



Joint area review

Salford children's services authority area

**Better
education
and care**

Review of services for children and young people

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

Introduction	2
Context	3
Summary report	4
Grades	8
Recommendations	9
Main report	10
Outcomes for children and young people	10
Impact of local public services	12
Being healthy	12
Staying safe	13
Enjoying and achieving	15
Making a positive contribution	18
Achieving economic well-being	19
Service management	21
Annex: the children and young people's section of the corporate assessment report	24

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 multidisciplinary team of eight inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), the Adult Learning Inspectorate, and the Audit Commission. The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the inspection of children's services*.

2. The review was linked to the contemporaneous corporate assessment of the local council by the Audit Commission and its findings are represented in the relevant part of the corporate assessment report. It also drew on the inspection findings of the Youth Offending Service (YOS) and the monitoring visit made to evaluate recent progress of the youth service.

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

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

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

- self-assessment undertaken by local public service providers
- a survey of children and young people
- performance data
- planning documents
- information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day-care provision
- evidence gathered during the earlier Youth Offending Team (YOT) inspection
- briefings from staff within inspectorates, commissions and other public bodies in contact with local providers.

6. The second stage included inspection fieldwork, including the contemporaneous monitoring of the youth service. 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 the Little Hulton neighbourhood. 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 visits to a number of local venues providing a range of support for children and young people, 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. Salford is situated on the west side of the Greater Manchester conurbation, covering an area of around 37 square miles.

8. Salford rates as the 12th most deprived area on the index of multiple deprivation¹. It is also an area of contrast, with distinct urban and rural aspects. Worsley and Boothstown, for example, on the western edge of the city, are among the most prosperous areas, with highly desirable residential accommodation, a significant amount of 'greenbelt' land and low levels of unemployment. In contrast, Broughton, Little Hulton, Ordsall and Langworthy have been targeted for major regeneration and continued investment to tackle high levels of social deprivation. A number of successful regeneration schemes has already transformed large parts of the area, including the Salford Quays, which contains a number of commercial developments and nationally known venues for the arts. Salford also boasts a thriving university, a major teaching hospital and a high-profile super league rugby club. Although the proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups is relatively low, the city reflects a range of cultural diversity, including Higher Broughton, which encompasses one of the largest Orthodox Jewish communities outside London.

9. There are 107 maintained schools within Salford, catering for around 33,000 children and young people. There are 83 primary schools, 15 secondary, four special, four pupil referral units and one hospital school. There are 579 children looked after by the council, which is higher than the national average for local authorities. The Learning and Skills Council Greater Manchester works closely with the local authority, colleges and schools in addressing the 14–19 strategy. Post-16 education and training is provided by a general further education college, two sixth form colleges and 10 work-based training providers. Adult and community learning, including family learning, is provided by the local authority and local colleges.

¹ The English Indices of Deprivation 2005, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Summary report

10. Outcomes for children and young people in Salford are adequate overall, and are improving in a number of key areas.

11. The diverse nature of Salford leads to differences in a number of outcome areas for children and young people. Despite concerted efforts by the local authority and its many partner agencies, the life experiences of children and young people differ across Salford. There are some local communities that suffer from very high levels of deprivation, which bring with it relatively high levels of crime, poor health, low levels of success at school and very limited opportunities for adults and young people to find gainful employment. There is some good partnership work to deal with the impediments to good health; in particular, smoking cessation, healthy eating, increased physical activity and better oral hygiene, although the full impact of these is yet to be seen. Feeling safe, which is a concern for some children and young people in Salford, is being addressed through joint police, YOS and council work to tackle crime and make local communities safer for all residents. The vast majority of primary schools, irrespective of the area, generally do well, and build successfully on very good early years provision. However, this good start is not maintained consistently at secondary level, where low levels of attainment and attendance remain a problem in a number of schools. Recent improvements in secondary attainment, among the best nationally, need to be consolidated further. Opportunities for children and young people to express their views about life in Salford are at an early, but very encouraging, stage of development. Strategies to support young people in preparing for working life are beginning to be successful, but more work is needed to ensure that all groups of young people have equal access to work experiences.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

12. The combined work of local services in securing the health of children and young people is adequate. Children and young people are generally healthy, but there is variability across the area.

13. Joint working between the local authority and the primary care trust (PCT) is good, with effective joint commissioning arrangements in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and teenage pregnancy and substance misuse services. Children and young people, parents and carers generally receive adequate health support in their local areas; this is particularly evident in areas with a Sure Start programme. There is strong direction from the PCT and local authority, including schools, to promote improved public health. Other local initiatives include more effective general practitioner (GP) services, an increase in breastfeeding, the cessation of smoking by expectant mothers, and the reduction of decayed and missing teeth in children and young

people. However, there has been a recent upturn in the rate of teenage pregnancy, following year-on-year decreases since 1999. Support for vulnerable groups is targeted effectively, with the health needs of looked after children and those from minority ethnic groups appropriately reviewed. Although there have been some delays in the receipt of health reports for children and young people requiring a statement of special educational need, a recent review has committed more resources to address identified needs and the situation has now improved.

Staying safe

14. The overall contribution of services to keeping children and young people safe is adequate. The vast majority of children and young people are safe.

15. Children and young people say that Salford is generally a safe place to grow and develop. Advice to parents and carers about keeping children safe is adequate. Referral, assessment, planning and review arrangements are adequate in protecting the most vulnerable children. The numbers of registrations and children on the child protection register are higher than found nationally, and reflect an inconsistent early identification of children with complex needs by city-wide preventive services. The number of looked after children, at 579, is much higher than found in most other authorities. Although these children are well cared for, and the council's residential homes and fostering and adoption teams provide appropriate services, not all looked after children are allocated a social worker and too many are placed out of the area. Recent changes to the structure of social care teams and the development of new services have not yet had a measurable impact. Although the children's services directorate has taken action to implement the requirements of the Children Act 2004, further work is needed to achieve more effective and efficient service provision, especially in relation to monitoring and evaluating services to safeguard children.

Enjoying and achieving

16. The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and achieve well is adequate. Children and young people are well prepared for school. They do as well as expected in primary school, but less well, overall, at secondary school.

17. Some recent improvements in education provision have been good, but there are some areas requiring considerable development. These include overall levels of attainment and low attendance at secondary level, and the number of schools judged by Ofsted as weak. All local services are strongly committed to supporting parents and carers in helping their children to enjoy learning and to achieve as well as they can. Senior leadership in the council is successful in driving forward improvements. The early years provision is a major strength

and contributes significantly to the good start that most Salford children make to their statutory schooling. The vast majority of primary schools, irrespective of area, generally do well. Most secondary schools are generally improving, with GCSE results rising impressively in 2005. Initiatives to improve behavioural standards in schools are meeting with success, particularly through the school-based police officers in secondary schools. Educational support for looked after children is good, and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well in nursery and primary schools. Those in effective secondary provision also do well, but those in schools where provision is less good underachieve. The area provides adequate opportunities for children and young people to participate in recreational, play and voluntary learning activities.

Making a positive contribution

18. The overall contribution of services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate. Children and young people have an adequate range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility, and many make a positive contribution to their communities.

19. The support for children and young people to develop socially and emotionally is adequate, although there is a small minority at greatest risk of exclusion who do not develop as well as they should. Access to childcare is good. Out-of-school activities provided by the authority's youth service and the voluntary and private sector offer adequate opportunities for young people to participate and develop a wide range of skills, and make new friends. However, effective liaison to develop further educational, recreational and leisure activities is underdeveloped. Children and young people receive good support to help them to cope with challenges and difficult periods in their lives. Transition arrangements between schools, and between schools and local colleges, are generally effective, although not all young people get sufficient and timely careers guidance. The authority's commitment to including children and young people in decision-making processes is strong, but initiatives are at a very early stage of development and do not yet include sufficient numbers of those young people who have left school. Consultation events involving partners, children and young people, parents and carers are good. School councils make a valuable contribution to helping children and young people become involved in democratic processes. Vulnerable young people, including looked after and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, receive good specialist support. Collaboration between partners has been effective in reducing the high levels of anti-social behaviour in the city, and provision provided by the YOS has been successful in reducing the numbers of first timers in the youth justice system. Although levels of re-offending are high, they are reducing in line with national averages.

Achieving economic well-being

20. The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate. Most children and young people are prepared for working life.

21. Salford's strategies for supporting young people to prepare for working life, and reducing the number of young people who are not in education and training are adequate. The local authority and its partners collaborate well in the planning and the coordination of an adequate 14–19 provision. Most schools offer curriculum flexibility at Key Stage 4, which has led to a significant increase in the numbers of the pupils involved in vocational education and an increase in the number attending local colleges. Looked after young people in education or training achieve and progress well. Work-based learning providers work well with the local authority, the Learning and Skills Council, and schools to offer a wide range of work-related learning for young people. Careers advice and guidance for most young people are adequate, but do not always meet the needs of some young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. More could be done to encourage some young people to consider professions that span across the traditional gender biases. The local authority has been very successful in its many regeneration and housing initiatives. However, it does not monitor sufficiently the involvement of young people in the regeneration of the city.

Service management

22. The management of services for children and young people is adequate. Partnership working is strong. Salford has high ambitions for the way its services will contribute to outcomes for all children and young people, but there are still inconsistencies in the performance and coordination of some services.

23. The council and its partners have clear and challenging ambitions for children and young people in the area. The majority of existing plans are thorough and link well to outcomes for children and young people; these provide a sound basis for the Children and Young People's Plan, for launch in April 2006. The authority knows well the areas which need to be improved, although its self-assessment is a little generous in some areas. The involvement of children and young people in a broad range of democratic processes is at an early stage of development, but positive action is being taken to increase the provision for listening to children. However, further work is needed to increase the involvement of those who have left school. The council is well prepared to meet the requirements of the Children Act, having made progress on developing a new children's services directorate, a Children and Young People's Partnership Board, a lead councillor for children's services and newly defined scrutiny roles for children and young people. A high priority is given to children's services by the PCT. Partnership is a key strength, especially with the PCT and the voluntary sector. The overall capacity to improve outcomes for

children and young people is good. A high level of surplus places in schools is now being tackled successfully. Some aspects of preventive services are underdeveloped, which are reflected, in part, in poor secondary attendance and high numbers of exclusions and looked after children. Most of these issues are being addressed as a matter of high priority, but the drive for change has been slow in some areas. Performance management is adequate, and value for money and financial management generally good. Processes are sound, challenge from elected members is robust and most areas of underperformance and high spend are being addressed.

Grades

Grades awarded:

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

	Local services overall	Council services	Health services
Being healthy	2		
Staying safe	2		
Enjoying and achieving	2		
Making a positive contribution	2		
Achieving economic well-being	2		
Service management	2		
Capacity to improve	3	3	
Children's services		2	
The education service		2	
The social care services for children		2	
The health service for children			2

Recommendations

For immediate action

- The council should ensure that the numbers of looked after children are reduced, especially in external placements outside Salford.
- The council should ensure that all looked after children are allocated a social worker.
- The council should review and strengthen its capacity to monitor, evaluate and develop further appropriate safeguarding services for the local area.

For action over the next six months

- Partners should increase the number and range of children and young people involved in consultation, particularly those who are not school pupils.
- The council should develop more effective links between the youth service and other agencies to extend educational, leisure and recreation opportunities for children and young people.

For action over the longer term

- Key partners should improve the quality of careers advice and guidance for young people, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Main report

Outcomes for children and young people

24. **Outcomes for children and young people in Salford are adequate.**

25. **Children and young people are generally healthy, but there is variability across the area.** The overall immunisation rates are similar to those found nationally and marginally higher for children under 5. The incidence of chlamydia among 16 to 19 year olds is high. There has been a recent upturn in the rate of teenage pregnancy, following year-on-year decreases since 1999. The number of expectant mothers smoking, at 25%, is significantly greater than found nationally. The percentage of babies with a low birth weight is slightly below average. The number of women breastfeeding is significantly below that found across the country. There has been a significant decline in the number of young people under 18 being admitted to hospital for asthma. The admissions to hospital of young people under 20 with mental or behaviour disorders due to substance misuse are lower than elsewhere in England; however, substance misuse is a significant problem in Salford. There have been delays in completing some statements of special educational need within the targeted 18 weeks because of delays in some health reports.

26. **The majority of children and young people are safe.** The number of children killed or seriously injured in road accidents in Salford has reduced significantly over the last three years. The number of children admitted to hospital with severe injuries is below the national average. Around 95% of primary, and all secondary and special, schools have adequate child protection arrangements in place. The number of children-in-need referrals is the highest in the north-west region. Almost 50% of initial assessments are not completed on time. All children on the child protection register are allocated to a qualified social worker, and all child protection reviews are completed on time. There are very high numbers of looked after children, with a significant number of these placed at home. The number of looked after children in foster care, or placed for adoption, is below that for similar authorities and the national average. The authority has maintained 100% of looked after reviews on time. Around 90% of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, aged 14 and above, have transition plans.

27. **Children and young people are well prepared for school. They do as well as expected in primary school, but significantly less well overall at secondary school.** Attendance in primary schools is good and in most secondary schools compares favourably with national averages. In some secondary schools, poor attendance remains a problem. There are sufficient early years and childcare places to meet the needs of children and parents. The educational standards achieved at the end of primary school are good or better than those found in similar authorities, and in line with standards expected nationally. Although there is underachievement in some secondary schools, 13

out of 15 made improvements in 2005, with the overall percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*–C grades increasing by seven percentage points; one of the biggest improvements in England. In weaker schools, predominantly secondary, some groups of pupils do not achieve as well as they should. Children and young people from the central area of Salford achieve lower standards than in other areas of the city. Most minority ethnic pupils do well. The level of permanent exclusions from secondary schools is higher than in similar areas, and nationally. Exclusions are rare in primary schools. Children looked after by the authority achieve higher results than is the case nationally, and their attendance is very high. The achievement of the majority of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Young people in the secure unit achieve well.

28. Children and young people have an adequate range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility, and many make a positive contribution to their communities. An increasing number of children and young people are involved in decision-making processes, including a representative group of five who sit, as ex-officio members, on the newly formed Children and Young People's Partnership Board. The majority of schools have school councils, and a significant number have mentoring systems. The number of young people engaged in education, employment and training is increasing annually, and now stands at 85% of 16 to 18 year olds. Around 63% of school leavers go on to further education. Levels of recidivism are higher than those seen nationally but are reducing annually, and are now among the best in the north west. Over the past three years, there has been a significant reduction in levels of reported crime. Overall, there has been a reduction in the total number of offenders sentenced, but an increase in the number of young people receiving reprimands, final warnings and court disposals. There has also been an increase in the number of custodial sentences. A very high proportion of looked after children participate in their statutory review. During 2004/05, 72% of statutory assessments included advice from children and young people.

29. Children and young people are able to achieve economic well-being and most are prepared for working life. The achievement of most post-16 young people has improved. Most secondary schools offer vocational courses for Key Stage 4 pupils. The proportion of young people who gain GCSEs and advanced level qualifications has improved. Many pupils enjoy studying vocational courses and achieve well at level 2 qualifications. The young people participation rates in post-16 learning, and their success rate, have increased and are now in line with national averages. Salford local authority and its partners have reduced significantly the number of young people who are not in education and training. Looked after young people achieve well. The progression rates to higher education have increased, and are now much closer to regional averages. There have been a number of very successful regeneration schemes, which have improved housing provision for young people, including young parents and carers.

Impact of local public services

Being healthy

30. **The combined work of all local services in ensuring the health of children and young people is adequate.** The Salford PCT and Salford City Council have a good record of working together in partnership. There have been a number of important joint appointments, including the post of director of public health and the director of development of the PCT, who assumes a role for children's services and is a member of the children's services directorate leadership team.

31. There is effective joint commissioning for children and young people in CAMHS, teenage pregnancy and substance misuse services. There is a clear and well-informed commitment to ensure that effective integration of services extends across the four locality areas of Salford as an aid to improving the all-round health and well-being of children and young people. The joint approach to public health by the PCT and local authority has provided a significant impetus for action, including the setting of targets to reduce smoking and promote a healthy lifestyle. There are some adequate joint strategies for the promotion of healthy eating and the tackling of obesity in children and young people. All community health staff promote healthy lifestyles throughout the city, and health improvement teams have a responsibility to promote local initiatives in schools, community groups and in neighbourhood services.

32. The failure of a small number of GPs to modernise and embrace more fully the all-round health provision for children and young people has been a concern. Effective action has now been taken to improve the situation through the recruitment of salaried GPs and bringing practices into clusters. The results of this work have been more focused and targeted actions to improve immunisation uptake, influence prescribing patterns for children and young people, and establish GP rotas in some areas to cover the baby clinic service at local health centres.

33. At local level, there has been a number of successful initiatives to improve health, including increasing breastfeeding and smoking cessation, in line with the public health strategy of empowering people to take responsibility for their own health needs. Parents and carers are now receiving good-quality advice and support in keeping their children healthy. Support programmes, including the Sure Start initiative, focus effectively on the key health issues identified across Salford.

34. There are a number of well-targeted multi-agency initiatives relating to teenage pregnancy, substance misuse and sexual health. The targets in the crime and disorder reduction strategy to reduce harm caused by drug and alcohol misuse are being met, and the drug action team is beginning to focus more of its work on substance misuse among children and young people.

Sexual health advice is an integral part of the local health worker's remit. The teenage pregnancy service continues to prioritise action to reduce the high number of young mothers, with action suitably focused on those schools with high rates of teenage pregnancies. Support for vulnerable groups such as looked after children is effectively targeted. The substance misuse service offers support to young people with identified problems, although some staff expressed concern that some of the most serious misusers are not currently being provided with a suitable service.

35. Salford schools make a positive contribution to improving and promoting children's health, with a recent independent report concluding that school meals were of good quality. There is, however, evidence of increasing problems with childhood obesity. Action has been taken to maximise healthy eating in schools, and includes the decrease of vending machines selling unhealthy food, and an increase in the number of healthy options. Schools and youth leisure services also promote healthy living through a range of activities.

36. There is a well-resourced CAMHS, which has an integrated partnership board and a jointly commissioned multi-agency approach to its work. This is working well in reducing the overall number of children and young people with depression and behavioural problems.

37. The health needs of minority groups are appropriately recognised and reviewed. The PCT has established an assessment centre for people new to the area, which assesses language and housing needs as well as health needs.

38. There has been a significant improvement in the provision for checking the health of looked after children, with the numbers having a health and dental check in 2004/05 increasing significantly from the previous year. The immunisation rates for these children and young people have also improved. These improved outcomes are the result of well-focused work by the teenage pregnancy service, the substance misuse team and the nurse responsible for looked after children.

39. There are some delays in the receipt of health reports for children and young people requiring a statement of special educational need. This has been recognised and is being successfully addressed through a joint improvement plan. In addition, a review of the service has committed more resources and improved the speech therapy service and communication through a keyworker approach.

Staying safe

40. **The overall contribution of services to keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** Those children and young people surveyed for this inspection indicate that they lead safe lives and generally know how to deal with potential risks to their safety. Schools provide a safe environment for

their pupils. Some children and young people who met inspectors feel unsafe in some areas of Salford because of crime, vandalism and the presence of local gangs of young people.

41. Procedures for tracking children and young people are adequate. There is cross-agency monitoring and sharing of information about the movement of children and young people, and an effective information-sharing policy between all the Greater Manchester authorities.

42. The local authority provides relevant safety information to carers. Voluntary agencies and Sure Start also provide useful information to help reduce accidents in the home, with schools routinely providing good-quality road safety and stranger abuse awareness training for pupils.

43. Thresholds for social work intervention are high. The authority is aware of this, and is refocusing some local services to increase support to families to minimise the incidence of abuse and neglect, provide children with a safe environment and reduce family breakdown. However, these arrangements are at a relatively early stage of development and have not yet had a significant impact. Some of the preventive services are not well coordinated, which has resulted in unnecessary duplication of work and a reduction of the support available for families most in need. Some services targeting minority ethnic groups do not always meet fully the specific needs of children and young people from those communities. Multi-agency child protection arrangements are good. Agencies work well together to deliver services to vulnerable children and their carers to reduce risks to their safety and ensure that children remain protected.

44. The local authority recognises that its guidance and records for adults who work with children and young people are out of date, but is taking action to address these issues. Front-line children's services are well organised and well resourced to meet current demands on child protection, with all cases allocated to qualified and experienced social workers. Although managers screen all initial referrals appropriately, and within timescales, the completion of child protection investigations is, in some cases, considerably out of date. The system of recording team managers' decisions on Post-it notes for cases awaiting allocation, and social work staff allocating cases to themselves is not good practice.

45. Social care staff have good training and development opportunities, including post-qualifying stage 1 and 2 training. Staff have open access to their line managers and experienced colleagues for informal help and support, including regular and frequent formal supervision, annual reviews and appraisals. However, there is inconsistent use of formal performance monitoring and management oversight of social work intervention in case files and records. Case files do not always have summary sheets or chronologies, which makes it

difficult to gain a clear understanding of the key issues and history of the case, and the current position in relation to intervention.

46. Schools and children's residential homes comply with requirements for a nominated senior member of staff responsible for child protection. Referral systems are understood well by those staff, but the multi-agency form for reporting is not consistently used. Core support groups are held on time, and multi-agency attendance is good and is focused on implementing the child protection plan.

47. The Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) is well established, but has limited capacity to meet fully all of its commitments. There are adequate policies, procedures and protocols in place to support the safeguarding of children and young people. The ACPC's business plans for the last two years lack contextual detail and performance analysis, and a number of important targets have not been achieved. While the membership of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) and the budget contribution from partner agencies have been proposed, they have yet to be finalised.

48. Salford has a significantly higher number of looked after children than found nationally, but these numbers have stabilised over the last two years. Local services place looked after children in safe environments and meet most of their needs. However, there are significant numbers in expensive placements outside the authority. There are also too many children who are the subject of care orders placed at home or with friends and family, with insufficient progress to remove them from the looked after system. There is no clear strategy to ensure that a suitable range of cost-effective placements is available to meet the needs of looked after children.

49. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are adequately provided for, with services working well together to meet their diverse needs and to provide support for their families. Transition planning for children and young people over 14 years old is generally good, but some plans are not implemented consistently or progressed satisfactorily. The perception of a small number of parents is that transition arrangements from children's services directorate to adult services result in uncertainty over the long-term future care arrangements for service users.

Enjoying and achieving

50. **The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and achieve well is adequate.** Improvements in pupils' levels of attainment are being made, but these are insufficient to improve aspects of low performance in some secondary schools.

51. All local services are strongly committed to supporting parents and carers in helping their children to enjoy learning and to achieve as well as they can. The contribution made by primary schools and many secondary schools is impressive, but where the quality of education provided is not strong, parents and carers are less keen to get involved in activities to help improve their children's learning. The Sure Start programmes are making a positive impact in supporting early literacy, numeracy and computer skills, and in re-engaging some parents and carers in learning, and further training courses to improve their employment skills.

52. Parents and carers receive clear guidance on the admission arrangements for schools. They are encouraged to make preliminary visits to ensure that the school offers the curriculum that is suited to their child. These visits are judged to be important and valued by parents and carers. Secondary schools perceived to have a poor reputation in a local area have been supported well by feeder primary schools, many of which have undertaken innovative work to change perceptions and support the transition arrangements for pupils. Playgroups and early years centres provide welcoming and supportive, caring environments for children and families.

53. The early years provision is a major strength and ensures that children make a good start to their formal learning. Strong local partnerships ensure that liaison between private and voluntary providers is effective, and that transition to school is managed well. The local authority has made a firm commitment to the development of children's centres and has opened four in the most deprived wards. These are having a very positive impact in ensuring that local services for health, education and care are integrated effectively for many children, particularly the most vulnerable.

54. Pupils achieve well in the vast majority of Salford primary schools. Headteachers appreciate the effective support they receive from school improvement officers and other specialist support staff. A small minority of headteachers indicated, however, that specialist support for children with English as an additional language was not always readily available. The local authority has consistently identified the achievement of secondary school pupils as a major area for improvement. The reorganisation of the secondary school improvement service has played a key part in this area, particularly in developing very positive and challenging relationships between secondary schools and the local authority, which have resulted in improved provision in many schools. There is now better-quality performance data available, improved self-evaluation and well-targeted support for schools causing concern. Close attention has been given to the effective delivery of national strategies for raising attainment. These are having a positive impact in encouraging a more diverse primary curriculum and ensuring that core skills are taught effectively at Key Stage 3. The result of this work is an impressive increase of 7% in the number of pupils achieving five good GCSE results in 2005, as a continuation of the improvements achieved in 2004 and 2003.

55. Although the local authority has successfully tackled some important issues, three major challenges remain. First, in comparison with similar areas, Salford has a high number of schools in Ofsted categories of weakness. During 2005, three schools with the longest history of formal weakness were judged by inspectors to no longer require formal intervention. However, during this period four other schools were placed in a formal category. Second, attendance in a number of secondary schools is poor. The introduction of fixed penalty notices, together with the reorganisation of the education welfare service and targeted intervention during key examination periods, has helped some schools to improve their attendance record, but there is still much to do. Third, although a number of pupils in secondary schools achieve at least satisfactorily, overall progress is not as good as it should be.

56. The authority has correctly identified the need to improve further the development of behaviour strategies in its schools, and the recent appointment of a lead behaviour professional now provides the opportunity for a better coordinated approach across Salford. Despite the number of exclusions rising in secondary schools during 2004/05, the provision for pupils excluded from school is generally adequate. Young people at risk of exclusion receive a broad range of provision, including home-based learning software and home tuition to support those refusing to attend mainstream school settings. The introduction of a permanent police officer in some secondary schools has been warmly greeted by schools and has shown positive outcomes. Most pupils in the primary pupil referral unit receive integrated programmes that assist their reintegration into mainstream settings.

57. Educational support for looked after children is good. They do well when compared with looked after children in similar areas. Attendance rates are very high. Although most requirements for looked after children are met by schools and the local authority, only 86% of these young people have a personal education plan.

58. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well in nursery and primary schools. Those in effective secondary provision also do well. The number of young people with statements of special educational need is decreasing. When specialist provision is considered, the authority ensures that children are taught as close to their home as possible and that parents and carers are consulted as fully as possible. However, a small minority of parents and carers who met inspectors voiced concerns that some young people are not being adequately supported to reach their full potential.

59. The area provides many opportunities for children and young people to participate in recreational, play and voluntary learning activities. There is adequate coordination of sports clubs between the local authority and voluntary providers. There are, however, too many who have yet to formalise this link.

Making a positive contribution

60. **The overall contribution of services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate.** The provision to support children and young people to develop socially and emotionally is adequate but, for a small minority, exclusion from school and poor behaviour have impeded their overall development in these areas. However, the local authority has acted decisively and recent developments, including the appointment of designated lead teachers in each school and new procedures to manage those at greatest risk, have helped to reduce the overall number of exclusions and increase the rates of reintegration back into mainstream provision.

61. Sure Start provides access to good-quality childcare and provision to help parents and carers develop new skills as an aid to returning to education or employment. Across Salford, out-of-school activities provided by the authority's youth service and the voluntary and private sector offer adequate opportunities to young people to participate and develop a wide range of skills, and make new friends. However, joint working to identify gaps in provision is only in the early stages of development. Most schools and colleges have appropriate mentoring schemes to provide additional support for those who need it.

62. In general, children and young people receive good support to help them cope with challenges and difficult periods in their lives. Arrangements to help children move from early years settings to primary school, and eventually on to secondary school, are effective. Most young people in Year 11 receive adequate information from local colleges about available post-16 provision, although not all get sufficient and timely careers guidance to help them to make the most informed career choices.

63. The authority's commitment to including children and young people in decision-making processes is strong; however, some of the newer initiatives are at a very early stage of development. Well-considered plans are being implemented to deliver the local authority's priority of extending the involvement of children and young people in different democratic processes. These include a children's champion, a partnership and participation manager for linking with parents and carers, local consultation events involving all key partners, and representation on a Children and Young People's Partnership Board that will oversee key decisions involving services for children and young people in Salford.

64. Although there are some good opportunities for children and young people's voices to be heard at local level, a number interviewed during the inspection expressed frustration at the lack of feedback following consultation. Some schools continue to make an important contribution to this area through well-established school councils.

65. There is effective collaboration between the local authority and partner agencies in reducing levels of anti-social behaviour. Community sector

meetings, involving key professionals, are used to identify children and young people at risk. However, the role of schools in these meetings is inconsistent. Community committees, consisting of representatives of the local area and key agencies, are used effectively to identify local hotspots and areas of nuisance and local priorities to develop agreed local priorities action plans.

66. Specialist support for young offenders and those at risk of offending is good, and includes a health assessment and advice on sexual health and substance misuse. The YOS has been successful in reducing the numbers of first-time offenders in the youth justice system and, although levels of recidivism are high, they are reducing in line with national averages. The service has established effective partnerships with neighbourhood management teams, and has used these to develop a number of successful interventions.

67. Vulnerable children and young people, including those looked after, those with learning disabilities and/or difficulties, and minority ethnic communities, receive adequate support from the local authority and voluntary organisations. Looked after children's views are incorporated into their personal educational plan and most have been involved in commissioning specialist provision. However, opportunities to involve looked after children in making decisions about service design and delivery are at an early stage of development. There is good-quality advice and support for young mothers and a successful parenting group for young fathers. Young carers are provided with dedicated support workers who offer individual advice and information, and opportunities to make contact with those in similar circumstances.

68. Some good work has been undertaken by the authority to consult children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; this includes membership of the Children and Young People's Partnership Board. During 2004/05, 72% of statutory assessments included the views of children and young people. Connexions has good arrangements to target advice to vulnerable young people aged 13, although the role of personal advisers in special needs annual reviews is not well developed.

Achieving economic well-being

69. **The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate.** Salford's determination to remove the barriers to employment faced by parents and carers has led to good-quality childcare provision. Effective review, planning, and detailed advice and financial information have contributed to increased provision and take-up, particularly in the most deprived areas. Overall, there is a flexible mix of childcare provision, which has promoted good-quality access for service users, including family learning programmes and English for speakers of other languages.

70. The local authority and partner agencies have been very successful in reducing the number of young people who are not in education and training by 8% in 2004. Overall, the participation rates in education and training have improved and are now in line with the Greater Manchester averages of 75.5%. However, there is a lower proportion of young people engaged in full-time education when compared with the national averages, but the proportion of young adults who participate in government-supported training and employment with training is good, and at 10%, is higher than the national average. Generally, the success rates for most 16–18 year olds have improved, and participation rates to higher education have increased towards regional averages.

71. Well-considered strategies and effective collaboration have led to more work experience opportunities, increased vocational options and adequate advice on post-16 education or training. Young people have access to education and training, which have improved and are of an adequate standard. More could be done, however, to encourage some young people to consider professions that are not traditionally gender-biased. Also, there are insufficient opportunities for young people to apply their work-related experiences to other aspects and areas of their school work. The local authority, the Learning and Skills Council Greater Manchester, colleges, work-based providers and schools collaborate well in the planning and the coordination of an adequate 14–19 provision. Young people from the age of 14, including those at greatest risk of non-participation or drop-out, are encouraged to choose from a wide range of academic, vocational and work-based learning opportunities. The partnership working for curriculum progression and staff development between schools and local colleges is particularly effective and provides local college staff with valuable work experience in a number of partner schools.

72. There have been many very successful regeneration projects for some of Salford's most deprived communities. Each of the eight community committees has democratic structures and fora to seek the views of the local community and young people in the development strategies, activities and funding issues. However, as the local authority has acknowledged, the level of involvement of young people is not yet sufficiently high or adequately monitored.

73. There are detailed plans to improve the availability of decent housing, and the local authority has been successful in providing sufficient, supported accommodation for young parents, and in not using bed and breakfast accommodation for its young people.

74. The arrangements to support the transition of looked after children and young people into learning or employment is good. Many looked after young people who engage in education or training progress and achieve well. Work-based learning providers collaborate well with the local authority, schools and colleges to provide valuable work-related learning for many of these young people. Wider curriculum activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's award

scheme and a range of voluntary activities, have made a significant impact on the motivation and social engagement of these young people. Looked after children or young people who have substance dependencies, involvement with the justice system, or have social or economical challenges, are supported well through a multi-agency working approach. However, consistent involvement of YOS staff in coordinated social care service provision for looked after children is weak in some cases.

75. The provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate and continuing to improve. Around 90% of children with disabilities aged 14 or above have transition plans. The quality of learning support offered by service providers is at least adequate overall, with excellent support provided in one local college. Although direct payment to the families and carers of these young people has increased, the rate of implementation is too slow for some families. Careers advice and guidance are generally adequate overall.

Service management

76. **The management of services for children and young people is adequate.** The ambition of the council and its partners is good. Most existing plans are of high quality, ensuring clear and challenging priorities for children and young people across Salford. The Community Plan, which is a key document for all partners, has a number of key themes that recognise and value the place of children and young people. Action has been taken to deliver key improvements, especially very low levels of attainment at secondary level. Planning for 14–19 provision has improved, with good cooperation between schools and colleges. The numbers of young people not in employment, education or training have reduced. There are, however, some plans, such as the ACPC business and training plans and the youth service plan, which lack either sufficient detail or are incomplete.

77. Sound needs analysis has been undertaken and better information on children and young people's needs is being compiled. However, the authority rightly recognises that more needs to be done for some small minority ethnic groups, particularly those who have recently arrived in the country. Strategic gaps, including those for children and young people, are identified successfully through an annual review by the Local Strategic Partnership that involves stakeholders. There has been ongoing consultation at local level on needs and priorities. Children and young people, including those from vulnerable groups, are well represented on the Salford Children and Young People's Partnership Board and, increasingly, at local level. The views of the young people are valued by adult members, but further work is needed to increase the involvement of those who have left school.

78. Prioritisation to meet the needs of children and young people, including vulnerable groups, is adequate. Good progress is being made towards the development of a Children and Young People's Plan. Priorities draw on the

council's seven key pledges for improvement, the Community Plan themes and national outcomes for children and young people. Planning is also based on age groups, locality and key groups of children and young people. Restructuring and improvement of health services for children and young people is a high priority with the PCT. There are effective interagency processes for planning and reviewing provision for individual children and young people.

79. Some preventive services are underdeveloped. Social care intervention levels are high, there are high numbers of looked after children, and there are too many exclusions and low attendance levels in a number of secondary schools. However, a number of early intervention initiatives have been introduced that have had a positive effect on provision. For example, there has been a reduction in the number of statements of special educational need being issued, and attainment and attendance in some targeted secondary schools are improving.

80. The youth service has made limited progress in a number of key areas since it was previously inspected. Some key targets in the ACPC business plan and the commissioning strategy have been missed.

81. There are high levels of surplus places in schools. However, this is now being addressed and, following a comprehensive city-wide review, the local authority has embarked on a rolling programme of detailed reviews of primary school provision, with a number being replaced by new, more viable schools. All special schools are in new, purpose-built accommodation.

82. The overall capacity to improve outcomes for children and young people is good. Partnership working is a particular strength.

83. A lead member, director and a new directorate, all focused on children's services, have been created as part of the council's wider corporate 'think customer' strategy. The children's services directorate has also established an integrated children's commissioning team, which has significantly enhanced capacity.

84. Partnerships, especially with the PCT, police and voluntary sector, are used positively to develop capacity. Joint appointments with the PCT promote integrated service provision. Police officers, based at some secondary schools, are having a positive effect on attendance and behaviour in those schools. Specialist voluntary organisations provide key services, for example for autistic children, and Orthodox Jewish children and young people. There are joint commissioning and/or partnership arrangements for a number of services, with the CAMHS demonstrating particular strengths. Plans to integrate services for children with disabilities are in place.

85. Recruitment and retention are being improved through collaboration with local providers and universities, and increased payments to foster carers are being examined as a possible 'invest to save' initiative.

86. Training provided for staff is generally of high quality. This includes diversity, managing absence, project management, business process re-engineering (BPR) and senior management training. Human resource management, internal communications, supervision and appraisal arrangements are good. Finance, human resources and information technology support to and within children's services are good.

87. Value for money is good. There is a robust approach to reviewing value for money of each major service area corporately through self-assessment and rigorous challenge by the budget and efficiency group, which involves leading councillors. The council is committed to high levels of early years provision, with expenditure matched well to need. Early years provision is a major strength in Salford and ensures that children make a good start to their formal learning. The benefits of this are seen in Key Stage 1 performance. Areas of high spend, which are not reflected in outcomes, are being addressed particularly in relation to developing preventive approaches. For example, the high level of resources spent in pupil referral units is being redirected to provide targeted support within schools. Permanent exclusions are being reduced by securing managed moves; and expenditure on special education needs has been redirected to schools where it can be applied more flexibly and effectively through earlier intervention. However, there are one or two exceptions to the strong approach to securing value for money: measures to reduce the number of external placements are too slow; and the youth service is an example of low expenditure and inadequate service.

88. Thorough best value reviews (BVRs) have been undertaken of some key services, including school improvement, which is an area of relatively low expenditure that produces effective service. BVRs have also been undertaken within the PCT. BPR is used widely within the council to improve service effectiveness, and children's services staff have been trained in BPR and project management. These processes are embedded well and are leading to more efficient and effective services.

89. Performance management is adequate. Robust planning and performance monitoring arrangements are in place and key weaknesses are being addressed vigorously in most services. There is effective use of performance data to monitor, support and challenge schools. The impact of key developments, such as the transfer of special educational need resources to schools, is carefully tracked. Monitoring arrangements, used by councillors, are robust, with strong challenge to underperformance provided by leading members. Management information has been improved and is available on a flexible basis to meet managers' specific needs. Within social care, however, comprehensive performance management systems are not applied consistently. Further enhancement of performance management processes, through the introduction of a balanced scorecard and a comprehensive electronic performance management system, is being developed. Financial management is good and outturn expenditure for education and children's social care services has closely matched budgets for the past two years.

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

1. The council is performing adequately in its provision for children and young people. Leadership from councillors and officers is good. Very effective partnership working between the council and other agencies and organisations is resulting in challenging ambitions for children and young people across the whole of Salford.
2. The council is aware of the areas that need to improve, and has already committed itself to making major improvements in health, children's safety, educational attainment, housing and regeneration, and greater community involvement, including by children and young people. The council has created a structure that embraces an integrated approach to services for children and young people. Leadership and management of the new directorate of children's services are good overall, with effective planning and adequate performance management systems in place to ensure consistency and coherence.
3. A new lead councillor and scrutiny committee are in place, and both are linking well to officers, partner agencies and organisations, and children and young people. There is clear political awareness that much more needs to be done, but there is energy, commitment and the will to make further improvements for all children and young people across Salford.
4. The council provides high levels of early years provision, with expenditure matched well to identified need. This has helped make early years a major strength in Salford, and provides children with an excellent start to their formal schooling. The benefits of this provision are seen in the performance results at Key Stages 1 and 2 in most primary schools. Most secondary schools generally do less well than primaries, although recent results at GCSE are improving. The number of children in special schools is high, and there are too many exclusions and low attendance levels in a number of secondary schools. In comparison with similar areas, Salford has a high number of schools in Ofsted categories of weakness.
5. Feeling safe, which is a concern for a number of children and young people in some parts of Salford, is being addressed effectively through joint council, police, and YOS work to tackle crime and make local communities safer for all residents. The council's targeted work in improving road safety has helped reduce the number of children and young people killed or seriously injured in road accidents since 2003. Other work on protecting children and young people is also meeting with some success. Some preventive services are underdeveloped. Social care intervention levels are high, and there are high numbers of looked after children. However, the council's recent commission on corporate parenting has brought about a greater awareness of the corporate parenting responsibilities owed to all these children.

6. There is joint project working between schools, colleges and local businesses offering work experience. The result of this concerted effort is that the number of young people not in education, training or employment has reduced significantly in recent years, and overall standards are now beginning to rise and move closer to national averages.

7. The council has embraced the greater involvement of children and young people in local democratic processes. The new Children and Young People's Partnership Board comprises the lead member and senior officers for children's services, key partners, and a representative number of young people, some of whom are from vulnerable groups such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It is evident that the views and opinions of young people are taken as seriously as any councillor, senior officer or key partner. The youth service, however, does not have sufficiently clear priorities, and its work is fragmented.

8. Some very good regeneration work has taken place across Salford, with a number of very successful schemes that have improved housing for young people, parents and carers.