

Joint area review

North Tyneside Children's Services Authority Area

Review of services for children and young people

Adult Learning Inspectorate
Audit Commission
Commission for Social Care Inspection
Healthcare Commission
HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
HM Inspectorate of Court Administration
HM Inspectorate of Prisons
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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 seven 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 North Tyneside area and evaluates the way local services, taken together, contribute to their well-being. Joint area reviews focus on the extent to which children and young people are healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and are well prepared to secure economic well-being.

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

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

- self-assessment undertaken by local public service providers
- a survey of children and young people
- performance data
- the findings of the contemporaneous inspection of the youth service
- planning documents
- information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision
- briefings from staff within inspectorates, commissions and other public bodies in contact with local providers.

6. The second stage included 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 two neighbourhoods, Howdon/Battle Hill and West North Shields. It also included gathering evidence on 10 key judgements, selected because of

their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. This included discussions with elected members of the local authority and their equivalents in other public agencies, officers from these agencies, service users, and community representatives. A review of case files for children and young people receiving support from a number of local agencies was also included.

Context

7. North Tyneside is a borough in the north-east of England with a population of approximately 192,300, of whom 45,100 are children and young people, with 1.9% part of a minority ethnic group.

8. The borough improved its national deprivation ranking from 69th in 2000 to 80th in 2004, but there remains a significant gap between the most affluent areas and those with high levels of deprivation and poverty. Approximately 11% (21,000) of the population live in areas which are amongst the most deprived 10% in England, and almost 32% (62,000) live in areas considered to be among the most deprived 20%. Health and educational attainment remain a challenge in neighbourhood renewal areas. Life expectancy and general health are improving but are still below the national average. Around 22% of the population described themselves as having a long-term limiting illness or disability in the 2001 census.

9. In 2005, the borough created the children's services authority and initiated Children's Trust arrangements. The Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board was established in 2004 and brings together partners from the council, the Strategic Health Authority, the Primary Care Trust (PCT), the police, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and voluntary and community organisations. Each partner on the board has lead responsibility for, and reviews, key elements of the strategy. The underpinning sub-group structure focuses on commissioning arrangements and the performance management of the Children and Young People's Plan. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) was established in 2004.

10. Four area children's strategy groups, which involve the voluntary and community sectors at local level, along with other partner agencies, are tasked with determining local priorities and engaging parents and young people to improve outcomes. Specific action plans have been developed for each locality. Two area-based children's teams will be established by April and June 2007 and two further teams by December. These teams will coordinate the delivery of services for vulnerable children and young people.

11. North Tyneside has also identified an overarching outcome, 'be spirited', to help young people develop personally, morally and spiritually. This outcome promotes a sense of self by enabling children and young people to gain self-esteem and emotional security and to develop their ability to express themselves creatively and socially. It also supports children and young people's

growth as 'spirited' and moral beings with a sense of shared responsibility and commitment to each other, their community and the environment.

12. The North East LSC is a partner with the council, the Connexions service, Tyne Metropolitan College, the North Tyneside Work-Based Learning Network and schools in developing the 14–19 strategy. Post-16 education and training are provided by Tyne Metropolitan College and its sixth form academy, eight school sixth forms and five work-based training providers. The college has centres of vocational excellence in mechatronics and early years. The contract for Education to Employment provision is held by Barnardo's at Palmersville Training, which controls 50 places and sub-contracts to four other providers. Adult and community learning, including family learning, is provided by the council's Adult Learning Alliance.

13. Primary care for children in North Tyneside is provided by the North Tyneside PCT. Northumbria Health Care NHS Foundation Trust is the main provider of acute health services. Other children's hospital services and accident and emergency services are provided by Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which also provides services to surrounding areas. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are provided by the Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Trust, which also provides services to many other surrounding areas. The trusts providing health services for the children of North Tyneside fall within the North East Strategic Health Authority.

14. There are 56 first and primary schools in the borough, and 15 secondary schools, of which four are middle deemed secondary schools. Eight secondary schools have sixth forms. All eligible secondary schools have specialist status and two are full service extended schools. There are five local authority special schools, one nursery school, two independent special schools, one independent primary school and one independent secondary school. 1.7% of children and young people are deemed to be young carers and there are approximately 180 asylum seekers of school age. There are 107 children and young people on the child protection register and 1,472 children have open referrals. 216 children and young people are looked after by the local authority, of whom over two-thirds are boys. Across the borough, 927 children and young people were charged, warned or reprimanded for offending between April 2004 and March 2005.

Summary Report

Outcomes for children and young people

15. **Outcomes for children and young people in North Tyneside are good.** Most are healthy and achieve well. They are increasingly well prepared for working life and many have very good opportunities to make decisions and take responsibility within their schools, their communities and across the borough. Most health indicators are better than in similar areas. Mortality rates and oral health at age five years are better than the national average. However,

more expectant mothers smoke than the national average, the teenage pregnancy rate, though reducing, is high and almost one in three children in the borough is overweight or obese. Most children and young people are safe. Educational standards are often better than those in similar areas. Children make very good progress in the early years and most continue to make at least adequate progress by the age of 11 and often good progress by the age of 14. They make good, and in some cases very good, progress between the ages of 11 and 16, achieving above average standards at GCSE. The rate of progression to further education and training at the age of 16 is rising and compares well to that in similar authorities; for vulnerable groups, the participation rates are high. While post-16 standards on GCE and work-based courses are rising at a faster rate than nationally, the attainment at Level 3 is below that found nationally and a significant number of young people at the age of 17 discontinue their programmes of study. Between September 2006 and the end of March 2007, the number of pupils excluded from schools reduced to zero. School attendance is in line with national averages. While the percentage of first-time offenders has fallen, re-offending rates remain high. Across the borough, children and young people have many and varied opportunities to contribute their views and participate in decision-making. Too many children are affected by poor housing.

The impact of local services

16. The impact of local services in improving outcomes for children and young people is good. The lives of children and young people in North Tyneside are improving as a result of dynamic partnerships, a shared vision and strong leadership within the council and within the Children, Young People and Families Board. Good local knowledge has supported the accurate identification of need and the creation of new solutions to local issues. The partnership has built on the track record of success in sectors such as education in order to forge links and develop strategies to tackle health and social issues in the community. The revised structures to deliver many services for children and young people at local level demonstrate an excellent understanding of how to build on areas of strength and effect change. The decision to place schools at the centre of the four area children's strategy groups has ensured that the inclusive agenda is shared by all key partners, who together take responsibility for the achievements and well-being of all children and young people in the borough. The commitment and enthusiasm of staff and stakeholders is palpable, reflecting the quality of consultation, communication and involvement across the partnership. Children and young people are key players. Their voice is central to the Children and Young People's Plan and is reflected in the many and varied strategies for their involvement in consultation, planning and increasingly in the review of services. The arrangements for the management of performance are good; the partnership has a good understanding of what it does well and what needs to be improved. Its capacity to improve further is outstanding.

Being healthy

17. The impact of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. There is well-integrated partnership working in a variety of settings to provide parents and carers with good advice and support to keep their children healthy. Initiatives are making a difference to the low numbers of mothers breastfeeding and the high teenage conception rate but have made no impact on the number of expectant mothers who smoke during pregnancy. Healthy lifestyles for children and young people in school and in the community are promoted well, with good access to a wide range of sport and exercise opportunities. Access to mental health services is good and provision is well matched to need, including a dedicated service for adolescents. The substance misuse service, N2L (Never Too Late), provides a comprehensive and effective treatment programme. Provision for looked after children is good, with a joint approach by health, children's social care and education services. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive a generally adequate service, and the service for those with complex needs is good. A designated GP service offers good support for asylum-seeking families who are in transition, with linked midwifery and health visiting staff.

Staying safe

18. The impact of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good. An established culture of safeguarding and effective cross-agency partnership work keeps children in North Tyneside safe. Most children and parents seen by inspectors understand and value this approach and children's views are taken seriously, resulting in good multi-agency action to make them safer. Policies to keep children safe are comprehensive and used well by staff in local agencies. Children at most risk of harm are protected effectively. The LSCB retains good oversight over the monitoring of child protection activity; board members take their duties seriously and are focused on improvement. Firm action has been taken to ensure that all settings comply with vetting requirements for staff, volunteers and carers.

19. Preventative services are of good quality and are widely available, with some examples of very good work. Services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their parents or carers are good overall. Where there are gaps in services, for example in relation to domestic violence, these are known and are being tackled. Assessments of children in need, including those with disabilities and those in need of protection, are undertaken and recorded well by children's social care and are subject to good management oversight. Children on the child protection register receive high quality, multi-agency support and protection. Their plans are well implemented and reviewed. Children and their parents are mostly well involved, although they do not make a contribution to service planning. Good management and effective preventative work ensure that children only become looked after when there is no alternative, and most live in stable placements with foster carers

who receive very good levels of inter-agency support. However, there is sometimes insufficient choice of placements.

Enjoying and achieving

20. **The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** Parents have good opportunities to engage with their children's education. Parents report positively on the support and guidance they receive. The provision for early years is very good. Many outcomes are above the national average and compare well with those in similar local authorities. Support for schools and school improvement is good. The authority has an excellent track record of having no schools in special measures because it focuses its improvement work on those schools and areas that are most at risk. This has helped to raise attainment in targeted areas and for vulnerable groups, particularly at Key Stage 4. However, the picture overall is mixed. While analysis of data has been used effectively to improve outcomes for more able pupils at Key Stage 2, further work is needed to make consistent progress on closing the gap between the attainment of vulnerable groups and their peers.

21. The majority of children and young people enjoy school and know how well they are doing. Attendance is in line with the national average but static. At the time of the review, there had been no permanent exclusions in North Tyneside in the previous six months. Fixed-term exclusions are reducing because of the strongly supportive inter-school ethos and impressive collaborative work between the authority and its schools. Provision for those who are excluded is very good. It is well managed and monitored, and an imaginative vocational curriculum successfully motivates these young people. The provision the council makes for the recreational needs of children and young people, including those who are looked after and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is good. The council is investing highly in improving this provision further. North Tyneside has high aspirations for its looked after children. They are supported well and educational outcomes are above national averages and improving. Their attendance has been highlighted as a priority for improvement. Provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in mainstream and special schools is good.

Making a positive contribution

22. **The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.** There is a strong culture of young people's involvement and participation in service planning and decision making in North Tyneside. They receive good support for their development in schools and other education and care settings. Good inter-agency collaboration supports many children and young people through changes and challenges in their lives. Parenting support is good and inclusive of families in challenging circumstances. Adults offer good models of behaviour and mentoring for young people, including those in vulnerable groups. The needs of young carers have

recently been recognised and strategies to meet their needs are being developed.

23. Young people participate well in democratic processes and decision making, their views are effectively incorporated in many forums, including in the development of the Children and Young People's Plan. Greater consistency of participation is now being achieved across the partnership, and the involvement of young people in the review of the Children and Young People's Plan has set the precedent for their engagement in evaluating the impact of the partnership's initiatives. Young people, including those with disabilities, are encouraged to participate and are well supported when they volunteer.

24. The multi-agency response to anti-social behaviour has had a good impact in some parts of the borough, for example in Wallsend. There has been a very significant reduction in the numbers of first-time offenders across the borough. However, re-offending rates remain high. Offending by looked after children is beginning to decrease. Looked after children's participation is well supported both in their individual reviews and in enabling their collective voice to be heard and acknowledged. Corporate parenting is adequate overall; it is well supported by officers but the understanding and involvement of most councillors is not sufficiently developed. Children with disabilities have been consulted on the development of a charter to support their rights, but do not currently have sufficient opportunities to participate in making the decisions that impact on key areas of their lives.

Achieving economic well-being

25. **The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.** Targeting of resources to help families and young people to achieve economic well-being is effective. Childcare is good and parents receive well-planned support for increasing their skills as parents and for employment. The impressive range of vocational and work-based options at Key Stage 4 has contributed to much improved participation, motivation and attainment for this age group. Young people receive well-coordinated advice and guidance for transition to further education, training and employment. While post-16 participation rates are increasing, and numbers in work-based learning are high, a significant number later discontinue their education and training. In some areas of the borough, too few progress to higher education. Vulnerable groups are supported well at transition periods and a high proportion, compared to national averages, progress to further and higher education. Young people with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities have limited access to supported employment opportunities at the age of 19. Strong partnerships at strategic and provider levels have contributed to an effective, well-managed 14–19 strategy, which has improved the range and quality of provision for this age group. Post-16 attainment is improving at a fast rate on GCE and work-based courses, although overall outcomes at Level 3 are still below national comparators. Regeneration projects and housing

strategies are well focused on the needs of families with children and of young people.

Service management

26. **The management of services for children and young people is good. The capacity to improve further is outstanding.** Strong partnership working and a commitment to improve outcomes based on the rights of children and young people underpin services in North Tyneside. Ambitions are excellent. The area's overriding ambition of closing the gap between the most and the least disadvantaged runs through the community strategy, the council plan and the Children and Young People's Plan. Over 4,000 children and young people contributed to the development of the Children and Young People's Plan. Prioritisation by partners is good. Following a borough-wide analysis of need, more detailed analyses were undertaken in the four area children's strategy group sub-areas, which led to the identification of local priorities. However, Children and Young People's Plan priorities are not specific in ensuring that the needs of all disadvantaged groups are addressed systematically. The Children and Young People's Plan, together with partners' supporting service plans, focus well on targets but are less precise on interim milestones to monitor their progress.

27. The overall capacity of local services is good. The Elected Mayor and Portfolio Holder are highly visible champions for children and young people supported, unusually for North Tyneside, by political consensus. There is impressive leadership and management across the partnership, exemplified by an excellent strategic director of children, young people and learning. Good partnership working and the securing of external funding enhance capacity. Some good services are provided at low cost, such as the school improvement service, youth service and school transport. Conversely, expenditure on family support services is very high compared to other councils. Value for money in children's services is, therefore, adequate overall. Performance management across the partnership is good. The area is developing a culture of performance management that is generally focused on outcomes and is already well embedded in some places. Children and young people are increasingly involved in performance management.

28. The capacity to improve further is outstanding. Strong leadership, good partnership working and a relentless focus on performance to identify and tackle problems have led to significant improvements in outcomes over the last three years, particularly in education and social care. Lessons learned from these improvements are now being applied more widely and are supported by increasingly robust multi-agency systems and structures. The authority's self-assessment is accurate and demonstrates a good knowledge of strengths and weaknesses across the partnership.

Grades

Grades awarded:

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

	Local services overall	Council services	Health services
Being healthy	3		
Staying safe	3		
Enjoying and achieving	3		
Making a positive contribution	3		
Achieving economic well-being	3		
Service management	3		
Capacity to improve	4	4	
Children's services		3	
The education service		3	
The social care services for children		3	
The health service for children			3

Recommendations

For action over the next six months

The council and its partners should:

- develop the 14–19 strategy to improve the participation and performance of underachieving groups at Level 3
- revise the Children and Young People's Plan to ensure that the needs of all disadvantaged groups are addressed systematically through the six outcomes and delivery plan
- ensure that the Children and Young People's Plan and supporting service plans include specific targets and milestones to monitor their progress effectively.

The council should:

- develop the contribution of all elected members to corporate parenting through scrutiny and dialogue with children and young people looked after by the council.

For action in the longer term

The council and its partners should:

- reduce the incidence of women who smoke during pregnancy
- develop supported progression routes into employment for young people with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities after the age of 19.

The council should:

- consolidate and improve educational outcomes for children at Key Stage 2
- improve the educational outcomes for vulnerable groups to better match that of their peers.

Main Report

Outcomes for children and young people

29. Outcomes for children and young people in North Tyneside are good.

30. Children and young people are mostly healthy. Most children and young people who responded to the joint area review survey report that they feel healthy. Most health indicators are good. Immunisation rates at ages two and five, oral health at age five and mortality around the time of birth, in infancy and up to the age of 15 are all better than national averages. An effective programme has successfully reduced substance misuse. Nevertheless, some outcomes are poor, though in most cases improving. More expectant mothers smoke than the national average and the trend is static. The

proportion of mothers initiating breastfeeding is showing an improvement but remains lower than the national average. Teenage pregnancy shows a sustained and marked downward trend though it remains above the national average. Almost one in three children in North Tyneside is either overweight or obese, which is worse than the national average but better than the regional average for the north-east of England.

31. **Children and young people appear safe.** Almost all children and young people who responded to the survey for this review say that they feel safe in school and in their local area. Children are also safer as a result of action to reduce numbers killed or seriously injured on the roads, which has reduced at a greater rate than the national average.

32. A good range of early intervention services and effective multi-agency working means that referrals to children's social care are appropriately low. The large majority of initial assessments, and almost all core assessments, are completed within required timescales. The total number of assessments is significantly lower than in similar authorities but the rate of re-referrals is stable and is in line. Children in need of protection are identified promptly and the number of initial child protection conferences held within required timescales is better than in similar authorities. A well-managed and effective child protection system ensures that all children are allocated to a suitably qualified social worker and all children have their cases regularly reviewed. The number of children on the child protection register is safely kept at a low level. Effective multi-agency child protection plans result in most children being safely removed from the register within two years; the number of children who are re-registered has recently reduced and is now in line with similar authorities.

33. Good preventative work means that there are fewer looked after children than in similar areas and all are supported by suitably qualified workers. Almost all children live in stable foster care placements. Numbers of children with three or more moves during the year are low, which is very good, and the number of moves for foster children in long-term placements remains at an acceptable level. Adoptions of looked after children are in line with similar areas, although too few are placed within required timescales. Almost all children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have good quality transition plans.

34. **Children and young people achieve well.** By the end of the Foundation Stage, children have made very good progress and attain around the national average when they enter Key Stage 1. At least satisfactory progress is maintained through the key stages. By the time pupils reach GCSE, the numbers achieving five or more A* to C grades are above the national average, both overall and including English and mathematics. This is well above the performance of similar authorities. The performance of looked after children is above the national average but remains well below that of their peers in North Tyneside. Generally, the performance of the small numbers of Black and minority ethnic children and young people has fluctuated over the last three years but with some notable improvement for Bangladeshi pupils at Key Stage

4. The gap between boys' and girls' attainment at Key Stages 2 and 3 is similar to the gap nationally. Despite slight improvement recently, it has not been consistent from year to year. Children with special educational needs make good progress compared to their prior attainment, and the number of GCSE passes gained by those educated other than at school has increased substantially, more than doubling between 2003–04 and 2004–05.

35. Attendance is broadly in line with the national averages and with similar authorities for both primary and secondary aged children and young people and has remained static for the last three years. Authorised and unauthorised absences in primary schools are lower than national averages and similar authorities. In secondary schools, absences are in line with national averages and lower than in similar authorities. At the time of the review, there had been no permanent exclusions in the previous six months. Fixed-term exclusions in secondary schools have reduced substantially, from 417 in 2001–02 to 317 in 2005–06. In primary schools they reduced slightly, from 75 to 71, over the same period. In special schools and other settings, they increased from 46 to 177 in 2003–04 but fell to 135 in 2005–06. The total percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need in all school types was higher than national and statistical comparators in 2006 but is reducing.

36. **Children and young people have a good range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility, and many make a good contribution to their communities.** Children and young people benefit from positive relationships with professionals and make good progress in their emotional, social and personal development. Significant numbers participate in volunteering activities and provide peer support in such activities. There are high levels of participation on representative bodies, in consultations and in democratic processes. Some young people participate in the management of services and in the recruitment and training of staff and volunteers. For most young people, transitions at different stages of their lives are well supported, and for more vulnerable young people there is effective and sustained support. Many looked after children participate well in their reviews and contribute collectively on issues that affect them.

37. There has been a significant drop in the number of first-time offenders, although the number of re-offenders remains relatively high. Recent efforts to reduce the frequency of offending by looked after young people are having a positive effect.

38. **Children and young people are able to achieve economic well-being and are prepared well for working life.** Over 700 young people at Key Stage 4 take part in collaborative vocational and work-based learning. The attainment and level of exclusions for this age group have improved significantly and compare well to national averages. The proportion of young people in education, employment and training at the age of 16 is rising and above the regional average. Progression rates for care leavers, supervised juveniles and young people learning difficulties and/or disabilities are high. A

high proportion of care leavers progress to higher education, although participation among young people as a whole, while rising and around the regional average, is below that found nationally, and in some wards is very low. The proportion of young people between the ages of 16 and 19 who are not in education, employment and training is around that found in similar areas but above the national average. The success rate of young people aged 16 to 18 at Level 1 is rising rapidly and is now well above the national average. The proportion of young people attaining Levels 2 and 3 by the age of 19 is rising, but though around the regional average, remains below the national average. The attainment of full Level 2 across the 16 to 18 age group is above the national average, reflecting an improving trend. The average points score on GCE AS and A level courses is increasing at a rate faster than that seen nationally and is in line with that in similar authorities but below the national average. While almost all make the progress expected on these courses, there is too much variability in the progress that students make in different institutions across the borough. Success rates in work-based learning have risen sharply to around the national average. The use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families and young people is rare, although too many families are affected by poor housing. The rate of increase in the number of childcare places and take-up of benefits is high.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

39. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** A good range of multi-agency services works well in a variety of settings to provide advice and support to parents and carers. A specific initiative to engage fathers shows good initial results. The children's centres provide easy access to health and support services, which include baby massage, advice on diet and on emotional needs of children, and specific sessions for deaf children and deaf parents. These are all viewed very positively by parents and carers. The extended services provided, for example, at New York primary school, a designated children's centre in a deprived area of the borough, offer a particularly impressive example of addressing health matters, through a close working relationship between the school, the local GP and health visitor. There is good support for teenage mothers. Well-planned initiatives have resulted in a rise in the proportion of mothers initiating breastfeeding. The health needs of asylum-seeking families are met well by a nominated transitional care general practice with supporting midwifery and health visiting staff.

40. Services work closely together to promote healthy lifestyles. Universal health screening services are effective and all children aged under five have contact with a health visitor. A proactive approach to immunisation, including opportunistic and domiciliary immunisation, has contributed to rates that exceed the national average. The 'Spoony' approach to promoting the five outcomes of Every Child Matters, based on a wooden spoon character, has

caught the imagination of pre-school children very effectively. Health promotion in schools is good and the youth service makes a valuable contribution to sex and relationship education. Drop-in sessions are available in school and community settings and Plan B, promoting the availability of emergency contraception, has had a high uptake since it was introduced three months ago. These initiatives have contributed to a sustained and marked downward trend in teenage pregnancy.

41. The baseline measurement for the obesity strategy, taken in 2006, showed that 29% of children are overweight or obese, which is above the national average but below the regional average. The comprehensive strategy includes a series of targets to close the gap in childhood obesity levels between the neighbourhood renewal areas and North Tyneside as a whole. Annual targets are in line with Strategic Health Authority guidance and focus on reducing the rate of increase of obesity. A successful Healthy Schools programme operates across the borough and 96% of schools have achieved Healthy Schools award status. Children and young people have a good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and a school survey showed a 71% reduction in the volume of chips consumed and a rise of 23% in the amount of fruit and vegetables eaten. There are good sport and exercise programmes, including innovative options such as cheer-leading and Kids Get Active which targets overweight children. The Free Swims for Juniors programme has attracted a high number of visits.

42. Access to acute hospital services is good. The children's unit at North Tyneside General Hospital, which provides in-patient care, has an ambulatory care area and a dedicated adolescent annexe. The accident and emergency department has separate children's facilities and there is a good accident prevention strategy. Targeted work has reduced the incidence of dental decay in two areas with poor oral health.

43. Children and young people have good access to appropriate mental health services. There is a strong emphasis on preventative work in schools, with initiatives such as Teen Talk supported by voluntary organisations, for example Relate, and a specialist nurse for preventative work in a school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The response to referrals of young people who offend is prompt. Multi-agency pathways for the diagnosis of children with possible autistic spectrum disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder have been established. N2L provides a comprehensive, effective and targeted service for young people who misuse drugs and alcohol, and has been successful in reducing substance abuse for 51 young people who accessed a treatment programme last year. There is a strongly supportive service for pregnant women who abuse drugs, which has been effective in minimising the number of their children taken into care. An early intervention service for psychosis supports children and their families. CAMHS have a dedicated team for adolescents aged 15 to 18 years and this, working in liaison with a psychiatrist from the adult mental health service, has facilitated smooth transition to adult care.

44. There are a high number of annual health assessments and dental checks for looked after children. An emotional well-being screening tool has been introduced and a designated doctor and nurse support looked after children; the nurse links with healthcare providers for children who are placed out of the area. A very good integrated approach to health and education for this group of children and young people is provided by the Raising Health and Education in Looked After Children Team, which includes a substance misuse worker. Access to dedicated CAMHS, which include psychologists and therapeutic social workers, is good. Foster carers receive good support in matters relating to health.

45. A recently introduced approach to assessment and care planning for children who have a complex learning disability, using the Common Assessment Framework and the national early support programme, incorporates regular parental feedback. This approach has been effective. The waiting times for occupational therapy are unacceptably long and significant funding has recently been allocated to increase staffing. Mental health support for children and young people with a severe learning disability is good. A new pathway has been developed for joint assessment by the Community Learning Disability Team and CAMHS for those with a less severe learning disability. The creation of a community matron post for children with autism is highly innovative. Respite options are good and include facilities and expertise to manage the complex health needs of children and young people with serious disability. Transition planning takes good account of health needs.

Staying safe

46. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.** Almost all children and young people who responded to the survey for this review, or were seen during it, say that they feel safe at school, although a few do not feel safe on the streets and on the metro.

47. The LSCB has a good focus on safety through the innovative Child Accident Prevention Strategy. Parents on low incomes with young children have better access to safe equipment and their homes are now safer through the Safety Crackers scheme. Good initiatives are in place to minimise dangers posed by some adults, for example through the children's centre parenting programmes and the recent effective focus on internet safety. Policies have been appropriately strengthened to enable staff to effectively assess and manage risk so that they are able to undertake their work safely and ensure that more children are able to enjoy out of school visits in safety.

48. The LSCB is well established, appropriately resourced and effectively led. A solid culture of improvement, through business planning, performance monitoring and review, has ensured that weaknesses are identified and improvements made. Good action has been taken to ensure that members fulfil their statutory duty to work together to improve the well-being of children. The LSCB has made reducing bullying and harassment a key priority within its

staying safe strategy, so that when children describe feeling bullied, they are listened to and appropriate action is taken. The LSCB has also correctly recognised the need to improve the recording and reporting of incidents of bullying and harassment. No serious case review has been held within the last three years. However, management reviews have been appropriately undertaken and the learning from these has led to identifiable improvements in policy and practice, for example the development of the Hidden Harm action plan. There is a good approach to the management of sex offenders in the community, with local representation at most meetings and appropriate liaison with the LSCB. Designated staff for child protection and for looked after children in health and education settings are in place and all receive good support.

49. Robust action by the council has ensured that all settings, including schools, now comply with government guidance in relation to safe recruitment and vetting of staff, volunteers and carers. Systems to track children missing from education and care and children on the child protection register are effective. Inter-agency procedures to respond to complaints against staff working with children work well.

50. There is a good range of well-coordinated and appropriately targeted services for vulnerable children and their families which are effectively promoted. Children's centres and extended schools make a particularly strong and creative contribution, as does the well-evaluated Mellow Parenting programme and specific work with parents with learning disabilities. Parents identify clear benefits for their children and themselves.

51. Policies and procedures to safeguard and protect children are in line with the latest government guidance. A comprehensive programme of multi-agency training ensures that front line staff, including those working in schools and with adults, are fully aware of their safeguarding and child protection responsibilities. A few staff groups have not yet received sufficient training and plans are now in place to address this. A good start has been made to implement the Common Assessment Framework, which has been piloted in two areas, with over 800 staff trained. However, regular and systematic use of the assessment tool is still at an early stage.

52. All agencies work well together to identify and protect children affected by domestic abuse. Staff, including those in schools, are well supported by clear practice standards and guidance. Voluntary organisations, such as Avenues and Acorns, provide good quality support and counselling for children and adults. However, there are recognised gaps in housing provision. Services for perpetrators are also recognised as inadequate. A recent campaign by Northumbria police has resulted in improved arrest rates and more referrals of victims to local agencies. Although oversight of victims of domestic violence by social services has improved, the extent to which more women are engaging successfully with services is not tracked sufficiently. Effective action has been taken to strengthen strategic coordination of support for this group.

53. Thresholds for early intervention and children's social care are well understood by staff from all agencies and are almost always consistently applied. They have been recently clarified by the development of inter-agency guidance. Agencies make timely and appropriate referrals of children in need and in need of protection to children's social care. Arrangements to receive and respond to referrals are well managed; decision making is prompt and transfer processes operate well. Appropriate action has recently been taken to address the reasons for low numbers of initial and core assessments, and recent data supplied by the council show this is beginning to result in increased numbers. Children in need benefit from good multi-agency care planning. The standard of assessment and case recording and presentation has improved as a result of systematic audit and is now good overall, although a few assessments lack a thorough analysis of risk.

54. Cases of children, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in immediate need of protection, are promptly investigated and effectively assessed, for example by the Child Protection Unit which is jointly operated by the police and social services. Very secure systems for child protection ensure that all agencies share information, participate effectively and produce good quality child protection plans, which are reviewed well by experienced independent reviewing officers. Most children and parents receive good support from committed staff to participate in their child in need and child protection plans, and have access to independent support and advocacy from a voluntary agency. However, a few do not feel fully prepared and their views do not systematically inform service planning.

55. Preventative work is effective and good action is taken by senior managers to ensure that children only become looked after where there is no alternative. The number of children placed out of the area has been safely and significantly reduced and the range of local placements has increased steadily. Despite this, there is not always sufficient choice. Children who are looked after receive good support from local agencies and regular visits from social workers, although continuity is variable for some. Their cases are well reviewed and good action is taken to ensure that children are in permanent placements. The fostering service is very well managed and provides excellent support and training to foster carers and their children. Children's homes serve children well. New arrangements for identifying and monitoring the very small numbers of children living in private foster care known to the council have been strengthened, but the number of children supported is low.

56. Agencies share information well to meet the needs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and children are well prepared for meetings to review their cases. Service provision includes a flexible and well-targeted short breaks service, provided by well-trained and supported carers. Most parents are offered an assessment of their own needs.

Enjoying and achieving

57. **The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good, with some very good features.** Parents have good opportunities to engage in their children's education. They have access to clear and informative literature and can access a good range of support through schools and children's centres. Parents report positively on the support and guidance they receive.

58. The provision for early years is very good. Children in need have good access to free places at children's centres. The proportion of settings judged good and outstanding is above the national average. In consequence, most outcomes are above the national average and children make very good progress. The authority has a very good relationship with all settings and monitors the provision very effectively.

59. Support for schools and school improvement is good. The authority has an excellent track record of maintaining no schools in special measures and the one school that had a notice to improve in 2006 had it removed within the year. This is the result of targeting resources towards those schools and areas that are in most need. Schools receive robust and effective challenge. One factor is the way that data from individual schools are shared transparently across the borough, enabling schools to make comparisons and improve their own practice. The school improvement service provides good value for money and makes effective use of the experience and expertise of headteachers, for example in leading local collaborative groups and monitoring the quality of alternative educational provision. Work on improving outcomes for pupils who are gifted and talented is good. The authority is now well placed to use its comprehensive data to improve outcomes at Key Stage 2 and to plot, examine and improve the progress of vulnerable groups in order to begin to close the gap in their comparative attainment.

60. The majority of pupils say they enjoy school. They cite as reasons good relationships in school, the lack of bullying and the many activities that take place after school. They also say they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to get better. One exciting initiative is the impressive learning portal. Imaginative materials such as personalised space (My Stuff), the rap revision programmes and the chat line discussions are increasingly engaging young people, particularly those who have hitherto been less well motivated. The council has an effective and pragmatic approach to reducing the surplus places in primary schools. It has been appointed as a national Pathfinder for the future design of capital programmes, which has led to improvements to borough primary schools. Admission procedures are good. Guidance is clear and almost all parents get their first choice of schools for their children.

61. Work in neighbourhood renewal areas and in particular schools is having a positive impact on improving attendance. Nevertheless, the council has rightly

identified the need for continued work to break the 'flat line' that has occurred in recent years. A significant improvement in reducing rates of exclusion in 2006 was a result of particularly impressive collaborative work between the authority and its secondary schools, which produced a very effective Managed Moves protocol. Thus, there were no permanent exclusions between September 2006 and March 2007, and fixed-term exclusions are reducing because the strongly supportive inter-school ethos is keeping most hard to manage children and young people within the school system. Good use is made of alternative accredited activities and the young people who were observed during the neighbourhood study indicated that the experiences had been highly motivating and, for some, life changing. The range of provision for those who are excluded is also very good, through the pupil referral unit, the Youth Project and accelerated learning provision. The Young Mothers' Unit is judged outstanding by Ofsted and provides an increasing range of GCSE courses. Headteachers are confident that the greatly improved range of opportunities for alternative curriculum provision in school and educational provision other than at school will enable them to sustain and improve on this positive picture.

62. The provision the council makes for the recreational needs of children and young people, including those who are looked after and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is good. The young people who guided inspectors around the two neighbourhoods were generally very positive about the sport and leisure opportunities available to them. However, some reported that there were limited things to do when not at school, especially for girls, and that it can be difficult to find out what is going on. They feel strongly that there is a need for supervised venues where they can relax and socialise without the need to take part in organised activities. To a large extent, the council is addressing these concerns. A £3 million programme of investment in play spaces has been started across the borough and work on extended schools is progressing well. The evaluation of the council's involvement in the national DfES Pathfinder programme for extended schools was positive about how the schools were integrated into the whole local authority strategy.

63. Provision for looked after children is good as a result of the governance group, championing arrangements and the Raising Health and Education in Looked After Children Team. This group of professionals has high aspirations for looked after children and young people and a 'never say no' approach. It provides individual, well-targeted, multi-agency support as a result of good monitoring and data analysis. For example, the provision of an innovative GCSE course using the Marden City Learning Centre has helped four looked after young people with significant disabilities gain high grades for GCSE photography. The attainment of looked after children at GCSE is well above national averages and those in similar local authorities. Their attainment is also beginning to improve at earlier key stages, but overall remains well below that of their peers in North Tyneside. Strategies to improve the attendance of looked after children have succeeded to some extent and the authority rightly anticipates improvement to continue into 2007–08 and beyond. Nevertheless, attendance remains below national and statistical neighbour averages.

64. Provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The inclusion strategy is widely supported by mainstream and special school headteachers, who have been fully involved in its development. The authority is successfully reducing the number of statements of special educational needs and increasing provision within the borough, for example for children and young people within the autistic spectrum, so reducing the number of out of borough placements. School inspections show that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are generally well provided for in inclusive environments. Results for this group are improving at Key Stages 2 and 3 and for the A* to G grade indicators at GCSE.

Making a positive contribution

65. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people make a positive contribution to society is good.** There is good support for children and young people's social, emotional and personal development. Professionals provide constructive role models and adults offer high quality support through, for example, learning and behaviour mentoring. Positive relationships between adults and children are evident in care, education and leisure settings, and targeted work with more vulnerable children in different groups is making a significant impact. Parents needing support, including parents with disabilities, have access to skilled support through children's centres and related services.

66. The quality of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children and young people is high and above the national average. The introduction of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme builds on existing work to target mentoring and behaviour support at the most vulnerable, and contributes to a reduction in exclusions. High quality parenting support, provided through children's centres and other services, is available to parents of children with learning disabilities and parents of children at risk of offending.

67. Children and young people, including those from more vulnerable groups, are supported well through changes and challenges in their lives. Schools provide effective support to children and young people through transitions at all stages of their education. Significant numbers of children and young people in high risk groups, including young offenders and looked after children, receive effective mentoring through the Approved Provider Mentoring Project. The monitoring of individual goals shows good evidence of impact and positive outcomes, including the reduction of first-time offending. The needs of young carers have been recognised through consultation and a new strategy launched in June 2006. Good progress has been made in identifying young carers, and some targeted services are in place, but awareness among front line professionals is variable and the local authority has only recently matched resources to emerging needs.

68. Positive engagement with young people is very well embedded in the culture and processes of the partnership. Strategic planning and the Children and Young People's Plan itself reflect the human rights-based approach to children and young people's needs. The participation strategy has made a good impact in involving young people in the processes of the partnership, although this is not yet uniform across all partners. The Hear by Right standard is being implemented to ensure a more consistent approach to listening to young people. They are involved systematically in service planning and management at a number of levels. The chairs of the Youth Council and area youth forums meet regularly with the Elected Mayor, Lead Member and the Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Learning. A group of young people has been trained in supporting the Elected Mayor in making decisions about the allocation of bids to his well-being fund. Young people have also been included in staff recruitment and training for foster carers, and they are standing members of school councils, neighbourhood groups and management committees in targeted statutory and voluntary services. There is good support for young people's volunteering, including peer support to children with disabilities participating in volunteering opportunities. The Millennium Volunteers Scheme for children with disabilities has received national recognition. Children and young people have been involved in the review of the Children and Young People's Plan and it is recognised that they could be further involved in assessing and evaluating the impact of partnership initiatives on their lives.

69. Effective multi-agency partnership work, including with the voluntary sector, supports preventative approaches to anti-social behaviour; the impact of this work is good, with significant reduction in anti-social behaviour in parts of the borough, for example Wallsend and Whitley Bay. Much of this behaviour is alcohol-related, and an alcohol strategy for young people led by the PCT is in place. Other measures, including Positive Futures and the Childsafe initiative, have achieved significant local impact in specific areas of the borough. Plans to extend them to other areas are being discussed.

70. Action to prevent offending and to reduce re-offending has had significant impact in relation to the numbers of first-time offenders. Partnership arrangements between Northumbria police, schools, the council, the health services and voluntary and community organisations are now well established. The Youth Offending Team includes CAMHS and N2L (drug and alcohol) workers. The Youth Inclusion Support project has successfully reduced the number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system. The need to tackle re-offending rates has been identified as a priority within the local area agreement. Offending by looked after children increased during the last performance year. The reasons for this, related to the application of thresholds for children and young people in one area of the service, have been identified and successful action taken.

71. Looked after children participate very well in their reviews, using a variety of media for making their contribution. They are well supported to contribute to strategic decisions through the Have Your Say group and a dedicated

participation officer. Work by this group has included developing a charter for looked after children and informing the borough's response to the Government Green Paper *Care Matters*. Looked after children also contributed to the recent corporate parenting review. Senior officers work effectively as champions to respond to the needs of looked after children but the work of councillors in fulfilling their corporate parenting responsibilities is underdeveloped.

72. Children with disabilities have contributed well to improving work on transitions arrangements and to developing a charter for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It is planned that they will be involved in evaluating its impact.

Achieving economic well-being

73. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.** Effective targeting of resources has resulted in a significant increase in good quality childcare places. The Children's Information Service works well with other agencies to maximise the take-up of benefits and employment opportunities. The range, accessibility and quality of information provided by the Children's Information Service has led to contact with increasing numbers of clients. Families, including those in crisis, have good access to support for parenting through the children's centres. The Mellow Parenting programme, for example, has given parents confidence in their parenting skills and helped to improve relationships with their children. Family learning has been well targeted, using novel approaches to developing literacy and numeracy skills. Although there are good subsidies for leisure activities for young people below the age of 16, some are not sufficiently aware of them and some young people over the age of 16 report that they are deterred from participation in activities by the cost.

74. The responsiveness of schools, colleges and work-based learning providers has ensured very good participation in a wide range of flexible vocational and work-based learning opportunities at Key Stage 4, although in a few vocational areas there is gender stereotyping in the choices made. Young people in schools have good opportunities for developing work-related and enterprise skills. They receive good advice and guidance about the full range of post-16 progression routes from Connexions advisors. Overall participation rates in work-based learning are high except, for example, for females and some ethnic groups. A range of well-targeted initiatives has supported increased participation in post-16 education, employment and training following the end of year 11. Plans are in place to increase the participation rate after the age of 17. There are some excellent programmes aimed at securing continued participation and employment, for example the Partners in Work initiative which guarantees employment for those taking part. Nevertheless, the range of pathways to employment and higher education is not yet meeting the needs of all young people. The Aim Higher partnership has played an effective role in improving higher education applications and participation, but actions by the

council and partners have not yet had sufficient impact in some parts of the borough where participation is very low.

75. The council has played a key role in engendering trust and effective strategic work between key partners to develop a well-targeted strategy for the 14 to 19 age group. This climate of trust has supported well the collaboration of providers, which is underpinned by an established curriculum entitlement, effective cluster arrangements and a common approach to resource sharing. Combined with the flexible approach of Tyne Metropolitan College and work-based learning providers, strong collaboration has enabled the curriculum needs of a large number of young people at Key Stage 4, and many post-16 students, to be met. Well-designed programmes re-engage potentially disaffected young people. The well-conceived learning portal is supporting collaborative arrangements effectively. The 14–19 strategy has been central to the council's successful plans for improving the outcomes at Key Stage 4, including the steep reduction in exclusions. Work-based learning providers, the voluntary sector and employers are effectively integrated into plans. The Skills and Enterprise Centre is an excellent facility in which these and other partners work closely together to meet the needs of individual young people. Three more centres are planned and will underpin the council's well-developed plans for specialised diplomas, in which the vocational specialisms of Tyne Metropolitan College and schools, as well as employer links, have been shrewdly utilised. Good collaboration between Tyne Metropolitan College and higher education institutions has resulted in more locally based higher education provision. While the 14–19 strategy has helped to improve results for many in this age group, it has not yet made sufficient difference to post-16 standards at Level 3 and the strategy does not address explicitly the gender gap in achievements at this level. Quality assurance arrangements for post-16 provision in schools have been strengthened and include better communications between school improvement officers and the local LSC. Race equality plans are in place within individual providers and are appropriately monitored.

76. The council is working well to ensure that regeneration initiatives address the needs of children and young people and that their views are considered, for example in the Howdon Park regeneration scheme. Considerable progress has been made in improving the local economy and employment opportunities. The council has appropriately prioritised housing developments for families and vulnerable young people, for example at Longbenton. The draft supported accommodation strategy for vulnerable groups addresses the need for a greater range and volume of accommodation for young people in these groups. Currently, some 68% of houses do not meet the Decent Homes standard and too much inadequate housing affects families with children. Appropriate sums have been agreed to enable all homes to meet the standard by 2010. A family mediation service has just begun to try to prevent homelessness but it is too early to assess its impact. The use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families and young people is reducing.

77. Pathway planning for care leavers is effective and a high proportion progress to further and higher education. They receive very good support from the Leaving Care Team. Individualised and generous financial packages enable care leavers to continue in education and to learn independence, although there are not enough supported accommodation options to meet the needs of those making the transition to independent living. Care leavers have good access to mental health services. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also receive good multi-agency support for transition at 16 and into adult services. The take-up of direct payments is increasing and is at least satisfactory. Many young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress to further education where they have good opportunities for work-related learning, for example at Beacon Hill School. Tyne Metropolitan College has responded well to the needs of this group, for example by making new provision for young people with autism. At the age of 19, young people with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities have insufficient access to supported employment options.

Service management

78. **The management of services for children and young people is good. The capacity to improve further is outstanding.** Strong partnership working and a commitment to improve outcomes based on the rights of children and young people underpin services in North Tyneside. The Children and Young People's Plan is clear, is owned by all agencies and outlines delivery of integrated services in the four local areas. The capacity to improve is outstanding. Strong leadership, good partnership working and a relentless focus on performance to identify and tackle problems have led to significant improvements in outcomes over the last three years, particularly in education and social care. Lessons learned from these improvements are now being applied more widely, supported by increasingly robust multi-agency systems and structures. The self-assessment is accurate and demonstrates a good knowledge of strengths and weaknesses across the partnership.

79. Ambitions for children and young people in North Tyneside are excellent. The area's overriding ambition of closing the gap between the most and the least disadvantaged runs through the community strategy, the council plan, which has 'creating positive futures for children and young people' as the first of five themes, and the Children and Young People's Plan. The community strategy includes an impressive vision for the area for 2030, which determines the extent and pace of change to which partners have committed. The strong vision expressed in the Children and Young People's Plan is shared by partners, children and young people themselves and, unusually for North Tyneside, is supported by political consensus. It has a unique North Tyneside feel with the inclusion of the sixth outcome, 'be spirited', and is based on an extensive needs analysis. The four local areas have completed their own needs analyses and have developed local versions of the Children and Young People's Plan driven by local priorities.

80. The partnership shows an impressive commitment to consultation and involvement. Over 4,000 children and young people contributed to the development of the Children and Young People's Plan, ensuring a high priority being given to reducing bullying and harassment and the inclusion of safer places and spaces as a major theme in the local area agreement. Staff across the partnership show a very good understanding and strong commitment to the ambitions and vision. Children and young people also understand the Children and Young People's Plan and actively challenge staff based on Children and Young People's Plan pledges issued on credit card sized fold-out cards.

81. Prioritisation by partners is good. The comprehensive needs analysis was extended into four further analyses, one for each of the area children's strategy groups, and led to local priorities being established. For example, in the south-west area a priority is to tackle drug and alcohol abuse, while in the north-east area the priority is the development of activities and places for children. Schools are well engaged and central to assessing need and developing services in each of the four local areas. Partners are explicitly moving resources into preventative services. The council reinvested resources into behaviour support services, reducing the number of permanent exclusions from a peak of 74 in 2000–01 to none in this school year after taking the difficult decision to close a special school and a PRU. The Children and Young People's Plan together with partners' supporting service plans identify clear lead responsibilities and priorities. All focus well on targets but are less precise on interim milestones.

82. Partners have a strong commitment to joint working. For example, they have committed to wider joint commissioning by extending pooled budgets to include occupational therapy and support for children with special educational needs. In addition, sub-regional commissioning with two other councils based on the new North of Tyne PCT area is being developed for foster care, residential care packages and independent special schools. However, resourcing information is not included in the Children and Young People's Plan.

83. Some services take good account of equality and diversity issues. For example, looked after children's health and education is the focus of a multi-disciplinary team and a community midwife is attached to a specialist GP service for families in transition, such as asylum seekers. The youth service makes good provision for vulnerable and minority groups and for young people who do not achieve well at school. All partners have a range of equalities strategies and undertake equalities impact assessments leading to targeted services. However, the Children and Young People's Plan priorities are not sufficiently specific to ensure that the needs of all disadvantaged groups are addressed systematically.

84. The overall capacity of the local partnership's services is good. All partners work well together. Children's Trust arrangements are well established and the close working of partners is improving outcomes. The LCSB is robust and has effective links to the partnership.

85. The Elected Mayor and Portfolio Holder are highly visible champions for children and young people but understanding of corporate parenting by other councillors, including some in children's scrutiny, is limited. There is impressive leadership across the partnership. The Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Learning is described by headteachers and other partners as 'inspirational'. Good leadership and management extend through children's services and are highly valued by a largely stable workforce. Staff are increasingly focused on delivering improved outcomes for children and young people, with front line staff in education and social care receiving impressive support and appropriate challenge from central staff and managers. Good, well-accessed professional training and secondments, including those of headteachers, are appreciated by staff and increase capacity. Sickness absence is higher in social care than in other councils, although lower than the rest of the council, and this is being tackled corporately. Recruitment and retention of staff is broadly effective and includes 'grow your own' schemes, for example in the Youth Offending Team and for social workers. Workforce planning has not previously been coordinated within the partnership, although it is now under way.

86. Good partnership working enhances capacity. For instance, the partnership board agreed an inter-agency strategy for weighing and measuring year six pupils without additional staffing. The voluntary sector is involved effectively, for example, Barnardo's provides the Base at Whitley Bay, and a council grant of £125,000 enabled the voluntary sector to attract a further £575,000 which, in part, supported young people's volunteering. Capacity is also enhanced by securing external funding. In 2005–06, £613,000 of neighbourhood renewal funding was directed towards children's centres in New York/Moor Park, Battle Hill, Shiremoor/Killingworth and Whitley Bay and £6.5 million for improvements to primary schools has been secured by the council as a Pathfinder on the Primary Capital programme.

87. Value for money in children's services is adequate. The council's medium-term financial strategy is linked to priorities. Some good services, such as the school improvement service, youth service and school transport are provided at low cost. Conversely, expenditure on family support services is very high compared to other councils. The council has agreed a value for money review of children's services this year. Savings have been made, for example almost £1 million per year has been saved by reducing the number of out of borough placements. Health partners have completed a three-year financial recovery plan enabling additional investments in 2007–08, including six extra posts for children's services.

88. Children, young people, parents and carers are involved in identifying their own needs and in shaping services for themselves in care and case planning. The Common Assessment Framework is being rolled out across the partnership. An electronic information sharing system is being developed to support this work.

89. Performance management across the partnership is good overall. The area is developing a culture of performance management that is generally focused on outcomes and is already well embedded in some places. Within the council's children's services, performance is well managed at all levels. This focus has led to significant improvements, for example to the school attendance of looked after children, and to the area's best ever GCSE results in 2006. Agencies readily share data and have agreed a common set of performance indicators. The partnership has started to manage performance formally. Theme groups are accountable for performance in each of the five outcomes, for example the LSCB takes responsibility for managing performance in 'staying safe'. However, it is too early to see the impact of these arrangements.

90. Knowledge from complaints is used to improve services within particular service areas, for example the schools admissions document for parents has been revised to make it clearer, but a wider analysis of complaints across agencies is not used by the partnership. Children and young people are increasingly involved in performance management, for example, two young people are board members of a hospital trust and a seminar was held for young people involved in developing the Children and Young People's Plan in order to review its implementation and effectiveness.

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

1. The council's contribution to delivering outcomes for children and young people in North Tyneside is good. The area's overriding ambition of closing the gap between the most and the least disadvantaged runs through the community strategy, the council plan and the Children and Young People's Plan. It is shared and understood well by all partners. Prioritisation is good, based on a comprehensive needs analysis at borough and local area level. The Children and Young People's Plan together with partners' supporting service plans focus well on targets but are less precise on interim milestones.

2. The overall capacity of the council's services is good. The Elected Mayor and Portfolio Holder are highly visible champions for children and there is impressive leadership and management across the Children, Young People and Families Partnership, exemplified by the Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Learning, who is described by headteachers and other partners as 'inspirational'. Good partnership working and the securing of external funding enhances capacity. Value for money in children's services is adequate. Performance management across council services and across the partnership is good.

3. The capacity of the council to improve further is outstanding. Strong leadership, good partnership working and a relentless focus on performance to identify and tackle problems have led to significant improvements in outcomes over the last three years, particularly in education and social care. Lessons learned from these improvements are now being applied more widely, supported by increasingly robust multi-agency systems and structures. The partnership's self-assessment is accurate and demonstrates a good knowledge of strengths and weaknesses.

4. Most children and young people are healthy and achieve well. They are increasingly well prepared for working life and many have very good opportunities to make decisions and take responsibility within their schools, their communities and across the borough.

5. The impact of well-integrated partnership working in securing the health of children and young people is good. Healthy lifestyles for children and young people in school and in the community are promoted well. Initiatives are making a positive difference to the low numbers of mothers breastfeeding and the high teenage conception rate but have made little impact on the level of smoking during pregnancy. An established culture of safeguarding and effective cross-agency partnership work keep children in North Tyneside safe. Children at most risk of harm are protected effectively. The Local Safeguarding Children Board retains good oversight and monitoring of child protection activity. Preventative services are of good quality and are widely available, with some examples of very good work.

6. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good. The provision for early years is very good. Many outcomes are above the national average and compare well with those in similar local authorities, though further work is needed to close the gap between the attainment of vulnerable groups and their peers. Provision for those who are excluded or at risk of exclusion is well managed and monitored and an imaginative vocational curriculum successfully motivates these young people. The provision the council makes for the recreational needs of children and young people is good. North Tyneside has high aspirations for its looked after children, education provision has improved and they are supported well. Provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.

7. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. Young people participate very well in democratic processes and decision-making. Good inter-agency collaboration supports many children and young people through changes and challenges in their lives. Corporate parenting works effectively on behalf of looked after children, with good support by officers. However, the understanding and involvement of most councillors is not sufficiently developed. The needs of young carers have recently been recognised and strategies to meet these needs are in development. There has been a significant reduction in the numbers of first-time offenders across the borough but high re-offending rates remain a challenge for the partnership.

8. The targeting of resources to help families and young people to achieve economic well-being is effective. Childcare is good and parents receive well-planned support for increasing their skills as parents and for employment. Strong partnerships at strategic and provider levels have contributed to an effective, well-managed 14–19 strategy, which has improved the range and quality of provision for this age group. Standards and achievement are improving and post-16 participation rates are increasing but a significant number later discontinue their education and training. In some areas of the borough too few progress to higher education. Regeneration projects and housing strategies are well focused on the needs of families with children and young people.