



# Joint Area Review

Northamptonshire 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  
HM Inspectorate of Probation  
Ofsted

Audience	Published	Reference no.
All	14 August 2006	928



---

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the local authority or at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

---

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Summary Report</b>	<b>4</b>
Grades	9
Recommendations	9
<b>Main Report</b>	<b>11</b>
Outcomes for children and young people	11
The impact of local services	13
Being healthy	13
Staying safe	14
Enjoying and achieving	16
Making a positive contribution	18
Achieving economic well-being	20
Service management	22
<b>Annex: The children and young people's section of the corporate assessment report</b>	<b>26</b>

---

## 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 10 inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), 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 Northamptonshire 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 Youth Offending Team inspection;
- 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 one neighbourhood in Corby. It also included gathering evidence on eight 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. Northamptonshire is a county in the heart of England and is part of the East Midlands region. Its population has been increasing steadily over the past 10 years and now stands at 646,700. It is projected to grow by a further 27% by 2021. It contains a mix of urban and rural areas. There are seven borough and district councils. Around one third of the population live in the county town, Northampton. A further third live in Kettering, Wellingborough, Corby, Daventry and Rushden. The remainder live in small towns, villages and rural areas.

8. Overall, the level of deprivation is low but there is wide variation in prosperity and deprivation across the area. Corby district is ranked as the 74<sup>th</sup> most deprived area of the country, while South Northamptonshire is one of the most affluent with a ranking of 344 out of 354. While unemployment levels are below the national average, wages are low and both average weekly earnings and qualification levels are below the national average. 92% of the population is white British. Young people and families from ethnic minority communities live mainly in Northampton and Wellingborough. The overall number of children and young people is above the national average.

9. The council comprises 73 councillors and is controlled by the 45 members of the Conservative group who were elected in May 2005. The Council's strategic direction is managed by a leader and cabinet. There is a designated cabinet member with lead responsibility for children's services and a scrutiny committee for children's services, chaired by a Labour member. Traditional education and social services departments have been brought together in a Children and Young People's service headed by one Director. A Children and Young People's Partnership Board is in place with all the major partners represented and work is well underway on developing the children and young people's partnership plan. A Local Safeguarding Board is established.

10. There are 37 secondary schools, 2 middle schools, 268 primary schools, 13 special schools, 5 pupil referral units, 8 nursery schools and 1 through school. There are 318 providers of non maintained early years provision and 40 registered child minders. Post-16 education is provided at 35 school sixth forms, Northampton, Tresham and Moulton colleges of further education and a number of work-based learning providers. A strategic partnership, led by the Learning and Skills Council and the local authority, is in place to develop the 14 to 19 strategy, working closely with the seven district and borough councils. Adult and Community Learning including Family Learning is provided by Northamptonshire County Council.

11. There are five Primary Care Trusts serving the population of Northamptonshire, three of which provide around 98% of coverage. There are two Acute Hospital trusts and a Mental Health Trust within the catchment of Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, and Rutland Strategic Health Authority. These provide a wide range of health services to children, young people and families including child and adolescent mental health services and substance misuse services.

## Summary Report

### Outcomes for children and young people

12. **Outcomes for children and young people in Northamptonshire are adequate. The area places a high priority on improving outcomes for children and young people.** Targeted work is showing some positive results but provision is not consistent. Children and young people are generally healthy and receive adequate support from a range of agencies to maintain health and well being. From the evidence gathered, most children appear to be safe, but those who need support from specialist social care services do not consistently receive a timely or appropriate response or a thorough multi-agency assessment. Not all children have effective plans in place to support them. Children and young people enjoy school and achieve well overall, especially in infant and primary schools. Pupils' achievement in secondary schools at Key Stages 3 and 4 shows an upward trend. Many children and young people make a positive contribution to their communities and are actively involved in consultation activities. However the extent of their influence on service planning is variable. Most young people are prepared well for working life, and an increasing number are able to achieve economic well-being. Many young people aged 14 to 16 are beginning to benefit from a broader curriculum. A high proportion of 16 year olds take up education or training, but the drop out rate at 17 is high. The range and quality of appropriate housing for young people is inadequate.

### The impact of local services

#### Being healthy

13. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is adequate.** Children and young people receive satisfactory health support and are generally healthy. However, some areas have high rates of teenage pregnancy, and access to mental health support is limited for some vulnerable groups. Partnership working at the Pen Green Centre and in Sure Start areas promotes health activities very well. An effective multi-agency partnership supports teenage parents well and has started to reduce teenage pregnancy rates across the county. However, rates in Kettering have increased. The lack of a policy to share information about children and young people hinders the identification of young mothers and restricts the

ability to offer multi-agency support. A well-established and evaluated programme of sex and relationship education support is in place in all schools and some schools have a well-used 'drop in' service. Some young people express concern about the quality of school meals, despite good involvement by schools in the healthy schools programme. A programme of universal health screening is offered across the county but the take-up rate is variable. There is, however, a high uptake of the immunisation programme. Oral health is good. Children and young people have 24-hour access to dedicated facilities within the two Accident and Emergency departments in Northamptonshire. The extent of breastfeeding varies and there is no breastfeeding strategy in place. There are still long waiting lists for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the service offered for children with learning difficulties, 16-18 year olds not in education, and looked after children is limited. There are effective multi-agency assessments to meet the needs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

## Staying safe

**14. The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** Information and initiatives are in place to help raise awareness about risks and staying safe. However, there is insufficient co-ordination at a strategic and targeted level to reduce bullying. All children on the child protection register are allocated to qualified social workers. The development of family resource centres is helping to reduce the number of looked after children and children placed on the child protection register. While outcomes for most children are satisfactory, there are concerns about the quality and consistency of practice. Evidence gathered in the inspection showed that the response to referrals in one team was not satisfactory; there was no effective system to ensure that cases were allocated and progressed, which could have left children at risk. Immediate action was taken by senior managers to address this issue when it was raised by inspectors. A significant proportion of longer-term cases seen lacked co-ordination, focus, management monitoring and an assessment of risk. Many professionals are not clear about thresholds for intervention, or their role in assessments. This can result in delays and an ineffective response to referrals. The inter-agency procedures have been updated but manuals have not yet been distributed to teams. Training is provided on a multi-agency basis to both statutory and the voluntary sector and is valued by staff. Multi-agency public protection arrangements, and, in particular, risk management planning, are not sufficiently robust. Most parents of children with disabilities value the services provided but the availability of respite care places for young people with learning disabilities and serious challenging behaviour is insufficient to meet need. Health services and the county council are commissioning services separately for children with disabilities, which is an inefficient use of resources.

## Enjoying and achieving

**15. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** Education services are helping to raise standards and motivate children and young people well. The strategy for childcare and early years is good. Parents and carers are supported effectively and provision is at least satisfactory and mostly good. Plans for developing children's centres are progressing well and two have been recognised as models of good practice. The council provides good guidance on admissions and is successfully reducing the number of surplus places. Provision is excellent in nursery schools and good or better in primary schools and in the majority of secondary schools. The quality of the authority's intervention and support is effective, especially in schools causing concern. Nevertheless, schools are still falling in to an Ofsted category of concern, which had not been anticipated by the council. The support for the implementation of national strategies for raising attainment is effective. Pupils' attendance is in line with the national average and is improving but pupil-level data has yet to be fully utilised consequently, limiting progress in this area. The level of exclusions in some secondary schools is too high but the council is working effectively in these schools to reduce this. The 'hard to place' protocol is beginning to improve the rates of integration particularly of pupils aged 11 to 14. Provision in the referral units and complementary centres is good and young people achieve well. Not all the young people who are excluded from school, however, receive the required 20 hours a week of education. The attendance of looked after children is slightly above the national average and improving, as are their levels of achievement. Provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and, in particular, the support for children with autism. The council's approach to educating young people with a disability in mainstream schools is developing well. The council and schools provide good opportunities for children and young people to take part in sport and music.

## Making a positive contribution

**16. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate.** Children and young people are encouraged to contribute their views through school councils, youth forums and a plethora of consultation activities. Consultation and participation are influencing developments at a local level, but at county level the picture is less positive. Young people do not feel that they are consulted sufficiently about developments that affect them and feel that their contributions have limited impact. In drawing up the proposals to reconfigure and reduce youth services, young people were not consulted. Looked after young people make good use of the independent advocacy service. They are well supported to contribute effectively to their reviews and practical matters that affect them. Consultation with some vulnerable groups, including those who offend and young people from travelling communities, however, is unsatisfactory. Children and young people's social and emotional development is helped by the good work of the



council and its partners. Bullying and harassment remain a concern to many young people and whilst effective programmes have been introduced to help reduce anti-social behaviour the range of diversionary activities is limited. Work to support the victims of youth crime by the youth offending service is inadequate. Too few accessible and affordable leisure activities are available to young people, especially for those living in rural areas. The proportion of young offenders in education, training or employment remains well below the national average, which is unsatisfactory.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

**17. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well being is adequate.** A clear and appropriate strategic direction for 14-19 education, training and development has been set by key partners including the local authority, local Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Connexions, schools and colleges. Partnership working and intended action are not yet fully embedded to achieve a significant improvement in outcomes for all young people. Too few employers and work-based learning providers are involved at all levels. Many young people aged 14 to 16 are beginning to benefit from a broader and more vocationally-related curriculum. The provision of post 16 education and training is generally satisfactory although there are variations in the range, quality and availability. The proportion of young people continuing in education or training after the age of 16 is above the national average although it declines significantly at age 17. However, trends in most achievement rates for learners aged 16 to 19 in schools, colleges and work-based learning are improving towards the respective national averages. There is insufficient suitable housing available to meet the needs of vulnerable young people. Parents are supported by good levels and availability of suitable childcare provision. Young people who are looked after have above average participation rates in employment, education and training. Provision of employment for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate for those with low level needs, but is limited for those with complex or profound needs.

### **Service management**

**18. The management of services for children and young people is adequate. The capacity to improve further is good.** Northamptonshire's ambition for children and young people is good and clearly expressed in the community strategy, the Council's improvement plan and the Children and Young People service plan. The ambitions for the area are challenging and realistic. They are well focussed on national priorities around the five outcomes in 'Every Child Matters' but also appropriately grounded in local evidence of need. Prioritisation is good and appropriate to the needs of the county. The interim children and young people's plan shows clear and robust priorities which have been informed by consultation, including with young people. However, comprehensive risk assessments have not been undertaken to inform all proposals for service changes or developments. Capacity in services for children

and young people is adequate overall. Capacity to improve is good. A new senior leadership structure has been in place since August 2005. A Children and Young People's Partnership Board is in place. However councillors' direct contact with front line social care services is not satisfactory. There is clear decision-making and accountability at senior levels but there are some examples at other tiers in children's services where management is less effective. Contracting and commissioning arrangements are not consistently robust and joint commissioning is very limited. Performance management is adequate. There is effective performance management in the Schools Services section but it is less well embedded across other areas of children's services, for example in the youth service. The audit system is unsatisfactory. It is more focused on systems than outcomes and there is no formal reporting of audits to senior management and members. Overall, however, the performance management culture is developing well and there is increasing ownership of it across the service. The quarterly performance review provides sound monitoring, challenge and support for the service.

## Grades

Grades awarded:

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

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

## Recommendations

### For immediate action

- The response of social services to referrals and the quality of risk assessment, casework practice, case audits and management monitoring needs to ensure expected standards are consistently met to protect children.

- Ensure comprehensive risk and impact assessments are completed to inform all strategic and service changes and developments.

### **For action over the next six months**

- PCTs to develop a countywide breastfeeding strategy and improve take up of child health screening.
- Ensure that all excluded pupils receive sufficient full-time education.
- Identify at an earlier stage which schools need support to prevent them falling in to an Ofsted category of concern.
- Develop strategies to improve the access to, and range of, informal learning and recreational opportunities.
- Improve access to employment, training and education for young people who have offended.
- Develop effective work to engage victims of youth crime and address victim issues with young people who offend.
- Develop strategies to ensure that all young people are consulted and their engagement and participation is effective at every level.
- Develop strategies to improve the participation rates in education and training for young people aged 17 and over.
- Ensure that employers and work-based learning providers play a more central role in the development of a strategy for 14 to 19 education and training

### **For action in the longer term**

- Further work is needed at a strategic and targeted level to reduce bullying.
- Co-ordinated joint commissioning, supported by effective contracting arrangements, needs to be developed and monitored appropriately.
- Take steps to improve the range and quality of appropriate housing for young people, particularly those in disadvantaged or vulnerable circumstances.
- Put plans in place to ensure that all young people with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities can progress to post-16 education and training.

# Main Report

## Outcomes for children and young people

19. **Outcomes for children and young people in Northamptonshire are adequate.**

20. **Children and young people are generally healthy.** They have good access to a range of preventative services, including drop in advice sessions at secondary schools. General practitioners have been supported to develop 'teenage friendly surgeries' and access to genito-urinary medicine services for young people has been prioritised. A programme of universal health screening is offered across the county but the take-up rate is variable. The immunisation programme has a high take-up rate. Oral health is good. Access to CAMHS is limited for looked after children, children with learning disabilities and 16 to 18 year olds not in education, and there are long waiting lists. The rate of teenage pregnancy is higher than the national average across the county although the co-ordinated strategy is beginning to have an effect in some areas. The numbers of babies who are breastfed vary across the county. Smoking during pregnancy is not effectively tackled. The needs of children and young people with disabilities are identified effectively through multi-agency assessments.

21. **Most children and young people appear safe.** Services are in place and being developed to protect and to keep children safe. Work on reducing the instances of domestic violence is particularly effective. There is good information available for parents and young people to raise their understanding of safety issues. The investment in family support services is having a positive impact on reducing the number of looked after children and those placed on the child protection register. All children on the child protection register are allocated to a qualified social worker and designated members of staff within schools and other agencies are appropriately trained and supported. However, evidence gathered in the inspection showed that there was a lack of consistency in the quality of intervention and support, and inter agency work often lacked co-ordination. In one area, there was evidence of inappropriate responses to recent referrals, which could have left or placed children at risk. In some cases, there were delays in achieving stability and positive outcomes for children. However, targeted work is being done to improve placement stability for looked after children. Systems are being developed to ensure all children are known to health and education. The number of children with a disability placed out of the county has reduced and is lower than national figures and with comparator councils.

22. **Children and young people achieve well.** The work of the education services is having a positive impact. The range and quality of childcare provision is good and parents and carers are supported well. Most children and young people have good access to music and sport. Vulnerable groups such as looked after young people, teenage mothers and young people from travelling families have good targeted support, which is having a positive impact.

Standards are improving and are above average in primary schools. In secondary schools, pupils' achievements at Key Stage 3 and 4 are below the national average, but overall the trend is upward. The overall effectiveness of the majority of schools is at least satisfactory and, in many, it is good, but not all schools that fall in to a category of concern are anticipated. Attendance is improving. Not enough pupils excluded from school receive the education to which they are entitled. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve satisfactorily. There is effective multi-agency support for children with disabilities, which is helping to raise their achievement.

**23. Children and young people have a satisfactory range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility.**

**Many make a good contribution to their communities.** Children and young people, including those who are looked after, have the skills and confidence to comment on issues that matter to them through participation in school councils, local youth forums and a wide range of consultation activities. However, they do not feel they receive sufficient feedback to consultation activities or that enough notice is taken of their views, especially at county level. Vulnerable groups of children and young people are helped and encouraged to face change and challenge through effective partnership work. Projects designed to reduce anti-social behaviour have been successful. Work with victims of crime by the Youth Offending Service is inadequate. The number of young people who have offended and are in education, employment or training is well below the national average, which is unsatisfactory.

**24. Most young people are prepared adequately for working life, and an increasing number are able to achieve economic well-being.**

An increasing number of young people benefit from a varied and more vocational curriculum available to them from the age of 14 and through the good partnership between schools, further education (FE) colleges and work-based learning providers. The proportion of young people continuing in education or training after the age of 16 is above the national average although it declines significantly at age 17. Young people's chances of success on most of their chosen courses are beginning to improve. In school sixth forms, the average GCE A level points score per candidate is close to national comparators. However, retention rates in some sixth forms are low. Success rates in FE colleges and in work-based learning are around the national average. Appropriate housing for young people in parts of the county is in short supply, especially for vulnerable young people. Young people who are looked after have above average participation in employment, education and training. Education and training opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities vary, but are generally more limited than for other groups.

## The impact of local services

### Being healthy

25. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is adequate.** Multi-agency support for parents and carers to keep themselves and their children healthy is effective and well co-ordinated in several areas, particularly in the Pen Green Centre and Sure Start areas. Multi-agency teams effectively target hard-to-reach groups, for example travellers, parents with depression, teenage parents and fathers. Parents speak highly of the services they receive, particularly the programmes that help them understand their children's emotional and physical development. Plans for developing children's centres are progressing well.

26. Community staff provide good support to mothers and have developed 'baby cafes' and a peer support programme. However, breastfeeding rates vary across the area and there is no co-ordinated breastfeeding strategy to address this. Similarly, there is no consistent approach to reducing smoking during pregnancy. A 'smoking in pregnancy' worker is employed in the south of the county and works effectively with maternity services to provide mothers with one-to-one support and treatment. There is no equivalent post in the north of the county. Children and young people have 24 hour access to dedicated facilities within the two accident and emergency departments in Northamptonshire.

27. Healthy lifestyles are promoted satisfactorily for children and young people. The number of schools working at level 3 of the Healthy Schools initiative is higher than the national average. School nurses offer targeted support to tackle obesity. However, young people express concern about the quality of school meals. The teenage pregnancy partnership has developed a co-ordinated multi-project approach, which has started to reduce teenage pregnancies across the county. However, rates are still higher than the national average across the council and have continued to increase in Kettering. The lack of a policy to share information about children and young people hinders the identification of young mothers and restricts the ability to offer multi-agency support. There is a well-established and positively evaluated programme of sex and relationship education in all primary and secondary schools. There are examples of multi-agency 'drop in' facilities within schools, which provide a range of health promotion activities and individual support. General practitioners are being helped to develop 'teenage friendly surgeries'. Access to genito-urinary medicine services for young people has been prioritised

28. The Drugs and Alcohol Action team, in partnership with agencies and voluntary groups, provides a range of promotion and access to treatment for children and young people. However its development has been weakened by the lack of historic strategic planning and co-ordination. Innovative work to reduce solvent abuse has been developed by Solve-It, a voluntary sector provider.

29. Each area has a co-ordinated plan to promote children and young people's physical health within the community but there is no evidence of a countywide approach. The outcomes of the support are variable. Community staff provide universal health screening across the county and all offer targeted support as required, but engagement is low in some areas. The immunisation programme has a higher than average uptake across the county. Specialist posts to promote health to hard-to-reach groups have been developed including those excluded from school. However, some traveller groups have difficulty accessing general practitioner services. Young people involved in offending behaviour who are referred to the health team within the youth offending service receive appropriately targeted programmes and interventions.

30. Despite positive and significant attempts to develop a unified service, with an aligned budget and shared policies and protocols, the delivery of CAMHS is not consistent across the county and, overall, waiting times are too long. There is no dedicated direct service for looked after young people or for 16-18 year olds not in education. The support for children and young people with learning difficulties is restricted to those with mild learning difficulties. There are primary mental health workers who support doctors, schools and community staff satisfactorily. However, mental health promotion across the county is patchy and not co-ordinated. The CAMHS strategy is designed to reduce these inconsistencies and improve the overall service. A commissioning strategy to address the lack of specialist acute mental health services for young people is not in place.

31. Overall, looked after children's physical health needs are satisfactorily addressed in the county, but the quality of provision varies between the north and south of the county. There is no designated doctor in the south. The health needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are satisfactorily catered for within the multi-agency assessment centres. Assessments are timely and responsive to requests from other agencies, with good communication pathways when children are moved out of the county. The assessments have an effective 'team around the child' approach. Partners work effectively together to provide good support for children with autism.

## Staying safe

32. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** Information is available for young people, parents and carers in a range of formats to help raise awareness about risks and ways of staying safe. This is supported by targeted initiatives to improve road safety, and reduce fire hazards and dangers posed by some adults.

33. Action taken to reduce domestic violence is having a significant impact in helping victims and keeping children safe. This has received national recognition. Work is being undertaken to reduce bullying but children still feel concerned. There is insufficient co-ordination at a strategic and targeted level across agencies to address bullying.



34. The development of Family Resource Centres, whilst at an early stage, forms a central part of the preventative strategy. This investment in family support is having a positive impact in reducing the number of looked after children and children placed on the child protection register. However, support and intervention is not well co-ordinated between agencies and lacks a clear focus. The standard of overall monitoring and management oversight is inconsistent. Agencies do not have a shared understanding of thresholds for intervention, resulting in some referrals to social care not receiving an effective response. Work to develop the Common Assessment Framework across all agencies is slow. No comprehensive directory of services is available. Workers across agencies are often unaware of the range of projects and support to which they can refer or signpost families.

35. Outcomes for children are generally satisfactory, albeit slow to be achieved. In the inspection, evidence showed that for some longer term cases, plans lacked clarity and recommendations from reviews were slow to be progressed. In one referral team, there were examples of poor response to recent referrals, which could have left or placed children at risk. These cases and the lack of management monitoring were raised with senior managers. Immediate action was taken in each case and to address the underlying reasons for this situation occurring. In the other referral team inspected, response to referrals and the quality of casework were satisfactory.

36. Completion of initial and core assessments within timescales has improved. However, they are not consistently informed by multi-agency working and do not always fully consider information available which affects their quality. Systems to monitor practice and casework vary and not all managers use the available management information effectively. Some managers have simple and effective monitoring systems in place but these are not consistently used across the county. Appropriate policies and processes are in place across agencies, which require new staff and carers to have criminal record bureau checks, but these are not followed in all cases.

37. Inter-agency procedures and their use are well monitored by the area child protection committee (ACPC). However, whilst multi-agency child protection procedures have been updated, they have not been distributed. As a result, services only have access to out-of-date procedures. All children on the child protection register are allocated to a qualified social worker. Designated members of staff within schools and other agencies are appropriately trained and supported. Training within agencies and on a multi-agency basis has improved in the last year although insufficient attention has been paid to raising awareness regarding child protection, both within statutory and some voluntary sector projects. Multi-agency public protection arrangements and, in particular, risk management planning, are not sufficiently robust.

38. Case recording across agencies is of variable quality. Not all case files reflect work done and are not structured to help professionals or enable service users to access their records. A file audit system has been introduced but it is

focused on the completion of paperwork rather than outcomes for children and families. Supervision within social care teams does not deal effectively with the quality of practice. Line management is not well evidenced on case files. Reviews and case conferences take place on a regular basis with good multi-agency attendance. Attendance by parents, carers and young people is also good and they are well supported by independent advocacy where appropriate. Review recommendations are not consistently implemented. Serious case reviews are undertaken to an agreed multi-agency framework, but take too long to complete. Recommendations in some cases are not specific enough to lead to improved outcomes.

39. Systems are being developed to ensure all children are known to health services and the education service. Work with traveller children has improved their access to and take up of education. Home link workers are also helping to improve pupil attendance generally.

40. The number of looked after children has reduced partly through the use of family group conferences and kinship care. An appropriate strategy is in place to improve placement stability. Changes in placements and related decisions are monitored and work is being done to increase the number of foster carers. However this has yet to show a significant impact.

41. The number of children with a disability placed out of the county has reduced and is lower than comparator councils and the national average. There are no arrangements in place, however, for joint funding with health, for children placed out of the county. Services for children with autism spectrum syndrome are particularly well developed. There are, however, no effective respite care places for young people with learning difficulties who have seriously challenging behaviour.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

42. **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 support given to parents and carers across the county to enable them to help their children enjoy school and achieve well is good and is particularly well targeted at the most disadvantaged areas.

43. The integrated strategy for early years provision is good; it is well established and well managed. The 2006 target for the number of places for childcare provision has already been met and there is easy access to a good range of provision for under-3s for those parents and carers who want it, especially in the most deprived areas. The range of provision in rural areas is not as wide as resources are rightly targeted on the more deprived urban areas.

44. The early years' school improvement team monitors provision effectively and provides good support. Excellent research work and effective training, particularly catering for teachers of children with learning difficulties and/or

disabilities is also in place. Positive links with infant and primary schools help children sustain the good progress they have made when they transfer.

45. Guidance for parents on admissions arrangements for schools is good. There are sufficient school places but pupil referral units are overstretched. The council has made good progress, reducing surplus places through amalgamating infant and junior schools where circumstances permit and reorganising to a primary and secondary school structure in Northampton town. Since the reorganisation, there have been improvements in pupils' progress and attainment.

46. Provision is excellent in nursery schools, and is good or better in primary schools and in the majority of secondary schools. Standards are improving and are above average in primary schools. In secondary schools pupils' achievements at Key Stage 3 and 4 are below the national average but, overall, the trend is upward. The quality of the authority's intervention and support is effective, especially in schools causing concern. Nevertheless, there are still schools falling in to an Ofsted category of concern which had not been anticipated as requiring support by the council. Increasingly detailed data is used constructively to monitor pupils' performance, including that of black and minority ethnic and vulnerable groups. However the achievement of black African Caribbean and Bangladeshi young people is below other ethnic groups. The support for the implementation of national strategies for raising attainment is effective. It has been particularly successful in Corby where the work of the Education Action Zone, now an Excellence Cluster, is bearing fruit.

47. Pupils' attendance overall is in line with the national average and continues to improve. This is due in part to the recent good management of the work of the education welfare team and successful involvement in a DfES attendance project. The lack of pupil-level data limits the extent and quality of analysis that takes place and the use that can be made of it. For example, there are issues about the attendance status of those children who are sent home to work.

48. Support for behaviour management in schools is adequate. Primary school children behave well, have positive attitudes and generally enjoy school. The picture is not as positive in secondary schools even though the work of behaviour consultants is appropriately targeted there. There has been a significant increase in permanent exclusions since the autumn term 2005, particularly for pupils aged 14 in Northampton town. The level is now too high. Overall pupils in referral units achieve well. However, the requirement for at least 20 hours of full-time education is not met for a significant proportion of excluded pupils. The newly-established protocol for young people who are 'hard to place' is beginning to help reintegrate children and young people at Key Stage 3 into mainstream schools.

49. Provision for teenage mothers in the complementary centres is excellent. The young women are well motivated and supported and their achievement is good. Support for young people from black and minority ethnic groups is good. The traveller education team also provides good support and has an extensive knowledge of the whereabouts and achievements of young people from these communities.

50. School inspections show that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve satisfactorily although the picture is not as positive in secondary and special schools as in primary and nursery. The council's approach to educating young people with disabilities in mainstream schools is developing well. Protocols are well established and well documented. Education, social care and health staff work well together to produce effective multi-agency assessments. There is a high level of parent satisfaction with the support their children receive.

51. Support for the education of children who are looked after is satisfactory. Schools have designated teachers and are provided with good information. Levels of attendance are slightly above the national average and are improving. The Virtual School and the Life Chances team provide good support and track achievement. The number of looked after young people attaining at least one GCSE pass has increased and is higher than comparators. However, looked after children do not achieve many high grades at GCSE.

52. Early years settings and the majority of mainstream schools provide a satisfactory range of after-school, learning and recreational activities. However, provision of informal learning opportunities is more limited for young people aged 13 to 19. The Disabled Children's Service provides a good programme of extra-curricular opportunities. Good provision is made for sport and music. Despite this, many of the young people surveyed wanted more opportunities to take part in these kinds of activities.

### **Making a positive contribution**

53. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate.** Children and young people are well supported in their social and emotional development. Through their work in schools, colleges and other partners, children and young people are helped to form positive relationships. Effective mentoring programmes include those which raise the achievement of young people from black and minority ethnic groups, give assistance to children who are looked after by the council and help for those who experience learning and other difficulties in school. Good examples exist of young people providing mentoring to their peers. However there is no strategic approach to mentoring to ensure it is consistently available to all those who would benefit from it.

54. Children and young people who face change and challenge are provided with good support to cope with difficult periods in their lives. Vulnerable groups of children and young people are helped and encouraged through effective

partnership work. Deaf Connect, for example, provides a good service to young people with hearing loss. The U Choose programme, managed jointly by Connexions personal advisers and youth workers, offers an accredited learning opportunity for young people excluded from school or who are not in education, employment or training. A multi-agency carers strategy group commissions an effective service from Northants Young Carers, which is a model of good practice. Active partnership between health services and social services offers practical support to teenage parents and, with the Youth Offending Service, runs a Ladz 2 Dadz project.

55. Children and young people are encouraged to contribute their views through school councils, youth forums and a plethora of consultation activities. School councils contribute well to young people's knowledge, understanding and practice of citizenship. Opportunities exist for young people to engage in volunteering, for example through the positive work of Millennium Volunteers. A culture of volunteering, however, is not promoted across the county. The youth involvement team enables different groups of young people to have greater influence on the nature and quality of services available to them. One group organised a large cross-county conference for and facilitated by young people. Young people have participated in the recruitment and selection of staff across different partner agencies. Young people have not been formally consulted about the proposal to reconfigure and reduce youth services. The Children's Rights Service actively promotes the participation of looked after children and young people and enables them to make effective contributions. Some vulnerable groups, however, are not well served. Young people who offend, for instance, are not consulted about the services provided for them. Whilst examples exist of young people's views making a difference, this is not always the case; insufficient feedback is provided for children and young people about the outcomes of consultations. Overall, the processes of consultation and participation are insufficiently strategic or co-ordinated across the county to ensure they have a real and consistent impact on the delivery of services.

56. Good partnership work is in place to reduce anti-social behaviour. In Corby, this has enabled different groups to work together, for example, the targeting of different aged young people by the Positive Futures project and Happenin' project. This ensures that resources for activities to divert young people from anti-social behaviour are maximised. The U Turn project, a cross-county activity, successfully supports young people, identified as being at risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour, and their families. It has a service-level agreement with Relate to provide parenting courses. The project has exceeded its targets and is due to be expanded. However, insufficient diversionary activities are available across the county. Although school policies are regularly reviewed and other supportive measures are in place, a significant proportion of children and young people continue to suffer from bullying, harassment and racism. The lack of affordable leisure facilities and transport for those in more rural areas are a concern to many young people.

57. Appropriate action is not always taken by workers to identify and address the needs of young people who offend. Work with victims and the use of restorative interventions is inadequate. The proportion of young offenders in education, training or employment remains well below the national average, which is unsatisfactory. The Reducing Youth Offending project was established to help meet the public service agreement target for reducing youth offending. It is an effective multi-agency group, which has successfully introduced focussed programmes to support children and young people who have offended. It works closely with the seven crime and disorder reduction partnerships. While plans to develop a co-ordinated approach to preventative work for those most at risk of offending are at an advanced stage, they are not yet in place.

58. Arrangements to support the contribution of looked after young people are good overall. A significant proportion of them make contributions to their reviews and these take place on time.' Kic.in2.Study' is a dedicated project which provides looked after young people with a range of opportunities in a well-resourced informal setting. However, although encouraging progress has been made in bringing the numbers of looked after children who offend more in line with the national average, there is no strategy for this work. The Children's Rights Service is a model of good practice. Its advocacy service is well-used by large numbers of looked after young people both within and outside the county. Good progress has been made in developing the council's Corporate Parenting Board. Elected councillors have undertaken appropriate training to better understand their role. Some of this training has been delivered by looked after young people.

59. Arrangements to support children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good. Effective inter-agency work exists at an operational level to share information on individual children and young people. Social workers and Connexions personal advisers contribute well to transition reviews from Year 9 onwards. All looked after young people with disabilities have good access to advocacy services. Parents of children on the disability register receive an informative quarterly newsletter.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

60. **The combined work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well being is adequate.** A clear and appropriate strategic direction for 14-19 education and training development has been set by key partners including the local authority, local LSC, Connexions, schools and colleges. However, key partners recognise that successful delivery of the strategy requires a step change in performance. They have a good understanding of the issues that need addressing to bring this about. Employers and work-based learning providers, particularly at a strategic level and in partnership working in some districts, are insufficiently involved.

61. The co-ordination between strategic groups at county and district levels has improved with an extension of the existing and often long-standing collaboration between district partners. This has already produced examples of good practice, including effective collaborative arrangements between schools and colleges in some districts to offer a broader and more flexible curriculum and the sharing of information about learners. However, despite examples of improving trends in participation and achievement rates, partnership working and planned actions are not yet sufficiently embedded to bring about a significant improvement in outcomes for all young people.

62. Many young people aged 14 to 16 are experiencing an increased range of work-related provision. In the majority of schools, pupils undertake a period of work experience as part of the key stage 4 curriculum and have the opportunity to study vocational GCSEs. The increased flexibility programme has been used well to enhance collaboration between schools and colleges with good success and progression rates for young people who take part.

63. A responsive approach has been made to meet the needs of some vulnerable young people through entry to employment (E2E) and pre-E2E programmes. Examples of effective work by Connexions includes appropriate guidance for young people and good strategic partnership work to reduce the number of young people not in education or training in most areas of the county. The number of young people who offend who are not in education, employment or training is very high. An effective '*Aimhigher*' programme is helping to raise aspirations and awareness of all progression opportunities into higher education, including those available through work-based learning. Good levels and availability of childcare provision overall supports parents taking up training and employment.

64. A full curriculum audit is being undertaken to identify the gaps in provision across the county. The quality of provision in all types of providers of post-16 provision is at least satisfactory but there is not enough good provision. The local LSC and local authority is actively promoting improvements and supporting capacity building.

65. The local authority, in partnership with borough councils, has started to successfully target funding and initiatives for community regeneration in some of the most needy areas of the county. In particular, an ambitious regeneration programme is planned for the Corby area to generate economic growth and transform the social, education and leisure facilities within the town. There is good involvement of all key strategic partners at both county and borough level and a strong emphasis on community involvement and support. Pilot project work has worked well in improving the quality of life in one of the town's most deprived estates, through, for example, the development of local entrepreneurship, a teenage café for young people and the provision of a skills centre.

66. Provision of housing services for young people in Northamptonshire is underdeveloped. Existing services vary in quality and are unevenly distributed across the county. In some areas, housing strategies are beginning to be linked to wider issues of community regeneration and neighbourhood renewal with a clear emphasis given to meeting the needs of disadvantaged families and young people. For example, in Corby, as part of the 'Supporting People' programme, good progress is being made in enabling vulnerable young people to develop independent living skills through the development of 'floating support' services. There is good provision for teenage parents within Corby. However, other areas, including Northampton town, are not responding effectively to the need to provide suitable accommodation for many young people including some who are leaving care, teenage parents, and young people who offend. The county council's community support team provides a good service to vulnerable young people aged 16 and 17 who have difficulty in finding accommodation.

67. Arrangements to encourage and support children and young people who are looked after to engage in education employment or training are satisfactory. The leaving care service provides effective support to care leavers to enable them to achieve independence but there are no drop-in facilities available. Only three quarters of looked after children over 15, however, have a personal adviser. While clear transition protocols are in place they are not always followed when young people are being transferred to the leaving care team, which is not satisfactory. A significant number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors are not receiving adequate support.

68. There are good examples of provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities for example within work-based learning and some colleges. The proportion of young people in this group who participate in work based learning is slightly above the national average. However, overall, there is insufficient provision to meet the needs of all young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In particular, there are limitations for the progression for learners with emotional and behavioural difficulties and more complex needs. Arrangements for multi-agency transition forums are long standing and work well. Too few young people are in receipt of direct payments although a clear strategy is in place to improve this.

## Service management

69. **The management of services for children and young people is adequate. The capacity to improve further is good.** Ambition for children and young people is good. Clear and relevant ambitions are expressed in the community strategy, the Council's improvement plan and the Children and Young People service plan. The ambitions the Council and its partners have set are challenging and realistic. They are well focussed on national priorities around the five outcomes in 'Every Child Matters'.

70. Ambitions are based on a shared understanding of local need, often involving stakeholders including district and borough councils, health service partners and the police. However, the degree to which needs analysis informs



the development of services for children and young people, particularly at a local level, is not fully developed. There have been well-managed consultations, such as the reorganisation of education to a primary and secondary school structure in Northampton. This is an example of where councillors and officers have tackled a difficult problem and taken tough decisions, which are improving outcomes for children, and young people as seen in their key stage three results.

71. Prioritisation is good and there is differentiation in the interim children and young people's plan to take account of the needs of the county. The children and young people service plan and the interim children and young people's plan show clear and robust priorities, which have been informed by consultation. The priorities in the plan have been amended following consultation with young people to take account of their views, and, as a result, now explicitly include reducing bullying and improving access to leisure. A priority of the community strategy includes raising education standards, skills and qualifications; achieving well-performing local schools; and extending the use of schools as the heart of local communities. The Children and Young People Service is able to give a sound and well documented account of what actions are planned to secure and monitor service delivery. The Caroline Chisholm School provides good evidence that the council can deliver on its ambitions and priorities.

72. Capacity in services for children and young people is adequate. Capacity to improve is good. The recently appointed Director of Children and Young People is providing sound direction for the development of services. There is strong decision making and accountability at senior management levels of the service but there are examples of less effective management, at other tiers, in children's services. Roles and responsibilities are clear including those, respectively, of the Director and the Cabinet member for children and young people. However, councillors' direct contact with front line social care services is inadequate. Strategies are in place to address social worker vacancies in order to retain staff on a longer term basis, bringing stability to the service.

73. There is strong commitment by all partner agencies to delivering integrated services through the Children and Young People Partnership Board. The Board is chaired by a Borough Council chief executive and this helps provide the Board with authoritative leadership. Delivering on the outcomes is at an early stage.

74. Achieving value for money is adequate, however this is not consistent across the service. There are cases of under-used resources and there is no systematic way of understanding the link between performance and value for money. For example, the resourcing of one of the pupil referral units illustrates a high ratio of staff to pupils, which is not cost effective. Some schools, in both the primary and secondary sectors, have significant surpluses in their accounts. Although the council has consulted with schools about introducing a 'clawback' provision as an incentive to schools to spend funds on pupils currently at the school, no strategy is in place.

75. Not all projects are evaluated to ensure they are well targeted and consistent with priorities. The sustainability of a number of good projects is not assured. Contracting and commissioning arrangements are variable in quality, and there is limited joint commissioning. Plans by the partnership board to appoint a joint commissioner aim to address this. Risk assessment is not used consistently in the approach to financial management. For example, proposed cuts in services to meet the funding available in the 2006/7 budget were not risk-assessed before being presented to councillors even though a number of the cuts, if implemented, will have significant impact on service delivery.

76. Performance management within the children and young people's service is adequate. Overall, a performance management culture is developing well and there is increasing ownership of it across the service. The large majority of staff has professional development plans in place. There is strong performance management in the Schools Service section. It is, however, less well embedded across Services for Children. For example, recommendations in reviews are not being consistently followed through and the lack of capacity of some staff to manage complex caseloads has not been addressed. There are a number of cases where the needs of individual children have not been managed effectively. Ethnic origin is not recorded consistently on case files. Performance management has not been used to improve operations in the youth service, a persistently under-performing provision for young people.

77. There are good examples of the use of performance management to spread notable practice and drive improvement, such as the reduction in time to complete conference reviews. However, the dissemination of good practice is not routinely undertaken across the service. The independence of review chairs is compromised by where they are in the current structure, which weakens their contribution to quality assurance.

78. The childcare case file audit system is unsatisfactory. It is more focused on systems than outcomes and there is no formal reporting of audits to senior management and councillors. There is little evidence of children and young people contributing to performance management.

79. Where performance management is good, targets for improvement are set in line with priorities; performance and under performance are monitored and the Schools Service plan demonstrates how performance is analysed and addressed. The regular reporting cycles for the quarterly performance review are regarded as challenging and both councillors and senior officers are very effectively involved in this challenge. The Children Scrutiny Committee is not providing sufficiently robust challenge to the performance of the children and young people's service.

80. Performance management of partnership working is at an early stage as are the arrangements with partners for performance monitoring and managing the neighbourhood renewal strategy. However, a corporate protocol has been agreed with partners for the performance management of the local area

agreement, and a protocol has been agreed with partners for the performance management of its Children and Young People's Plan.

81. The self assessment for the joint area review identifies most of the strengths and weaknesses in services for children and young people across the area. However, the weaknesses and inconsistent practice in response to referrals, poor co-ordination of multi-agency working and examples of ineffective management monitoring are not identified.

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

1. The council is performing adequately in this area. Outcomes for children and young people in Northamptonshire are adequate. Targeted work is showing some positive results, but provision, especially for more vulnerable young people, is not consistent across the county. The council's youth service is inadequate. The youth offending service is performing adequately.

2. There are clear and relevant ambitions for children and young people expressed in the community strategy, the Council's improvement plan and the Children and Young People's service plan. There is strong commitment by all partner agencies to delivering integrated services through the Children and Young People Partnership Board. However delivering on the outcomes is at an early stage. The Children and Young People's interim plan show clear and robust priorities.

3. Achieving value for money is adequate although this is not yet consistent across the service. Risk assessment is not used consistently in the approach to financial management. There is no process in place to ensure that all projects, which support children and families, are well targeted, and consistent with priorities. Performance management is adequate. It is very robust in some services. However there are areas in which performance is poor and this is not being identified and addressed.

4. The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is adequate. Children and young people are generally healthy. Multi-agency support for parents and carers to keep themselves and their children healthy is effective and well co-ordinated. Teenage parents are well supported but there are still high rates of teenage pregnancy in some areas. A programme of universal health screening is in place but the take-up rate is variable. The extent of breastfeeding varies and there is no overall strategy in place to address this. Immunisation rates are high and oral health is good. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services have long waiting lists and offer limited services to some vulnerable groups.

5. The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate. Most children and young people appear safe. There is good information available for parents and young people to raise their understanding of safety issues. The investment in family support services is having a positive impact. While outcomes for most children are satisfactory there are concerns about the quality and consistency of some casework practice and lack of consistent management oversight. Most parents of children with disabilities value the services provided although there are insufficient respite places for young people with learning disabilities who have seriously challenging behaviour.

6. 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 strategy for childcare and early years is good. Pupils' attendance is in line with the national average and is improving. The level of exclusions is too high. Provision in the referral units and complementary centres is good and young people achieve well. Not all the young people who are excluded from school, however, receive the required 20 hours a week of education. In primary schools standards are above average. Standards in key stages 3 and 4 in secondary schools are below the national average but overall are improving. The attendance and attainment of looked after children is slightly above average and improving. Support for black minority ethnic pupils is good. Provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is effective. Good opportunities are provided for children and young people to take part in sport and music.

7. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate with some strengths. There are good opportunities for many young people to contribute to the way their schools are run and to local issues that matter to them. However young people do not feel that they are consulted sufficiently about developments that affect them and that their contributions have limited impact. Looked after young people make good use of the independent advocacy service. Children and young people's social and emotional development is well supported. However, bullying and harassment remain a concern to many young people. Effective programmes have been introduced to help reduce anti-social behaviour. Work with victims of youth crime is inadequate. Too few accessible and affordable leisure activities are available to young people. The numbers of young people who offend who are not in employment, education or training is well above the national average, which is not satisfactory.

8. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well being is adequate. A clear and appropriate strategic direction for 14-19 education and training development has been set by key partners. However it has not yet achieved a significant improvement in outcomes for all young people. There is insufficient inclusion of employers and work-based learning providers at all levels. Many young people aged 14 to 16 are beginning to benefit from a broader curriculum. The provision of post-16 education and training is generally satisfactory. The proportion of young people continuing in education or training after the age of 16 is above the national average although it declines significantly at age 17. There are improving trends in most achievement rates for learners aged 16 to 19 in schools, colleges and work-based learning. There are insufficient levels of suitable housing to meet the needs of all young people. Young people who are looked after participate well in employment, education and training. Provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate for those with low level needs, but limited for those with complex or profound needs with seriously challenging behaviour.