

Joint area review

Reading Children's Services Authority Area

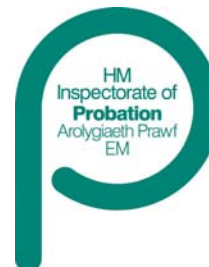
Review of services for children and young people

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

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Introduction

1. The 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) for Reading judged the local authority's children's services to be adequate overall and its capacity to improve as good.
2. This report assesses the contribution of local services in ensuring that children and young people:
 - at risk or requiring safeguarding are effectively cared for
 - who are looked after achieve the best possible outcomes
 - with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve the best possible outcomes.
3. The following investigations were also carried out:
 - the impact of the partners' 14–19 education and training strategy, including the work of the youth service, in improving outcomes for young people
 - the impact of the partners' strategy on reducing teenage conception.

Context

4. Reading is situated 41 miles due west of London. Its population of just under 150,000 lives in an urban area covering 15.6 square miles. The town has changed rapidly over the last 10 years, as the previous manufacturing base has been replaced by financial services and a broader service economy. Social disadvantage and poverty are just above the national average. In 2007, the borough was ranked 151st out of 354 authorities on the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation. Although it ranks 12th in the South East for the proportion of people educated to degree level, an above-average percentage of residents has few or no qualifications.
5. The proportion of the population with Black and minority ethnic backgrounds is above average (13% compared to 10% nationally). The Pakistani community (3%) is the largest group. Around 18% of the population is aged under-16, in line with that nationally. Over the last three years, an influx of families from Eastern Europe, particularly from Poland, has contributed to a 30% increase in pupils with a non-British background.
6. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average in primary schools (23%), but below in secondary schools (16%). Just over a third of the 194 looked after children has some form of special educational need and one in five of these has a statement. Around 40% of looked after children have Black or minority ethnic heritage.

7. Pre-16 education is provided at 56 early years settings (five nursery schools, 31 day-care centres and 20 pre-schools); six children's centres; 37 primary schools; seven secondary schools (including one academy); three special schools; and one pupil referral unit.
8. Post-16 education or training is provided in secondary school sixth forms, at the local further education college and at a number of work-based training providers. Chiltern Training, the main private provider, specialises in childcare. The college and Chiltern Training, together with the West Berkshire Training Consortium, also contribute to the Entry to Employment (E2E) scheme. Adult and community learning, including family learning, is provided by New Directions and the college.
9. Primary healthcare is provided by the Berkshire West Primary Care Trust. The main provider of local hospital services is the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, which provides acute medical and surgical services to the people of Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham. Accident and emergency services are provided at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. Acute care is also occasionally commissioned from the Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust. Specialist mental health and substance misuse services are provided by the Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.
10. Children's social care services are provided by 96 foster carers, 19 family link (short-break) carers and two children's residential care homes (including one for disabled children). Additional foster and residential care services are commissioned as required. To complement the five field social work teams, four multi-agency locality-based children's action teams have recently been set up across the authority.
11. There is one young offender institution in the area. Young people who have offended or are at risk of offending are supported either by the youth offending service or services commissioned from the Connexions service or other providers. The youth offending and the youth/community services, together with substance misuse, teenage pregnancy and information, advice and guidance services, form the Integrated Youth Development Service.

Main findings

12. The main findings of this joint area review are as follows:
- Safeguarding is inadequate due to significant weaknesses in fundamental elements of child protection and children's social care. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is largely ineffective. The partnership has recognised the problems and action is being taken to deal with them. Multi-agency preventative work and support for some of the broader aspects of safeguarding are good.

- The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for looked after children and young people is adequate. Most benefit from living in good and stable family placements. Corporate parenting is strong. However, the well-being of a minority of looked after children is adversely affected by frequent changes of social worker.
- Services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are adequate and provision for their education in secondary schools is comparatively good. The local authority assessment team and the parent partnership service provide outstanding support. Service co-ordination is improving, but parents and carers often have to work hard to secure the help they need.
- Provision for 14–19 education and training is adequate. Numbers of 16–18 year olds not in education, employment or training have fallen over the last three years. The proportion of young people achieving Level 2 qualifications by age 19 is improving, but remains below the national average. Further work is needed to improve young people's access to comprehensive impartial advice and to evaluate the impact of initiatives. The youth service is now having a greater impact and has achieved good levels of participation among young people from vulnerable groups.
- Provision to reduce teenage conceptions is poorly co-ordinated and inadequate. A lack of robust data is impeding planning and service development. Sex and relationship education (SRE) is variable and advice on good sexual health is not reaching all young people. The situation is not helped by a lack of school nurses. A new strategy group has been set up to tackle the problems, with appropriate senior management representation from all key partners.
- Service management and capacity to improve are adequate. Although weak performance management has resulted in inadequate responses to serious child protection issues and in reducing teenage pregnancies, the partnership's targeted, resourced and timed action plan for improvement suggests that the weaknesses can now be overcome. Good partnership working is adding capacity at both strategic and operational levels.

Grades

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

	Local services overall
Safeguarding	1
Looked after children	2
Learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2
Service management	2
Capacity to improve	2

Recommendations

For immediate action

The local partnership should:

- ensure that an appropriate way is found for the successful dissemination of the findings of this report to children and young people in the area
- ensure that managers carry out regular and systematic audits of social care files on the basis of an agreed protocol and that the outcomes of the audits are reported to the director of children's services
- strengthen the reporting and accountability of the Children's Services Directorate to ensure that accurate data on performance in relation to safeguarding and teenage conception are presented to senior managers and elected members on a regular basis
- ensure, where relevant, that all looked after children have a pathway plan which is reviewed regularly
- ensure that there is a clear understanding between the health service and local authority about funding responsibility for the provision of specialist equipment for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to use at home and at school
- establish rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure optimum impact of initiatives aimed at improving 14–19 outcomes.

For action over the next six months

The local partnership should:

- improve the capacity of the LSCB to challenge local practice and deliver training
- ensure that information about children and their families held on social care files by the Children's Services Directorate is accurate, stored safely and easily retrievable
- ensure that all foster carers receive an annual review of their performance conducted by an independent chairperson
- ensure that the Through Care team is fully staffed with qualified and permanent personnel and more consistently able to support looked after children through to independence
- increase the provision of short-break care and social worker support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- ensure that comprehensive impartial information, advice and guidance on post-16 options is accessible by all young people
- ensure there is consistently good and timely access for young people to high quality SRE and appropriate information, advice and guidance on good sexual health
- strengthen performance management arrangements to ensure that any weaknesses in services are clearly identified and acted upon
- develop and agree a joint workforce strategy for the recruitment and retention of staff working in children and young people's services
- review planning documents to ensure that priorities are aligned and expressed consistently, and include user-focused targets, milestones and detail on resource implications.

For action in the longer term

The local partnership should:

- ensure that the proportion of young people achieving Level 2 qualifications by age 19 is improved in line with national expectations
- ensure that services aimed at reducing teenage pregnancies are co-ordinated and meet the needs of all young people

- increase the number of school nurses in line with government targets for 2010
- ensure that the local authority and partners are regularly informed about practice with regard to safeguarding and that appropriate measures are put in place when poor performance is identified.

Equality and diversity

13. The local authority has achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government, placing it among the top 25% of councils nationally. Young people from different cultures get on well in Reading. Various initiatives promote cultural understanding among different ethnic groups, including Travellers, and incidence of racist behaviour involving young people is relatively low. Targeted support has helped to reduce some gaps in school attainment levels. Achievement of many Black and minority ethnic groups and among White working class pupils continues to be below their peers at all key stages. However, progress has been made in reducing the proportion of 16-18 year olds in these groups who are not in education, employment or training or who have offended.

14. Collaboration with the voluntary sector is helping to support children from minority ethnic groups who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and work with unaccompanied asylum seekers is helping to improve their language skills. Within the youth service, a pro-active approach to equality and diversity issues has resulted in good levels of participation by vulnerable groups such as young carers and young people with disabilities and/or from different ethnic groups. The local authority has implemented special parenting programmes to meet the needs of Asian parents. The Partnership is aware that across services for children and young people's the staff mix does not yet reflect the diversity of the local community. However, the proportion of staff from Black and minority ethnic groups in the local authority's workforce is increasing.

Safeguarding



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

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Agencies work well together to provide a wide range of preventative services for children and families.</p> <p>Good arrangements to track children missing education.</p> <p>Success in reducing permanent and fixed-term exclusions from school.</p>	<p>Key child protection assessment and planning processes not being completed within acceptable timescales.</p> <p>Significant shortcomings in the work of the LSCB.</p> <p>Weak performance management within the local authority's social care service and the wider partnership.</p> <p>Personal information on children not being stored in a way that it is easily retrievable.</p> <p>Poor arrangements for ensuring that social care files are systematically audited.</p>

16. The 2007 APA judged the contribution of the local authority to ensuring that children and young people in Reading are safe to be good overall. However, it noted that performance against key indicators relating to assessment and planning processes to support child protection, while improving, was significantly below that of statistical neighbours. During 2007–08, performance did not improve and in some cases deteriorated. For example, while all child protection reviews were carried out on time in 2006–07, performance fell in 2007–08 to 91% (the second lowest in the country).

17. Child protection practice in the local authority's children's social care service is inadequate. Front-line staff are suitably qualified, but are poorly served by the systems they are required to operate. The quality of recording in files across children's social care services is unacceptable. Personal information is not stored in a way that is easily retrievable and the use of both an electronic filing system and paper files is dangerous. While steps are being taken to remedy the situation, there remains a significant risk of vital information being lost between the two systems and not being seen by case workers and their managers, with potentially serious consequences for children's well-being.

18. Performance management of the local authority's child protection processes is inadequate. Social care files are not audited systematically and, until very recently, poor use was being made of national performance indicators when judging service quality. Management information systems designed to assist front-line managers in ensuring that processes are carried out properly and in good time, are ineffective. Managers have sought ways round the problem by designing their own personal information systems but this cannot be sufficient to make practice sound and sustainable. Over the last 18 months,

tough action has been taken by senior managers within the children's social care service to secure cultural and structural change, including addressing significant staff capability issues and improving supervision and front-line practice. Poor monitoring and a lack of challenge by the local strategic partnership, the LSCB and elected members meant that demonstration of impact of these improvements was delayed. The measures taken have now begun to secure better outcomes for young people, but progress is very recent and it has yet to be demonstrated that it can be sustained.

19. The latest Serious Case Review carried out by the LSCB was judged by Ofsted to be inadequate. Key actions to improve practice have still to be undertaken, such as the proposal to ensure substance misuse workers attend case conferences. The intention to complete this action by March 2008 was not achieved and it had still not been completed at the time of the inspection. Fundamental mistakes identified in the case, including the poor quality of case-file recording, are still being repeated.

20. Significant numbers of initial and core assessments of child protection referrals are not completed in a timely manner. In the financial year to March 2008, the proportion of initial assessments completed on time was 57%, which is well below the average for similar authorities. Between April and July 2008, there was no marked improvement. The proportion of core assessments completed on time in 2007–08 was 54%, which is down from the previous year and again well below similar authorities. Between April and July 2008, the figure fell even further to 40%. Other important aspects of performance have deteriorated. Child protection multi-agency core group meetings are not consistently carried out when due and administration of case conferences is poor. Invitations to attend are not always sent promptly to partner agencies and families and poor attendance makes some conferences ineffective.

21. The number of social care referrals fell from 1,816 to 685 per 10,000 in 2007–08, indicating a better multi-agency understanding of thresholds when managing cases. However, the rate is still above statistical neighbours. In 2007–08, all child protection cases were allocated to qualified social workers, but limited capacity meant caseloads were inappropriately high. The local authority is aware of the caseloads issue and has now made additional resources available to tackle it.

22. Good and up-to-date inter-agency procedures to protect children from harm are now in place and staff from the various partners have good access to safeguarding training. Agencies work well together to provide early intervention with the intention of reducing further the incidence of child abuse and neglect. A good range of support services is provided for children and families by children's centres, community settings and through extended services. A good strategy has been developed to improve parenting and plans are in place to audit this on an annual basis. Parents have access to a good range of information that is helpful in minimising risk to their children's safety. Health visitors work closely with other partners and provide an effective service.

Satisfactory arrangements are in place for dealing with notifications of private fostering placements. Safe recruitment practices are satisfactory and appropriate checks are made on staff before they take up posts in the area.

23. The local authority has a good range of initiatives to deter, and improve the reporting of, bullying; youth workers are making a useful contribution to these. Racist incidents in schools are infrequent and are followed up by the local authority where patterns emerge. Arrangements to track children missing education have improved significantly over the last two years and are good. During 2007/08, the number of young people missing education was significantly reduced. Tracking of young people identified as being at risk of 'going missing' is good.

24. Arrangements to educate young people other than at school are satisfactory. Preventative work to deter exclusions is much improved and good progress has been made in reducing the number of permanent and fixed-term exclusions. There were no permanent exclusions in primary schools in 2006/07 and 2007/08 and those in secondary schools halved to 10 in 2007/08. Improved collaboration with neighbouring local authorities is helping to reduce the incidence of Reading pupils being excluded from out-of-borough schools. There remain a few instances of young people out-of-school not receiving full-time tuition, but supervision of these cases during non-attendance is satisfactory. Reintegration of excluded pupils, including those from out-of-borough schools, has improved and the 'managed moves' scheme is working well.

25. Attendance at school is satisfactory. It continues to improve in primary schools and is good in secondary schools. Persistent absence remains low. The behaviour of pupils in most schools is good and, where there are problems, schools receive effective support. As Reading's own youth inspectors found, young people engaged in youth activities benefit from clear advice on drug and alcohol abuse. This is one of many initiatives which are effective in deterring anti-social behaviour in the local community.

26. Implementation of the common assessment framework (CAF) is adequate. The numbers of assessments completed under the framework and staff trained in the methodology are in line with similar authorities. There are, however, instances of the CAF being used by services as a referral tool rather than an assessment. Information sharing protocols are in place and are good.

27. The recent creation of the children's action teams has enabled earlier access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) tier 2 and family support services. It is too early to measure the impact of the new teams, but measures are being put in place to ensure this is monitored. Waiting times for tier 3 CAMHS appointments have been reduced to 15 weeks, which is better than the national average. However, a comprehensive CAMHS service is not yet fully available for 16-17 year olds.

28. Young carers receive an adequate service and individuals are particularly well supported by the youth service. However, not all carers have been identified and their needs are not yet assessed systematically. Strategies to put in place a continuum of support across different settings are being further developed.

29. The domestic abuse strategy is good and is beginning to impact on the lives of children and their families. Effective consultation with a wide range of agencies and survivors of domestic abuse has helped to inform the strategy. The action plan is being rigorously implemented. Multi-agency public protection arrangements and multi-assessment risk assessment conferences are good.

30. Re-offending by children and young people subject to community or custodial penalties has fallen and compares favourably with similar areas. The number of first-time entrants into the criminal justice system fell by 13% in 2007–08. This is significantly ahead of Youth Justice Board targets. However, the performance of the youth offending service (YOS) in safeguarding children and young people who have offended and are at risk, either from themselves or from others, requires improvement (YOS inspection, 2008).

Looked after children and young people



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

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Strong commitment from elected members to corporate parenting.</p> <p>A high proportion of looked after children in stable family placements and cared for by well-supported foster carers.</p> <p>Effective partnership working to help looked after children stay healthy.</p> <p>A relatively high percentage of adoptions completed within 12 months of a decision to adopt.</p> <p>A relatively low number of looked after children receiving a final warning or a caution.</p>	<p>Too many changes of social worker in the Through Care team having a negative impact on the well being of looked after children.</p> <p>Not all foster carers receiving an annual review of their performance.</p> <p>The relatively low proportion of children leaving care with one or more passes at GCSE.</p> <p>Not all eligible and relevant looked after children have pathway plans.</p>

32. The 2007 APA found that support for looked after children, their annual health checks and the opportunities through which they could make a positive contribution were good, while noting that the number of looked after children was higher than statistical neighbours. Numbers have been high for the last four years, but the drop from 214 to 194, very recently achieved, places Reading in line with statistical neighbours.

33. The absence of a robust recruitment and retention strategy to address capacity in the Through Care team is seriously undermining the team's ability to provide continuity of support to looked after children through to independence. During 2007–08, there were high caseloads and vacancies in the team. The team deploys a number of agency workers, but attempts to recruit sufficient permanent staff have not been successful. This has a negative effect on the children and young people, who value a trusting relationship with the same social worker. The proportion of looked after children allocated to a suitably qualified social worker has improved from 78% in 2006–07 to 99%, but the position is not sustainable. For a minority of children, the only continuity is provided by independent reviewing officers (IROs), who chair their statutory reviews twice a year.

34. Most looked after children feel safe. Placement stability is good, with fewer children being placed more than 20 miles from Reading. The local authority has been successful in placing 89% of looked after children in family placements, the use of residential placements is relatively low and the numbers living with family and friends are above statistical neighbours. The percentage of children adopted within 12 months of a decision being taken rose from 73% to 93% in the year ending March 2008, which is well above statistical neighbours (70%).

35. Social care, education and health partners take commissioning decisions about external placements jointly and a pooled budget has been established for this purpose. The wide range of family support services is valued by parents and the well-established family group conference service is used appropriately. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are well supported by specialist workers and effective counselling and support services are provided to looked after children from black and minority ethnic groups.

36. The most recent Ofsted regulatory inspections (2008) judged the fostering service to be good and the local authority's children's homes to be satisfactory. A range of fostering provision is in place and specialist 'treatment' and 'therapeutic' foster carers effectively prepare children with more complex needs for permanent family placements. The capacity of the fostering service is limited and the considerable demand for foster home placements results in a minority of children being placed with carers outside their approval range. In such cases, a risk assessment is undertaken before a child is placed. Supervising social workers support foster carers well and most carers feel respected and valued by the local authority for the work they do. However, not

all foster carers receive timely annual reviews of their performance and these are not chaired independently.

37. Elected members serving on the local authority's corporate parenting panel show a strong commitment to meeting the needs of looked after children. The panel regularly seeks the children's opinions on the quality of their care and is highly supportive of the newly-established 'looked after children's council', which provides the children with a systematic process for making their views known.

38. Performance in conducting statutory reviews on time and ensuring that young people contribute to them has recently improved and is in line with statistical neighbours and the national average. Reviews are usually chaired by IROs, although staff vacancies over the last year have resulted in a minority of reviews being chaired by managers rather than independently. Most looked after children make effective use of the 'Viewpoint' IT system to communicate their views directly to IROs.

39. The support to help looked after children stay healthy is good, with nearly 90% of the children receiving annual health checks. The support offered by the dedicated full-time nurse is highly valued by the young people. However, without additional resources the extent to which the service is able to follow up the full range of issues affecting the health of the children is limited. CAMHS provides looked after children with appropriate support and similarly gives foster carers useful and timely advice.

40. Attendance of looked after children at school is good, with fewer days missed compared to statistical neighbours and no looked after children permanently excluded from school in the last year. The proportion of children leaving care in 2007 with one or more GCSE passes at grades A* to G was 29%, which is well below that of statistical neighbours (55%). However, the local authority reports that unvalidated 2008 results for looked after children in Year 11 show that an improvement trend is being maintained. Close working between the new 'virtual' headteacher for looked after children and designated teachers and carers has sharpened the focus on raising the children's attainment. The percentage of looked after children with an up-to-date personal education plan (90%) is adequate and improving.

41. All care leavers have personal advisers and most have pathway plans. However, these are not reviewed consistently every six months as required. By the age of 19, compared to statistical neighbours, a high percentage of care leavers is engaged in education, employment or training. With the support of a Connexions adviser, many who do not achieve well at school return to education at a later stage. A good range of accommodation is available to meet the differing needs of care leavers. All receive the 'Your Reading' card giving them free access to leisure activities, although take-up is variable.

42. Good partnership working between the Through Care team and YOS has meant that allocated social workers attend all planning meetings for the small number of children subject to custodial sentences. The number of looked after children receiving a final warning or a caution is significantly lower than that of statistical neighbours.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities



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

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Outstanding support for parents from the Special Educational Needs Assessment team and the parent partnership service.</p> <p>Good leadership in developing special educational needs provision.</p> <p>Very good personal and careers guidance and support for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities aged 14–19.</p>	<p>Lack of clarity over funding responsibility for some specialist equipment.</p> <p>Assessment and planning processes not sufficiently joined up, resulting in parents and carers having to report their needs repeatedly before securing help.</p> <p>Limited information for parents/carers on service availability and entitlement.</p> <p>Insufficient social worker support and short-break care.</p>

44. The 2007 APA identified important strengths in the support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including transition planning and aspects of health and educational provision. Since the 2007 APA, the local authority has almost completed the remodelling of many services and improved service co-ordination. However, services are still not collaborating sufficiently and many parents/carers have to work hard to secure the support they need.

45. For children with very severe disabilities, needs are identified at an early stage and assessed appropriately. However, the different assessment processes are still not always well co-ordinated and there is insufficient information for

parents on the availability of the full range of services and how these can be accessed. As a result, parents often have to 'tell the story' of their child's and family's needs on several different occasions, sometimes over several months.

46. For the larger group of children and young people whose difficulties emerge later in their development, services are usually effective in identifying needs reasonably early and delivering effective support. Early years provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a strength, as is support to help parents meet their own children's needs. However, weaknesses regarding the availability of information and the co-ordination of services again apply, as outlined above.

47. Co-ordination improves significantly for most families when their child begins to attend school, as most health and educational provision is available there. Most parents whose children attend local special schools or special needs units in mainstream schools are very happy with both the provision for their child and the support they receive from the school. Additionally, links between schools and the new children's action teams and the increasing use of the CAF are gradually improving access to a wider range of services. These processes are also helping to improve services' understanding of the full range of each family's needs and the quality of planning to meet them.

48. When a full assessment of special educational needs is required, parents receive outstanding support from both the local authority's assessment team and the parent partnership service. There has been a dramatic improvement over the last year in the former's performance, both in completing assessments to deadlines and in establishing good-quality relationships with both parents and schools. The team is efficient, child-centred, open and transparent, and very responsive and supportive to parents. Annual reviews are conducted well, with constructive challenge from local authority staff to the reports submitted by schools.

49. Provision to meet the health needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate overall. Problems retaining staff in the various therapy services, including physiotherapy and occupational therapy, have interrupted service delivery. A recurring parental complaint relates to apparent disagreements between health and local authority staff over funding responsibility for some specialist equipment. This has resulted in delays in important provision being made available and caused considerable distress to families.

50. The specialist team of CAMHS practitioners provides an effective range of services to children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The creation of new CAMHS posts within the children's action teams and the linking of special schools and units to these teams to secure better support and guidance for staff are positive recent developments. Some waiting times for CAMHS appointments have fallen, but recruitment and retention difficulties are still adversely affecting young people with particular needs.

51. Social care provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is insufficient, both in terms of social worker support for families and short-break care. Most families characterise support as 'only being available in a crisis'. Far too many say that 'if you show any signs of coping, you're left to get on with it'. Following consultation with young people and parents, good developmental work has recently helped to improve the range of short-break support, particularly for those who do not want overnight stays away from home. The problem of the amount of provision, however, still remains. Effective guidance and training are provided to ensure that staff are aware of the particular vulnerability of the children and young people to abuse and neglect and key staff are appropriately trained to follow up concerns.

52. Educational provision in all three local special schools is at least satisfactory and, in one case, outstanding. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in mainstream secondary schools is comparatively good, but this is not currently the case in primary schools. However, focused improvement work by the local authority is beginning to bear fruit, for example with a significant increase in 2007-08 in the proportion of schools judged by Ofsted to have good or better special educational needs provision. The use of pupil attainment data to monitor the quality of schools' provision and challenge them to improve is a weakness, particularly for mainstream schools. Advice to schools to ensure consistency of judgements when assessing pupils' needs is limited and there is currently no external moderation of these judgements. The local authority is much more effective in closely scrutinising progress at individual pupil level. This is used to good effect in assessing and challenging school performance.

53. Dialogue between the local authority and schools on the development of provision for special educational needs is frequent, open and thorough. This successfully compensates for the relative weakness of planning documents. A clear and shared understanding of how services are intended to develop and the role of each provider has been built up over the last couple of years from a very low base. There is also developing confidence on the part of schools in the capacity of the local authority to deliver planned improvements. Support for staff in early years education and day-care settings is good.

54. The transition of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities between stages of educational provision is usually well managed. Considerable effort has been put in to improving the planning processes involved and to ensure that they are well co-ordinated. This work has been relatively recent and some inconsistencies in practice remain. However, participation by key agencies is much better than it was and the number of separate discussions some parents and young people have to attend is being helpfully reduced. Good work is also being done to provide better personal support to young people in managing transitions, thereby alleviating some of the abrupt changes a young person experiences when moving from children's to adult health or social care services.

55. Post-16 education and training provision meets the needs of most young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities well. The Connexions service provides very good guidance and support from age 14 and post-16 participation in education, employment and training is comparatively high. Both learning and pastoral support in local further education colleges are good. Provision to meet the accommodation needs of young adults wishing to live independently is also good.

56. Leisure and recreation provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate. The local authority's youth service provides well for increasing numbers of young people, but provision overall is patchy. Many young people and their parents/carers are unaware of what is available. The range of activities designed specifically for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is significantly better than the support to help the young people access mainstream provision. Some imaginative work has been done to improve the latter, but this is relatively recent and on a very small scale. A key factor limiting access is the heavy dependence on parents to stay with their children throughout an activity. This can have major implications for the wider family and often prevents participation.

57. Good opportunities, encouragement and support are given to young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to contribute to discussions about the provision made for them and they participate well in the local youth cabinet. Consultation is, however, much less effective on wider issues. Although services have taken reasonable steps to seek the views of current users on their provision, they have been much less effective in establishing users' priorities for improvement and in consulting those with unmet needs.

Other issues identified for further investigation

The impact of the partners' 14–19 education and training strategy, including the work of the youth service, in improving outcomes for young people

58. The impact of the partners' 14–19 education and training strategy, including the work of the youth service, in improving outcomes for young people is adequate.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
Good, well-planned development and introduction of the new Diploma programme.	Insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the impact of new provision. Insufficient progress in Level 2 achievement by age 19.

<p>Good rate of improvement in the proportion of young people achieving five or more passes at GCSE grades A* to C at age 16.</p> <p>Good proportion of young people achieving Level 3 qualifications by age 19.</p> <p>Good progress in improving the impact of the youth service.</p> <p>Good focus on reducing the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training.</p>	<p>Below average success rates at the local further education college at all levels.</p> <p>Low numbers of young people in work-based learning.</p> <p>Access to impartial information, advice and guidance too variable.</p>
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59. The 2007 APA reported great variation in the overall quality of post-16 provision. It identified two specific areas for development: increasing the proportion of young people gaining Level 2 qualifications by age 19; and reducing further the percentage of 16–18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training. In 2005, an inspection of the youth service judged its provision to be inadequate.

60. The local authority and its partners have made adequate progress in implementing their 14–19 strategy. Although progress was initially slow with varying levels of commitment across institutions, the development of provision for the new Diploma in schools and colleges has been well managed, has promoted partnership working and has increased the pace of change. The draft review of the 14–19 strategy shows a good awareness of progress to date and identifies further areas for development, including increased collaboration with neighbouring authorities.

61. Overall achievements of young people in schools and in 16+ provision are now satisfactory, but vary significantly across establishments. Achievements at Key Stage 4 are high at the two selective schools, but only 20–25% of the pupils at these schools reside within the borough. During 2005–06 and 2006–07, the proportion of pupils attending Reading schools achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C improved significantly from a low base (46% in 2005 to 60% in 2007; national figure for 2007: 62%). Unvalidated data provided by the local authority for 2008 show that this improvement is being maintained, with all schools now achieving the government's minimum targets. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more passes at GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is at the national rate of 47% (2007). Between Key Stages 2 and 4, pupils make varying, but improving progress.

62. Although the proportion of young people achieving Level 2 qualifications by age 19 (2006–07: 67%) is increasing, it remains below the national average (70%), as does the progression of young people to education and training at age 16. This contrasts with the higher than average proportion of young people achieving Level 3 qualifications by age 19 (2006–07: 52% compared to 45% nationally). Attainment at GCE Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced (AS and A) level is high, mainly due to the outstanding performance of the two selective schools. Student success rates at the local further education college have been consistently below the national average for some time, due mostly to low retention rates. College data for 2008 indicate retention rates have improved and are in line with the 2007 national average for general further education colleges at Level 1, although they continue to be below the national average at Levels 2 and 3. Completion rates for apprenticeships have improved and are now in line with the national average. Progression from E2E programmes into further learning remains below average (2007–08: 48%).

63. Progress in developing the 14–19 curriculum to meet the needs of all young people is adequate. Students at the further education college have access to a wide range of provision, but the degree to which schools have expanded their vocational curriculum for 14–19 year olds is variable, although improving. Around 300 students enrolled for the new Diploma beginning in September 2008 and the expansion of the government's Increased Flexibility programme at the college has been successful in broadening the offer for pupils aged 14–16. The local authority and its partners recognise that there is still work to do to ensure that all schools are offering a 14–19 curriculum that fully meets young people's needs. A good range of alternative provision is available for underachieving or disengaged young people, but the impact is not systematically monitored or evaluated.

64. Work-based learning opportunities continue to be limited. The number of advanced apprenticeships has grown steadily over the last three years from 41 that started in 2004–05 to 72 in 2006–07, but the total number of apprenticeships fell sharply during 2005–07 (from 184 to 144), although it stabilised in 2007–08. A new partnership has been established to develop clearer progression routes for young people on E2E programmes.

65. The recent creation of the Integrated Youth Development Service has ensured that the youth service is well placed to facilitate partnership working and effectively support targeted provision for the most vulnerable. The leadership and management of the service are now satisfactory. Significant progress has been made in improving staff recruitment and retention. Operational management of youth work is now effective and staff morale is good. The service has developed clearer planning and performance management processes which take account of both the national priorities and the local needs of young people.

66. Within the youth service, the overall level of engagement of young people is in line with national benchmarks. Young people accessing the service develop good levels of confidence and transferable skills through participation in self-determined and planned activities. They participate in processes to shape provision and successfully influence strategic and operational decision-making. Good recent action has improved accreditation opportunities, from 9% at the time of the previous inspection to 17% in 2007–08. However, this remains below the national target of 30%.

67. The contribution of partners to reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training is adequate. Although the proportion of 16–18 year olds not placed in education, employment or training exceeds that nationally (6.7%), there has been a downward trend over the last three years (2005–06: 10.7%; 2007–08: 8.4%). The local authority has identified the reduction of numbers of young people not in education, employment or training as a key priority and recent wide-ranging initiatives to reduce numbers further include intensive support for those at risk and a variety of school-based projects. The local authority has yet to evaluate these fully and actions to rationalise activities and maximise impact are ongoing. Around 40% of the current cohort of young people who are not in education, employment or training was educated outside the borough and the local authority is beginning to work strategically with neighbouring authorities to reduce this figure.

68. The range and impartiality of information, advice and guidance (IAG) available to young people is adequate. The Connexions service provides impartial IAG to young people through school-based provision and a drop-in service in the Connexions centre. The quality and range of impartial IAG offered by schools and other providers are more variable. Careers education and guidance provided by schools are of mixed quality. The local authority recognises the need to improve young people's access to comprehensive impartial IAG and has commissioned a research project to inform future planning of the provision.

The impact of the partners' strategy on reducing teenage conception

69. **The impact of the partners' strategy on reducing teenage conceptions is inadequate.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
Good access for vulnerable young people to specialist sexual health services.	Insufficient progress since the area was identified for improvement in the 2007 APA. Lack of robust data to support planning and service development.

	<p>Lack of co-ordination of services designed to reduce teenage pregnancies.</p> <p>Lack of school nurses to advise children and young people.</p> <p>SRE and information, advice and guidance on good sexual health not reaching all young people.</p> <p>Inconsistent messages about how to access free emergency hormonal contraception.</p> <p>Lack of suitable and affordable accommodation for teenage parents.</p>
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70. The 2007 APA found the number of teenage conceptions well above the national average and much too high. Insufficient progress has been made over the last 12 months to reduce the number and Reading still has the highest conception rates in the South East region. The projected trend indicates that Reading will not meet the national target to halve the rate of teenage pregnancy by 2010. Performance management in implementing the partnership's strategy has been wholly inadequate. The provision of SRE is inconsistent and not meeting the needs of most young people.

71. The partnership is now making the reduction of teenage conceptions a more focused priority. The Primary Care Trust and the local authority have agreed that teenage pregnancy should be one of the four areas of greatest need to be tackled jointly. Structures and plans are in place to take this forward, driven by senior managers. A revised strategy group, with appropriate senior management representation from all key partners, has been set up to tackle the significant underperformance in reducing the rates of teenage conception. This is now providing improved leadership and accountability, but it is too early to determine its impact on service delivery.

72. The revised teenage pregnancy strategy takes account of national guidance and legislation. Priorities are appropriate and the views of schools and young people have helped to inform the development of more targeted provision. However, the strategy is not fully funded nor underpinned by comprehensive service mapping or analysis of need. As a result, services lack co-ordination and are still developing in isolation.

73. Performance management is inadequate. There has been a lack of robust information and data available to the partnership to inform planning, shape commissioning and develop targeted use of resources. A data-sharing agreement has recently been developed with the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust to provide timely, accurate and internally validated data, but this is at an early stage of implementation.

74. The provision of SRE is inadequate, with poor co-ordination impeding its effectiveness. Following consultation with young people, the partnership recognised the need to target provision and a committed team of youth workers provides enhanced SRE appropriately woven into the school curriculum, in five of the seven secondary schools. Voluntary organisations provide support and information within the two faith schools. However, compared to the national average, there are few school nurses and their input to SRE programmes is very limited. Over 3000 young people have received SRE within youth settings, but it is not clear that the most vulnerable groups of young people have accessed this service.

75. Children and young people have inadequate access to information, advice and guidance about sexual health and risk-taking behaviours. Information about how to access services is available, but is not well publicised or advertised. The partnership has recognised this and a new post has been developed and funded to improve advertising. Limited access to contraception services is available at the specialist clinic, at drop-in clinics within the college and at the Connexions office in the town centre. While the service provided at the college reaches a significant number of young men, it does not meet the needs of all young people. There is still confusion among many young people about how to access free emergency hormonal contraception (the morning after pill) and where this is available. The Primary Care Trust has recognised that this is an issue and has funded training for additional pharmacists to provide more services.

76. Good partnership work is developing to provide specialist sexual health services. Working with the youth service, the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust has begun to provide contraception and sexual health advice in two schools and the college. The national target to provide access to genito-urinary services within 48-hours is consistently met. Access to services, including genito-urinary medicine, has improved at the specialist clinic, as opening times have been increased. The needs of the more vulnerable young people are being addressed at the clinic with the development of a fast-track service for those who attend with a professional, for example looked after children with their key worker.

77. For those who choose it, there is good and appropriate access to termination services and the percentage of conceptions leading to legal abortions increased from 44% to 60% during 2005–06. Arrangements to promote good sexual health, for example through chlamydia screening, are good. Various screening techniques have been adopted to increase the number of young people accessing this service. Despite this, rates of chlamydia have risen in line with national trends.

78. Support, advice and information for teenage parents are good. Once a young person becomes pregnant, a good range of support services is available to address all areas of need. Good support is provided by the teenage pregnancy reintegration officer and opportunities to continue with education are

encouraged within individual schools and colleges. A good accredited training course for young mums-to-be and teenage parents has been developed. A multi-disciplinary team offers a drop-in clinic for teenage parents in the centre of Reading and attendance at the newly-located service has increased by approximately 40% over the last year. Information, advice and support for this group are readily accessible and encourage learning and development of new skills. Compared to statistical neighbours, the number of 'Care to Learn' applications completed for those wishing to return to further education is good.

79. There is inadequate provision of appropriate and affordable accommodation for teenage parents. For many, the deposit guarantor scheme is the only option available. However, for those who use the scheme, it often results in debts and families having to leave the accommodation. Emergency accommodation is provided on a bed-and-breakfast only basis.

Service management

Inadequate	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adequate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Good	<input type="checkbox"/>	Outstanding	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Capacity to improve

Inadequate	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adequate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Good	<input type="checkbox"/>	Outstanding	<input type="checkbox"/>
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80. **The management of services for children and young people is adequate. Capacity to improve further is adequate.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Partnership working adding capacity at the strategic level through the Children's Trust and joint working at the service delivery level.</p> <p>Clear vision for children and young people in Reading and a shared commitment to key improvement aims.</p> <p>Good recent track record of improvement in schools.</p>	<p>Weak performance management around aspects of safeguarding and in relation to high teenage pregnancy rates, resulting in delayed response to the problems.</p> <p>Lack of a clear, agreed staff recruitment and retention strategy.</p> <p>Planning documents vary in quality: priorities not aligned consistently; too many actions not directly related to outcomes for service users.</p>

Strong high-level political and financial commitment to ensure rapid progress against performance standards for safeguarding.	
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81. Service management is generally adequate. However, weaknesses in performance management have contributed to the shortcomings in some fundamental aspects of safeguarding and attempts to reduce teenage conceptions not being identified quickly enough. There is now a greater determination within the partnership to correct these mistakes and this is reflected in the recent allocation of additional resources to support safeguarding and stronger leadership of the teenage pregnancy strategy. Management oversight of these aspects at chief officer level is now much stronger.

82. The partnership's ambitions for children and young people in Reading are adequate. The sustainable community strategy SCS identifies children and young people as one of its key themes. A clear long-term vision has been agreed and is reflected in the partnership's key strategic documents, such as the SCS, Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and the Directorate of Education and Children's Services (DECS) plan. In most aspects of the partnership's work, ambitions are based on adequate research, consultation and analysis of community needs.

83. The Children's Trust is providing effective leadership at strategic level. It has established a clear sense of direction, is clear about what it wants to achieve and has gained the confidence of stakeholders and staff. In 2007, the Trust used the 'logic modelling' approach to identify gaps in its understanding of community needs and followed up the initial work with more detailed surveys. This work helped Trust members to reach a shared understanding of key local issues and to agree three overarching objectives for improving the well-being of children and young people. The Trust consults widely with young people, including vulnerable groups.

84. Prioritisation is adequate, but planning documents vary in quality. Priorities set out in the CYPP are based on an extensive analysis of need but are not aligned consistently. Too many actions are not directly related to outcomes for children and young people. Subsequent updates of the plan have taken account of both national and local developments and the views of service managers, partners and young people. The indicators and targets in the Local Area Agreement support the three main priority areas identified by the Children's Trust. However, the links to these priorities are not explained clearly enough in either the CYPP or the directorate plan.

85. Capacity is adequate. Good partnership working is evident at strategic level in the Children's Trust and at operational level through, for example, the youth service. Inter-agency collaboration in service delivery is improving. The partnership is extending its range of preventative services so that needs are addressed before problems become intractable. Local authority staff value the

wide range of training and development opportunities. Staff vacancies and turnover are close to the national average and new approaches, including recruitment from overseas, are helping to fill posts. The lack of a clear partnership-wide recruitment and retention strategy has, however, hampered the effective and timely management of vacancies in several services.

86. The partnership has the financial capacity required to deliver its priorities and has been very successful in securing additional funds from a range of sources. Councillors, partners, and service managers are demonstrating their commitment to delivering value for money, for example through the streamlining of service delivery via the children's action teams and the development of joint commissioning. DECS has successfully achieved efficiency savings of £2.6 million over the last two years, while maintaining service levels and achieving significant improvements in some areas.

87. The partnership is strengthening its approach to commissioning. A joint commissioning strategy has been agreed by the Trust and a joint board is in place to oversee its implementation. To help ease the transition from the more traditional style of procurement and contracting using service level agreements, training on commissioning was provided for senior managers in the summer of 2007. A newly-appointed commissioning manager has undertaken an audit of staff skills and is using this to develop further training and support.

88. Performance management is inadequate in some important service areas, but is more effective in others. Weaknesses in the monitoring arrangements intended to support safeguarding and to reduce teenage pregnancies failed to identify poor performance sufficiently promptly and have impeded remedial action. In the case of safeguarding, reports have not focused sufficiently on poor or deteriorating performance against critical national standards. In the area of teenage pregnancy, prioritisation and performance management have been hampered by the lack of timely and locality-focused data. Arrangements to monitor the performance of education services are stronger, with ongoing improvement and better outcomes for children and young people. The youth service has also demonstrated recent improvements.

89. Although a performance management culture is not yet fully embedded in all parts of children and young people's services, it is becoming more widely established. Discussion within teams about service improvement is frequent, open and thorough. Since the May 2008 council elections, a new cross-party management group has been established to take a stronger lead in planning scrutiny of the authority's work. Membership of the education and children's services scrutiny committee changed after the elections and the new committee is beginning to demonstrate a shared understanding that joint responsibility is required to secure improved outcomes for young people.

90. The Children's Trust and DECS management and service teams regularly consider performance, using quarterly reports and data from the corporate Quality Performance Review system. These reports provide basic information on

progress against targets, but do not give sufficient focus to where performance is still not good enough, such as in safeguarding. Comparative data is included in the reports, and the directorate also makes use of information-sharing arrangements with other councils. Progress is being made on linking performance and financial management systems so that financial and performance information can be read together. Young people and other users are actively engaged in evaluating provision and contributing to improvements, but this is not the case across all services.

91. The partnership's capacity to improve is adequate. It has a good track record of strong improvement in services such as schools and the youth offending service. Stronger leadership is now being shown towards reducing teenage conceptions. Within children's social care, tough action has been taken over the last 18 months to deal with significant staff capability issues and address shortcomings in supervision and front-line practice. In addition, to help secure cultural and structural change, the local authority has increased capacity in its social work teams and the new posts are being filled.

92. The council acknowledges the continuing seriousness of the safeguarding problems identified in this report and lead councillors and the new chief executive are providing strong leadership by driving through urgent measures to ensure rapid improvement within six months. A rescue plan sets out clear actions and identifies additional resources and timescales. Planned actions include commissioning an external audit of all child protection cases at six-monthly intervals, additional training and mentoring, extra officer support to improve systems and produce good-quality performance information, and the purchase of monthly clinical consultancy to ensure robust planning for children. Implementation will be overseen and monitored by a high-level task group, including the council's cabinet lead member and the chief executive.

Annex A

MOST RECENTLY PUBLISHED ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN READING

The full annual performance assessment for 2008, which was published on 17 December 2008, can be found at:

[http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare_providers/la_download/\(id\)/4774/\(as\)/APA/apa_2008_870.pdf](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare_providers/la_download/(id)/4774/(as)/APA/apa_2008_870.pdf)

Annex B

CORPORATE ASSESSMENT ACHIEVEMENT – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE¹

1. Outcomes for children and young people in Reading are in most cases adequate. Performance against most key health indicators is in line with national averages. Health outcomes for looked after children and young people are good. However, teenage pregnancies continue to be well above the national average. Safeguarding performance against several key child protection indicators is poor and significantly worse than statistical neighbours. Standards in primary schools are not yet high enough, but are rising faster at Key Stage 2 than in similar authorities. In secondary schools, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more good GCSE passes (including English and mathematics) has improved significantly over the last two years and is in line with the national average.

2. Service management in Reading is adequate. Ambitions for children and young people are adequate and a clear long-term vision for the future has been agreed by partners. The Children's Trust is providing effective leadership and prioritisation is adequate and based on an extensive analysis of need. Planning documents for children and young people's services vary in quality. Capacity is adequate and inter-agency collaboration in service delivery is improving. The partnership is strengthening its approach to commissioning. Performance management to support safeguarding and to reduce teenage conception is inadequate. The leadership and management of the youth service are now satisfactory.

3. The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is adequate. The long-term pattern of health needs is well understood in the area. However, strategies and actions to reduce teenage conception are inadequate. The provision of sex and relationship education is inconsistent and not meeting the needs of young people. Waiting times for CAMHS appointments have been reduced, but progress towards fully implementing a comprehensive integrated CAMHS service has slowed. Good advice and support is offered to parents and carers at an early stage to help them to keep children healthy. Support to keep looked after children healthy is good.

4. Safeguarding of children and young people is inadequate, with significant weaknesses in fundamental elements of child protection arrangements. The LSCB is ineffective. Multi-agency preventative work and support for some of the broader aspects of safeguarding are good. The local authority has a good range of initiatives to deter, and improve the reporting of, bullying and arrangements

¹ Judgements contained in the corporate assessment of children's services are based on a combination of the outcomes of the joint area review and the latest published annual performance assessment (APA 2007) available at the time of the inspection.

to track children missing education have improved significantly over the last two years and are now good. Preventative work to deter exclusion from school is much improved and good progress has been made in reducing the number of permanent and fixed-term exclusions. A high proportion of looked after children live in family placements and are well cared for. However, high turnover of social workers creates a lack of continuity in these children's lives.

5. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is adequate. Efforts to address weaknesses in primary education, including improving school leadership and standards in literacy, are bearing fruit. Targeted support has helped to reduce some gaps in school attainment levels. However, achievement of many Black and minority ethnic groups and White working class pupils continues to be below their peers at all key stages. The number of young people leaving school with no qualifications has reduced and is now much closer to the national average. Provision in mainstream secondary schools for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is comparatively good, although this is not the case in primary schools. Attendance at school is satisfactory overall. It continues to improve in the primary schools and is good in secondary schools. Persistent absence remains low.

6. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. Young people with disabilities and from different ethnic groups participate well in youth work. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are well supported by specialist workers. The number of looked after children contributing to their reviews is now in line with statistical neighbours. Leisure and recreation provision is adequate. Within the youth service, a proactive approach to equality and diversity issues has resulted in good levels of participation by vulnerable groups such as young carers and young people with disabilities and/or from different ethnic groups. Reasonable steps are taken to seek young people's views on services.

7. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate. The local authority and its partners have made adequate progress in implementing their 14–19 strategy and provision for the new Diploma is being well-managed. The proportion of young people achieving Level 2 qualifications by age 19 remains below the national average, but is improving. The local authority and its partners recognise that there is still work to be done to ensure that all schools are offering an appropriate 14–19 curriculum that fully meets young people's needs. Careers education and guidance provided by schools are of mixed quality. The proportion of 16–18 year olds not in education, employment or training exceeds that nationally, but has fallen over the last three years.

8. The capacity of the local authority's services to improve is adequate. The local authority has now acknowledged the seriousness of the safeguarding problems and is implementing a well-funded six-month action plan to tackle these.

Annex C

SUMMARY OF JOINT AREA REVIEW AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS

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

2. The review was linked to the contemporaneous corporate assessment of the local authority by the Audit Commission and these findings plus aspects of the most recent annual performance assessment 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 Reading and evaluates the way local services, taken together, contribute to their well-being. Together with the annual performance assessment of children's services, joint area reviews focus on the extent to which children and young people are healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and are well prepared to secure economic well-being. This review explores these issues by focusing on children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, children who are looked after and children at risk or requiring safeguarding and a few additional investigations. It evaluates the collective contribution made by all relevant children's services to outcomes for these children and young people.

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