering the considerable movement of families between neighbouring councils. A comprehensive missing children protocol is currently being agreed by all agencies.

45. Well-focused action is taken to avoid children and young people from having to be looked after. Family group conferences are successful in identifying alternative support and a Kinship Care team provides effective support for the placements of children in their extended families. Nevertheless a high proportion of looked after children are placed outside Slough, though many are just over the border in neighbouring areas. Social workers make regular visits and cases are subject to a thorough reviewing system to ensure that children and young people are safe. The need to reduce the dependency on placements beyond Slough is recognised and appropriate steps are being taken to increase provision within the borough, for example by increasing the number of local foster carers through a successful recruitment campaign. There is good multi-agency support for disabled young people as they move between children's and adult services.

46. Children on the child protection register are all allocated a qualified social worker, as are almost all looked after children and care leavers. Satisfactory arrangements are made for the remainder through well-supported allocated workers. Measures have been taken to reduce the vacancy levels among permanent social workers. Nevertheless, these remain high, reflecting the difficulties facing many areas in and around London. Significant progress has been made in recruiting staff from abroad, in ensuring consistency in the use of agency staff and in encouraging agency staff to become Slough employees.

47. Suitable procedures are in place to minimise unnecessary changes of social worker. Secure systems are also in place to ensure continuity of support when social workers change, although there are sometimes undue delays when files have not been updated fully by those handing over cases. Work has been undertaken in the past year to improve the consistency in the structure and content of case files. These are adequate overall but remain too variable, as does the quality of information available for individual children's reviews.

48. Young people and their carers receive sufficient information about risks and how to deal with them through effective programmes in school, safer

parenting advice booklets and initiatives provided by Sure Start and the voluntary sector.

Enjoying and achieving

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

50. The local authority and its partners place a high level of importance in ensuring that children and young people enjoy and achieve. In primary schools, well-targeted action has enabled leadership and management to become more consistent and sharply focused support is improving the quality of Pakistani heritage boys' writing. At secondary level, very good support is helping schools to raise standards, especially at Key Stage 3. Active approaches to attracting and retaining teachers have helped reduce vacancies in schools. Nevertheless, high staff turnover and the use of a significant number of unqualified/overseas trained teachers are contributing to too much variability in the quality of teaching in some schools. As part of the solution to this, Slough has recently recruited a large number of newly qualified teachers and is providing good quality support for their induction into teaching.

51. School places are very tight at secondary level. This, combined with the complex arrangements for admissions to secondary schools, has posed a considerable challenge for the authority, especially in processing admissions for those young people seeking placements after the school year has started. Increased capacity in several secondary schools from September has helped to alleviate, although not totally solve, this problem. Despite the very good progress made, the authority recognises that further work is needed to reduce to zero the number of newly arrived pupils who spend more than 20 days without a school place, and this remains a target for action. Looked after children are given high priority in the admissions process and arrangements for admitting pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into schools are good. However, for some traveller children without a school place the support offered is not fully integrated into the work of the local authority and this hampers its local effectiveness.

52. The support for individuals and groups of pupils is mostly good and is enhanced by effective action from the voluntary sector. Young children are helped to make a very good start to their education and actions to improve the tracking of children's progress are furthering their personal and social development. There has been no significant improvement in primary attendance over the past three years, but more recent strategies have begun to reduce absence in some targeted schools. The excellent support for young carers helps to raise their self-esteem and promotes team skills. The Ethnic Minority Achievement Service provides satisfactory support for pupils with English as an additional language. After an unsatisfactory start, the English as an additional language pilot scheme is now beginning to be effective in the 14 schools involved. Support for the enjoyment and achievement of the small

number of looked after children, including those placed outside the borough, is very good. All these children are engaged fully in education and their attendance at school continues to improve. Strenuous efforts are made to ensure that changes in the care arrangements for looked after children do not necessitate a change of school, and this contributes strongly to the good standards attained by this group of pupils. The authority also supports schools well in assessing and meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Outreach support from Arbour Vale Special School is deployed effectively to help pupils in mainstream schools and provision is frequently good or better.

53. There is a very good range of innovative provision for children with behavioural or motivational problems who need to be educated other than at school (EOTAS), some of it of excellent quality. All EOTAS pupils have access to the nationally recommended amount of weekly support and there is a good focus on re-integrating pupils back into school. At Key Stage 3, the intensive 20-day training programme for those young people in danger of exclusion is excellent in raising pupils' self-esteem and modifying their behaviour. At Key Stage 4, very good outcomes are achieved through the Springboard, Activate and Pitstop programmes, with most pupils progressing to further education or employment. The education welfare and youth services have played a significant role in achieving the low rate at which pupils are excluded from school. Academic mentoring is helping to raise the achievement of many older pupils.

54. The wide range of leisure provision and cultural services provides good access to recreational and voluntary learning for young people of all ages/groups from most, but not all, parts of the borough. Looked after children are strongly encouraged and supported to participate in activities. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are much less involved, but they do have good access to highly valued sporting activities at Arbour Vale Special School. Affordability and access are barriers to involvement in sports for a minority of children, with participation lowest among deprived families. The council's strategy for sport attempts to address this, but has no timescales for full implementation. Arts services are of excellent quality, offering imaginative and innovative approaches to stimulating creativity. The 'after-hours' programmes encourage interest in music, dance and the digital arts for around 500 young people each year, as well as offering the opportunity for achievements to be accredited. The youth service makes a positive contribution to young people's social development.

55. Parents and carers, particularly those of younger children, have access to a good range of advice and support. Good support is provided via the 'Play and Learn Library' and 'Music Time' sessions and by the parent partnership service, which is both active in supporting individual families and a very good vehicle for consultation. Work is ongoing to develop materials in languages that can be accessed by newly emerging and hard-to-reach groups. However, some of the more complex or technical materials are not easily understood and, for a

significant minority of hard-to-reach parents, there are insufficient opportunities for more face-to-face contact to discuss issues and problems.

Making a positive contribution

56. The contribution of services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.

57. There is effective support to help children and young people to develop socially and emotionally. Nearly all families with young children under 5, including children with disabilities, benefit from the social opportunities provided by good quality activities in the early years. Knowledgeable, well-trained members of staff, including health visitors, work closely with parents and carers to help young children feel happy and confident. The Sure Start children's centres linked with Montem, William Penn and Claycots schools provide especially well-targeted support and advice to those parents and carers having difficulty in maintaining positive relationships with children. Peer-mentoring schemes are having a positive impact in schools and are enabling children and young people to play a great part in helping each other.

58. The strong support for emotional and social development underpins the help that children and young people receive for managing changes and responding to challenges in their lives. Almost all 3 and 4 year olds attend nursery education sessions, making good progress in readiness for school. Children and young people make a smooth transition when they start or change school. In Chalvey there are a number of families new to the area whose children have attended little or no nursery education or who have changed schools during the school year. The schools in the area help new pupils settle in as quickly as possible through well-conceived initiatives, including 'buddying' schemes. Connexions personal advisors give good individual support to young people in transition to further education and work, and are especially effective in helping young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Children and young people facing sudden or serious challenges such as bereavement or young parenthood have an accessible network of advice and practical support. Young people living away from home in public care are actively encouraged to maintain links with friends and family.

59. The extent to which all children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision-making and give support to the wider community is good, although initiatives are not yet sufficiently co-ordinated and there are limited opportunities for children and young people to influence the work of the council. All schools encourage responsibility through being, for example, a captain, prefect or learning mentor. Almost all schools have active councils that help shape policies such as healthy eating, bullying and litter. School councils, however, are not routinely brought together for discussions and representatives have little knowledge of how the councils link with other decision-making bodies. Increasingly, children and young people are used as trained service evaluators and are helping to select senior teachers, personal advisors and

other staff. This year a youth voices conference, widely attended by 14 to 25 year olds, debated key issues and made recommendations to the council on sex education, bus services and youth centres. Video links were made available to young people with disabilities who could not be there in person.

60. There is a wealth of opportunity for children and young people to engage in community decision-making if they choose to. The annual youth festival and creative youth arts initiatives are reaching out to gain new enthusiasts. Youth centres act as a focus for new initiatives, such as a local radio station run by young people, but these are not always well publicised to young people.

61. Looked after children and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are involved routinely in reviewing the services that they receive. A few children and young people who are looked after are beginning to take part in wider decision-making through helping to establish a corporate parenting panel and supporting the development of a residential home for 11 to 16 year olds.

62. Support to help children and young people behave responsibly, including from voluntary agencies, is good. Schools consistently expect and encourage good behaviour. Children's and young people's concerns about anti-social behaviour including bullying and gangs on the streets are acknowledged and steps are being taken to bring about improvements. Swift action, for example, is taken by police and partners to tackle low level anti-social behaviour. In particular, well focused activities in Britwell have reduced the incidence of crime and anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhood by a third. Partners are increasingly able to share intelligence, identify hotspots and target diversionary activities, although evidence about the effectiveness of the activities has not always been kept. There are some good strategies to support community cohesion and a satisfactory climate of race relations both inside schools and in the wider community. Many schools deal promptly and effectively with incidents of racial harassment but there is insufficient challenge for the schools not returning reports of racist incidents.

63. The action taken to prevent offending and to reduce re-offending by children and young people is satisfactory. Effective partnership working between the youth offending team (YOT) and the police is reducing youth crime in targeted areas. The YOT has taken positive action to implement the recommendations of the recent inspection report. Victims are now better supported and there is a much sharper focus on reparation and restorative justice. However, a lower proportion than is the case nationally of young people who offend is in full-time education, employment or training.

Achieving economic well-being

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

65. Good work-related learning and work experience help young people prepare for working life, with the support of local businesses. Careers education and guidance in schools is good, with much effective support from the Connexions service. The 14–19 partnership is improving impartial information and guidance about the range of options available to young people at 16. A high proportion of young people are staying on after age 16 into full-time education, but the numbers of young people who are not in employment, education or training are slightly below the national average and have increased in 2005. The Connexions service has made good progress in identifying and tracking young people whose destinations are not known, and partners are working closely to address the barriers to participation by some young people.

66. An effective partnership between Slough Borough Council, the local Learning and Skills Council, Connexions and other agencies has led to the development of a well-considered 14–19 strategy and action plan. However, measurable targets have yet to be set by the partnership. There are plans to review the 14–19 curriculum further, following a recent labour market assessment which identifies the changing skills needs in the area. Most Slough residents are in lower level jobs, whereas there is a growing need for managers and professionals.

67. By age 19, more young people than nationally have achieved qualifications equivalent to five or more good GCSE grades, including a greater proportion who have achieved this since age 16. Nevertheless all partners recognise that there is scope for further improvement. There is a satisfactory and improving range of vocational options at Key Stage 4, including some in skill shortage areas such as construction. School consortia are broadening the post 16 curriculum to include vocational and key skills courses at foundation and intermediate levels, which are encouraging more young people to stay on and to achieve. Increasing numbers of young people are entering higher education. There is good access to a range of entry to employment (E2E) programmes; progression rates from these into employment, education or training, although low, are improving. The number of Slough young people on apprenticeship programmes is low, with some unsatisfactory achievement rates.

68. There is a good range and quality of childcare available to parents and carers who are working, studying or training. Children's centres in Baylis, Britwell and Chalvey provide good local access to support from children's services, and further centres are planned in all localities. The children's information service helps parents to identify suitable provision. There is effective help for teenage mothers through social workers and Connexions, but low numbers of teenage mothers are in education, employment or training.

69. Community regeneration initiatives are having a positive impact on the lives of young people. The authority has prioritised Britwell, including a focus on the quality of schools and the fabric of school buildings, and the centre of Slough, where arts projects are based. Community activities tackle anti-social behaviour and help to clean up the environment. Other activities have improved

recreational and sporting facilities and encourage community learning. A professional theatre and arts centre based at the West Wing on the same campus as Arbour Vale Special School is benefiting the community. Pupils from the school run the centre's café, and an inclusive theatre group is being developed. A private finance initiative will replace three schools where buildings are in a poor condition. Nine new schools should be completed by 2008 including a Muslim primary school and a Sikh primary school.

70. Affordable, adequate housing for families is in short supply in Slough. Nevertheless, accommodation is found for the most vulnerable young people, including care leavers, young people who have offended, and refugees and asylum-seekers. There has been a review of hostel accommodation for young mothers and action is being taken to improve support services in the hostel. Some teenage mothers in other accommodation find it difficult to access consistent advice on housing. The poor management of local authority housing has adversely affected families, but is now improving. The authority is taking steps to improve the availability of social housing.

71. Looked after children are provided with good quality advice at post 16 to enter education, employment and training, although there is limited continuity of learning support to help these young people maintain good progress. The use of personal education plans is well established in years 10 and 11, and young people's views are sought from an early stage. Pathway plans are used to prepare and support young people in transition to adult services, with effective help from Connexions and social care staff. Looked after children are often accompanied to interviews for places at college or employment, and those in residential care have access to computers and homework support. Despite these positive actions, there is a need for greater continuity of care for care leavers after 16.

72. There is good support for young people with special educational needs to achieve economic well-being. Procedures and support for pathway planning are good, and young people, parents and carers are involved from an early stage. Information, advice and support are readily available to young people and parents and carers. The school curriculum, work experience and part-time college courses help to prepare young people for change and greater independence. At East Berkshire College there is good teaching and learning for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, an innovative curriculum and high retention and pass rates on most courses. A project by Arbour Vale Special School and the LSC is developing new programmes to meet the needs of learners for whom suitable programmes are not currently available at age 19.

Service management

73. **The management of services for children and young people in the Slough area is good.** Partnership working is strong and the capacity to deliver priorities is good, though the leadership of councillors is under-developed.

74. Slough and its partners have established challenging ambitions for children and young people based on a shared commitment to putting children first. The ambitions of the partnership link clearly with those of the council and to the ambitions of the local strategic partnership. The considerable challenges in improving the life chances of children and young people are recognised. Gaps and underperformance in services have been identified and priorities for attention have been derived from a thorough audit of need. Partnership structures and communication links are well established and arrangements for consultation are extensive. Although the views of children and young people have been taken into account effectively by different services, the partnership recognises that this process is not yet sufficiently co-ordinated and has identified this as one of its priorities.

75. Prioritisation is good. The vision is articulated as five shared priorities with a range of linked targets. These will form the basis of the children and young people's plan. Some of these priorities recognise and address issues arising from diversity, such as the under-achievement of Pakistani heritage pupils or health issues in particularly disadvantaged localities. Members of staff are well aware of how they contribute to these priorities. The clear education and children's services directorate's plans have been restructured to address the five outcomes for children and young people. However, these plans have only recently been incorporated into a council-wide process which makes explicit links to the council's corporate priorities and to the activities of other services and agencies. There is a clear understanding of the resources required to deliver in most of these areas, though these are not detailed in plans.

76. Inter-agency collaboration through the children's and young people's local strategic partnership is good, and very good as far as provision in the early years is concerned. Partners such as the PCT and Connexions have begun to incorporate agreed targets for children and young people into their plans. The area is effective in reviewing progress and reassessing plans to improve joint delivery.

77. Capacity to deliver these ambitions is good. Partners are working well towards the establishment of a Children's Trust through the Children and Young People's Local Strategic Partnership. Leadership by senior managers is strong and staff and partners are positive and committed to delivering good services to children and young people. Leadership by councillors is insufficiently strategic, though they are effective advocates of particular groups such as disabled children and are highly committed to delivering better outcomes for Slough. They are at an early stage in understanding their role as corporate parents.

78. Partnership working, including with the business community, the voluntary sector and neighbouring authorities, has enhanced capacity in many areas, such as early years and alternative education. The council has made judicious use of consultants to drive improvement and change in key areas including the private finance initiative project and the restructuring of the education and

children's services directorate. Workforce planning and training is effective. Neighbourhood-based integrated provision has been reinforced by the relocation of staff such as the police and community nurses. Multi-agency working to support the families of looked after children and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is increasingly effective, although the role of the lead professional is not yet established. Vacancies for social workers and teachers have been reduced through effective recruitment initiatives. There are still, however, too many vacancies within the youth service. Child protection training has been made widely available and equality and diversity issues are addressed effectively by services. There are good examples of local voluntary sector and faith groups being involved in promoting community cohesion.

79. Value for money is good. Although resources are limited they are well-controlled and targeted and there is effective use of external funding. There is a strong commitment among councillors, senior managers and service managers to delivering and improving value for money and spending pressures are quickly identified and addressed. The robust annual Star Chamber process requires council services to review their budgets against priorities and to identify savings and justify growth. Resources have been directed to front-line services providing early intervention targeted at vulnerable children. There has been a conscious decision not to pool budgets for children's services but to manage resources co-operatively. However, resources from different sources are effectively combined to deliver cross-agency services. Local commissioning strategies such as the pan-Berkshire initiatives and joint commissioning with the PCT are effective and have enhanced value for money.

80. Performance management is adequate. The partnership demonstrated a good understanding of its own strengths and weaknesses in its self-assessment. Management of the performance of council services is generally good and particularly strong in children's social services but there is scope for some partners to improve the performance information they collect on the effectiveness of their activities. Service managers are usually well aware of how their services are performing and this is backed up by detailed monitoring and benchmarking information in both social care and education. However, targets are not always measurable or challenging enough. Restructuring of services and relocation of line management responsibilities has helped to identify, but not yet remedy, key weaknesses in the practice within the youth service. The performance of the YOT is improving as a result of targeted action. Scrutiny of services for children and young people is strengthening as the new committee becomes more familiar with the area, but it is not yet systematically examining and challenging performance.

81. Systems for holding information on children and young people are developing, with an integrated assessment system being piloted in one locality. A new social care IT system is being carefully introduced with good involvement of frontline staff users. However, the links between the different management information systems of the council and its partners are not sufficiently robust to

allow collation of reliable information on their effectiveness. Areas where this is apparent include information on participation in youth services and data on activity of looked after children beyond the age of 16.

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

1. Overall the council and its partners achieve good outcomes for children and young people in Slough. Overall children and young people are safe and those most at risk are protected.

2. Improving the life chances for children and young people and supporting their families are identified as key priorities in both the 2005/08 corporate plan and the community strategy for Slough. There are challenging ambitions for children and young people based on a shared commitment to putting children first. A thorough audit of need has identified gaps in services and has enabled clear and focused priorities to be derived. The council and its partners are on track to deliver a single integrated plan for children and young people by April 2006 and are working well towards the establishment of a Children's Trust.

3. Services are good overall and have a beneficial effect on improving outcomes for most children and young people. Service managers are usually aware of strengths and weaknesses in service delivery, and this is backed up by detailed monitoring and benchmarking of information in both social care and education. Nearly all services are good. Particularly good provision is made for looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The youth service, however, is inadequate and has suffered from ineffective leadership and managerial oversight. Targets for improvement, derived from the audit of need, are measurable and appropriate, but those in existing corporate plans are not always sufficiently challenging.

4. Children most at risk from abuse are well protected through thorough and well-managed referral systems and good inter-agency collaboration. The council and its partners make good arrangements to provide children and young people with safe environments. Prompt action is taken to complete social care assessments when referrals are received. There is a low rate of re-referrals, indicating that appropriate action is generally successful first time. All children on the child protection register are allocated a qualified social worker, and action has been taken to address an undue rise in the numbers placed on the register. There has been a reduction in road accidents and hospital admissions relating to children and young people.

5. High importance is placed on ensuring that children and young people enjoy and achieve. Support for schools and pupils is mostly good. Attainment in 2004 compared favourably with similar areas and nationally in the early years and for 7, 14 and 16 year olds. For 11 year olds, however, although attainment was broadly in line with similar areas, standards were below national averages. The unvalidated results for 2005 show a similar pattern, with notable improvement for 14 year olds. There are also significant differences in the educational attainment of different ethnic groups. In particular, children and young people from Pakistani heritage backgrounds and White heritage boys

entitled to free school meals should be doing better. Attendance in primary schools is below that of similar areas and nationally, while attendance in secondary schools is above. Exclusion rates are below those nationally and the number of pupils permanently excluded is very low.

6. There is effective support to help children and young people to develop socially and emotionally. Consultation with children and young people is wide ranging but not yet sufficiently well co-ordinated. Most children and young people in Slough feel that it is easy to have a say in the way things are run at their school and increasingly within their local communities. There are more limited opportunities, however, for children and young people to engage in democratic processes or to influence the work of the council. Support to help children and young people behave responsibly is good and action taken to prevent offending and to reduce re-offending by children and young people is adequate. Youth crime is reducing in targeted areas. Despite improvements in recent years, insufficient numbers of young people who offend are in full-time education, employment or training.

7. Opportunities to prepare for working life are good. Vocational options have increased for 15 and 16 year olds, and a start has been made in addressing skill shortage areas such as construction. By age 19, more young people have achieved qualifications equivalent to five or more good GCSE passes than is the case nationally, including a greater proportion who have achieved this level since age 16. Despite this, the partnership recognises rightly the scope for even greater improvement. Support for families is effective in enabling parents and carers to work or study. Young people who are looked after, and those with special educational needs, are supported well in entering education, employment and training. Community regeneration initiatives are having a positive impact on the lives of some young people, particularly in disadvantaged areas such as Britwell. Whilst housing is found for the most vulnerable young people, many others are affected by the shortage of affordable, adequate housing.