

Joint area review

Thurrock Children's Services Authority Area

Review of services for children and young people

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

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Introduction

1. The 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 11 inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Audit Commission. The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the inspection of children's services*.

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

3. The review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in the Thurrock 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 seven 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
- the findings of the contemporaneous inspection of the youth service
- planning documents
- information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision
- evidence gathered during the earlier Youth Offending Team inspection; and
- briefings from staff within the inspectorates, commissioners and other public bodies in contact with local providers.

6. The second stage included inspection fieldwork. This included how far local services have improved outcomes for a small sample of children and young people, some of whom have the most complex needs and a study of

provision in one neighbourhood in Tilbury and Chadwell St Mary. It also included gathering evidence on 10 key judgements, selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. This included discussions with elected members of the local authority and their equivalents in other public agencies, officers from these agencies, service users, and community representatives. A review of case files for children and young people receiving support from a number of local agencies was also included.

Context

7. Thurrock is situated in south Essex and lies to the east of London on the north bank of the river Thames. More than half of Thurrock is classified as green belt land. The area to the north is predominantly rural with small villages and hamlets, whereas the south is mainly urban and industrialised.

8. The population of Thurrock has increased by 13% since 1991. There are higher proportions of pensioners and young people compared to the national average. According to the 2001 census the, a proportion of Black and ethnic minority people is below the national average at 5.4%. Since then the proportion of Black and minority pupils in primary schools has increased by 20% and by 13% in secondary schools.

9. The unemployment rate (2.4%) is slightly below the national average. However, the labour market is characterised by a low skill, low wage economy mainly in the retail and service sectors. The percentage of residents with no qualifications is below regional and national averages. Access to affordable housing is an issue for local people. Some wards within the local authority fall within 10% of the most deprived in England.

10. The council looks after 183 children and young people. Most of these children are cared for in local foster care homes although a small number are placed outside the area, in externally provided residential care or independent foster care agencies. There are 77 children on the child protection register.

11. The South West Essex Teaching Primary Care Trust (PCT) provides primary care for children in Thurrock. Basildon and Thurrock University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is the main provider of acute health services. The South Essex Partnership Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust provides children's mental health services. The NHS East of England Strategic health authority covers NHS organisations in the Thurrock area.

12. Within the borough of Thurrock there are 43 primary and infant schools, 10 secondary schools and two special schools.

13. The Learning and Skills Council Essex works closely with Thurrock Council, local colleges, a training provider consortium and schools in addressing the 14-19 strategy. Post-16 education and training is provided by Thurrock and Basildon FE College, Palmer's sixth form college and a work-based training

consortium. Entry to Employment provision is managed by NOVA, a local consortium. Adult and community learning, including family learning, is provided by Thurrock Adult College, part of the council.

14. In 2005, the council entered into a long-term contract with a private company to deliver a range of services. These include: a customer contact centre for personal and telephone calls; housing benefit administration; council tax collection; information technology provision; and support and procurement as well as other back office functions.

15. Regeneration of the area is a major challenge. The council has successfully lobbied for the creation of an urban development corporation. The Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation, which is co-terminus with the council, has been set up to deliver this regeneration. This includes growth targets of 26,000 new jobs and 18,500 new homes as well as development of the infrastructure for the existing communities.

16. The Local Strategic Partnership (Shaping Thurrock) has been reformed around five Improvement Boards to deliver the revised Sustainable Community Strategy. The Improvement Boards cover: Children and Young People; Healthier Communities; Community Involvement; Sustainable Communities and the Safer Thurrock Partnership. A revised partnership working compact has been produced for voluntary sector partners. The Thurrock Local Area Agreement is to be established in spring 2007.

17. There are no young offender institutions in the area.

Summary Report

Outcomes for children and young people

18. **Outcomes for children and young people in Thurrock are adequate overall** with the exception of economic well-being, where they are inadequate.

19. Children and young people are generally healthy. Teenage pregnancy rates are close to the national average and are reducing rapidly. Infant mortality rates are improving and are now in line with both the benchmark group and the average for England. The number of babies born with low birth weights is falling and breast feeding rates are in line with national averages. Immunisation rates are, however, below national averages. Health provision for looked after children, including their dental care, is good, although universal dental health for those under five years of age is below national targets. The waiting times for young people with non-urgent mental health needs to access services are now good. There are high rates of Chlamydia among those aged 16 to 19 years, although the rate for those below 16 years of age is in line with national targets.

20. Ninety-three percent of children and young people responding to the 'Tellus' survey for this review say they feel safe or very safe in their schools and 85% say they feel safe in their local areas. Those who feel less safe in their local areas identify bullying and crime as their main concerns in spite of a visible police presence in the local areas. The number of children and young people killed, or seriously injured, in road accidents is reducing and is now close to the national average. Children have adequate, and increasing, access to earlier intervention and preventative services. Safeguarding arrangements are generally secure and joint working across agencies is improving arrangements further. The number of children with a child protection plan, and those who are looked after, are reducing and are lower than in comparable councils.

21. Standards in education are improving in many respects. Children enjoy school and their behaviour is judged to be good or better than the national picture. Although educational outcomes remain below that found nationally in primary schools, by the age of 16, standards achieved in GCSEs are in line with national averages. The proportion of looked after children achieving at least one GCSE pass is above the national average for this group but low compared to all young people. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. Black and minority ethnic groups usually make good progress and reach significantly higher standards than other pupils. There have been reductions in the number of pupils being permanently excluded from school but fixed-term exclusions continue to be high in secondary schools. Attendance rates are improving and are now at their highest levels for four years, although they remain below the national average. Levels of unauthorised absence in secondary schools improved markedly a few years ago and are now stable, close to the national average. In primary schools, however, unauthorised absence continues to be above the national average.

22. The number of children and young people who offend for the first time has reduced by half during the last two years from 95 to 49 and now compares favourably with statistical neighbours. Re-offending rates show some improvement among young people leaving the system after one year; they are now in line with national averages and are better than statistical neighbours. The number of children who re-offend two years after leaving the system remains high. The proportion of young people who offend who are in full-time education, employment or training is low compared to national averages.

23. Overall outcomes for achieving economic well-being are inadequate. Participation and success rates for many young people are improving, but remain below national averages, particularly for vulnerable groups. The development of a coherent 14-19 strategy and a diverse curriculum has been very slow until recently. Employer engagement remains a significant challenge for the council. Many young people have modest ambitions, and many of those who take up employment after school are in low skilled jobs with little prospect of training or progression. The proportion of young people achieving a level 2 qualification by the age of 19 is 11 points below the Essex average at 58%. Progression to higher education is very low at 20%. The number of young

people not engaged in education, employment or training is the highest in the Connexions partnership and above the target.

The impact of local services

24. The impact of local services in improving outcomes for children and young people is adequate. Recent improvements are addressing identified weaknesses, but the contribution of services to the economic well-being of young people remains inadequate. The contribution made by the youth service to some outcomes is good, for example support to substance misuse services and provision of sport and leisure activities. However, the service receives inadequate funding and is judged to be inadequate overall.

Being healthy

25. The contribution of local services in improving the health of children and young people is adequate. Partnership working between agencies both within and outside the borough is adequate and improving. The implementation of some key government initiatives is securing improved multi-agency working, these include: the teenage pregnancy strategy; the Healthy Schools initiatives; the SureStart programme; and the ongoing development of children's centres. These measures are having a positive impact on health outcomes for children and young people within the borough. For example, all schools in Thurrock have implemented a travel strategy four years in advance of government requirements. Through targeted provision, attendance by families, children and young people is good at various healthy living centres. In addition, sessions on healthy eating have taken place at mother and toddler groups in six deprived local wards.

26. There are some good innovative approaches to health promotion and achievement of key clinical indicators, for example the reductions in smoking and the number of teenage pregnancies. However, in some areas of the borough, oral health for the under fives is lower than national targets, and there are also gaps in routine health screening. Both of these issues are currently being addressed by the active recruitment of dentists, health visitors and school nurses. There are limited parenting programmes currently but the Patch Parents and Community Mothers' provision is good. The sexual health nurse provides good support for hard to reach groups and others in the community, and the condom card scheme is developing well.

27. The waiting times for non-urgent referrals to, and treatment from, for the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have been lengthy but have significantly fallen in the last year and are now minimal. This service is improving and additional resources are being deployed to develop responsive service provision for vulnerable children and young people. Transition arrangements from CAMHS to adult mental health services are underdeveloped.

28. The health needs of looked after children, including those placed out of borough, are met well. Health professionals maintain a high level of surveillance. There are good support programmes for looked after children, and constructive leisure activities for children with complex needs are a key focus. The health needs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, however, are not sufficiently addressed. Multidisciplinary healthcare service outcomes, for instance speech and language therapy for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are currently inadequate.

Staying safe

29. **The impact of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** Joint working across agencies is adequate and is improving safeguarding arrangements for children and young people. Good information and support for children and their families contribute well to a fall in the number of fatalities and serious injuries. Processes to identify and manage risks posed to children and young people by adults are robust, with effective action taken to ensure compliance with safeguarding requirements in schools and childcare settings. Although services to combat high levels of domestic violence are a local priority, assessments of risks are impeded by delays in police notifications of incidents where children are present. This aspect of the service is inadequate.

30. A good multi-agency framework is reducing, at a rate faster than comparable authorities, referrals of children in need; the number of child protection investigations and the number of looked after children. Thresholds for intervention are clear and appropriate. Initial responses to referrals of child concerns are generally adequate. However, weaknesses in management arrangements result in some delays and inconsistency in the quality of assessments. Timescales for completion of initial assessments are improving but take too long and exceed the seven day target. Once children are assessed as being in need, joint working arrangements, procedural compliance and multi-agency assessments are generally good. Most looked after children, and all those with child protection plans, are allocated to a qualified social worker.

31. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is effective in leading the wider safeguarding agenda. Multi-agency child protection procedures are up-to-date and comprehensive. Arrangements for monitoring procedural compliance with lessons learnt from serious case reviews and auditing the quality of front-line practice are, however, less well developed. Processes for tracking missing children and those in out-of-school provision are effective. Safeguarding arrangements for looked after children are generally good. Care planning to achieve placement stability and permanency through adoption and long-term placements is good overall, but procedures for investigating and monitoring complaints from looked after children and young people are insufficiently clear. Services to safeguard children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good. However, thresholds for social care family support services are high and some families wait too long for respite care.

Enjoying and achieving

32. **The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is adequate.** Changes introduced to improve services to schools are having a positive impact on attendance and on raising the aspirations of children and young people. The local council and its partners provide good support to parents and carers in areas of highest need. Where children's centres are well established, a strong multi-agency approach contributes to responsive and appropriate support for parents.

33. The improvements to local services include the restructured school improvement and education welfare services, and the commissioning of external and school-based providers. Importantly, the local authority has successfully engaged with schools in its drive to raise standards, using data from a range of sources and agencies effectively to identify which schools are most in need of support. This is beginning to impact strongly on primary schools where standards are rising. Underachieving schools benefit most from focused interventions and many are improving at a faster rate than nationally. The number of schools identified by Ofsted as requiring additional support has historically been high, but active and effective action since early 2006 has resulted in effective support for these schools. No secondary or special school, nor pupil referral unit, is currently judged to require special measures or has received a Notice to Improve. The primary school in special measures was deemed to provide good education and care a few days after the joint area review fieldwork was completed and one of the two primary schools that had received a Notice to Improve was judged to be good in early February.

34. The majority of children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are educated in mainstream schools but not all schools cater well for this group. The service for formal assessment and monitoring of special education provision is good, but inter-agency working is adversely affected by limited joint funding. Educational support for looked after children is good and the multi disciplinary team provides effective and timely support for social workers and schools. Services to support schools' understanding and provision for promoting cultural diversity are underdeveloped. National strategies introduced to promote improved behaviour are having a positive impact and the number of permanent exclusions is low. The provision for pupils at risk of exclusion or excluded from schools is adequate and improving. There are delays in finding school places to ensure timely admission to schools for children arriving mid-year. Although there is a wide range of recreational activities, they are not easily accessible to all young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who would wish to use them.

Making a positive contribution

35. **The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate.** The council is delivering a good range of services that support children's emotional and social well-being adequately. Strong voluntary groups, such as Open Door, offer support, advice and guidance and engage with a high number of young people. Ursay, the independent advocacy service, managed 100 cases during 2005-2006; however, some looked after children and young people seen during the inspection were not aware of this service. There is a suitable mentoring and independent visitor scheme for looked after children. Children and young people receive good support during times of change and transition. However, services for young carers remain at an early stage of development and do not reach enough young people. There are waiting times for some therapeutic services.

36. The Youth Cabinet is developing well and the young people involved are keen to make a positive contribution, although they have not had training to enable them to develop their skills further. The Youth Cabinet includes representation from young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and from looked after young people, but there are currently no separate forums representing the wider views of vulnerable and hard to reach young people. The Cabinet is frequently consulted on a range of issues and consultation days engage larger numbers of young people. The council and its partners are currently over dependent on the Youth Cabinet as the key mechanism for consultation with young people. Although the number of young people engaged with the youth service is low, effective youth work has led to increased self-confidence in those young people who have been engaged by the youth services and tangible progress in their development has been made.

37. The police work effectively, and in partnership, with other agencies to deter anti-social behaviour in identified hotspots. The council and its partners, including the police, Safer Thurrock Partnership and Trust, have begun work to address community race relations issues in order to increase cohesion and address alcohol-related crime.

Achieving economic well-being

38. **The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is inadequate.** Most families with young children are adequately supported to take up education, employment or training. Childcare places have increased rapidly and provide a satisfactory number of places to meet the needs of most families. Support for parents with pre-school children is good, particularly for those whose children have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Participation in employment, education and training and success rates post-16 for many young people are improving, but remain below national averages, particularly for teenage mothers, young people supported by the youth offending team and those leaving care. The

development of a coherent 14-19 strategy and diverse curriculum has been very slow until recently. Many of the vocational elements in the 14-16 curriculum are designed to meet the needs of disaffected young people. Post-16 options are narrow, particularly in work-based training, and employers have been insufficiently involved in planning the 14-19 curriculum. Many young people have modest ambitions, and many of those who take up employment after school are in low skilled jobs with little prospect of training or progression. The number of young people progressing to higher education and the number achieving a level 2 qualification by 19 are both lower than the national average and lower than its geographical neighbour (Essex). Post-16 education and training opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are limited, and their chances of success in work-based learning are very low.

Service management

39. The management of services for children and young people is adequate. The capacity to improve further is adequate. The management of services for children and young people is adequate. The ambition contained within the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) is adequate. The current CYPP covers one year to allow alignment with the Thurrock Community Strategy and the emerging Local Area Agreement (LAA). The relationships between key local partners are good and although the PCT is new, it is building on previous good relationships. The track record of the council and partners in achieving their priorities is adequate.

40. The interim Director of the Children, Education and Families Service has provided a focus on delivery and outcomes as well as sound leadership. Strategic management has been strengthened and he is supported by good senior managers. However, there are some weaknesses in middle management in social services. The lead portfolio holder has an adequate understanding of his roles and responsibilities and is developing this further by seeking mentoring support. The current split in responsibilities between him and the portfolio holder for looked after children is unhelpful and does not support the inclusive agenda of Every Child Matters. Some elected members have limited knowledge of the new agenda.

41. The self-assessment reflects awareness of the strengths and weakness of the current provision although it does not reflect adequately the impact of the regeneration agenda on service demand across the council and with its partners. It also fails to acknowledge that some initiatives are at an early stage of development and consequently are aspirations rather than solid outcomes.

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	1		
Service management	2		
Capacity to improve	2	2	
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 improve management arrangements to ensure effective and timely initial assessments of needs of children and young people

- the police should undertake timely reporting of domestic violence incidents where children and young people are present, in accordance with the local multi-agency protocol
- the council, and its partners, should develop the range of opportunities for all children and young people, including those from hard to reach and vulnerable groups, to participate in the planning and performance management of services and activities
- the council, and its partners, should develop, agree and implement the 14-19 strategy
- the council, and its partners, should improve identified weaknesses in services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

For action over the next six months:

- all services should ensure that CAMHS fully meet local needs and meet national targets.

Main Report

Outcomes for children and young people

42. Outcomes for children and young people in Thurrock are adequate overall. In some aspects they are low but improving, with the exception of economic well-being, where they are inadequate.

Being Healthy

43. Children and young people are generally healthy. Infant mortality rates are improving and are now in line with both the benchmark group and national average. The number of babies born with low birth weights is falling and breast feeding rates are in line with national averages. Immunisation rates are, however, below national averages. The teenage pregnancy rate has reduced by 37% since 2003 and is now close to the national average. There are high rates of Chlamydia in the 16 to 19 year age groups, although the rate for those below 16 years of age is in line with national targets. Health provision for looked after children, including their dental care is good, although universal dental health for those under-five is below national targets. The waiting times for young people with non-urgent mental health needs to access services are good and are on the verge of being cleared.

Staying Safe

44. Children and young people appear to be safe. Ninety percent of children and young people responding to the Tellus survey for this review say they feel safe or very safe in their schools and 85% say they feel safe in their local areas. Those who feel less safe in their local areas identify bullying and

crime as their main concerns. A few young people have contributed to the council's strategy to address these concerns. Many children and young people access an increasing range of advice and guidance in their schools and in the community on staying safe. The number of children and young people killed, or seriously injured, in road accidents is reducing and is now close to the national average.

45. Children and young people's access to earlier intervention and preventative services have improved. This is making a difference, with fewer children subject to child protection investigations or family breakdown. However, some children and young people experience delays in having their needs assessed because when referred initial assessments are not completed within seven days. Numbers of children with a child protection plan and those who are looked after are reducing and are better than the national average. All children on the child protection register, and most looked after children, are allocated to a qualified social worker; the few looked after children who are not are monitored effectively. Most looked after children receive good quality care and experience stable placements. A good proportion of them achieve permanency through adoption or long-term placements. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are effectively safeguarded when using respite and family support services. Children and young people from Black and minority ethnic communities who are looked after have their cultural needs met well.

Enjoying and achieving

46. **Children and young people enjoy and achieve adequately.** There are many signs of improving educational outcomes for children and young people. High deprivation factors and the poor language and communication skills of many children when they enter school contribute significantly to the low attainment levels in primary schools. When this is taken into account the progress made by children and young people by the age of 16 is good.

47. Outcomes for children in early years settings are adequate and improving. Despite some good progress, children enter school with skills below those expected for their age. This has an impact on their achievement as they move through primary school and results are below average at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. There has been a three-year trend of improvement in English and mathematics up to the age of 11 and the attainment gap is closing at a faster rate than elsewhere. Children and young people do less well in reading than other core subjects but reading recovery programmes have a demonstrable impact on raising standards in targeted schools.

48. Good progress is made overall in secondary schools and, in the 2006 GCSE examinations, the proportion of young people, including those who are looked after, attaining five passes at A* - C grade is in line with the national figure. The attainment of young people from Black and minority ethnic groups compares favourably to other young people in Thurrock. Progress of children

and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good in early years settings and special schools and adequate in mainstream schools. Although improving, unauthorised absence in primary schools is above national averages and high levels of fixed-term exclusions in secondary schools continue to impact negatively on overall achievement. Some young people moving into the area mid-year have to wait too long to find a school place.

Making a positive contribution

49. Children and young people make an adequate contribution to their communities. Children and young people develop secure and positive relationships with their peers and adults. Some young people have opportunities to be volunteers, peer mentors and educators. Youth cabinet members are enthusiastic and have total control of the Youth Opportunity Fund. Young people are consulted regularly. The council has plans in place to address the low number of young people taking part in elections for the cabinet and UK Youth Parliament. The opportunity for children under 13 to make a positive contribution is restricted to school councils.

50. The number of looked after children who communicate their views to the statutory review is good. The number of children from Black and ethnic minorities who have culturally appropriate placements is improving. All children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have transition plans in place and most feel that they are involved in decisions that affect their lives. Despite on-line surveys and liaison with schools and general practitioners, many young carers remain unidentified, and this means that only a minority of these children currently receive support.

51. The number of children and young people who offend for the first time in the youth justice system is reducing; it is now in line with the national average and compares favourably with statistical neighbours. Re-offending rates one year after leaving the youth justice system show some improvement, but are generally higher than nationally with regard to those offending within two years of leaving the system. The work of the Final Warning and Reprimand Panel and an increased focus on victim and restorative justice are having a positive impact on young people within the pre-court group of offenders. The proportion of supervised juveniles in full-time education, employment or training is low compared to both statistical neighbours and the national average.

Achieving economic well-being

52. Children and young people are less likely to achieve economic well being and are poorly prepared for working life. Childcare provision and support for families is satisfactory: a council survey of childcare provision in 2005 led to an increase in child care places. A project to support and encourage parents into education, employment or training exceeded its target. The care-to-learn project doubled its contacts between 2005 and 2006, although take-up remained very small at three out of the 80 contacted. Improvements at Key Stage 4 mean that fewer young people than the national

average leave school with no qualifications. Success rates in the local sixth form college improved to around 80% across all courses in 2003-04. However, despite improvements, the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training remains higher than average. Participation in education, employment and training by teenage mothers and those supported by the youth offending team are particularly low compared to national averages. Unemployment is high among 16-24 year olds, especially those from Black or minority ethnic heritage. Most young people who work are in low-skilled jobs without training and there is a higher proportion of young people that have no qualifications. Participation in work-based training is lower than national average and success rates are very low compared to national figures. A-level success rates are well below the average. Progression to higher education is very low at 20%.

53. The proportion of local authority housing meeting the decent homes standard is good. The average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation is much improved and judged to be good in recent inspections. Outcomes for looked after children are adequate. The ratio of care leavers in employment, education or training as a proportion of the overall population has fallen and is lower than for similar councils. Fewer care leavers are in suitable accommodation than in comparator councils or nationally. The number of families and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who receive direct payments is good. However, the numbers of these young people who successfully remain in work-based training is inadequate.

The impact of local services

54. **The impact of local services in improving outcomes for children and young people is adequate.** Recent improvements are addressing identified weaknesses. The contribution of services to the economic well-being of young people remains inadequate. The contribution made by the youth service to some outcomes is good, for example support to substance misuse services and sport and leisure activities. However, the service receives inadequate funding and is judged to be inadequate overall.

Being healthy

55. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is adequate.** Health care targets for children and young people are being met in many areas, but remain below the national average in some cases.

56. There are good examples of parental support systems within the community, but with uneven provision across the borough with regard to both type and availability. There is very positive feedback regarding the impact of both parenting skills and early years' development programmes. Through the Community Mothers Project, the council is supporting parents from disadvantaged communities to develop their health and basic skills to enable them to look after their children better and improve their own aspirations. The

Community Mothers programme has proven outcomes in relation to improving poor diets and other healthy lifestyle factors, providing advice on parenting skills, basic skills, early years' development and raising the confidence and self-esteem of parents and young children in less advantaged communities. The SureStart model impacts positively on parents, children are safely looked after and it demonstrates the opportunities for centralised child health care in the communities and compliance with government initiatives. Health visitors and children's centres promote breast feeding, with rates that are comparable with peer authorities. Rates of maternal smoking during pregnancy are also better than similar authorities.

57. The Thurrock Teenage Pregnancy Strategy has a successful and comprehensive approach to reducing teenage pregnancy and in providing support for teenage parents. Infant mortality rates are in line with both the benchmark group average and the national average.

58. Healthy lifestyles are being promoted effectively for school age children. The 50% target set for involvement of schools in the Healthy Schools programme has been exceeded, and they are working well towards achieving healthy schools status; all schools are implementing the five-a-day fruit scheme. Marked improvements have been made to snack facilities and school meals menus. Children in schools across the borough demonstrate a good understanding of the healthy eating initiatives and a good awareness of the benefits of physical exercise. There are good support mechanisms within the community for hard to reach groups regarding healthy living and there are now after school clubs across the borough. However, there is a lack of adequate and accessible sports and leisure provision in the community to meet the needs of children and young people, which reduces their opportunity to improve their physical health. Some vulnerable children also have minimal access to support and activities in the community.

59. Most early years' provision provides well for the health of young children and the range of services provided meet national targets. A backlog of routine health screening restricts the time available for health promotion with early years children and young parents. Immunisation rates are low and incidence of childhood illnesses such as measles have been high. Some innovative campaigns are in place to improve immunisation rates including a good initiative where three health visitors are being trained to perform the six-week medical check and BCG immunisations to improve health surveillance in the under-fives in the home. Screening for sexually transmitted diseases is identifying high rates of Chlamydia for those over 16. The appointment of a jointly-funded sexual health worker is in place, but not yet showing an impact for this group. Positive work by schools to address sexually transmitted diseases has seen a reduction in Chlamydia rates for those under 16. Monitoring to assess the impact of local health projects, such as stopping smoking and obesity management, are inadequate.

60. The work of the primary mental health team is good. In recognition of its success, the team won an award from the South Essex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust in 2005. The effective partnerships between counselling services and Connexions and the Young Peoples Advisory Service are well regarded by children and young people across the borough. Assessments and timescales for treatment within the youth offending services are good and have consistently achieved CAMHS targets, but this is not the case for all referrals, particularly those from the GPs. The CAMHS team has been successful in reducing the waiting times for non-urgent cases from 12 months to less than four months and now only four young people are currently waiting. Plans are in place to manage resources from a risk management basis to prevent long waiting lists in the future. The council and partners have made substance misuse a high priority area and worked hard to successfully reduce the incidence, including the use of peer educators in workshop events. A good proportion of young people with identified substance misuse needs receive specialist assessment within appropriate time frames.

61. Health indicators for looked after children regarding dental health and physical health assessments are good. Mental health services for looked after children are also good, and the waiting times for CAMHS services are being addressed. There has been a reduction in teenage conceptions among looked after children and care leavers through targeted sex and relationship education. There are good multi-disciplinary groups supporting looked after children.

62. The CYPP has established useful workforce plans allied to learning difficulties and/or disabilities to develop services. There is a relatively new dedicated CAMHS for children with learning disabilities providing an out of hours' service for young people up to the age of 18. However, there is currently a lack of respite care for vulnerable children in the borough. Nursing care at home is inadequate for those with complex needs and waiting times for speech and language therapy are inadequate because of recruitment problems; this is a problem nationally.

Staying safe

63. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** Children and young people and their families have access to good information and multi-agency support with regard to staying safe and reducing environmental hazards. A good parenting handbook is available in many languages relevant to local communities. Compliance with national standards for safeguarding in schools, child-care settings and residential and fostering services is good. Steady progress is also being made in raising public awareness of private fostering requirements with some increase in notifications of placements. Schools have access to a good advice and support service to identify and manage risks relating to visits and external activities, but this good advice is not currently used to support similar activities managed across children's services.

64. Arrangements to provide a safe environment for children and young people are adequate and improving. Good information and support for children and their families contribute well to a fall in the number of fatalities and serious injuries. Effective action is taken to ensure compliance with safeguarding requirements in schools and childcare settings. Processes to identify and manage risks posed by adults are robust. The authority acknowledges that some aspects of its work require further improvement, including reviewing the area-wide anti-bullying strategy and ensuring compliance with the agreed domestic violence protocol. The authority has responded positively to the concerns raised by young people about bullying and is reviewing its approach to borough-wide anti-bullying strategies. A challenging target to reduce high levels of domestic violence has been set in the LAA. The LSCB and the Safer Thurrock Partnership are cooperating well on the development of a comprehensive multi-agency domestic violence strategy. There remain, however, significant delays in notifications by police of some domestic violence incidents where children are present. This delay is in breach of the current protocol and is impeding the timely assessment of children's and young people's needs.

65. The new Assessment and Response Children's System, combined with the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), provides a good multi-agency framework for timely assessment of needs and intervention. Agencies, notably schools, are increasingly taking responsibility for the lead professional role for coordinating multi-agency plans and responding at an earlier stage to identified needs of children and young people. Thresholds for intervention are clear and appropriate. However, there has been some confusion among front-line staff about managing the interface between pathways for children in need, child protection and looked after children because of misunderstandings in the language used.

66. Arrangements for initial responses to referrals have been strengthened and are now adequate. Frontline children's services are organised and resourced appropriately to meet the demand, with nearly all cases allocated to qualified, and experienced, social workers. Managers screen all initial referrals within timescales although recording of management decisions is less consistent. However there is a high number of repeat referrals and, in two cases reviewed by inspectors, delays in responding to child concerns were identified. The council has strengthened processes for tracking referrals and assessments, safe allocation and transfer of cases; this includes a revised quality audit tool to monitor procedural compliance. Whilst these actions are yet to be fully embedded, they have had a positive impact particularly with regard to ensuring compliance with the requirement to undertake timely agency checks which had previously impacted adversely on the quality of some child protection investigations and initial assessments.

67. Once children are assessed as being in need, cases are transferred promptly to family support and the looked after children's team, where management and joint working arrangements and practice are generally good. Child protection conferences and reviews are timely and well attended by

partner agencies. There is good work in engaging parents and direct work with children and young people. Most core and specialist assessments are of good quality. Most children looked after and all those in need of protection are allocated to qualified social workers. Whilst some children in need await allocation, satisfactory arrangements are in place to monitor their progress.

68. Multi-agency arrangements to monitor adults who pose risks to children and young people are robust. Recruitment and service commissioning processes support good levels of compliance with requirements for checks to the Criminal Records Bureau. Processes to investigate and monitor complaints against staff are good particularly where there are child protection concerns. However, processes for responding to complaints from children and young people about service provision are less well monitored or evaluated.

69. The LSCB is driving a comprehensive business plan with a broad safeguarding agenda. Participation and contributions from relevant statutory and voluntary agencies to the board are adequate. Designated officers for child protection are established in schools and agencies. New joint safeguarding procedures and a good handbook for staff have increased consistency and communication across boundaries with the neighbouring authorities of Essex and Southend. Processes for commissioning of serious case reviews have been strengthened. Although some multi-agency quality audits take place, these are limited in scope and impact. Supervision for staff is regular although its effectiveness is variable across teams. Training is highly valued by front line staff and is appropriately co-ordinated by the LSCB.

70. Information systems operating across children's services are clearly mapped and manually linked to support communication pending the long-term development of a shared electronic system. Although a single over-arching information sharing protocol is at an early stage of development, partnership working is effectively supported by clear operational procedures for information sharing between agencies. Processes for recording and tracking children who go missing or are out of school are effective. Processes for sharing information on looked after children or those on the child protection register who move across area boundaries are robust.

71. Locality teams and the CAF system are having a positive impact on reducing numbers of children and young people who are looked after and those with a child protection plan. Evaluation of pilot projects has identified improved relationships between parents and professionals and some improvement in school attendance and reduction in challenging behaviours. However, there are some gaps in provision of culturally specific services and in particular parenting classes. Links with faith communities are developing.

72. Overall, looked after children and young people receive a good standard of personal care in their placements. Increased provision of local foster placements supports good placement stability and reducing dependence on external placements. However, placement choice and local placements for

children from Black and minority ethnic communities are insufficient. Foster carers have good access to training and support. Care planning to achieve permanence through adoption and long-term placements is good overall.

73. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are effectively safeguarded when using services. Eligibility criteria for accessing the children with disability team are high although consistent with many other councils. Children who do not meet these criteria are serviced by the relevant social care team depending on needs. The council acknowledges that there is insufficient care provision for children and young people to provide respite for families and carers. Parents are positive about the quality of social care services provided but are concerned about long waiting times for respite care services.

Enjoying and achieving

74. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is adequate.** Information for parents and carers to help them support their children to enjoy and achieve is adequate overall. It is at its best for parents of younger children in areas identified as in greatest need. Parents of young children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well but web-based information is difficult to access and some information is out of date. The Flagship Children's Centre visited during the neighbourhood study provides good multi-agency support for families and children.

75. Strategic planning and provision for early years are improving rapidly with effective integrated planning and targeting of resources to improve achievement in known areas of need or under achievement.

76. High levels of financial delegation, local schools cluster developments and commissioning of schools to provide services have promoted a healthy partnership between schools and the local authority. Restructuring of school improvement services has led to good use of performance data to target resources at under-achieving schools. A good range of strategies, including commissioning of private providers, are used to extend the available support and challenge. National strategies to improve achievement, behaviour and attendance are beginning to have a measurable impact on raising standards. In a survey for this review, children and young people reported that they felt they would do better if the curriculum and teaching were more interesting and fun.

77. The council has successfully engaged with schools in its drive to raise standards. It uses data effectively from a range of sources and agencies to identify which schools are most in need of support. Underachieving schools, particularly those in the primary sector, benefit most from focused interventions and many are improving at a faster rate than nationally. The number of schools identified by Ofsted as requiring additional support has historically been high but active and effective action since early 2006 has resulted in effective support for these schools. No secondary or special school, or PRU, is currently judged to require special measures or has received a Notice to Improve. The primary

school in special measures was deemed to provide good education and care just as the joint area review fieldwork was completed and one of the two primary schools that received a Notice to Improve was judged to be good in early February. Headteachers have welcomed these initiatives.

78. Written guidance for schools is helpful in providing an overview of the needs and expectations of young people from other cultures and backgrounds. However, there has been insufficient development to ensure schools have the confidence to develop policy and practice for the increasing number of children and young people from Black and minority ethnic groups, refugees, asylum seekers and those who have English as their second language.

79. A restructuring of the education welfare service has been undertaken to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the support to schools in challenging both the authorised and unauthorised absence rates, which continue to be high, especially in primary schools. There is clear evidence of progress with better tracking of individuals and vulnerable groups in order to target support. Whilst there is a common commitment to tackling unauthorised absence, the reconfigured service is yet to win the full confidence of schools.

80. A range of strategies has been introduced to improve services for supporting children's and young people's behaviour. In addition to successful work in the behaviour improvement programme a unit for primary age children with emotional, social and behaviour difficulties has just opened, with a secondary age unit to follow in April 2007. The youth service provides good support with initiatives such as the X2I (exclusion to inclusion) project which helps young people gain basic skills and develop personal confidence.

81. Many school buildings are in poor condition. Whilst the Building Schools for the Future programme and the Thames Gateway development will address this situation in time, work is at a very early stage and many schools need updating to meet the needs of a modern curriculum. There are immediate pressures arising from a shortage of places for mid-year secondary school admissions, which result in some children and young people being out of school for substantial periods. A start has been made in seeking a solution with the support of schools, most of which are responsible for their own admissions. Good progress has been made in coordinating annual school admissions and the transfer of excluded pupils, which has reduced the level of permanent exclusions.

82. Arrangements for young people being educated at home are adequate and accurate tracking is in place. However, the numbers of young people being educated at home has increased from 33 to 57 in the year to December 2006, in part because of difficulty in finding alternative secondary school places for mid-year arrivals and transfers between schools. There is now a range of alternative settings for excluded pupils that provide a satisfactory curriculum for most young people. There is growing recognition of the need for coordinated approaches to social, behavioural and attendance issues.

83. There is an inadequate range of recreational, leisure and cultural facilities overall. Increasingly, schools are providing a wide range of after-school-clubs as part of their extended provision, including sport. Whilst some very successful recreational activities are available, such as the music studio and street football in some areas of the borough, these are not universally available. Voluntary and community groups offer appropriate activities for some Black and minority ethnic groups and good support is given to looked after children to attend a range of recreational activities assisted by subsidised entry to council-run leisure facilities.

84. Educational services for looked after children are good. A multi-disciplinary team provides effective and timely support for social workers and schools. There are robust systems for recording the movements of looked after children into and across schools, and the authority provides support to schools in meeting the needs of looked after children placed in Thurrock by other authorities. Support for looked after children from non-English speaking groups satisfactory. Access to additional language support is variable and in some instances there are delays in children obtaining a school place.

85. There is a good strategy to promote the inclusion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Services promote inclusive practice well across schools and Ofsted inspections identify that practice is now at least adequate in most schools. Special schools make a valued contribution in improving mainstream provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Formal assessment processes and monitoring of provision are good. Inter-agency working is hindered by minimal aligned funding. As a result, the successful education-focused inclusion team is not yet sufficiently well integrated despite some good plans for the future.

Making a positive contribution

86. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate.** Children and young people access a wide range of services that support their emotional and social development. Community Mothers, Pyramid (a transition screening support scheme) and positive parenting courses are successful at boosting parents self esteem and self confidence, and help them engage positively with their children. Children's centres are making a valuable contribution, for example, the Flagship provides an outreach pre-school for-hard-to reach families. Good progress is being made with the healthy schools scheme. The number of young people engaged with the youth service is low, but secure, positive relationships between young people and workers exist, for example, the X21 music sessions at the Riverside studio. The council and its partners are providing this against a cultural backdrop of low aspirations within Thurrock.

87. The Open Door service is accessible and well used as a source of information, advice and guidance, reaching around 11,000 young people in 2006. However, some therapeutic services, such as counselling, anger

management work, mediation services and life-coaching, have long waiting lists. Some young people are peer mentors and educators, for example on a very good youth service drugs project. Mentoring schemes, supportive buddy and playground friend projects are well developed within most schools. Learning mentors are a valued resource within schools. Good transition schemes in the borough are helping children to settle well on entry to secondary schools. The X2I project and Jack Lobley Centre offer good support to excluded pupils at times of transition and re-integration.

88. Consultation carried out with some young people in Thurrock influenced the CYPP and the use of youth voice is a key aspiration within the plan. There are many examples where individual children have contributed to decision making regarding their own lives but, as yet, there is no overarching consultation and participation strategy. There are some examples of young people engaged in the design and management of services, for example, within the Connexions service. Care leavers are involved in the recruitment of social workers. The Youth Cabinet is developing well, and has responsibility for the Youth Opportunity Funding budget. Young people are consulted frequently. However, the council and its partners are currently over-dependent on the cabinet as the key mechanism for youth consultation and participation in the borough. The cabinet includes representation from looked after young people and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are, however, no separate forums representing vulnerable groups or hard-to-reach children and young people, although some community groups are developing youth forums. The council also makes use of informal ways of gathering the views of young people such as the on-line surveys. Voting in the UK Youth Parliament and cabinet elections has taken place during consultation events and, therefore, the number of young people voting has been low. School councils are developing well in most schools and provide opportunities for younger children to take part in decision making; for example, primary school children have been involved in projects such as creating a memorial garden and taking part in interviews for teaching staff.

89. Many activities to deter anti-social behaviour have proved successful, such as the firebreak scheme. The anti-social behaviour delivery group has a positive and progressive direction of travel and is part of the numerous youth crime prevention actions, such as the successful Corringham consultation model. The key issues for children and young people have been identified; for example, the licensing department is working proactively with both the police and trading standards to address the issue of underage drinking in the borough, linked to the rate of alcohol-related crime. The Safer Thurrock Partnership receives regular information regarding hotspots and is attempting to respond appropriately, although outcomes are not yet assured. There are effective links between the partnership, the youth offending team and community solutions youth workers.

90. There is an increased focus on victim and restorative justice work, which is having a positive effect upon young people, particularly in the early stages of

offending. Nine recent restorative justice conferences have been held in which the children and young people who offend have been directly confronted with the effects of their offending. The Youth Offending Team engages well with children and young people who are persistent offenders in the intensive supervision and surveillance programme. This means that young people are well supported and engaged as well as being monitored and challenged whilst on the programme. However, there is no graduated removal of support at the end of the programme.

91. Partnership work between the police, the Safer Thurrock Partnership, TRUST (a local Black and minority ethnic group) and the authority's diversity officer to address race/hate crime is at an early stage of development. The council and its partners correctly identify that work is needed with schools and the youth community around race issues. Some schools are under-reporting racist incidents and this has been identified as a focus for school improvement visits this year.

92. The number of looked after children and young people who communicated their views specifically for their latest statutory review is good. All care leavers have pathway plans. There is good support at transition for looked after children and the authority works hard to ensure educational placements offer continuity. There remains a need to continue the robust recruitment campaign to attract foster carers from Black and minority ethnic groups. Care leavers have opportunities to train as peer mentors through the 'What makes a difference' scheme. Independent advocacy provision is available, with 100 contacts being made through the Ursay during 2005-2006. However, some looked after children and young people seen during the inspection were not aware of the service. An annual pantomime demonstrates an innovative approach to boosting self confidence and self esteem and engaged 120 looked after children and young people last year. There is a satisfactory new corporate parenting strategy and social care managers and designated teachers describe a mutual accountability regarding corporate parenting responsibilities. However, the understanding of corporate parenting remains underdeveloped within the council.

93. Support for transition at key points is effective. Portage delivers a good and highly valued service which supports children well on transition to nursery provision. A good multi-agency transition service has been operating over the past twelve months and is having a positive impact on transition arrangements for young people aged fourteen years and above. All children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have transition plans in place to support their move to adult education and care. Most young people feel involved in decisions that affect their daily lives. Parents of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are represented on the Children's Disability Forum although there is no current representation from young people themselves.

Achieving economic well-being

94. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is inadequate.** Support for families with young children to promote their economic well-being is satisfactory. Childcare places broadly meet the needs of parents, and information is readily accessible especially through the children's centres. Community-based peer volunteers called Patch Parents and Community Mothers provide good support to families. The Wishes project has been successful in helping to raise aspirations and skills of parents who participated in this project.

95. The council has invested much of its resources on improving the quality of provision for children and young people up to 16, in order to raise their self esteem and self-confidence, and on making remaining in full-time education or training a more attractive and more realistic proposition. However, much of this work has yet to impact sufficiently on the outcomes for young people in economic well being.

96. The overall contribution of the youth service to economic well being is satisfactory. The number of young people aged 13-19 participating with the service is low. However, the service has successfully targeted young people not engaged in education, employment or training through the GAPP and the X21 projects. The X21 project works well with young people who are permanently excluded from school and all the young people who attended the X21 project in 2005/06 were subsequently in training, education or employment by June 2006. Other support is less consistent. Similar work at the AIM project, with individuals identified as at risk of exclusion, offers much poorer provision. The Connexions Centre One Stop Shop in Grays houses a range of youth service partner organisations that provide information, advice and guidance services.

97. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training has improved but remains higher than in neighbouring authorities working with the same learning skills councils (LSC Essex) in the region. The sixth form college is increasing the number of young people accessing a varied curriculum. The authority is working closely with the Learning and Skills Council (Essex) to increase the number of college and work-based training places. Young people have good access to appropriate advice and guidance from the Connexions service, which extends to those who leave school to take up low-skills jobs without training. Participation rates in education, employment or training remain lower than national averages. Success rates for those young people taking A-levels were low and progression to higher education is very low. Unemployment is high among 16-24 year olds and fewer people have high level qualifications. The take up of work-based training is very low, and success rates for those who do are well below national averages. For the few young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who take up this route, their success rates are inadequate. There are not enough college, work-based learning or entry-to-employment places to meet the demand.

98. The authority has a clear vision about how its 14-19 strategy needs to link to the wider regeneration agenda. The vision is well communicated and shared

between its key partners, including the LSC, schools, Connexions, some employers, and the work-based learning consortium. Schools are beginning to recognise the benefits of a diverse 14-16 curriculum. Plans to offer three of the new specialist diplomas and to introduce new partnership-based sixth form provision are appropriately advanced. However, work-related learning and vocational or work-based learning options at 14-16 are still largely aimed at disaffected or under-performing young people. Employer engagement is significantly under-developed. The range of post-16 vocational pathways is narrow, and also mainly aimed at under-achievers. Until recently, schools have been critical of 14-19 planning.

99. The needs and interests of children and young people are adequately involved in regeneration plans, particularly through the developing links between the 14-19 strategy and the Thames Gateway planned developments. However, young people are not sufficiently involved in planning discussions and their views are not sufficiently canvassed beyond the youth cabinet.

100. Most children and young people have access to appropriate housing, the local authority is working to meet the decent homes standard, and there is little use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

101. The combined impact of services to improve the economic well being of looked after children are adequate. All care leavers have an allocated worker and young people receive good support from Connexions in continuing their education. A number of young people who left the care system are supported in higher education by the authority. The range of housing available for care leavers is adequate, including a growing number of supported lodging arrangements. The council has good arrangements in place for looked after children to remain in foster placements once they become care leavers.

102. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported while they are in school. For those who want to stay in school at 16 or move on to further education in college, transition planning is very good, and the take-up of direct payments to support them is good. However, for those who do not want to continue in school or college, alternative routes are poor. Work-based learning is not a realistic option. There is very little supported employment, either immediately on leaving school or after finishing in college, a fact that the authority has recognised and begun to deal with in a new collaborative project with one of the special schools.

Service management

103. **The management of services for children and young people is adequate. The capacity to improve further is adequate.** The ambition contained within the CYPP is adequate. The current CYPP covers one year to allow alignment with the Thurrock Community Strategy and the emerging LAA. It was a conscious strategic decision to have a one year plan to ensure partners were fully engaged and the council is aware of the need to demonstrate increased ambitions in the next CYPP. The current plan is based on good

analysis of needs with some focused work in areas of deprivation. Some children, young people, parents and carers have been consulted on the emerging issues from the needs analysis, as well as on the LAA and community strategy, and this has been used to influence priorities.

104. Prioritisation to improve outcomes for children and young people is adequate. The CYPP priorities are well understood by partners, staff and voluntary and community organisations and they reflect both the national agenda and the specific needs of Thurrock. Through using the needs analysis data, resources and services have been put into areas of greatest need first, such as the roll out of the children's centres going to areas of highest deprivation and increasing the staffing levels within the looked after children's service. However, some strategies that underpin the longer-term ambitions are underdeveloped and lack focus, for example linking how regeneration might address issues of inequality. Similarly, information covering the resources required and lead responsibilities for some key area is inconsistent. These shortcomings are recognised and are already being addressed in the new draft plan and the delivery plans which underpin it.

105. There is an adequate overarching medium-term business plan that takes account of comparative and benchmarking data to support delivery of services. Service plans are in place in all areas except the youth service, but not all targets are sufficiently outcome-focussed. The impact of the regeneration of Thurrock and how this will affect children's and young people's services is yet to be modelled in detail; however, some resources are appropriately targeted at specific priorities, for example the development of the Gateway Academy and Pupil Referral Units.

106. The overall capacity of the council and its partners is adequate. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board (CYPSPB) is functioning well with appropriate membership. The roles and responsibilities of partners are clear and understood. Partners are working effectively towards children's trust arrangements with a strong shared will to improve services at a strategic level that is mirrored at the operational level.

107. The CYPSPB is working strongly to resolve some capacity issues concerning health. The newly-formed South West Essex Primary Care Trust, like many PCTs nationally, is experiencing financial constraints that impacts on the delivery of key national targets. Some PCT senior staff are new but there is a strategic agreement to build on previous partnership work and strategic and operational relationships are in place. The PCT is working with the council on agreeing how to maximise their resources through increased joint working. While there are two pooled budgets, the majority of service budgets are not aligned across the council and the PCT due to health reorganisation. Plans are in place to achieve this for the next financial year. There are shared ambitions and priorities with the new PCT with a strong commitment that the Local Delivery Plan for the PCT will reflect the LAA and Community Strategy. Work on developing a comprehensive commissioning strategy and a joint workforce plan

is underway but currently there is no joint commissioning strategy covering, for example young people with complex health needs or for services for young carers who need support. There is joint training, which also includes the voluntary and community sectors. There is a refreshed Compact with the voluntary and community sectors, and although it is acknowledged that the sectors needs strengthening, there are examples of joint delivery, for example the delivery of some of the virtual Healthy Living Centre projects that support 14,000 people from deprived wards through the St Clements Community Centre.

108. Recruitment and retention initiatives are in place, with some evidence of positive impact in, for example, the support given to newly-qualified teachers and the 'grow our own' social workers initiatives. There are good examples of work being undertaken to improve shared management information systems and capacity with partners including the voluntary and community sectors.

109. External consultants are used well to support new initiatives and to test out new ways of working. Although there is inconsistent evaluation of new initiatives, some have been rightly stopped due to lack of agreed impact, for example some piloted work within schools, and others such as the Aim Higher project have been further supported because of its success.

110. Budget management is sound. The council and Children and Families Service delivered a balanced budget for the second year running and met its efficiency targets. Financial management and budget monitoring have been strengthened and there are clear gate keeping procedures in place. It is an example of effective partnership working and medium-term planning that the council and schools have agreed that £2m of surplus school balances should be redirected to capacity building initiatives in the education service. Similarly the council has sought and secured external funding to assist in delivering its priorities and match future anticipated demographic needs. There have been successes with obtaining external funding of £28 million from the DfES towards the Gateway Academy with the aim of raising standards for young people in Tilbury and Chadwell St. Mary, as well as £11million for new special schools buildings.

111. Value for money is adequate. This is a key priority for the council. Children's services know where they have relatively high cost and value for money is being embedded in business planning and in service plans. The council is part of the pan-London commissioning group and plans to use benchmarking information and block contracts to further reduce unit costs of key services such as learning difficulties and/or disabilities and foster placements. However, the youth service is inadequately funded and does not currently provide good value for money. The CYPSPB is starting to use effectively information on costs of current services and the level of investment required to deliver the longer term agenda. This has led to agreement to build a small therapeutic unit within Thurrock rather than sustain out of borough places for a specific group of young people.

112. The capacity of the council and its partners to improve further is adequate. Partners share a strong vision for the development of the Children, Education and Families Service and in recent years have demonstrated success in achieving improvement in some key service areas through initiatives such as Sure Start. The interim Director of the Children, Education and Families Service has provided a focus on delivery and outcomes as well as sound leadership. There is clear evidence of his effective leadership in the LSCB. Strategic management has been strengthened and generally he is supported by good senior managers. However, there are some management deficits, especially at service manager level which the council is seeking to address through the performance management review. Difficult decisions are taken by elected members and officers where necessary and focus is sustained, for example the closure of two failing schools in two distinct communities to create the Gateway Academy.

113. The lead portfolio holder has an adequate understanding of his roles and responsibilities and is developing this further by seeking mentoring support. The current split in responsibilities between him and the Portfolio holder for looked after children is unhelpful and does not support the inclusive agenda of Every Child Matters. Some elected members have limited knowledge of the new agenda.

114. Performance management is inadequate within the council and across the partnership. There is clear commitment and focus from councillors and officers to improve performance. The engagement of the external strategic partner has led to a supported and comprehensive review of the previous performance management system and the roll out of a new council wide system. This system and framework are developing, although this is not yet consistent across the children's service and some service areas are using the 'old' system but this is part of a detailed planned roll out. Performance reports are of variable quality but are used, for example by managers and frontline staff as part of their supervision sessions. As a result, there is a developing understanding of performance against ambitions and priorities from a strategic level down to individual staff and in some cases individual pupil level. There is a new staff appraisal system which is being rolled out clearly linking individual targets to the priorities for the children's service. Managers are being supported and trained in how to manage poor performers. Schools identified as underachieving receive targeted support to ensure they provide adequate educational provision.

115. Overview and scrutiny of children's and families' services are now in place but have yet to demonstrate consistent challenge and impact on policy development. In addition, the links to other scrutiny panels for issues that impact on children and families, such as health, are underdeveloped.

116. Currently there is no shared performance management system in place to support decision making across partners, consequently the ability of the CYPSPB to challenge performance is limited. It is envisaged that a single team will collate the information across the partners. There is an information sharing protocol at LSP level which has recently been agreed but this is in the early stages of implementation across partners and boards.

117. The engagement of children and young people in service planning and performance management is inconsistent across the partnership. While there is clear evidence of engagement of looked after children in service planning, recruitment and service improvement, there is variation in other areas such as the development of the youth service. The numbers of young people engaged in the Youth Cabinet is under 50 and the voice of children under 13 years of age is not reflected in the cabinet. The role of the youth service in promoting these activities is underdeveloped given the low cohort using its services.

118. The self-assessment reflects awareness of the strengths and weakness of the current provision, although it does not reflect adequately the impact of the regeneration agenda on service demand across the council and with its partners. It also fails to acknowledge that some of the initiatives are at an early stage of development and, consequently, are aspirations rather than solid outcomes.

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

1. The provision of services for children and young people in Thurrock council is adequate. Outcomes for children and young people in Thurrock are adequate overall. In some aspects they are low but improving, but those for economic wellbeing are inadequate.
2. Health outcomes for children and young people are adequate. The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is also adequate. Health care targets for children and young people are generally being met and improving in many areas. CAMHS has improved but does not fully meet local needs because of limited resources. The implementation of some key government initiatives are securing improved multi-agency working. These include the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, the Healthy Schools initiative, the Sure Start Programme and ongoing development of children's centre. The health needs of looked after children, including those placed out of borough, are met well.
3. Children and young people appear safe. They can access a range of advice and guidance on staying safe. Road traffic accidents are reducing. Most children and young people surveyed for this review felt safe or quite safe in their schools and in their local areas. The few who felt less safe in their local areas identified bullying and crime as their main concerns. The council's contribution to early intervention and preventative services is good. Some children with less urgent need wait too long for an assessment and others from Black and minority ethnic heritage have difficulty accessing services that are sensitive to their cultural needs. However, increasing provision in early intervention is making a difference, with fewer children subjected to child protection investigations or family breakdowns. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families are well supported. Looked after children receive good quality care and have stable placements.
4. Children and young people achieve adequately. There are many signs of improved educational outcomes for children and young people with a three year trend of improvement at Key Stage 2 and the proportion achieving five A*- C GCSE in line with national figures, but there continue to be weaknesses in some areas. Outcomes for children in early years settings are adequate and improving. Despite some good progress, children continue to enter school with skills below those expected for their age in mathematical development, communication, language and literacy. Although improving, unauthorised absence in primary schools and high levels of fixed-term exclusions in secondary schools continue to have a negative on overall achievement. Some young people moving into the area mid year have to wait too long to find a school place. There is very limited impact on the achievement for young people as a result of their involvement with the youth service. The youth service is

inadequate and lacked sufficient funding; however, the contribution of individual youth workers in some areas is good.

5. Young people are consulted frequently. The Youth Cabinet is developing well. However, the council and its partners are currently over-dependent on the cabinet as the key mechanism for youth consultation and participation in the borough. The council also makes use of informal ways of gathering the views of young people such as the on line surveys. School councils are developing well and provide opportunities for younger children to take part in decision making. The number of looked after children who communicate their views to their statutory reviews is good. The number from Black and minority ethnic heritage who have culturally appropriate placements is improving. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have transition plans in place and most feel involved in the decisions that affect their lives. The lack of identification of young carers across the borough means that only a small number receive support. The number of first-time offenders in the youth justice system is reducing. Re-offending rates, although improving, are generally higher than those found nationally. The preparation of supervised juveniles in full-time education, employment or training is low compared to national averages.

6. Children and young people are less likely to achieve economic well being and are poorly prepared for working life in Thurrock. Despite improvements, the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training remains higher than average. Participation by teenage mothers and those supported by the youth offending team is particularly low. Unemployment is high among 16 – 24 year olds, especially those from Black and minority ethnic groups. Progression to higher education is very low. The proportion of local authority housing meeting the decent homes standard is good. Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation is much improved. However, fewer care leavers are in suitable accommodation than nationally. Direct payments to families and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who successfully remain in work-based training are adequate.

7. The ambition contained within the Children and Young People Plan is adequate. Financial management and budget monitoring have been strengthened. The council and Children, Education and Families service delivered a balanced budget for the second year running and met its efficiency target. Value for money is adequate and is a key priority for the council.

8. The interim Director of the Children, Education and Families services has provided a clearer focus on delivery and outcomes. Strategic management of the service has been strengthened and he is supported by good leaders and managers. The current split in responsibility between the Lead Portfolio Holder and the Portfolio Holder for Looked after Children does not support the Every Child Matters agenda. Understanding of corporate parenting across the council is under developed. The provision of and access to services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are limited.

9. Performance management is inadequate within the council and across the partnership. Performance reports are of variable quality and there is no agreed performance management system in place to support decision making across partners. Consequently the ability to challenge performance is limited.