



Joint area review

Swindon Children's Services Authority Area

**Better
education
and care**

Review of services for children and young people

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

Audience	Published	Reference no.
All	10 October 2006	866



© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the local authority or at www.ofsted.gov.uk

Contents

Introduction	2
Context	3
Summary report	4
Grades	10
Recommendations	10
Main report	11
Outcomes for children and young people	11
The impact of local services	14
Being healthy	14
Staying safe	16
Enjoying and achieving	18
Making a positive contribution	20
Achieving economic well-being	22
Service management	24
Annex: The children and young people's section of the corporate assessment report	27

Introduction

1. This joint area review was conducted using the arrangements required under Section 20 of the Children Act 2004. It was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of nine inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Audit Commission. The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the inspection of children's services*.

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

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

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

5. The review took place in two stages consisting in total of three weeks over a six-week period between 22 May and 23 June 2006. 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 monitoring visit of the youth service
- planning documents
- information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision
- evidence gathered during the contemporaneous Youth Offending Team (YOT) inspection
- briefings from staff within inspectorates, commissions and other public bodies in contact with local providers.

6. The second stage involved inspection fieldwork. This included studies of how far local services have improved outcomes for a small sample of children and young people, some of whom have the most complex needs, and a study of provision in one neighbourhood, Park North, in Swindon. It also included gathering evidence on ten key judgements, selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. Discussions were held 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. A unitary council since 1997, Swindon is a Borough Council. It has a population of 181,000, of which 20.2% are under 16, and is growing at one of the fastest rates in England, expecting to reach 208,000 by 2011. The majority (87%) live in the town of Swindon, which occupies one quarter of the borough's area, and the remainder live in the surrounding rural areas, which include Highworth and Wroughton. Part of the borough falls within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Beauty. The proportion of people from groups other than white British was 9% in 2001, below the national average of 13%. Significant groups include communities from Poland, Italy and Ireland, as well as more recent arrivals from the Balkans and Middle East. Over 40 languages are used locally. The black minority ethnic communities are relatively small, comprising 4.8% of the population. Overall, Swindon is ranked just below the English median for deprivation, although Park North is one of the 10% most deprived areas in the country based on Indices of Deprivation published in 2004, and one of the worst affected by childhood deprivation: almost a third of children in Swindon live in the 10 most deprived areas. The percentage of secondary school pupils eligible for free school meals increased slightly in 2004 but remains below the national figure.

8. The district contains a mix of principally urban, with outlying rural, communities. Swindon has a buoyant economy with levels of unemployment just below the national average, although the town of Swindon contains wards where there is significant economic and social diversity. The pace of growth has slowed, with job losses in manufacturing; nearly 80% of local employment is in the service sector.

9. The authority maintains 67 primary schools, 10 secondary schools (2 with sixth forms), 6 special schools and 1 Pupil Referral Unit. There are 3 foundation and 6 community secondary schools, and 1 voluntary aided school. There are 6 secondary schools with specialist status, 3 in technology, 2 in science, 2 in performing arts and 1 in business and enterprise. There are 252 looked after children.

10. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had been engaged with the council since 2002 due to its poor Comprehensive Performance Assessment rating. The council appointed a newly-retired chief executive from Kent County Council as interim chief executive and is recruiting a permanent post-holder. It has invested in a totally new structure and recruited a new team of first-tier officers. Swindon became a children's services authority in October 2005 and the council's services for children and young people are managed through the recently established Group Directorate for Children. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) for 2006–09 and Local Area Agreement set out agreed strategic priorities. There is a lead council member for children's services and work is underway to implement the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the CYPP, and to form a children's trust. The council has just established a governance board in June 2006 that will operate as the children's trust board, and includes representatives from the primary care trust (PCT) and the police force. A Children and Young People's Partnership Board (CYPPB) with wide-ranging stakeholder representation, including the voluntary sector, parent governors and Chair of the Youth Forum, is providing policy advice. The Children's Trust Performance Review Group, with senior officers and managers from the council, partners and the voluntary sector, co-ordinates the development and monitoring of joint commissioning arrangements. The existing Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) will remain as a wide-ranging stakeholder group, with three meetings a year, informing and advising the CYPPB.

11. The Learning and Skills Council for Wiltshire and Swindon and the Connexions Service are partners with the local authority, colleges, training providers, and schools in addressing the 14–19 strategy. Post-16 education and training is provided by 2 further education (FE) colleges and an independent college, 2 schools with sixth forms, 16 training providers working with the local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC) and 3 special schools for pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. There are 3 providers managing Entry to Employment (E2E) provision.

12. Primary health care is provided by the Swindon PCT. Swindon and Marlborough Health Trust is the main provider of acute health and mental health services in Swindon. The trusts providing health services for the children of Swindon, with the exception of the Wiltshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust, fall within the South West Strategic Health Authority.

Summary report

Outcomes for children and young people

13. **Outcomes for most children and young people are generally adequate with some positive and emerging strengths. Children and young people appear safe.** In general, young people are healthy, with a lower than the national average child mortality rate. Smoking and substance misuse is a significant challenge to physical health, being more prevalent in the

most economically disadvantaged areas of the borough. Educational achievement in primary schools has recently reached national averages but remains lower in secondary schools. This overall picture reflects particular underachievement in the more disadvantaged areas such as Park North. Children from black and minority ethnic communities performed above the borough average at GCSE. Many young people are contributing well to their school and community, and some have participated in consultation and taken positions of responsibility. However, there remain groups of young people who are disengaged and are not participating positively in their schools and communities. Most children appear safe, but for some children, bullying is a concern. One in every five children looked after by the council lives outside Swindon. The most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people are not improving their social and economic status and some young people have low aspirations and poor ambitions regarding the type of training and work they want to undertake. A higher proportion of children from black and minority ethnic communities when compared to other groups, are looked after or involved with the YOT.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

14. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Rates of breastfeeding are increasing and smoking in pregnancy is reducing. Effective immunisation programmes protect children, and oral health is good. The systematic effort to understand the cultural and practical issues that influence uptake of services such as immunisation programmes has had a positive impact in promoting better health for many children in Swindon. There has been effective work done to reduce sales of tobacco to children. The commissioning arrangements to ensure improved services are available for prevention and treatment of illegal drug use have recently been revised. However, the number of young people involved in illegal drug use and consumption of alcohol remains too high, and plans are insufficiently monitored.

15. The Healthy Schools programme has the highest participation rates in the region, with 95% of schools included in the programme. Schools with more than 20% of pupils receiving a free school meal have been targeted, along with all special schools, and the programme is a major vehicle for co-ordinating health promotion activities for children and young people. Schools value the input of school nursing and health promotion staff. There is active participation by the council sports development officer, and additional school nursing hours have been funded to assist the healthier school meals plan. Teenage pregnancy rates have risen but, following local audit, revised interventions are now being implemented. Senior managers in the partnership are making sure services are better focused, using evidence from other areas about what works well. Support for young teenage parents is good. The standard of services and facilities for treating acute illness is high. Young people's mental health is

promoted positively through a good range of services. Health checks for looked after children and young people are managed effectively and they are guided to any additional services needed. Clinical provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. There is a well resourced assessment service at the Sadler Unit and there are intentions to develop a more effective multi-agency service with enhanced involvement of parents and carers.

Staying safe

16. The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate. Children identified as being most at risk of harm are protected by committed professionals from relevant services who have clear plans for their protection. Domestic violence is a problem for many of the children referred to social services and is frequently compounded by other difficulties confronting their family. Some children say bullying is a concern outside the family. Improving the arrangements for keeping children safe is a key priority for the council and its partners following criticisms in the 2005 annual performance assessment, and the referral and assessment service is now working effectively to ensure children are safeguarded. The newly established Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has clear and appropriate priorities. Staff across agencies are generally trained and supported to carry out their roles. Agencies generally work well together, and are improving outcomes for significant proportions of children. However, consistent support, planning and co-ordination for the vulnerable groups of children not subject to formal protection plans are not as well developed. Thresholds for deciding which children receive services from social workers are appropriate. Older children supported outside the looked after services, such as the 16-plus service, require more consistent and purposeful work, although improvements had been made. Core assessments are of variable quality: too often they lack a clear description and analysis of children's needs, and this impedes clear and purposeful planning of work that describes tasks or outcomes. Some case files do not have a core assessment within them. There is variable supervision of staff; some managers are more preoccupied with process and compliance with than outcomes for children.

17. Some good family support services are provided through Sure Start, voluntary-sector projects/programmes and the two local preventative group pilots. There are some good services in place to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families. The social work team offers a comprehensive service to families. Looked after children are being adequately safeguarded through effective compliance with statutory requirements. More children and young people are being supported to attend their reviews, but there is no defined Children's Rights Service. The council had not developed a strategy describing how it would fulfil its role and responsibilities as a corporate parent. Newly-elected members have taken responsibility for overseeing aspects of this, but are yet to acquire sufficient levels of information and detail about services and outcomes for children.

Enjoying and achieving

18. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** Swindon education services have improved in the last three years and now make a good contribution to ensure that children and young people enjoy their education and achieve well. Services have provided effective support to schools to bring about substantial improvements in leadership and management and the quality of provision. Good support to schools causing concern has reduced the number of schools requiring special measures. The attainment of primary school children is now in line with similar authorities, but there is still significant underachievement in some secondary schools. These weaknesses are being addressed through well targeted strategies, which are beginning to make a difference and are improving attainment at GCSE. Permanent exclusions have reduced, although fixed-term exclusions remain above the average in secondary schools. There is good support for improving attendance. Joint working across a range of services has supported early years settings well to improve the quality of provision. Support for the education of looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good and have resulted in improved outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. Parents and carers receive effective support, particularly those facing particular challenges and those in the most disadvantaged areas such as Park North.

Making a positive contribution

19. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.** Children's Fund initiatives have a positive impact, although the youth service's contribution is limited. Communication and consultation with most young people is developing well, and there are good examples of involving young people in 'real' decision-making. Efforts to improve the participation of young people from various hard to reach groups have yet to prove effective. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to contribute through an increasing range of activities. A good range of support is in place for these young people, much of it multi-agency, with an increased emphasis on measurable outcomes.

20. Many schemes target poor behaviour effectively, particularly among older children. The strengthening partnership between the YOT and other agencies has increased effectiveness in deterring and preventing offending. Good bilateral arrangements between schools and voluntary agencies also contribute positively to help raise young people's self-esteem and in moderating poor behaviour. In some of these schemes, however, the young people receive less than the required study time. The strategies and youth service arrangements to deter offending by looked after children and young people from minority ethnic groups, and to support the reintegration, further education and training of offenders, are not sufficiently robust.

21. All looked after children are encouraged to attend their reviews and are helped to contribute to these. The Looked After Children Education Service (LACES) provides good, wide-ranging and well targeted support.

Achieving economic well-being

22. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate.** The improving collaboration between schools, training providers and colleges across the partnership is increasing opportunities for young people and encouraging them to consider further education or training options. The number of young people staying on in education after 16 is gradually improving but is still below the national average. Achievements of qualifications equivalent to five good GCSE (level 2) grades at ages 16 and 19 remain poor. Connexions personal advisers provide effective support for disadvantaged young people, and satisfactory careers education and guidance is provided across the borough for most young people. The number of young people not in education, employment or training is steadily declining, and is now below the national average. Connexions staff are improving their tracking of young people, and working more intensively during the summer with young people at risk of not entering education, employment or training. Local employers offer satisfactory support to schools for work experience and other activities, but are not sufficiently involved in post-16 education and training. The council does not offer apprenticeships or take advantage of supported employment schemes. Opportunities for young people to join apprenticeship schemes are limited, with many training providers preferring to work with young people already in employment. The Aim Higher initiative is not significantly increasing the number of young people progressing to higher education. Appropriate housing is found for most vulnerable young people, including care leavers, and more comprehensive support is now in place for those with complex needs, although planning for care leavers with disabilities is insufficiently developed. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have satisfactory progression opportunities into further education and training.

Service management

23. **The management of services for children and young people is adequate.** The capacity to improve further across children's services and with its partners is adequate. Senior leadership of the integrated children's services is good. The ambition of the council is good, and there is a challenging and comprehensive agenda for change and improvement. The council provides good political and managerial leadership to the Executive Management Group, the CYPPB and the Children's Trust Performance Group that underpin the emerging Children's Trust. Relationships between key local partners are good, and partners have been involved in endorsing the ambitions and priorities. The track record of the council and partners on achieving their priorities is adequate. However, some elected members have limited knowledge of the new agenda.

The multi-agency self-assessment for this joint area review recognises most of the partnership's strengths and weaknesses.

24. The integration of children's services, which started in October 2005 and unified education, children's social care and the youth service has been well managed. This has increased capacity to support the new service, with additional staff recruited to senior posts. Partnership working is good and there has been some mapping of provision to highlight duplication and gaps across health and children's services. Value for money is adequate and funding for services is below national comparators. There are a number of long-standing cost and performance issues that remain to be solved, particularly the high cost of out-of-borough placements for social care and special educational needs, and longer term financial planning is not yet in place to support the implementation of local programmes. Performance management arrangements across the partnership are adequate. Some of the performance management structures are relatively new or emerging, and there is a plan to improve the information technology to support the new needs. The council and its partners recognise that real time performance management and financial data need to be linked more effectively. While training for middle and lower managers has been undertaken, there is inconsistency in how staff are managed, and managers are not sufficiently focused on ensuring staff are maximising outcomes for children. There are clear areas that require improvement, such as the youth services, which now has a new Head of Service and an action plan for improvement, developed in part through consultation with children and young people.

Grades

Grades awarded:

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

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

Recommendations

For action over the next six months

- In order to ensure the council and its partners understand and provide effective corporate parenting and guidance, they should develop a written strategy. This should describe the distinct role and responsibility of councillors in overseeing arrangements and

promoting good outcomes for young people. The strategy should be supported with training and defining the information councillors need to receive.

- In order to ensure better consistency and support for older vulnerable teenagers, the council and its partners should ensure that:
 - the review of the 16-plus service is completed and an action plan to improve consistency and range of services is implemented
 - that the review of 16-plus services addresses the specific support needs of children with disabilities leaving care.

For action in the longer term

- In order to ensure that the council's ambition for improvement and delivery of services to children is achieved, plans need to be refined to:
 - enable managers to further develop their skills and capacity to implement change effectively; provide support and enhance the impact of services and staff interventions; and ensure clarity and consistency about what needs improving and when; and
 - identify the resources required and how they are to be allocated.
- In order to increase the support and availability of work-based learning for young people, the council and LLSC should develop clear arrangements that include large and medium-sized employers in providing work-based learning opportunities. This should also be supported by plans that increase the proportion of young people achieving level 2 (equivalent to 5 good GCSEs) by the age of 19.

Main report

Outcomes for children and young people

25. **Outcomes for children and young people in Swindon are adequate overall with some areas of strength.** Children and young people appear safe and, in general, they are healthy. Educational achievement is better at primary level than secondary, with underachievement in the more deprived areas. Children from black and minority ethnic groups perform above the borough average at GCSE. Parental satisfaction about services is mixed.

26. Children and young people are generally healthy but there is inequality within the borough. Swindon has outcomes similar to other areas when comparing death rates in early life and childhood. The number of mothers who smoke during pregnancy are below the national average, but remain higher in more disadvantaged areas. Breastfeeding rates are increasing. There are, however, areas in Swindon that, at present, do not have adequate access to facilities that promote good health and healthy lifestyles. Efforts to understand the cultural and practical issues that influence the use of services are helping to inform how access for more vulnerable populations can be improved. For example, immunisation rates for infants and pre-school children have been sustained at a high level and oral health is better than in other similar areas. Teenage pregnancy rates have risen very recently against a longer period of reduction, and achieving the target of 50% fewer conceptions by 2010 will now be a significant challenge. Young people are working with the CYPSP to improve the provision of sexual health services. The usage of illegal drugs and alcohol by young people, especially the more vulnerable, is perceived as a concern in local communities; higher priority is now being given to address this. Children have access to services and facilities for treating acute illness, which are generally of high standard. Children's mental health is positively promoted and early support to help with emotional problems is provided. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive timely and appropriate health care support. Looked after children make use of dedicated health advice and have continuing help when needed.

27. Children and young people appear safe. Children are protected by agencies that generally work effectively together to safeguard those most at risk. The number of children on the child protection register has reduced, and the number of children re-registered is low. All children on the child protection register are allocated a social worker.

28. Improved child protection systems are now keeping children safe from harm and neglect, but many children and young people feel less safe in their local neighbourhood. Children generally feel safe at school, but young people report concerns about the safety of younger children in their local area. Young people know which areas are unsafe. In general, a similar proportion of young compared to other areas are worried about bullies and gangs and would like to see more police on the streets. The approach to community safety in hotspot areas has reduced the level of anti-social behaviour. The number of children injured in road accidents has reduced.

29. The numbers of looked after children who are matched with adopters is high. All looked after children have care plans. The frequency, quality and timeliness of reviews have improved and are now adequate. Children are encouraged and supported to attend their reviews. Good attention is paid to keeping children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities safe. Parents are confident about the safety of their children.

30. **Children and young people achieve adequately.** Achievements for most children and young people have improved from a low baseline. Most children and young people attend school regularly and enjoy their education. There are enough early education and childcare places to meet needs, and children are well prepared for school. The educational standards achieved by most children at school show sustained improvement. Primary school attainment is now in line with the national average, and attainment in GCSE has improved over two years; black and minority ethnic students perform above the authority average at GCSE. However, overall, secondary school attainment is still below the national average and a significant number of young people underachieve at GCSE. There is wide variation in standards and achievement across the borough, and children and young people from the most deprived areas generally achieve less well than those in more prosperous ones. Attendance is generally good and permanent exclusions are low. However, fixed-term exclusions are above average in secondary schools. Children looked after by the authority have very good attendance and achieved well in 2005, when 73% of looked after children in Year 11 achieved five or more A*–G grades at GCSE. Attainment of looked after children at Key Stage 3 was low, as was their participation in testing: only 4 of the 11 pupils undertook tests. There is early identification and early intervention for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and most make good progress at school.

31. **Children and young people have a good range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility, and most make a good contribution to their communities.** Personal development and well-being are promoted effectively in schools. Most young people find it relatively easy to access and participate in positive activities in the local area, although in areas such as Park North, levels of involvement, especially for younger children, are much lower. Communication and consultation with young people is improving, and most feel well supported in responding to the challenges and changes they face in their lives. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make an increasingly positive contribution to identifying and responding to their own needs, and a high percentage of those aged 14+ have transition plans. The proportion of looked after children contributing to their statutory reviews has increased significantly. Children who are looked after also participate in a wide range of local activities. Fewer young people are offending.

32. **Children and young people are able to achieve economic well-being and are prepared adequately for working life.** Outcomes for children and young people with regard to achieving economic well-being are adequate. There are increasing curricular opportunities available to young people. However, the achievement of five or more good GCSEs (level 2) is poor, and too many young people in Swindon have low aspirations with regard to their education and potential to gain qualifications. The national campaign to encourage young people into higher education, Aim Higher, is not significantly increasing the number of applications to higher education. There are relatively few work-based learning opportunities for young people to engage in education and training after 16.

33. Care leavers and other vulnerable young people have access to appropriate accommodation and support. Bed and breakfast accommodation is only used in emergencies. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have satisfactory opportunities for progression into further education, but there need to be more opportunities for work-based learning at the appropriate level. Transition arrangements are usually well managed, but in some cases lack focus on education and training. Practical measures taken by a further education college, and some extended care arrangements ensure that some young people with complex support needs can return to their own communities for their further education.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

34. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** There is a strong multi-agency commitment to improving the health of children and young people, and the Local Area Agreement targets reflect this. Universal services providing health care are appropriate and accessible for the majority of children and young people. Targeted initiatives demonstrate positive impact on health outcomes in the areas covered by Sure Start, Children's Centres (Parks and Walcot East) and Children's Fund work. However, there is limited access to healthy fresh foods such as fruit and vegetables in local shops and a lack of safe play areas for young children in Park North. This constrains the ability of parents and carers to promote healthy lifestyles for their children.

35. Midwifery services are responsive in supporting more vulnerable groups of women through pregnancy. The input of the Hillside Resource Unit for pregnant young teenagers is highly valued and an example of good practice. Breastfeeding is being actively promoted, and peer support schemes have been introduced with positive results. Finding suitable premises for these activities outside the Sure Start and other Children's Centre areas is difficult and limits the continuity of the schemes. The rate of smoking in pregnancy is now below the national average, and there is good access to smoking cessation services; the downward trend is exceeding the targets set.

36. The Healthy Schools programme is good and has the highest participation in the region. Application has recently been made for the award of Beacon status for the programme. Support to schools with high levels of free school meals and to special schools is, appropriately, a priority focus. In the schools, involved there is positive encouragement to eat healthy foods and to participate in sports and active leisure pursuits. Schools value the input of school nursing and health promotion staff. The Multi-Agency Training Team is effective in the support it delivers, providing a continuing sequence of training to all agencies' staff on mental health, sexual health and substance misuse. Outside schools, the Swindon Leisure Card allows young people reduced-price access to facilities, but transport costs are reported as limiting the value of this for some families

and young people on low incomes. Some young people report that they do not feel safe outside their own neighbourhoods, and this is also a deterrent to the use of parks and taking part in other active recreational opportunities.

37. Trading standards officers have reduced sales of tobacco to young people, although the number of young people involved in illegal drug use and consumption of alcohol remains a concern. The Young Peoples Substance Misuse Plan identifies action for more accurate needs assessment so that services can be directed more effectively in early intervention and treatment.

38. The teenage pregnancy rate is rising, and achieving target reductions will be a challenge. An audit of the Swindon Teenage Pregnancy action plan has been undertaken. Arising from this there are changes planned in services, and the membership of the Teenage Pregnancy Board already reflects a strengthened multi-agency approach. Genito-urinary medicine services are now more specifically aimed at young people, and a joint drop-in clinic at a health centre in the town centre sees increasing numbers of young people. Chlamydia screening is being implemented to meet the national target timescale.

39. Health surveillance programmes at pre-school and school ages follow national guidance. Immunisation rates are higher than national and regional rates. Most immunisation is delivered through general practice and there is good co-operation with community health services to promote this. NHS dentistry access is perceived by other primary care practitioners to be difficult to obtain.

40. Access to more specialist paediatric services is good, and children and young people were involved in the design of ward facilities at the acute hospital. The Accident and Emergency (A&E) department does not have a dedicated separate area for children, but staff are well trained in the needs of children and young people and work closely with the paediatric wards to move children to a more appropriate setting as soon as possible. There have been recent changes in the interface between the A&E service and the primary care out-of-hour's facilities. The public have been informed about the services available and are guided to access those that are most appropriate.

41. Positive mental health promotion is a high priority, and the range of services to promote emotional well-being is very good. Children's Fund schemes are delivered effectively and provide a continuum of support to promote self-esteem and improve behaviour. Local Preventative Groups provide a multi-agency approach for vulnerable children and young people. Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are accessible for advice; children and young people who are referred are seen within target waiting times. There is now a single point of access through Primary Mental Health Workers.

42. The designated health service for looked after children has been refocused to improve access for young people. Health checks now have good coverage. Where they are needed, additional health services can be accessed.

43. Clinical provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. There is a well-resourced child development service, and more effective multi-agency working and involvement of parents and carers is planned as part of service relocation. Complex care packages are agreed in a responsive way for home and school support through jointly funded agreements and protocols.

Staying safe

44. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** Children and young people who are most at risk are safeguarded well. The numbers of children on the child protection register are consistent with national data and similar council areas. Arrangements for removing children from the register are effective.

45. Referrals of children in need are consistent with similar areas, although the number of repeat referrals is higher in Swindon. Fewer children in need are subject to an initial assessment compared to similar areas. The proportion of initial assessments completed within timescales is lower against a national trend of the majority being completed within seven days. There are plans to improve this, and better performance is evident over three months, although this remains untested over a longer period. The time taken to complete core assessments has improved and is in line with national figures, although a lower proportion of children in need undergo these detailed assessments. Other issues remain, particularly regarding the quality of core assessments. Poor analysis of children's needs undermines consistency of work and impedes clarity in making plans and agreements with children and their families.

46. Some good work is being done with children in need. Around 60% of the work in the referral and assessment team is focused on children in need, and about 30% in long-term teams. This reflects better and timelier provision of support to children and their families before problems escalate requiring formal child protection intervention, or before a family breakdown occurs.

47. A good range of other family and parenting support is available to children in need, although co-ordination needs to be clearer. Local Preventative Groups operate in two areas as pilots before wider implementation across the borough. These are well regarded by local partners and are a vehicle for providing more timely help to families and children in need. The groups are supported with significant contributions from the voluntary sector and the YOT. In other parts of Swindon, there is less consistency in arrangements for co-ordinating multi-agency work outside formal child protection protocols. The implementation of the Common Assessment Framework is being used to address this and to build on the work of services such as Children's Centres, but the capacity to extend support to all areas is untested.

48. Although agencies are working well together, resulting in better outcomes for some children, the arrangements for older children require improvement. There are limitations in the ability of the services to provide an intensive

response to older children at risk of becoming looked after. Services to children over 16, some of whom are particularly vulnerable because of their lifestyle or their emotional needs and development, are not sufficiently comprehensive; they are the subject of review.

49. There are effective procedures in place to deal with bullying. There is a multi-agency equalities group, which monitors and evaluates racial incidents and bullying, the findings of which are used to develop initiatives to address these issues. Nevertheless, some children and young people feel unsafe in their neighbourhoods, citing racial harassment and bullying as their prime concerns.

50. Corporately, the council understands and takes seriously its responsibility to keep children safe. The council and its partners have worked hard to improve inter-agency practice. This is underpinned with good systems for examining specific cases and decisions. However, not all multi-agency staff are sufficiently aware of the procedures for resolving professional differences that have been developed as a result of this work. Quality assurance groups have been set up that focus on outcomes for children and involve other services.

51. Domestic violence is being given particular attention through a specified worker in the duty team. Work is being undertaken with the police to ensure that domestic violence is dealt with appropriately, although this is untested. A domestic violence strategy is being drafted.

52. The LSCB has been established, supported by five working subgroups. The LSCB has a clear plan of work that covers national priorities and local issues. Learning from serious case reviews is disseminated through training. Written procedures are comprehensive and up-to-date. Performance management by the LSCB is contributing to improved practice across agencies. The LSCB has appropriate links to the Multi-Agency Public Protection Panel, and has a child-focused approach to keeping children safe from adults who may present a risk to them.

53. Recruitment procedures for safeguarding children are robust and cover both permanent and agency staff. Progress is being made in recruiting and retaining permanent social workers and team managers, and capacity in fieldwork teams is good. Health personnel files comply with safeguarding standards.

54. Agencies communicate well to share information about children's whereabouts on a day-to-day basis. Agencies are effective in developing information sharing through the Local Preventative Groups, common assessment training and Information Sharing Index.

55. Child protection training is a priority in Swindon and is adequate. Staff from different services, including voluntary sector and multi-faith groups, receive child protection training. However, team managers are not being trained in managing complex child protection cases.

56. Management oversight of social work staff is variable, including the quality of supervision and social work practice. Records of supervision are placed on the electronic file record.

57. Although access to statutory services is appropriate, the public does not have published eligibility criteria for children in need, as this information is only available through the local authority computer system.

58. The monitoring work of the placements panel, the commissioning team, as well as the independent reviewing service, promotes a clear focus on safeguarding looked after children within their placements. Social workers and carers are knowledgeable about the complex needs of looked after children. The rate of adoption is good overall.

59. A significant proportion of looked after children in Swindon are placed outside the borough. There are no defined children's rights for looked after children and young people; this does not meet current good practice. Newly-elected members who have been appointed as corporate parents have limited understanding of their role and do not have a good enough level of detailed knowledge about services to enable them to carry out their responsibilities effectively. The council does not offer a comprehensive service to young people leaving care, although this service is currently being reviewed.

60. An adequate range of local services is available for disabled children and their families, including good multi-agency planning; this results in good outcomes for some children. There is insufficient respite care available for all families who have been assessed as needing it, and the systems for direct payments are at an early stage of development. Staff in all settings are well trained and aware of how to safeguard children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Enjoying and achieving

61. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** Parents and carers receive good support in helping their children to enjoy and achieve. Support is well planned to include focused work with those in the most disadvantaged areas and those who face particular challenges. Parents of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, for example, are well supported by the Swindon Parent Partnership. Good family learning programmes provide parents with skills to help their children achieve well at school.

62. Early years provision promotes children's development and well-being effectively, and helps them meet early learning goals. Joint working across a range of services supports them in improving the quality of provision. Early identification and intervention strategies are effective in supporting children who are likely to underachieve.

63. Parents and carers receive clear guidance on the admission arrangements for schools and the 95% receive their first choice. There are few surplus places, and services have responded well to the development of extended school provision. The three existing children's centres provide good multi-agency support, and seven new and replacement schools are currently being constructed to improve the quality of accommodation and facilities.

64. Services have provided good support to improve standards and achievement in schools over the last three years. The Swindon validated school self-review process provides rigorous monitoring and challenge and effective allocation of support. There are some good procedures in place to support the sharing of best practice, such as head teacher mentoring and the Advanced Skills Teacher programme. These strategies have resulted in improvements in overall standards, leadership and management and the quality of provision. However, there are weaknesses still, including wide variations in standards across primary and secondary schools and underachievement at GCSE by a significant number of young people. The education service has put appropriate plans in place, and head teachers have a high level of confidence in its capacity to secure necessary further improvements.

65. Cross-directorate procedures to identify and support schools causing concern are good. The number of schools in special measures or requiring significant improvement has declined since 2002, and no secondary schools are now in special measures. Two primary schools currently in special measures are receiving well targeted and integrated support. There is effective implementation of the national strategies for raising attainment, and good support to improve the performance of low attaining pupils.

66. Services provide good support to schools to encourage attendance and prevent disaffection and exclusion. The scheme, whereby children and young people move between schools to help them make a fresh start and avoid exclusion, has been effective. There is some very good support for behaviour management through the behaviour improvement programme, learning mentors and programmes co-ordinated by CAMHS.

67. There is a wide range of provision for pupils educated other than at school, and provision within the various centres is well matched to the needs of the children and young people attending. However, lines of accountability between some schemes, negotiated between schools and the voluntary sector, are unclear and attendance is not sufficiently well monitored. Reintegration rates into mainstream secondary schools are improving but are still low.

68. Access to recreational activities, including play and voluntary learning provision, is adequate. Schools provide young people with good opportunities for out-of-hours learning, and community-based clubs provide a range of leisure, arts and sports opportunities. There are some effective initiatives to provide positive activities and support personal development of vulnerable young people. The Swindon Ten to Eighteen Project (STEP), for example,

provides excellent therapeutic group work and life skills development for young people experiencing social difficulties. However, the quality of provision across the borough is variable and not well co-ordinated. Not all young people have access to positive recreational activities. In Park North, for example, there are too few opportunities to access positive activities and develop life skills.

69. Support for the education of looked after children is good. Absence is below the national average and achievement has improved in 2005. The number of looked after children receiving fixed-term exclusions has reduced, and none has been permanently excluded over the last three years. All education providers have trained designated teachers and governors for looked after children. The majority of looked after children have a Personal Education Plan, although the quality of the plans is inconsistent. The council is in the process of appointing a co-ordinator to oversee this work. LACES provides a good range of support, including examination preparation and revision.

70. There is good support to help children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to enjoy and achieve. The Special Educational Needs Referral and Assessment Panel provides effective advice and allocation of resources to schools. Criteria for statements are clear and all statements are completed on time. Special schools and centres provide a continuum of provision, which is well matched to pupils' needs. The pilot for Local Preventative Groups in Children's Fund area schools provides a strong foundation for developing inter-agency work. A plan was in place, but not yet implemented, to roll out these groups to ensure referrals to various agencies are manageable and criteria are met.

Making a positive contribution

71. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.** A good range of activities, including those provided by voluntary agencies, is effective in helping to raise self-esteem and in promoting personal responsibility among young people, particularly vulnerable groups. The Plas Pencelli outdoor education centre helps young people to develop interpersonal skills and gain confidence. Some good support is also provided for children of refugees/asylum seekers, and this is helping to improve their key skills. However, a few groups (for example, many younger children in Park North and older disaffected young people) are not yet receiving effective support. Children's Fund initiatives are having a positive impact in helping many young people manage the changes and challenges they face. Very young children are well supported in early years settings, and support for young carers is good. Good support helps looked after children make an effective transition from primary to secondary schools. However, although young people generally have good access to advice at key transition points, this does not consistently encourage higher aspirations. Youth work also provides limited support for 13 to 19 year olds facing key decisions in their lives.

72. Communication and consultation with most young people is developing well, with looked after children consulted effectively through the 'Focus' group. Increasing numbers of schools have a school council, but these do not yet feed into a formal pyramid of consultation. The Youth Forum has made a good start in bringing young people together across Swindon, but is at an early stage of development. Many young people have the opportunity for responsibility in schools as peer mentors and to gain accreditation through, for example, community volunteering. There are also some good examples of young people contributing to staff selection processes.

73. Many schemes aimed at supporting young people's social and emotional development also target poor behaviour effectively, particularly among older children. Good bilateral arrangements between schools and voluntary agencies contribute positively to moderating behaviour. In some of these schemes, however, young people receive less than the statutory study time, and lines of accountability are not sufficiently clear. Local Preventative Groups in some parts of the borough are helpful in planning support to address behavioural issues. There is a good range of initiatives, including the use of sport's Showing Racism the Red Card, to address racism, although their effectiveness is unknown.

74. The strengthening partnership between the YOT and other agencies is increasingly effective in deterring and preventing offending. There are also good arrangements in place to support looked after children who have offended. However, liaison between the team and, for example, the Pupil Referral Unit is not effective in supporting the further education and training of offenders. Strategies to deter offending by looked after children and young people from minority ethnic groups and to support the reintegration and further education and training of offenders, including those returning to Swindon after release from custody are not robust.

75. All looked after children are encouraged to attend their reviews and are being helped increasingly to contribute to these. Their views are increasingly built into planning. The 'Focus' group provides a good forum for wider participation by looked after children and young people. There are some good instances of the children taking responsibility, for example in producing newsletters and organising a residential activity at Pencelli. LACES provides good, wide-ranging and well targeted support both for the children and the staff supporting them, and more recently has begun to develop proactive strategies that are already proving effective. Looked after children are not sufficiently aware of the complaints procedure.

76. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to contribute through an increasing range of activities, both at school and through regularly organised events. A good range of support is in place for these young people, much of it offered through multi-agency provision with an increased emphasis on measurable outcomes. There is an improving focus on seeking the children's opinions, and increasing numbers of young people contribute to their annual and transition reviews. There are good examples of multi-agency

support for young people with hearing/sight impairment and other specific difficulties.

Achieving economic well-being

77. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate. Some successful initiatives are in place to encourage young people to remain in education or progress into further education, work-based learning or employment. These initiatives are well focused on young people at risk of disaffection, and who have had negative experiences at school or prefer a vocational emphasis to their learning. The increased flexibility offered across Swindon is well managed and is increasing the opportunities available to 14–16 year olds. There is productive partnership work between the further education colleges, schools, training providers and out of school provision to develop an improved range of courses for young people at Key Stage 4. The widening participation programme identifies and supports disengaged young people who need support to make progress onto post-16 education or training. Good additional help and guidance is provided where necessary, and Connexions Personal Advisers maintain contact and encourage involvement in summer activities. The number of young people not in education, employment or training is gradually reducing and is now at the national average. The improved tracking of this group throughout the year enables Connexions to prioritise their work and provide an increasingly effective service for vulnerable young people.

78. Young people across the borough receive satisfactory careers education and guidance. Work-related learning in schools is becoming more extensive, with an increasing range of activities organised by the enthusiastic local education Business Link Consortium (EBPlus). The funding of EBPlus is reducing and it is becoming more reliant on schools purchasing services and teachers taking on a greater organisational and delivery role. Whilst many employers are supportive of in-school activities and work experience, there is insufficient engagement of large and medium-sized employers within the post-16 sector. Although there is a young apprenticeship scheme led by a further education college, historically work-based learning has been poorly promoted to young people in Swindon. Too few opportunities exist for young people to start employer-based apprenticeships, with most employers preferring to offer training to their established employees. The council does not offer apprenticeships, nor does it take full advantage of other government-funded and supported employment schemes and programmes that would encourage a diverse workforce and provide non-traditional routes into employment. The partnership recognises the lack of involvement and has recently formed an employer engagement sub-group, although there is little employer representation on this group.

79. Achievement by young people aged 16 to 19 of qualifications equivalent to five good GCSEs is below average and too many of them have low aspirations for future careers and qualifications. The Aim Higher programme offers an

adequate range of activities to young people to encourage them to progress into higher education, but it has little impact on the numbers applying to higher level courses. The number of young people progressing into higher education is still below the national average of 43%. Level 3 achievements are also low at 40% compared with 53% achievement by the best-performing statistical neighbour. The satisfactory E2E programmes help to develop young people's confidence and improve employability, but there is a lack of supportive work placement opportunities to develop necessary employment skills.

80. Swindon's regeneration programme has a strong focus on increasing the capacity of local communities throughout the borough thereby encouraging people to participate in local decision-making, and there is a challenging ambition to introduce 27 neighbourhood partnerships by 2008. Regular meetings take place between councillors, community representatives and service managers to help develop priorities.

81. There is an appropriate choice of housing available for most young people, including supported lodgings, hostel places and self-catered accommodation. Transfer options into council, housing association or private sector tenancies are supported with suitable advice and guidance to ensure the right choice is made. Some effective early interventions help some young people avoid homelessness and, where necessary, help them manage tenancies. There has been a reduction in the length of stays and use of bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation. The partnership recognises there is insufficient housing support for vulnerable young people with complex needs and intends to increase the number of places available with full-time support. A youth accommodation panel and youth accommodation forum, involving housing providers, council officials and support agencies, were recently introduced to improve the accommodation and support allocation for individuals and to develop a more strategic approach to the housing needs of young people in Swindon.

82. Care leavers have access to a care leaver's fund, but it is not effectively used to support all care leavers into appropriate employment, education or training. Planning for care leavers aged 14 to 19 who have disabilities is not well developed. The 16-plus team does not have sufficient breadth of function to fully meet the needs of young care leavers. For example, the current remit does not involve clear links with all relevant agencies or employers to develop work experience or training opportunities. The role and function of the team is currently under review. The proportion of care leavers in the NEET group is higher than that for all 16 year olds but in line with the national average.

83. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have access to satisfactory or better provision in local schools and colleges. Although the electronic transition process increasingly involves young people, there is insufficient focus on education and training opportunities at some reviews. There are good opportunities for parents and council officers to work together

in formal and informal situations; the views of parents and carers are taken into account by a more regular and systematic approach to information sharing.

84. Childcare is adequate to meet the needs of most families, with 422 childcare places created since 2004. The Sure Start programme is working well to support parents close to the two local centres. The good family learning support helps to raise the self-esteem and confidence levels of parents and children. In many cases, parents have changed their views of learning and feel encouraged to apply for further education courses or aspire to higher-level jobs.

Service management

85. The current management of services for children and young people is adequate. The capacity to improve further is adequate.

86. The ambition of the council and board-level partnership is good. The council has set itself a challenging agenda for change and improvement. This agenda has been developed and then shared with, and endorsed by, partners. The ambition has been developed into a vision, with priorities based upon a detailed analysis of needs including community-based data on key areas such as health inequalities, recorded criminal activity and educational attainment at Super Output Areas. This analysis will be strengthened by the planned survey identified in the Local Area Agreement, which will provide an in-depth baseline assessment for monitoring future outcomes at lower neighbourhood levels. While the ambitions of the partnership clearly reflect the national agenda and some local priorities, there are plans such as the background strategic plans that are not yet sufficiently focused on the local priorities and needs.

87. Leadership is good. The council gives clear political and managerial leadership to the local partnership. However, opportunities to link ambitions across the council have not always been maximised. For example, the regeneration agenda of the city centre is not linked to improving the training and employment opportunities for the 14–19 years group.

88. Prioritisation is adequate. The Swindon Local Strategic Partnership has set out its over-arching strategic framework in the Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement. Within these, there are clear priorities for children's services and the emerging Children's Trust to deliver, which are reflected in the CYPP. These are maximising resources and opportunities for the most vulnerable, reducing health inequalities, and improving services. The track record of the council and its partners in achieving their priorities is adequate and improving; examples include: improvement in educational attainment at Key Stage 2; increases in preventative services; and the percentage of children looked after that have had their health assessments. Whilst there has been improvement in some areas, some have come from a very low baseline and not all action has resulted in the anticipated improvement within the identified timeframe, for example the youth service.

89. The capacity of the council and its partners to deliver better outcomes for children and young people is adequate and in some areas improving. The accountability structure for the Group Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member is in place. Senior staff and senior elected members of the council are enthusiastically committed to improving services, but some elected members have limited knowledge of the new agenda. The senior management team has been strengthened by recruitment to new posts. There is a range of co-located and multi-agency teams in place across the tiers and partnership, including a Group Director for Adults, Housing and Health within the council who is also the PCT Chief Executive. These initiatives have helped overall capacity. However, the integrated children's service has brought together education, social care, and youth services, all of which have had challenging issues of poor performance to deal with. While there has been training and support for middle and lower managers, there is a need to ensure this training and support is translated consistently on the ground and focused on better outcomes for children and young people.

90. Partnership working is good. There is a culture of partnership working among local service providers, which includes the voluntary and community sector. There are good inter-agency relationships at both strategic and at local operational levels. The council is developing its community leadership role well. There is an established multi-agency partnership, engaging all major organisations, which provides the foundations of the commissioning Children's Trust Board. The decision-making framework is in place for the Trust, although the latter is relatively new and untested.

91. Use of resources and value for money are adequate. Some areas are improving, for example where there has been investment and changes, including the newly tendered independent fostering service and the children's centres. This has led to increasing local provision. There is good alignment of budgets across the council and with partners, especially with the PCT. The council's medium-term financial plan and budget show that resources are being moved to support areas of greatest need, which are supported by its partners, and that medium-term plans are resourced. High out-of-area placements are the subject of a joint Preventative Strategy with health and social care, focused on reducing external placements over a period of time, although this is largely untested so far. Joint commissioning strategies are being further developed, and there are examples of joint or aligned budgets such as Sure Start, Sure Start Plus and the children's centres. Historically, national and local funding for education and children's social care has been below national comparators. There are a number of long-standing cost and performance issues which remain to be solved, particularly the high cost of out of borough placements for social care and special educational needs, and longer term financial planning is not yet in place to support the implementation of local programmes. Education outcomes are adequate and improving, although from a low and, in some schools, a very low base. There are examples of services such as the youth service that do not yet demonstrate good value for money.

92. Performance management arrangements across the partnership are adequate. Information provided at the top level is of good quality and timely. This has led to the identification of key problem areas such as the youth service. Performance across a wide range of performance indicators is improving, although some from a low base. Lead councillors have intervened and monitored performance closely when council services have not met the anticipated outcomes to get performance back on track. The Children's Trust Performance Group will be taking on the role for the monitoring of performance within the CYPP. The council and its partners are developing a comprehensive performance management framework to support the Children's Trust Board, which has met recently for the first time. This whole systems performance management framework is not yet in place, although the framework used within the council's services provides a good building block. The senior management team has identified the need to link performance and budget monitoring more clearly to better support their ability to identify overspends and take prompt corrective action. This is part of the council-wide activity through the Aspire project, a joint programme of work with a strategic partner that will increase capacity, especially in systems and other areas. Other strategic partners such as health are hoping to join the Aspire project in the near future. Currently there is limited real time joint performance and financial data to support management decisions at lower levels. New human resource systems are being rolled out across the council, with a clear focus on performance, training and development, although there are a number of staff who have no performance targets in place yet.

93. The role of scrutiny of children's services is adequate and becoming more effective, with reviews of service areas in the forward plan. The views of many children and young people, including those who are looked after, as well as parents and carers, are taken into account using a range of processes. In addition, opportunities are available for children and young people to be involved in evaluating the services they receive, and involving them in what changes need to occur, such as in the youth service. These opportunities are growing, although the quality and impact is variable across service provision, and not all children are involved in these processes. In addition, there is a lack of knowledge about some informal arrangements, such as the arrangements for some children attending off-site provision in schools, which is not reported to the council.

94. The capacity to improve is adequate. While the council and its partners have put in place a number of the building blocks to improve capacity, some areas do not meet best practice, including, for example, no identified Children's Rights Services. There is inconsistency in staff supervision and management, especially with front-line staff, which does impact on delivering consistent outcomes for children and young people. The multi-agency self-assessment for the joint area review recognises most of the partnership's strengths and weaknesses.

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

1. The ambition of the council and the partnership for children and young people is good. The council has set itself a challenging agenda for change and improvement. This agenda has been developed and then shared with and endorsed by partners.
2. The ambition has been developed into a vision, with priorities based upon an analysis of needs, which have been the focus for changes and investment. For example, the analysis highlighted areas of inequalities such as educational attainment, which has led to improved support to schools and improved quality of provision. However, opportunities to link ambitions across the council have not always been maximised. For example, the regeneration agenda of the town centre is not linked to improving the training and employment agenda for young people.
3. The leadership and management of services for children and young people are adequate. The integration of children's services, which joined education, children's social care and the youth service starting in October 2005 has been well managed. It has increased capacity to support the new service, with additional staff recruited to senior posts. The Group Director Children, the designated Director of Children's Services and Lead Member have been in post for a year. Senior leadership of the integrated children's services is good. The council provides good political and managerial leadership to the Executive Management Group, the CYPPB and the Children's Trust Performance Group that underpin the emerging Children's Trust. There is inconsistency in management of staff at lower levels, with varying experiences of supervision and performance monitoring focused on achieving good outcomes for children and young people.
4. Use of resources and value for money is adequate. Some areas are improving, for example where there has been investment and changes, as in the newly tendered independent fostering service and the children's centres. This has led to increasing local provision. There is good alignment of budgets across the council and with partners, especially with the PCT. The council's medium-term financial plan and budget show that resources are being moved to support areas of greatest need, reinforced by its partners, and that medium-term plans are resourced. High out of area placements are subject of a joint strategy with health and social care focused on reducing these over a period of time building on the plans aimed at preventing out of area placements. Joint commissioning strategies are being further developed and there are effective examples of joint and aligned budgets such as Sure Start, Sure Start Plus and the Children's Centres. Historically, national and local funding for education and children's social care has been below national comparators. Education outcomes are adequate and improving, although from a low, and in some schools a very low, base. There are examples of services that do not demonstrate good value for money, such as the youth service.

5. Outcomes for most children and young people in Swindon are generally adequate with some positive and emerging strength. Children and young people appear safe. There are, however, inequalities both in access to services and outcomes achieved for children and young people.

6. Smoking in pregnancy, which was above national rates, has decreased but remains high in the more disadvantaged areas. Breastfeeding rates are increasing. There are, however, areas in Swindon that at present do not have adequate access to facilities that promote good health and healthy lifestyles. Immunisation coverage and oral health are good. The Healthy Schools programme is a major vehicle for coordinating health promotion programmes to children and young people and schools value the input of school nursing and health promotion staff. Positive mental health promotion is a priority and there is an impressive range of initiatives to promote emotional well being and self esteem. Clinical provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.

7. Although children and young people are healthy and life expectancy compares well to the national average, there is considerable inequality across the borough. Initiatives such as the multi-agency children's centres are aimed at supporting areas of greater need with a view to reduce these inequalities.

8. Overall, children appear safe. For some children bullying was a concern. Children assessed as most at risk of harm or abuse and subject to formal plans of protection are protected by multi-agency work and committed professionals. Front-line social care services have shown consistent improvement. The referral and assessment service is now working effectively to ensure children are safeguarded. Slow progress on reducing the overall numbers of children being looked after was limiting opportunity for reinvesting in providing further family support services.

9. Educational achievement in primary schools has recently reached national averages but remains lower in secondary schools. This overall picture reflects particular underachievement in more disadvantaged areas, although improvements are being made. Good support to schools causing concern has reduced the number of schools in special measures. The attainment of primary school children is now in line with similar authorities, but there is still significant underachievement in some secondary schools. These weaknesses are being addressed through well targeted strategies, which are beginning to make a difference and are improving attainment at GCSE. Support for improving behaviour is effective in reducing permanent exclusions, although fixed exclusions remain above the average in secondary schools. There is good support for improving attendance.

10. Many young people are contributing well to their school and community, although significant groups remain disengaged. In spite of some good initiatives being developed, some core services including youth services require significant improvement. Improvements to failing services such as youth provision were

still to be achieved. Children from black and minority ethnic communities performed above the borough average at GCSE but were over-represented as a proportion of children looked after or involved with the YOT.

11. There is improving collaboration between schools, training providers and colleges across the partnership to increase economic well-being for young people and to encourage them to consider further education or training options. Achievements of qualifications equivalent to level 2 at ages 16 and 19, however, remain poor. The number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is steadily declining from 8.1% in 2004 to 4.6% in 2006. Local employers offer satisfactory support to schools for work experience and other activities but are not sufficiently involved in post-16 education and training. The council does not offer apprenticeships or take advantage of supported employment schemes. Opportunities for young people to join apprenticeship programmes are limited, with many training providers preferring to work with young people already in employment. Existing strategies are not significantly increasing the number of young people progressing on to higher education. Appropriate housing is found for most vulnerable young people, including care leavers, and more comprehensive support is now in place for those with complex needs. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have satisfactory progression opportunities into further education and training.