

# Joint area review

**Walsall Children's Services Authority Area**

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Review of services for children and young people

Audit Commission  
Healthcare Commission  
HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate  
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary  
HM Inspectorate of Prisons  
HM Inspectorate of Probation  
Ofsted

**Age group:** All

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**Published:** 3 June 2008

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**Reference no:** 335



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## Introduction

1. The most recent Annual Performance Assessment (APA) for Walsall judged the council's children's services as good and its capacity to improve as good.
2. This report assesses the contribution of local services in ensuring that children and young people:
  - at risk or requiring safeguarding are effectively cared for
  - who are looked after achieve the best possible outcomes
  - with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve the best possible outcomes.
3. The following investigations were also carried out:
  - the impact of the partners' 14–19 strategy in improving outcomes for young people.

## Context

4. Walsall Council is a Metropolitan Borough in the West Midlands, one of four local authorities which make up the Black Country. The borough covers an area of 41 square miles and is made up of a number of distinct settlements which came together through local government reorganisations in the 1960s and 1970s.
5. The borough's population is 252,500, of which 13.6% of residents are from Black and minority ethnic groups, a proportion that rises to 21.2% for children and young people aged under 25.
6. On the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index, Walsall ranked 49th out of 354 local authorities in 2007. Unemployment is currently 3.4%. The west and centre of the borough have inner-city characteristics of poor housing, higher unemployment, high concentrations of social deprivation and a poor environment, whereas much of the eastern part is relatively affluent.
7. There is a range of early years settings in the borough, including 216 childminders, 51 full day care settings, 29 sessional day care settings, 53 out-of-school settings and 13 crèches.
8. There are 86 primary schools (60 community schools, 12 voluntary-aided, 10 voluntary controlled and four foundation schools) and 19 secondary schools (nine community schools, five voluntary-aided, four foundation schools and one academy). There are also seven community special schools and eight community nursery schools, three pupil referral units, 11 designated children's centres and two family centres.

9. Post-16 education and training is provided by Walsall College, nine work-based training providers contracted through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), and the 19 secondary schools, each of which has a sixth form. Entry to Employment provision is through LSC contracts with Juniper Training, Nova Training, Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust and Age Concern. The borough youth service operates centre-based, detached and mobile provision, some in partnership with local community associations.

10. Primary health care is provided by Walsall teaching Primary Care Trust (tPCT), which is coterminous with the borough. Acute hospital services are largely provided by Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust, which operates from the Manor Hospital near Walsall town centre. Mental health services, including Tier 1, 2 and 3 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), are planned and commissioned jointly by Walsall tPCT and Walsall Council. Tier 4 CAMHS are provided in Birmingham by Birmingham Children's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

11. Children's social care services are provided through 146 foster carers, six children's residential homes and 11 field social work teams (made up of two initial response teams, four safeguarding and family support teams, four corporate parenting teams and a transition and leaving care team). At the time of the inspection, 432 children were looked after by the council and 173 had a child protection plan.

12. Walsall has one youth offending team. There are no young offender institutions or secure units in the borough.

13. In 2002, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills directed that all education services should be outsourced to address weaknesses in the performance of educational services. The council entered into a contract with Serco Ltd which, as Education Walsall, served as the council's education department. This contract ends in July 2008. Currently, the council is completing a comprehensive tendering process to select an external partner to provide education and associated services within the children and young people's service.

## Main findings

14. The main findings of this joint area review are as follows:

- Service management is good. Strong partnership working and good leadership have led to improvements in services and outcomes for children and young people. Outsourced education services contribute effectively to improved outcomes. Good arrangements for commissioning and quality assurance are incorporated into the new contract. Appropriate plans are in place to engage voluntary and community groups more fully, but the diverse needs of all groups are not systematically included in action plans and service delivery.

- Arrangements for safeguarding children and young people are good. Children and families receive good support at a very early stage from a range of agencies that work very well together. Child protection concerns are identified and responded to appropriately. A small number of children with child protection plans are not visited sufficiently at home by social workers and caseloads of some social workers are too high.
- Services for looked after children and those to meet the specific needs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are adequate overall. There is much good practice improving outcomes for both groups, but provision in a few of the council's children's homes is not good enough. There is insufficient provision for respite care and short breaks.
- Looked after children receive very good support to raise their educational achievement, to maintain excellent attendance at school and to express their wishes and feelings. However, some do not see their social workers regularly and care plans do not always reflect their age or stage of development.
- Learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and good joint working ensures needs are addressed. However, parents are not always sure how to access services to support their child, and insufficient suitable transport limits access to both respite care and leisure activities. Support, advice and challenge to schools to meet the needs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good.
- The impact of the partners' strategy in improving outcomes for young people aged 14 to 19 is adequate, although attainment at Key Stage 4 continues to be below average and a full entitlement programme is not yet in place across the borough. Good partnership working, the introduction of local collaborative timetables and vocational programmes all contribute to increasing participation from 14 to 19 year olds. The level of young people engaged in education, employment or training post-16 is much improved and now better than in similar authorities.
- Effective partnership working, sound planning and the use made of the new education contract process to take stock gives the council good capacity to improve further.

## Grades

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

	Local services overall
Safeguarding	3
Looked after children	2
Learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2
Service management	3
Capacity to improve	3

## Recommendations

### For immediate action

The local partnership should:

- ensure that an appropriate way is found for the successful dissemination of the findings of this report to children and young people in the area
- work to raise the standards in those children's homes judged to be inadequate
- ensure allocated social workers visit all children with child protection plans and all looked after children in their placements/homes within expected timescales.

### For action over the next six months

The local partnership should:

- review capacity to ensure all caseloads held by qualified social workers are manageable
- ensure that there is clarity about access to disability services in the authority
- increase the availability of respite care
- increase the availability of transport for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to enable them to attend respite provision and leisure activities

- ensure the needs of all sections of the community are systematically included in action plans and service delivery.

### For action in the longer term

The local partnership should:

- develop a borough-wide 14 to 19 entitlement offer
- improve attainment at Key Stage 4.

## Equality and diversity

15. The council and its partners have a commitment to promoting equality for all and respect for diversity and human rights. The council takes into account the diverse needs of the community in delivering services. Preventative services are targeted at the most disadvantaged areas. Voluntary and community groups provide valuable and targeted support for communities at a local level. However, some groups do not feel sufficiently involved strategically. Fewer people from Black and minority ethnic groups access health services and children's centres than would be fully representative of the size of these communities.

16. Analysis of examination results identifies groups which may be underachieving and, as a result, groups such as boys of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin receive additional targeted support. Children looked after by the council have good access to a wide range of services. Involvement of young people in the Anti-bullying Forum has led to service improvement in addressing concerns of racism, cyber-bullying and homophobic behaviour. The workforce across the partnership does not reflect the borough's population as a whole. However, recent recruitment to services such as CAMHS and the youth service has been successful in the appointment of key workers from Black and minority ethnic communities. School-based staff are not consistently aware of equality policies.

## Safeguarding



17. **The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for children and young people at risk or requiring safeguarding is good.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>The wide range of preventative services.</p> <p>Good access to early support for families through the child concern model.</p> <p>Good systems to identify children and young people affected by domestic abuse.</p> <p>Good services to support families affected by domestic abuse.</p> <p>A very well organised, resourced and managed initial response service.</p> <p>A comprehensive case audit programme.</p> <p>Good work with local madressahs to raise awareness and improve safeguarding practices.</p> <p>Effective work to address substance misuse by young people known to the Youth Offending Team.</p>	<p>Insufficient visits by social workers to a small number of children at home with child protection plans.</p> <p>High caseloads of some social workers.</p> <p>Disproportionately low number of children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds with a child protection plan.</p>

18. The APA judged the local authority's arrangements for staying safe as good. This review confirms that finding. Over the past four years, Walsall has been very successful in refocusing the approach of its services, from intervening once problems have arisen to effective prevention and support. As a result, the number of referrals to children's social care has reduced steadily and is now just below that in similar areas. Repeat referrals are well below similar areas and national averages.

19. Good multi-agency working is very well established through the child concern model, ensuring effective support for children and families at an early stage. Professionals have an excellent understanding of their safeguarding role. They are positive about the benefits of early joint working with parents and other agencies. Child concern officers make a positive contribution to this work. Key staff across agencies have been trained in using the Common Assessment Framework and this is implemented well across the borough. An increasing number of families with higher support needs are benefiting from this.

20. Children and young people receive good advice and support through schools and a wide range of preventative services to achieve healthy lifestyles and help them understand about risks to their safety. The Safe Parenting

Handbook gives helpful guidance to parents on keeping children safe. Safe use of the internet is well promoted through the Jigsaw programme in schools. Effective and creative inter-agency work on road and travel safety has helped to reduce the number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents to 50% below the 1994–98 average, achieving the government target.

21. The council recognises that bullying is a concern for many children and young people and has a well-coordinated approach to ensuring that incidents of bullying and racism are identified and tackled. Young people make an active contribution to developing policy and practice both at school and authority level. Racist and bullying incidents are reported and reviewed, and appropriate action is taken at a strategic level.

22. Services to prevent substance misuse are well coordinated; with good multi-agency liaison ensuring vulnerable young people are identified and supported. Young people using these services find them helpful. However, comparatively high numbers of young people are admitted to hospital with mental health disorders related to substance misuse. Young people with substance misuse problems have good access to early intervention, assessment and treatment.

23. Drop-in clinics for advice on sexual health and for Chlamydia screening in convenient locations have recently been developed. The pilot Family Nurse Partnership project provides excellent support for targeted, vulnerable, first-time young parents in the borough. Although the most recent figures show a slight rise in the number of teenage conceptions, the overall trend since 1998 is reducing and at a faster rate than in similar authorities and the national average. Creative and innovative work is done to increase awareness among the most vulnerable young people of the risks of sexual exploitation.

24. Children and young people with mental health difficulties receive satisfactory support. Waiting times for assessment have reduced from 72 weeks in 2004 to 10 weeks. Staff across all agencies receive satisfactory advice and support in identifying possible mental health problems and in making appropriate referrals. Good progress is being made to develop full CAMHS but not all services are in place, for example no 24-hour cover. Access to timely mental health services for young people who offend has been affected by staffing difficulties within the Youth Offending Team but plans are in place to address this.

25. A very robust system, supported by excellent multi-agency working, ensures that children affected by domestic violence are identified, protected and supported. All incidents of domestic abuse reported to the police are risk assessed by a multi-agency team and responded to appropriately. A very good range of services support families affected by domestic violence, including a multilingual helpline, direct work with children, support for parents and work with perpetrators.

26. A good range of positive, well-targeted activities divert children and young people from anti-social behaviour and the police report that incidents of anti-social behaviour have reduced. However, the number of young people offending for the first time has recently increased, reversing the improving trend over the past two years and is now above levels in similar authorities. Overall, the number of young people re-offending has reduced, but young people subject to community-based penalties are more likely to re-offend than those who receive custodial sentences. Young people involved with the Youth Offending Team benefit from a good range of services to support and improve their physical health. Access to assessment and treatment for substance misuse for young people involved with offending is excellent.

27. Guidance on referring concerns to children's social care specialist services is very clear. Child protection concerns are identified and responded to appropriately and thoroughly through the very well-organised, resourced and managed initial response teams, with good joint working with the police. The quality of initial assessments is good. Timescales for completing these had deteriorated but have improved recently to above national figures. Data over recent months shows that 83.2% were completed within timescales. An excellent IT system (PARIS) ensures accountability and transparency, and supports effective managerial overview. Children in need are well supported through focused service plans drawing from the wide range of preventative services in the area and valuable support from family centres.

28. Child protection systems work well and appropriate plans are in place to reduce risks to children. All children with child protection plans are allocated to qualified social workers. Timescales for holding child protection conferences and reviewing plans are good. The views of parents and extended family members are sought and good efforts made to involve them in child protection planning. Professionals from all agencies work well together on individual cases, meeting regularly to discuss progress and identify risks. However, while children with child protection plans are seen regularly by professionals, in a small number of cases there is insufficient monitoring of these children in their own homes by social workers.

29. Timescales for completing core assessments are good. Overall, the quality of assessment is satisfactory. However, not all assessments are sufficiently clear about the impact of risk, and in some cases the outcomes from individual agencies' assessments are not drawn together coherently by the social worker to inform future plans. The approach to working with substance-misusing parents is not consistent across the service. These issues have all been identified through the council's comprehensive case audit programme. Appropriate action plans are in place to improve practice in these areas, including practice workshops with managers to discuss and disseminate audit findings.

30. Despite positive steps to reduce high caseloads, these remain too high for some social workers and the number of social workers overall is lower than in similar authorities. There is good evidence in case files of regular management oversight. Staff have regular supervision, good access to a wide range of training and feel well supported by their managers. The number of children known to be in private foster care is low and work has started on promoting awareness of this among agencies and the public.

31. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) is well established, with excellent involvement across all agencies, and is taking a strong lead in promoting and improving safeguarding across the area. It has a clear work plan and progress is regularly reviewed. It is well supported by a number of multi-agency operational groups. The LSCB recognises that children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely to have a child protection plan and is exploring this. Positive work has been done with local madressahs to raise awareness and improve safeguarding practices.

32. Child protection procedures are comprehensive and regularly reviewed. Serious case reviews are undertaken well, with clear action plans leading to improved services. Appropriate Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) are in place, supported by comprehensive guidance, and links to the LSCB are good. Recruitment systems for staff within the council and education service are sound, all have Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks prior to taking up employment and checks are renewed every three years. However, there have been delays in renewing CRB checks on carers and these arrangements are being strengthened. There is a sound system to manage allegations against staff and carers. Good, well-implemented procedures help to identify and trace children missing from education and vulnerable children. However, there are no formal links established between health systems and education to ensure that the whereabouts of all children is known. Good arrangements are in place to provide education for young people excluded from school and to monitor their well-being and progress.

## Looked after children and young people



33. **The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for looked after children and young people is adequate.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>All reviews are held on time.</p> <p>High-quality work with looked after children by the Outreach Team.</p> <p>Good adoption planning.</p> <p>Good quality support services promoting the health and education of looked after children.</p> <p>Good support to care leavers.</p> <p>Excellent school attendance.</p>	<p>Two mainstream children's homes are judged inadequate and the response to this has been too slow.</p> <p>Allocated social workers do not always have enough direct contact with the children on their caseload.</p> <p>There is no systematic mechanism for senior managers and elected members to have direct contact with looked after children.</p>

34. The council and its partners work effectively to maintain children within their families. A strong focus on providing responsive preventative services has resulted in a steady year-on-year decline in the number of children who need to be looked after by the council. The number is now just above that found in similar councils. Effective and flexible services provided by Spurgeons, a voluntary organisation, prevent family breakdown for children in need aged 10–15. An additional social worker post has been established to discharge care orders for children placed with parents, which is a good use of resources.

35. Services for most children and young people who become looked after are adequate. There are sufficient placements for looked after children, including those from a Black or minority ethnic heritage. Whilst 42% of children are placed out-of-borough, most are placed within 20 miles of their home address (89.1%), in line with the percentage in similar councils. Commissioning arrangements are robust and ensure the quality of out-of-borough placements. The stability of placements is good.

36. Approaches to care planning are adequate, but occasionally the timescales of plans do not reflect a child's age and development, and plans are not consistently informed by comprehensive core assessments. Adoption planning is good and a higher proportion of children are placed for adoption than is found nationally and in similar authorities. Alternative permanency options to adoption, such as special guardianship orders, are not always considered for children placed with relatives or in long-term foster care. The use of family and friends as carers is less frequent than in similar councils and family group conferences have not been introduced. The proportion of children in residential care (11.9%) is less than in similar councils (14.2%), though some very young children spend significant periods in residential care.

37. In some cases in the files read during the review, not all statutory visits by social workers to children in their placements had been undertaken. Looked after children report they receive very good support from local services, such as

the Outreach Team. This team provides excellent support to both looked after children and their carers by its direct work with children and by delivering holiday and out-of-school activities. It also offers good support to identified projects, encouraging involvement of looked after children and young people in musical and drama activities, such as Musical Matters.

38. The council's fostering and adoption services have both been inspected recently and are judged to be satisfactory. However, two of the council's four mainstream children's homes are rated inadequate. Whilst this is an improved position from last summer, one, which remains inadequate following a re-inspection, provides care for children under 10 years. Independent reviewing officers are clear about their role within the service and 95% of reviews took place on time, which is very good practice and better than in similar councils (89%). Participation by children and young people in their reviews is very good.

39. Looked after children's health needs are addressed well. Most (87%) have an annual health assessment, including dental checks, which is just above the level found in similar authorities (82%). The Looked After Children's Health Team has good systems to monitor attendance at health checks. The designated doctor undertakes full profiling of birth parents for younger children in order to assist in future placements. A specialist CAMHS team provides good services for looked after children and young people. Teenage pregnancy rates are high among the care-leaving population. However, since the appointment of a dedicated health worker within the team, there have been no pregnancies in young people under 16 and a reduced number in care leavers aged 16 to 18.

40. Services to support the education of looked after children are very good and well resourced. Designated teachers are well trained and can readily access additional support for looked after children in school. All pre-school children are in nursery education and all looked after children have satisfactory Personal Education Plans. School attendance is outstanding, with only 3% of children missing 25 days or more in the current academic year. Fixed-term exclusions are reducing and there have been no permanent exclusions in the last two years. Despite the very good support, improving achievement remains a challenge and GCSE results continue to be below those for similar authorities and national figures for looked after children. However, over time the number leaving care with at least one GCSE has improved, and in 2007 was in line with the figure for care leavers nationally. The council is a pilot authority for the role of a virtual headteacher and an appointment has recently been made. The benefits of this appointment are already evident in focusing attention on improved achievement, with individual targets set for all children. The Corporate Parenting Strategy Group is identified as the governing body for the virtual school.

41. A very good advocacy service is provided for all children who request one. Age-appropriate packs about the service are regularly provided to all children, including a special one for young people in secure accommodation. The percentage of young people involved in offending behaviour has dropped

slightly but remains above levels in similar councils. The council has introduced restorative justice mediation into its children's homes and has invested in an extensive multi-agency training programme, although it is too early to judge its impact.

42. Services to support care leavers are very good. Care leavers are positive about the help and encouragement they receive. All care leavers have personal advisers and Pathway Plans, which are regularly reviewed. This is excellent performance and better than in similar authorities. The number of care leavers in education, employment or training is very good and higher than for other young people in the local community. There is a proactive approach to encouraging young people to go on to university. Care leavers are taught independence skills prior to moving into their own accommodation. However, sometimes this move is made too early and not all young people are actively encouraged and enabled to stay in care once they are 16. There is sufficient accommodation for care leavers, with appropriate levels of support available to meet the different needs of the young people.

43. Senior managers and elected members take an active interest in the outcomes and well-being of looked after children; a Corporate Parenting Board is in place and meets regularly. However, whilst Board members meet with looked after children and young people on special occasions, they do not have a formalised and regular means of communication.

## Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities



44. **The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Good multi-agency partnership working to meet children's needs.</p> <p>The good focus on early intervention and prevention across services.</p> <p>Good support from advisory and support services.</p>	<p>Insufficient clarity about the access to disability services amongst parents and professionals.</p> <p>The limited availability and quality of some respite care.</p> <p>Inadequate arrangements for transport for disabled children and young people.</p>

<p>Good challenge and support to schools to improve the achievement of those with learning difficulties.</p> <p>Good therapy services.</p> <p>Effective arrangements for transition to adult services.</p>	<p>Inconsistent quality and availability of information for parents.</p> <p>The lack of specific support within the youth offending service.</p> <p>Insufficient work-based learning opportunities.</p>
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45. Partners have worked hard to make improvements to children's services and have a good understanding of strengths and areas of development for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Senior managers are providing good leadership and challenge through the multi-agency Champions Group to ensure that issues relating to disabled children and young people and their families are an integral part of developments in the authority. There is a clear focus on continuing improvement. The additional vulnerability of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is recognised and specific training courses are provided for staff on the protection of disabled children.

46. Services work together well to ensure early identification and intervention. For children with the most complex needs, this begins shortly after birth with good support for families from the Team Around the Child.

47. Parents do not always find it easy to know where to get information to help both themselves and their children. Partners across education and inclusion services produce helpful information leaflets, although these do not always specify that they are available in different formats or languages. The work of family support workers in children's centres and personal support advisers in around 50 pilot schools has had a positive impact in securing better relationships with families and in improving attendance. Routes to support are less clear for parents who do not yet have access to these specific initiatives. There is a lack of clarity about how to access disability services among parents and professionals.

48. The authority is in the worst quartile for the production of new statements of special educational need within timescales. However, health partners have taken a robust approach to their role in this and there have been significant improvements. Improvements in the arrangements have led to a good reduction in the number of parents who make an appeal to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal, from 27 in 2004/05 to 14 in 2006/07. The number of children and young people who have statements is in line with that found nationally and lower than in similar authorities. Good partnership working is shown by the joint funding of out-of-borough placements, with health services contributing to a higher number than is found nationally.

49. Children's services have delegated funding for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to schools successfully. This is shown by the good understanding schools have of their roles and responsibilities and their

appreciation of the flexibility this delegation allows. There is good support and challenge to schools to ensure funding is accounted for and its impact on provision and outcomes is evaluated.

50. Schools receive good input from Education Walsall advisory and support services, including those for early years. Schools find services responsive to their needs and are confident they will receive good training and appropriate resources to help them include children. The number of children who receive their education in mainstream schools or in additionally resourced provision (ARP) has increased, and is in line with that found nationally and in similar authorities. The recently realigned approach to outreach from special schools and ARP enables a coherent offer of a wide range of support; take-up of this is variable.

51. Education Walsall has been using data well to challenge schools about the achievement of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities over the last three years. There is good tracking of individual pupils. Clear criteria support the assessment of special educational needs and provide a useful tool for moderating schools' use of School Action and School Action Plus. Data illustrates that interventions are effective, with pupils making progress at a similar rate to their peers at Key Stages 1 and 2, but with the gap widening as they get older. Inspection findings show that most pupils make at least satisfactory progress. However, a smaller proportion of schools are identified as supporting good or better progress than in similar authorities.

52. There were no permanent exclusions from special schools between 2004 and 2006. However, in 2005 there were higher numbers of fixed-term exclusions from special schools than that found nationally or in similar authorities. The proportion of fixed-term exclusions of all children and young people with statements rose slightly from 10.55% to 12.55% between 2006 and 2007. These higher levels largely relate to pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The special school review has brought about changes in provision for this group and there have been good improvements in the quality of the pupil referral units. These services are now working together, with a focus on prevention, outreach and reintegration, to reduce exclusions. The Youth Offending Team provides insufficient support for young people known to it with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

53. Good therapy services, including the work of community matrons, ensure good support for pupils in all schools and contribute to the ability of teaching staff to meet needs. CAMHS provision is satisfactory and a full range of services is in development. Good support for mental health issues is given to the pupil referral units.

54. Good individual packages of care offer effective support and provision for many children and young people with complex needs and their families. However, overall there is insufficient opportunity for short breaks and respite care to meet demand, and a council residential home for children with learning

difficulties and/or disabilities has continued to be judged inadequate on inspection. In some cases, families are waiting a year to receive respite care. Of the 15 children and young people on the waiting list for short-term breaks, 10 have disabilities which include autistic spectrum disorders, and there is a particular shortage of suitable placements for this group. The ability of families to use respite services and leisure activities is further limited by inadequacies in the availability and quality of transport. There is no transport provided for young people receiving respite care at the Acorns Hospice and this affects their attendance at school. Fifty-five families and two young people receive valuable support through direct payments. However, parents do not always feel they have sufficient support to access and make use of these payments.

55. There are satisfactory opportunities for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to contribute to decisions about important events in their lives, for example to reviews of their Personal Education Plans and statements. The Youth Forum provides increasing opportunities for those with a disability to plan events and discuss borough-wide topics. There are some good individual initiatives, such as training and using youth inspectors in the youth service, and, notably, in the successful Kindred Spirits disability training programme. However, there is no overall strategy by which children and young people are routinely involved in staff appointments and service planning. Partners now have a clear focus on improving participation by young people and on strengthening the voice of parents in policy making.

56. There is a satisfactory range of leisure activities, with some specialist youth clubs. The number of young people participating in these has more than doubled over recent years and youth workers are sensitive and measured in their approach. There is a satisfactory range of other leisure activities coordinated by the Walsall Resource Centre. This service makes good efforts to ensure that costs are not a barrier to attendance. It also runs a well-attended group to support Asian families with disabled children.

57. There are smooth transitions between phases of education. Particularly good work by the multi-agency Transition Team ensures a successful bridge to adult health and social care services. Educational provision for post-16 is good. A higher proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than is found nationally continue in education, employment or training. Special schools and the pupil referral unit work closely with Walsall College and young people have good opportunities for work-related college courses and succeed in gaining accreditation. The college makes good and flexible provision. The increased flexibility programme achieves good success rates, with 88% of students with learning difficulties completing the course. The level of work-based learning placements has increased, but is still below the national figure. Although there is sufficient housing for this group, specifically adapted housing is not always available.

## Other issues identified for further investigation

### The impact of the partners' strategy in improving outcomes for young people aged 14 to 19

58. The impact of the partners' strategy in improving outcomes for young people aged 14 to 19 is adequate.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Good partnership working promoting increased curriculum choice.</p> <p>Good school improvement services impacting positively on achievement at 11–19 years.</p> <p>Improving trends in performance at Key Stage 3.</p> <p>Good improvement in the numbers of young people entering education, employment or training at 16.</p> <p>Improved curriculum choices.</p> <p>Very effective multi-disciplinary working and early intervention to support vulnerable learners.</p> <p>Good involvement of employers to extend opportunity and choice.</p>	<p>Poor achievement of young people at Key Stage 4, particularly White disadvantaged males and some minority ethnic groups.</p> <p>Low levels of re-engagement in education, employment or training by young people who left school without a placement at ages 16 and 19.</p> <p>A full borough-wide 14 to 19 programme is not in place.</p>

59. Improving outcomes for young people aged 14 to 19 was identified in the APA 2007 as an area for development. Adequate progress has been made, with some notable improvements in provision, but it is too soon for the full impact of developments to be seen in improved standards, especially at Key Stage 4 and Level 3 qualifications.

60. Good partnership working, the development of common timetables at a locality level and the introduction of vocational programmes contribute well to the strategy for increasing participation and improving attainment of 14 to 19 year olds. However, a full 14 to 19 programme across the borough is not yet in place and the new borough-wide strategy lacks focus and clarity of purpose. The service recognises the issues and the newly formed executive group is challenging the pace of improvements and engaging all partners.

61. Attainment, although improving, continues to be below national figures. Participation in education, employment or training at 16–18 years has improved steadily and is better than in similar authorities. There has been less success in

re-engaging young people who left school without a post-16 placement, especially for 19 year olds.

62. The partnership has a good focus on improving achievement for all learners. Improvements in Key Stage 3 are good, with attainment similar to national averages in 2007. Partners acknowledge that attainment continues to be too low at Key Stage 4. Just over a third of young people achieved five or more A\*–C grades at GCSE including mathematics and English in 2007. This is below national figures and similar authorities. The number of young people achieving five or more A\*–G grades at GCSE is increasing and in 2007 was just below the national average. However, disadvantaged young White males and some minority ethnic groups achieve less well at Key Stages 3 and 4. Increased flexibility programmes continue to provide young people aged 14 to 16 with the option of work-based qualifications, and success rates are good.

63. Over the past four years, the attainment of young people aged between ages 16 and 19 has shown an improving trend, albeit from a very low base. Two-thirds of young people achieved Level 2 by age 19 and although still below the national average, this is an improvement on earlier years. The numbers of young people achieving the higher Level 3 is well below national figures.

64. School improvement services are good and effective in challenging schools in raising standards. The support is highly valued by the schools. Government Office targets for improvement in identified areas of underperformance, particularly at Key Stages 3 and 4, have been achieved. There is no complacency in efforts to improve standards further to more closely match national figures. Data is used effectively to evaluate progress, identify underperformance and set targets, for example in the focus on improving attainment at Key Stage 4 in English and mathematics for young people of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin. School improvement partners provide good support and effective challenge.

65. The proportion of 16 year olds choosing to stay in learning in 2007 is good and well above that of similar authorities. Post-16 work-based learning is good and success rates have improved to above national averages in 2007. The numbers of learners aged 16 to 18 who are not in education, employment or training is significantly reduced and at 9.1% in 2006/07 is now below that of similar authorities. There is an effective strategy to target pre-16 young people at risk of not continuing with learning. A multi-agency strategy group has wide strategic and operational representation and good teamwork to broker placements, funding and expertise to provide for disengaged learners.

66. The partnership is much less successful than similar authorities and the national average in encouraging young people not in education, employment or training to re-engage with learning. A high proportion of young people known to the Youth Offending Team are not engaged in learning or employment both pre-16 and at 19. The strategy group is actively addressing this through tighter

monitoring processes and better information gathering and sharing, but it is too early to assess impact.

67. Partnership working is good. Education Walsall has established effective networks to bring a wide range of partners together. Leadership of curriculum development to support the 14 to 19 national agenda and the introduction of the new Creative and Media Diploma is effective, with a wide range of working groups, pilot projects and staff development events. There is a commitment to provide all young people across the authority with an identified programme of learning post-16. However, the youth service, training providers, voluntary sector and learners' views are not included sufficiently in shaping the 14 to 19 strategic plans.

68. Recently introduced vocational programmes are good and helping to give a broader curriculum choice for all young people. The number and range of Level 2 and 3 vocational courses offered by schools has significantly increased. Over 500 more young people accessed vocational programmes in 2006/07. The numbers of learners completing an apprenticeship programme is improving faster than that found nationally. The youth service and Youth Offending Team provide a good range of accredited options. Learners at risk benefit from tailored and flexible programmes.

69. Aimhigher is central to 14 to 19 developments. It is well coordinated across all schools and is making a positive contribution in the continuing improvement in attainment in Key Stage 4. Collaborative arrangements in smaller sixth form schools provide more choice for learners. Walsall College works closely with schools to coordinate curriculum choices. The number of young people in Year 13 progressing on to higher education increased from 53% in 2005 to 85% in 2006. Over 500 Walsall young people thought to have low aspirations use the Black Country Choose a Real Deal scheme, which offers a guaranteed place to higher education on completion of specified goals.

70. Regional collaboratives have made good use of local analysis of need to develop a 16 to 19 curriculum which is available on the borough website. However, the development of the 14 to 16 curriculum has been slow. The Academy and grammar schools are not supporting the borough-wide initiatives. Impartial advice and guidance is provided by Connexions advisers and some schools have been supported to achieve the Black Country Quality Standard for careers education and guidance.

71. Statutory and voluntary sector agencies work extremely well together to provide appropriate learning packages to motivate and engage disaffected young people. The Kick-start project provides an effective pre-entry Level 1 programme. In 2006/07, 74% of young people on the project progressed onto other courses or moved into employment, with 60% achieving a Level 1 qualification. Good specialist provision for young people with mental health problems supports reintegration into mainstream settings, and in 2006/07 a large majority moved into education, employment or training.

72. Employers are involved effectively in developments. Schools have good links with the Education Business Partnership, which facilitates links between schools and industry and engages local industries to fund and lead enterprise development days. Attendance at these events is very good, with a high level of learner and teacher engagement. The training provider network and the Education Business Partnership provide a wide range of work-based learning opportunities for young people. Good links with local regeneration partnerships inform the development and delivery of the diploma agenda within the strategic vision of regeneration for Walsall.

## Service management



## Capacity to improve



73. **The management of services for children and young people is good. Capacity to improve further is good.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Good partnership working across the Children's Trust based on shared ambitions and a strong and clear commitment to improve outcomes for children and young people.</p> <p>Strong leadership provided by senior managers and councillors.</p> <p>Increasing, meaningful involvement of stakeholders in the planning and delivery of services, for example in developing the new education contract.</p> <p>Active performance management in the partnership.</p>	<p>There are gaps in targets and milestones in some service plans.</p> <p>The needs of all sections of the community are not systematically included in action plans and service delivery.</p>

74. Good leadership and strong partnership working have ensured improvements in services for most children and young people from a low base up to a level comparable to that of similar councils. Partners have been able to transcend the contractual arrangements of the outsourcing of education to work together effectively to deliver shared objectives and ambitions. Outsourced education services are currently in a strong state and arrangements for commissioning and quality assurance of the new contract indicate that this will be maintained and improved. Children and young people have an increasing say in the shaping and delivery of services. The voluntary and community sector is now engaged strategically. Appropriate plans are in place to engage them more fully and to increase the sector's capacity to deliver more commissioned services. The diverse needs of all groups are not systematically included in action plans and service delivery.

75. Ambitions for children and young people in Walsall are good. Services for children and young people feature strongly in the sustainable community strategy, the council's corporate plan and other agencies' strategic plans. There is a commitment to delivering the Change for Children programme, which aims to increase the integration of governance, commissioning processes and front line services by developing existing Children's Trust arrangements. Clear ambitions and objectives are shared among agencies, articulated well in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and underpinned by good partnership working. The five major outcome themes each have a lead officer who represents children's services and regeneration in the council as well as the tPCT and Education Walsall. The partnership now includes representatives of the voluntary and community sector. However, this is a recent development and work is continuing to ensure that all views are represented. Partners are well placed to deliver the agreed ambitions and objectives.

76. The revised CYPP contains ambitious targets, such as reducing first-time offending by 5% year-on-year and making a further £1 million efficiency saving from social care and youth services. The needs of groups at risk of disadvantage are taken into account. Improving the educational outcomes for pupils of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin at age 16 are now priorities. The CYPP is based on an extensive needs analysis and wide consultation with children and young people. During the review of the CYPP in 2007, the partnership surveyed over 1,600 children and young people and consulted more widely through local partnership events. As a result, reducing bullying was included as a new target. However, consultation with hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups is not consistent, for example the emerging needs of newly migrant groups have not been assessed. The partnership ensures that children and young people are aware of the CYPP by producing a young people's version and short leaflets in conjunction with a Walsall young people's consultation group. Consequently, children and young people have influenced and are aware of the broad aims of partners.

77. Prioritisation by partners is good. The CYPP sets out agreed priorities across the five outcome areas and these were reviewed and revised by partners, including the voluntary and community sector. Responsibilities are agreed and well documented in the CYPP, but some underlying strategies and action plans are less precise, for example in spelling out measurable targets and deadlines. Ten locality planning events have identified main local priorities reflecting children and young people's views and suggestions and these are clearly linked to priorities in the CYPP. High-quality data is provided to support the planning and delivery of services strategically and locally. However, the focus is too often on numeric targets, with insufficient weight given to quality of provision.

78. Priorities take account of equalities and diversity issues and there is an infrastructure in place to address these, such as an inter-agency equalities group. Equalities impact assessments are undertaken within agencies, although in some cases lacking precision and measurable targets. There are some good initiatives. For example, health visitors have been appointed with a specific public health remit to work with travelling families, women and children experiencing domestic abuse and to support the reduction of teenage pregnancy. However, equalities and diversity issues are not carried through systematically into all action plans or service delivery.

79. Medium-term financial planning in agencies supports the CYPP and the shift of resources from high-intervention services to preventative services. As part of the Change for Children project, the number of looked after children was reduced from a high of 477 in May 2006 to 432 by March 2007, eight better than the target, enabling resources to be shifted into preventive services.

80. The overall capacity of the local partnership's services is good. There is a well-established partnership which takes responsibility for joint decision making for children's services and is the accountable body for the children and young people's block of the Local Area Agreement. Good leadership across the partnership is evident, particularly from the Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services. The development of the new education contract has been handled well, with extensive engagement of stakeholders in strategic and detailed operational considerations, including politicians from all parties and children's scrutiny. This has resulted in a wide understanding and commitment to the new contract, as well as emphasising the value of partnership working in delivering the wider children's agenda. Developing the contract demanded a great deal of staff time and the council plans appropriately to increase its own managerial capacity so that it is better placed to manage the new contract.

81. Partnership working is open, trusting and effective. The partnership has started to engage meaningfully with the third sector. Plans to build capacity in this sector are in place. Trust and effective communication between statutory partners and the third sector is developing quickly from a low base. The partnership is well placed to make fuller use of the capacity of all stakeholders.

82. Joint commissioning has a sound base and is developing well. Budgets are pooled and aligned. For example, £81,000 is divided between council leisure services and the tPCT to fund work on reducing obesity in primary school age children; the reduction in young people not working or studying is aided by funding of work from the partnership; and CAMHS is jointly funded by the council and the tPCT. The partnership also oversees Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and Children's Fund spending. As a result, the partnership is using its combined resources well to improve outcomes for children and young people.

83. Value for money in the council is good and attention is given to budgets and resource issues in the partnership. For example, the tPCT shared its proposed spending on children's services with the executive group and increased its commitment to health services for looked after children by about £40,000 as a result of the discussion. The new education provider will be required to contribute to efficiency savings required of the council by the government.

84. A joint workforce strategy has been agreed but it is too soon for this to have had any impact. Recruitment and retention is broadly good across agencies, although there is high sickness absence among council staff. The case load of some social workers is too high. There is a wide range of training and development opportunities for staff, some of which is multi-agency.

85. Performance management across the partnership is good. A culture of active performance management has been established across the partnership and within agencies. The partnership uses an effective performance management framework. Agencies supply data which is used to populate a scorecard to provide quarterly monitoring using traffic light indicators. Performance leads in agencies identify underperformance and propose corrective actions for agreement by the partnership executive. This has led to a reduction in CAMHS waiting times from 16 weeks to the 10-week target. However, not all supporting strategies and action plans have established baselines or set precise targets, and progress against these cannot therefore be measured accurately.

86. The area has a good awareness of its strengths and weaknesses. The partnership generally responds well to external evaluation and challenge, for example improving educational outcomes in response to Ofsted inspections, but there are missed opportunities in learning from pilots and projects in the area and in the response to the inspection of children's homes. Children and young people are involved in reviewing services strategically and locally and complaints are used to improve services, but neither is systematic.

87. Based on a strong track record of improvement, effective partnership working, sound planning, and the use made of the new education contract process to take stock, the capacity to improve is good.

## Annex A

### **MOST RECENTLY PUBLISHED ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WALSALL**

#### **Summary**

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, in partnership with Education Walsall, delivers good services for children and young people and shows sustained improvement. Some parts of the borough face significant social and economic obstacles and the council shows increasing ambition to challenge these. This ambition, together with high-quality strategic leadership and innovative solutions, are improving the achievement and well-being of young people. The council is aware of the need to improve the educational attainment and life chances of young people aged between 14 and 19. Plans to achieve this through collaborative working are a significant strength.

The full APA can be found at:

[http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/pdf/?inspectionNumber=3076&providerCategoryID=0&fileName=\\APA\\apa\\_2007\\_335.pdf](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/pdf/?inspectionNumber=3076&providerCategoryID=0&fileName=\\APA\\apa_2007_335.pdf)

## Annex B

### CORPORATE ASSESSMENT ACHIEVEMENT – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, in partnership with Education Walsall, delivers good services for children and young people and achieves sustained improvement. Children are generally healthy and appear safe, with much reduced levels of road deaths and injuries. Good arrangements ensure children in need of protection are identified and supported. However, some children's homes do not meet national minimum standards. Education outcomes are improving, but continue to be below national averages at Key Stage 4. Educational achievement for disadvantaged White males and young people of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin is well below that of their peers.

2. Service management is good. Ambitions for children and young people in Walsall are good. The council and its partners share a commitment to raising aspirations and increasing the life chances of young people. Good leadership across the partnership is evident, particularly from the Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services. Corporate support for improving children's services is very good. A strong commitment to multi-agency preventative work is reflected in effective joint working and early intervention. Significant thought and care has been taken in negotiating the proposals for a new commissioned contract in line with the children's services' priorities.

3. The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people has been consolidated since the 2007 APA and is good for the majority of children and young people. Health partners work very effectively with the council to provide well coordinated and targeted support. The health needs of looked after children and young people are met effectively and performance indicators exceed national averages. Access to CAMHS is variable: looked after children have good support, but those known to the Youth Offending Team have long waiting times and there are no specialist services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Young people known to the Youth Offending Team receive excellent, timely support for substance abuse and good support to promote their physical health, including sexual health promotion.

4. Children and young people appear safe and arrangements to ensure this are good. They receive good advice and support at school to raise their awareness of healthy lifestyles and risks to their safety. A wide range of preventative services effectively identify and support families at an early stage, reducing the number of children needing to be looked after by the council. Services to support families affected by domestic abuse are very good. Professionals have an excellent understanding of their safeguarding role. Child protection systems work well and concerns are identified and responded to appropriately. Bullying is a concern for many children and young people. A well-

coordinated approach ensures that incidents of bullying and racism are identified and action taken.

5. The 2007 APA identifies that the impact of all local services in helping children to enjoy their education and achieve well is good. Educational outcomes have improved in primary schools and are in line with national rates. Although the attendance of looked after children is excellent, their achievement continues to be below that found in similar authorities. School inspection findings show that almost all schools support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make at least satisfactory progress. However, there are fewer schools where progress is good or better compared to similar authorities.

6. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. Children and young people have an increasing say in the shaping and delivery of services. The findings of the joint area review are less positive than the APA in relation to the engagement of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and looked after children. Whilst these groups are appropriately involved in contributing to decisions about important events in their lives, they have limited opportunities to influence the shape of services that support them. Considerable improvements have been made to the provision offered by the Youth Offending Team. However, there continues to be a high proportion of young offenders who are not in education, employment and/or training. Having been judged unsatisfactory by Ofsted in 2004, the youth service has made significant improvement and serves those young people involved well.

7. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to achieve economic well-being is adequate. Partnerships to improve provision for 14 to 19 year olds are good, although the new borough-wide strategy lacks focus and clarity of purpose. There is a strong commitment from partners to raise the aspiration and outcomes for all learners. Employer engagement is strong and schools have good links with the Education Business Partnership. Curriculum and timetables have been dovetailed across providers to ensure a more coherent approach regarding diplomas and other vocational options. It is too soon to judge the impact of these programmes on attainment. More young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and care leavers, are in education, employment or training than is the case for young people in the local community as a whole.

8. The capacity of council services to improve is good. There is a strong track record of improvement, effective partnership working and sound planning. Very good use has been made of the new education contract process to take stock and strategically plan for future improvements.

## Annex C

### SUMMARY OF JOINT AREA REVIEW AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS

1. This joint area review was conducted using the arrangements required under Section 20 of the Children Act 2004. It was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of inspectors from Ofsted, the Healthcare Commission and the Audit Commission. The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the Inspection of cChildren's Services*.

2. The review was linked to the contemporaneous corporate assessment of the local council by the Audit Commission and these findings, plus aspects of the most recent APA, are represented in the relevant part of the corporate assessment report.

3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in Walsall and evaluates the way local services, taken together, contribute to their well-being. Together with the APA of children's services, 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. This review explores these issues by focusing on children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, children who are looked after and children at risk or requiring safeguarding, and a few additional investigations. It evaluates the collective contribution made by all relevant children's services to outcomes for these children and young people.

4. The review took place in two stages, consisting of an analysis stage (where recorded evidence was scrutinised) and a two-week fieldwork stage (where inspectors met children and young people and those who deliver services for them).