

Joint area review

Hertfordshire Children's Services Authority Area

Review of services for children and young people

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

1. The most recent Annual Performance Assessment (APA) for Hertfordshire judged the council's children's services as good and its capacity to improve as good.
2. This report assesses the contribution of local services in ensuring that children and young people:
 - at risk or requiring safeguarding are effectively cared for.
 - who are looked after achieve the best possible outcomes.
 - with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve the best possible outcomes.
3. The following investigations were also carried out:
 - the quality of provision and outcomes for Black and minority ethnic children and young people
 - the quality of provision and achievement for young people aged 16-19.

Context

4. Hertfordshire borders London to the north and covers 643 square miles, having a population of over one million people, making it the most densely populated shire county in the East of England. Approximately 260,000 of the county's population are aged between 0 and 19 years. The 2001 census showed 11.6% of the population were members of minority ethnic communities. Amongst children and young people, the largest minority ethnic group are of Indian heritage, making up 1.6% of all 0 to 15 year olds, followed by mixed white and black Caribbean (1.3%), Pakistani (1.07%) and mixed white and Asian (1.06%). The 2006 pupil annual school census data indicates that 17% of pupils in Hertfordshire schools are from minority ethnic background heritage. Between 800 and 1000 Traveller children of school age are identified each year. There are between 7,000 and 8,000 young carers in Hertfordshire.
5. The county is prosperous, with an economy built on several sectors, including financial and business services, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals, electronics, film, media and IT. In 2005, the mean average annual earnings of Hertfordshire resident employees were the highest in the east of England. Unemployment is low.
6. Hertfordshire is the least deprived county in the east of England, and ranks 12th highest amongst the 149 counties and unitary authorities in England. However, there are pockets of deprivation, for example within districts in new towns, such as Stevenage, and in more isolated rural areas.

7. Hertfordshire has a county council, 10 district councils, and 130 town and parish councils. Around 6,000 voluntary organisations provide services within the county.

8. There are 491 private or voluntary early years settings and there are six children's centres. The county has 15 nursery schools, 407 primary schools, six middle schools, 76 secondary schools, 25 community special schools and eight Pupil Referral Units. Post-16 education is provided by four general further education colleges, 76 sixth forms and 25 work-based learning providers.

9. Entry to Employment is managed by The Learning and Skills Council East of England.

10. Adult and community learning, including family learning, is provided by the Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Service. Family learning is provided through a combination of direct delivery and sub-contractors.

11. Primary care is provided by East and North Hertfordshire Primary Care Trust (PCT) and West Hertfordshire PCT, which operate under one Chief Executive. Acute hospital services are provided by West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust in the west of the county and East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust in the east. Mental health services are provided by Hertfordshire Partnership NHS Trust.

12. Hertfordshire was one of the first authorities in England to integrate council education and social care services for children and young people to form the Children, Schools and Families directorate. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership was established in 2002. Now known as the Hertfordshire Children's Trust Partnership, membership includes key statutory and voluntary agencies across the county. The Trust Board, chaired by the Lead Member for children's services, was established in April 2006. The board governs the Trust and inter-agency cooperation arrangements for delivery of children's services in line with the five Every Child Matters outcomes.

13. Children's social care services, provided by Children, Schools and Families, comprise 477 foster carers, 142 respite carers, eight children's residential homes. Three of the residential homes provide respite for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are two respite centres for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A further three external providers offer respite residential care. There are no secure units or young offenders institutions in the county. A Client Services Team within the county call centre receives all initial referrals to Children, Schools and Families, passing them to four Area Referral and Assessment social work teams, who each work within a defined geographical area.

Main Findings

14. The main findings of this joint area review are as follows:

- the arrangements for safeguarding children and young people are inadequate and the council's arrangements to ensure safe staffing are weak. Improvements have been made in key areas; however, children's social care services are starting from a low base and these improvements are not yet sufficiently embedded in practice
- the contribution of local services to improving outcomes for looked after children and young people is inadequate. Services are improving substantially, but again from a low base, although appropriate action is being taken to improve weaker aspects
- services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are adequate, although there is insufficient provision for those with less complex needs
- while young people's achievement is good and improving up to age 16, it remains only adequate overall post-16. Smaller sixth forms in some schools are not adding as much value to young people's achievements as those in the larger schools
- attainment of key minority ethnic groups has improved at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 but school improvement processes are having insufficient impact on raising the attainment of young people in these groups at Key Stage 4 and in school sixth forms.

Grades

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

	Local services overall
Safeguarding	1
Looked after children	1
Learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2
Service management	2
Capacity to improve	3

Recommendations

For immediate action

The local partnership should:

- ensure that an appropriate way is found to successfully disseminate the findings of this report to children and young people in the area
- ensure that all staff and volunteers working with children and young people are subject to criminal background checks and that confirmation of such checks is immediately available and identified on human resources files
- ensure that decisions to appoint staff with criminal offences are taken at senior management levels
- ensure that all children and young people on the child protection register and those who are looked after receive visits within timescales and are seen alone, and that such visits are recorded and are monitored by managers
- ensure that data quality is robust and can be used to inform effective strategic planning, service improvement, resource allocation and performance management
- secure sufficient funding for Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) within the partnership to enable consistent and appropriate access for all vulnerable children and young people
- ensure that children and young people are involved consistently in quality assurance activities and service planning
- identify where the oversight and leadership for vulnerable groups, such as children and young people from Black and minority ethnic groups, lie within the Children's Trust Partnership
- identify and set in place processes to capture incidences of bullying of vulnerable groups and address this type of behaviour.

For action in the next six months

- Ensure that the delivery of value for money is an explicit and integral part of all commissioning processes and that outcomes are monitored.
- Sustain a focus on capacity which contributes to the delivery of equitable services across the county.
- Ensure that multi-agency eligibility criteria and thresholds for access to services are devised and implemented in consultation with all partners.

- Ensure that there is clarity of roles and responsibilities within Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board with regard to ensuring activities are completed appropriately and within defined timescales.
- Develop and implement a partnership strategy for joint commissioning and consistent inter-agency work to ensure that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive sufficient, timely and co-ordinated health and social care to meet their needs.
- Review the management structure for Independent Reviewing Officers and ensure that it meets the requirements of government regulations.

For action in the longer term

- Ensure schools provide high quality training for a wide range of staff, including teaching, support, administrative and supervisory staff, to identify and respond to racist incidents and that staff give their responsibilities for race equality and managing and reporting racist incidents sufficiently high status.
- Secure the implementation of the agreed 14-19 learner entitlement by providing strong support to underdeveloped Strategic Area Partnership Groups and increase the pace at which achievement post-16 occurs in school sixth forms through the implementation of robust school improvement processes.
- Ensure all Strategic Area Partnership Groups review the effectiveness of 16-19 provision for vulnerable groups, including Black and ethnic minority young people and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and implement robust action plans to improve provision for, and the achievement of, these young people.
- Develop a strategy to enable children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to have appropriate opportunities to influence the planning of strategic partners, particularly with regard to the services which directly affect the young people.

Equality and diversity

15. Equality and inclusion underpin the 2007-2008 Children and Young People's Plan which is informed by the Youth Charter based by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and aligned with the five Every Child Matters outcomes. However, services for children who need safeguarding are inadequate and there is a lack of clarity about where the oversight and leadership of priorities for children and young people from Black and minority ethnic groups lies within the Children's Trust Partnership. Action is taken by the

council to promote equality through the production of clear, comprehensive guidance for schools on diversity issues but there are inconsistencies in the response of school staff to the racist incidents. Looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well at school. Targeted actions are also improving the achievement of key minority ethnic groups in some schools but school improvement processes are having insufficient impact in securing similar improvements at Key Stage 4 and in school sixth forms.

Safeguarding



16. **The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for children and young people at risk, or requiring safeguarding is inadequate.** Comprehensive safeguarding plans across the local partnership are in place but key operational processes in the children's social care service to safeguard children are inadequate.

17. The 2006 APA highlighted the need for significant improvement in completion of initial and core social care assessments within required timescales, which represented an area of serious underperformance. The lack of published, eligibility criteria for access to services, which are agreed by all agencies, was also noted. There have been improvements in performance, but from a low base, as a result of which these issues continue to be significant weaknesses.

18. Good progress is being made in reducing the numbers of children and young people killed or seriously injured on the county's roads, with a number of initiatives in place, including the Megadrive multi-agency education programme. Fewer babies are born with low birth weights and there are fewer stillbirths in Hertfordshire than nationally. The percentage of children who are overweight or obese is in line with the national average. Conception rates among 15-17 year olds show a decreasing overall trend and remain below the national average and that of comparators. Targeted action in Stevenage to reduce the rate of teenage pregnancy has been impressive, but the partnership recognises the need to refocus this action to districts in the county where conception rates are increasing.

19. Priorities and ambitions for promoting healthy lifestyles are clearly set out in the local area agreement. Hertfordshire Together, a local strategic partnership, is effectively targeting action to improve the health of children by encouraging walking or cycling to school and green travel plans for schools. The partnership has developed an innovative approach to anti-bullying through the Hertfordshire Anti Bullying Initiative, funded by the children's fund. By March 2006 1374 pupils and 859 staff members had been trained in anti bullying techniques. This service links to the CAMHS through four behaviour support

teams. School inspections show that good attention is paid in Hertfordshire's schools to health and safety issues, and appropriate child protection procedures are in place in the vast majority of schools. However, some young people report that they do not feel safe in the local community, and that the response of school staff to bullying and harassment is variable. There is inconsistent reporting of racist incidents by schools. Effective protocols to track children missing from school or care are in place and are well supported by the local police. The protocols are available to foster carers and are included in contracts for commissioned or purchased care services.

20. Awareness of safeguarding issues amongst healthcare staff is good and community health staff receive appropriate child protection training. Hospital Accident & Emergency (A&E) departments check new referrals against the child protection register appropriately. However, not all hospitals have electronic access to the register. Access to designated children and young people's A&E facilities is not universal across the county. Children's urgent, inpatient and day care are now no longer provided at Mount Vernon Hospital. Whilst Hemel Hempstead General Hospital provides A&E care for children and young people, it does not have night-time provision for Advanced Paediatric Life Support. Ambulances and general practitioners have therefore been advised to take or refer children to Watford. Although a protocol is in place at Hemel Hempstead General Hospital to assess children and transfer them to Watford General Hospital for further assessment if necessary, with a consultant from Watford travelling to Hemel Hempstead in critical cases, the risk is unacceptable, particularly for circumstances where treatment must be initiated very quickly and where journey times would delay this.

21. Waiting lists for CAMHS have been long and, although these have recently been reduced, this has been achieved by raising the thresholds to access the service, rather than by extending provision, leading to some children being denied access to the service. Early access to CAMHS remains poor for children and young people with less complex needs.

22. The Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board is in place and an independent chair was appointed in 2006. The Board is comprised of appropriate, senior level officers from most agencies as prescribed by government guidance. The exception to this is the police who should be represented at Assistant Chief Constable level. The safeguarding children board has an annual business plan to March 2008 but the published priorities lack specific, measurable, and time focussed objectives and outcomes for children. It is difficult to clearly identify individuals in agencies who are responsible for carrying through developments and actions that have been agreed by the Board, and to whom they are ultimately responsible for delivery.

23. Multi agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) are in place accompanied by appropriate procedures. However, until very recently there has been a lack of attendance at key MAPPA meetings by Children, Schools and Families staff, leading to risk that key information about offenders is not shared between agencies. The strategic management board of MAPPA has now

negotiated with senior managers in Children, Schools and Families to ensure that appropriate staff attend the local risk management panels.

24. Written eligibility criteria for referrals to social care services are now in place, but these have not been agreed across all agencies, and there is inconsistent understanding by other agencies as to how they are applied, leading to continuing inappropriate referrals. Hertfordshire did not implement the Framework for Assessment for Children in Need and their Families, as recommended by government guidance in 2002, and instead introduced a more limited process which does not clearly define the roles and responsibilities of other agencies. The Common Assessment Framework, which will provide the required multi-agency working, is being piloted in one area of the county. However, the full implementation of the Common Assessment Framework is unlikely to be achieved within the required timescale of April 2008.

25. In 2005-06, only 19.1% of initial assessments were completed within the required seven days and 24.3% of core (full) assessments were completed within the 35 day statutory timescale. This performance was significantly below that of similar councils and those nationally. Since then, performance has improved and good progress is continuing. However, because of the low base for performance in 2005-06, it has still not risen to an adequate level. This, together with the variable quality of care plans on some case files, leads to delays in providing services to match assessed needs of children and young people and increased risk.

26. A pilot project, situating a social work intake team, Client Services, within the county call centre to ensure better consistency of response to referrals has provided limited improvement, but the team is very small. This team can only respond to those referrals which are new to social care. Referrals of families previously known to the service are received directly by area teams. The pressures of high numbers of referrals and some staffing vacancies result in the call centre intake team and one area assessment team in particular operating higher thresholds than other area teams, leading to unacceptable risk for some children and young people.

27. The accuracy of the data used to inform social care performance and to provide background information for practitioners is acknowledged by the authority to be unreliable as social care staff are not consistently keeping information on the electronic filing system up to date. The limited information on the history and situation of some children and young people leads to risk that important factors are not considered in making decisions about services, and that potential child protection concerns are not clearly defined on their files. Managers are not taking sufficient action through supervision, support and training of social workers to remedy the situation. Whilst performance management systems are being instituted, and such processes are beginning to provide more robust information, there is no easily accessible data on some key activities which safeguard children and young people. For example, there is no system in place which clearly identifies whether children and young people on the child protection register, or who are looked after, are seen within timescales

and seen alone. The lack of such key management information and oversight of practice poses unacceptable risk.

28. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checking within council services is inconsistent. It is not always possible to confirm from human resources files that appropriate checks have been carried out, and appropriate checks have not been carried out for some staff. Identity and reference checks are not routinely found on files. CRB checks are not routinely made when Children, Schools and Families, youth service or youth justice service staff change post and there is no routine process for rechecking CRB on a regular basis. There is no written protocol to ensure that senior managers in Children, Schools and Families are involved in decisions about appointing staff who have previous offences. Whilst schools receive clear guidance on completion of CRB checks for staff, and have access to good human resources advice, there is no audit system to ensure that all school staff and volunteers have been appropriately checked.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Improved responses to referrals leading to improved outcomes, but starting from a low base.</p> <p>Good performance in lowering road deaths and serious injuries.</p> <p>Innovative and effective approaches to combating bullying.</p> <p>Trend of reduction of conception rates for 15-17 year olds.</p>	<p>Poor and inconsistent application of staff vetting procedures.</p> <p>High levels of social worker vacancies.</p> <p>High and variable thresholds for access to child protection services.</p> <p>No quality assurance system for social care managers to ensure children and young people on the child protection register, or who are looked after, are seen by social workers within timescales and seen alone.</p> <p>Lack of multi-agency agreed eligibility and access criteria to social care services.</p> <p>High degrees of variability in the quality and timeliness of social care assessments of children, young people and their families.</p> <p>Inaccurate electronic data.</p> <p>Lack of accountability and performance management in Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board.</p> <p>Restricted access to CAMHS for children and young people.</p>

Looked after children and young people



29. **The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for looked after children and young people is inadequate.** Services for children and young people who are looked after are improving substantially, but from a low base. Significant progress has been made over the last year, and children and young people report that effective processes have been put in place that are improving their quality of life and opportunities. More young people who are looked after live in more stable placements than the average of comparable councils. The percentage completion of annual health assessments is adequate, and equals that of similar councils. Educational outcomes are good in comparison with national averages for achievement of children and young people who are looked after. However, they are lower than those of the population of children and young people within the county, where overall achievement is high. There is a higher proportion of children and young people who are looked after in further or higher education, training or employment than in similar councils or nationally.

30. However, whilst care services for children who are looked after are improving, they are yet to meet statutory guidance in some areas such as completion of reviews within timescale. Services to support families and prevent admission of young people to care, and the consequent range of placement options, are limited and care planning is variable. There is a lack of consistency of personal support which is needed by vulnerable young people due to turnover of staff, and not all children and young people who are looked after are allocated a qualified social worker. Performance management systems to ensure that managers know that all children and young people are visited within statutory timescales and are seen alone are inadequate.

31. The 2006 APA noted that the proportion of young people who had received an annual health assessment in comparison with similar local councils had improved. Educational achievement had also continued to rise, with 72% of children and young people who are looked after sitting at least one GCSE in 2005-6, compared to the national average of 62.1%, and 59.1% leaving school with at least one GCSE A*-C or GNVQ, compared to a national average of 54%. Participation of looked after children in reviews is improving substantially although it is still low in comparison with similar councils. The percentage of children and young people who were looked after for more than six months who were adopted in 2005-06 was 7.1%, slightly below national average. Allocation of social workers and regularity of visits to looked after children was 'not clear' in a minority of cases but generally the service was described in the APA as satisfactory.

32. The creation of a defined health team for children and young people who are looked after is planned to enable good progress to be made in identifying and meeting health needs, and improve inter-agency working. One specialist nurse for children and young people who are looked after provides good liaison with regard to health needs. Two further posts are now created, one of which will provide support to care leavers. Multi-agency funding is now secured for a designated doctor. There is a good focus on sexual health needs, and teenage pregnancy rates are reducing. The rate of annual health assessments of children and young people who are looked after equals that of similar councils, at 79%, but is below the national average of 83%. Whilst the Strategic Health Authority recognises the county's prioritisation of children and young people looked after as a vulnerable group, progress in addressing this area within health services is unclear.

33. CAMHS has ring-fenced services, jointly funded by health services and Children, Schools and Families, to help young people looked after and support staff and foster carers, and there is a counselling service for care leavers. A dedicated CAMHS worker is linked to each children's residential unit. CAMHS faces planned reductions in health service funding, but the council is working with health services to redefine the CAMHS remit and to develop joint services where appropriate.

34. Hertfordshire now helps most young people who are looked after to raise their aspirations. However, there are limited services to support families in difficulties and to prevent reception into care. Expenditure on services to support families and prevent admissions to care has been below average but has recently risen, providing an increase the number of qualified social workers. Deployment of these workers to increase the number of initial and core assessments of family need, conducted in a timely way, is planned in order to improve preventative and family support services. The creation of 82 children's centres in total, by 2010, are also planned to provide a range of services to children, young people and their families, to address need and prevent children and young people requiring to be looked after. Forty four of these centres will be operational by April 2008.

35. The quality of care planning is variable, and while some work is excellent, some poor planning leads to inappropriate delays in providing services to some children and young people who are looked after, and, in a few cases, in returning home. The percentage of young people looked after who have an allocated qualified social worker is unacceptably low, being 85.6%, which is below similar authorities (92.2%) and national average (94.8%). Performance management systems for managers to ensure statutory visits are made within timescales, and that children are seen alone, are not robust.

36. The numbers of children looked after has been stable over the past four years and, in 2005/06, was very slightly above the average for comparable councils. A good percentage of children who are looked after are placed in foster homes compared with similar authorities. A new Central Placements Team commissions and allocates foster care and residential placements within

and outside the county and monitors their quality. This team has had an immediate and positive impact on the admission to care process by ensuring a more consistent and informed approach to matching placements to young people's needs and by working with the independent reviewing officer team to improve completion of first statutory reviews within timescale. Only 43% of statutory reviews were held within statutory timescales in 2005/06 but the council's un-validated data shows significant improvement, with 85% on time in the month of April 2007, now being in line with national average. The proportion of young people who contribute to their reviews has risen significantly and is now in line with similar authorities.

37. The independent reviewing officer team has started gathering more systematic information about the looked after population, the quality of placements and areas of unmet need. These officers meet with children and young people to help them prepare for and contribute to their reviews and have helped to increase the proportion able to do so.

38. New posts have been created in order to chair reviews of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in receipt of short breaks. Statutory guidance in holding such reviews has not yet been adhered to but the backlog is reducing.

39. The number and range of placements in the county are insufficient to meet need, including foster placements for young people from Black and minority ethnic groups. The resulting placement of children and young people in agency placements outside of the county has led to a £1.13million overspend of the agency placement budget. Hertfordshire now plays a lead role in a regional consortium of children's services authorities, recently taking over management of the central database of council and private residential facilities. The consortium monitors and reports on the quality of placements, enabling local councils to better match placements appropriate to the needs of children and young people.

40. Currently, an above average percentage of children, when compared with similar councils, are placed for adoption within 12 months of adoption panel agreeing that this is in their best interest. The inspection of the adoption service in 2006 found that the service was doing well in most respects. A recent inspection of the fostering service is generally positive. However, despite continuing recruitment campaigns, the numbers of foster carers are not increasing. The numbers of Hertfordshire foster carers of Black and minority ethnic background are proportionately higher than the general population but still insufficient to ensure appropriate cultural match in placements. Foster carers do not always receive regulatory monthly supervision visits from their social workers, and foster carers' access to CAMHS is variable. Inspections of the council's residential homes show good attention to safeguarding. The percentage of council owned children's homes that meet the individual standards for health and wellbeing is above the national average. All council owned homes meet the individual standards for complaints and consultation.

41. Young people who are looked after have access to a range of opportunities to boost their self esteem and enable them to make the most of their lives, such as sports experiences, music lessons, a residential weekend for potential university applicants and work experience. There is very good support for them in schools and colleges from the looked after children education team, social workers, the Connexions service and teachers. More young people leave care with at least one GCSE grade A*-G or a GNVQ (59%) and achieve five or more GCSEs at grade A*-C or a GNVQ (10.9%) than similar councils or nationally. This figure is projected to rise to 13.5% in 2006-07, well above national projections of 11.6%. Young people in Hertfordshire as a whole achieve more highly than the national average, with 98.35% of Hertfordshire young people achieving at least one GCSE A*-C grade. Thirty young people who are looked after are very well supported to attend university, with 18 new entrants in 2005. The percentage of young people looked after on 1 April 2006 aged 16 who were engaged in education, training or employment at the age 19 is very good in comparison with similar councils. Young people interviewed value the wide range of experiences and opportunities which are made available for them.

42. A new service has now been commissioned by the council to monitor absences from school of young people looked after, which is facilitating prompt action to ensure good levels of attendance at school. This service is able to ensure that data is more robust, and the increase in the percentage of children looked after identified as having missed at least 25 days schooling during the previous school year from 12.7% to 15.2% in 2005/06 reflects this more accurate data.

43. The Corporate Parenting Group of elected members takes an active interest in young people who are looked after and makes regular statutory visits to the council's residential homes. The Lead Member for children and families takes a particularly energetic interest in the service, and is an effective champion for improvement.

44. There is an effective advocacy service, commissioned from a national voluntary organisation, Voice. The newly appointed participation officer plans to re-establish a participation group for looked after young people. Some young people have been closely involved in the planning of the Adolescent Resource Centres, including commenting on design and decoration. Young people are invited to contribute to events such as service reviews, staff training, awards events and public conferences.

45. The leaving care service is in a state of transition. Previously, the service had been provided by a voluntary organisation, reverting to an in-house service in April 2007. Young people spoke positively about the support offered by the previous service. However, although young people were consulted about the changes, they were not kept fully informed and there was an inappropriate disruption in weekly payment arrangements to some young people during the transition.

46. There is a range of housing for young people leaving care including supported accommodation in hostels and foyers. However, the percentage of care leavers at age 19 who are living in suitable accommodation is lower than in similar councils or nationally. Young people particularly value the support of the Connexions service and feel that it helps them to plan their future and manage the transition to independence.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Children and young people report good recent improvement in services.</p> <p>Higher achievement at school than in similar authorities or nationally.</p> <p>Stability of placements.</p> <p>Low percentage of children and young people in residential care and high percentage in extended family placements and foster care.</p> <p>Above average number of children placed for adoption.</p> <p>Good inspection results of adoption and fostering services and residential units.</p> <p>Advocacy service known and increasingly used by children and young people.</p> <p>Connexions support for children and young people who are looked after.</p> <p>Good multi-agency processes to address the need to improve health services.</p>	<p>Not all children and young people who are looked after are allocated a qualified social worker.</p> <p>Preventative and early intervention services limited in availability and scope.</p> <p>Inconsistent performance management arrangements for looked after children's services.</p> <p>Limited range of foster carer placements, including appropriate matches for children and young people of Black and minority ethnic origin.</p> <p>Statutory requirements regarding timely review of children and young people who are looked after and also those who receive respite care are not met.</p> <p>Variability in quality and timeliness in implementation of care plans.</p>

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Inadequate <input type="checkbox"/>	Adequate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Outstanding <input type="checkbox"/>
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47. **The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate.** Most children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in education, although health and social care

support is less consistent. A significant number of young people with complex needs have to wait too long for care and placements that meet their needs. A major re-focusing of services is underway, but many actions to achieve this are either at an early stage of implementation or are not yet being applied consistently across the county.

48. Progress has been made on the quality of CAMHS and the transition of children with disabilities, both of which were highlighted as weaknesses in the 2006 APA. Whilst reorganisation of CAMHS services has helped to further reduce waiting times for assessing complex cases, access to CAMHS for less complex cases remains a problem. The number of out of county placements for children and young people with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities has risen over the last three years and the Children and Young People's Plan identifies addressing this rise as a priority. The plan also recognises the need for more preventative work in order to improve collective support for all children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families. Elected members have begun to challenge provision for young people with specific learning difficulties. However, national performance and inspection data are not sufficiently informing this work and there is scope for the scrutiny of learning difficulties and/or disabilities support to be widened.

49. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least good progress in most mainstream schools and in almost all special schools. Early years settings make an effective contribution to young people's social and emotional development. Special schools cater for a wide range of need and they support young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities well. They provide excellent support for pupils' care and welfare by focusing on improving self-esteem, responsibility and respect for others. Behaviour in most Hertfordshire schools is good overall. However, numbers of children and young people with complex learning and behavioural needs are increasing and posing a considerable challenge in many mainstream schools. Specialist support from education support centres, special schools and the behaviour support service to help schools tackle poor behaviour is of good quality, but it is not well co-ordinated across the county and availability is patchy. Instances of bullying of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in and out of school do occur, but evidence from children and young people and their parents indicates that these often go unreported.

50. Statements of Special Educational Need (SEN) and review processes are mostly of good quality, although health needs are not identified consistently and not always in a timely manner. Good opportunities are provided for young people with sensory impairment to access their full entitlement and inclusion is mostly good in the primary phase. However, the proportion of pupils with statements who are excluded from secondary schools is higher than nationally and, although some progress has recently been made in re-integrating pupils back into school, arrangements for this vary across the county. The impact of new SEN funding arrangements in mainstream schools is not yet evident and a review of the special schools' strategy and its funding is at an early stage.

51. Most young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are generally healthy. Women with babies have good access to professional health advice and sessions run by extended schools offer parents of very young children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities the chance to socialise and gain support. Good communication channels between school nurses and hospital accident and emergency departments facilitate direct advice and support for carers and teachers. Children's Development Centres, which are increasing across the county, also provide access to a good range of health and educational support for families. There can be long waits for speech/language and occupational therapy, significantly delaying and impeding these young people's progress. In-patient paediatric mental health support is good, but access in the community, particularly for young people with less complex needs, is still too limited. Good help and support is provided by social care services to meet the health and care needs of some Asian families. Young people take opportunities to express their views at school and there are good opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in care to make these known through the advocacy service. Looked after children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been consulted on the specifications of new children's homes, but otherwise examples of young people's views influencing local strategic policies are rare. Specialised facilities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are limited, but leisure centres provide very good opportunities for children, particularly those with severe learning difficulties, to participate fully in activities. Most young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities extend their education beyond 16, but opportunities to access work-based learning are poor.

52. Inter-agency working is not consistently embedded across all services for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Services collaborate well to support looked after children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and much in-county residential care provision is good. The quality of respite care is good, including for Black and minority ethnic groups, but there are delays in making provision available. Pathway plans are in place for all of these children and care staff often link well with schools to support improvement in key skills and in helping to broaden the young people's outlook. Good support is provided by the pupil referral units, which collaborate well with Connexions and youth workers, for example in promoting personal independence, especially among young people from Black and minority ethnic groups. These arrangements work well in boosting young people's self-esteem and raising aspirations and are particularly effective in helping young people overcome drug dependency. The principle of 'lead workers' co-ordinating multi-agency support for individual young people is gaining ground, but is not yet being applied consistently. Inter-agency approaches involving education, care and health are in place to train school staff, governors and parents on SEN and inclusion, although these are not always well co-ordinated by the local authority. Private and voluntary organisations make a limited contribution to supporting young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although MENCAP provides a useful service in resolving disputes around support for those with special educational needs.

53. A significant minority of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is currently not served as well as they might be. Young people and families requiring support for complex needs (such as autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) often have to wait a considerable time for the care and placements that fully reflect their needs. Early identification of needs is not yet consistently established and diagnosis of problems is too slow. A specialist autism support team is in place, but its capacity is far exceeded by the demand. Transition arrangements from paediatric to adult services are variable for young people with complex needs. Lack of clear information, poor communication and high turnover among social care staff prevent some families from accessing the services they need. Arrangements for parents/carers of young people with physical disabilities to receive direct payments are in place in part of the county. However, while these have been very helpful to some families, they have served to highlight insufficiency in the services available for purchase and a wider range of need than the local authority previously recognised.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Improving transition planning.</p> <p>Good achievements by many young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in schools.</p> <p>Support provided by special schools.</p> <p>Good examples of multi-agency collaboration to support looked after children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.</p> <p>Success in boosting young people's self-esteem and raising aspirations.</p>	<p>Outcome data not consistently informing strategic planning.</p> <p>Insufficient scrutiny of provision.</p> <p>Health elements not identified in SEN statements consistently and in a timely manner.</p> <p>Few opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to influence council policy.</p> <p>Delays in providing care and securing placements for young people with significant health or complex learning and behaviour needs.</p> <p>Weak arrangements for tracking and reporting instances of bullying.</p>

Other issues identified for further investigation

The quality of provision and outcomes for children and young people of Black and minority ethnic communities

54. **The quality of provision and outcomes for children and young people from Black and minority ethnic communities is adequate overall.** Equality and inclusion underpin the 2007-2008 Children and Young People's Plan but there is a lack of clarity of where the oversight and leadership for Black and minority ethnic priorities lies within the Children's Trust

Partnership Framework. The quality of needs analysis undertaken by the partnership to inform priorities for Black and minority ethnic children and young people is variable. Targeted actions are bringing about improvements in the attainment of key minority groups in some schools, but school improvement processes are having insufficient impact on raising the achievement of Pakistani, Black Caribbean and Traveller young people in secondary schools, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in school sixth forms. Good targeted actions are having a positive impact on raising the self-esteem and confidence of children and young people, but there are inconsistencies in the response by school staff to the racist incidents children and young people experience.

55. The 2006 APA stated that the educational attainment of minority ethnic groups was generally satisfactory but the authority was seeking to improve the performance of some groups, particularly of Travellers, Black African and Caribbean communities where the achievement of boys falls behind that of girls. Comprehensive data is kept by the Minority Ethnic Curriculum Support Service on the attainment of Black and minority ethnic pupils and is used effectively to target interventions and support in some schools. This is having a positive impact for key minority ethnic groups in primary and secondary schools at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. Indian and Chinese children and young people have high and improving attainment in all key stages. Since the 2006 APA, the attainment of Black Caribbean children and young people has improved at Key Stage 1 to be in line with the average for all children in Hertfordshire and nationally. At Key Stage 2, while there has been an improvement in both English and mathematics, the attainment of Black Caribbean children remains below most other children in Hertfordshire. At Key Stage 3, their attainment in English has improved to equal that of most other young people in the authority but remains below in mathematics. There is a similar pattern of improvement for Black African children and young people although their attainment in English is in line with most other children and young people at both Key Stage 2 and 3. The attainment of Traveller children has fallen in English at Key Stages 1 and 2 and is very low.

56. The impact of school improvement since the 2006 APA has been less successful in secondary schools, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in school sixth forms. The attainment of Pakistani young people at Key Stage 3 is well below the attainment of most young people. Although there have been slight rises in the proportion of Pakistani and Black Caribbean young people who obtained 5 higher grade GCSEs, which include English and mathematics, their attainment level remains persistently low when compared with other groups of young people in Hertfordshire. There is continued underachievement in school sixth forms by Pakistani and Black Caribbean young people and by Bangladeshi and Black African young people. Few Traveller young people continue and remain in secondary education in schools and the attainment of those that do is exceptionally low.

57. Overall success rates for 16-19 year olds in further education are adequate and data provided by the local Learning and Skills Council indicates learners from Black and minority ethnic communities are achieving as well as

their white counterparts. There is good support for unaccompanied asylum seeking young people to continue into education post-16 and to progress to higher education. In 2006, all unaccompanied asylum seekers in Year 13 were successful in gaining a university place, as has been the case in 2007.

58. The local authority and its partners have only partially identified the reasons for underachievement of minority ethnic groups in the 14-19 age range. The 2007-08 Children and Young People's Plan contains appropriate areas for development in terms of greater integration of the work of minority ethnic curriculum support service teams with national strategies at secondary level and improved access to, and attendance at secondary education, by traveller young people. However, the lack of sharp targets within individual schools for the improvement of key Black and minority ethnic groups limits the effectiveness of performance monitoring. Elective home education undertaken by Traveller young people has been inadequately monitored. The monitoring process has recently been strengthened but it is too early to see the impact of this action. Most learners from ethnic minorities are in school sixth forms, where key minority ethnic groups underachieve. Their involvement in work-based learning is low, even though the small number who do take part achieve better than their white counterparts. The percentage of young people from Black and minority ethnic groups that are not in education, employment or training is very low, in line with the Hertfordshire average of 4%. However, the proportion of young people from Bangladeshi, Black and mixed Caribbean and Black African communities who are not in education, employment or training in Three Rivers, Watford and Welwyn is significantly higher.

59. Effective family learning programmes targeted at Black and minority ethnic communities are improving the literacy and numeracy skills of mothers through their gaining accreditation at levels 1 and 2. Three learning support assistants appointed from the Traveller community act as positive role models for the rest of the community. A wide variety of processes have been used by partners to gather the views of children and young people, their parents and carers to help inform provision and to provide them with some advocacy and support. Good targeted actions are having a positive effect on increasing the self esteem, confidence and attitudes and behaviour of some children and young people aged between 8-13 through the community-based Aiming High mentoring project in North Hertfordshire. However, children and young people across the authority have experienced inconsistencies in the response of school staff when they report racist incidents, which arise from a lack of common understanding of what constitutes a racist incident. Good quality guidance on recognising and managing such incidents and on schools' responsibilities for equality and diversity have been produced by the local authority, but the effectiveness of their application has not been sufficiently monitored. An innovative approach to encourage school managers and governors to implement their statutory duties through an accreditation process is currently being developed. Children and young people from Black communities are more likely to offend in all parts of Hertfordshire. While there is little evidence of targeted prevention work by the Youth Offending Service, a number of effective initiatives have been put in place both to work with and support young people

from Black and minority ethnic communities once they have offended or if they have committed a racially motivated offence.

60. Equalities and inclusion underpin the work of the 2007-08 Children and Young People's Plan but there is a lack of clarity of where the oversight and leadership for Black and minority ethnic priorities lies within the Children's Trust Partnership Framework. The quality of the needs analysis undertaken by the partnership and the extent that data are used to inform strategic planning and service improvement is variable. Currently services, such as health, do not have an overarching strategy for Black and minority ethnic children and young people. Nationally health services are not directed to collect information about Black and minority ethnic groups such as infant deaths, immunisations, teenage pregnancies and the incidence of illness. There is some evidence to demonstrate such information is being collected locally to inform service development and improvement, for example, through antenatal screening of inherited diseases more prevalent in some ethnic communities and the use of Children's Fund and healthy schools monies to develop the collection of Black and minority ethnic data related to childhood obesity.

61. Early intervention services, developed into extended consortia networks across the county are targeting Black and minority ethnic groups through the parenting support strategy and this has been well received by parents; however, there is no clear pro-active approach to targeting cultural needs at present although data from the audits by the commissioned lead agencies for each children's centre will inform local community needs. Social care staff have not been proactive in gathering the views and experiences of minority groups and analysing data to inform service delivery and improvement. In common with many other authorities, difficulties have been encountered in finding sufficient carers from minority ethnic groups but programmes of targeted recruitment of foster carers from minority communities have not been developed. Training for foster carers on cultural issues for Black and minority ethnic children who are looked after has been provided but the local authority acknowledges more work is needed in this area.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Effective use of data to target improved attainment of key minority groups at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.</p> <p>Effective targeted action to raise self-esteem and confidence.</p> <p>Effective family learning raising basic skill levels.</p> <p>Wide range of processes used to gather the views of children and young people, their parents and carers.</p>	<p>Lack of clarity of where oversight and leadership of Black and minority ethnic priorities lies in the Children's Trust Partnership.</p> <p>Insufficiently sharp targets for improvement of Black and minority ethnic groups within the partnership.</p> <p>School improvement processes having insufficient impact on raising achievement of key Black and minority ethnic groups at Key Stage 4 and in school sixth forms.</p>

Effective support by the Youth Offending Service for young people who have offended.	Inconsistent response by school staff to racist incidents.
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The quality of provision and achievement for young people aged 16-19

62. **The quality of provision of services and achievement for young people aged 16-19 is adequate.** The 2006 APA identified that although the attainment of young people up to the age of 16 is good, by the time they reach the end of their post-16 experience overall attainment has stagnated but remains adequate overall. Smaller sixth forms are not adding as much value to young people's achievements as some of the larger ones.

63. This pattern of 16-19 performance has continued. While attainment is good and improving at 16, it continues to be adequate overall post-16. Success rates at level 3 are adequate and those for levels 1 and 2 are good, being above the national average. Good and outstanding post-16 attainment in a third of school sixth forms masks attainment which is below the national average in the remaining two thirds. The speed of development of the seven strategic area partnership groups is variable. Employers are under utilised by the strategic area partnership groups.

64. Young peoples' attainment by the age of 16 continues to improve and is good overall. In 2006, the proportion of young people who achieved five or more higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, was above the national average and statistical neighbours. The most successful schools clearly demonstrate good and sometimes outstanding achievement that masks weaker performance elsewhere. While more than a third of all secondary schools achieved results well above the national figures, results in one in 10 were well below the national average. The proportion of young people progressing into post-16 education is good. A good proportion of young people are in education, employment and training at just under 96%.

65. Post-16 achievement continues to be adequate overall in 2006. Success rates at level 3 are in line with the national average while those at levels 1 and 2 are above it. The majority of post-16 learners are in school sixth forms. Good and outstanding post-16 attainment in a third of Hertfordshire school sixth forms masks attainment which is below the national average in two thirds of schools, many of which are small in size. Attainment in all four colleges of further education has improved and is adequate. Good support is provided for most vulnerable young people to achieve. Three out of four young people who are looked after are in education and training at age 19 and 14% progress to higher education which is above the national average. However, young people from some Black and minority ethnic groups underachieve in school sixth forms.

66. The co-ordination of 16-19 education and training is adequate and improving. The establishment of seven strategic area partnership groups across Hertfordshire is facilitating the implementation of an agreed 14-19 learner entitlement at a local level. However, the speed of development of the different strategic area partnership groups varies significantly and some are under developed. Each group has developed a local three year action plan but these plans vary in the extent to which they are based on a clear analysis of need and whether they have clear targets for implementation and development. None have reviewed the effectiveness with which provision meets the needs of vulnerable groups.

67. Adequate action is taken to ensure educational provision is of good quality. Since September 2006, School Improvement Partners have been allocated to every secondary school but it is too early to see their impact on underachievement which is evident in a significant number of the authority's secondary school sixth forms. Recent inspection reports of the further education colleges show improvements in teaching and learning and leadership and management. Progress has been made with regard to accessing the new diplomas in all partnership areas except St Albans and Harpenden. Where leadership has been particularly effective innovative improvements in 14-19 provision have been developed with local schools; for example in Stevenage.

68. Partnership working has been successful in developing a broader curriculum for some learners. In some strategic area partnership groups strong collaborative working between schools, colleges, training providers and the Connexions service have resulted in a wide range of vocational courses at levels 1 and 2 being made available at Key Stages 4 and post-16. Common timetables, crossover teaching and subject leadership have been established in preparation for the development of new vocational pathways and the introduction of specialist diplomas. However, in other strategic area partnership groups, some key school leaders in the contributing local consortia are reluctant to be involved in collaborative working and vocational developments. Ofsted school inspection reports identify inconsistent access to post 16 curriculum developments and levels of achievement which struggle to reach acceptable levels.

69. The lack of a co-ordinated approach to employer engagement and the needs for better mutual understanding between education providers and employers has been identified by the county's 14-19 Strategic Partnership Group. Employer involvement and engagement in planning is under-utilised to meet the demands of the diplomas and to increase the number of vocational options. Employers and training providers' representation and involvement in the seven strategic area partnership groups is insufficient.

70. Opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to participate in post-16 education, employment and training are adequate. Many young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities extend their education beyond 16 but opportunities to access work based learning are poor. School inspections have identified the need for improvements in work

experience and vocational opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities both at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Increased flexibility funding have effectively supported progression into entry level qualifications in colleges but there are few opportunities for these young people to progress into supported or independent employment. Social enterprise and sheltered working opportunities are limited. The Community Learning Disability Team budget has not risen to meet the needs of the increased numbers of vulnerable young people. There is a lack of clarity of where funding allocations and agency responsibilities lie for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities transferring from Children's to Adult services.

71. Healthy lifestyles are promoted well to young people aged 16-19 in schools and colleges. Teenage pregnancy rates are decreasing and remain below the national average. However, young people feel they receive insufficient information about sexual and mental health issues and the dangers of alcohol misuse. Schools and colleges have appropriate links with specialist agencies and appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure this support is accessed. Support for vulnerable young people is adequate and improving. Connexions personal advisers support disadvantaged learners well and help to remove barriers to learning. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have informed significant improvements to the support they receive when transferring from school to college. Young people age 16 to 19 have adequate access to housing and accommodation through local District Council provision. National targets for the length of time they spend in temporary accommodation are being met. Young people aged 15 to 18, or who have a high support need, are a priority. Hertfordshire Young Homeless provide an emergency service for 16 to 17 year olds and have good links with the relevant services to meet short and longer term needs.

Major Strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Good 5A*-C, including English and mathematics, achievement at 16.</p> <p>Good progression into post-16 education.</p> <p>Broadening of pre-16 and post-16 vocational offer.</p> <p>Good progression to higher education, including access by vulnerable young people.</p>	<p>Post-16 GCE A/AS attainment below national average in two thirds of school sixth forms.</p> <p>Varied rate of development of strategic area partnership groups, resulting in inequalities to the learner entitlement across the authority.</p> <p>Quality of needs analysis and operational planning of strategic area partnership groups.</p> <p>Under utilisation of employers in strategic area partnership groups.</p> <p>14-19 strategy not yet reviewed effectiveness of provision for vulnerable groups.</p>

Service Management



Capacity to improve



72. **The management of services for children and young people is adequate. Capacity to improve further is good.** Hertfordshire Children's Partnership Trust has set challenging ambitions and priorities for children and young people in Hertfordshire. These are based on both needs analysis and extensive consultation. However, in some areas such as health provision, the Trust does not currently have the capacity to provide equitable services across the county. The Trust does not provide adequate safeguarding for vulnerable children. Performance monitoring is improving but inconsistent data detracts from effective performance management. Strong leadership, self awareness and effective partnership working are providing a clear direction and actions for improvement. Identification of, and investment in, underperforming areas has led to substantial improvements with continued good progress, in key areas, but from a low base. Together these provide good capacity for improvement.

73. The 2006 APA judged service management and capacity to improve as good. The significant areas for improvement identified in the APA 'Staying Safe' judgement have not been resolved and weak corporate council processes to ensure safe staffing mean that safeguarding is now judged to be inadequate.

74. Ambition for Children and Young People in Hertfordshire is good. Hertfordshire Children's Partnership Trust has challenging ambitions for children and young people. The ambitions and plans of partner organisations are aligned with those in the Children and Young People's Plan and clearly specified in the Local Area Agreement. The Plan reflects both national priorities and the local needs. The county council has facilitated the development of District Children's Trusts, enabling them to address local needs more effectively. Ambitions have been effectively communicated through stakeholder events. Clear and challenging ambitions provide a focus for the Trust to deliver and improve services for children and young people.

75. Ambitions are informed by both needs analysis and extensive consultation. Hertfordshire Children's Partnership Trust commissioned an independent needs analysis which has informed the development of children's services across Hertfordshire. It has enabled services such as those to reduce teenage

pregnancy to be targeted into the areas of highest need. An extensive range of consultation with children and young people has been carried out by the Trust. Consultation is inclusive and represents the views of both vulnerable and minority groups, carers and parents. Further needs analysis is planned around the emerging Children's Centres and District Children's Trusts to ensure local commissioning effectively meets local needs. Services are being shaped to meet local needs through needs analysis and consultation.

76. Prioritisation is adequate. Priorities for children and young people are clearly specified in the Children and Young People's Plan and action effected through partnership plans. In some areas the priorities are driving service planning, improvement and informing staff targets. The council is redirecting resources to support underperforming priority areas. The Trust is maintaining a strong focus on the short term improvement of prevention services and safeguarding. The county council's Strategic Compass process has been used to identify additional resources to support improvements in children's social care services. Work in the extended schools consortia has resulted in additional resources being targeted in needy areas. Effective prioritisation focuses service delivery on what is important to children and young people in Hertfordshire.

77. Progress in delivering improvement in priority areas is mixed. The priorities specified in the Children and Young People's Plan are not consistently understood by staff as the key drivers of service delivery and improvement. There is no specification of non-priorities which could inform disinvestment decisions. The prioritisation of safeguarding activities has led to some improvements but progress in other areas such as the development of a common assessment framework has been slow. Action is taken to promote equality, such as clear and comprehensive guidance for schools on diversity issues. Targeted actions are having a positive impact on the attitudes and behaviour of Black and minority ethnic pupils although achievement of Black and minority ethnic pupils at Key Stage 4 is mixed. Educational outcomes for children who are looked after are good.

78. The capacity to deliver services for children and young people is adequate. The Hertfordshire Children's Partnership Trust has been established with sound governance and financial arrangements and partner responsibilities are clear. Partnership working with the voluntary sector is effective. There is a high level of awareness, in the partnership, of the issues facing children's services and safeguarding is an agreed priority. Action to improve management and supervision in children's social care includes specification of roles and responsibilities. The responsibility for oversight of Black and minority ethnic group priorities requires further clarification. Inconsistent understanding of roles and responsibilities detracts from the effectiveness of service delivery.

79. The council is taking action to improve staff capacity in children's social care. Training programmes increase the capacity of staff to deliver and plan services for children and young people. A capacity building team is being used effectively to develop management and supervisory skills in social work teams. The council has invested £2.3 million in extending the capacity of social work

teams with the introduction of 42 new social worker posts and the appointment of ten additional managers. Over the last three years, the council has implemented innovative plans, working closely with the university, to address difficulties in recruitment of social workers. Over 30 qualified social workers will graduate from these schemes in 2007.

80. Staff capacity to deliver health services for children and young people is mixed. Access to services for children and young people is inconsistent across the county, for example, access to sexual health services and availability of CAMHS services. Service provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities lacks resources to provide sufficient respite and physical care. The Trust has only recently appointed a designated doctor to support the health of children and young people who are looked after. However, the Trust is taking effective action to improve equity of access to health services, for example through the joint appointment of a Director of Public Health and plans for further alignment and pooling of budgets such as the budget for CAMHS.

81. Value for money is mixed but adequate overall. The council's expenditure on children's services is similar to comparable councils. Areas of higher costs are linked to the delivery of good quality services. The Star Chamber process identifies both efficiency savings and more cost effective ways to deliver services. The process ensures that resources are redirected to priority areas and that the needs of vulnerable groups are generally protected. Surplus places in schools have been reduced and opportunities through collaborative commissioning with partners, for example, with residential care, have been identified. Whilst there is an expectation that commissioning will deliver value for money specific targets are not set for teams and there is no formal monitoring of outcomes. Projects initiated to develop services for children and young people have not consistently delivered value for money. However, improvements in service efficiency and effectiveness are leading to improved value for money.

82. The effectiveness of budget management is mixed. There is some limited joint commissioning, with plans to develop strategic joint commissioning in 2007/08. There is some alignment of funding through the local area agreement. Pooling of budgets is limited, but appropriately so. The costs of out-of-county placements have not been controlled effectively with a £1.13 million overspend in 2005/06. The council is actively addressing the high levels of school reserves through a claw back scheme. Inconsistent budget management detracts from efficient service delivery.

83. Performance management is improving but has failed to ensure sufficient standards in some key areas, and is therefore inadequate overall. The data system used to inform senior managers of information regarding key performance indicators in children's services is not robust, due to inconsistent inputting by staff. Performance systems are in place to manage key partnerships with reports to the Hertfordshire Children's Partnership Trust and its executive group, but they are at an early stage and evidence of impact on

service improvement is limited. Neither children's services nor corporate services' performance management systems identified significant shortcomings of staff vetting procedures, which are inadequate.

84. Senior managers in children's services have identified the need to improve performance management. A performance framework has been agreed and plans to introduce the corporate balanced scorecard are well advanced. Early implementation of the performance framework has focused on safeguarding as the area most in need of performance improvement. However, until it is fully embedded in practice, important information as to whether children and young people on the child protection register or who are looked after are visited within timescales and seen alone, is not available to managers other than through individual supervision of staff. Individual staff members have performance agreements which link into team and service priorities and are monitored through appraisal. However, the impact of these measures is mixed.

85. Performance management systems are not used consistently. Outcome-related targets to deliver improvements are not present in all action plans. Guidance for the development of team plans is limited and does not ensure consistency. Budgets are considered alongside the development of service and team plans, although plans are not fully costed.

86. Data is insufficiently robust in some areas to support effective performance management. Data to underpin commissioning decisions is variable. Some baseline data is incomplete, for example on childhood obesity, although this is now being addressed through the public health function. There is a lack of reliable data for children and young people from Black and minority ethnic groups. The formal statistics from IRIS, the current social care information system, are not reliable. Whilst action is being taken to resolve these issues, impact is currently limited. This means that the Trust is unable to manage some aspects of performance effectively.

87. Capacity to improve in partnership and within council services is good. The Trust has effectively identified underperformance in a range of areas, has prioritised appropriate action to address these, and can demonstrate sustained improvement. Such demonstrated improvement, in areas such as timely completion of social care assessments and statutory reviews for children and young people who are looked after, has been from a low base. Overall educational attainment continues to improve and is high in comparison with other councils. There is a strong vision for children and young people which is robustly shared by partners and is based on needs analysis and ongoing consultation with children and young people and their carers. Councillors and senior managers, in particular the lead member for children and young people and the director of children's services, are providing strong leadership and a clear focus on improvement.

88. Effective partnership working is increasing capacity to deliver outcomes, for example through increasing levels of joint commissioning and plans for the further pooling of funds. Systems are in place to generate efficiency savings

which enable resources to be redirected to priority areas, and there is appropriate investment in key priorities. Redistribution of resources and additional investment in council children's services is increasing the speed of improvement. The Trust has identified, and is developing, performance systems which are fit for purpose and clearly drive service improvements across the partnership. Effective and, in some cases, innovative, action is being taken to address staff shortages, such as qualified social workers and some key health staff, and training is used effectively to develop the skills of the workforce. Capacity is further increased by the use of carers in the voluntary sector.

89. Significant progress has been made in developing District Children's Trusts. Six Children's Centres are established and are delivering integrated services for children and young people. An integrated multi agency approach has identified lead commissioning bodies for a further 44 centres.

90. The identification of, and focus on, appropriate key priorities across the partnership and within council services is leading to substantial improvements which are starting to impact on outcomes for children and young people. Many new policies and processes, however, are not yet fully embedded and the roll out of initiatives such as the Common Assessment Framework within national timescales poses a significant challenge.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Strong leadership and a clear vision for improvement from senior officers and councillors.</p> <p>Challenging ambitions for children and young people shared by partner organisations.</p> <p>Priorities for children and young people based on needs analysis and inclusive consultation.</p> <p>Effective partnership working based on the Hertfordshire Children's Partnership Trust.</p> <p>Effective performance monitoring leading to service improvements.</p>	<p>Priorities specified in the Children and Young People's Plan not consistently understood by staff as the key drivers of service delivery and improvement.</p> <p>Systems are not delivering adequate safeguarding – improvements not yet embedded in practice.</p> <p>Inadequate capacity to deliver equitable services across the county.</p> <p>Inconsistent budget management leads to significant overspends in some areas.</p> <p>Data quality is not sufficiently robust to underpin effective performance management.</p>

Annex A

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

Summary

Areas for judgement	Grade awarded
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
<i>The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people</i>	3

Hertfordshire social care services provides the minimum requirements for maintaining and improving the outcomes for children and young people but has a good capacity to improve. The council's services make a good contribution in helping children and young people to be healthy. Services ensure children and young people's achievement and well-being is good. The Children and Young Persons Plan (CYPP) takes good account of the views of children and young people and demonstrates good levels of partnership working, which continue to be a strength. Children's social care services are only adequate, in particular around the performance on both initial and core assessments. However, the immediate action taken by the council to secure improvement must be sustained. Children and young people are enabled and encouraged to attend and enjoy school although the absence rate for looked after children is high. This performance judgement means that your authority is regarded as coasting for children's social care services.

The full annual performance assessment can be found at:

http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/pdf/?inspectionNumber=75958&providerCategoryID=0&fileName=\\APA\\apa_2006_919.pdf

Annex B

CORPORATE ASSESSMENT ACHIEVEMENT - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Outcomes for children and young people in Hertfordshire are generally adequate and improving, but those in need of high levels of family support or of child protection services do not always receive consistent or timely support. The council's services make a good contribution in helping children and young people to be healthy. Services ensure children and young people's achievement and well-being is good. Children and young people are enabled and encouraged to attend and enjoy school, although the absence rate for children and young people who are looked after is high and increasing. Services for children and young people who are looked after are improving substantially but some statutory requirements are still to be fully met. These issues, combined with poor human resources processes to ensure safe staffing, poor timeliness of completion of full (core) assessments and variable case planning lead to the service as a whole being judged inadequate. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from good support, particularly in special schools, and improved multi-agency processes. However, plans and strategies do not yet sufficiently address outcomes for these children and young people.

2. The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is generally good. The APA 2006 states that the authority makes a good contribution towards improving the health of children and young people. The partnership between key services continues to be effective in promoting healthy lifestyles. National health targets are met in most areas and exceeded in some. Schools inspections noted 90% of schools were good at enabling learners to be healthy. Waiting times for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have been reduced by raising thresholds for access to service. Agencies are working together to agree the future remit of CAMHS, due to planned budget cuts, and the effect of these cuts is not yet known. The dedicated CAMHS service for care leavers has achieved good results.

3. Arrangements to ensure that all children and young people are safe are inadequate. The council is not able to evidence that all staff working with children and young people have been subject to Criminal Records Bureau checks, and there is no defined plan to achieve this within a set timescale. Clear guidance is given to schools regarding safe staffing, but no audit of school processes is in place. Performance management of these key human resources processes is inadequate. There are no multi-agency agreed threshold criteria for access to child protection services, and such access is variable across the county, leading to unacceptable risk for some children and young people at highest risk. Completion of initial and core assessments is improving, but is still well below national average, leading to unacceptable delay in provision of services to match assessed need. Robust performance management systems to enable managers to ensure that children and young people whose names are on the child protection register, or who are looked after, are visited within

timescales or seen alone, although planned, are not in place. Whilst children and young people generally feel safe within school, they report that they do not feel safe in the community. Innovative and effective processes to address bullying are in place, but there is inconsistent reporting of racist incidents by schools, and insufficient training by some schools for their staff as to how to identify and respond to such incidents.

4. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is good, with some notable strengths. The overall quality of early years' provision is good. Pupil results are above the national average through Key Stages 1-4. At the end of Key Stage 4, more pupils achieve five good GCSE passes than in similar authorities and nationally. While achievement is good and improving at age 16 it continues to be adequate overall post-16. Children and young people who are looked after achieve better at school than in similar authorities, but well below that of their peers in the county. There are insufficient work opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

5. Local services work well together to ensure that children and young people are enabled to make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing. A range of opportunities for children and young people to be consulted about plans and new initiatives is in place, although this is not consistent in all strategic planning. Good support and information is provided for young carers. The participation of children who are looked after in statutory reviews continues to improve, and is now in line with similar councils. School councils operate in almost all schools. Participation in further education is high and the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training is low. Access to, and participation in, vocational work-based and alternative curriculum offers has improved and is now good. The proportion of young people, including those who are looked after, who progress to higher education or training continues to be above the national average. The very good work of the Connexions service is valued by young people.

6. The capacity of council services to improve is good. The council and its partners provide effective leadership for children's services, and are demonstrating improvement, but are starting from a low base and such improvements are not yet sufficiently embedded. All partners agree that safeguarding is a key priority. The Children and Young Peoples Plan identifies a range of priorities, based on needs analysis, and there is good multi-agency working at strategic level to effect these. However, many plans are not costed, and establishment of clear and effective targets in planning is not universal. Social care spending in Hertfordshire compares well to similar councils, and further investment has been made in order to effect swifter improvement. Partners work together to ensure that services can be appropriately delivered despite individual difficulties, such as the financial pressures within health services, in order to achieve consistency of improvement.

Annex C

SUMMARY OF JOINT AREA REVIEW AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS

1. This joint area review was conducted using the arrangements required under Section 20 of the Children Act 2004. It was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of inspectors from Ofsted, the Healthcare Commission and the Audit Commission. The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the Inspection of Children's Services*.
2. The review was linked to the contemporaneous corporate assessment of the local council by the Audit Commission and these findings plus aspects of the most recent Annual Performance Assessment are represented in the relevant part of the corporate assessment report.
3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in Hertfordshire and evaluates the way local services, taken together, contribute to their well-being. Together with the Annual Performance Assessment of Children's Services, joint area reviews focus on the extent to which children and young people are healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and are well prepared to secure economic well-being. This review explores these issues by focussing on children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, children who are looked after and children at risk or requiring safeguarding and a few additional investigations. It evaluates the collective contribution made by all relevant children's services to outcomes for these children and young people.
4. The review took place in two stages consisting of an analysis stage (where recorded evidence was scrutinised) and a two week fieldwork stage (where inspectors met children and young people and those who deliver services for them).