



# Joint area review

Milton Keynes Children's Services Authority Area

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## 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  
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## Introduction

1. This joint area review was conducted using the arrangements required under Section 20 of the Children Act 2004. It was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of eight inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), the Audit Commission and the Adult Learning Inspectorate. 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 Milton Keynes 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 earlier Youth Offending Team (YOT) inspection; and
- 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, Beanhill and Netherfield. It also included gathering evidence on 10 key judgements, selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. This included discussions with elected members of the council 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. Milton Keynes is an area which is growing and developing to an unusual degree. Its current population of an estimated 216,000 is expected to expand by almost 50% by 2031 in response to the government's programme for the building of homes. Its location, plans for growth and good communication links continue to attract many national and international businesses.

8. The population of the area is predominantly young: there are above average proportions of children aged 0-15 years, and of people of working age. The population has grown by 3.6% since 2001, which is an increase of more than double the national and regional rates. There is an above-average birth rate; the number of school-age children is expected to increase by 5% by 2011, and that of 0-4 year olds by 17% over the same period. In response to this population growth, the council has opened seven new schools in the last 18 months and has plans for a further 16 new schools.

9. The population of Milton Keynes is becoming increasingly diverse. The proportion of local residents whose ethnic background is other than White British is close to the national figure, but well above that in the south east region. In particular, the proportion of people of Black African heritage is above that for England and well above that for the south-east region. Black African individuals and families who originally travelled to other European countries as refugees have subsequently moved to Milton Keynes. Unemployment, at 1.9% of the working population, is just below the national average, but above that for the region. An above average 15% of the population live in low-income households. Of secondary school pupils, 11% are eligible for free school meals, which is well below the national average but slightly above that for the region. Milton Keynes is ranked 157 out of 354 councils in England and Wales in terms of overall deprivation. There has been a significant increase in home ownership to approximately 80% in 2004. The school population is unusually mobile as families move within Milton Keynes to better housing. One quarter of primary schools have pupil mobility of more than 25%.

10. The integration of children's social care and education with other community services started early in Milton Keynes, when the area became a unitary authority in 1997. The directorate of learning and development now covers all the council's children's services, and includes several posts jointly funded with the Primary Care Trust (PCT). The council and Milton Keynes PCT

have also jointly appointed the director of public health. A lead member for children's services has been appointed, and the corporate director of learning and development is the overall director of children's services. The children and young people's strategy group has been in place for two years, with a membership comprising the council, the PCT and acute trust, the police, community and voluntary groups. Two headteachers will shortly join the partnership. Public consultation on the draft children and young people's plan was completed just before the inspection. The priorities outlined within the plan are based on needs analyses and link to those of the community strategy, which emphasises the importance of local partnerships. There is a children's trust in shadow form. The council currently looks after 233 children and young people, and there are 35 children and young people on the child protection register. The proportions of children and young people in these categories are below average, especially the percentage on the child protection register, which is extremely low.

11. Primary healthcare and mental health services for children are provided by Milton Keynes Primary Care Trust. Milton Keynes General Hospital NHS Trust is the main provider of acute health services. The trusts providing health services for the children of Milton Keynes fall within the Thames Valley Health Authority.

12. A school reorganisation programme is underway to ensure that secondary education starts at the beginning of Key Stage 3, moving away from a previous system of middle schools. This process is scheduled for completion in September 2006, by which time there will be two nursery schools, 36 infant schools, 16 junior schools, 38 primary schools and 12 maintained secondary schools. In addition there are six special schools and four pupil referral units.

13. The Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) works in partnership with the council, the further education (FE) college, training providers, and schools in developing and implementing the 14-19 strategy. Post-16 education and training is provided by one general FE college, 10 sixth forms and 11 work-based training providers. The two new secondary schools will have sixth forms once pupils have reached Year 12. Entry to Employment (E2E) provision is managed by three work-based training providers. Adult and community learning, including family learning, is provided by the council and the FE college. There is also a prison taking young people from the age of 18, and a secure training centre which is undergoing separate inspection monitoring by the CSCI.

## Summary report

### Outcomes for children and young people

14. Outcomes for children and young people in Milton Keynes are at least adequate and in some aspects good. Children and young people are generally healthy and almost all schools participate in the Healthy Schools initiative.

There has been a significant reduction in conception rates for young women under 18 years of age. The proportion of expectant mothers who smoke is below the national average and declining; an above average, and increasing, proportion of mothers are initiating breast feeding. Good rates of immunisation are protecting children from common illnesses. Milton Keynes is generally a safe place for children and young people to live. The council's partners have refocused services effectively towards the early identification and prevention of harm and family breakdown. This has led to a significant reduction in the number of children on the child protection register, and in the number of children looked after by the council. Children and young people at immediate risk of significant harm are identified and safeguarded promptly. A small number of children in need experience unacceptable delays in being allocated a social worker and receiving an assessment of need.

15. Children and young people generally achieve adequately academically and enjoy their education. Standards of attainment are broadly in line with national averages, except at age 11 when they are slightly low; in general, standards up to age 16 are rising steadily. Young people from some minority ethnic groups tend to achieve lower standards than others but, in certain respects, this gap has reduced recently. School attendance is in line with national averages. Children and young people benefit from a range of opportunities to develop socially and emotionally, and to contribute constructively to their communities. The numbers of young people involved in offending are small. Multi-agency support has reduced anti-social behaviour in targeted areas. Most young people are placed in housing which meets their needs. Young people are helped to prepare for working life. There are satisfactory opportunities overall for vocational study at Key Stage 4, although not all pupils have access to these. More learners are staying on in sixth forms, but the curriculum is not yet enabling all post-16 learners in schools to achieve in line with what could be expected given their prior qualifications. GCE/AVCE average point scores have declined overall in schools.

## **The impact of local services**

### **Being healthy**

**16. The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.**

17. There is a comprehensive range of services for parents and carers. Some of these benefit from joint commissioning arrangements, and others from integrated working between providers. Parents and carers of young children are supported well by health visitors, who link effectively with partner organisations to provide a seamless service. The Healthy Schools initiative has been adopted across the locality. Schools value the local services which support young people's mental health needs, although they report that access to mental health support can be too slow. There is a misapprehension that only general practitioners (GPs) can refer young people to child and adolescent mental

health services (CAMHS). There is a good strategy for (CAMHS), which promotes partnership working arrangements and provides clear plans to develop the service and address these issues. Looked after children receive the necessary health assessments, checks and care. There is good-quality, 'joined-up' service provision for children and young people with disabilities. The development of joint commissioning in some areas has been slow, however, and partnership working between the acute trust and other partners is not yet fully developed.

## Staying safe

**18. The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** Many agencies combine to work on reducing anti-social behaviour and crime, but a minority of children and young people do not feel safe in their neighbourhoods.

19. Partners have refocused services effectively to support parents and carers in keeping their children safe and minimising child abuse and neglect. There is a good emphasis on the welfare of children and on the primary responsibility of parents for safeguarding children, and a good strategy to increase the coverage of safeguarding by developing further local family support services. The strengthening of family support services has led to a significant reduction in the numbers on the child protection register. Those children at immediate risk of harm are identified promptly and protected. There is a wide and innovative range of support services to prevent family breakdown, although there are some aspects of provision where there is insufficient capacity to meet needs, such as those of young carers, children exhibiting sexualised behaviour and some needing one-to-one support at home. The plans to commission these services are at an early stage.

20. Collaboration across the agencies to support children assessed as in need and vulnerable is sound, although understanding and acceptance among some individuals within agencies, such as schools, are inconsistent in relation to thresholds, responsibilities and referral procedures. A small number of children in need experience a delay in receiving an assessment and an allocated worker. The Area Child Protection Committee's (ACPC's) arrangements to scrutinise and monitor the overall effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements is under developed, but there are plans for the newly established Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LCSB) to address this. The current policy and procedure for the referral, assessment and support of children and young people who move in and out of Milton Keynes are inadequate. The council is taking steps to address this issue in the context of a fast-growing and mobile population. There are satisfactory arrangements to support some groups such as young people of refugee origin, but current arrangements for establishing the identity and whereabouts of all children aged 0-16 years are insufficient. Services to provide looked after children with a suitable, stable and safe home are generally satisfactory, although local placement provision is in short supply. Among managers and practitioners there is an inconsistent understanding and

application of the delegated decision-making under the Placement of Children with Parents etc Regulations 1991. The arrangements to support parents and carers in safeguarding children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are generally sound.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

**21. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and achieve well is adequate.**

22. Schools and childcare settings provide almost all pupils with at least a satisfactory education; many schools and nurseries are good or better. The range of recreational opportunities is adequate, with some strengths. The council's reorganisation of schools to improve pupils' attainment, and its building of new schools for a rapidly expanding population, are proceeding very well. The school improvement service has had some success in supporting pupils recently arrived in Milton Keynes' schools, including those of refugee origin. Actions to improve the achievement of some minority ethnic groups are beginning to make a positive impact. The service has a good action plan to raise standards at age 11 after a recent slight fall. The service is, however, more highly valued in primary and special schools than in secondary schools. Collaboration between agencies has helped to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions from primary schools. A few secondary schools have difficulty in managing the behaviour of some pupils and their exclusion rates are high. The council's provision for pupils who have been excluded is inadequate and falls well short of ensuring that all children and young people receive full-time education.

23. The council has made significant improvements in provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but the support given to individuals and their families is still inconsistent and there is not yet a clear vision for the future role of special schools, for instance their links with mainstream provision. Looked after children receive useful educational support but their foster carers receive only limited guidance about education. The council has recently increased its educational support for young people of minority ethnic heritage and, in some respects, their achievement is improving.

### **Making a positive contribution**

**24. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.**

25. Partners use a range of provision, including the youth service and specific projects, to help children and young people to develop socially and emotionally. Collaborative arrangements between the council and partners, such as the voluntary sector and Connexions, provide effective support for disadvantaged families, and vulnerable young people who are at risk of social exclusion. There are many opportunities for children and young people to become involved

constructively in society, both at school and in their local communities. They are frequently consulted on issues that affect them, although there is not yet a strategy and structures to ensure systematic participation. Care leavers and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have opportunities to make a positive contribution. An advocacy service for looked after children and children in need is developing well. Various projects have supported older children and young people with differing degrees of success, although they have not all been effectively managed or evaluated.

26. Concerns about anti-social behaviour are being addressed through early intervention, and demonstrate both collaboration and innovation on the part of many partner agencies. Formal arrangements, such as the Community Safety Partnership, work well. At local level there is increasing liaison and information sharing, such as initiatives to co-locate council housing staff and neighbourhood police teams. The Youth Offending Service (YOS) makes a good contribution. The numbers of young people involved in the youth justice system have not risen in line with the rise in population, and projects aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour are effective.

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

**27. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate.**

28. Strategic partners have agreed a revised strategy and entitlement for 14-19 education and training. The strategy is broadly satisfactory but does not focus sufficiently on the needs of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Partnership working has led to a broader range of vocational options for 14-16 year olds, although not all schools are yet offering a suitable range of opportunities. Good links are being created by the partnership to start to address skills gaps in the area. The Connexions service provides much effective support for individuals and Aimhigher is raising aspirations. There is much worthwhile support to young people in preparing for working life, although information, advice and guidance for school pupils on the full range of opportunities available at age 16 are not always impartial. Schools have started to offer alternatives to traditional GCE advanced levels in the sixth form, including some level 2 provision. A higher proportion of Year 11 learners choose to progress into their school sixth form than previously. However outcomes for young people show that the post-16 curriculum is not yet meeting the needs of all learners who stay on at school, especially those with lower GCSE point scores. Numbers remaining in education and training at 16 have improved and are broadly in line with the national average, but a significant number of young people leave education at 17. Looked after children and care leavers are well supported by the leaving care team and Connexions.

### **Service management**

**29. The management of services for children and young people is good.** The council's and its partners' self-assessment identified many of the

strengths and some of the areas for development in the current provision of services. The partners' ambitions for children and young people are clear and challenging; they focus on building on and developing preventative services for vulnerable children and young people to improve outcomes. Inter-agency collaboration through the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership is good. Ambitions are based on a comprehensive analysis of need, and have been strengthened through inclusion in a range of other plans. The approach to prioritising services for children and young people is good. Joint planning has been in place since 1999 across the main partner agencies, including the voluntary sector. Priorities are based on needs and gaps or weaknesses in services. Resources are clearly linked to priorities and plans within the council and its partners. The council is making difficult decisions and taking robust action to deliver priorities, for instance aligning education provision more closely with the needs of children. Good partnership working has led to clear accountability for decision-making, and there is progress towards the establishment of a children's trust. Leadership from senior managers and councillors is strong; staff at all levels are clear about their role in delivering the area's priorities. The need to anticipate future service needs to respond to a growing population of children and young people has informed the area's preventative approach. Partners have worked together to integrate services where this is appropriate, and have developed capacity in the voluntary and community sector.

**30. The partners' capacity to improve further is adequate.** Work to build and release additional capacity, such as through joint commissioning, is at an early stage. The council's own capacity to improve services is also adequate. Additional capacity is developing, but is stretched by the growth and changes in the area. It has proven capacity to deliver significant strategic changes, particularly in education, such as a major school building programme. The pressure on demand-led budgets is growing. Staff recruitment is not keeping pace to meet the necessary growth in services, or to implement changes, such as strategic commissioning to support early intervention. Some important strategic work has been delayed due to capacity constraints within the council. Work to implement information sharing and common assessment processes, and to identify lead professionals, has slipped. Work to improve the quality of some outcomes for children and young people is only now underway. Provision to meet the needs of children and young people without a school place is inadequate, and a small number of children in need experience unacceptable delays in being allocated a social worker and having their needs assessed.

## Grades

Grades awarded:

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

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

## Recommendations

### For immediate action

- The council should review and improve the understanding and application of arrangements for delegated decision-making under the Placement of Children with Parents etc Regulations 1991.
- The LCSB should develop further policy and procedures, and improve practice, to check the quality, consistency and effectiveness of the safeguarding and family support arrangements.
- The council should strengthen compliance with the arrangements to quality assure the safeguarding and family support arrangements in social care.
- The council should ensure that pupils permanently excluded from school receive full-time educational provision.

### For action over the next six months

- Partners should review and improve arrangements for partnership working with the acute trust.
- Partners should ensure that arrangements for access to CAMHS for children and young people are well understood and working effectively.
- The LCSB should review the arrangements for the effective communication of thresholds, responsibilities and referral procedures between agencies and especially schools, with particular attention being paid to the support of children who move in and out of Milton Keynes.
- Partners should: incorporate into the 14-19 education and training strategy appropriate plans and actions relating to provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and skills for life for 16-19 learners; improve access to post-16 vocational provision in some schools, particularly at lower levels; and enhance teaching and learning methods to improve GCE/VCE attainment.

## For action in the longer term

- In collaboration with schools and other partners, the council should develop a clearer vision for the future role of special schools and their links with mainstream schools.
- The council and its partners should develop a strategy for the participation of children and young people in making decisions which impact upon their lives.
- The council should monitor and evaluate the outcomes of improvement projects for children and young people.

## Main Report

### Outcomes for children and young people

31. **Children and young people are generally healthy.** The proportion of expectant mothers who smoke is below average and declining. An above average, and increasing, proportion of mothers are initiating breast feeding. The proportion of babies with low birth weight has declined to about average: the infant mortality rate has also declined in recent years, but is above average. The number of children under five who have first contact with health visitors is significantly above the national average, the rate of immunisation by the second birthday is good, and children's dental health is better than average. Almost all schools participate in the Healthy Schools initiative and a majority are working towards the national Healthy Schools status. There is good access for children and young people to general practitioners. Action to reduce the rates of teenage pregnancy has contributed to a year-on-year reduction in conception rates for young women aged under 18. The rates of infection from chlamydia are below average. Low numbers of young adults are admitted to hospital suffering from problems associated with substance misuse, compared with the national average. There are good take-up rates by looked after children to annual health assessments, immunisation and dental checks. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good health support.

32. **Milton Keynes is generally a safe place for children and young people to live,** although a minority of young people do not always feel safe in their local neighbourhoods. The number of children aged 0-15 killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents has reduced and is relatively low. Social care services have been effectively refocused towards the early identification and prevention of harm and family breakdown. This has led to a significant reduction in the number of children on the child protection register, to a level well below average, and in the number of children looked after by the council. Children and young people at immediate risk of significant harm are identified and safeguarded promptly and adequately. However, a small number

of children identified as being in need experience unacceptable delays in the allocation of a social worker, and in receiving a thorough assessment of their needs. Looked after children generally receive good family support and are positive about their experiences, but the inadequate level of local placement provision affects the quality of outcomes for some.

**33. Children and young people generally achieve adequately and enjoy their education.** Almost all young people surveyed feel they are doing well at school and feel safe and happy there. Children's standards of attainment at age five and seven are broadly in line with those seen nationally, but they decline to below average by age 11. However, standards then improve and at ages 14 and 16 are broadly similar to those seen nationally. In general, standards across the age range are steadily rising, but young people from some minority ethnic groups tend to achieve lower standards than others; however, in certain respects, this gap has reduced recently. For example, by the end of Year 11 pupils of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black African heritage have closed or reduced the gaps in achievement, although for those of Black Caribbean heritage the gap remains. The achievement of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly similar to the national picture. The proportion of looked after children who achieve well at GCSE is low. However, many have complex needs and others make sound progress. Overall, pupils' school attendance is in line with the national figure and is steadily improving, especially in primary schools. A higher proportion of pupils than nationally was permanently excluded from primary schools until this year, when the number fell significantly; the number excluded from secondary schools, by contrast, rose this year, having previously been average.

**34. Children and young people have a good range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility, and many make a positive contribution to their communities.** Young people benefit from a range of provision which helps them to develop socially and emotionally. Many young people are engaged in volunteering opportunities. Regular consultation events are held by the council and its partners with children and young people, but their ability to influence decision-making at this level is limited. At local level, there are many examples of children and young people being involved in projects and neighbourhood developments. Many of these are initiated by the youth service, which provides activities that benefit an above average proportion of the 13-19 year old population. The numbers of young people involved in offending are small. A range of preventative and early intervention projects is contributing to reductions in anti-social behaviour. Good opportunities exist for care leavers to contribute to service development and for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make their views known. A satisfactory proportion of looked after children take part in their progress reviews. Support for those in care to make a positive contribution was adversely affected for a period by staff vacancies and sickness in the Children's Rights Service, but vacancies have now been filled. An independent friendship and advocacy support service for looked after children is developing well, and also provides advocacy for children in need.

35. **Children and young people are adequately supported to achieve economic well-being and prepare for working life.** Parents have good opportunities to develop their basic skills. Progress is being made in the number of homes meeting national standards, but not all vulnerable families and young people are housed in suitable accommodation. The number of young people continuing in education and training after Year 11 is rising, and in 2005 was broadly in line with the national average. However the proportion of 17 year olds in education or training is well below average. Many young people enter employment directly, but too few have access to accredited training while in employment. A satisfactory number of young people aged 14-16 have access to vocational options, and they achieve well. More young people are choosing to stay on into the sixth form: more alternatives to traditional advanced level provision are now available, including some level 2 courses, but the curriculum is not yet effectively meeting the needs of all learners. While the overall GCE/VCE advanced level point scores in the area have increased to just below the national average, when school and FE college data are combined, the overall average points scores for schools have declined over the last two years. In some schools, a number of young people are not achieving at advanced level in line with expectations from their prior achievements.

## The impact of local services

### Being healthy

36. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Most aspects of health have an increasingly high priority across the locality.

37. Partnership working is leading to good outcomes for children and young people. There is a comprehensive range of services for parents and carers in place; some of these benefit from joint commissioning arrangements, and others from integrated working between providers. There are generally robust plans that are tackling issues such as breast-feeding and smoking during pregnancy effectively. Parents and carers of young children are well supported by health visitors who work well with partner organisations to provide a coherent service. Health professionals in schools work well with parents and carers to meet the needs of children over the age of five. All general practice lists within Milton Keynes are open, providing easy access to primary care for new residents to the area. There has been a good response from dentists to the new dental contract, ensuring that provision within the area is accessible. The development of joint commissioning in some areas has been slow, however, and partnership working between the acute trust and other partners is not fully developed.

38. The Healthy Schools initiative has been adopted across the locality, with almost all schools participating, and 56% working towards the national Healthy Schools status: the community paediatrician and a nurse are effectively involved in this work. The majority of young people see themselves as healthy,

which is in line with the national picture. Health visitors and school nurses work well in partnership with the council and the voluntary sector to deliver the public health agenda, supported by jointly-funded posts and partners' shared responsibility for services. There are designated health visitors for social inclusion, looked-after children, asylum-seekers and homeless families and Travellers. Health visitors and school nurses employed by the PCT also provide a good service across the area, with individuals specialising in issues such as child protection, special needs and paediatric liaison. Effective action has been taken to reduce teenage pregnancies. A teenage pregnancy strategy group links strongly with schools and sexual health services. There are also effective links with the Brooks advisory service on sexual health by the genito-urinary medicine service at the hospital and other partner organisations.

39. Children's services within the Acute Trust are good overall, although, as elsewhere, provision for young people aged over 14 in paediatric units is not entirely appropriate. Assessment units have been established to avoid hospital. Services for paediatric continuing care are being streamlined and better integrated within the partnership, with formal plans currently being developed. In other areas, such as the children's disabilities team and some other activities undertaken within public health, formal operational plans are not in place to ensure the continuity and review of services and their outcomes.

40. Mental health services for children are incorporated clearly within the children's and young people's agenda. There is a good strategy for CAMHS, which actively promotes partnership working arrangements. The voluntary sector provides a good range of additional services for children and young people, working closely with CAMHS. Schools value the work of local services in supporting the mental health needs of young people, but report that access to mental health support for children and young people is too slow. There is a misapprehension that referrals for Tier 2 services can only be made by GPs, when this is not the case. Access to services for children and young people with more severe mental health needs is provided within nationally prescribed waiting list times. There are swift and appropriate referrals into CAMHS for looked after children. The service has been reviewed and the CAMHS strategy group, which includes the joint commissioner, is addressing the areas for development.

41. Looked after children receive the necessary health assessments, checks and care. There are well-embedded processes in place which ensure that their health needs are reviewed regularly; identified healthcare needs and actions taken are recorded effectively. Looked after children have good rates of annual health assessments, immunisation and dental checks. There are designated health professionals available for looked after children, with strong working partnerships and involvement by professionals from a range of services. The nurse for looked after children is helpfully located with local authority colleagues. Strong efforts are made to provide looked after children with accessible health promotion and preventative information.

42. There is good healthcare provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. When need is identified, an effective team offers support and clinical services to families. The school nurses within the team provide strong support to staff within special and mainstream schools to help them supply good care for children with additional and complex medical needs. Young people are supported effectively to prepare for their transition out of specialist children's health services relating to their disabilities. However, parents would like more information and support to gain a clearer understanding of what services will be available for their children in the future.

### **Staying safe**

#### **43. The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.**

44. There are some striking features in the arrangements to safeguard children and young people in Milton Keynes. Over the last nine years there has been a significant and sustained reduction in the numbers of children on the child protection register. This is a consequence of services to safeguard children being refocused effectively from more formal child protection procedures into family support. This refocusing of services has been well conceived and delivered on a multi-agency basis.

45. All agencies understand the importance of their role in helping parents keep their children safe, and in ensuring that concerns about significant harm are referred for appropriate action. As a result of the high priority given to safeguarding children through family support, the council and PCT provide good information for families about the range of services they can access. There is a wide range of provision commissioned from the voluntary sector and some good initiatives for children and young people such as the Hazard Alley safety centre and the Young Drivers initiative. Once a child is identified as being in need, agencies work well together with families to ensure they are informed and supported in keeping their children safe. There is a good emphasis on the welfare of children and on the primary responsibility of parents for safeguarding children, and a good strategy to increase the coverage of safeguarding by developing further locally accessible family support services. There are currently areas of unmet need, such as for some children exhibiting sexualised behaviour, some young carers, and some children needing one-to-one support at home.

46. The priority given to providing children with a safe environment by all agencies is good. Milton Keynes is generally a safe place to live. Many agencies work together on reducing anti-social behaviour and crime. The majority of children and young people feel safe in their school or surrounding areas, but a minority do not feel safe in their neighbourhoods. There are good initiatives to provide children with a safe environment including services commissioned through the Community Safety Partnership and Children's Fund. Staff in settings such as early years, schools, and the voluntary sector have a satisfactory

understanding of the safeguarding procedures and arrangements and are well supported by the appropriate designated officers.

47. The ambition and priority given by agencies to reducing the incidence of child abuse and neglect are very good, and are reflected in the Children and Young People's Plan. Children and young people at immediate risk of significant harm are identified and safeguarded promptly and adequately. The arrangements to ensure officers in all agencies are suitable to work with children are sound. There is good understanding across all agencies of the Every Child Matters initiative and the requirements of the Children Act 2004. There are sound capacity and arrangements for the ACPC to move to a LCSB and embrace the broader safeguarding and performance management requirements. However, the current arrangements of the ACPC for scrutinising, auditing and monitoring the effectiveness of safeguarding practice are under developed.

48. Collaboration across agencies is highly valued and generally satisfactory. There are good working relationships between the social care services and other agencies, for example the police. However, understanding and acceptance of thresholds, responsibilities and referral arrangements are inconsistent among some individuals within agencies, most notably schools. This is particularly the case for vulnerable children not yet identified and assessed by the social care service as being in need. The arrangements in specific areas such as collaboration with the local secure training centre and prison are good, as are the arrangements for conducting serious case reviews.

49. The quality assurance of the safeguarding practices within the social care service is adequate overall. There are good arrangements for monitoring the quality and consistency of practice but these are weakened by inconsistent compliance. This is significant as high levels of risk are being managed outside more formalised child protection procedures. These weaknesses relate to referral procedures, record-keeping, audit compliance and reviewing of family support plans, particularly for children identified as in need of protection from emotional abuse and neglect. A small number of children in need experience unacceptable delays in being allocated a social worker and receiving an assessment of need.

50. The current policy and procedure for the referral, assessment and support of children and young people who move in and out of Milton Keynes are inadequate. The council is taking steps to address this issue in the context of a fast-growing, mobile population. There are satisfactory arrangements to support Travellers, the homeless and young people of refugee origin. Current arrangements for establishing the identity and whereabouts of all children 0-16 years are insufficient. This is being dealt with through the implementation of the Information Sharing and Assessment database and the Common Assessment Framework. However, progress has not kept up with original plans.

51. The action taken to prevent children and young people becoming looked after is generally good. The family group conferencing service is well established and effective, and the use of kinship care is increasing and is a valued alternative to children becoming looked after by the council. These arrangements have contributed to a sustained decline in the numbers of children in care since 1999 despite a growing population. Looked after children generally receive good family support and are positive about their experiences. The arrangements to allocate children to a social worker and ensure care plans are reviewed in a timely way are satisfactory. The identification of and support for private foster carers is sound. However, overall placement provision for looked after children is inadequate. There is a lack of placement choice, and a significant minority of children are placed outside the council area in costly residential establishments, although numbers have reduced. National data show that children placed some distance from home are more likely to be vulnerable to poor outcomes. Arrangements to evaluate the quality and value of placements are not fully systematic. A relatively high number of children on care orders are placed at home with parents. There is inconsistent understanding among managers and practitioners of the responsibilities for delegated decision-making under the Placement of Children with Parents etc Regulations 1991.

52. Safeguarding arrangements for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are satisfactory and understood well across the key agencies. The dedicated team of social workers and social work assistants have good links with colleagues in the special educational needs service, PCT and acute trust. This multi-disciplinary approach effectively promotes the safety and welfare of children. The direct payments scheme is administered well with good support for parents, although the availability of respite provision and suitably experienced and qualified carers is limited.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

**53. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and achieve well is adequate.**

54. Overall strategies for education and recreation are good. There is much useful collaboration between partners, particularly in disadvantaged areas, and in work targeting vulnerable young people. Partnership between the council and primary schools is good, and its partnership with secondary schools is developing. The council is implementing successfully a major reorganisation of schools, which is aimed at lifting standards of attainment. Similarly, the council is making good progress in its ambitious programme of building new schools to match the growing population. It has a detailed knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of educational and recreational services, and provides good support to schools in tackling the issues raised by high levels of mobility in the school population.

55. The council's partners provide useful support to parents and carers, especially regarding very young children. The Children's Information Service helps them to find appropriate childcare, and provides useful advice. There are well-targeted parenting courses in disadvantaged areas. Nurseries work well with parents and there is some good multi-agency support for parents and carers experiencing difficulties. Information about school admissions procedures is presented accurately, but many parents are likely to find it difficult to understand. Some schools' admission criteria do not give the preference that they should to looked after children or those with statements of special educational needs. Steps are being taken to remedy this by 2007.

56. The quality of childcare and nursery provision is generally at least satisfactory, but standards at age 5 have not improved significantly in recent years. However, the local early years partnership challenges providers where necessary, and has sound plans for improving standards. The development of integrated children's centres is proceeding appropriately. Young children with developmental difficulties receive some good support.

57. The overall quality of schools is broadly similar to the national picture, in that most schools are good or better. There is only one school in an Ofsted category of concern. The youth service gives good support to young people's personal development. Pupils' standards are generally rising, but there was a slight fall at age 11 in 2005, resulting from weak progress made by pupils in a number of schools. The school improvement service has generally secure systems for identifying weakness and for supporting improvement strategies. It has a good action plan to raise standards at age 11. It gave good support to one secondary school when it required special measures. Its general support for school improvement is valued more highly in primary and special schools, than in secondary schools. The council has proposed academy status for another secondary school with the aim of promoting faster improvement.

58. Standards achieved by pupils of the various minority ethnic groups vary considerably. In some respects, however, their achievement is improving. The council has recently doubled its funding of specialist support and also provides a useful, though small-scale, project through which induction is provided to young people and their families who are of refugee origin.

59. Pupils' school attendance is improving, especially in primary schools where the improvement has been considerable. Agencies have collaborated well to bring about a reduction in unauthorised absence from certain secondary schools, where it had been high. Similarly, the previously high rate of exclusion from primary schools has been reduced as a result of collaborative work between schools and the council. However, too many pupils are being excluded from a few secondary schools. Despite the wide range of support in place, some schools find these pupils' behaviour very difficult to manage. However, the council and schools are working effectively towards an improvement plan.

60. The council provides inadequate support for pupils without a school place and it falls short of ensuring that all children and young people receive full-time education. Many of those permanently excluded from school receive insufficient or no education. For instance, some as young as 12 have been out of school for several months, receiving no education; one with a statement of special educational needs has been out of school for a long period. There is a lack of capacity in pupil referral units to provide places for all excluded pupils who need them. Despite these serious deficiencies, progress has been made in broadening the range of alternative education for older pupils.

61. Looked after children receive satisfactory support from a central team. Almost all have a personal education plan, although pressure of work in schools was cited as a reason why a minority had not been completed. Attendance at school of looked-after children is improving. Many have complex needs and overall attainment is low, but most of those whose progress can be measured systematically make sound progress. All schools have a teacher designated to oversee looked after children, though not all of these have yet been trained. Foster carers are given only limited guidance and advice on helping the children they look after to make educational progress.

62. The council has considerably improved its management of provision for pupils with special educational needs, and this is leading to an increased rate of inclusion in mainstream schools and improved value for money. Primary schools are benefiting from more integrated support and take more responsibility for these pupils' progress than previously. In general, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making improved progress at ages 5 to 7; thereafter their rate of improvement is more mixed. The quality of support received by individual pupils and their parents is varied, and some parents are not fully involved in annual reviews. Disabled pupils have increasingly good physical access to mainstream schools. However, although it is usefully broadening the range of specialist provision, the council has not provided a clear vision for the future of special schools, and their links with mainstream schools.

63. Most young people surveyed said it was easy to find things to do in their local area. Local partners' planning of play and recreational opportunities is thorough and targets disadvantaged areas. The youth service provides good activities that promote young people's self-esteem and, in some cases, qualifications. Local transport fares are reduced for young people attending leisure and recreational facilities and they have discounted admission to swimming pools. There are some good specialist activities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many schools offer breakfast clubs or other out-of-hours activities. Woughton parish council provides a considerable amount of recreational activities in Beanhill and Netherfield, a disadvantaged area. Milton Keynes has a very good school music service which reaches over 10% of pupils.

## **Making a positive contribution**

**64. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to make a positive contribution to society is good.**

65. There is good support for children and young people to develop socially and emotionally. A number of 'community mobilisers', funded by the Children's Fund, are working in targeted areas, to facilitate multi-agency support for disadvantaged families. Family centres and new Sure Start children's centres are enabling services to work more coherently together. Projects have supported older children and young people with varying degrees of success, although they have not all been effectively evaluated. Opportunities for pupils to support each other through mentoring and mediation schemes are widespread, and schools place a high priority on anti-bullying work. The work of the youth service contributes well to the personal and social development of those involved.

66. Most children and young people are supported well in times of change and challenge, such as the transition between primary and secondary school. There is good, accessible information, as well as courses for parents. A Young Carers' Project supports over 60 young carers, although care workers state that there are many more that are not yet reached by this service. Specialist support is provided for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The Youth Information Service provides advice and links for teenagers. Both the Connexions partnership and the youth service provide specialised support and advice for vulnerable groups of young people such as those from minority ethnic groups, those at risk of school exclusion, and refugees and asylum-seekers. There is support for small voluntary organisations in their work with particularly vulnerable groups of young people, such as the homeless and gay and lesbian groups. The youth service provides grant aid, and the YMCA holds a contract from Connexions to provide personal advisers in voluntary sector settings.

67. The opportunities for children and young people to contribute to the community are good. An above average proportion of young people feel that they are able to make their voices heard. Young people are frequently involved in community projects. For example, the Spotlight on Bletchley regeneration scheme enabled young people to contribute significantly in local history, music and sports. Many opportunities exist to contribute to the life of schools or the community through volunteering activities, such as the Junior Rangers scheme in Woughton. There is a very well-established Millennium Volunteers scheme involving large numbers of young people. The youth service participation team provides excellent support and training for school council representatives. The youth MP receives good personal help in her role. The council itself holds large-scale consultations on major developments. However, structures for young people's systematic representation and involvement in decision-making at this level are not yet well established.

68. There is some provision for children and young people in the care of the council to make a positive contribution. The proportion involved in their reviews is satisfactory and many co-chair these occasions. The youth service and the Children's Rights Service collaborate in offering a drop-in club. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are also able to attend this group. Care leavers are helped to make an effective contribution. A young people's group has made a real contribution to the development of the leaving care service.

69. Consultations with local residents indicate that anti-social behaviour is a major concern and believed to be a growing problem. Through effective multi-agency collaboration, a wide range of innovative actions is being taken to address and prevent anti-social behaviour. There have been successful projects in neighbourhoods such as Bletchley and Greenleys. Schools and the police target children deemed to be at risk of offending through an intensive programme run by the YOT. The police, in particular, demonstrate a strong commitment to neighbourhood policing strategies, with innovative co-location of police teams with council housing staff. The participation of children and young people in community safety developments is insufficient.

70. The YOT makes a good contribution to crime reduction and anti-social behaviour strategies. Its emphasis has been increasingly on preventative work and working in partnership, making good use of secondments of staff from health, education and fire services. The mental health and education needs of young people involved in youth justice systems are well met. The numbers of young people who have offended who are engaged in education, employment or training is good, and re-offending rates suggest progress is being made. A range of interventions is employed and the use of anti-social behaviour orders is minimal.

71. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported in making a positive contribution. Support and guidance is provided at special schools by specialist Connexions personal advisers and the Valuing People team from the education service. One special school visited in Netherfield provides a good work-related curriculum in liaison with external providers. Advocacy mechanisms enable the views of the young people to be heard. The youth service involved young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities well in its service review and provides tailored projects for them such as the development of a sensory garden.

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

**72. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate.**

73. Good efforts are made to support families in maximising their economic well-being. There is satisfactory provision of skills for life for adults by the council's adult and continuing education service and the FE college in a wide variety of accessible venues. The number of child care places has expanded

rapidly, particularly in disadvantaged areas, and meets local demand. Extended school provision is developing well.

74. There is much effective support for young people to prepare for working life. There are good opportunities for work experience. The Connexions service offers good personal support, especially for those who have specific needs. However, not all young people are receiving sufficiently impartial information, advice and guidance from their schools about the full range of opportunities post-16. Good progress has been made, after a slow start, in developing the vocational curriculum at Key Stage 4. Achievement is good on vocational qualifications taken in Year 11. Progression from these vocational courses into education, employment and training is satisfactory. A successful alternative curriculum supports achievement and progression of disaffected young people.

75. The 14-19 strategy group has developed a revised 14-19 strategy, informed by the LSC's strategic area review. The strategy is broadly satisfactory but does not focus sufficiently on the needs of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A detailed implementation plan and targets have yet to be put in place. Schools are working more collaboratively with the local college, businesses and training providers, but collaboration between schools is less well developed. Routes into work-based training are being developed in areas of skill shortages, such as construction. Good links are being developed with businesses where employment needs are greatest. However, training is only available for a few young people. Local training providers offer at least satisfactory worked based learning provision and E2E.

76. An increasing number of learners are choosing to stay on in their sixth forms after Year 11. Progress is being made in developing a wider post-16 curriculum in schools, with more opportunities at level 2 and some alternatives to GCE/VCE advanced level courses. However, the post-16 curriculum is still mainly academic in many cases and is not effectively meeting the needs of all learners now staying on. Overall average point scores on GCE/VCE advanced level courses, when school and FE college data are combined, are just below average but are improving. However, overall average point scores in schools have declined over two years; boys in particular are under-attaining in a minority of schools. The value added to learners' achievements by advanced level courses in some schools is below expectations for a number of young people. The strategy group is encouraging the development of new approaches to post-16 teaching and learning through subject networks and conferences.

77. The proportion of young people remaining in education and training at 16 has improved to a point broadly in line with the national average, but a significant number of young people leave education at 17, often to enter low-skilled employment. Too few employed young people have access to accredited training. However, Aimhigher is working closely with schools to raise the aspirations of young people. Overall success rates in the FE college have improved significantly over the three years to 2005, and are now at around the national average.

78. Community regeneration initiatives have been effectively targeted at needy areas, and the degree of community involvement in the planning and delivery of these projects has varied. The Spotlight on Bletchley programme benefited from a considerable degree of community involvement. Some initiatives, such as the Active Communities project, have been brought into mainstream provision across the borough. Current plans are aimed at increasing the availability of routes into employment for males.

79. The council has made progress towards addressing housing needs in the area, but finding suitable housing for some families and young people remains difficult. The council has successfully negotiated with developers that an unusual 30% of new housing should be affordable for people wishing to enter the property market. The Decent Homes Standard should be met, as required, by 2010. The council makes little use of bed and breakfast accommodation. The average length of stay in hostels is well above the national average, although the numbers of young people involved is a small proportion of those in temporary housing. Following consultations, a housing strategy for young people is being developed. A facility for housing teenage parents has been opened.

80. The council's leaving care team works well with care leavers to engage them in employment, education and voluntary work. They ensure that those who need more sheltered housing have access to it. The overall range of transitional and supported housing for young people leaving care is limited. Young people, including care leavers, are unhappy about housing in areas where they do not feel safe and where repairs are slow to be implemented. Pathway plans for care leavers are satisfactory, as is the advice and support they get in accessing appropriate financial support. In addition to the leaving care team, care leavers and looked after children are effectively supported by a specialist personal adviser from Connexions.

81. The FE college provides courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including vocational routes, and is developing further its provision for those with profound and multiple disabilities. The youth service provides good support in preparation for employment for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Transition reviews are carried out in schools, but do not consistently inform parents and young people about the range of provision available post-16. There is little access to vocational qualifications in school sixth forms below level 2. A few secondary schools offer entry level study post-16, mainly in core subjects, but there is no consistent policy for developing skills for life for 16-19 learners.

### **Service management**

82. **The management of services for children and young people is good. The capacity to improve further is adequate.** There has been proven capacity to date to deliver significant strategic changes, such as a major school building programme and the refocusing children's social care on family

support. Additional capacity is developing, but is stretched by growth in the area and its plans for developing services. The partners' self-assessment identified many of the strengths and some of the areas for further development, and specified ambitions and plans clearly. It emphasised work that was planned or underway but which has yet to demonstrate a significant impact on outcomes for children and young people.

83. Ambitions for children and young people are clear and challenging. They focus on building on and strengthening preventative services for vulnerable children and young people in order to improve outcomes and reduce reliance on more expensive services. Inter-agency collaboration through the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership is good, including strong involvement of the voluntary sector. The ambitions have been embraced and strengthened in the plans of the local strategic partnership (LSP), the community strategy and service plans for statutory partners. The agreement between the LSP and the government appropriately includes a number of key areas for improving the lives of children and young people locally, which address the main challenges for the area.

84. The ambitions are based on a comprehensive analysis of need which has also helped to identify gaps in service provision. Key areas for improvement include improving the attainment level of children at Key Stage 4, improving pupils' skills in speaking and listening in primary schools, and increasing the number of teenage mothers engaged in education or training. Consultation on the children and young people's plan has involved a wide range of agencies and has sought contributions from young people, which influenced the plan and existing services, although this process is not yet fully systematic.

85. The council and its partners have effective race equality schemes and have responded well to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. For example, the council has provided training for school staff and governors covering their responsibilities under the act which has been well attended. Schools have had information to assist in increasing the accessibility of premises and the curriculum.

86. The approach to prioritising services for children and young people is good. Joint planning has been in place since 1999 across the main partner agencies, including the voluntary sector. Priorities are based on needs and address gaps or weaknesses in services. For example, education priorities focus consistently on areas of underperformance. Priorities are explicit, both in combined plans of partners and in individual service plans. For example, the final draft of the Children and Young People's Plan translates the area's ambitions into clear priorities. These target children and young people in most need by strengthening early intervention to prevent learning and behavioural problems. There is also a focus on areas of high deprivation, to improve outcomes and address inequalities. Priorities for children and young people in major strategic and service plans of all partners are consistent. The Supporting People Strategy, commissioned through the council, Milton Keynes PCT and

probation services, clearly links to the Every Child Matters agenda. It shares the priority of focusing on preventative services to meet the needs particularly of young people at risk and teenage parents.

87. Resources are clearly linked to priorities and plans within the council and its partners. The council has continued to prioritise spending on special educational needs as a result of a thorough analysis of need: this has led to a significant reduction in statements of special educational needs to levels below statistical neighbours. To provide early intervention, it is increasing funding in mainstream schools for behavioural support. In line with its priority of increasing educational attainment, the council's spending in individual school budgets is higher than those of statistical neighbours and all unitaries. The council is also appropriately changing its priorities in response to the needs of a more diverse population. For example, it has increased the delegated funding support for children with English as an additional language in order to support improved attainment by pupils from minority ethnic groups.

88. The council is making difficult decisions, effectively communicating the need to change, and taking robust action to deliver priorities. It has used comparative performance information, examples of best practice, and analysis of its own performance to inform its actions about changing the age of pupil transfer between primary and secondary school. The new system matches the transition between key stages, allowing schools to focus on, and be accountable for, whole key stages. The council has funded single point of school entry for four year olds, and there are early indications this has contributed to improved education outcomes with a rise in standards at age seven.

89. The council has a longstanding approach of prioritising resources to invest in early intervention to support children and young people and their families. The number of looked after children is comparatively very low and only those children and young people with the highest needs are being supported intensively. Resources have been moved from more expensive provision to improve preventative services. The council has reviewed contracts to ensure these concentrate on family support. Its contract with the NSPCC, which had been completing assessments, has been appropriately refocused to provide advice and support in schools to parents, carers, pupils and teachers. Although the number of placements outside the area is still too high, the council has made progress in reducing these.

90. Value for money and the management of resources in services for children and young people are good. The performance of children's social services is largely better than that of statistical neighbours and costs are lower. Spending on agency social workers has been reviewed, and permanent posts have been created from spending on agency staff. The service has also enhanced the social work salary grade to assist in future recruitment, and developed its model of support for social workers. Standards in schools are generally rising at an above average rate, from a low base, and are now broadly in line with averages. Costs are also broadly in line. Areas of higher spending are in line

with priorities for improvement. The Council has reviewed a number of areas of significant higher or lower expenditure compared with other councils. For example, it used benchmarking information to change the approach of the educational welfare service and provide additional capacity. The Council's budget prioritisation targets resources to areas of lowest performance and highest need. Capital expenditure has been moved to fund school reorganisation and expansion. Phase one of this has been delivered on budget and in time.

91. The council has shown in some areas a long term approach to reduce pressure on demand-led budgets and specifically out-of-area placements in social care and education. Increases in the population of children and young people, and therefore needs, have led the council to develop in-area provision. A new special school is being built to provide residential placements all year round. The planned approach to out-of-area placements offers support closer to home and the potential to improve value for money.

92. Performance Management is adequate. There are good examples of performance being managed to improve outcomes, but it is inconsistent across partners and the range of services. The council, with its partners, have started to develop their approach to performance management. The council has used performance information to inform its strategy to address the overspending in out-of-area placements. However, there are weaknesses elsewhere: within the youth service, while systems are in place to review and improve how staff work, these are not used consistently; arrangements for the ACPC to scrutinise, monitor the effectiveness of safeguarding and refocus services are not systematic; and insufficient scrutiny is given to reviewing the pace of development and the effectiveness of the family support model.

93. **Partners' capacity for further improvement is adequate.** Partners have a strong set of mature relationships which reflects the long history of effective community groups and a strong voluntary sector. There is clear accountability for decision-making and this has been formulated through partnership working. Partners are working effectively towards a Children's Trust. Leadership from senior managers and councillors is strong, and staff at all levels are clear about their role in implementing the area's priorities. Partners have developed capacity in the voluntary and community sector. Work to build and release additional capacity is underway. However, much of this is in its early stages, such as the work by partners to establish a joint strategy and commissioning function across council and PCT services. The partnership is currently reviewing a number of processes relating to special educational needs, children's social care and health intensive services, to rationalise information sharing, assessment and planning processes. Service mapping to reduce duplication and release capacity is acknowledged as an area for further development, with particular challenges within the PCT where resources are stretched.

**94. The council's own capacity for further improvement is adequate.**

It has proven capacity to date to deliver significant strategic changes, particularly in education. It has successfully completed the first phase of a major school capital building programme, which has also integrated schools with other services. However, some important strategic work has been delayed due to capacity constraints. For example, work to implement information sharing and common assessment processes and to identify lead professionals has slipped. Work to improve the quality of some outcomes for children and young people is only now underway. Provision to meet the needs of children and young people without a school place is inadequate, and a small number of children in need experience unacceptable delays in being allocated a social worker and having their needs assessed. The pressure on demand-led budgets is growing. Staff recruitment is not keeping pace to meet the necessary growth in services, or to implement changes, such as strategic commissioning to support early intervention.

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

1. The council and its partners have made good progress in developing collaborative provision for children and young people in Milton Keynes. The council made an early start with the integration of children's social care and education with other community services when the area became a unitary authority in 1997. The council's directorate of learning and development covers all the council's children's services, and includes several posts jointly funded with the Primary Care Trust (PCT).

2. The council's approach to prioritising services for children and young people is good. Joint planning has been in place since 1999 between the council and its main partner agencies, including the voluntary sector. The final draft of the Children and Young People's Plan translates the area's ambitions into clear priorities which address needs and gaps or weaknesses in services. Priorities target children and young people in most need by strengthening early intervention.

3. The management of the council's children's and young people's services is good overall. The council is making difficult decisions and taking robust action to deliver priorities, such as the reorganisation of school provision to change the age of pupil transfer between primary and secondary school. Its strategy to increase preventative services and family support in social care is being carried through successfully. Performance management within council services is adequate. The council has effectively used performance information to inform its strategy to address the overspending in out-of-area placements for children, and has been developing its approach to the performance management of joint activities with partners.

4. The council's capacity to improve its children's and young people's services is adequate. It has proven capacity to date to deliver significant strategic changes, such as the first phase of a major school capital programme. The pressure on demand-led budgets is growing. Staff recruitment is not keeping pace to meet the necessary growth in services, or to implement changes, such as strategic commissioning to support early intervention. Some strategic work has been delayed due to capacity constraints. Work to improve the quality of some outcomes for children and young people is only now underway.

5. The council collaborates well with health partners to promote children's health. The council's early years services link effectively with those of health visitors and others to provide a good service for early years children, while for older children, schools work in partnership with health professionals. The Healthy Schools initiative has been adopted across the locality. The council contributes significantly to multi-agency initiatives which are effectively targeting particular problems such as teenage pregnancy.

6. Milton Keynes is generally a safe place for children and young people. The council's care services have been effectively refocused to support families in keeping children safe and minimising abuse and neglect. This has led to a significant reduction in the numbers on the child protection register. Children at immediate risk of harm are promptly identified and protected, but some significant areas of unmet need remain. Services to provide looked after children with suitable homes are generally satisfactory, although there is a significant shortage of local placement provision.

7. Schools and childcare settings provide almost all pupils with at least a satisfactory education, while many are good or better. Standards are broadly rising, except at Key Stage 2 where they fell in 2005. The re-organisation of schools to improve pupils' attainment, and the building of new schools for a rapidly expanding population, are proceeding very well. The council has increased support for recently arrived young people and those of minority ethnic heritage, leading to some improvements in achievement. Collaboration between agencies has helped to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions from primary schools, but some secondary schools have high exclusion rates. Provision for pupils who have been excluded is inadequate. The council has made significant improvements in provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many looked after children make at least sound progress.

8. The council provides good support to children and young people to develop socially and emotionally, and contribute constructively to society, through schools, the youth service and partnerships with other agencies. Young people are frequently consulted on issues that affect them. Disadvantaged families, and vulnerable young people at risk of social exclusion, are supported by collaborative arrangements between the council and its partners. The council contributes effectively to multi-agency initiatives such as those that tackle anti-social behaviour.

9. Children and young people are receiving adequate help overall in developing their future economic well-being. The council supports parents who want to work or study through expanding childcare provision and family learning opportunities. Progress is being made in increasing the amount of affordable housing. Young people receive help in schools to prepare for working life, and good progress has been made in increasing the availability of vocational options for 14-16 year olds. While more vocational provision is now available in sixth forms, the curriculum is not yet effectively meeting the needs of all learners. The proportion of young people remaining in education at 16 has improved to about average, but a significant number of young people leave education at 17 for work in mainly low-skilled occupations.