



# Joint area review

Sandwell Children's Services Authority Area

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**Better  
education  
and care**

## Review of services for children and young people

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

Audience	Published	Reference no.
All	14 August 2006	333

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## Introduction

1. This joint area review was conducted under the requirements of Section 20 of the Children Act 2004. The review was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of ten inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), the Audit Commission, and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI). The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the Inspection of Children's Services*.
2. The review was linked to the contemporaneous corporate assessment of the local council by the Audit Commission and its findings are represented in the relevant part of the corporate assessment report. The review was enhanced to include an inspection of the youth service and a re-inspection of the 14-19 service following the original Inspection in 2003. The Youth Offending Team (YOT) was also subject of a recent re-inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) following the original inspection in April and May 2005. The findings from this inspection are reported separately but reference is made to the YOT and its contribution to this review in this report.
3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in the Sandwell 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. The review evaluates how well services are managed and the capacity for improvement. 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 (LDD).
5. The review took place in two stages consisting in total of three weeks over a seven-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
  - a survey of schools
  - performance data
  - the findings of the contemporaneous inspection of the youth service
  - planning documents

- the findings of the contemporaneous re-inspection of the 14-19 service
- information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision
- evidence gathered during the earlier Youth Offending Team inspection
- briefings from staff within inspectorates, commissions and other public bodies in contact with local providers
- a review of the progress recorded against the current improvement plan for social care.

6. The second stage included inspection fieldwork. This involved a study 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 Oak Houses. 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. Sandwell lies in the heart of the West Midlands, in an area known as the Black Country. Six main towns make up Sandwell; Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich. Sandwell has a population of 285,773 of which 68,383 are aged 17 and under and 39,113 aged between 11 and 20. The population of the area has been falling since the late 1960s, although the rate of decline is reducing. Sandwell has become a more ethnically diverse area in recent years; 20% of all residents and 29% of all under-19s now classify themselves as being from a minority ethnic group. The 2001 census showed that 79.7% of the Sandwell population was from a white ethnic group compared to the England and Wales average of 91.3%. The Asian or Asian British Indian population was the next largest group at 9.1% of the total local population compared to a national average of 2.1%. The next largest ethnic groups are Caribbean (3.3% of the total local population), Pakistani (2.9%) and Bangladeshi (1.2%)<sup>1</sup>. Sandwell also receives a relatively high level of people, including children and young people, seeking asylum.

8. Sandwell provides a challenging environment in which to deliver services. The Borough is ranked sixteenth most deprived out of 150 in the country with four out of five households experiencing at least one significant dimension of deprivation. One in four school children is entitled to free school meals and the extensive take up of working tax credits, combined with low levels of income, is

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<sup>1</sup> Source: 2001 Census

evidence of significant levels of poverty. In 2001, 8% of all households were lone parent households, double the proportion in 1991. In general, the expectations and aspirations of the community are relatively low and this poses a particular challenge to effective community leadership by the council and public agencies in Sandwell.

9. Sandwell's economy relies upon the manufacturing sector, particularly the metal industry, and on medium-sized firms. The number of jobs in the area has risen over the last decade, mainly as a result of increases in service sector employment. However, over the same period, the rate of economic growth in Sandwell has not kept pace with the rest of England. The number of claimants of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) as a proportion of resident working-age people in Sandwell is 8,886 or 5.2%, well above the regional and national averages of 3.5% and 2.6% respectively. Claimants aged between 18-24 years number 2,780 or 31.4% of the total claimants in Sandwell, again higher than the regional and national averages at 30.6% and 29.9%<sup>2</sup>.

10. Sandwell has a Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (the partnership) established by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to provide governance for a Children's Trust, which is one of 35 national pathfinders. The partnership has an independent chair and representation from all the local key agencies and stakeholders, including young people. The council's education and social care services for children were brought together under a single directorate in May 2005 following a decision to restructure some key council services. The council's Chief Executive and the interim Director of Children's Services both left their posts immediately prior to the review. An interim Chief Executive (the former Deputy) has been appointed alongside a Developmental Director of Children's Services. The Developmental Director manages four Directors covering Schools, Social Care, Strategy and Resources and the Children's Trust project.

11. In Sandwell there are 97 primary schools, 18 secondary schools, four special schools and six Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). Sandwell has four residential educational establishments outside of the Borough and the Sandwell Academy is scheduled to open in September 2006 with two more academies in the planning stages. Sandwell has made substantial progress with the extended schools agenda. The number of children and young people looked after by the council is 548, which is relatively, and comparatively, very high, reflecting a history of initiating legal proceedings as a means of attempting to safeguard children, despite evidence that outcomes for such children are often poor. There are 164 children on the Child Protection Register and, in April, the Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) was replaced by a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) in compliance with Section 14 of the Children Act 2004. The council has three residential children's homes and a range of services covering advice, referral and assessment, family support, child protection,

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Claimant Count (April 2006) - NOMIS

looked after children including young people leaving care, emergency out of hours, and a multi-disciplinary team for children with disabilities.

12. The three Primary Care Trusts (PCTS) in Sandwell (Wednesbury and West Bromwich, Oldbury and Smethwick, and Rowley Regis and Tipton) are moving to a single PCT and have recently established a single management structure. Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals' Trust is the main provider of acute services including Accident and Emergency as well as the community paediatric service. There are 62 General Medical Practitioner (GP) practices many of which are jointly managed. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are provided through a service jointly commissioned by the council and the PCTs and these link to other primary services delivered through the extended schools and children's centres and the multi-disciplinary team for disabilities. Out-of-hours CAMHS provision is provided through the council's Emergency Duty Team and the Adult Psychiatry Service.

13. The Black Country Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is in partnership with the council, the college, training providers, and schools in addressing the 14-19 strategy. Post-16 education and training is provided by one college, 10 sixth forms and 10 work-based training providers. Education to Employment (E2E) provision is covered by three providers: NACRO, Rathbone and Sandwell New Horizons, providing 187 places in total. Adult and community learning including family learning is provided by the local authority.

14. The review occurred at a time when the social care service to children and families in Sandwell had been judged to be inadequate following a CSCI inspection in January 2005. In the 2004/05 CSCI performance ratings, the council was considered to be serving no children effectively, with uncertain prospects for improvement. The council was deemed to require "special measures" to help it improve its social care services and action was taken through the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

## **Summary Report**

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

15. Social, educational, health and economic outcomes for children and young people in Sandwell are inadequate, with the majority of indicators below the national averages. For example, rates of infant mortality and childhood obesity are too high, and whilst the achievements of children and young people are improving, levels of educational attainment and participation in post-16 education training are too low, some children at risk of harm are inadequately safeguarded, and too many children are looked after with too few having permanent and secure placements.

## The impact of local services

### Being healthy

#### **16. The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is adequate.**

17. There is a wide range of relatively new and innovative services to combat the below average health outcomes. The services are managed adequately and well targeted to meet the health needs of children and young people. The impact of some of these services is emerging but limited. Infant mortality rates are above the national average, but this is being tackled as part of a perinatal project and rates are now improving. Immunisation programmes are in place but are uncoordinated. The overall uptake at below 95% does not meet national targets. Attendance at Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments is higher than the national average, but the services provided are generally good. Families served by Sure Start programmes receive good health support to keep children healthy. The involvement of over 95% of schools in the Healthy Schools scheme provides an effective and coordinated approach to health promotion in both primary and secondary settings. Services to specifically reduce the high incidence of childhood obesity in Sandwell are under developed. There is good access to dentistry services and dental health is good compared to the national average. Although overall numbers remain high, an inter-agency strategy is effective in reducing significantly the numbers and rate of teenage conceptions. Mental health services for children and young people are adequate. However, as is the case nationally, there is limited availability of specialist in-patient beds, particularly for young people between 16-18 years of age. Children needing such services, however, do not have to travel too far as these are commissioned from nearby public and independent providers. The health service support to the YOT is currently limited, mainly coming from the CAMHS. Health support for children and young people looked after by the council is adequate. The level of service has been increased and increasing numbers of looked after children are now having immunisations and health assessments. The recent integration of services to children and young people with LDD is good, but the mental health services available for children and young people with moderate levels of autism are inadequate.

### Staying safe

#### **18. The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is inadequate.**

19. Current arrangements to safeguard and protect the most vulnerable children and young people in Sandwell are: not robust; not reliable; and not adequate. This has been the case for some time and is evidence of the unsatisfactory governance by the ACPC and the council as the lead agency.



20. In some cases, there are significant delays in investigating child protection concerns and there is no system for checking the quality, progress and outcomes of investigations. There are delays in completing initial and core assessments, many of which lack input by other agencies and an appropriate analysis of risk. Standards of case file recording are variable and inadequate overall. Significant numbers of children on the child protection register, children looked after and children in need do not have an allocated social worker, leaving them without adequate protection and with plans not satisfactorily progressed. Arrangements to recruit and retain social workers are not sufficiently developed.

21. Timescales for holding initial child protection conferences are comparatively good. Core groups and reviews are held regularly with good attendance from partner agencies and parents. There is a lack of confidence in the availability of more preventative services as evidenced by the length of time that some children remain on the child protection register. The effectiveness of the multi agency approach to incidences of domestic abuse is weakened by an inconsistent response by children's services. The lack of an overarching coordinated approach to safeguarding and the prevention of harm means that agencies are unclear about their own, and others', roles and responsibilities in safeguarding children. As such, the current arrangements do not fully comply with the duty to cooperate and safeguard under sections 10 and 11 of the 2004 Children Act. The ACPC has not maximised the benefits of partnership working and progress on the development of common processes for assessment and information sharing is slow. Action plans emerging from serious case reviews and the recommendations of the Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié are not fully implemented.

22. An integrated support service for children with disabilities is in place and is beginning to improve the coordination and safeguarding arrangements. The range of family support services necessary to prevent family breakdown and reduce the need for children to become looked after is currently inadequate. The level of placement stability for children looked after is, however, good. The council is aware of and beginning to tackle the insufficiency of council foster placements to meet current demand, resulting in high numbers of children placed in external placements and some foster carers caring for more children than they are approved for. The identification and support to children in private foster care is inadequate, primarily because the satisfactory private fostering procedure has not been implemented.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

**23. The work of all local services is adequate in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well.**

24. The council works satisfactorily with parents and partner organisations to improve the quality of education and encourage children and young people to

make progress and enjoy life. Standards of attainment in schools are well below national averages but the council's initiatives are well focused and the achievements of children and young people are improving. More recently, overall progress has been in line with, or better than, the national improvement level. Provision for the youngest children is satisfactory and they make adequate progress. Looked after children make satisfactory progress but services for them are insufficiently coordinated. Children and young people with LDD make satisfactory progress and in some settings their achievements are very good. Helpful information and guidance is available to support parents and carers and the range of family learning programmes is good. The local authority has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of its schools and the effect of a renewed partnership with head teachers is now having a positive impact on standards. Effective strategies are in place to improve and remove schools from formal categories of concern. There is a strategy to reduce bullying and racism but incidents still occur and schools are not sufficiently diligent in passing on reports to the council about racist incidents. Services increasingly work together to tackle low attendance and high rates of exclusion and the overall picture is improving, although too many pupils are regularly absent from school. Children looked after generally have good attendance. Exclusions from primary and secondary schools are above average but have fallen recently. However, a significant proportion of young people who offend and are known to the YOT are not in school and not receiving suitable levels of alternative education. Few pupils are excluded from special schools. The monitoring of special educational needs (SEN) provision in schools is well supported by officers but the local authority's own procedures for monitoring the quality of provision and value for money in this regard are unsatisfactory. The council is making steady progress with its policy for inclusion by reducing the number of statements issued and improving the efficiency of its statutory assessment procedures. There are inadequate leisure and recreational opportunities.

### **Making a positive contribution**

#### **25. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate.**

26. There is adequate support for children and young people to develop socially and emotionally. The vision and plans to further increase participation and inter-agency working are well conceived and clearly expressed. Many of these initiatives are at an early stage of development and they are currently insufficiently coordinated to provide wide reaching participation. The Shadow Youth Cabinet provides good advice to the council on improving outcomes for young people in Sandwell. Young people have opportunities to contribute to strategic and local decision-making through some youth forums and school councils. However, consultation with the wider population is unsystematic and a number of young people expressed frustration at not having a voice in key decisions affecting them. There is effective support from specialist services for vulnerable young people dealing with pregnancy and sexual health issues, but

the current support to those referred to social services and newly-arrived asylum seekers is under developed. The recently established Looked After Children's Board and Corporate Parenting Board are well conceived and are enabling some looked after children and young people to participate effectively. However, the impact on wider service planning is under-developed. Opportunities for consultation for young people with LDD are limited. There are some effective initiatives to reduce anti-social behaviour and reduce offending in known trouble spots but a coordinated strategy between the police, YOT, education service and social services is not in place.

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

#### **27. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is inadequate.**

28. The 14–19 strategy is currently lost within a detailed operation plan and, as a consequence, is not effectively communicated to and understood by all partners. The re-inspection of 14-19 provision judged that there has been limited progress to date in rectifying the weaknesses in provision identified in the original inspection in March 2003. As a consequence, the outcomes for young people are inadequate as is the contribution of services to improving these outcomes. Participation in post-16 education and training is improving but remains below the national average. Levels of achievement are low at all stages, and standards in sixth forms are too low. Achievement is slightly higher than national averages in work-based learning. The number of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET) shows a steady decline, although there are a significant number of young people known to the YOT who are in this category.

29. The involvement of the Connexions service with the local authority is good. Personal advisors provide well-targeted and objective advice and guidance for young people. Young people from minority ethnic groups are well represented in employment, education and training. However, the contribution of services overall to improving the economic well-being of more vulnerable children, such as those looked after, is inadequate and outcomes remain poor. The quality of social housing is improving from a low base, and most young people live in affordable housing. There is good, targeted support for families through regeneration initiatives.

### **Service management**

#### **30. Overall, the management of services for children and young people in Sandwell is inadequate. The capacity for improvement is adequate.**

31. Ambition for these services is adequate. The council and its partners demonstrate a clear understanding of the area and its needs and there is engagement with some children and young people as part of the consultation process. Service ambitions are based on an adequate analysis of needs. The

extent to which local partners are routinely including the diverse needs of the population into planning their provision, such as implementing race equality schemes, is inadequate. The council's prioritisation is inadequate. Although there are clear and realistic priorities in the Partnership Plan and in the plan for the council's education and children's services, the ability of the council to stay focused on its priorities is variable. The consistency and effectiveness of the management of resources is not sufficiently robust and does not assist the focus on priorities.

32. The council's capacity and the capacity of the broader partnership to deliver services for children and young people are adequate. There have been a number of recent permanent appointments to key senior posts in children's services and these underpin the improvements in capacity to improve. In recent months there has been some significant corporate investment in additional capacity such as dedicated staff to tackle some long-standing competency issues in the social care workforce. Political leadership has also secured council support for the academy schools project. There is now a better understanding of the areas for development and the factors that have led to poor services. Moreover, there are signs that some poor services are being turned around. The new interim appointments of Chief Executive and Development Director also support improved capacity by providing the corporate, partnership and directorship needed to deliver on the improvement priorities for children's services. The council and its partners are at the beginning of a drive to improve service management. There is, however, no clear and sustained focus on value for money. The Children and Young Person's Partnership is well constituted and reflects an established history of collaboration. However, the plans to maximise the capacity from improved joint working and joint commissioning have been slow to develop, particularly as Sandwell is a pathfinder Children's Trust.

33. The performance management of service delivery is adequate. There is a good level of involvement of councillors and senior officers in performance review and management. The creation of a dedicated portfolio of performance management for one of the deputy leaders of the council has raised the profile and importance of performance management to an adequate level. Lead members are better informed about the state of services through improved performance information and thereby able to provide more effective challenges than in the recent past.

## Grades

Grades awarded:

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

	Local services overall	Council services	Health services
Being healthy	2		
Staying safe	1		
Enjoying and achieving	2		
Making a positive contribution	2		
Achieving economic well-being	1		
Service management	1		
Capacity to improve	2	2	
Children's services		1	
The education service		2	
The social care services for children		1	
The health service for children			2

## Recommendations

For immediate action

- The partnership should review the Children and Young Person's Plan to:

- incorporate the recommendations for action arising from the joint area review, the re-inspection of the 14-19 service, the youth service inspection and the re-inspection of the YOT
  - identify the actions most critical to improving outcomes for children and young people over the next 12 months
  - identify and routinely monitor the specific impact of service improvements on outcomes for children and young people.
- The partnership, the LSCB and the council as the lead agency for safeguarding should ensure that:
- the social care improvement plan (including the actions required from the recommendations of the inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Victoria Climbié) continues to be implemented on a multi-agency basis to ensure, as a matter of urgency, that looked after children and children likely to be at risk of significant harm are adequately protected
  - a clear overarching and well-coordinated approach to safeguarding and preventing harm is developed and implemented to ensure all agencies are clear about their, and others, roles and responsibilities in accordance with sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004. This should specifically include children living in households where there is a risk of domestic violence
  - a system is introduced for routinely monitoring the progress and effectiveness of all child protection support and interventions
  - the procedure to identify and support children in private foster care is implemented
  - social care case recording and filing is improved so as to be compliant with the standards in the SSI publication Recording with Care<sup>3</sup>.
- The partnership and/or LSCB should routinely and regularly review the social care improvement plan to ensure milestones are realistic and urgent remedial action taken if targets are unlikely to be met.
- The council should urgently improve recruitment and retention of qualified social workers.

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<sup>3</sup> DH 1999

- The council should ensure that schools are diligent in passing on reports to the council about racist incidents.
- The partnership should ensure that there is a clear 14-19 strategy that is understood by all partners and is informing the planning and development of services.

### **For action over the next six months**

- The partnership should:
  - build further financial and human resource capacity for improvement through developing a systematic and broadly owned approach to securing value for money
  - develop further a common workforce strategy and plan
  - increase the engagement of all agencies and the pace of implementing common processes such as information sharing, common assessment and lead professional.
- The partnership should develop further the extent to which the issues of diversity and race equality are satisfactorily included in planning service developments.
- The council should improve its arrangements for the monitoring of special educational needs outcomes, the quality of provision, the use of budgets and value for money.
- The council should ensure that the services for looked after children are better coordinated and fully integrated.
- The partnership should improve the co-ordination and coverage of arrangements to engage children and young people in making a positive contribution to service developments and the design of their own service plans. Opportunities for effective consultation with children and young people with LDD should be further developed.
- The partnership should ensure there is improved coordination and joint working between the police, YOT and the council education, social care and youth services to reduce anti-social behaviour and offending and decrease the numbers of young people known to the YOT who are not in education, employment and training.
- The partnership should improve mental health services for children and young people particularly with regard to the out of hours service and access to specialist services.

- The partnership should further develop the range of services to children and young people with moderate levels of autism.
- The PCT should agree and implement with all relevant partners a strategy to reduce childhood obesity.

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

- The PCT should provide a specialist health service to the YOT.
- The partnership should review and develop further the range and availability of family support services to prevent family breakdown and reduce the high numbers of children who are looked after.
- The partnership should increase the range of leisure and recreational opportunities available to children and young people.

## **Main Report**

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

**34. Social, educational, health and economic outcomes for children and young people in Sandwell are inadequate as the majority are below the national averages.**

35. Whilst the majority of young people consider themselves to be quite healthy, many health outcomes are unsatisfactory. Despite some recent improvement, Sandwell has a high infant mortality rate when compared to the national average. The quality and availability of overall health care is starting to improve particularly in those areas served by a Sure Start initiative. However, an uncoordinated approach towards immunisation means too many children are not able to easily access the immunisation programme and national targets are not being reached. Oral health of children and young people in Sandwell is good compared to national targets with good access to National Health Service (NHS) dental services and a fluoridated water supply. Childhood obesity is high in Sandwell with currently one in four children estimated to be overweight. The emergency facilities for treating children in A&E departments are good but attendance rates, particularly for gastro-enteritis and lower respiratory tract infections, are higher than the national average. Teenage pregnancy rates and numbers are still very high, but a cross-agency strategy has been successful in starting to reduce these rates significantly. Breast feeding rates are lower in Sandwell than the national average and rates for smoking during pregnancy remain high. Health assessments and immunisation cover for looked after children are improving. Health care for children and young people with LDD is generally good and a multi-agency initiative including staff from health, education, social care and Connexions now provides an integrated service to these children and young people.



36. Not all young people feel safe in their local area. In general young people feel that better public transport, more police on the streets and more protection from bullies or gangs would improve their feelings of unease. While most children and young people feel safe and happy in school, bullying is still a concern for some children despite positive policies and action to counter it. The lack of robust and reliable child protection and safeguarding arrangements are a major weakness especially for those at greatest risk. Delays in investigating concerns and completing assessments means some children are inadequately safeguarded. Many children on the register are well supported by good interagency working but significant numbers of children on the child protection register, children who are looked after, and children in need, are not allocated to a social worker leaving them without sufficient protection, and too often their plans not adequately progressed. There is a disproportionately high number of children looked after in Sandwell and outcomes for these children are less certain. Children living in households where there is domestic abuse are not always adequately assessed. Some children have good support plans in place with packages of respite care and care support at home, but services are not able to meet the demand.

37. The standards of attainment of the majority of children and young people in Sandwell are below average but improving compared to national standards. In 2005, for the first time, the proportion of young people gaining one or more A\*-G grades in General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSE) was in line with those in similar authorities. At Key Stage 3, the results at level 5 in English and mathematics rose by double the national rate of improvement. However, white boys and children of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage do not always progress well. Looked after children make satisfactory progress and the proportion gaining one or more grades A\*-G in GCSE varies around the national average but is below the national figure for higher grades. Children and young people with LDD make satisfactory progress and their achievements are sound. Attendance is below national averages but gradually improving and the council is on track to meet its target of 92% attendance in 2008. Children who are looked after generally attend school regularly. Permanent exclusions from schools are above the national average but very low in special schools. Rates of exclusion are falling and successful re-integration for those who have been excluded from school is rising.

38. Children and young people have an adequate range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility and many make an adequate contribution to their communities. There are some good initiatives that enable children and young people to develop personal and social skills and take personal responsibility. Some children and young people make a positive contribution to their communities through peer mentoring, youth forums and school councils. However, a relatively large number are not able to contribute their views about key decisions affecting them because their school does not have a council or because they do not have access to the elected Youth Cabinet. Looked after children and young people and those with LDD are not consistently involved in their reviews and do not always find it easy to make

their views heard. Rates of repeat offending have decreased but young people who have offended are not always given appropriate opportunities for alternative education, training or employment.

39. The overall extent to which children and young people are able to achieve economic well being and are prepared for working life is currently inadequate but there are improvements in some areas. Planning for 14–19 provision is not sufficiently cohesive, does not fully engage all partners and, as a consequence, the implementation of action plans has been slow. Collaborative working across schools, however, is now ensuring a better range of A levels for students. Participation in post-16 education and training remains significantly below the national average. Levels of achievement are low at all stages, and standards in sixth forms are too low. Achievement in work-based learning is slightly higher than the national average. Rates of participation of young people with learning difficulties or disabilities in work-based learning are slightly higher than national averages and the number of young people in employment, education or training is showing steady improvement. Although a number of young people attend Level One courses at Sandwell College, there is insufficient provision at Level One and below across Sandwell. There are only 158 E2E places and 52 pre-entry to employment places. The rate of progression of looked after children into employment, education and training, has steadily improved over the last five years, but it remains just below the national average.

## **The impact of local services**

### **Being healthy**

#### **40. The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is adequate.**

41. An adequate range of preventative services and community initiatives are in place to help address the levels of poor health experienced by many children and young people in Sandwell. Parents and carers, particularly those in a Sure Start area, receive good, well-co-ordinated advice and support in keeping their children healthy. Partnership working within Sure Start and other community developments such as the Greets Green project are reducing health inequalities by targeting services on neighbourhoods with the greatest need.

42. The infant mortality rates in Sandwell are higher than the national average but there is a good perinatal project coordinated on a regional basis, which is tackling this issue; rates are now improving. However, beyond this, the quality of advice and support to vulnerable parents is somewhat inconsistent, with midwifery services and parenting classes still largely based within the hospital setting as a consequence of limited accommodation in the community.

43. The Sandwell Healthy Schools scheme provides a well co-ordinated, multi-agency approach to the promotion of healthy lifestyles in both primary and secondary schools. The involvement of over 95% of schools in this scheme is

good and above the national average. Physical activity is promoted within schools and through community settings, with more children and young people now involved in some form of activity. The health surveillance programmes at pre-school and school ages follow national guidance and children's and young people's physical and emotional needs are supported adequately through the school curriculum and school nursing services.

44. A good range of increasingly effective services is provided through drug education, counselling, confidential advice (DECCA). The support work by peer educators in both primary and secondary schools is well received, and there is targeted outreach work with the more vulnerable young people. It is, however, not clear how services fit into an overall strategy.

45. An inter-agency strategy to reduce the high rate of teenage pregnancies is good and having a positive impact with significant reductions in the numbers and rates of teenage conceptions. There is a wide range of support services available to very young parents.

46. The identification and assessment of health needs at an early age is satisfactory but immunisation uptake is low across Sandwell, despite promotional work by the health visiting service. Dental health is good, with the percentage of children with untreated tooth decay lower than the national average. There is good access to NHS dentistry services across Sandwell.

47. Much of the mental health support available for children and young people is adequate. Joint commissioning of services using pooled resources is leading to an improvement to the waiting times for referral to the service. Preventative and early support services (tier 1) are satisfactorily supported and developed and are now adequate. Partnership working with a wide range of partners, including service users and the voluntary sector, is satisfactory. Young people benefit from the attachment of a dedicated psychiatric nurse to the YOT. As is the case nationally, there is limited availability of specialist in-patient beds, particularly for young people between 16-18 years of age. Social worker cover is low when compared with national figures and the social care contribution to more specialised and targeted mental health provision is insufficient. The services and support to children and young people with moderate levels of autism are inadequate.

48. Health support for children and young people looked after by the council is adequate. Resources for the service have been increased and completion rates for health assessments and uptake of immunisation cover by young people are improving. The designated nurse works well with the teenage pregnancy unit to promote positive health and in youth centres to help raise the self-esteem of looked after children.

49. A multi-agency initiative including staff from health, education, social care and Connexions providing an integrated service for children and young people with LDD is beginning to have an impact. This recently integrated service

means parents and children can now access the services they need more easily. A service pathway with a single referral point to reduce the need for repeated requests for information from families and carers has just been implemented. The impact and effectiveness of the service will be reviewed in October 2006.

## **Staying safe**

### **50. The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is inadequate.**

51. Current arrangements to safeguard and protect the most vulnerable children and young people in Sandwell are: not robust; not reliable; and not adequate. This has been the case for some time and is evidence of unsatisfactory governance by the ACPC and the council as the lead agent.

52. In some cases, there are significant delays in investigating concerns, leaving some children and young people at risk. A new system is in place to ensure that referrals are appropriately taken and responded to, but there is no clear system to track the progress and effectiveness of child protection investigations. Some children do not receive the protection and support they need as the lack of an overarching coordinated approach means agencies are unclear about their own, and others, roles and responsibilities in safeguarding and supporting children. Written guidance on thresholds for children's services intervention is clear and appropriate, but has not yet been disseminated to partner agencies. As such the current arrangements do not fully comply with the duty to cooperate and safeguard under sections 10 and 11 of the 2004 Children Act. Some children are left in situations where risk is not assessed in a timely way due to significant delays in completing initial and core assessments. The quality of such assessments is reduced both by a lack of consistent input from other agencies and inadequate analyses of risk. Currently, assessment and planning for some children is compromised by serious gaps in recording of both recent and historical events. The Information Sharing Project (ISP) is being piloted well in Tipton in order to bring agencies together to share information and put appropriate support plans in place for children. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is also being developed but both initiatives are undermined by delayed involvement by children's social care services. A number of key actions identified by the ACPC in their action plan arising from the recommendations from the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié have not been implemented, and as a result some poor practice continues. For example, children and parents are not always seen and spoken to before their child's case is closed, which might put children at risk. Guidelines for managing the safe discharge of a child from hospital are, however, being effectively implemented. Sandwell Organization Against Domestic Abuse provides a coordinated multi-agency response to incidences of domestic abuse, but its effectiveness is weakened by an inconsistent response by the children's social care service. Indeed, the overall quality of practice of front line social work staff is inconsistent and, therefore, unsatisfactory. Front line managers show a determination to address poor performance but have not had access to recent

helpful guidance to ensure a consistent approach. Some social care case files show evidence of appropriate supervision, but this is inconsistent. A system of routine auditing of such case files is being introduced, but is not yet fully embedded in practice.

53. Once children are identified as possibly being at risk of significant harm the timescales for holding initial child protection conferences are good and better than comparators. In the majority of cases, meetings of core groups and reviews are held regularly with good multi agency and parental attendance. Child protection plans are in place, but are insufficiently focused on outcomes. Some children are placed on the child protection register, and remain on the register, to ensure an effective multi-agency service, highlighting a lack of confidence amongst agencies in the availability of more preventative services. Of major concern is the fact that a significant number of children on the register do not have an allocated social worker due to the high number of vacancies. This leaves children without adequate protection and is compounded by some of these children not having a risk assessment on their file: the significance of subsequent concerns, in terms of the overall risk to the child, is not readily apparent and may lead to inappropriate and unsafe responses. The arrangements to recruit and retain social workers are insufficiently developed. ACPC child protection procedures are out-of-date and there is no evidence of interim guidance being issued. There have been significant delays in the ACPC completing reviews into serious cases of harm and one is still outstanding. Not all recommendations from these reviews have been implemented. Effective work has been done with the Bangladeshi community on raising awareness of child protection issues and to inform staff of the learning from two serious case reviews. New and much more robust arrangements for the convening and administration of serious case reviews are in place through the newly established LSCB. Up-to-date vetting and barring policies are in place, which include updating Criminal Records Bureau checks on staff every three years. Insufficient multi-agency training capacity in the LSCB has led to not all staff in contact with children having the necessary access to training in child protection.

54. The contribution of services to preventing children becoming looked after, and safeguarding those who are looked after, is inadequate. A children's resource panel is in place, which is helpful to staff in identifying alternatives to children becoming looked after but this, in itself, is insufficient to systematically reduce the high numbers of looked after children and the relative over reliance on legal proceedings to safeguard children. The range of family support services necessary to prevent family breakdown is currently inadequate. The quality and consistency of social work practice with children looked after is variable with some examples of good practice. The overall quality of practice is adversely affected by high levels of sickness absence and high numbers of agency staff. Not all looked after children are allocated to a social worker and, for a number of these children, visits to their placements required by law are not being undertaken. The arrangements to ensure such children are in safe and secure placements are, therefore, inadequate. There are delays in children's plans being progressed satisfactorily and in a timely manner as

evidenced by the comparatively low number of children placed for adoption and low numbers adopted. The level of placement stability is, however, good. There are insufficient council foster placements to meet current demand and this results in high numbers of children placed in external placements and some foster carers caring for more children than they are approved for. Outcomes for such children are considerably more uncertain. All children recently becoming looked after receive a helpful induction from the Looked After Children Board. Children and young people looked after in foster care generally know how to make a complaint and have received a guidebook. The picture is more mixed in residential care, with only one children's home having an effective complaints procedure. The identification and support to children in private foster care is inadequate, primarily because the satisfactory private fostering procedure has not been implemented.

55. Children with LDD are beginning to receive improved and more coordinated support through the new integrated support service. The impact of this provision on improving the safety of these children is untested as the ACPC has not routinely analysed the number of such children subject to child protection investigations or those on the child protection register.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

**56. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is adequate.**

57. Partnership work for children and young people is improving standards in education. The trends are encouraging and partner organisations such as local community centres, voluntary and private providers and West Bromwich Albion football club make a valuable contribution to improving the attitudes, aspirations and actions of young people. Many parents and carers, especially those from ethnic minority groups, receive good advice from parental and educational support services, early years' providers and schools. For example the Year five Reading in Tandem initiative supports shared learning for families and is raising the achievements of pupils and parents alike.

58. A satisfactory integrated early years partnership plan gives priority to vulnerable children. Helpful local authority guidance on early years' practice reflects statutory requirements and is targeted on the greatest need. Young children make an adequate start in their personal and social development and language skills, but their understanding of mathematics and number is less strong. Monitoring of all early years providers is in place, though the procedures are insufficiently coordinated.

59. Overall standards of attainment are below the national and statistical neighbour averages. The added value provided by schools is also below average; however, between key stages 1 and 2 it was above average in 2005 and rising standards in secondary schools now place Sandwell close to the

national average. Many of the council's initiatives to raise standards are well focused and have energetic leadership. This is particularly true in primary schools. In secondary schools the academic coaching project in 2005 contributed significantly to increased GCSE standards for targeted pupils. More recently, overall progress has been in line with, or better than, the national improvement level. In 2005, the proportion gaining one or more GCSE grades at A\*-G was in line with statistical neighbours for the first time, the 5 A\*-G grades improved by more than the national average and English and mathematics results for 14 year olds improved at double the national average. Children and young people who are looked after often do better than their peers nationally, as in GCSE A\*- G grades in 2003 and 2004 and also A\* - C grades in 2004. Overall, their GCSE results are satisfactory but the proportion of children looked after entered for GCSE examinations is less than the national average.

60. The school partnership framework and the positive views of head teachers indicate that the council's school improvement and intervention strategies are beginning to raise standards. Procedures are clear and intervention and support are differentiated appropriately. The previously high number of schools in special measures and serious weaknesses has been effectively reduced to three primary schools in special measures; no secondary or special schools are in any formal category. All schools use the local authority's self-evaluation procedure and there is good performance data, especially for ethnic minority groups. Strengths, weaknesses and priorities for development are discussed and head teachers report that these meetings are challenging. They have a suitable focus on the quality of teaching, leadership and management. There is a strategy to reduce bullying and racism, but incidents still occur and schools are not sufficiently diligent in passing on reports to the council about racist events. Good guidance on extended schools supports their development and the construction programme for children's centres is underway. However, local authority staff and those in partner organisations generally have a limited understanding of the objectives of these developments. The understanding of service integration and workforce changes is narrow and the council is aware it has given insufficient leadership to these aspects of the development of children's services.

61. School attendance is below the national average and the average for similar authorities. Looked after children overall have good attendance. The education welfare service makes judicious and effective use of support to families, penalty notices and court action where necessary. A new long term absence monitoring system does, when interrogated fully, identify patterns of non attendance and determine multi-agency intervention where needed. There are sufficient school places but surpluses have recently increased. Parental preference was met in all transition cases in 2004-05.

62. Children and young people who are looked after have satisfactory achievement overall. Monitoring is secure and their progress and achievements are reported to the Corporate Parenting Board. Support from the pre school service and the looked after children education team (LACE) is good. The

integration of these services is limited. The needs of looked after children are monitored effectively. Not all looked after children have personal education plans and only 37% are involved in the writing and review of their plan. All schools have a designated teacher for looked after children.

63. Permanent exclusions are above the national average in primary and secondary schools but well below the national figure in special schools, as are exclusions of looked after pupils. Exclusions are gradually declining partly because of an agreed schools' protocol for managed transfers and fewer pupils have tuition for more than a year than is the case nationally. Most pupils out of school, with the exception of those that have special circumstances, receive 25 hours of education per week. A mix of satisfactory and some good practice exists in these settings, but it is not consistent.

64. The use of individual education plans and the involvement of young people is variable but generally adequate. Monitoring of the quality of provision, levels of progress and value for money of SEN provision is inadequate. Pupils with a statement or identified special educational need make satisfactory progress overall and in some cases their provision and achievements are good. School SEN coordinators speak highly of the authority's specialist support services and the recent improvements in the statutory assessment procedures. The coordinators' professional development is good in its quality, range and aspirations.

65. Recreation and leisure provision is limited and some public spaces are in poor condition, though young people report recent improvements. Community initiatives and the Youth Service offer a range of outdoor and sports activities, but leisure facilities are limited. Though some arts and creative opportunities exist the range insufficient. Officers recognise this and the development of suitable venues is underway.

### **Making a positive contribution**

**66. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate.**

67. There are well conceived and well expressed visions for increased participation and inter-agency working. However, initiatives are not sufficiently coordinated or wide reaching.

68. Support for children and young people in developing socially and emotionally is adequate through initiatives such as pre-school intervention programmes and the Healthy Schools Award. Local partners offer a number of targeted projects that effectively develop personal and social skills of participants through peer mentoring. Initiatives such as study support, promotion of race relations and disability awareness training have done much to promote achievement, support the development of positive relationships and help young people value diversity. Mentoring for young people at risk of



disaffection and exclusion has supported some vulnerable young people well, resulting in a reduction in permanent exclusions and improved attendance and achievement.

69. Support for children and young people from vulnerable groups in managing changes in their lives is inadequate. There are delays in responding to child protection concerns and inconsistencies in social care provision. Whilst schools provide effective support for refugees and young people with English as an additional language, there is not a significantly coordinated approach across services to ensure efficient allocation of resources or effective support for newly-arrived asylum seekers. Partners are aware of the issues and a preventative strategy has recently been produced, with actions planned to improve integrated multi-service support to vulnerable young people, their parents and carers.

70. There are examples of effective provision for vulnerable young people from specialist services, for example support for pregnant teenagers and advice on matters of sexual health, drugs and alcohol. Special schools visited during the review are providing good support for children and young people with LDD.

71. Opportunities for children and young people to participate in making decisions and in supporting the community are adequate overall, with some good initiatives. The partnership's commitment to broadening participation by young people is strong and is well illustrated by the appointment of an independent Children's Commissioner and the establishment of a Children's Trust pathfinder to develop interagency and partnership working. Good initiatives include the Voice 21 magazine group, who are responsible for a high quality magazine and effective youth councils in some schools. However, strategic developments are at too early a stage to have had a significant impact on outcomes for young people. The Shadow Youth Cabinet provides good opportunities for some young people to learn about democratic process and make recommendations to council. There is evidence that they have been able to influence aspects of provision, such as improved street lighting, promotion of healthy lifestyles and improved access to complaints procedures. However, despite these examples, significant numbers of young people expressed frustration at not having a voice in key decisions affecting them at either a strategic or local level. They expressed concerns about access to transport, sport and leisure facilities, and safety in the community. In particular, some young people do not have access to consultation processes because their schools do not have a council or because their community groups do not have access to the Shadow Youth Cabinet.

72. Opportunities for looked after children to make a positive contribution have improved and are now adequate. Partners have recently established a Looked After Children's Board and Corporate Parenting Board to enable looked after children to participate in key decisions affecting their lives. The Corporate Parenting Board is well constituted and the Looked After Children Board provides a good service within its remit and scope. The Looked After Children

Board has undertaken a number of consultations to inform planning for user participation and has designed a useful booklet to support young people newly taken in to care. At present, however, representation through the Board is limited. Some looked after children do not have the opportunity to meet together or contribute their views to the Board and would appreciate the opportunity to do so. Opportunities for looked after children to contribute to their reviews have significantly improved, with 83% participating at January 2006. However, recommendations to make the process less stressful and enable full participation have not yet been fully implemented. Advocacy services for looked after children are currently inadequate and the Looked After Children Board have been involved in appointing an alternative advocacy service, which will be operational from July 2006.

73. Opportunities for consultation for young people with LDD are currently under developed. Young people with LDD have raised issues through forums such as the Mixed Young People Committee and Independent Living Centre Youth Committee, and they have made recommendations to improve respite services and transition arrangements and developed a good awareness training programme. Nonetheless, the partnership recognises the need to expand and develop further these arrangements.

74. Action taken to reduce anti-social behaviour and offending by young people is adequate. There are some effective initiatives to reduce anti-social behaviour in known trouble spots and some preventative projects are beginning to have an impact. Organised positive activities during out of school hours have had a positive effect on reducing anti-social behaviour in targeted areas. Preventative initiatives such as the Pupil Engage Team and Truancy Watch are having a positive impact in reducing exclusions and improving attendance at school.

75. Partners have provided some good support in race awareness and understanding of diversity through peer mentoring projects. The inter-agency management group is developing work to prevent young people at risk of offending from becoming offenders and to deter those who have already offended from repeat offending. Local indicators show a reduction in nuisance fires, violent crime and drink related offences. However, whilst the re-offending rate has declined, overall rates of youth offending are increasing. The YOT works effectively with other agencies to provide support for young offenders involved in substance misuse but there is no specific strategy in place to monitor and address the education and training needs of young people engaged with the service. A coordinated strategy is not in yet in place and joint working between the police, YOT, education service and social services is insufficiently developed.

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

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

77. Sandwell local authority and its partners do not currently provide a satisfactory level of support to help families achieve economic well-being. Planning for 14–19 provision is insufficiently cohesive and does not fully engage all partners. The re-inspection of 14-19 provision judged that only limited progress had been made in rectifying the weaknesses in provision identified in the inspection in March 2003. Some analysis of provision and progression routes has taken place but the implementation of action plans has been slow and the full impact cannot yet be seen.

78. The Childcare Information Service provides easily accessible and good quality information to parents and carers. Childcare places are increasing, though at a rate lower than the national average. The take up of tax credits is increasing and local community centres work closely with Jobcentre Plus and the Citizens Advice Bureau to promote these and other benefits. The authority recognises there are major levels of low achievement across the Black Country, with ten of the 24 wards in Sandwell having low or very low literacy levels. A strategy for the accreditation of basic and key skills to raise the attainment of all learners in English, maths and information and communication technology is now in place, but, as yet, there is no evidence of significant impact.

79. The involvement of the Connexions service with the local authority is good. Personal advisors provide objective advice and guidance for young people across the authority, with interventions targeted to those with the greatest need. Satisfactory careers information and advice is also provided through schools and colleges. A common prospectus is available for post 16 education and training. Analysis of data is clear and there has been a steady reduction in the overall number of young people not in education, employment, or training. The number of young people whose destinations are not known has also reduced significantly over the last 12 months. Whilst some young people from minority ethnic groups are well represented in employment, education and training, overall the services to improve the economic well-being of more vulnerable children are inadequate. The arrangements to ensure that young people who offend and are known to the YOT are in suitable employment, education or training are inadequate. A low proportion of looked after children have a pathway plan, though the figure has improved over the last 12 months. The local learning and skills council is not aware of the achievement trends of young people who are looked after. This means that the council is insufficiently aware of the outcomes for young people in their care. The rate of progression of looked after children into employment, education and training has steadily improved over the last five years, but is below the national average. The council offers a short work experience programme to some young people leaving care. Opportunities for supported living for care leavers in Sandwell are limited. The council does, however, provide a rent guarantee offer for care leavers entering the social housing market, and continues to develop protocols for children leaving care.

80. For young people with LDD, a multi-agency team has begun to improve transition arrangements. Personal advisors from the Connexions service work

as part of the multi-agency team ensuring young people are properly prepared for this transition period. Rates of participation of young people with LDD in work-based learning are slightly higher than national averages and the number of young people in employment, education or training is also showing steady improvement. The take up of the direct payment scheme is, however, low.

81. Satisfactory use is made of alternative curriculum arrangements. An increasing number of students are referred from schools or the pupil referral unit into successful vocational programmes. Realistic working environments in a range of occupational skill areas are well used. Appropriate, objectives have been set for level 2 learners, who are not achieving in the current curriculum, to achieve a Certificate of Personal Effectiveness and to improve standards of literacy, numeracy and Information and Communication Technology. A good range of Aim Higher activities are used including enterprise activities, thinking skills and teamwork development activities. The education business partnership works effectively helping in the arrangement of work related activities for almost 5000 students.

82. Collaborative working across schools ensures an improving range of advanced level courses and a broadening of the vocational curriculum at Level Three. Close working between schools and work-based learning providers is developing from a low base. Participation in post-16 education has increased from a very low base but it remains below the national average. Post-16 achievement is also low despite some limited improvement at Sandwell College and in the borough's sixth forms, both of which are seeing a rise in participation. Achievement in work-based learning is slightly higher than the national average. Although a number of young people attend Level One courses at Sandwell College, there is still insufficient provision at Level One and below across Sandwell. Three providers offer 158 entry to employment places and only 52 pre entry to employment places. The approach to gifted and talented learners is satisfactory, including arrangements for visits to universities both in the West Midlands and elsewhere.

83. Sandwell has a collaborative and responsive approach to regeneration. Community partnerships set up in Lyng and Greets Green incorporate a network of agencies including voluntary and community organisations. Partnership arrangements between the housing authority and the local school are good. Work is also ongoing to break down territorial attitudes of young people living in neighbouring areas. The views of young people were not adequately sought during the early phases of regeneration projects but some young people are now involved in ongoing evaluation, their views sought through a variety of young peoples' forums. Local construction companies have worked with a job link programme to provide on-the-job training for some young people.

84. There is a reduction in the proportion of homes that do not meet the decent homes standard but the figure remains high at 65%. Further significant investment has started in the Greets Green area, previously identified by residents as the most unpopular place to live in Sandwell. There is sufficient

semi-independent housing for vulnerable groups and support for teenage parents is good. The homeless strategy is adequate, though the authority recognises there is scope for improvement. The council does not use hostel accommodation and the length of stay for families in bed and breakfast accommodation is slightly better than national averages.

### **Service management**

**85. Overall, the management of services for children and young people in Sandwell is inadequate. The capacity for improvement is adequate.**

86. Ambition for these services is adequate. The Council and its partners demonstrate a clear understanding of the area and its needs. The developing approach to consultation with children and young people provides a valuable but limited source of this understanding. Ambitions are based on an adequate analysis of needs, informed by a range of feedback from residents' surveys, contact centre, elected members' cases and stakeholders such as the Sandwell Partnership.

87. The Council has shown determination and imagination in pursuing its ambition to raise standards in Sandwell schools in the political drive to construct five academies, all to be opened by 2008/09. Children and young people and other stakeholders have been involved in determining the six priorities of the Children and Young People (CYP) Partnership and in identifying and contributing to the priorities and actions set out in the CYP Partnership Plan. The Partnership is at an early stage in its development and has not yet delivered on any of its priorities.

88. The extent to which local partners are routinely including the diverse needs of the population into planning their provision, such as implementing race equality schemes, is inadequate. The extent to which local services share common objectives and targets to achieve outcomes for children is similarly underdeveloped.

89. The Council's prioritisation is inadequate. Until recently, staff changes and temporary appointments at various levels have meant that the council and its partners have not always remained focused on its priorities. The management of resources in children's social services has not been robust and has not supported the focus on priorities, although the council is now working to align resources more closely with priorities and to hold managers more effectively to account for resource management. The priority to raise attainment in all schools is undermined by some schools holding funds in surplus balances that should normally be spent on pupils currently in school. Work by the council with its partners to enhance its financial and other capacity to achieve ambitions and priorities is at an early stage. There are clear and realistic priorities in the CYP Partnership Plan and the council's plan for education and children's services, resulting from prioritisation by members and officers. There is some

commissioning through partnership to support the delivery of priorities, but this is underdeveloped.

90. The Council's current capacity to deliver its services for children and young people is inadequate. This has, until recently, led to poor services that have failed to contribute consistently to improving outcomes for children and young people. There are positive aspects of current capacity, for example, the political leadership demonstrated in a number of actions such as securing council support for the academy schools project. The capacity of the council and the broader partnership to improve is adequate. Recent changes of Chief Executive and Development Director provide a sound basis on which capacity can improve and, although the current post holders are interim appointments, there is clear evidence that they can provide the corporate, partnership and directorate leadership needed. In addition, there have been a number of permanent appointments to key senior posts in children's services and these have underpinned the strengthening of the capacity for improvement. The council and the partnership has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses as evidenced in the generally accurate self-assessment. There is now a better and more accurate understanding of the areas for development and the factors that have led to poor services, and the council is at the beginning of its drive to improve service management. The Children and Young Person's Partnership is well constituted and reflects an established history of collaboration. However, the plans to maximise the capacity from improved joint working and joint commissioning have been slow to develop, particularly as Sandwell is a pathfinder Children's Trust. Preparations for partnership commissioning of services are, however, now well under way and there are opportunities for some children and young people to contribute to relevant commissioning strategies. Similarly, the voluntary and community sector is involved in helping to shape commissioning strategies. There are agreed shared priorities which feed into the budget setting processes of the individual agencies.

91. There is evidence of sound political leadership of children's services, for example, in securing council support for the academy schools project. Members responsible for the scrutiny of services pursue the progress of their recommendations by using the tracking and monitoring system and the executive is responsive to recommendations made through scrutiny. Aspects of workforce development have been effective, such as the work in partnership with higher education leading to improved recruitment of newly qualified teachers. Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks of 5,500 staff have been completed. Strategies to reduce long term absence, including more effective support for managers from the human resources service, have met with success, the number of such absences nearly halving between 2004/05 and 2005/06. Some team working at various levels in the directorate is not strong enough to secure consistently the best outcomes for children and young people.

92. The council's capacity to secure value for money is inadequate. There is no sustained focus on obtaining value for money but a corporate framework to

review this aspect has been developed in recent months. Overall, the use of resources is adequate but, in an authority where 78% of education performance indicators are in the lowest profile, no systematic analysis takes place of how current funding can be more effectively used to raise attainment, for example, by securing more efficient sixth form provision or more efficient provision of PRUs on which spend is significantly higher than the England average.

93. The critical role of elected members in raising the aspirations and expectations of the community of Sandwell, and thereby providing effective challenge for officers, is not fully developed. The overall organisational development for the council to work as a learning organisation and to raise the expertise and skills base of elected members, the workforce and other stakeholders, such as school governors, is currently unsatisfactory. However, the council is now aware of this and some developmental work has started and is beginning to have the necessary impact.

94. There is insufficiently robust management of surplus balances in school budgets. The number of primary schools that have surpluses in excess of 8% of their annual budget rose from forty six in 2003/04 to fifty five in 2004/05. In 2004/05, sixteen schools had surpluses exceeding 15%, some of which were double this figure. Strategic leadership of schools and the arrangements to hold schools to account is not yet sufficiently strong. Until very recently, corporate support for services to children and young people and the pace at which corporate and directorate managers tackle poor service delivery, have been inadequate. However, the newly-appointed interim Chief Executive is developing the corporate role and collective responsibility for improving the services to children and young people. All four of the Directors of the service sit on the council executive management team. The executive of the Partnership Board has insufficient capacity to drive forward the pace of change required. Partnership working with the voluntary and community sector is not yet fully established.

95. The performance management of service delivery is adequate. There is good involvement of councillors and senior officers in performance management. The creation of a dedicated portfolio of performance management for one of the deputy leaders of the council has raised the profile and importance of performance management to a satisfactory level. Lead members are now better informed about the state of services through improved performance information and thereby able to provide a more effective challenge. As a consequence, following the critical CSCI report of January, 2005, the lead members for education and children's services are now better equipped to scrutinise and challenge service quality through improved performance information. Quarterly monitoring, use of monthly statistics and decision conferencing contribute to the performance culture. Performance review, inspection findings and independent reviews are used to develop priorities for improvement. Most staff understand how their individual and unit targets align with the overall service objectives and personal and professional

development plans provide opportunities to discuss progress and identify training needs. However, performance management is applied inconsistently across the council's services to children and the pace of improvements remains slow. Thirty six per cent of the council's performance indicators fall in the worst quartile, 78% of which are education performance indicators.

96. Overall, the council's education service contributes adequately to improving outcomes but the social care service contribution is inadequate. This is unsatisfactory for those children most vulnerable to poor outcomes and, therefore, the combined contribution of council services to improving outcomes is judged to be inadequate.



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

1. Social, educational, health and economic outcomes for children and young people in Sandwell are inadequate as the majority are below the national averages. Overall, the council's education service contributes adequately to improving outcomes but the social care service contribution is inadequate. This is unsatisfactory for those children most vulnerable to poor outcomes and, therefore, the combined contribution of council services to improving outcomes is judged to be inadequate. The capacity of the council to improve the management and quality of services is adequate.

2. The management of the council services for children and young people is inadequate and weaker than most other council services. Although there are clear and realistic priorities in the Education and Children's Services plan, the ability of the council to stay focused on its priorities for children is variable. The consistency and effectiveness of the management of resources is not sufficiently robust and does not assist the focus on priorities. The council's current capacity to deliver its services for children and young people is inadequate and has led to poor services that have failed to contribute consistently to improving outcomes. The council has not sufficiently maximised the capacity available through partnerships despite being a Children's Trust pathfinder. The capacity to improve is adequate. In recent months there have been changes in key personnel at senior corporate levels, as well as investment of additional corporate capacity. Notwithstanding the temporary nature of some of these key appointments, there is now better understanding of the areas for development and the factors that have led to poor services. The council is at the beginning of a drive to improve service management. There is, however, no clear and sustained focus on value for money. The performance management of service delivery is adequate and councillors are satisfactorily engaged in scrutiny and challenge.

3. The contribution of council services in partnership with the commissioners and providers of health care to improve the health of children and young people is adequate. There is a satisfactory range of relatively new health service initiatives. The impact of these services on reducing health inequalities is emerging but limited. The work of the council in keeping children and young people safe is inadequate. The arrangements for governance, accountability and partnership through the council as the lead agent for safeguarding children are inadequate and do not comply with the duties in the 2004 Children Act to cooperate and safeguard. The work of the council in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is adequate. The council works satisfactorily with parents, partner organisations and schools to improve the quality of education and encourage children and young people to make progress and enjoy life. There are, however, insufficient leisure and recreational opportunities for children and young people. The work of the council in helping children and young people to contribute to society is

adequate. There is adequate support to help them develop socially and emotionally. The vision and plans to further increase citizenship, participation and inter-agency working are well conceived and clearly expressed but most of the initiatives are at an early stage of development and insufficiently coordinated to provide wide reaching participation. The council's contribution to helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is inadequate. The council has identified that whilst improvements are being made, outcomes are currently unsatisfactory. The quality of social housing for young people is improving from a low base, and most young people live in affordable housing. There is good, targeted support for families through regeneration initiatives.