



Joint area review

Sefton 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
HM Inspectorate of Prisons
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Audience	Published	Reference no.
All	6 February 2007	343



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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 nine inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Audit Commission. The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the Inspection of Children's Services*.

2. The review was linked to the contemporaneous corporate assessment of the local council by the Audit Commission and its findings are represented in the relevant part of the corporate assessment report. It also drew on the findings of the contemporaneous inspection of the youth service.

3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in the Sefton 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:

- a self-assessment undertaken by local public service providers
- a survey of children and young people
- performance data
- the findings of the contemporaneous inspection of the youth service
- planning documents
- information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision
- evidence gathered during the earlier Youth Offending Team (YOT) inspection 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 Southport. 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. A review of case files for children and young people receiving support from a number of local agencies was also included.

Context

7. Sefton is one of five boroughs comprising the Merseyside metropolitan area. It is located between the Mersey and Ribble estuaries with a coastline of 22 miles. Southport is in the north of the borough, with Bootle, Litherland, Netherton and Seaforth in the south. Between these urban areas are the towns of Formby, Crosby, Maghull, Aintree and Lydiate set within a more rural part of the borough.

8. The population of Sefton is just over 280,000, of which 20.2% (57,121) is under the age of 16 years with a pre-school population of 15,000. Over 30% of households have dependent children or students. Of the population, 3.3% is non-white British with a growing population of migrant workers and asylum-seekers in the north of the borough. Migrant workers have, in the main, come from countries that acceded to the European Economic Area (EEA) including Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

9. Some of the most deprived wards in the country are contained in Sefton, particularly in the south of the borough. However, the borough also includes some very affluent areas. The diverse nature of the area is reflected in demographic, health and deprivation indices; life expectancy in the borough remains slightly lower than the national average, the unemployment rate at 4% is higher than the national average (3.3%), and historical patterns of deprivation are gradually being ameliorated as the result of the considerable regeneration effort in the borough and the impact of higher levels of external investment.

10. Sefton has a strong tradition of partnership working and this has formed a firm foundation for more recent developments to integrate children's services. In this context, actions to integrate health, education and social care services have preceded Government initiatives. In 2003, education and children's social care services combined to form a new department and this union has acted as an important driver for wider integration. A partnership Board has been established alongside a Children's Safeguarding Board. Strategic partnerships exist between the council, the South Sefton and Southport and Formby Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), Merseyside Police, Sefton Community Voluntary Service

(one of the biggest of its kind in the country), Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Connexions and other key agencies in both statutory and independent sectors. A director of children's services was appointed in 2003 and active steps are being taken to establish a Children's Trust for Sefton. The Children's Trust director was appointed in March 2006.

11. The Merseyside LSC has partnerships with the council, colleges and schools to address the 14–19 strategy. Post-16 education and training is provided by three colleges: Hugh Baird; Southport and King George V. Entry to Employment provision (E2E) is managed by the LSC and delivered through three Sefton-based providers. In addition, there are 10 Merseyside providers based in Sefton. In total, Sefton young people are registered with 99 work-based learning providers.

12. Primary care for children in Sefton is provided by the two PCTs. These will merge into a single PCT for Sefton in October 2006. Alder Hey Hospital in Liverpool and Ormskirk Hospital provide acute and accident and emergency health services for children and young people. These hospitals also serve other local authority areas in Merseyside. Southport and Formby PCT and South Sefton PCT provide children's mental health services and from July 2006 the service has been provided by a fully commissioned service.

13. In Sefton there are 80 primary schools, 22 secondary schools, 5 special schools and 4 nursery schools. Nine primary, 3 secondary and 1 special school are 'Beacon' schools. The number of children who are looked after by the council is 331. This has reduced from a high in 2003 of 373. The current rate appears to be stable and is likely to remain constant for the foreseeable future. Children are accommodated in a good range of services, including foster care, residential care and with friends and family.

Summary Report

Outcomes for children and young people

14. Outcomes for children and young people in Sefton are good and, from the evidence gathered, children and young people appear safe. Children and young people are generally healthy. Considerable effort is being made to reduce health inequalities across the borough; there are some variations in access to services in different parts, but this is a known issue and strenuous efforts are being made to ameliorate the effects of this. There is an understanding that 'one size does not fit all' and considerable joint effort is being made to develop local and responsive services. Educational standards are good and continue to improve. Most Sefton schools are good or very good and none are judged to be in need of special measures. Most 16–17 year olds are in full-time education and this proportion continues to rise. The levels of school exclusions and absences remain comparatively low. Good progress has been made in establishing and implementing a 14–19 strategy. The council and its partners, including the LSC, have successfully taken action to increase the achievement

rates of 16–19 year olds. The Connexions service provides good advice and guidance to young people and it is suitably integrated with a range of other local services. Children and young people appear safe and there is a strong commitment by all agencies to child protection. Most children and young people are able to contribute well to school and community life and a strong culture of participation and involvement exists. Services for looked after children have improved in recent years and there is now a suitable balance of services available for this group within Sefton, including family support, foster and residential care; out-of-area placements are reducing. Youth crime and offending is reducing across the borough as a whole. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive adequate services, with some good features.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

15. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Services work well together at all levels and have a shared vision. This is enhanced through the health section of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). Wide-ranging programmes are provided to support parents and promote health, many of which are well targeted and relevant to local needs. Health services for individual children and young people are generally of good standard and are accessible. Considerable effort has been made to reduce health inequalities across the borough with good evidence of positive impact against key national targets, including healthy eating, teenage pregnancy, smoking, breastfeeding and immunisations. Health services for children looked after have been strengthened and are now good. Waiting times for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are adequate and within national standards but some inconsistencies exist in the provision for tiers 3 and 4. Health services for disabled children are adequate with some good features, but access to the range of services is variable in parts of the borough.

Staying Safe

16. **The combined work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.** Sefton is generally a safe place in which children and young people grow up and develop. An effective local safeguarding children board (LSCB) is in place that underpins local safeguarding arrangements across a wide range of agencies. Recruitment practice is safe and staff and carers are well trained, qualified and supported in their task of looking after children and keeping them safe in the community. Duty and referral systems work well and, generally, the functions of initial assessment, planning and review operate effectively. The timeliness of initial and core assessments is relatively good compared to similar areas, but the quality of core assessments is variable. Child protection and looked after systems are overseen and quality

assured by independent review arrangements which challenge practice, safeguard children and contribute to service improvement.

17. Good work is being done to reduce the need for the council to look after children and young people. The use of appropriate family support is good and timely except in a few cases: this includes the use of contracts with families about the support they will receive. The numbers of children placed for adoption is high and is being sustained. Services for severely disabled children are adequate with some good features and are provided through a specialist team. Assessment and family support teams work with children with milder forms of disability and provide good services. Respite and short breaks are available for the majority of disabled children and placement choice is adequate.

Enjoying and achieving

18. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** The council works effectively with its partners to ensure that children and young people enjoy their education and achieve well. There are enough childcare places to meet the needs of children and their parents and the majority of provision is good. The council gives good support to schools and early years settings, the vast majority of schools are good or very good and there are no schools in need of special measures. Achievement is good overall, but is better in primary schools than in secondary schools; attainment is above the national average, although only marginally in Years 9 and 11 (Key stages 3 and 4). The support for improving attendance is effective. There is good support for improving behaviour resulting in few school exclusions and there is effective provision for young people excluded from school.

19. There is a strong commitment to inclusion and schools are rigorously monitored to ensure that they meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people. Focused support is given to children from minority ethnic groups. The attainment of looked after children is generally lower than other local children in the population but their achievement is in line with that of similar children nationally and they attend school regularly. Education support is well targeted at looked after children and this is having a positive effect. Inspection indicates that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well. The council provides effective support for asylum seekers and other young people with English as an additional language. Good progress is being made to help children reintegrate into school life when they have been absent. There is a good range of leisure facilities and opportunities for recreation. The youth service is contributing well to the development of opportunities that enable children and young people to enjoy and achieve.

Positive contribution

20. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.** The council and its partners are working effectively to enable children and young people to develop socially and emotionally. Together, they demonstrate commitment to the positive engagement of children and young people who are benefiting as a result. School councils are in place and operational in most schools in the borough and they are helping children and young people to develop a sense of citizenship and pride in school life and their local communities. Children and young people are frequently consulted on important issues that affect them and their contribution is increasingly influencing the way services are planned and delivered. Individual successes are celebrated in positive ways. Looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are provided with a range of opportunities to contribute positively and arrangements to enable them to do so are good.

21. Effective measures are in place to identify children and young people who are at risk of anti-social behaviour. There has been a reduction in first-time offenders and rates of offending are reducing overall, including among looked after children.

Achieving economic well-being

22. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.** The Connexions service provides good advice and guidance to young people and is suitably integrated with a range of other local services. There are indications this is having impact on reducing higher youth unemployment rates in parts of the borough. The council and its partners have successfully taken action to increase the achievement rates for 16–19 year olds and these compare favourably with metropolitan areas. Good progress has been made in establishing and implementing a 14–19 strategy and this is having a positive impact in promoting education, training and support amongst vulnerable groups of young people. Clear progression routes have been established for young people, including for looked after young people and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

23. There are clear strategies and a range of well-targeted regeneration activities to meet the needs of young people and the communities in which they live: partners engage well to secure affordable housing for young people and families. However, the availability of affordable housing in and around Southport is limited because of a lack of building development land in the locality. The council and partners have a good strategy in place to provide suitable housing to vulnerable groups, including use of lodgings in and around Southport. Transition arrangements for young people leaving care and for most young people with statements of special educational needs and learning difficulties and/or disabilities are adequate, with some good features.

Service Management

24. **The management of services for children and young people is good.** The ambition of the council and its partners for children and young people is good. The partnership has articulated a clear vision, which is shared by partners and, increasingly, by front-line staff. The ambitions in the children and young people's plan are based on a sound analysis of need across the borough and the views of children and young people have clearly influenced the plan. Prioritisation is good. The council's overall planning regime has improved in recent years, and there is a consistency running through plans at all levels, based on delivering the five outcomes in *Every Child Matters*. The council has a track record of supporting children and young people as a priority in budgetary terms and, within children's services, resources have been redirected to priorities. Service planning within children's services is generally sound, although the coordination of planning between agencies could be more formalised to jointly plan and resource services. Work is taking place to establish joint commissioning arrangements on a more formal basis.

25. The capacity of the council and its partners to deliver its ambitions for children and young people is good. Partnership working is also good. The early creation of a children's services department was well managed and staff morale is high. Financial management is adequate and a medium-term financial plan provides a sound basis for decision-making. The council is achieving good value for money in its provision for children and young people. On most measures, Sefton is funded at average or below average levels compared to similar councils whereas outcomes are regularly satisfactory or better than that. The council manages its children's services workforce well and plans are in hand, across the partnership as a whole, to establish an integrated workforce strategy. The council has been proactive in addressing difficulties in the recruitment of social workers. Checks on staff through the criminal records bureau are rigorously undertaken.

26. Performance management is adequate with the use of clear performance management frameworks. Insufficient attention is paid to measuring the impact and quality of services. The current scrutiny function is insufficiently focused on corporate parenting responsibilities and the use of related performance and quality data. This is counter-balanced to a large degree by the active engagement of lead members and senior managers. The council and partners are very open to external evaluation and challenge and are using external consultation to good effect.

Grades

Grades awarded:

4: excellent/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 action over the next six months

- The council should strengthen scrutiny arrangements for children's services, including corporate parenting and, with partners, improve performance management systems.

- Health services should improve the consistency of service provision across the borough in the areas of specialist CAMHS services, with a particular focus on tiers 3 and 4.
- The council and its partners should accelerate plans to implement a joint commissioning strategy to ensure a more formalised and structured approach to the development of integrated health and social care services.

For action in the longer term

- The council, in collaboration with head teachers and school governors, should evaluate variations in achievement between schools in the borough and between specific groups of particularly vulnerable children and young people and how joint services can be deployed to promote social inclusion.

Main Report

Outcomes for children and young people

27. Outcomes for children and young people in Sefton are good.

28. Children and young people in Sefton are generally healthy. National health indicators in Sefton are broadly in line with national or benchmark averages. Life expectancy at birth is increasing but there is significant disparity across the borough correlating with marked differences in levels of deprivation. For example, oral health is better than the national average in the least deprived areas but remains worse where levels of deprivation are higher. Smoking during pregnancy is decreasing. Breastfeeding rates are low, but improving and are now above benchmark averages in the most deprived part of the borough. Consumption of vegetables is increasing and smoking and alcohol use by children and young people has decreased. Immunisation rates have improved and are now in line with national averages. Teenage pregnancy rates have improved and are now better than national averages. Health indicators for looked after children are good. Considerable work is being undertaken to reduce health inequalities in the borough.

29. Children and young people appear safe. Most children and young people surveyed said that they feel safe in Sefton. Initiatives to lower the numbers of road accidents and fatalities are effective. There is good joint working between agencies, including the police, and effective systems are in place to protect the most vulnerable children and young people from harm. Services are suitably targeted at the most vulnerable groups with good examples of effective action to respond to identified need. All child protection and looked after children cases are suitably allocated to qualified social workers and staffing capacity is closely monitored. Joint activity to monitor offences against children is effective and well coordinated. Initial and core assessments

are timely and adequate but the quality remains too variable. Children who are looked after are suitably safeguarded with good monitoring of all placements, including out of borough placements. Good arrangements are in place to safeguard the welfare of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

30. Children and young people achieve well. Children and young people are well prepared for school. The vast majority of children and young people attend school regularly and enjoy their education and leisure. Attendance at schools across the borough has improved steadily and is now above the national level, while the rate of unauthorised absence is low. Exclusions from schools are very low and particularly so in secondary schools. There is effective support for young people at risk of becoming disaffected with education.

31. There are enough early education and childcare places to meet the needs of children and their parents. The attainment of children and young people is good: educational standards achieved in schools are above those found in similar areas and nationally, despite many children entering Sefton schools with standards that are below those found nationally. Overall, achievement is better in primary schools than in secondary schools; however, achievement in secondary schools is improving, with attainment in years 9 and 11 (Key Stages 3 and 4) improving steadily and is now just above national levels. The achievement in some schools serving the most deprived areas is good.

32. The attainment of children looked after by the council is below that of other children locally but their achievement is in line with that of similar children and young people nationally and their attendance is above the national rate. School inspections indicate that the achievement of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good or better. The council and partners are focusing services well on children and young people from minority ethnic groups to enable them to achieve well.

33. Children and young people have a good range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility, and many make a good contribution to their communities. Children and young people in Sefton are able to make a positive contribution to their schools and local communities. There is an increasing range of opportunities for young people to participate and all agencies across the borough are fully committed to finding new ways of listening to their views. School councils are run in most schools but these are not yet fully operational in a few secondary schools. Activities designed to engage children and young people to deter them from anti-social behaviour are well targeted and are particularly effective in reducing the rate of first-time offending. Offending rates are also reducing amongst looked after children. Services for identified vulnerable groups, for example asylum seekers and families who have experienced domestic violence, are particularly effective in providing appropriate advice and support. Considerable effort is being made to support care leavers and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in transition. Support for parents and carers of children and

young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to enable them to make a positive contribution is adequate with good features.

34. Most young people are able to achieve economic well-being and they are prepared well for working life. Young people receive good and impartial advice and guidance from Connexions in a variety of forms which is helping address a range of issues related to education and training, as well as youth unemployment in the borough. The council and partners, including the LSC, have successfully taken action to increase the achievement rates for 16–19 year olds: the achievement rate of apprentices in 2004/05 is 53% showing an increase from 35% in 2003/04. Work has been completed to re-contract services, which, in conjunction with the appointment of a joint-funded work-based learning coordinator, is ensuring more focused work and outcomes. Achievement rates at A-level remain below the national average with some variations between schools and colleges. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training is 8.35% which compares favourably with the other metropolitan boroughs. Many innovative and effective projects are in place to re-engage young people in education, employment or training. A good range of well-targeted regeneration activities and services are in place to meet the needs of young people and the communities in which they live. There are clear strategies and good engagement of partners to secure affordable housing for young people and families. Good support is provided to young people to enable them to secure and live in suitable housing.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

35. The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. Preventive and health promotion services are comprehensive and well targeted at the needs of the community, groups and individuals. A common vision and shared principles across agencies and organisations underpin this provision.

36. Parents and carers receive comprehensive advice and support to keep their children healthy. Children's centres are operating effectively to contact hard-to-reach groups and provide good health advice and support. Homestart in the north and Venus in the south provide volunteer support and these services are valued highly by parents. Male volunteers are used to support fathers. The Speakeasy project supports parents and carers in talking to their children about sex and relationships. Good work is undertaken by midwives attached to children's centres to provide breastfeeding and smoking cessation advice. Maternal smoking in pregnancy has reduced. Some parents identified some gaps in health support for older school-age children. Good healthy lifestyle advice, including healthy eating, alcohol and drug misuse, and sexual health is provided in all child health settings

37. Schools in Sefton are making valuable contributions to health promotion. More than 90% are signed up to the healthy schools programme with focused attention on more deprived areas. Many health promotion projects and programmes are innovative and make good use of voluntary and private providers. Encouragement of healthy eating features in all health programmes for children and young people and includes children in vulnerable groups such as those who are looked after and those with disabilities. There has been considerable impact of fruit and vegetable vouchers, a fruit and vegetable box scheme and healthy eating education. Some schools are introducing good schemes to encourage exercise and the school transport plans are encouraging walking and cycling to school. The council is improving the options to enable children to play safely outside.

38. There is a structured health promotion programme aimed at pre-school and school age, with effective targeting at hard-to-reach groups. A home visiting framework, used by non-health staff, is being piloted in the south of the borough. The school nursing services are being developed through the rapid roll-out project. Access to assessments for developmental concerns in the south is good, but there are some reported delays in the north due to low community paediatric staffing levels. There is good training and clinical supervision for staff in child protection. Additional support is being provided from the south to increase the capacity to undertake child protection examinations, pending longer-term planning arrangements. All children have good access to secondary care services, including access to two accident and emergency services that are open 24 hours a day and have significantly higher than national average levels of paediatric nursing staffing. Some parents in the north of the borough commented on the problems of access to emergency services because of travel time.

39. A multi-agency Troubled Children group has been set up to provide quick access to mental health services and this has been very effective in individual cases. Waiting times for access to CAMHS are within national standards and rapid access is available according to agreed criteria. However, some front-line staff reported excessive waiting times for routine specialist CAMHS. A brief intervention service and support sessions for health visitors and school staff are available. There are insufficient beds to meet the current need for in-patient CAMHS and long travelling distances for these services create difficulties for some families. There are some gaps in the provision of CAMHS for 16 and 17 year olds and for specialist health services. Health professionals are aware of these and active steps are being taken to overcome any service variability across the borough.

40. The health needs of looked after children are well monitored with a rapid increase in performance against national standards. Some carers report difficulty registering for NHS dentistry and with GPs. Community nursing services are well informed about looked after children and carry out routine health assessments. Innovative and expert services, addressing all aspects of

healthy living, are available and two mental health workers provide support and training to staff as well as direct work with children and young people.

41. Health service provision to children with disabilities is adequate with good features. However, there are excessive waiting times for assessment by the community paediatric service in the north and some variability in access to therapy services across the borough as a whole. Some parents indicated that hospital and GP services were not always as inclusive as they would like. The appointment of a specialist nurse for complex cases has led to improved care for children with additional health needs. The voluntary and private providers for disabled children offer a good range of services to them and their families. Transition services for young people with severe learning disabilities are generally good.

Staying safe

42. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.** Most children and young people in the borough surveyed during this review felt safe both inside school and within their local area. Children benefit from a range of anti-bullying arrangements that work effectively. The local children's safeguarding board has usefully adopted a wide remit and membership to encompass both rail and road safety. Initiatives to lower the numbers of road accidents and fatalities are in place and proving to be effective. Children and their carers are given good information about general safety as well as clear signposting to other services. A comprehensive and well-coordinated response to domestic violence has been developed, including partnership arrangements with specialists in the voluntary sector. These arrangements are effective and are leading to positive outcomes for children and families, which were evidenced through the case tracking conducted during this review.

43. Inter agency training to ensure child safety is widely available, of good quality and is highly valued by staff. The safety of professional staff and the children they supervise is carefully considered and risk assessment systems are in place and are effective. The recruitment of staff across the service conforms to government guidance including the use of appropriate vetting procedures and safeguards. This has been given consistent and high priority by the council and partners, leading to excellent recruitment and human resource practice. Arrangements to ensure that allegations against staff are investigated and resolved are in place and are demonstrably good. These arrangements now also include allegations made against foster carers.

44. The initial duty and referral arrangements are timely, safe and well managed. Referral, initial assessment, planning and review arrangements for children work well. Core assessments in social care cases are produced within timescales and performance in this respect is good. Further effort is needed to make these more useful tools to analyse needs and risks. Family support arrangements to assist families in difficulty provide a useful and effective

alternative to statutory involvement by the service. The local children's safeguarding board has operated in shadow form for some time before its formal launch. The board provides effective underpinning for all safeguarding activities in the borough. Comprehensive inter agency procedures are in place and are operating well.

45. Serious case reviews are undertaken in accordance with Government guidance and appropriate quality control systems are in place to ensure effective inter-agency learning and development regarding child protection issues. Partners also have access to all serious case reviews undertaken across Merseyside and use these for training and staff development purposes. Joint agency arrangements to manage dangerous or violent offenders in the community are in place and are well coordinated with links into the LSCB. The threshold levels for the involvement of family support services and child protection services are lower than those for some similar boroughs. This means families with lower levels of difficulty are also offered services, which is entirely appropriate within the context of local services and partnerships. Cooperation between local agencies in safeguarding children and sharing information is good and each agency has a clear understanding of the others individual role. Plans are securely in place to implement lead professional arrangements and a common assessment process by April 2007.

46. Good systems are in place to ensure that children are tracked throughout children's services and do not get lost in either the education or social care systems. These arrangements extend to other agencies such as the police and include protocols to ensure that children missing from public care are identified, located and returned. Arrangements for the transfer of child protection cases that move across boundaries to other authorities work safely and effectively.

47. Support services to reduce the need to accommodate children are effective. The being looked after panel is valued and experienced as a supportive and helpful process to meet the needs of children and young people. The panel's role in gate keeping resources is good. Family support is mostly offered in a timely and coordinated basis. In a few children in need cases, there is evidence that the provision of support is delayed.

48. The number of foster care placements within the borough is sufficient to meet demand but only through the use of selected fostering agency placements. Significant effort to improve the in-house supply of carers is being made. Children looked after are cared for by staff and carers who are suitably trained, qualified and well supported for the task. Oversight of the looked after and child protection systems is provided by the independent reviewing service that works well. Looked after children are well supported by the planning and review process, including placements out of the borough. Quality assurance aspects of care placements and child protection are regularly monitored and reported upon by the independent review service which challenges practice and circulates its reports to senior managers, ensuring a strong link into service improvement.

49. Children and young people are able to report concerns about their care and treatment throughout the service. The provision for independent advocacy is adequate with some good examples of its use. Respite and short-break placements for children with disabilities are adequate but more work is needed to increase placement choice.

50. The standard and quality of residential care placements for children with disabilities has been commended by CSCI. There is good awareness of the need to provide opportunities for children with learning disabilities to communicate their views and a number of good initiatives have been developed to improve staff communication skills. There is effective support available to children with disabilities to assist them in transition from one service to another as they grow up. The availability of carer assessments is adequate but there is some variation across the borough as a whole. Some parents indicated that assessment processes for disabled children could be simplified to reduce unnecessary delays and to provide greater clarity about the services available to them.

Enjoying and achieving

51. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** There is a good range of high-quality support for parents and carers to enable them to help their children to enjoy life and to achieve well. A wide range of courses are provided, including some through schools, to help parents support their children's learning effectively. The children's centres, Sure Start and voluntary groups provide a range of good quality advice and support on health, family issues and personal development. This support is correctly targeted at those parents facing the greatest difficulties.

52. There is a coherent strategy for the development of early education and childcare places that has resulted in available places increasing at a faster rate than nationally. The extended schools initiative has made a significant contribution to this development. The overall quality of provision for childcare and early education is improving and the majority is good or better. The council recognises that improving quality remains a key priority and there is a coherent programme of monitoring, challenge and support in place, which is resulting in further improvement.

53. Most schools are good or very good and there are no schools requiring special measures. There is an effective strategy for school improvement with clear protocols and structures in place to challenge schools to improve. The standards and effectiveness service uses a wide range of statistical data and other local intelligence to monitor schools effectively. The achievement of individual pupils in vulnerable groups is rigorously monitored, but the service has yet to use this information fully to share best practice. There is good support for the National Primary Strategy, which has had a significant impact on attainment. The impact of the secondary strategy is not yet fully consistent, but

it has been successful in improving attainment and achievement in a significant number of schools.

54. There is a robust strategy for school place planning that has successfully reduced the high number of surplus places. There is clear and effective guidance for parents on admission procedures and the admission criteria give appropriate priority to children and young people looked after by the council.

55. The attendance service of the council provides good support for improving attendance and this is valued by schools. The full range of available strategies is used to improve attendance including truancy sweeps, a school attendance panel, use of formal procedures and an initiative to support vulnerable young people during transition to secondary schools. There is good support for asylum seekers and other young people with English as an additional language.

56. The support for improving behaviour is effective through a number of successful initiatives including the behaviour improvement project. There is a clear focus on developing emotional well-being. A pupil inclusion panel plans support effectively for pupils at risk of exclusion from the primary sector. There is good support for vulnerable young people who are without a school place through the multi-agency monitoring and placement group. This ensures that young people excluded from school are reintegrated or provided with an appropriate placement. An innovative and effective pupil referral unit provides a valued alternative curriculum for pupils at Years 10 and 11 who have been excluded or who are at risk of becoming disengaged from education. Support for pupils with physical and mental health needs is well planned and young people whose parents have elected to educate them at home are supported well. The youth service provides good services to support enjoyment and achievement.

57. Schools provide young people with good opportunities for out-of-hours learning, which are valued by young people. These include good access to sports facilities and opportunities to become involved in arts and drama. The council provides a good range of leisure facilities and services for children and young people. The youth service and partners in the voluntary sector provide a broad range of activities to support the personal development of young people. The council effectively encourages the most vulnerable young people to use the good range of leisure facilities available through its free leisure passport and the work of specialist support staff. A small number of parents of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities believe that the provision does not fully meet their needs.

58. Support for the education of looked after children is good. All schools have designated teachers for looked-after children and personal education plans are in place to support their development. The multi-agency support team provides effective access to additional teaching, information technology and distance learning materials. There are effective initiatives, *Positive Futures* and *No Limits*, to raise the self-esteem of these young people. The strategy to involve

looked after children in the Aim higher initiative is well established through the *Superstars* project, which provides training on study skills and mentoring. The achievement of looked after children is in line with national targets and indicators.

59. School inspections indicate that the achievement of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good or better in the majority of schools. The council is committed to the inclusion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities within mainstream schools including resourced provision. This is being achieved effectively through the targeting of additional funding at pupils with intensive needs in mainstream settings. There is a clear strategy for the early identification of young children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Specialist staff from within the early years team and portage service provide good support. Targeted support for schools and individuals through Sefton's teacher and education psychology service is effective. Opportunities exist to develop and enhance the outreach role of special schools to support inclusion.

Making a positive contribution

60. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.** Support for children and young people's social and emotional development is good. Those young people surveyed indicated they experience positive relationships with adults and their peers. Staff in all agencies are clearly committed to enabling children and young people through the provision of good information, facilitating discussion and, where necessary, explaining limitations. A good range of mentoring services is available and opportunities are being created for children and young people to act as mentors to their peers. Good support is also provided for parents. The YOT, for example, provides good written information to help parents manage difficult situations more effectively.

61. The council and voluntary agencies offer good support to children and young people, including those from vulnerable groups, to manage challenges and changes in their lives. Individual children and young people support their peers at times of additional stress. Good systems are in place to promote and encourage the education of children of asylum seekers. The service across the borough is adequate; however, the service based in Southport is currently experiencing staffing problems. This and organisational changes have led to some discontent amongst the young carers involved.

62. Opportunities for children and young people to participate in decision-making and in supporting the community are good. A culture of participation exists and consultation with children and young people is well embedded. The youth parliament plays an important role in developing an understanding of democracy and citizenship. The views of looked after children and those with disabilities are being listened to and these contributions are increasingly being used to influence plans. Children and young people indicate they are proud of

their contributions. The regionally recognised youth bank project provides a good example of children and young people making decisions to improve the lives of others.

63. School councils exist in most schools and these are making a considerable impact in enabling children and young people to contribute positively to the running of their schools. Issues identified by children and young people are used in the wider learning context and links are made to the curriculum. Some children and young people have been involved in the recruitment and selection of their class teacher. Election processes, topical debate and activities to support others are helping to promote citizenship, feelings of pride in school life and the wider community. Plans are in place to establish school councils in all schools and to monitor their operation.

64. The youth inclusion programme (YIP) and out of school hours provision (OOSH) are having considerable impact and children and young people can articulate the positive benefits of these services on their behaviour. Opportunities to celebrate children's and young people's achievements are being maximised through accreditation, certification and award ceremonies.

65. The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership is effectively reducing anti-social behaviour by children and young people in Sefton. Activities are informed by consultation with the community, including young people, as well as the effective use of data gathered by the police and other services. The youth service, Connexions and schools have a variety of activities underway, not only to identify those young people who are at risk of anti-social behaviour, but also to engage them in diversionary activities and raise their self-esteem. Resources have been identified to facilitate free access to a range of activities including libraries and sports facilities. The rates of youth crime in the borough and of re-offending are below the national average and generally better than similar authorities. Parenting courses are used alongside restorative practice to maintain the impetus of reduction. The recent integration of the work of a number of services, including the Youth Offending Team, the Drugs Action Team, and the Youth Service and Connexions, is leading to improved monitoring and support of young offenders.

66. Children and young people looked after by the local authority have good opportunities to make a positive contribution. They have helped to re-design documentation used at statutory reviews. The work of the participation officer is having a considerable impact. Advocates and mentors are available to support looked after children further and opportunities exist to make them more readily accessible. An effective complaints system is in operation in social care services, which is regularly reviewed to make it more accessible and useable by children and young people. Young people confirmed complaints are taken seriously and resolved to their satisfaction.

67. Children and young people with disabilities have good opportunities to make a positive contribution. The 'Way forward' document sets out the range of services available. Specific consultations involving children and young people with disabilities have raised ideas which have influenced services.

Achieving economic well-being

68. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.** There has been a significant increase in childcare places and close working with providers to secure quality, support sustainability and address issues such as affordability. Active strategies, including a project in partnership with the Inland Revenue, are employed to ensure families are able to access entitlements such as out-of-work benefits and child tax credits. Parents and carers, including from groups such as migrant workers and asylum seekers, are able to access provision. A good range of vouchers and free entry systems are in place to ensure that all children and young people can benefit from recreational activities and services. Services to support the achievement of economic well-being for families with children with profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities are adequate with some good features. However, access can be variable across the borough as a whole, leading to some inconsistencies.

69. Young people receive good impartial advice and guidance from Connexions in a variety of forms. The service is proactive and tries to resolve issues before they become problems or barriers to the young person's success. Connexions staff provide innovative and flexible support to young people in Sefton. Connexions managers work closely with other organisations with the aim of ensuring good links between services and to learn from the experiences of individual young people. The service also funds, in conjunction with other partners, several advisory posts. These allow individual support to be delivered to young people and, where appropriate, their families in a variety of venues and at times to meet their needs. There are a number of innovative programmes for young people who are not in education, employment or training. Connexions staff are working to open services to the most vulnerable groups and this is being successful. Participation rates for young people are good.

70. Good progress is being made in establishing and implementing a 14–19 strategy following the area-wide inspection. The learner entitlement is effective and ensures that all learners are treated equally and fairly. The council and the LSC are taking a robust approach to the planning of provision for 16–19 year olds. A rationalisation of provision has taken place with a potential reduction in the number of schools sixth forms. This has led to a review of post-16 curriculum provision and entry criteria in the Southport area. Clear pathways and progression routes have been established for young people including those in care and those with disabilities. These routes are well publicised in a variety of ways. There is good collaboration between the providers of post-16 learning services, including all work-based learning providers.

71. The processes for self-assessment of post-16 learning providers are well established and provide good opportunities to share practice across the borough. Most provision is good and is able to meet the needs of young people. The leadership and management of provider services is generally very good. There is an effective range of targeted activities funded through all the major regeneration initiatives to address issues identified in disadvantaged areas. Projects are based on consultation with all sectors of the community, including children and young people.

72. Partnerships with voluntary and community sector providers are strong with these sectors contributing well to both planning and service delivery. There is some evidence of resource pooling to support effective multi-agency working, although formal joint commissioning arrangements are in the process of being formed.

73. There is a good understanding of the housing and accommodation needs of vulnerable young people in the borough and asylum seekers. The council and housing partners have clear strategies for the provision of affordable and safe housing. The council, housing associations and private landlords are collaborating well to address gaps in provision and secure decent housing for families. Direct support, including the paying of bonds to private landlords is given to groups that have specific needs such as teenage parents, young offenders and looked after young people leaving care.

74. Transition arrangements for young people leaving care are generally good and all young people have specific pathway plans. The service is well resourced to provide practical help, support and access. The leaving care team is a multi-agency team and includes leisure services. It provides lifestyle and tailored packages of support for young people. These packages are generally good. The authority has successfully increased the number of care leavers in education, training or employment from 50% in 2002/03 to 71% in 2005/06. The council and partners guarantee employment to some looked after young people who cannot find work elsewhere.

75. Transition arrangements for most young people with statements of special educational needs and disabilities are good. Services for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been extensively reviewed. Provision for 16–19 year olds has been included in one special school and an FE college in the north of the borough has re-designated its entry and pre-level 1 provision to provide a flexible and integrated range of services for young people. There is an extensive range of E2E provision available in the area.

Service management

76. **The management of services for children and young people is good.** The ambition of the council and its partners for children and young people is good. The partnership has articulated a clear vision in the CYPP. These challenging ambitions are shared by partners and increasingly by staff in

the respective organisations. The commitment by the health service is strong, symbolised by the appointment of managers from the primary care trust to the posts of Children's Trust director and partnership manager.

77. The ambitions in the CYPP are based on a sound analysis of need across the borough, although the analysis of health needs has been less comprehensive. Children and young people were consulted thoroughly in the preparation of the plan and their contribution has a high profile in the final version. The views of children and young people clearly influenced the framing of plans.

78. Prioritisation is good. The council's overall planning regime has improved in recent years, and there is a consistency running through plans at all levels based on delivering the five outcomes in *Every Child Matters*. The council has a track record of supporting children and young people as a priority in budgetary terms. Additional government funding for education is consistently passed on to the service and children's services have been protected from a corporate requirement to find efficiency savings. Resources have been redirected to priorities. A reduction in spending on education advisory posts released additional resources for looked after children. Resources previously spent on out-of-borough special education placements have been re-invested in specially resourced provision in the authority's schools, so allowing more pupils to have their needs met within mainstream schools inside the borough.

79. Service plans within children's services are well structured, defining timescales, responsibilities and success criteria and relating explicitly to the CYPP and to corporate priorities. In some areas, for example, work to tackle anti-social behaviour, where many partners are involved and all are engaged in an abundance of productive activities on the ground, the planning process is not yet fully coordinated. Following criticism at the last inspection of the local education authority, the council has taken deliberate steps to improve its focus on meeting the needs of black and minority ethnic groups and disadvantaged children and young people, and this has been given suitable priority within the area.

80. The council has not been afraid to take difficult decisions. This is evident internally as the council has ensured that it has the right staff in post to deliver its priorities. It is evident externally in the resolute implementation of a programme of school closures in the face of falling pupil rolls.

81. The capacity of the council and its partners to deliver its ambitions for children and young people is good. Partnership working is good. On the ground initiatives, such as the developments on extended schools, are driven forward by multi-agency teams of enthusiastic professionals; at a strategic level, the partners are putting in place the infrastructure for a Children's Trust, with active working groups taking forward each priority area. The council anticipated the agenda for integrated service working ahead of publication of the *Every Child Matters* green paper with the early creation of a children's services department.

This change was well managed, staff morale is high and plans are advanced for the introduction of multi-skilled neighbourhood teams. Services to children and young people and their families are very well led at both officer and member levels. Moreover, the council successfully seeks to enhance its capacity from external sources. There are, for example, very productive working relationships with the voluntary sector and with Liverpool University.

82. Financial management is adequate. A medium-term financial plan is in place, which provides a sound basis for decision-making. There are ongoing pressures on the budget, particularly in respect of agency placements of looked after children and the strategy to resolve this problem. A joint commissioning strategy for the partnership is being developed with a draft currently undergoing consultation. It is seen as a vehicle to align some budgets and to build more local joint-service provision.

83. The council is achieving good value for money in its provision for children and young people. On most measures, Sefton is funded at average or below average levels compared with similar councils; outcomes on the other hand are regularly satisfactory or better than that. The implementation of a robust strategy to reduce surplus school places in both the primary and secondary sectors has released resources for use elsewhere and action is currently being taken, in collaboration with the LSC, to rationalise sixth form provision. Despite this encouraging picture, an explicit focus on value for money within management procedures is not yet systematic. For example, there are limited links between financial and performance monitoring, which, while comprehensive, are treated largely as separate processes.

84. The council manages its children's services workforce well. There is a strong training culture across the department and the support offered to newly-qualified teachers is particularly effective. The council has been proactive in addressing difficulties in the recruitment of social workers. Checks on staff through the Criminal Records Bureau are rigorously undertaken. Across the partnership as a whole, however, workforce planning is underdeveloped, with an audit of skills across all partners not yet in place.

85. Performance management is adequate. A clear performance management framework has been established and staff are well supported in its use by advice and guidance from the corporate centre and from within the children's services department. Senior managers are explicitly held to account for the delivery of particular targets and objectives within the departmental plan. The performance development and review system ensures that the work of other staff is firmly related to targets and priorities within team plans.

86. Progress against action plans is carefully monitored, but there is not yet a consistent emphasis on the evaluation of outcomes to ensure that the effect of initiatives on the partnership's priorities is properly measured. At the same time sufficient attention is not always paid to the qualitative element in performance

management and some opportunities are being missed to test the impact of services against strategies and priorities.

87. The scrutiny function is weak and there is little evidence of substantive change resulting from the committee's deliberations. The work programme is determined with little regard either to partnership, council priorities or performance issues. This lack of rigour is offset to a large extent by the regular and formal challenge to which the cabinet member with overall responsibility for performance subjects the lead member and senior officers for children's services.

88. The council is very open to external evaluation and challenge. Implementation of the recommendations from the last inspection of the local education authority has been systematically monitored. Services routinely benchmark their performance against other authorities and the partnership is keen to learn from good practice elsewhere. Children and young people are increasingly making a good contribution to performance management as services deliberately seek their feedback.

89. The capacity of the council and its partners to improve further is good. The self-evaluation undertaken for this review demonstrates a realistic understanding of what has been and still needs to be achieved.

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

1. The council is performing well in the provision of services for children and young people. Its services are provided at a lower comparative cost than similar authorities and provide good value for money. Leadership throughout the organisation, including elected members, senior managers and local managers, is strong and effective. Children's services are a priority for the council and health services in Sefton. Children and young people overall achieve educational standards that are above the national average, no schools are in special measures and there is a clear focus on sustaining and improving standards. The council's youth service has improved over the past year and is now regarded as being adequate. Children and young people who are subject to child protection or are looked after are served well. Joint systems for the protection of children are effective, embedded and consistently applied across the borough. A safeguarding board is in place with good representation from all the key agencies in the area. Services for children with learning disabilities and/or disabilities are adequate with some good features. However, accessibility to these services is variable across the borough and assessments of need for both children and carers are not of a consistently good quality.

2. Sefton has a strong tradition of partnership working and this has formed a firm foundation for more recent developments to integrate children's services. In this context actions to integrate health, education and social care services have preceded government initiatives. In 2003, education and social care services combined to form a new department and this union has acted as an important driver for wider integration. A partnership board has been established alongside a Children's Safeguarding Board. Strategic partnerships exist between the council, the South Sefton and Southport and Formby Primary Care Trusts, (PCTs), Merseyside Police, Sefton Community Voluntary Service, (one of the biggest of its kind in the country), Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Connexions and other key agencies in both statutory and independent sectors. A director of children's services was appointed in 2003 and active steps are being taken to establish a Children's Trust for Sefton. The Children's Trust director was appointed in March 2006. Vision and ambition for services are clear and articulated through a wide range of relevant strategies and plans.

3. The management of the council's services for children and young people is good. The capacity to meet the council's objectives for services is secure with robust medium-term planning arrangements in place. Considerable work has been completed to re-balance services through strengthening of family support provision, permanency planning including adoption, and reducing the number of children entering the care system. Effective action has been taken to reduce the number of distant and out-of-borough placements through expansion of local fostering placements and gate keeping meetings. The numbers of initial and core assessments completed within timescales is good, but the quality of core assessments needs to be improved in the context of joint assessment

arrangements. All child protection and looked after children cases are suitably allocated. Staffing capacity is adequate but is having to be supplemented in social care through the use of agency staff. The council is working with other Merseyside authorities to recruit social care staff from abroad and this is having some success.

4. The council collaborates well with health partners. There is good contribution from schools in health promotion and development and very good examples of targeted projects across the area to meet the health needs of children and young people. The PCTs covering Sefton are due to merge into a single PCT in autumn 2006 and this will provide greater opportunity to further develop joint commissioning arrangements, joint teams and pooled budgets.

5. On the evidence gathered by the joint area review, children and young people appear safe. Those most at risk of harm or neglect are safeguarded well with good examples of partnership, joint planning and service delivery. Thresholds for access to services are generally low and this is valued by all agencies in contact with children and families in the borough. Outcomes for looked after children are good with robust planning and review systems operating. The council guarantees employment to some looked after young people who cannot find work elsewhere. This scheme is exemplary with some excellent outcomes. Arrangements for scrutiny by elected members in respect of corporate parenting responsibilities are insufficiently focused on outcomes, service impact and quality.

6. The council contributes to a good strategy for childcare and early years education. The majority of schools are good or very good. The council provides effective support to school improvement and school attendance. School attendance rates are good and behaviour support services are targeted well. The council is committed to the inclusion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in mainstream schools and this work is supported through good inter agency working. Several special schools in the area focus on children with disabilities with additional needs and these are enabling placements without recourse to out-of-area resources.

7. Children and young people in Sefton are able to contribute positively to their area and are making good personal and social developments as the result of concerted work in the borough. There is a strong culture amongst all providers of services to enable children and young people to participate in service planning. There are good examples of consultation on a range of issues affecting them including children and young people from minority groups. Further work is required to support young carers in ways that ensure their views and wishes are taken into full account in the design and delivery of services and to restore services to their previous standard.

8. Performance management of services is adequate but is based mainly on quantitative data. Opportunities now exist to extend performance management to support joint working and to include information on service impact, outcomes

and quality for users. There is further scope to strengthen the analysis and evaluation of joint strategies.

9. Good progress is being made in the borough to make affordable housing available to vulnerable young people and families in need. A joint housing strategy is in place and is effective. This is based on good needs analysis. The availability of housing is less good in the north of the borough but this is mitigated through careful planning and support. The council continues to make good progress in the provision of education, training and employment for care leavers and personal support for most young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities post-16 is effective.