



Joint area review

Gateshead Children's Services Authority Area

**Better
education
and care**

Review of services for children and young people

Adult Learning Inspectorate
Audit Commission
Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI)
Healthcare Commission
HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
HM Inspectorate of Court Administration
HM Inspectorate of Prisons
HM Inspectorate of Probation
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Audience	Published	Reference no.
All	14 August 2006	390



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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 a Business Relationship Manager and eight inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Audit Commission. The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the Inspection of Children's Services*.

2. The review was linked to the contemporaneous corporate assessment of the local council by the Audit Commission and its findings are represented in the relevant part of the corporate assessment report. There were also links with HMI Probation's inspection of the Youth Offending Team (YOT) which took place at the same time. Findings from the YOT have been represented in this report where relevant.

3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in the Gateshead 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 (LDD).

5. The review took place in two stages consisting in total of three weeks over a seven-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
- 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 Bensham and Saltwell, neighbourhoods in Gateshead. It also included gathering evidence on eight key judgements, selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. Discussions were held with elected members of the local authority and their equivalents in other public agencies, officers from these agencies, service users, and community representatives. A review of case files for children and young people receiving support from a number of local agencies was also included.

Context

7. Located within the conurbation of Tyne and Wear, Gateshead is the largest of the five Tyne and Wear Metropolitan authorities, covering an area of 55 square miles stretching along the south bank of the Tyne. Gateshead hosts a mix of urban areas such as Felling, Dunston and Blaydon, busy commercial areas such as the Team Valley and rural areas such as Ryton, Wickham and the Derwent Valley. Most of the population live in urban areas, where there are areas of industrial decline and high levels of deprivation.

8. In the 2001 Census, Gateshead had a population of approximately 190,000, of which approximately a quarter were children and young people aged between 0 and 19 years old. The area has a relatively small, but growing Black and minority ethnic population of 1.6% of its total population. There is also a significant Orthodox Jewish community, approximately 0.8% of its total population.

9. Nearly half of the people in Gateshead live in areas among the top 20% most deprived in England, making the area the 26th most deprived in the country. The borough has seen a decline in its residential population over the last two decades. Significant new housing developments have started to regenerate particular areas. The unemployment rate in Gateshead is now 3.7%, the lowest in Tyne and Wear. There are significant differences across Gateshead with unemployment at 8.4% in Dunston and Teams and 1.1% in Low Fell.

10. Over the last 20 years Gateshead Council and its partners have pursued a strategy of regeneration through culture. Recent improvements include Gateshead Quayside with developments such as the Gateshead Millennium Bridge, the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Arts and The Sage Gateshead, a concert hall and music complex. Elsewhere in the borough, there is the Gateshead International Stadium with training facilities used by athletes and local people across Gateshead and the North East.

11. The Children and Young People's Partnership, chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People, reports to the Gateshead Strategic Partnership. A young person and the Chief Executive of Gateshead Primary Care Trust (PCT) are joint vice chairs. The Partnership includes the Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council, Gateshead Primary Care NHS Trust, Gateshead Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Northumbria Police, Northumbria Probation Area, Connexions Tyne and Wear, the local Learning and Skills Council, schools, Gateshead College and voluntary organisations. Council services were restructured in April 2005, to meet the requirements of the Children Act 2004, and the Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LCSB) was established in November 2005. All council services for children and young people are now part of the Learning and Children Group led by the Director of Children's Services.

12. Gateshead has 11 secondary schools, 76 primary schools, six special needs schools and one pupil referral unit. There is one college in the area and there are also a number of schools and colleges owned and managed by the Orthodox Jewish community. There are approximately 280 children and young people who are looked after by the council.

13. The Learning and Skills Council Tyne and Wear works with the local authority, the college, voluntary organisations and schools in delivering the 14-19 strategy. Post-16 education and training is provided by one further education college, nine school sixth forms and a collaboration of six work-based training providers. Education to employment (E2E) provision is coordinated by a main contractor managing a local consortium of delivery providers. Adult and community learning including family learning are provided by Gateshead Council.

14. The Gateshead Primary Health Care NHS Trust provides primary care for children in Gateshead. Joint arrangements are in place with Newcastle-upon-Tyne PCT to provide, for example genito-urinary medicine provision. Gateshead Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is the main provider of acute health services including accident and emergency and most Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Northumberland Tyne and Wear Mental NHS Trust also provides a range of specialist child and adolescent mental health services.

15. Children's hospital services, including specialist paediatric services, paediatric intensive care and adolescent mental health care services are also provided by Newcastle-upon-Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust. All health trusts providing health services for the children and young people of Gateshead fall within Northumberland, Tyne and Wear Strategic Health Authority including North East Ambulance Service NHS.

Summary Report

Outcomes for children and young people

16. **Outcomes for children and young people in Gateshead are good. Children and young people appear safe.** The health of children and young people is generally good. Perinatal and infant mortality rates are below the national average and are decreasing. Teenage pregnancy rates have fallen at a greater rate than the national average and attendance at contraception and sexual health services is increasing. Agencies work well together to protect most children at risk and there is a good range of services in place to support children, young people and families in need. The council and partners are working successfully to address issues of bullying, discrimination and harassment. However, some care leavers do not feel their voice is valued in relation to their housing options.

17. Early years provision is particularly good and most children are doing very well at primary school. Young people achieving five or more A*-C grades in their GCSE examinations is impressive and this performance is among the top in the country. However, there is a wide variation in achievement at both primary and secondary levels. The rate at which children and young people are re-integrated back into mainstream education is better than that of similar areas and nationally. The number of personal education plans for looked after children and young people is low. Most children and young people are able to make a positive contribution to their local communities. The Connexions service has been highly effective in engaging young people in the evaluation and delivery of the service. Young people are prepared well for working life. However, a few young people follow programmes that are not best suited to their individual needs. The number of direct payments for children and young people is low.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

18. **The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** The strong ethos of partnership working between agencies is pursued vigorously in a number of areas. A good range of services meets the physical and mental health needs of children and young people well including those with LDD and children looked after by the local authority. Parents and carers are supported in their parenting by a range of good initiatives. Agencies are effective at promoting healthy lifestyles for children and young people and the local area has achieved Beacon Status for promoting healthy communities. Multi-agency Behaviour and Emotional Support Teams (BEST) provide a wide range of support and outreach services to children and young people in schools and are able to refer them on to other services appropriately and timely. Access to health provision is enhanced by

locating services within community settings and at convenient times for those wanting to use services, for example young people's sexual health services are generally held after school hours. Health provision to Gateshead's minority ethnic communities includes a health team for Traveller families and a link health visitor to the Orthodox Jewish children's centre. There are effective integrated services for children and young people with LDD.

Staying safe

19. The overall contribution of services to keeping children and young people safe is good. Children in need of protection and family support benefit from a timely response from social care. Assessments are of good quality and benefit from well-established systems of communication between agencies. Re-referral rates to social care have reduced significantly and are now in line with national averages. All children on the child protection register and those looked after by the council are allocated to a qualified social worker. Child protection and care plans promote children's welfare and are regularly reviewed. Children at risk of domestic violence or substance misuse benefit from specific processes to manage risks and support their parents and carers to provide them with safe care. The number of children on the child protection register is just above the national average and a recent rise in the 2004/05 re-registration rates is out of line with previous years' activity. Long-term stability is not secured for some looked after children due to a lack of choice in matching their needs to specific carers. However, the percentage of children who experience three or more placements is below that of similar areas and the national average. Bullying, harassment and discrimination are usually addressed well by agencies but some children and young people remain concerned about bullying in their local area. Children with LDD are safeguarded well. Support to young people leaving care is generally good. Safe recruitment practices are in place and agencies contribute to the management of dangerous offenders in the community.

Enjoying and achieving

20. The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people enjoy their education and achieve well is good. The local authority and its partners work well together to provide parents and carers with a range of helpful information about educational provision across the area. Early years provision is particularly good, and links with external providers, including the local Orthodox Jewish community, are strong. The area has opened 10 children's centres and a further six are planned by 2008. The attainment of children and young people is adequate at Key Stages 1 and 3, and good or better at Key Stages 2 and 4. There is wide variation in individual schools' performance at both primary and secondary levels. Some primary and secondary schools fail to add sufficient value to children and young people's educational outcomes. There are strong performance management systems in place that help those working with children and young people to improve provision. The attendance of pupils at schools is adequate, although the

improvement at secondary level since 1999 has been good, with the overall average now just below that found nationally. The local authority is very successful at reintegrating pupils who have received an alternative educational provision back into mainstream education. Recreational opportunities are good. The provision for looked after children is adequate, and there are indications that recent improvements are beginning to have a positive impact. However, the percentage of completed personal educational plans is low. There is effective support for children and young people with LDD.

Making a positive contribution

21. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.** The council and its partners are working effectively to enable children and young people to develop socially and emotionally. Children and young people are encouraged to establish positive relationships and many take part in activities that help them to nurture a sense of responsibility. This is reflected in Gateshead achieving Beacon Status for Positive Youth Engagement. There are increasing opportunities for children and young people to take part in consultation activities and to influence decisions which affect them. School councils exist in all schools and these help to promote citizenship and pride in the borough. A good range of mentoring schemes are also in place which include children and young people supporting one another. Opportunities for the most vulnerable groups of children and young people to have their views heard are established and improving and are helping to shape policies and services. Representation and support systems for children and young people with LDD are improving with the provision of targeted help when they move from children's to adult services.

22. A range of targeted preventative programmes are in place and these are being used effectively by young people at risk of offending and already known to the YOT. Overall crime figures are declining with a corresponding decline in youth nuisance incidents. Re-offending rates are also declining and offending amongst looked after children is lower than that of similar areas. The Connexions service has been highly effective in engaging young people in the evaluation and delivery of the service.

Achieving economic well-being

23. **The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.** Most young people are increasingly well supported to achieve economic well-being. Childcare is good, accessible for most parents and carers, and its availability is improving. Effective local initiatives are helping to improve parents' literacy and numeracy levels. The Connexions service provides young people with very clear and objective advice and information. However, a few young people follow programmes that are not best suited to their individual needs. There is a good strategy for the development of 14 to 19 educational provision and good and increasing collaboration between partners, particularly in developing vocational

provision. A 14 to 19 local consortium has been established in one area and other consortia are being developed within the area although progress varies. The take-up of direct payments to young people and their parents is low. The length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation is lower than the national average. The numbers of young people leaving care and young people engaged with the YOT who continue in education, employment or training are improving and are now above national averages.

Service management

24. The management of services for children and young people and the capacity to improve further are good. The council's self-assessment is well laid out and reflects a good level of self-awareness. It is based on an analysis of needs and sets out clearly actions the area will take in addressing issues identified.

25. The ambition of the council and its partners is good. There are clear and challenging ambitions for children and young people, developed in conjunction with key stakeholders. The council has also given high priority to ensuring that recent transformational projects provide benefit for local children and young people. There is good understanding of where performance needs to improve and efforts are concentrated there. There is good understanding of minority communities' needs and good engagement at strategic level with young people. Prioritisation to meet the needs of children and young people is good. There is consistency in key priorities at all levels. The children and young people's plan did not include specific targets, timescales, accountabilities or resource implications. These were being developed through the children and young people's delivery plan that was at a very early stage of development.

26. The capacity to produce outcomes for children and young people is good. There is effective partnership working across the full range of service delivery to children and young people. There are good arrangements for ensuring that elected members oversee services.

27. There is strong stability and commitment of staff but sickness levels in children and families services are high. Overall value for money is adequate. While the council provides services which generally represent good value for money, there are deficiencies in the arrangements it has in place to assure value for money. Performance management arrangements are adequate. Overall systems are very robust and action has been taken on most key areas of underperformance. However, partnership monitoring arrangements have yet to be established and there are some cases where voluntary organisations receive grants from the council but the expectations of what they are to deliver are not clear.

Grades

Grades awarded:

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

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

Recommendations

For action over the next six months

- The council and partners should develop clear and robust procedures for measuring value for money in all activities related to improving provision for children and young people.

- The council should ensure that personal educational plans for looked after children are a significant part of their educational planning and that rates of completed plans improve.

For action in the longer term

- The council should ensure that all young people leaving care are provided with sufficient choice of accommodation.
- The council and its partners should further develop the 14–19 vocational curriculum to ensure all young people have good access to a range of career options.
- The council should ensure that:
 - all plans clearly specify targets, timescales, accountabilities and resource implications
 - all financial arrangements with external partners, whether through contracts or grant aid, specify clearly the requirements of the council in such a way that their delivery is capable of being monitored.

Main Report

Outcomes for children and young people

28. **Outcomes for children and young people in Gateshead are good.**

29. **The health of children and young people is generally good and improving.** Of those children and young people responding to a questionnaire, the Tellus Survey, 92% described themselves as quite healthy or very healthy. Perinatal and infant mortality rates are below the national average with perinatal rates decreasing year on year. The proportion of expectant mothers who smoke during pregnancy has decreased although it remains above the national average. The number of women initiating breastfeeding is increasing at a higher rate than nationally. Overall immunisation rates for local children are close to statistical neighbours and national averages. Gateshead children have below average numbers of decayed, filled or missing teeth.

30. Teenage pregnancy rates have fallen at a greater rate than the national average with increasing attendance at contraception and sexual health services. However, rates of Chlamydia, a sexually transmitted disease, are increasing albeit in line with national rates.

31. There is good access to a range of CAMHS and waiting times are lower than average for new cases. There is a dedicated health team for looked after children and basic health checks and other measurements are very good.

32. On the evidence gathered children and young people appear safe.

Children, young people and their carers receive a timely response from agencies when they need help and support. Most children who responded to the Tellus Survey and those who took part in focus groups reported that they felt safe. The rate at which road traffic accidents have reduced is good and is better than the national average. Inter-agency child protection work is good and children at risk, including those with LDD, are safeguarded well. Most young people feel that bullying was being dealt with in schools well but they remain worried about some bullying in their local area. All children looked after and on the child protection register are allocated to a qualified social worker. Overall, the management and performance of child protection is good. However, the number of children re-registered on the child protection register is higher than national and local comparators. The LSCB works well and has developed plans to further improve practice and services. Most children looked after by the council have their needs met and live in stable family placements although long term stability is not achieved for a small number. Adoption is seen as a positive option and effective work is done to make sure that children are placed with adopters in good time.

33. Children and young people generally achieve well and enjoy learning.

Children are well prepared for the start of statutory schooling, and the majority achieve better than expected at the end of primary school. Progress is maintained for many young people, so that by the time they sit their GCSE examinations, the percentage achieving five or more A*-C grades is among the top in the country. However, there is variation in performance at both primary and secondary levels, which means that some schools are doing significantly less well than expected. Overall attendance at school is marginally above the national average at primary level and marginally below at secondary, although the improvement of 2.6% in secondary attendance since 1999 is impressive. There are sufficient childcare places for all those who require them, and inspections of early years settings show that around 62% are judged to be good or very good. The local authority successfully reintegrates more children and young people back into mainstream education, from alternative provision, than similar areas. The attendance of looked after children is adequate and most achieve as well as other looked after children nationally although this is well below the national figure for all children. The percentage of completed personal educational plans, at 59%, is low. Recent targeted improvements of specialist support services have helped the local authority increase its completion rates for statements of special educational need to around 97%, without exceptions.

34. Children and young people have a good range of opportunities to make decisions, take personal responsibility and many make a positive contribution to their communities.

They have good opportunities to develop socially and emotionally and good arrangements are in place at all levels to encourage participation and involvement. Mentoring schemes are good and children and young people feel that bullying is addressed appropriately. Offending rates are reducing, including those for looked after children, and

suitable priority is being given to targeting services for those most at risk. Considerable effort is being made to support young carers to enable them to make a positive contribution and to encourage children and young people from Black and minority ethnic groups to play a positive role in the development of local areas.

35. Most young people are prepared well for working life, and are able to achieve economic well-being. Young people benefit from the increasingly varied curriculum from the age of 14 provided by the developing partnership between schools, the college and work-based learning providers. Achievements in work based learning are in line with national comparators. However, too many young people drop out of education at the age of 17. Educational outcomes are improving and success rates at NVQ levels are just above national averages for the 16-19 age group. The proportion of young people aged 16 and over who are not in education, employment or training is reducing from a level significantly above statistical neighbours to one that is now adequate. The number of young people who offend who are engaged in education is above national comparators. The length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation is much lower than national and regional comparators at 2%.

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.

37. Most children have a good start in life. There are good initiatives in place to reduce the proportion of expectant mothers who smoke, including midwives who are trained in stop-smoking interventions and a specialist smoking cessation worker. The joint development of a baby-friendly approach to breast feeding by health trusts and the local authority includes the recruitment of a breast feeding specialist working with front-line staff; the number of babies being breast fed is rising albeit from a low starting point. Women with specific vulnerabilities are supported well, for example those misusing drugs are identified during pregnancy and care packages are instigated. This supportive approach has encouraged earlier presentation by other drug-misusing women.

38. Parents and carers, particularly those attending Sure Start/children's centres and voluntary projects, receive good advice and support in keeping their children healthy. Local fruit and vegetable co-operatives support healthy eating options at affordable prices. Baby massage sessions and classes on a range of parenting topics such as "eating well on a budget" are available from both statutory and voluntary services. There is a good range of programmes for parents of older children and young people that focuses on adolescent issues, for example, the Speakeasy programme helps parents to talk to their children about sexual relationships. The range of parenting courses available is

considerable. The Children and Young People's Partnership recognises the need to map current provision and to identify gaps in connecting with groups that are traditionally hard to reach.

39. Most agencies in Gateshead make valuable contributions to promoting healthy lifestyles and this is recognised through the achievement of Beacon Status for Healthy Communities. All schools have healthy schools status and a raising achievement service disseminates good practice. Delivery of drug, alcohol and safe sex programmes are effectively co-ordinated and supported by advisory staff and trained teachers. Children and young people are supported well in being active by a range of sports and exercise facilities, both within and outside of the curriculum. A young people's gym is partnered with Balance IT, a comprehensive health initiative for obese children and young people, which contributes to the local obesity reduction strategy. An excellent leisure card scheme for children and young people with a disability and their families, provides over 2,000 free or reduced-cost admissions to a range of leisure activities contributing to improving the inclusion, health and well being of the whole family. Health provision for Gateshead's minority ethnic communities includes an Innovation Award winning community health team supporting Traveller families and a link health visitor to the Orthodox Jewish children's centre.

40. An effective sexual health partnership delivers the teenage pregnancy strategy. Rates of teenage pregnancy are reducing supported by a good range of initiatives including a condom distribution scheme whereby the holder of a 'C-card' can obtain free condoms at a range of outlets. Sexual health sessions specifically for young people, a sexual health promotion worker for looked after children and school health advisor drop-in sessions at schools provide good advice and support on a range of issues. Attendance at contraception and sexual health clinics is increasing year on year and is unusually effective in attracting more young men than young women in the under 16 age group.

41. Rates of Chlamydia are rising in young people across the health authority area, albeit in line with national averages. Young people living in Gateshead currently have to access provision for this area of health care from a neighbouring health trust. This may affect the number of young people accessing the service. Provision for screening and/or treatment in the local area is planned.

42. Mental health support for children and young people is good. There is a strong CAMHS partnership underpinned by a comprehensive needs analysis. Prevention and early intervention work through the BEST team in schools are supported by CAMHS.

43. Children and young people are well supported and receive appropriate intervention from the Emotional Well-Being Team, a 24-hour crisis service provided by a multi-disciplinary child and family unit. Gateshead YOT has a full-

time mental health practitioner and there is a PCT lead for substance abuse working with an effective drug and alcohol team.

44. The multi-disciplinary health team responsible for looked after children has effective links with a range of professionals. Carers and other staff are supported well in meeting children and young people's health needs through, for example, comprehensive guidance on sexual health. The position of a psychologist for looked after children is vacant and has resulted in some delay in looked after children accessing CAMHS.

45. The Children's Trust partnership was instrumental in developing an integrated service to meet the health needs of children and young people with LDD. The integrated service is generally good and includes the use of a local common assessment tool. The council is reviewing parental involvement in a multi-disciplinary decision making panel that currently does not include parental attendance. Parents were involved in the design of an award winning service, led by nurses, to support parents/carers of children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). There are long waiting periods for some therapies especially speech and language therapy; additional funding has been provided to support an expansion for these services.

Staying safe

46. The combined work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.

47. There is a strong partnership approach to keeping children safe and specific work is being done to extend the safeguarding agenda across services so that it becomes everyone's business. A range of well-targeted programmes is in place to enable parents to keep their children safe. Effective road safety campaigns, including school travel plans and specific projects such as the 'walking bus', have led to a reduction in road traffic and cycling accidents.

48. Most children and young people are provided with safe environments through the effective application of risk assessments and health and safety procedures in settings such as residential children's homes, activity centres and youth clubs. There are effective systems in place to ensure that information is shared when children and young people move between agencies ensuring that their whereabouts are known.

49. Most children who responded to the Tellus Survey feel safe in school but not as safe in their local area. The council's own consultation processes identified that bullying remains a concern among young people, particularly in open spaces and parks. Good links have been established between the Orthodox Jewish community and the police and this has led to a reduction in anti-social behaviour towards this community. However, many Orthodox Jewish people continue to experience racist abuse.

50. There are good strategies in place to tackle bullying in schools and other settings. Bullying and harassment feature as one of the 10 priority areas for improvement in the Children and Young People's Plan and in the programme of the LSCB.

51. Most children and families have access to a good range of well co-ordinated and effective family support and preventative services. Some services are limited in rural districts and, although outreach services are available, some families have to travel longer distances to access services. Domestic violence is given significant attention by agencies. There is effective communication between the police and social care duty teams to ensure that risk assessments are undertaken and children and families receive appropriate support. A specific project called 'Safer Families' has been developed in partnership with the voluntary sector, the police and the council. Its impact is not yet evident but it is designed to further reduce the incidence of domestic violence. Services to support drug abusing parents are effective at safeguarding babies and young children.

52. Agencies work well together to protect children and young people. Social care access and referral arrangements are well established and understood by agencies. Child protection arrangements are effectively managed and there is also effective communication and support from the emergency out-of-hours service. Overall performance in relation to assessment and care management is good. Assessments are timely and generally of a good quality. All children on the child protection register and all children and young people looked after by the council have an allocated social worker. Child protection plans are well managed and all cases are reviewed on time. Over a number of years, there has been very good performance in relation to re-registrations but, in 2004/05, performance dipped for the first time. Effective work is undertaken to ensure children do not remain on the child protection register for more than two years. Agencies have clear policies and procedures in place for ensuring that criminal checks take place for staff working with children and young people.

53. Case records across agencies are generally well kept and provide up to date information about a child's circumstances. There is effective engagement with families using a solution-focused approach to casework and the 'Finding Solutions' surgeries enable families to focus on resolving issues before they escalate out of control. Feedback from children, parents and carers indicates positive changes in their relationships and as a result children and young people have been prevented from entering the care system. Most families with longstanding complex problems that include neglect are supported well to help them to make changes in their parenting. However, in a small number of cases, children have remained too long in situations that did not meet their needs.

54. The LSCB has been established in advance of national requirements. There is clear leadership, appropriate multi-agency representation at senior level and a work programme to ensure that national, local and cross boundary issues are addressed. Serious case and management reviews have been

properly managed and action plans well progressed. There is evidence to show that practice has improved from the lessons learnt from reviews. There is good access to a range of multi-agency child protection training courses and take-up of these is high. Practitioners have access to up-to-date procedures. Effective supervision and support arrangements are in place for practitioners.

55. Arrangements for managing sex and dangerous offenders in the community are well established and there is appropriate attendance at Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements meetings by the key agencies. The area is using similar systems and processes to better manage people who have not been convicted but pose a risk to children and young people in the community.

56. Statutory visits to looked after children and young people are taking place but some young people and foster carers would like to see the child's/young person's social worker more frequently. Most children and young people are in stable family placements but performance is not as good in relation to the percentage of children and young people who remain with their carer for more than four years. Support for foster carers is good. A number of strategies are being deployed to support carers to maintain young people in their placement but choice is limited particularly for children with complex needs, large family groups and young people with behavioural problems. The council is aware of this and has invested in a new Treatment Foster Care service and is in the process of recruiting specialist carers. Most young people leaving care receive good support from the leaving care service.

57. Children with LDD are safeguarded well by a range of specialist teams. The local area is a children's pathfinder trust and, although plans for co-location of multi-agency staff are in development, agencies work well together to ensure that assessments and care packages are coordinated. Families have access to a good range of services, including respite care, both in the home and in other settings. Most of these are valued and are well planned. The arrangements for ensuring that young people make a safe and smooth transition to adult social services have been improved following the establishment of a transition service for young people aged 14–24.

Enjoying and Achieving

58. The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people enjoy and achieve is good.

59. Gateshead places a high priority on helping its children and young people to achieve the best they are capable of and, through a broad range of supporting activities, enjoy all that they do, in and out of school. The council has ambitions to improve standards in schools further, challenge any underperformance and provide support. Well-planned local and national initiatives are helping to raise standards, especially at Key Stages 2 and 4. The work of the raising achievement service is helping to deliver very effectively the council's clear priorities for educational improvement. Link officers work well

with schools, and very secure and trusting professional relationships have been established. Officers are aware of their professional accountability, and a strong and regular performance management system helps all those who are working with children and young people to understand the impact of their work on improving provision.

60. Parents and carers are supported well by the council and a number of partner agencies in helping them to participate fully in their children's learning. Information about educational provision is clear and helpful, and the number of parents and carers who get their first preference of school is in line with that found nationally.

61. The provision for early years is well above the minimum standards expected, with an extensive range of good or very good settings across the borough. There are currently 10 children's centres open, with six more planned by 2008. The range of services offered at these centres is good, although some are so new that their impact on local community provision cannot yet be judged fully.

62. Children and young people living in and attending schools in Gateshead do as well as expected at Key Stages 1 and 3, but generally better at Key Stages 2 and 4. Some good overall progress is being made at primary level, and standards are generally above those found in similar authorities, and nationally, in all three core subjects at the end of Key Stage 2. The rise in the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A* - C grades at the end of Key Stage 4 is very impressive and Gateshead is among the best performing authorities in the country. However, there is wide variation in individual schools' performances across both primary and secondary phases, with some schools doing less well than expected, particularly in English and mathematics. The local authority is well aware of this and is making strenuous efforts to address this underperformance, for example through regular link officer visits to schools. The support for schools in formal categories is very good but, despite this, one primary school has gone into special measures within the past 12 months.

63. The attendance of children and young people at both primary and secondary levels is adequate and improving. With the exception of 2002, when Gateshead achieved higher rates than similar areas, attendance at primary level has generally been in line with statistical neighbours and nationally since 1999. At secondary level, attendance has improved since 1999 by around 2.6%, and although the local average is marginally below that found in similar areas and nationally, the overall improvement in attendance is good, with a decrease in the significant variations in levels of attendance across secondary schools. However, authorised absence has remained marginally above the averages found in similar areas and nationally. Overall rates of exclusions are in line for fixed-term exclusion at both primary and secondary levels, but are marginally higher for permanent exclusions in both phases.

64. The number of children and young people who receive alternative educational provision is generally in line with averages found elsewhere in the country, although the local authority is more successful at reintegrating those pupils back into local schools. There is an up-to-date database of those who are educated other than at school, and appropriate checks on children and young people in alternative provision, including those educated by parents at home.

65. The area provides well for the recreational needs of children and young people. There are well planned out-of-school sports and general recreational provision, and a well-considered and broad range of play opportunities across the area. Local communities are appreciative of the efforts made by different partners to encourage them to be active and purposeful in their leisure time.

66. There is effective co-ordination of support work for looked after children, with the raising the educational achievement of looked after children (REALAC) team targeting those most in need. Overall levels of attainment for looked after children are generally in line with national averages, with lower rates of exclusion from school. Attendance rates are satisfactory and occasionally better than the national average. Despite recent efforts to improve the overall percentage of completed personal educational plans, the current rate of 59% is too low, and limits the ability of schools, support agencies and carers to ensure a shared and co-ordinated provision for all looked after children in the area.

67. There is effective support for children and young people with LDD. With the exception of speech and language, specialist support for children and young people in need, is generally appropriate, readily available and appreciated by schools. Those children and young people with a statement of special educational need are supported well by school and local specialist staff to participate in their annual reviews and this occurs in most cases. Recent efforts to address unacceptable delays in processing statements have met with considerable success, and the current rate of around 97% of applications without exceptions is good.

Making a positive contribution

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

69. There is a strong commitment shown by all the agencies to enabling children and young people to make a positive contribution to their communities. Gateshead has achieved Beacon status for the engagement of children and young people in services and this accords with progress being made in the borough to develop wide-ranging consultation and participation processes. However, some care leavers feel that their combined voice is not always heard. Children and young people are generally proud of the area in which they live and have high aspirations for continued improvement. They highlight less

graffiti, cleaner streets, reduced levels of litter and more good spaces for play and leisure as examples of the way local services have responded to the views of children and young people and how, in turn, this has added to an increased sense of community in the borough.

70. All Gateshead schools have a school council and these are having a considerable effect in enabling children and young people to contribute positively to the running of their schools and to their wider communities. It is encouraging that schools are incorporating the work of school councils within a wider learning context and thus providing good opportunities to enable children and young people to enhance engagement opportunities. Good examples include modelling of election processes, visits to Parliament and meetings with local councillors and MPs. Children and young people feel empowered to deal appropriately with day-to-day issues, such as bullying and healthy eating, that affect them, both within schools and in their local communities.

71. Good mentoring services are available for children and young people and opportunities are being created for them to act as mentors to their peers. There are good arrangements in place for focused consultation with those from Black and minority ethnic and religious groups, with leadership coming from within these groups and an emphasis on building mutual understanding and tolerance. There is good participation of children and young people in health matters with suitable support services in place to promote the engagement of children and young people in all aspects of improving their health. For young people this includes contraception, work to reduce teenage pregnancy and education on the misuse of drugs and alcohol.

72. Gateshead's elected members and managers are working hard to develop ways to facilitate the engagement of children and young people in the design and evaluation of services offered to them. A young person is a member of the Children and Young People's Partnership, a youth assembly is in place and the implementation of plans to connect them to the five local forums is gathering momentum. The consultation project, Paper Chain was particularly successful, with good evidence that issues raised are being actively pursued. A workers engagement forum has been established to enhance the coordination of activities and to share information across key contributing agencies, including voluntary sector providers. The forum is in the process of confirming terms of reference and objectives and has the potential to focus on arrangements for the engagement of the most vulnerable groups of children and young people including those with LDD. Alongside this, work is taking place through One Voice to improve consultation with looked after children and young people and through an effective children's rights service. There is considerable support for this service and the role played by the children's rights officer. An effective complaints system is in operation in social care services which is regularly updated to make it more accessible to and useable by children and young people. Corporate parenting responsibilities are overseen by the Looked After Children Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

73. In general, children and young people receive good support in managing change and in coping with difficult periods in their lives. For example, effective support is provided by youth workers and Connexions personal advisers to vulnerable children and young people. Access to advice and guidance on a range of health, social and educational matters is good. Young carers are supported very effectively through the work of Crossroads, with support services being provided to between 180 and 200 young carers at any one time. Young carers have actively participated in the development of the service they receive.

74. Work to reduce anti-social behaviour is good and youth offending rates in Gateshead are reducing. Good progress is also being made to reduce offending amongst looked after children. This rate is now below most similar areas. The YOT is an integral part of the Prevention Strategy Group for Gateshead and there are several teams involved in the delivery of services to children and young people considered to be at risk of offending. The AMBER project consists of five Youth Inclusion and Support Panels across the borough chaired by a YOT operational manager. The project works effectively with children and young people aged 8 -13 years who are considered to be at risk of offending. There are two Youth Inclusion Projects, Respect Birtley and the Futures Plus Programme in the Springwell area of Gateshead. Each project works with up to 50 children and young people. The STOP Programme has been developed to provide suitable interventions for children and young people involved in anti social behaviour. Work with children and young people who had offended and were supported by the YOT was adequate. Although levels of engagement with children and young people were strong, the YOT inspection highlighted some aspects of practice which required attention.

75. Children with LDD generally have opportunities to express their views within the formal review processes and when they transfer from one setting to another or move from children's to adult services. However, contingency plans and arrangements are sometimes missing and parents and carers are not consistently engaged in the plans for their children. In a small number of cases plans have been amended without appropriate reference to parents or carers.

76. The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee has taken seriously issues regarding care leavers. For example, plans are in place to increase the amount of supported accommodation. Foster carers would like to see greater clarity about their delegated authority and responsibilities for making decisions for children in their care.

77. The Connexions service is particularly effective at engaging young people. Young people are involved in all aspects of the service, including the monitoring of the service through a mystery shopper scheme, representation on the economic well being theme of the Children and Young People's Partnership and in the selection and recruitment of staff. Young people engaged in these activities receive very good training in committee skills, recruitment and selection and decision making.

Achieving economic well-being

78. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.

79. Local services are making a good contribution to the economic well-being of children and young people. Parents and carers are well informed about the wide range of childcare facilities and activities through the Children's Information Service. Advertisements are placed regularly in free newspapers and information distributed through health visitors, Sure Start and early years providers. Many parents make good use of the Gateshead and Newcastle Service Directory through internet access at the council and in the local library. The council and partners are taking effective action to provide high quality childcare facilities in the most deprived areas. Local accessible, family learning is beginning to help parents develop the skills required to help them to support their child's learning.

80. Most young people receive good support in preparing for working life. Opportunities to participate in work related learning are good. Work experience opportunities are provided in all schools at Key Stage 4. However, a small number of young people are engaged in work experience that is not related to their career aspirations, vocational learning or their broader interests. A minority of young people do not participate in work experience and remain in school. Special schools are actively encouraging their students to participate in work related learning and work experience. However, for some young people, there are limited choices and opportunities. The Increased Flexibility Programme, the School Links Programme and student apprenticeships provide over 1,000 Key Stage 4 pupils with useful opportunities to participate in work-related learning.

81. The Connexions service provides good impartial advice and guidance to most young people, especially to targeted groups such as looked after children and those not in education, training or employment, although not all young people receive sufficient information from their schools about the broad range of learning opportunities available post-16. The Connexions service provides young people with very good support to attend job and education interviews through the provision of bus passes, clothing and equipment. In addition, they provide good support in the writing of curriculum vitae and job applications. Connexions advisers work increasingly effectively with schools to deliver aspects of the careers programme, in particular units of vocational careers awards.

82. Progression to post-16 education and learning is improving but remains below the national average and the number of young people leaving education at 17, whilst reducing, remains high and above the national average. Young people at risk of dropping out of post-compulsory education are identified and supported by progression mentors. The progression mentors are beginning to be used effectively to improve the numbers remaining in education at 17. The number of young people with a person-centred plan is low. The area is aware

of this and is taking action to improve. Take-up of direct payments among children with disabilities is low.

83. The local authority and the local Learning and Skills Council provide good collaborative support for 14-19 learning. Progress has been made in developing a wider range of options for young people aged 14-19. The range and breadth of the curriculum has increased year on year and includes more vocational and work-based learning leading to a broader curriculum offer. Strategic support and direction for these developments is good and most key partners are working well together. However there has been slow progress in developing a comprehensive 14-19 curriculum to maximise use of resources and to overcome duplication or curriculum gaps consistently across the area. An effective partnership between the college and three schools provides learners with very good opportunities to participate in a wide range of learning opportunities. A similar development has taken place amongst rural schools to maximise class sizes and learner choice. Choices for learners in some sixth forms are restricted because there are few opportunities for joint timetabling.

84. Achievement rates at aged 16 and over are improving at NVQ levels 1 and 2, and, in 2004, they were just above national comparators. Whilst improving, achievement rates at level 3 remain below national and statistical neighbours. Achievement rates in work-based learning are in line with national averages. The Connexions service has worked effectively with local schools, colleges and work-based learning providers to reduce significantly the number of young people post-16 who are not in education employment or training. The number of young people who were not in education, employment or training in 2005 was below the local target, but just above national targets. A high proportion of looked after children and young people who offend are in post-16 education and training but the number of young mothers in post-16 education is low. They have, however, good access to support and non-accredited learning through targeted support programmes provided by the Youth Service. Young mothers also have good opportunities to participate in programmes such as Millennium Volunteers, the Princes Trust and ASDAN awards.

85. There is a long history of focusing on regeneration initiatives in the area with the council having a good record of being involved in innovative work across its range of services. Good progress has been made in developing a community strategy to tackle social disadvantage. Community regeneration includes action to address the needs of children, young people and their families. There is also evidence of increasing their involvement in these initiatives. The development of children's centres is a high priority for the council and is seen as a key means of regeneration.

86. Partnership working is beginning to focus on specific housing needs and on improving housing stock. For example the voluntary sector is providing specialist advice and direct support to some young people including teenage parents. Affordable housing provision is improving and there is a low level of unoccupied housing. A housing association has provided some shared

ownership housing to cater for the needs of larger families in the Orthodox Jewish community, thereby reducing overcrowding. The length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation is reducing and is currently lower than the national average. The number of homeless people is rising and currently the length of stay in hostels is increasing and is above the national average.

87. The council has taken steps to support care leavers with their housing, for example, there has been an increase in the number of supported accommodation units for care leavers and there are plans to introduce 'taster placements'.

Service Management

88. The management of services for children and young people and the capacity to improve further are good.

89. The council's self-assessment is well laid out and reflects a good level of self-awareness. It is based on an analysis of needs and sets out clearly actions the area will take in addressing issues identified.

90. The ambition of the council and its partners to improve outcomes for children and young people is good. Children and young people have a high profile within the corporate strategy, Towards 2010, and in the community strategy. The Children and Young People's Plan sets out clear and ambitious priorities, developed following extensive consultation with all stakeholders, including children and young people. There is good understanding of where performance needs to improve and efforts are concentrated there. There is good understanding of most minority communities' needs such as the Muslim and Orthodox Jewish communities, which respects their particular cultural/religious traditions and assists the Orthodox Jewish community in particular in meeting many of their own needs, which is their preference.

91. The council has placed a high priority on ensuring that recent transformational projects, which have put Gateshead on the map nationally and internationally, provide benefits for local children and young people. At The Sage Gateshead music centre, the post of education director was the first to be filled while revenue support agreements for both The Sage and The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art include requirements concerning access for schoolchildren throughout the Borough. Gateshead International Stadium is frequently used for school sports events, provides pitches for local use and is the venue for Gateshead College's new sports academy.

92. There is good engagement at strategic level with young people, for example, a young person is co-vice chair of the Children and Young People's Partnership and there are young people on some of the theme groups supporting it. There is an active Youth Assembly which is well supported by the council. However, most members of the Youth Assembly are drawn from school councils so there is under representation of young people who have left

school and there is no clear link between the Assembly and the formal structures of the council.

93. Prioritisation to meet the needs of children and young people is good. There is consistency in key priorities at all levels, including the community strategy, corporate strategy, local area agreement, service plans and at the individual level through the achievement and development scheme. The local area agreement incorporates challenging targets for improving GCSE results in English and mathematics and for reducing the proportion of young people post-16 who are not in education, employment or training. The children and young people's plan does not include specific targets, timescales, accountabilities or resource implications. These are being developed through the children and young people's delivery plan that is at a very early stage of development.

94. The council is addressing most areas where improvement is needed, for example reducing surplus primary school places and out-of-borough placements for vulnerable children and young people, improving some aspects of attainment and the transition planning to adult services for young people with LDD. Resources have been shifted well to effect change, for example from residential to foster care, and within the youth service from younger children to the higher priority 13–19 age group.

95. The service planning process ensures that resources are available to deliver key priorities over the next year and the medium-term financial strategy demonstrates how all service plans will be resourced over the next three years.

96. The capacity to deliver outcomes for children and young people is good. There are good arrangements within the council for providing elected member leadership and oversight of services. The portfolio holder for children and young people is supported by two cabinet colleagues, one of whom is designated as champion for looked after children. They meet weekly with senior officers. The portfolio holder for children and young people similarly performs support roles for two cabinet colleagues. This arrangement promotes a corporate approach by cabinet members in line with the council's 'one council' ethos. The scrutiny function, including a specific looked after children sub-committee, which meets with them biannually, has had obvious impact in a number of areas, such as services for care leavers and boys' attainment.

97. There is strong stability and commitment of staff. Turnover and vacancy levels are low. Sickness absence levels in social care, however, are high and increasing in spite of improvements in managing sickness absence introduced corporately following a best value review which had an initial positive impact.

98. Most educational planning and support provided by the council is rated very highly by schools. Where support services, such as finance, information technology and purchasing, were less highly rated, action has been taken to explore these issues through focus groups with headteachers and improvements have been made. In some cases, demonstrable improvement in satisfaction has already been achieved.

99. The needs of children and young people are effectively assessed. Interagency working is good. Children and young people and their parents and carers are involved and supported well in most cases.

100. There is effective partnership working across the full range of services to children and young people. There are a number of joint appointments with health. Joint commissioning is developing well. This strength has an evident effect on service delivery and quality. A common assessment tool is being put into place and the lead professional role piloted. A good joint workforce strategy has been produced. The council works well with a wide range of voluntary organisations, but there are issues about sustainability, in relation to continuity of funding from time-limited sources and core funding to allow for future development. The council works with neighbouring councils to enhance capacity, for example the Building Schools for the Future programme with South Tyneside and regional commissioning of some specialist services.

101. Overall, value for money is adequate. While the council provides services which generally represent good value for money, there are deficiencies in the arrangements it has in place to assure value for money.

102. Spending levels are close to national average levels (a little above in education and a little below in social care) while outcomes in most areas are good. The school improvement service is an example of a high spending but very effective service, while family support is an example of low spending in a service providing a good range of preventative services to meet different needs. Action on out-of-borough placements and a wide range of multi-agency initiatives are delivering improved value for money.

103. The council and its partners have not, however, undertaken systematic explicit consideration of value for money in the past and a corporate framework to ensure this happens has only just been devised. There are very high school budget surpluses, to which the council's response is not sufficiently robust to ensure value for money. While budget plans relating to surpluses are required of schools, these are not monitored rigorously.

104. Performance management arrangements are adequate. Overall systems are very robust with biannual reporting to scrutiny committees and at least monthly reports to senior management on targets that are at risk of not being achieved. An example of a well-researched scrutiny report is one on gender differences in attainment, which identified key issues at primary school level, and hence action has been focused there. Another, on care leavers, involved young people at every meeting. Recommendations which have been acted on include acquisition of seven additional units of supported accommodation. A notable feature of this work is the continued monitoring at six-month intervals of nine care leavers on an anonymous basis to assess the longer-term impact of services. Robust monthly financial monitoring is also in place. A strong performance culture is evident in most areas of service. Children and young people are enabled to contribute to performance management in some

services. This is very strong in Connexions but variable in the youth service, for example.

105. The Children and Young People's Partnership has yet to establish monitoring arrangements and there are some cases where voluntary organisations receive grants from the council but the expectations of what they are to deliver are not clear and monitoring is inadequate.

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

1. Gateshead council demonstrates a strong commitment to children and young people and has made 'children and young people' one of the 10 themes of the community strategy, *Towards 2010*.
2. Gateshead has strong partnership arrangements and these have been effective at improving services for children and young people. The Children and Young People's Plan is ambitious and has clear priorities. Overall, services for children and young people provide adequate value for money. The council and its partners work well with Black and minority ethnic communities and there is good understanding of community needs.
3. The health of children and young people in Gateshead is generally good. Health promotion is effective and the area has achieved Beacon Status for promoting Healthy Communities. The number of mothers breast-feeding is increasing at a higher rate than the national average and teenage pregnancies are falling at a greater rate than the national average. There is a good range of services on offer for children and young people in need of child and adolescent mental health services. Young people currently have to access some adolescent inpatient facilities and sexual health provision from a neighbouring authority. There is effective multi- agency working to meet the needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
4. Children and young people appear safe. Systems and processes for assessment and care management including those for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are effective and timely. Inter-agency working relationships are good. However, some care leavers feel they would like more choice of accommodation. The council and its partners are addressing bullying and harassment in schools. However, children and young people report feeling unsafe in local parks and open spaces and some Orthodox Jewish children and young people experience racism. A small number of children and young people remain too long in situations that do not best meet their needs and there is a high proportion of re-registrations on the child protection register. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is aware of this and has made addressing neglect a key priority area in its work plans.
5. The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people enjoy and achieve well is good. Good advice and guidance about educational provision is available to parents and carers. Early years provision is very good. Most children are doing very well at the time they leave primary school. Young people achieving five or more A*-C grades in their GCSE examinations is impressive and they are among the best performing in the country. However, there is a wide variation in the achievement at both primary and secondary

levels with some schools performing below national averages. The rate at which children and young people are re-integrated back into mainstream education is better than that of similar areas and nationally. Looked after children receive an adequate education and there are indications that improvements are being made.

6. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. School councils exist in all schools and there is an effective youth forum. Opportunities for children and young people to support each other through mentoring schemes are good. Transition arrangements for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities moving from children's to adult services are improving with the provision of targeted support. Offending rates are reducing. The offending rates of looked after young people are lower than that of similar areas. The impact of the youth service for some vulnerable groups of young people is variable.

7. The overall contribution of services to help children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. Childcare is good and accessible for most parents and carers. Effective initiatives are in place to improve numeracy and literacy levels for parents and carers. The connexions service provides young people with clear, objective advice and information. However, a few young people follow programmes that are not best suited to their needs. The strategies in place to develop education for 14 –19 year olds are good and there is increasing collaboration between partners, particularly in developing vocational provision. The number of young people leaving care who continue in education, employment or training is improving and is above national comparators. The take up of direct payments is low. Gateshead Council has kept the needs of children and young people high on a very successful regeneration agenda and children and young people are benefiting from these initiatives.