



Joint area review

North Somerset children's services authority area

Review of services for children and young people

Adult Learning Inspectorate
Audit Commission
Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI)
Healthcare Commission
HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
HM Inspectorate of Court Administration
HM Inspectorate of Prisons
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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 multidisciplinary team of 10 inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission, the Audit Commission and the Adult Learning Inspectorate. The inspection also took into account the findings of the parallel inspection of the Youth Offending Team (YOT). 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 Somerset 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:

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

6. The second stage comprised inspection fieldwork. This included studies of how far local services have improved outcomes for a small sample of children

and young people, some of whom have the most complex needs, and a study of provision in one neighbourhood, the Windwhistle area in Weston-super-Mare. It also included gathering evidence on seven key judgements, selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. Evidence was gathered via 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 Somerset is a unitary authority covering 145 square miles with 27 miles of coastline along the Bristol Channel. The area is bordered to the north by Bristol and to the east and south by the Mendips and Somerset County Council. Its main communications are provided by the M5 motorway, an intercity rail link and an international airport. Two thirds of the area is considered rural although 70% of its population live in its four main towns; Weston-super-Mare in the south of the area is the largest of these with 40% of the population. The smaller towns of Nailsea, Clevedon and Portishead to the north of the area account for 30% of the population.

8. North Somerset is generally prosperous, having some of the wealthiest communities in the country, and in 2005 unemployment stood at 1.1%. However, there are some small but significant pockets of deprivation, notably those in the central and south wards of Weston-super-Mare. These areas fall into the bottom 10% of the most deprived areas in England, and have among the highest levels of health inequality as well as significant levels of unemployment.

9. North Somerset's school-aged population is expected to grow over the next seven years due to significant planned housing development in Weston-super-Mare and Portishead. Of North Somerset's population, 22% are under the age of 19, although the proportion of 16–24 year olds is lower than the national average and partly reflects the fact that many young people leave the area for higher education or employment not available locally. The Black and minority ethnic population (BME) is small and BME children and young people form a relatively small proportion (4%) of the school population.

10. In September 2005, North Somerset appointed a director of children's services to head an integrated children's services directorate and identified a lead member for children's services. The Children and Young People's Partnership Board forms the basis for an emergent shadow Children's Trust Board which came into effect in April 2006. The current Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board includes the council, the North Somerset Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the Weston Area Health Trust (WAHT), the police, Connexions, and the voluntary and community sector. There is a number

of joint planning arrangements and the partnership is embarking on new joint commissioning and strategic planning arrangements in line with the Change for Children agenda.

11. The council has 160 looked after children and a conventional range of children's social care provision. North Somerset has 65 primary schools, 10 secondary schools, three special day schools and has pupil referral units on four bases. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) works closely with the local authority, schools and Weston Further Education (FE) College, in addressing the 14–19 strategy, with two operational federations of secondary and special schools covering the north and south of the area. Some learners go out of the area to other FE colleges, such as the City of Bristol College and Bridgwater College. Weston FE college and Gordano are the main work-based learning providers located in North Somerset. Adult learning is provided by Weston College and the LSC contract for adult and community learning, held by the local authority, focuses on family and community learning. Primary healthcare for children is provided by North Somerset PCT. Child and adolescent services are provided by three trusts – United Bristol Healthcare Trust, North Bristol NHS Trust and WAHT; WAHT also provides community child health services. The trusts providing health services for children fall within the Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Strategic Health Authority.

Summary report

Outcomes for children and young people

12. Outcomes for children and young people in North Somerset are good. Most children and young people are healthy and there is equity of healthcare provision, with a strong focus on health education and preventive programmes in the areas of greatest deprivation. Overall, children and young people are safe and those most at risk are well protected. The significant majority of children attend school regularly, enjoy their education and achieve well. The work of all services to ensure that children and young people make a positive contribution to society is good. The overall work of local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good; for example, the number of young people in education, employment or training is above the national average. However, there are some areas for development, in particular a need for more employment opportunities and accommodation for vulnerable young people in the area.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

13. **The combined work of local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Most of North Somerset's health-related performance indicators for children and families are significantly better than

those for England as a whole or for comparable areas. However, some wards in Weston-super-Mare experience significant deprivation, which affects the health of children and young people. Health services and the council work well in addressing the preventive and healthy lifestyles agenda, and in developing accessible front-line services. Children and young people, and their parents and carers, have benefited from the development of new resources that have recently been put into both hospital-based and community health services, and in the education, childcare and youth services which work closely with health services. There is an accessible and high-performing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) largely due to the growth in funding over recent years. New arrangements for the co-location of children's community health services in Weston-super-Mare and Portishead and the single point of entry into specialist health services are improving inter-professional working for the benefit of children and their families.

14. Services for young children and their parents and for families with young disabled children particularly benefit from North Somerset's good interagency and multidisciplinary approaches. Such approaches also promote the health of children looked after by the council and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are further appropriate developments planned which include increasing the numbers of school nurses and midwives, improving the CAMHS, reducing the numbers of teenage pregnancies and extending hospital services for children.

Staying safe

15. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.** Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements work effectively for the most vulnerable children and young people. The Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC), now the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), has made significant improvements to single and joint agency practice and coordination. The LSCB aims to develop its first year's work plan with broader safeguarding objectives, although it recognises that its capacity to address these will be constrained by a lack of additional resources. All child protection cases, as well as looked after children, are currently allocated to qualified social workers, although recently a small number were not allocated over a two-month period, due in part to staff vacancies.

16. There is a range of accessible family support services for different levels of need that offer purposeful and good-quality interventions for both children and parents. In practice, thresholds of risk and need are not high although interagency understanding of eligibility for services varies between key professionals. Assessment and care planning work is mostly good and reflects positive interagency work. The effectiveness of preventive work is reflected in part by positive performance indicators for child protection work. The response to incidents of domestic abuse is coordinated effectively between agencies. However, there has been a large increase in the number of domestic abuse referrals, which is reflective of recent local initiatives to promote reporting of

incidents. There is multi-agency recognition that this is an area that requires further action and resources and a commissioned study will report on options for development.

17. For looked after children, services work well together to plan and achieve good outcomes. Planning for permanent placement, and particularly adoption, progresses well in most cases and the building of foster care capacity and placement choice is a recognised priority. There has been good progress on implementing the placement strategy which has improved the fostering service, but there is still a shortage of placements for adolescents and children with more complex needs. Care leaver services are less satisfactory in meeting accommodation needs, and a wider range of suitable and affordable options is lacking. Joint working to ensure the safe care of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is positive overall.

Enjoying and achieving

18. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** The overall support for parents and carers is effective, particularly for those facing the greatest difficulties. Parents have access to a good range of information and the parents of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the carers of children looked after by the council are well supported. There are sufficient childcare and early years places and the quality of nursery education is good. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and receive good multi-agency support.

19. The overall quality of educational provision is good and there is effective challenge and support for school improvement. The number of primary schools receiving additional support is too high, although this is due to the strong commitment to challenge schools to improve. The majority of pupils enjoy school and believe they are achieving well. Attainment overall is good especially at the end of Key Stage 2. Although pupils achieve well in many schools, there are too few schools in which achievement is outstanding. The achievement of some pupils in special school provision is very good. Support for behaviour and pupil attendance is good and levels of fixed-term and permanent exclusions are low. The provision for children and young people educated other than at school is effective, including that for pupils with medical needs. Pupil referral units are supporting young people well by providing a broad curriculum with vocational enrichment and accreditation at Key Stage 4.

20. The provision of leisure opportunities is effective particularly through schools, the youth service and the council's leisure services. There is also support for looked after children and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to access leisure opportunities. Educational support for children and young people looked after by the council is effective with a strategy in place to achieve consistent outcomes and raise attainment. Achievement of looked after children is in line with that found nationally

although the proportion of care leavers with a qualification is below the national figure. The achievement of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good in the majority of schools. There is good multi-agency identification and support of their needs as well as effective transitional planning arrangements.

Making a positive contribution

21. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. Young parents, young carers and others requiring help are well supported by good collaboration between the council, agencies and voluntary groups. The majority of young people, including those who are looked after by the council and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have increasing opportunities to voice their opinions on the services they receive and the development of new services through a wide variety of consultation mechanisms. Young people are effectively involved in decision-making at school through their school council and at a wider community level through the Youth Parliament. Parents, carers and young people are provided with good support as they move through their educational experiences, from early years and into post-16 education and training. Arrangements are particularly good for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those young people who are looked after by the council. However, the council is aware of the need to improve the advocacy service for them.

Achieving economic well-being

22. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. The authority is working towards ensuring that accessibility to affordable childcare is given priority in areas of greatest social and economic disadvantage through the development of children's centres. Connexions has strong working links with partners and provides good information, advice and guidance to all young people. It has successfully reduced the figures of young people not in education, employment or training, including children and young people who offend. The proportion of young people, including looked after children, in education, employment or training is higher than the national average. The quality of educational provision is generally good and qualification outcomes for young people are good. Achievement rates for young people on Education to Employment schemes are also good.

23. A 14–19 strategy is in place and is being implemented effectively, although it is recognised that further development is required to broaden the range of vocational and work-based opportunities offered to young people. There are, for example, insufficient vocational opportunities at level 2 and below. The council and its partners are tackling the shortage of employment opportunities in the area, although these regeneration initiatives have yet to make a significant impact on extending employment to young people. There are

good transition arrangements and educational opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but these are not yet matched by good employment opportunities. The council has prioritised the housing needs of vulnerable young people, including care leavers, and taken some steps to address them. However, there is insufficient suitable, affordable accommodation available to meet their needs.

Service management

24. **The management of services for children and young people is good.** Relationships between local partners are good and the council provides effective community leadership to the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) and the emerging Children's Trust Board. Major partners, including the voluntary sector and the police, are actively involved in the partnership and the emerging board. Partners have invested strongly in time and resources to develop their partnership approach.

25. The overall capacity to deliver the plans of the partnership is good. The integration of children's services, which joined education, children's social care and the youth service, started in October 2005. The council has managed these developments well. It has put in place steps to increase capacity to support the new integrated service with additional senior posts. It has also introduced a mapping exercise to highlight duplication and gaps across health and children's services. Value for money is good and costs of services are generally in line with national comparators. The council has put in place additional resources by appointing a value for money team to work with the emergent joint commissioning team.

26. Performance management arrangements are adequate but improving. Consultation and engagement with children, young people, parents and carers is good especially when looking at changes and developments. A young people's communication post has been recruited, although the independent advocacy service is limited and is due to be re-commissioned when the service level agreement expires in 2007. The self-assessment recognises most of the issues facing the partnership. Some of the performance management structures are relatively new or emerging. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) has been developed and further work is being done to ensure all underpinning service plans are in place. The lead member for children's services is established and development of this role is underway. However, there is confusion for some elected members about the specific roles and responsibilities of the Policy and Scrutiny Committee and Children's Champion Group, particularly in relation to the Children's Trust Board which could lead to duplication of effort and focus as well as confusion for external partners.

Grades

Grades awarded:

4: excellent/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	3	3	
Children's services		3	
The education service		3	
The social care services for children		3	
The health service for children			3

Recommendations

For immediate action:

The council should:

- ensure that statutory childcare work is consistently allocated to qualified social workers and, where this proves difficult, properly record and notify appropriate members and the LSCB of the situation

- improve member training to ensure that information is understood and that policy and scrutiny provide a robust challenge of performance
- clarify the specific roles and responsibilities of the Policy and Scrutiny Committee and Children's Champion Group and how they fit with the new structures such as the Children's Trust Board to enable stakeholders to engage with them.

For action over the next six months:

The council should work with its partners to:

- agree as a priority thresholds and eligibility for services at different levels and ensure that staff in all agencies are aware of the agreed approach
- ensure that the current Placement Strategy is developed into a commissioning strategy that secures the best placement options with relevant partners and providers
- ensure that a detailed strategy is in place to develop a wider range of placement options for care leavers and is being progressed
- improve and extend access and choice to the full range of the 14–19 curriculum
- ensure that there is sufficient and suitable housing provision for young people, particularly vulnerable groups
- develop an independent advocacy service to meet the individual and collective needs of children and young people including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those looked after by the council and those in need.

For action in the longer term:

The council and its partners should:

- increase employment opportunities within the area for young people, particularly for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Main report

Outcomes for children and young people

27. Outcomes for children and young people in North Somerset are good. There are, however, improvements needed, notably in employment

opportunities and the provision of suitable and affordable accommodation for young people.

28. Children and young people are healthy, although health outcomes are less favourable in the few areas of high deprivation.

Emergency hospital admissions of children and young people for gastroenteritis, lower respiratory tract infections, asthma, substance misuse or injuries are lower than national figures. Statistical indicators for North Somerset's children's health in the perinatal period are good. For example, perinatal and infant mortality figures are comparatively low, while figures for birth weight, breastfeeding and the number of mothers smoking are good. North Somerset's indicators for looked after children's annual health and dental checks and for immunisations generally compare well against those for England as a whole. Similarly, recent figures for the incidence of measles among children in North Somerset have been consistently below national figures. In contrast, the incidence of deaths of children under 15 has been consistently above figures for similar areas and the reasons for this are unclear. North Somerset is, however, included within a Bristol Children's Hospital study looking at deaths of young people within the ex-Avon Authority area.

29. Since 1998, North Somerset's teenage conception rates, although below national levels, have been significantly higher than for comparable areas. However, appropriate action has been taken and the rate of teenage conception in 2004 shows a significant reduction.

30. North Somerset is generally a safe place for young people to live.

The overall impact of services is effective in minimising the incidence of child abuse and neglect, and in preventing children and young people becoming looked after. Family support services for vulnerable children and children in need provide a good range of provision with evidence of positive outcomes for families through well-focused, professional interventions. Family support meetings chaired by independent review officers (IROs) provide a robust mechanism to divert children and young people from entering the care system. Children most at risk and on the child protection register receive good support and monitoring through child protection plans to keep them safe, and do not remain on the register for unnecessarily long periods.

31. Some young people, however, report feeling unsafe in the more deprived wards of Weston-super-Mare despite statistically low levels of reported crime. Young people report concern about the impact of anti-social behaviour in a small number of neighbourhoods which make them fearful of moving to or using specific facilities in these areas. These views have been adopted as a priority area within the CYPP. Out-of-school pursuits are risk-assessed and checks on adults involved include Criminal Records Bureau clearance. Bullying is not perceived as a significant concern in schools and is not seen as a significant threat to personal safety in the community. However, the impact of anti-bullying work will be monitored through the new LSCB.

32. The proportion of looked after children is consistently below that found in England overall and in comparator authorities. Permanence plans for looked after children are in place and are monitored effectively through timely statutory reviews that include consideration, where appropriate, of action to reduce the likelihood of offending. Children are encouraged to play a full part in their reviews, but independent advocacy for individuals and the collective voice of looked after children are currently acknowledged to be limited and the current service will be re-commissioned shortly. All looked after children have access to independent advocacy and this is widely promoted. Looked after children are mostly in stable placements, but a small number of young people present challenges to placement provision available to the council. Managers are aware of this concern and are exploring the commissioning of residential provision within the council area for children with complex needs (disabilities). For younger children, use of kinship placements to provide permanent care is increasing and there is effective use of the family group conference approach. For younger looked after children, adoption is achieved for significant numbers within appropriate timescales.

33. The volume of services, such as those that provide short-break care for children and young people with learning disabilities and/or disabilities, is improving from a low base and is now above statistical neighbours. Plans to increase the availability of short breaks with family-based care and other flexible day-care arrangements are beginning to make an impact through the parallel decommissioning of the Firs Residential Unit. However, parents feel the amount of respite care available can be limited. Transition planning for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities between children's and adult social care services and other agencies is robust, enabling early consultation with young people about their longer-term social needs and well-being.

34. **Children and young people achieve well.** The majority of children and young people attend school regularly and enjoy their education. There are sufficient early education and childcare places to meet the needs of children and their parents and the quality of provision is improving. The quality of nursery education is good. Children are prepared well for school. The overall quality of educational provision is good and there are no schools requiring special measures to improve. The educational standards achieved by children are above those found nationally at each key stage and show an improving trend in Key Stages 2 and 4. Attainment is particularly high at the end of Key Stage 2. The attainment of the small proportion of BME pupils is in line with that of other groups. Achievement is good in a number of schools, including some primary schools serving the most deprived areas, but the number of schools with very good achievement is too low. Attendance in both the primary and secondary phases is in line with the national averages. The levels of permanent and fixed-term exclusions are low. The attendance of children looked after by the authority is very good and their achievement is in line with expectations. School inspections indicate that the achievement of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good in the majority of schools.

35. Children and young people have a wide range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility and many make a good contribution to their communities. Inspections of early years settings show that, overall, they support the development of children's behaviour and personal, social and emotional development well. Inspection reports indicate that pupils' behaviour, self-esteem, confidence and community involvement are good in the majority of schools. Outcomes from the local authority's online pupil survey show that many young people have opportunities to comment on the way things are run in school. All schools operate schools councils. Almost all young people, including those looked after by the council and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have opportunities to make their views known to the council on what existing and proposed services mean for them. Young people generally say that they can access help and advice when they need it and they have access to support at times of difficulty and challenge in their lives. Projects such as the Crossroads Young Carers' Project support young people facing difficulties well.

36. There is a successful focus on supporting transition of all pupils from one phase of education to the next, including those at risk of social exclusion. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities requiring a transition plan have one, as do young people who are looked after by the council and those who are moving from children's social care into the community. The number of children and young people who have offended for the first time in the youth justice system is below both statistical neighbours and national averages and the numbers of young people re-offending is reducing. All young people who offend and who have mental health difficulties are referred to and access appropriate CAMHS support within the target waiting time.

37. Most children and young people are able to achieve economic well-being and are prepared well for working life. Children and their parents benefit from the wide range of childcare facilities. The accessibility of childcare in areas of social and economic deprivation is being addressed through the development of children's centres. Work-related learning and work experience opportunities are appropriate, but the small number of large local businesses limits the availability of sufficient relevant work experience opportunities. Opportunities for vocational training at Key Stage 4 are increasing although they are not yet available to all. Children and young people benefit from good information, advice and guidance provided by Connexions personal advisers, especially those who are identified as requiring specialist support. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training is below national averages and a high proportion of young people aged 16 progress to good-quality full-time education. Qualification outcomes are above the national average for level 2 and level 3 qualifications by the age of 19. The proportion of young people entering higher education is high. There are, however, areas for development. There are insufficient employment opportunities within the area, particularly for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. North Somerset has a shortage of affordable housing and,

although young people from vulnerable groups are given priority by the authority, they are not always housed in suitable, affordable accommodation.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

38. **The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good and partnership working between agencies across the area is good.** Since 2002, North Somerset's children and young people have benefited from the coterminosity of the council with its NHS partners, the North Somerset PCT and the WAHT. The relatively recent co-location of child health services, both in Weston-super-Mare and in the north of the area, has produced benefits for children and for staff.

39. The For All Healthy Living Centre opened last year in one of Weston-super-Mare's most deprived areas. It provides a strong base for the provision of health, childcare, educational and voluntary-sector services for children and families and for the wider community. The new facility involves Sure Start, the council, the PCT, WAHT and other community agencies. The centre serves as a model for the development of additional children's centres being planned for across the area.

40. Front-line staff from a range of agencies work well in providing multidisciplinary services, with early years services in particular providing an integrated approach for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Health visitor services are good and, where support is required, extended contacts with families are maintained. Speech and language therapy services provide strong support and are integrated well into the work of partner agencies. Childhood immunisation rates are good.

41. Additional resources have been allocated and are proving effective in providing a range of services for children, young people and their families, including the continuing development of new hospital and community paediatric services, based at Weston Hospital. This development means that families have less need to travel to Bristol for paediatric care. Until recently, Weston's Accident and Emergency Services had no specific paediatric provision, but a new waiting room for children, together with paediatric cover, is improving provision.

42. In responding to an increase in teenage pregnancies a few years ago, North Somerset adopted a robust interagency approach with a focus around its No Worries service. This service provides advice and guidance, not just on sexual matters, but through trained advisors working across the full range of services for young people, for example in a range of health settings, schools, the youth service, Connexions and the Youth Offending Service. This approach has had a positive effect and the most recent data for 2004 shows a reduction

in conceptions in line with both the national and local objectives of reducing teenage conceptions by 2010.

43. The health service and the council work well with other agencies to promote healthy living. Although fewer than half of the schools have focused on healthy eating, all schools inspected were judged satisfactory for participation in sport and exercise. The council has recently begun issuing Young Persons' Key Cards to promote healthy living by giving discounts to sports and other facilities although the impact of these has yet to be evaluated. Statutory agencies support and rely on voluntary agencies which provide a diverse and effective range of services for children and young people, especially for those with special needs.

44. Agencies work well together in addressing issues of substance misuse, with a special project, Cosmic, for children of substance-misusing parents. North Somerset's youth service plays an active role in promoting healthy lifestyles, providing good resources on a range of topics, including smoking cessation, and drug and alcohol awareness.

45. In recent years, the PCT and the council have funded growth in CAMHS so that fewer young patients need to travel to Bristol for these specialist services and waiting times have been reduced. CAMHS expansion has also enhanced the robust liaison and consultation arrangements with other local staff, for example health visitors, school nurses, education staff and youth workers, who provide support to young people. CAMHS staff provide supervision for the PCT-funded health worker post in the YOT. CAMHS also supports Consult, a specialist service, staffed with clinical and educational psychologists and social workers, to support the carers of looked after children. This service is particularly valued by foster carers.

46. A lead nurse and community paediatrician provide a good initial health assessment service for looked after children before passing cases on to other colleagues for day-to-day involvement, including a named health visitor or school nurse. Health checks for looked after children are undertaken in a child-sensitive way and they have ready access to CAMHS where needed. Weston Area Health Trust scored 100% on the performance indicator for its child protection arrangements. Designated health service staff regularly monitor the health of looked after children who are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles.

47. Currently, disabled children, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their parents, receive a comprehensive range of specialist services from early years to adulthood. This includes support from voluntary organisations, for example Springboard, for pre-school children with special needs and their families, and the local branch of the National Autistic Society. The Disabled Children's Team forms part of North Somerset Council's Children and Young People Service, with the majority of cases being children with learning disabilities; the team does not include health staff. The children's learning disability team is an NHS team, staffed only by health professionals. A

specialist health service within CAMHS provides for children with learning disabilities who also have mental health problems. Although there are good relationships between health and council staff, the partners have recognised that organisational arrangements need to be reviewed and it is planned that multi-agency teams working with children with complex needs will be co-located by April 2008. It is also anticipated that a joint interagency register of disabled children will be implemented by late 2006, to improve planning.

Staying safe

48. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.** Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements work effectively for the most vulnerable children and young people. The ACPC, now the LSCB, has made significant improvements to single and joint agency practice and coordination following the Laming Report. The LSCB aims to develop its first year's work plan with broader safeguarding objectives although it recognises that its capacity to address these will be constrained by a lack of additional resources.

49. North Somerset has satisfactory levels of qualified social workers, a high ratio of experienced staff and low staff turnover; all child protection cases, as well as looked after children, are currently allocated to qualified social workers. Pressures on social work resources are experienced infrequently and for short periods. However, recently, qualified social workers were not allocated to a small number of child protection cases and looked after children for a two-month period due, in part, to staff vacancies. Procedures for reporting on staffing pressures and unallocated work to members of the policy and scrutiny committee are currently uncertain. Similarly clear and accurate recording and prioritised discussion of unallocated child protection cases within the ACPC has not occurred consistently. The LSCB provides a broad and effective range of multi-agency safeguarding training as well as themed audits of child protection practice. The board is also represented and involved in safeguarding development at a sub-regional level. The coordination of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements is satisfactory. The arrangements for the safe recruitment of staff across the area are also satisfactory. The LSCB's early priorities acknowledge the need to engage a multi-agency group of managers in developing clear, consistent and safe recruitment practices and guidance across all agencies in the area.

50. Overall, there is a useful range of information from the Children's Information Service and front-line agency staff to inform children, young people and their parents about risks to their personal safety. Road safety and safe travel to school are satisfactorily promoted.

51. Effective preventive work is reflected in the relatively low numbers of looked after children or those on the child protection register. The rate of re-registration of children shows good performance and suggests good child protection planning and preventive interventions. De-registration rates also

show that children are not remaining on the register for long periods of time. Multi-agency child protection strategy discussions are held and recorded appropriately, and, overall, the quality of child protection practice is good. Practice similarly ensures that concerns arising from the Victoria Climbié Inquiry with regard to monitoring visits and seeing children alone are addressed. An interagency protocol for responding to referrals of domestic abuse, and for ensuring regular discussions between key staff in the relevant agencies, promotes good coordination of service responses. The partnership has identified the development of support services for children and young people affected by domestic abuse as a priority.

52. Interagency work in identifying and assessing need is mostly effective, but thresholds are not clearly defined for front-line staff. In practice, front-line workers across agencies use lower-level family support services without going through assessment by the two social care intake teams. A clear and comprehensive eligibility policy for children's social care services has yet to be agreed on a multi-agency basis, and perceptions of thresholds and eligibility vary among key professionals across agencies. Pilot work to clarify this under the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is underway as well as the coordination of agencies' information systems. However, this CAF development will not be implemented until November 2007 and clarity around current eligibility requires early resolution. Initial assessments by workers other than social care staff are limited to children with disabilities and day-care funding requests. Within Family Support Services, the quality of work is high and well regarded, with trained and experienced workers offering child and parenting work based on recognised models of intervention. The 0–17 Positive Interventions team does particularly good focused, time-limited and task-orientated work, and feedback from families is very positive. Social worker caseloads are not high, allowing them to work with significant numbers of children in need and to provide associated family support work.

53. Referrals into the intake teams are effectively screened and monitored by managers. The quality of initial assessments carried out by social care staff is good and mostly completed within the required timescales. Core assessment work across all social care teams is satisfactory overall, but variable in depth and quality. There is evidence that case auditing of children's social care practice is well established although the rigour and consistency of management and case audit can be variable and focused on process rather than outcomes.

54. A Placement Strategy is in place and is leading to the gradual improvement of in-house foster care capacity and competencies, with better take-up of training opportunities by carers. The Fostering Service shows improved recruitment and incentives for carers, with valued support from the CAMHS specialist service, Consult. The development of local residential provision for disabled children has started and expressions of interest from providers are being considered. A clear commissioning approach with partners to shape and manage the market, including independent providers, has yet to

be developed. Consideration has yet to be given to developing a commissioning approach that addresses the future role of independent providers.

55. Families and young people report good consultation and preparation for case conferences and reviews, explanation of reports and support from IROs, who have significant impact as they chair the family support meetings that control the gateway into the looked after system. They also have a very strong influence on care planning for looked after children.

56. There is effective support for care leavers including the support from Connexions personal advisers. Current accommodation options for care leavers are limited, however. The council has started to address this challenge with two training flats, and is about to evaluate the development of a supported lodgings and a high-support scheme.

57. There are good working relationships and communication between professionals which ensures that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are properly safeguarded. Care planning and transition arrangements for these young people moving from school to college and adult services are also well established.

Enjoying and achieving

58. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** The overall support for parents and carers to help children and young people to enjoy their education and achieve is good. There is a wide range of good quality information available to inform parents and carers about educational issues. In the most deprived areas, parents value the courses available through Sure Start, including those which focus on child development and health. There is good support for parents and carers of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly through the Family Support Service, Springboard Opportunities Group, and the inclusion support service. There is effective provision of support for carers of children looked after by the authority through a telephone helpline and a specialist advice service, Consult.

59. There is a clear strategic plan for the development of early years provision. This has resulted in a significant increase in the number of available places. The early years team is improving the quality of provision through a planned programme of monitoring, challenge and support. In addition, a broad programme of training and the use of networks to share good practice contribute to improvement. The quality of nursery education is good. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and supported well through a multi-agency approach.

60. The majority of schools are good or very good. The authority rightly considers the drive to ensuring all are judged to be at least good to be a major priority. An effective school improvement team supports schools well in

developing their capacity to evaluate their performance. There is very effective use of data to monitor performance and to challenge schools to improve. The support to schools is clearly differentiated to reflect their particular level of need. However, a strong commitment to challenging schools to improve is resulting in too many primary schools being placed in a high category of need. The support for schools in an Ofsted category of concern is carefully planned and its impact evaluated systematically. This support is valued by headteachers and chairs of governors. The impact of the service is evident in the significant reduction in the number of schools with serious weaknesses and the absence of any school in special measures. However, a primary school has been given a notice to improve in this academic year.

61. The support for implementing the national strategies is effective and has contributed to raising attainment. There are no schools below the government's floor targets for attainment. A thorough and detailed evaluation of the impact of individual initiatives has identified inconsistencies in impact; however, strategies to address this have been planned. There is a range of valued networks that are used to identify and disseminate good practice across the authority and good use is made of advanced skills teachers and leading-edge practitioners.

62. Pupils' school attendance is in line with the national average. The educational welfare service provides valued support and makes effective use of the full range of available strategies to improve attendance. A programme of intervention in a secondary school with high rates of unauthorised absence demonstrates the effectiveness of the service in contributing to bringing about improvement.

63. The levels of permanent and fixed-term exclusions are low. There is a clear strategy to reduce exclusions that involves negotiated moves and the use of alternative provision within the pupil referral units. The provision of a broad curriculum incorporating vocational education to re-engage older pupils is a particularly good feature. Work to re-engage young people who offend is effective. There is effective support for behaviour through the behaviour support team and the wider inclusion support service. The behaviour improvement project is being carefully planned to build on and extend this success. Provision for pupils with medical needs and for teenage mothers is effective. There is effective monitoring of the education of children and young people educated at home.

64. The local authority is committed to inclusion and the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs placed in special schools is below that found nationally. The process of statutory statementing and review is well managed and parents report that their views and those of their children are listened to. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported in schools. The early identification of need and provision of support is effective with good links between agencies and well-planned transitions between phases of education. The inclusion support service provides effective support and guidance and schools are able to access additional funding to meet

individual needs. The local authority monitors thoroughly the use of funding to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. School inspections indicate that the majority of pupils with learning difficulties achieve well. Attendance in special schools is above the national rate and exclusions are well below. The provision within special schools is generally good and pupils make good progress.

65. Looked after children are well supported and all have personal education plans. The majority of plans are of good quality and there are effective mechanisms for quality assurance. Attendance at school of these young people is above the national average and none has been excluded in the last three years. There is a well-developed strategy to raise attainment and careful monitoring of performance by the looked after children team. Effective use of funding provides additional support for pupils within and outside school. Initiatives are in place to raise the aspirations of these young people including a university-linked project. Their achievement is in line with expectations but the small number of young people in each age group makes the analysis of attainment and trends problematic. In 2004, attainment was above the national average in Key Stages 2 and 3 and in line for the proportion gaining a qualification at GCSE. In 2005, the attainment at Key Stages 1 and 3 improved, although that in Key Stage 2 declined from the high level in 2004. At Key Stage 4 the proportion gaining a qualification improved, as did the proportion gaining 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE. However, the proportion of care leavers with a qualification was below that found nationally.

66. Schools provide a wide range of good opportunities for out-of-hours learning and enrichment. In addition, the youth service provides a wide range of activities to support the personal development of young people including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and looked after children. There is a good range of opportunities for children and young people to access sports, music and arts provision through the leisure and play service and the music service. The local authority has recently launched a 'leisure key' scheme to subsidise access to leisure for young people, but it is too early to assess the full impact of this. There is effective provision in place to support young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through holiday play schemes and a buddy scheme to enhance access to leisure facilities: this is valued by young people and their parents. A small number of young people on the Bourneville estate complain that there are too few leisure opportunities for older children and teenagers on the estate.

Making a positive contribution

67. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.** The local authority and its partners collaborate well to help children and young people develop socially and emotionally, and to enable them to build positive relationships with adults and other young people. In early years settings and schools, a good range of activities helps to build young people's social skills and develop their confidence

and self-esteem. After-school clubs such as Pyramid Clubs support groups of young pupils at risk of social exclusion well. Pupils say they value these activities and teachers report that pupils who attend the clubs have also shown improvements in their literacy and numeracy skills. The youth service also provides good support to the social and emotional development of young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Young people's achievements in sport, performing arts, music and video, and their social experiences, are promoted by the service. A computer bus initiative that provides opportunities for young people to meet and which is targeted at isolated rural communities and estates is much appreciated.

68. There is a good range of support to help children and young people, especially those at risk of social exclusion, to manage and respond to difficulties and challenges in their lives. For example, young carers and young parents spoke positively about their opportunities to meet together in groups and valued the help provided by staff who support them. Parenting programmes for parents and carers who have significant difficulties in maintaining positive relationships with their children are well regarded by many of those who take part, as are those where offending by a child or young person is a significant risk factor.

69. Children and young people are well supported during the transition from early years to school, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those looked after by the council. Connexions advisers provide effective support to young people as they progress into post-16 education, training or employment. Parents of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly appreciative of the support and guidance provided for those aged 14 and above. All such young people are encouraged to contribute to their reviews and their views are sought even if they do not attend.

70. Young people are encouraged to gain knowledge and understanding to become good citizens. All schools, including three special schools, operate schools councils and these are helping young people make a positive contribution, and developing the skills of representatives to be strong advocates for others. For example, representatives from two secondary schools communicated their views to inspectors effectively and robustly on several issues affecting young people. The youth service provides effective support for young people's participation in wider democratic processes, such as the UK Youth Parliament.

71. The local authority and its partners are strongly committed to consulting with and listening to young people's views when key decisions about their future are made and in the development of services. A recent draft participation strategy has prepared the way for a coordinated and coherent approach to consultation and participation, so that all young people can participate in key decisions about the future development of services. Young people are now routinely involved in the appointment of key staff. Thorough analysis of the

outcomes of consultation with young people has taken place and this has informed some of the partnership's priorities within the single plan for children and young people. A variety of strategies have been developed to ensure the participation and involvement of the majority of young people is purposeful. These include an online pupil survey, consultation days and bespoke consultations with individual groups, including children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and children who are looked after by the council. A recent survey of looked after children and children in need indicated that almost all say their social workers listen to them when making decisions about their care or support. However, a small number of young people from the Windwhistle neighbourhood study area commented that they have not had the opportunity to make their voices heard. It was also found that more work is required to seek and understand the views of young people who offend.

72. The independent advocacy service available to young people who are looked after by the council and who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities has a limited impact. The council and its partners recognise this and are about to re-commission a new service from April 2007.

73. Agencies cooperate well to provide a wide range of activities to deter young people from anti-social behaviour. These are well coordinated and target disadvantaged areas. There are many useful projects such as a scheme to reward good behaviour of young people from the four most deprived estates by enabling them to take part in a five-a-side football competition with the police. Information is exchanged effectively and there are good links between agencies, for example between the police and housing department, to deal with anti-social behaviour. Work to reduce anti-social behaviour is enhanced by the close involvement of the YOT in projects such as Positive Activities for Young People, and a range of other early prevention projects. The YOT works effectively with the Police-Schools liaison team.

74. The YOT also does much varied work to address the causes of offending behaviour and it engages young people well. High priority is given to working with those at risk of offending at a very early stage. Positive and productive partnership arrangements enable those who have offended to have good access to education and health services. An increasing proportion of children and young people who have offended are in education, training or employment. However, there is insufficient post-16 provision for those with few basic skills.

75. Young people who have received detention and training orders are effectively reintegrated into the community and the YOT offers voluntary support as needed after completion of the order or licence. Although the proportion of young people re-offending has reduced over time, the quality of support programmes is inconsistent.

Achieving economic well-being

76. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. Local services are making a good contribution to the economic well-being of children and young people. Parents and carers are well informed about the wide range of childcare facilities and activities. Childcare provision has increased significantly in recent years. The local authority is working towards ensuring that accessibility in areas of social and economic disadvantage is given priority through the development of children's centres.

77. Schools have appropriate arrangements for work-related learning and work experience. The small number of large businesses limits the availability of sufficient relevant work experience and placement opportunities. The council is the main employer in the area and plans to introduce structured work experience opportunities this academic year. The intention is to extend the work experience from 50 placements this coming year to 100 in 2008–09. Connexions and the local authority have yet to carry out their audit of the work-related learning, careers education and information, advice and guidance available in each school.

78. The Connexions service provides good information, advice and guidance through personal advisers based at each school and the college. It operates a community model which supports young people within a geographical area from age 13 to 19. Personal advisers keep regular contact once young people have left school. The service also has specialist personal advisers who work with other agencies in support of specific groups of vulnerable young people. The Connexions service is valued and has been effective in reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training. In January 2006, the percentage of young people not in education, employment or training was 4.6% and that of those classified as not known was 4%. The numbers of 16–18 year olds in education, employment or training is above the national average. The take-up of the educational maintenance allowance is high, the authority publicises it widely in the schools and offers discretionary awards to those who are not eligible because of their age.

79. Qualification outcomes for young people are good. They are above the national averages for attainment of level 2 and level 3 qualifications by the age of 19. The proportion of young people entering higher education is higher than the national average. Over 400 learners aged 14–16 are enrolled onto the Increased Flexibility Programme offered in conjunction with Weston College. Progression rates from this programme are good, with over 70% progressing into full-time vocational education on completion of the programme. Achievements on Education to Employment programmes are also good, with positive destinations for over half of those who participate. Weston College has good retention and achievement rates and offers a wide range of qualifications from levels 1 to 3 in most areas of learning.

80. Opportunities for vocational studies have increased in recent years, and all schools offer some vocational options at Key Stage 4. Most young people are able to participate in the education or training of their choice post-16, although there are as yet insufficient opportunities below level 2 and in work-based learning. The council and its partners are aware of and addressing the insufficient opportunities for young people aged 14–16 to engage in vocational courses at level 2 and below. There are few local work-based learning providers and engagement in work-based learning is limited by few employment opportunities in the area.

81. The 14–19 strategic plan was adopted in April 2004. The plan is being implemented through two partnership groups, one based on a federation of Weston schools which provides for pupils aged 11–16 and the other on a federation of the schools in the rest of North Somerset which provides for those aged 11–18. The two groups have focused on mapping provision to produce a common web-based prospectus for each federation by autumn 2006. The 14–19 partnerships are developing effective collaborative arrangements and an increasingly flexible curriculum offer, but recognise further development is required, for example to develop more local collaboratively planned provision available for young people aged 14–16 such as the Wheels project. This project, commissioned by the Weston education partnership, enables 10 young people aged 14–16 to access motor vehicle training in Bristol. The range of provision is narrower in the northern part of the area, although collaborative transport arrangements between clusters of schools are increasing the accessibility of some provision. For example, a level 2 hairdressing course can be accessed by pupils from three of the schools.

82. Significant steps have been taken to implement the two recommendations of the local LSC's strategic area review. The first recommendation, to develop collaborative A-level provision in Weston-super-Mare by the college and local schools in order to raise aspirations in the area, is being implemented. A new Sixth Centre hub site is due to be opened in September 2007 to consolidate this provision. The other recommendation is for a multi-skills centre for those aged 14–19+ in Nailsea, which is on track to open in 2007. This development will increase access to vocational provision for young people living in the north of the area and is supported by Weston College, the local schools and the authority.

83. In general, there are insufficient employment opportunities in North Somerset, particularly in Weston-super-Mare. Currently a high proportion of the population travels to work outside the area, predominantly to Bristol. The authority has a clear focus on the need to develop well-paid jobs which keep people in the area as well as to support areas of poverty and deprivation. Regeneration initiatives are targeted at the most deprived areas, and there are some good examples of sustainable regeneration activity, often as a development of single regeneration budget-funded initiatives. To date, however, these initiatives have had little impact on extending local employment opportunities for young people.

84. North Somerset does not have enough affordable housing available to meet the needs of its population. The local authority has made appropriate plans to improve this position but has not yet ensured that young people, particularly those who are vulnerable, have access to suitable and affordable accommodation. The council also aims to re-invest capital provided from its recent housing stock transfer to meet the housing needs of priority groups. The council has prioritised the housing needs of vulnerable young people, including care leavers, and some progress has already been made in increasing appropriate accommodation.

85. There is good support for the economic wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers from Next Steps, Connexions and other partners. The proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training is higher than the national average. The main area for development is that of choice and availability of suitable, affordable accommodation for care leavers.

86. There are good transition arrangements and educational opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The council is working with partners to increase the number of jobs for people with disabilities by providing disability training for employers.

Service management

87. **The management of services for children and young people is good.** The ambition of the council and its partners for children and young people in the area is good. The challenging ambition has been developed into a vision, with clear priorities based upon a comprehensive analysis of needs. There is a shared geographic information system which provides focused community-based data on key areas such as health inequalities, recorded criminal activity and educational attainment. This data enables sharper targeting and movement of resources across the full range of local services. The views of many children and young people are taken into account using a range of successful processes with creative involvement of the voluntary sector.

88. Prioritisation is good. The North Somerset Local Strategic Partnership effectively provides the overarching strategic framework for the Community Strategy, the Local Public Services Agreement and the developing Local Area Agreement. There are clear priorities for children and young people such as maximising resources and opportunities for the most vulnerable and reducing health inequalities, substance misuse and anti-social behaviour. The council and its partners have focused on delivering service improvements in the areas which have the greatest need first which has informed their plan for the development of new children's centres. CAMHS development has been successfully prioritised as have new services for children in Weston hospital and the co-location of service delivery in some areas. There is a clear priority to improve the educational attainment and achievement of looked after children. The YOT prioritises services to those young people likely to offend as well as those who have offended. Good account is taken of equality and diversity issues, for

example the health, education and social care provision for children of travellers. In addition, consideration has been given to issues facing other specific groups, such as those excluded from schools and BME children. The track record of the council and its partners on achieving their priorities is good. Examples include: improvement in educational attainment; a positive trend in reducing the numbers of young people offending; responsive restorative justice; and a wide range of preventive services.

89. The capacity of the council and its partners to deliver better outcomes for children and young people is good. Integration of children's services has brought together education, social care and youth services, all of which have been performing well. The accountability structure for the director of children's services and the lead member is in place and their roles are being developed. Staff and senior elected members of the council are enthusiastically committed to improving services, but the knowledge of some elected members is limited, leading to a lack of information and challenge to information provided. There is an appropriate measured approach to integrate some services at the front line over the next two years.

90. There is a strong culture of partnership working including within the voluntary and community sector. There are good interagency relationships at both strategic and at local operational levels. The council fulfils its community leadership role well. There is an established multi-agency partnership consisting of all major partners, which will provide the foundations of the commissioning Children's Trust Board. Joint commissioning strategies are strengthening and there are effective examples of joint and aligned budgets such as Sure Start and the For All Healthy Living Centre. An information-sharing protocol has also been established across the partnership agencies.

91. Use of resources and value for money are both good. Alongside the structural reorganisation there has been a re-alignment of budgets. The council's medium-term financial plan and budget show that resources are being moved to support areas of greatest need, which are supported by its partners. Education outcomes are good and achieved with relatively low expenditure. The youth service and YOT also demonstrate good value for money. Out-of-area special educational needs placements have been reduced as part of a joint strategy with health and social care services. Where there has been investment, for example in fostering services and support for disabled children, this has led to increasing local provision and a subsequent reduction in out-of-area and agency placements. The senior management team has put a robust budget monitoring system in place and, where overspends are predicted or occur, prompt, corrective action is taken. The increasing population of the area had led to a shortage of school placements, although major building plans have been completed and further plans (including a new primary school opening in September 2006) are in place to meet the new and growing demands.

92. Performance management arrangements are adequate and improving. The multi-agency self-assessment for this joint area review recognises most of

the partnership's strengths and weaknesses. The council and its partners manage the performance of their services well, although some of the newer systems are at an early stage of development and unproven. The council and its partners are developing a whole-system performance management framework to support the Children's Trust Board. Councillors receive regular performance management information and, although attempts have been made to make it informative and focused, further work needs to be undertaken. There is a Policy and Scrutiny Committee for children's services in place as well as a Children's Champion Group, although there is confusion over the roles and responsibilities of the Committee and Group, and their linkage with the Children's Trust Board.

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

1. North Somerset Council and its partners' performance in this area is good overall. The council's use of resources is good and it is moving these towards areas of highest need and priority. The council's youth service and YOT are good. Most children and young people are healthy and safe and those most at risk are well protected. Services to support children and young people are generally of good quality and are contributing toward positive outcomes.

2. The local strategic partnership has set out challenging ambitions in 24 priority areas within its CYPP. The council has integrated its education and children's social care effectively at headquarters level. There is political support and commitment for improving outcomes for children and young people. There is current uncertainty about the future configuration of the PCT although the current coterminous arrangement assures a shared focus on the improvement agenda.

3. Management of the council's services for children is good overall. The council and its partners have a good track record of achievement on priority areas. The capacity of the council to meet its objectives for children's services is good.

4. The council collaborates well with its partners in promoting a strong focus on children's health education and preventive programmes. There is evidence of good multidisciplinary work to assure healthy outcomes for children and young people. The joint approach of agencies to reduce the level of teenage pregnancy on the basis of recent data appears to be having a positive impact. Similarly, CAMHS is providing a responsive and well-regarded service.

5. Children and young people most at risk from abuse are well protected through good multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. In practice, thresholds of risk are not high, although interagency understanding of eligibility for services varies between key professionals. For looked after children services work well together to plan and achieve good outcomes. Good progress has been made in developing placement choice but there is still a shortage of placements. For care leavers more needs to be done to ensure a wider range of suitable and affordable accommodation resources.

6. The council contributes well toward a good strategy for childcare and early years education. There are sufficient childcare places and the quality of nursery education is good. The overall quality of education provision is good and there is effective challenge and support for schools as well as effective support for pupil behaviour and attendance. The level of educational attainment in schools is good, though the proportion of care leavers with a qualification is below that found nationally.

7. There is good support to help children and young people to take personal responsibility and to contribute to their communities. The council and its partners are working together successfully to reduce anti-social behaviour by young people and are beginning to reduce offending. Opportunities for children and young people's involvement in decision-making on issues which affect them are developing well.

8. The proportion of young people, including looked after children, in education, employment or training is higher than the national average. Qualification outcomes for young people are good especially for the attainment of level 2 and 3 outcomes by the age of 19. The achievement rates for young people on Education to Employment programmes are also good. Young people overall receive good advice, support and guidance through the Connexions service. The council is implementing a 14–19 strategy, but more progress is required to broaden the range of vocational and work experience opportunities to young people. There is a shortage of suitable, affordable accommodation for young people and the council needs to do more to improve capacity in the area. Regeneration initiatives have not to date had significant impact in extending local employment for young people, especially those who have low attainment or learning difficulties and/or disabilities.