



# Joint area review

Wigan Children's Services Authority Area

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## Review of services for children and young people

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

Audience	Published	Reference no.
All	12 December 2006	359

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

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

3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in the Wigan 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 ten-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 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 Wigan. It also included gathering evidence on 10 key judgements, selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. 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. Wigan is the second largest of the 10 boroughs within Greater Manchester and has a population of around 305,000. The borough is made up of 14 towns and villages of which Wigan and Leigh are the largest. It covers an area of 77 square miles of which 75% is open land or countryside. Land used for industrial purposes has now been replaced by country parks and public open spaces. External transport links are very good, but internal travel is less easy.

8. There are concentrations of significant deprivation in some parts of the borough, but the general picture is one of small pockets located in every town. The authority is ranked around 54th most deprived on the 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation. About half of local areas in Wigan fall within the 30% most deprived in England. The proportion of pupils in Wigan schools eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national average. There is a legacy of poor health in the borough.

9. Unemployment in Wigan, including for those aged 16-24, is higher than both the regional and national averages. The population of Wigan has the lowest percentage of level 3 qualifications in the Greater Manchester area. About 2% of the pupil population is of minority ethnic heritage, which is well below the national average of 11.7%. A number of asylum seeker families have recently arrived in the borough as a result of dispersal from the south of England. There some 170 young people from asylum seeker families enrolled in Wigan schools.

10. The Children and Young People and their Families Strategic Partnership has been established since March 2004. It reports to the local Strategic Partnership group and is chaired by the council's lead member for children and young people's services. Membership of the partnership includes: the borough council; Ashton Leigh and Wigan Primary Care Trust (PCT); Wrightington Wigan and Leigh NHS Trust; Five Boroughs Mental Health Trust; the voluntary sector; Greater Manchester Police; local schools and colleges; the Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council (LSC); and the Greater Manchester Probation Service. There are clear links with other local strategic partnerships, the Wigan Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB), and the Youth Offending Team (YOT) management board. Council services have been restructured to meet the requirements of the Children Act 2004. A new department of Children and Young People's Services was established in April 2006, with a Director of Children's Services. The new department brought together staff from education,

children's social care, Connexions, education welfare, the youth service, Sure Start, Children's Fund and the YOT.

11. Greater Manchester LSC are partners with the local authority, colleges, training providers, and schools in addressing the 14-19 strategy. Post-16 education and training is provided by one general FE College with centres in Wigan and Leigh, two sixth form colleges in the west of the area and two voluntary aided school sixth forms. There are eight work-based training providers and five providers of Entry to Employment. Adult and community learning, including family learning, is offered by a wide range of partners and consists of a broad programme commissioned by the council, but delivered by others, including Wigan and Leigh College's 'College in the Community' programme.

12. The Ashton, Leigh and Wigan PCT directly provides community health services to the children and young people of Wigan. This is in addition to universal primary care provision within general practice. The Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Trust is the main provider of acute health services. Children's specialist mental health services are provided by the Five Boroughs Partnership NHS Trust, which provides services to Wigan and four other local authority areas. The trusts providing health services for the children of Wigan, with the exception of the Ambulance Service, fall within the North West Strategic Health Authority. There is one Young Offender Institution (YOI) in the Area; this is Hindley YOI.

13. Wigan has 136 maintained schools. A high proportion of these are voluntary aided. There are two nurseries and 105 primary schools. Four designated children's centres are in operation and more are planned. There are 21 secondary schools, two of which have sixth forms. There are eight special schools, and three pupil referral units. In September 2006, there were 405 children who were looked after by the council. The council has seven children's homes, two of which specialise in the provision of short breaks for children with complex needs.

## Summary Report

### Outcomes for children and young people

14. **Outcomes for children and young people in Wigan are good.** Children and young people are generally healthy, although there remain significant challenges to meet national targets in public health. Teenage pregnancy rates remain high and have fallen only slowly, and the quality of dental health is below the national average. Immunisation rates are high. Healthcare for looked after children is satisfactory and that for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Children and young people appear safe, with appropriate action being taken by agencies working closely together to protect them when necessary. All children on the child protection register are allocated to a qualified social worker; the numbers of initial

assessments carried out within seven working days of referral has improved. Educational achievement for children and young people is generally good and standards are in line with, or above, similar areas and the national average. Good progress has been made in narrowing the gap between lower and higher performing schools, in improving attendance and in reducing the number of pupils permanently excluded from school. The achievement of looked after children of all ages is well below that of pupils of similar age in Wigan and some miss too many days from education. Most young people have good opportunities to contribute to decisions involving issues of importance to their lives. Those who face significant challenges and difficulties are well supported. Levels of youth offending are decreasing in many areas. Success rates for young people in post-16 learning are improving and more are entering education, employment and training, although the proportion of young offenders not participating is high. Vulnerable young people have generally good access to appropriate accommodation.

## **The impact of local services**

**15. The impact of local services in improving outcomes for children and young people is good.** Services work effectively together to bring about sustained improvements in the outcomes for children and young people across all services. In health, a strong impetus has been provided by initiatives such as Sure Start and Healthy Schools activities to address a legacy of poor health, particularly by targeting more vulnerable groups. In social care, education and economic well being, local services have been highly focused in identifying how good outcomes may be strengthened still further. Good progress has been made in introducing new safeguarding arrangements, with even closer joint working. Educational attainment remains generally above that of similar areas. There are some notable recent successes in moving forward, particularly in GCSE results and in the improvement of learning opportunities for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. An increasing number of young people remain in learning or employment after the age of 16. There are many good examples of the involvement of children and young people in shaping services and this is becoming more coherent. Work with young offenders and those at risk of offending is very effective. The capacity of the partnership for further improvement is also good as it builds upon a strong track record of co-operative working to incorporate issues such as joint commissioning of services. The capacity of council children's services to improve further is excellent. It has very strong corporate and directorate leadership and a record of delivering major initiatives well to the benefit of children and young people.

### **Being healthy**

**16. The impact of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Wigan has a legacy of poor public health outcomes which agencies are now working to address. There are good partnership arrangements in place that work effectively to address the health

needs of children and young people. Universal and targeted services support families well. This is particularly evident in areas where Sure Start programmes are present. There is a well coordinated approach to promoting healthy lifestyles for children and young people in schools. The PCT also gives a strong lead in the promotion of good health to children and young people. Initiatives include smoking cessation, and action to address obesity such as encouraging increased physical activity. There has been a determination to reduce teenage pregnancy but the rates remain high. Better access to sexual health services has been developed. Other local initiatives include increasing the proportion of mothers who breast-feed, the cessation of smoking by expectant mothers, and the promotion of oral health and access to dental treatment. Despite some progress in these areas, much remains to be done.

17. Action has been taken to improve the availability of GP services, and there is good GP support for the Young People's Drug and Alcohol Teams (YPDAT), and the Homeless and Vulnerable Person's Service. The Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is now responding more speedily to referrals, although, for non-urgent referrals, the waiting time can be up to six months. There is a jointly commissioned YPDAT, which supports effective preventative work on drugs and alcohol in schools, and provides services to vulnerable young people with substance misuse problems. The health of looked after children is satisfactory; the percentage of those having health and dental checks has declined from previously high levels. Agencies work well together to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families.

### **Staying safe**

18. **The impact of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.** Services in Wigan work well together to ensure that children and young people are safe. The reorganisation of council services to form the Children and Young Peoples Service (CYPS) from April 2006 has further strengthened the council's capacity to plan and deliver services to the most vulnerable children and young people. The WSCB has good representation from all agencies and has made a confident start: its plans to promote the welfare and safeguarding of children are well underway. There are updated eligibility criteria for intervention that have been well received and are being piloted. Good new arrangements for referral and initial assessment are in place, and services are being refocused to increase family support and preventative intervention. Child protection work is well organised and the WSCB has provided good leadership for high profile multi-agency training. There is good joint working by front line staff in partner agencies to support families and looked after children. Children and young people with disabilities are making more use of direct payments so that they can purchase their own packages and there is good voluntary sector involvement in this scheme.

## Enjoying and achieving

19. **The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** Early years provision is excellent and young children are very well prepared for starting school. Educational provision is good and standards are generally in line with or above similar areas and the national average. Support and challenge for schools, including those causing concern, is increasingly effective in raising standards. There is a good range of recreational and voluntary learning activities available in the borough.

20. A good range of services and targeted projects, including a very strong Sure Start programme, helps parents to develop their own skills and support their children's education. However, not enough information for parents and young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is readily available in other languages and formats or includes a clear indication of how these may be obtained. The development of integrated multi-agency services in children's centres across the borough is proving effective in providing early identification and support for children and their families.

21. In line with national trends the achievement of looked after children of all ages in Wigan is well below that of pupils of similar age. Some miss too many days from school. However, there are some good examples of services working together to promote attendance and achievement. Practice in this area is improving as education and social care staff work more closely together.

22. Provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is generally good. The reshaping of special school provision has made a significant contribution to improving the learning environment for pupils with complex or severe difficulties and in promoting inclusion in mainstream. There is limited access to recreational and voluntary learning activities for these pupils. Opportunities are limited by the lack of appropriate schemes, specialist knowledge of staff, lack of support staff and transport difficulties. This issue is not addressed in the borough's Inclusion Strategy.

## Making a positive contribution

23. **The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.** Children and young people are effectively helped to become more self-confident. They engage with their communities by volunteering and participating in decision-making over a range of activities. Services in the area make a significant contribution to supporting young people in crisis, at difficult stages in their lives and in transition. Children and young people were extensively involved in the development of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and have helped to shape numerous initiatives. Their involvement in shaping services across the borough and with all agencies is not yet consistent and firmly established in all instances. Strong partnership working contributes to the excellent work done in the area to reduce anti-social behaviour. Effective action is taken to reduce the incidence of young people

offending and re-offending. The views of looked after children are effectively sought and acted on appropriately, as are those of children with learning disabilities and/or difficulties.

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

24. **The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.** The provision of childcare services is very good. They are well used and parents are kept informed about the provision and the benefits available. An increasing proportion of young people are in education, employment or training beyond the age of 16, which is now comparable to similar authorities. Care leavers are well supported to continue in education or employment and agencies work well together to support young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to continue in learning after 16. A high proportion of young people progress to higher education compared with other local areas. Good progress has been made on developing vocational opportunities for young people in schools and local collaboration is developing. However, much remains to be done in providing accessible opportunities across the borough for young people through a coherent 14-19 strategy. The overall achievement rate at GCE A level and equivalent qualifications is high and has improved for most 16-19 year-olds. Success rates on work-based learning have also improved significantly. Neighbourhood renewal has clear priorities and a good focus on improving the experiences of children and young people.

### **Service management**

25. **The management of services for children and young people and the capacity to improve further are both good.** The partner's self-assessment accurately reflects strengths and areas for improvement in most areas.

26. The ambitions of the partners for children and young people are very good. They are appropriate, challenging and have been identified through wide ranging consultation and effective needs analysis. There is a strong commitment from all partners to delivering improved outcomes. There is, however, insufficient data about minority ethnic children and young people.

27. Prioritisation to meet the needs of children and young people is adequate. Actions required to deliver the priorities are well understood by all stakeholders. However, there is insufficient clarity as to which of the many priorities are the key ones and planning is not yet supported by medium-term financial commitment across all partners. Plans for the development of children's trust arrangements are good. As a consequence of the council's absolute and appropriate commitment to ensuring that all partners are equally ready to embark on these significant developments, pace has been relatively slow to date in some areas. There is a suitable and shared focus on preventative issues although there is no cohesive and overarching preventative strategy.

28. Overall, council resources for children and young people are used well. The council's corporate approach to aligning priorities, budget setting and performance is good. However, there are no pooled budgets currently and relatively few joint budgets between agencies. Services provide good value for money. The council has a relatively low level of funding, in comparison to similar authorities, whilst generally achieving results in line with or above similar authorities and nationally. Educational attainment, family support services and the youth service provide good examples of this.

29. The capacity of the partners is good. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership has been in place since 2004, built on a number of previously effective partnerships. Consequently, there is a strong and embedded commitment to partnership working across all agencies. Pace in some areas such as joint commissioning has been slow. The capacity of the council to improve further is excellent. Corporate and directorate leadership of the council is highly effective, with the commitment, enthusiasm and capability evidenced at that level also reflected at middle manager level. People are well supported in fulfilling their roles. The authority has a track record of delivering major projects well. The use of rigorous quality standards is developing.

30. Performance management is good. The council sets challenging targets and is highly focused on effective performance monitoring which leads to improved outcomes. This process is being extended to partnership activities. Whilst children and young people are well consulted as service users in many cases, this is not universal.

## 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	4	
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

- Ensure that agencies work together to accelerate progress in reducing teenage pregnancy and the number of expectant mothers who smoke.
- Ensure implementation of the new 14-19 strategy to extend collaboration between institutions and provide a full range of

appropriate and accessible learning opportunities across the borough for all young people.

- Take steps to ensure that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities can participate fully in recreational and voluntary learning activities and that this approach is embedded in all council policies.
- Ensure that information on services for parents and young people is readily available in a range of appropriate languages and formats.
- Provide sufficient access for young offenders to pre-entry level training and flexible further education provision.

### **For action in the longer term**

- Ensure that partners develop an integrated medium-term financial strategy to support the implementation of their priorities.

## **Main Report**

### **Outcomes for children and young people**

#### **31. Outcomes for children and young people in Wigan are good.**

**32. Children and young people are generally healthy.** Children and young people are generally healthy although there remain significant challenges to meet national targets in public health. There are above average rates of immunisation. Infant mortality rates are in line with the national average, with a recent improvement in the local figures. The rates of breastfeeding are below average and the rate of expectant mothers who smoke is high. Teenage pregnancy rates remain high and have decreased only slowly in recent years. The rate of sexual infection among young people also remains high. Dental health is below the national average. There is a significant improvement in access to the CAMHS for children and young people. Healthcare for looked after children is satisfactory and that for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.

**33. Children and young people appear safe.** The rates of children on the child protection register and the numbers of children who are looked after are slightly above the national average. The numbers of initial assessments carried out within seven working days of referral has improved and there has been positive action to improve the capacity of duty systems to respond within target timescales. All children on the child protection register are allocated to a social worker. Adoption and fostering rates have improved and are now good. There is good access to family support services and a dedicated support team for family and friends who act as foster carers. Performance on the participation of looked after children in health assessments has been reviewed and appropriate

measures introduced to promote improvement. The number of direct payments to children and young people with disabilities and their families has improved, enabling them to tailor their own package of support.

**34. Children and young people achieve well.** There are sufficient places for three and four year olds in a range of early years settings. Achievement for pre-school children is good across all sectors of provision. Standards in schools in 2005 were generally above, or in line with, similar areas and the national average, although the increase in those achieving five good GCSE results was less than the national average. Early analysis of 2006 results indicates a good improvement in the number of 16 year olds achieving five good GCSEs, with all schools achieving more than the government minimum target of 25%. However, looked after children do not achieve as well as other pupils of the same age in Wigan. Attendance is improving, although a few looked after children miss too many days from school. Overall, authorised absences are now in line with similar areas and the national average, and unauthorised absences are below similar areas and the national average. The number of pupils permanently excluded from school has reduced by nearly three-quarters in the school year 2005/06.

**35.** Statutory assessments for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are now being completed quickly and most of these pupils make satisfactory or good progress.

**36.** Achievement for those engaged with the youth service is good with opportunities for young people to work towards recognised awards. For example, around 220 young people achieved Duke of Edinburgh awards during the last year.

**37. 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 develop well socially and emotionally. Many young people contribute to their communities, often through the youth service. Most young people have good opportunities to contribute to decision-making on issues of importance to their lives: looked after children contribute well to their reviews and complaints are addressed adequately. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have good opportunities to contribute to their own assessments, but have limited opportunities to contribute their views more broadly. Children at crisis points in their lives receive good support. Levels of youth offending are decreasing in many areas and fewer looked after children offend than is the case nationally. Children at risk of anti-social behaviour are being engaged well in educational and recreational activities, with positive results. Young people leaving custody are well supported in returning to education.

**38. Children and young people are able to achieve economic well-being and are prepared well for working life.** Young people have access to a good range of initiatives which help them prepare for continued learning

and employment. Most of them make good use of the information, advice and guidance available. A growing proportion of 16-19 year olds engages in employment, education or training, which is now similar to comparable areas. Overall success rates at GCE A level or equivalents are well above the national average. Success rates in further education are improving at all levels and are generally around national averages. Success in work-based learning has improved significantly to above the national average, as have the success rates for GCSEs in vocational subjects. Vulnerable young people, including teenage mothers, care leavers and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported into post-16 education, employment and training, with the exception of young offenders whose participation rate has worsened. Access to appropriate accommodation for vulnerable young people is generally good, except for young offenders who are in crisis.

## **The impact of local services**

### **Being healthy**

39. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Wigan has a legacy of poor public health outcomes which agencies are working to address. Good partnership working is now improving health, and taking forward the public health agenda. The joint appointment of the post of Director of Public Health reflects a good approach to partnership working; partners are now developing models of integrated working, and extending the use of pooled budgets, and joint commissioning arrangements.

40. There is a good range of both universal and targeted services. Immunisation rates are above the national average, and new national immunisation requirements have been introduced. The midwifery and health visiting services provide good support to pre-school children. The scope of the health visiting service has been extended to focus on preventative work, and healthy lifestyle initiatives. Sure Start programmes have been effective in developing a range of community services providing support to families and promoting healthy lifestyles for children. Wigan has above average smoking rates for expectant mothers and initiatives to reduce this figure have been introduced with some initial success. Rates of initiating of breast-feeding have been significantly below the national average. A strategy and action plan to improve this position has been introduced, including the encouragement of breast-feeding in hospital and peer support schemes. A slight improvement has recently been recorded. There is a dedicated health visitor and nursery nurse service for vulnerable and homeless families. A specialist GP works with this team. However, this provision is not able fully to meet the demands made upon it.

41. There is a positive and well co-ordinated approach to promoting healthy lifestyles for children and young people. This includes the PCT's active health promotion strategy, good progress in the Healthy Schools initiative, and good

use of the Children's Fund to support community programmes in promoting healthy lifestyles. Progress is carefully monitored by the council. All schools in the borough are participating in the Healthy Food in Schools initiative. The PCT, along with its partners, has recently launched the Healthy Weight Strategy. There are a number of initiatives to increase participation in sport and leisure activities. The council has instituted a summer play scheme providing access to local gyms and sports centres for a one-off payment. The youth service has an active approach to promoting healthy lifestyles for their young people, and makes good use of outdoor pursuits activities in the area.

42. The council's Children and Young People's Services and the PCT have reviewed and redirected the borough's sexual health strategy to increase the accessibility of sexual health services for young people. Sexual health advice is being made available at a greater variety of locations. Growing numbers of young people, particularly young men, are using the services of the TIC TAC bus which provides community-based sessions of advice and access to the 'C'card scheme for the distribution of condoms. Partnership work is developing as part of the teenage pregnancy strategy. However, the rate of teenage pregnancy remains high and significantly above the national average; the rate has only fallen slightly over the last three-year period. There are localities in the area with particularly high rates. A recent study commissioned by partners to explore this problem identified important cultural issues contributing to the continued high rates. The priority attached to sex and relationships education varies too widely amongst secondary schools.

43. Children and young people attending the local accident and emergency department are dealt with promptly. An impressive development has been a dedicated accident and emergency facility purely for children and young people, with local schools involved in the design and naming of this building. Infant mortality rates and the rate of stillbirths are in line with national averages, with Wigan showing recent improvements. The PCT has an active approach to taking services out of hospital and into the community. A good example is the network of locally based enuresis (bed-wetting) clinics to avoid hospital referrals. There has been a shortage of GPs in the area, and the PCT has taken steps to improve this position, with some success. Dental health is poor, with a high rate of children having decayed or missing teeth. The PCT has been taking action to improve dental health, including work through schools and clinics.

44. The local CAMHS has increased its resources to meet demand. Waiting times for referrals have gone down, although the waiting times for non-urgent referrals can still be six months. CAMHS now offers a 9am-5pm advice line, available to service users and other agencies. There is no specialist in-patient service in the borough. Transition arrangements from CAMHS to adult services are improving. The CAMHS meets the targets for accepting referrals from the Youth Offending Team.

45. The Young Person's Drug and Alcohol Team (YPDAT) includes a member from the CAMHS and a prescribing GP. This team has a high workload, and is implementing the regional approach of providing support and advice to other workers in their handling of non-specialist work. This team has experienced difficulties in meeting the target for the percentage of young people receiving interventions within five days of assessment. The YPDAT supports the implementation of drug and alcohol policies in schools, and work on a new information pack outlining issues in drugs and alcohol is under way. This team also provides good support to the youth service. There is an active alcohol strategy, which targets vulnerable young people, provides information to schools, and aims to challenge anti-social behaviour arising from alcohol misuse.

46. Healthcare of looked after children is satisfactory. The percentage of looked after children having an annual dental and health check has however declined from previously very high levels. The way health checks are carried out is being reviewed to make them more suitable through local GPs' surgeries. A decision has been made to appoint a looked after children's nurse. The CAMHS and YPDAT give priority to the needs of looked after children.

47. There is effective inter-agency working to promote the health of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A complex needs team supports children, families and schools. Access to health services is generally good. There has been growing use of direct payments to families and young people so that they can purchase their own care packages.

## Staying safe

48. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.** Children, young people and their carers have good access to a range of information about key risks to their safety, provided by statutory and voluntary agencies working in partnership. A productive partnership with the Neighbourhood Road Safety Initiative has resulted in young people's involvement in a range of imaginative projects to reduce the incidence of road accidents, which is a key strategic priority. There are strong examples of initiatives to target information to vulnerable groups. Embrace Wigan and Leigh, a voluntary agency, acts as a valuable resource for parents of children with disabilities. It promotes their involvement through the Face 2 Face befriending project and the Partners in Policymaking course. The council's after care team has produced a useful pack for young people leaving care entitled, "Information for Living". The WSCB has published a safe parenting handbook. The reorganised CYPS has a dedicated duty team which offers signposting advice to other services. This team has built up a comprehensive information base and good links with a wide range of local service providers since the beginning of their operation in April 2006.

49. Wigan has achieved a smooth transition to the creation of the WSCB in April 2006. This is linked to the adoption of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) as defined in Wigan's Change for Children and Young People System. Full implementation of the CAF is planned for March 2007. The Board has been active in defining new thresholds for intervention in safeguarding vulnerable children; these have been piloted in one part of the borough. The new thresholds are well publicised and the WSCB have been active in promoting relevant multi-agency training. Participation in the Board by partner agencies is good. A safeguarding board training manager has been appointed. There is good commitment to the broader needs of staff for training and this was reflected, for example, in the high levels of participation of residential care staff in NVQ training. Personnel files and records show that staff of agencies who have direct contact with children have received the necessary checks through the Criminal Records Bureau and other safeguarding procedures. In education, good progress has been made towards the completion of comprehensive records of such checks.

50. The effectiveness of joint work at strategic level is reflected in good inter-agency support to individual children and young people in practice. All children and young people on the child protection register are allocated to a qualified social worker. Frontline staff, who are members of core groups for children on the child protection register, show good levels of involvement in protection plans.

51. The introduction of a dedicated duty team for the CYPS has improved performance on a timely initial response to referrals. The percentage of initial assessments carried out within seven working days of referral has increased and is now satisfactory. This is monitored closely. There were improvements in staffing levels during 2005 and 2006. Team functions are now defined with greater clarity in the restructured service. Staff whose primary task is to offer longer-term support to children in need and their families no longer have to deal with crisis and short-term interventions. There has been steady progress in reducing the number of children remaining on the child protection register for more than two years. The council performs very well on the completion of reviews for children on the register. They are thorough and the outcomes are well documented. Multi-agency protection plan arrangements are well established under the chairmanship of the National Offender Management Service.

52. Some constructive steps have been taken to reduce the number of looked after children in placements outside Wigan. This has included the extension of in-borough residential placements and an increase in the numbers of local foster carers. For children and young people with disabilities, there has been growth in the numbers receiving direct payments and around 30 families now benefit from this type of flexible provision. A small number of service users have taken part in the In Control pilot that provides greater autonomy to families to purchase care support directly.

53. The restructured CYPS offers better opportunities for preventive work with families and there are good examples of multi-agency action to avoid care proceedings. Recruitment of foster carers is actively pursued although there is scope to reduce the time from initial contact to approval. There remains a shortage of placements for teenagers and children and young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. There is a dedicated team of support workers for family and friends acting as foster carers and the number of such placements is relatively high. Around 75% of looked after children are in foster placements.

54. Performance on adoption has improved from a low base and, in the year 2005-06, there were 34 adoptions, exceeding the target of 7% for the year. The permanency team is fully staffed and assisted by support workers. Care leavers are provided with good support. The after care service was restructured in 2003 and an Independent Reviewing Officer appointed to ensure that all care leavers' pathway plans were reviewed. Independent Reviewing Officers make regular visits to children's homes. Visits by councillors to children's homes have not been sufficiently regular or frequent. A new programme of these visits has now been planned. Children and young people in care know how to make a complaint, are consulted about services and take part in interviews for new staff in residential homes. The organisation of review meetings has been improved to promote the participation of children and young people.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

55. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** Information for parents and carers is generally clear and helpful. A good range of services and targeted projects, including a very strong Sure Start programme, helps parents to develop their own skills and support their children's education. Good information and support is available for parents of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through the Parent Partnership Service. Not enough information for parents and young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is readily available in other languages and formats or includes a clear indication of how these may be obtained.

56. Early years provision is excellent and young children are very well prepared for starting school. There is a good range of provision with 39% of places provided by the voluntary and private sector. There are vibrant, positive relationships between all sectors and a good network of early years providers which facilitates sharing of good practice, support and advice. Challenge and support to raise standards has increased and is welcomed by the providers who are engaged in the Quality First network and Wigan Quality Standard continuous self-assessment programme. There is a comprehensive needs led training programme leading to recognised accreditation. Detailed monitoring of take-up of early years places enables new settings to be targeted at areas of need to ensure ease of access for parents and carers.

57. Educational provision is good and standards are generally in line with, or above, similar areas and the national average. The development of integrated multi-agency services in children's centres across the borough is proving effective in providing early identification and support for children and their families. Link advisors work closely with schools to review progress and set challenging targets for improvement, supported well by detailed data. Schools are provided with very good support to develop their self evaluation skills. In the last year, one school has been given a notice to improve and another placed in special measures following Ofsted inspections. However, clear action has been taken to address the issues at these schools and support and challenge for schools causing concern is increasingly effective. Targeted support has been effective in reducing the gap between lower and higher achieving schools. Achievement of pupils from black and minority ethnic groups is monitored regularly and used appropriately to inform school based target setting. There is a good range of support available for children from asylum seeker and refugee families. Young carers are offered a good range of support through the Young Carers Network, including young carer groups, holiday schemes and counselling services, funded from a joint agency budget.

58. The school places and buildings plan is good, and good progress is being made on reducing surplus places in primary schools. The council is rightly monitoring the situation regarding secondary school places as birth rates change and increasing numbers of asylum-seeker and refugee families are placed in the borough. Access planning and the programme for building new schools are proving effective in making more schools accessible for pupils with disabilities. School admission arrangements are clear. Looked after children are given priority in all school admission policies.

59. Effective measures have been taken to reduce permanent exclusions through the supported transfer and managed move strategies and the promotion of improved behaviour in schools. There is a good range of provision for pupils out of school, including some very effective support for teenage mothers to return to education or training. There are good reintegration rates for pupils up to the age of 14. All pupils are offered a full-time programme and all but a few very hard to engage pupils, including some returning from the youth justice system, take this up. These pupils follow an individual programme which increases over time as the young person is more able to engage. A sound protocol is in place for monitoring children educated at home by parents.

60. A good range of recreational and voluntary learning activities is available to children and young people in the borough, including Scotsman's Flash, an excellent outdoor education facility. Children's centres and extended schools provide good before and after school activities. The youth service provides some good opportunities for targeted work with potentially socially excluded pupils, for example the Rafiki, Motswako and BYOU projects, and an outreach play team runs sessions on site for traveller children. There is a good level of engagement of children and young people in library services. The majority of young people responding to the Tellus survey, conducted for the joint area

review, felt it was quite easy to find things to do in their area. However, poor transport links across the borough inhibit their access to the full range of activities available, and opportunities to meet together in a warm and safe environment have been reduced by the closure of youth centres.

61. The achievement of looked after children of all ages is well below that of pupils of similar age in Wigan and some miss too many days from education. There are some good examples of services working well together to promote attendance and achievement and practice in this area is improving as education and social care staff work more closely together. All schools have designated teachers for looked after children and they receive good support from named CYPS officers. There has been a recent substantial improvement in the completion rates of personal education plans. A summer school at the Drumcrown Arts Centre provided an excellent opportunity for young children who are looked after to work together to develop positive relationships and improve self-esteem. The numbers of looked after children excluded from school are low with no children excluded in 2005-06. There has been specialist training for carers to improve educational achievement.

62. Provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is generally good. Effective joint agency working is promoting achievement and most of these pupils make satisfactory or good progress. The School-based Identification System (SIS) for funding special educational needs is empowering mainstream schools to shape support to best meet identified needs and facilitate early intervention. Use of SIS funding is monitored well at individual and school level but different measures of pupil progress are being used. The council is developing a central database to collate data on outcomes for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The review and reshaping of special school provision has improved the learning environment for children with more complex and severe learning difficulties and has made a significant contribution to improving inclusion in mainstream. However, protocols and service level agreements for outreach services to support inclusion in mainstream schools are not yet fully developed or understood by all schools, and access to outreach services across the borough is inconsistent. There are limited opportunities for joint training between special, resourced and mainstream schools.

63. There is limited access to recreational and voluntary learning activities for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Activities run by special schools are limited by the difficulty of providing transport for pupils outside the school day. Access to mainstream activities is restricted because of the lack of appropriate schemes, specialist knowledge of staff, lack of support staff and transport difficulties.

## Making a positive contribution

64. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.** Good support is provided for the personal, social and emotional development of young people. A confidential counselling service for young people is very well used. In school and youth service settings especially, there are many good opportunities for young people to develop positive relationships with adults, and their peers. Young volunteers are involved successfully in the youth service and in facilities such as parks and playgrounds. A number of schools have peer mentoring arrangements which support pupils through transition and help those concerned about bullying. Young mothers experiencing difficulty are well supported through the Home Start programme.

65. Children and young people are given effective support to cope with challenges and traumatic events in their lives. The successful Rafiki and Motswako projects enable young people from minority ethnic communities, refugees and asylum seekers to share experiences and cope with new or difficult situations. There is also good support for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people. Transition from one phase of education to the next for all groups is well managed and supported. The council commissions an effective advocacy support for young people from a local charity.

66. Involving children and young people in decision-making, including those from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, is a high priority for the council and its partners. Excellent consultation was undertaken as part of the development of the CYPP. There is also a strong commitment to developing consultation with very young children. Some services and projects have made very good use of the views of children and young people, for example in shaping support services for looked after children. The youth service is effectively brokering relationships between some Township Councils and young people to enable their views to be heard. Some training has been provided to young people to facilitate their participation in Township Councils. The extent of their involvement varies considerably across the borough. There are school councils in almost all schools, many of which provide an effective means of influencing aspects of school life. A borough-wide forum for secondary school council representatives has been less effective. The partners have rightly identified in their self-assessment the need for a more strategic approach to consulting with children and young people. A recently updated participation strategy aims to integrate existing communication mechanisms and ensure more systematic feedback to the young people on what has happened to their ideas, aspirations and suggestions. These plans are not yet fully implemented.

67. Strong partnership working contributes to the excellent work done in the area to reduce anti-social behaviour. There are very effective measures in place to identify young people at risk of anti-social behaviour. They are engaged in a variety of highly effective programmes including Positive Activities for Young People, and other interventions of the Youth Inclusion and Support

Panel. Minor crime levels in the borough were rising, but that trend has been reversed. A programme of high quality intensive support for individual young people on one estate has led to significant improvements in school attendance. The borough is an active member of the Community Safety Partnership and there is strong evidence of very effective inter-agency working. The YOT has a clear and effective role in addressing anti-social behaviour. Borough-wide initiatives are supported by strong action at a very local level. For example, young people identified an overgrown area and volunteered to work with adults to produce clear sight lines and deter its misuse. This led to local young people feeling safer. Many good YOT reparation projects are focussed on such local activities.

68. Effective action is taken to reduce the incidence of young people offending, and re-offending, through a range of initiatives. For example the FIX IT programme has used motor vehicle repair work to engage over 80 young people with outcomes including enhanced vocational qualifications and employment. YOT interventions are well matched to needs. There is a seconded teacher and a Connexions personal adviser based with the YOT to help young offenders access education, employment and training opportunities. Most young offenders from Wigan are placed in custody at Lancaster Farms YOI, with some placed at Hindley YOI. There is a team of three Personal Advisers located in Hindley YOI funded by the Youth Justice Board, managed by Connexions Wigan, providing resettlement information, advice and guidance to young offenders. The PCT has taken over responsibility for health care there and services such as anti-smoking initiatives and mental health support have now been improved. Once released from custody, young offenders are offered educational provision, usually through the Alternative Complementary Education (ACE) programme. There is good support to secure return to the educational settings in which they had places prior to custody, such as return to mainstream school.

69. Children who are looked after are supported well to enable them to contribute fully. Their participation in statutory reviews has improved recently. The council has an agreement with a national charitable organisation to support these children in expressing their views. This effective work has led to useful changes in systems, and processes. These children also have access to an independent, good quality, advocacy service for complaints. Foster carers receive training which addresses the importance of raising educational attainment. There are effective mechanisms for enabling looked after children to complain; they are aware of how to do this. The maintenance of family contact is encouraged appropriately. There are good arrangements in place for specific advice to looked after children who offend and the rate of final warnings, reprimands and convictions remains broadly constant and below national averages.

70. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well in contributing to their statutory reviews. Young people were involved in early discussions about a recent reorganisation of special school

provision although their views were not presented to the relevant cabinet meeting in which a final decision was being made on the matter. More recently, young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been effectively involved in a proposed reorganisation of support for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and have influenced the shape of emerging proposals. However, young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not as fully engaged in decision-making on broader issues, such as accessing leisure and recreational activities. Some respite care is available for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families. This provision is currently being reshaped to match needs more appropriately and provide emergency placements within the borough.

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

**71. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.** The range and quality of childcare services in Wigan are very good. They are promoted well and the borough has met its targets for increasing the number of places available. A 'care to learn' scheme has been successful in enabling young mothers to undergo training by providing help with good access to childcare. The number of teenage mothers who are in education, employment or training has risen significantly. The expansion and development plans take into account the views of parents. Parents make good and increasing use of the children's information service, which keeps parents well informed about childcare benefits available and the take-up of these benefits is high. The adult and community education service provides good support for family learning.

72. Partners work well together to provide advice and guidance to young people on education, employment and training opportunities. The Connexions service undertakes highly focused and effective work with the youth service, education welfare and other agencies, including the YOT. Referral processes between agencies are well established. The destinations of young people are carefully and effectively tracked. The council and its partners have been successful in improving the number of young people who are in education, employment and training after the age of 16. The number not in education employment and training has dropped steadily and is now below that of similar authorities. However, too many young people supervised by the youth offending service remain unemployed.

73. The personal development of young people is well supported through education and leisure activities. The work of the youth service provides a good range of activities, which are of good quality. They develop confidence and self-esteem in young people, particularly those from more vulnerable groups. In colleges, key skills provision is improving significantly, activities to enhance the curriculum are generally good and tutorials help develop research and study skills.

74. Young people in Wigan generally perform well in vocational learning and in post-16 education and training. Pass rates for GCSEs in vocational subjects in schools are well above the national average. The proportion of young people who gain a level 2 qualification by the age of 19 has improved and is close to the Greater Manchester and national averages. Further education success rates are improving at all levels. The overall provision is at least satisfactory and often good, and one large sixth form college has very high levels of attainment. Progression rates to higher education are above the average for Greater Manchester. Success rates on work-based training have improved significantly to above the national average. Progression from Entry to Employment into employment itself in Wigan is around 49%, which is above the national average.

75. Wigan's new 14-19 strategy and its implementation plan are based on a thorough analysis of need and broad consultation. The strategy provides a good framework for the development of clear learning pathways for all young people, and more extensive collaboration between institutions. It centres on the development of provision in three geographical areas in the borough to limit travel and address existing transport problems. Following a slow start in agreeing a strategy, considerable work remains to be done in implementing the 14-19 plan to provide accessible opportunities across the borough for all young people. Some significant development has already taken place in enabling young people in schools to pursue vocational qualifications. The FE college, employers and work-based learning providers have been involved effectively in this. Over 25% of young people aged 14-16 are now following such courses. Work experience opportunities are also extensive. There is a good range of work-based learning opportunities in the area. However for young offenders there is insufficient availability of pre-Education to Employment courses and the scheduling of some college courses does not allow young offenders to enrol quickly enough.

76. The neighbourhood renewal strategy has included a strong focus on improving the experience of children and young people. The council has recognised the need to ensure that the views of children and young people are fully heard in developing such initiatives. It has also taken steps to ensure that all applications for neighbourhood renewal funding are now assessed carefully for their impact on young people. Wigan has met its 2010 target for decent homes in social housing. Good use is made of supported accommodation for teenage parents, whose average length of stay in bed and breakfast is below the national average. Significant improvement has been made in ensuring suitable accommodation for care leavers who are now all housed appropriately. An educational welfare officer is designated to support the educational needs of children in temporary accommodation. However, there is no direct access to accommodation for young people in crisis who are known to the youth offending service.

77. The number of care leavers in education, employment or training has increased from 35.3% in 2003/04 to 86.4% in 2004/05, achieving the council's target. Care leavers are offered carefully designed support through taster courses, advice and help with enrolment. Some care leavers have recently gone on to higher education. The percentage of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who remain in education, employment or training at 16 has improved and is now over 70%. Support for these young people in colleges is good and colleges have improved the range of courses at entry and level 1. Good information and support is available to parents of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through the parent partnership service. Collaboration between agencies for those with complex needs is good. The level of direct payments for children and young people with disabilities and their families has improved.

### **Service management**

**78. The management of services for children and young people and the capacity to improve further are both good.**

79. The self-assessment of the partnership accurately reflects strengths and areas for improvement in most areas. The ambitions of the partners for children and young people are good. They are clearly expressed in the CYPP and appropriately linked to the community plan and the council's corporate plan. Ambitions are very demanding. This is reflected, for example, in the Local Area Agreement targets, which address areas of greatest challenge, particularly in relation to health, educational outcomes for looked after children and attainment at Key Stages 2 and 4.

80. The CYPP accurately identifies a wide range of relevant areas for improvement. It is an accessible document, based on extensive and thorough consultation with children and young people, staff and partners, including the voluntary and community sector and schools. Thus, its content is well understood and owned by all. The plan utilises a variety of good needs analyses from a useful range of internal and external sources.

81. Although the council has rightly acknowledged that the use of data regarding children and young people from black and minority ethnic communities needs improvement, race equality schemes are in place in the council and the PCT. The PCT is shortly to adopt a new, more comprehensive, single equalities scheme. Physical access is an area of relative weakness but is being addressed appropriately within financial constraints. The council has an appropriate action plan to deliver the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

82. Prioritisation in regard to meeting the needs of children and young people is adequate. Actions required to deliver the priorities in the CYPP are lucid, deliverable, well targeted and well understood by both council staff and partners. However, there is insufficient clarity in the plan as to which of the 52 priorities are the key ones and some elements of the more detailed

implementation plan do not have quantifiable outcomes. The implementation plan is only for one year and, whilst service specific risk registers exist, an integrated risk register has not yet been compiled. Although the council has clearly costed its services against the five Every Child Matters outcomes, this is not yet so for the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, known as the Children, Young People and their Families Partnership (CYPF). Thus, the CYPP is not currently supported by medium-term partnership financial planning, making its sustainability uncertain.

83. Plans for the development of children's trust arrangements are good. As a consequence of the council's absolute, and appropriate, commitment to ensuring that all partners are equally ready to embark on these significant developments, pace has been relatively slow to date in some areas, notably in joint commissioning. However, a new joint commissioning officer is now in place and plans for integrated commissioning will shortly be submitted to the CYPF.

84. There are good examples of preventative services in elements of Sure Start children's centres, extended schools and family support services. There is good understanding amongst partners of the staying safe agenda. However, the council and its partners do not have an overarching preventative strategy. Consequently, prevention is being addressed in individual service areas but the strategic overview is not clear.

85. Financial management of services for children and young people is good. There are, however, no pooled budgets and relatively few joint budgets. School balances are too high in a large number of schools but the council is now presenting a more rigorous challenge to these schools.

86. The capacity of the partnership and its capacity to improve further are good. The CYPF has been in place since 2004, built on a number of previously effective partnerships. Consequently, there is a strong and embedded commitment to partnership working across all agencies. Corporate and directorate leadership of council children's services is very good, with the commitment, enthusiasm and capability evidenced at that level also reflected at middle manager level. Best Value reviews and the Children's Advisory Panel provide useful challenge. Management and staff structures created for the new CYPS within the council have helpfully supported the development of increasingly integrated thinking and approaches to user focus. The period of transition has been well managed, supported by good communication.

87. The council attaches great importance to supporting people to fulfil their roles. This is reflected in an emphasis on staff training and development, including management competencies, and sound support from human resources staff. As a consequence, the council experiences a relatively low level of recruitment and retention difficulties and good staff satisfaction. Some joint training has been developed with partners, such as in relation to safeguarding.

88. Overall, council resources for children's services are used well. Council budgets have been realigned to priorities. Examples include increasing the funding of direct payments and the development of inclusion following the special school review. The council's corporate approach to aligning priorities, budget setting and performance is good and plans to develop further are well grounded. Significant Children's Fund monies are being used to support capacity building effectively in the voluntary sector through the local Council for Voluntary Services.

89. Council children's services provide good value for money. Wigan council has a relatively low level of funding, in comparison to similar authorities, whilst achieving results in line with or above similar authorities and nationally, for example in educational attainment. The youth service, with funding below national comparators, effectively supports those in greatest need.

90. Despite a historic budget for children's social care, which has been well below that of similar authorities and nationally, the budget for preventative services has been higher than in similar areas. This is reflected in good family support services, such as dedicated support for placements with family and friends. Stability of placements is good, as is the number of looked after children in foster placements. Value for money has been improved through the use of increased foster carer payments and development of in-borough residential placements.

91. Performance management is good. The council sets challenging yet realistic targets, which are related appropriately through strategic plans to service plans and employee development reviews. In addition, all staff in CYPS have regular supervision sessions to review progress. The council is highly focused on performance monitoring through the use of its very effective and well embedded Performance Plus system. There is regular quarterly monitoring of key performance indicators at senior officer and councillor levels and monthly monitoring of a broader range of indicators at middle manager and team levels. Areas of underperformance are consequently challenged, leading to timely improvement, such as the increased attendance of looked after children and young people at reviews. Sound arrangements are in place to extend the use of this system to capture progress with CYPP targets and provide quarterly monitoring to the CYPF Board and Executive. One area of weakness is the lack of criteria for some tasks which currently require value judgements in order to assess whether milestones have been achieved.

92. The capacity of the council's children's services to improve further is excellent. Leadership and operational management are both highly effective. The vision of the future development of integrated children's trust arrangements is well developed and supported by strong planning. The council is in a sound financial position and budgets are committed to priorities. The council has a track record of delivering major projects well, such as the Westfield and Platt Bridge extended schools and the building of 11 new primary schools since 1997. In an authority with 60% voluntary aided schools,

partnerships with the dioceses are highly effective. Rigorous new quality standards are in the process of being developed across all CYPs services.

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

1. The council has worked effectively with a broad range of partners for some years to improve services for children and young people. This has led to generally good outcomes despite significant deprivation and a relatively low level of funding compared to similar authorities. Resources for children's services are well-targeted to clear priorities. Services provide good value for money. Children's services' capacity to improve further is excellent. Leadership and operational management are both highly effective. The vision of the future development of integrated children's trust arrangements is well developed and supported by strong planning.

2. Good partnership working between the council and other agencies including the PCT is now improving children's health, and taking forward the public health agenda. Sure Start programmes have been effective in developing community services to provide support to families and promote healthy life styles for children. The council has provided good leadership of the Healthy Schools initiative. All schools are taking part in the Healthy Food in Schools initiative. There is effective inter-agency working to promote the health of children with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities (LDD). A complex needs team supports families, children and schools.

3. Services in Wigan work well together to ensure that children and young people are safe. The reorganisation to form the council's Children and Young Peoples Service (CYPS) from April 2006 has strengthened its capacity to plan and deliver services to the most vulnerable. The Wigan Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) has made a confident start. There are new eligibility criteria for intervention that have been well-received and are now being piloted. New arrangements for referral and initial assessment are in place, and services are being re-focused to increase family support and preventative intervention. Child protection work is well-organised, and there is good joint working by front line staff from the council and partner agencies to support families and children in public care. Children and young people with disabilities are making more use of direct payments.

4. Early years' provision is excellent and young children are very well prepared for starting school. Educational provision is good, with standards generally in line with or above similar areas and the national average. The council's support for schools, including those causing concern, is becoming increasingly effective in raising standards. Targeted support has been effective in reducing the gap between lower and higher achieving schools. The school places and buildings plan is good, and good progress is being made on reducing surplus places in primary schools.

5. Effective strategies with good supporting measures have been taken to reduce permanent exclusions and promote improved behaviour in schools, but looked after children of all ages achieve well below pupils of similar age in Wigan. Council staff and other agencies work well to promote attendance and achievement, and practice is improving. Provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is generally good and has been recently enhanced through the council's special educational needs review. However, the council has not addressed the limited access to recreational and voluntary learning activities for these young people.

6. Involving children and young people in decision making is a high priority for the council, and most young people have good opportunities to contribute on issues of importance to their lives. Looked after children have access to an independent, good quality, advocacy service for complaints. The youth service is effectively brokering relationships between some township councils and young people to enable their views to be heard. Strong partnership working contributes to excellent work to reduce anti-social behaviour. The youth offending team is very effective in its work to prevent offending and reduce re-offending.

7. The council works well with its partners to ensure that young people are well supported to move into further learning or employment at 16 years. Connexions undertakes highly-focused and effective work, and referral processes between agencies are well-established. The youth service provides a good range of high quality activities. The council has played a key role in driving forward the local 14-19 strategy. Good progress has been made in extending the scope of vocational learning but much remains to be done to broaden collaboration.