



# Joint area review

Doncaster Children's Services Authority Area

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**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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## Introduction

1. This joint area review was conducted in October and November 2005 using the arrangements required under section 20 of the Children Act 2004. It was carried out by a multidisciplinary team of 11 inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), 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. It also drew on the findings of the contemporaneous inspections of the Youth Offending Service and the youth service.
3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in the Doncaster 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 disabilities.
5. The review took place in two stages consisting in total of three weeks over a five-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 emerging findings of the inspection of the Youth Offending Service (led by HM Inspectorate of Probation)
  - 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 the Lower Wheatley and Elmfield Park neighbourhoods of Doncaster. It also included gathering evidence on 10 key judgements, selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area (see annex). This included discussions with local councillors and their equivalents in other public agencies, officers from these agencies, service users, and community representatives.

7. A report on the Doncaster youth service is being published by Ofsted at the same time as this report.

## Context

8. In area, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council is the largest metropolitan borough in England. It has a population of 289,000, a quarter of whom live in Doncaster town and its immediate suburbs. There is significant deprivation, with over 40% of the residents living in neighbourhoods which are among the most disadvantaged in England. Lower Wheatley and Elmfield Park, which was a focus for attention in this review of children's services, is one such area. The proportion of schoolchildren from minority ethnic groups is low, as is the number with English as an additional language. The number of Traveller and asylum-seeking families has increased over the past few years.

9. Doncaster is well served by the motorway network, mainline rail routes and a new international airport. The borough has received significant regeneration funds from central government and Europe in recent years. Unemployment is still in excess of national and regional averages but employment levels have improved over the last 10 years, narrowing the gap between local, national and regional rates. Average earnings are just above the regional average. However, household incomes are low, with 27% of children living in low-income families compared to 18% nationally.

10. The mayor is directly elected as the council's political leader and heads a cabinet of Labour councillors. Doncaster's Tomorrows, a multi-agency partnership, is leading the Change for Children agenda and is currently reviewing provision in line with the government's requirements. The newly convened Children and Young People's Partnership Trust plans to function as a commissioning board. This comprises all major partners including the borough council, three primary care trusts, a hospital trust, a healthcare trust, the probation service, the Learning and Skills Council, schools, the Connexions partnership, the police force, the youth service and the voluntary and community sector forum. There are already some well-established multi-agency service groupings through the Doncaster Strategic Partnership, which include voluntary and community groups. The council has undergone a radical reorganisation to achieve the delivery of services through multidisciplinary

teams based in neighbourhoods. A designate director of children's services has been appointed and a local safeguarding children's board is in place.

11. There are 103 primary schools, 17 secondary schools, one academy, seven special schools and six pupil referral units. All secondary schools have learning support units. Three quarters of schools with the youngest children have nursery classes. Fourteen secondary schools and four special schools have a sixth form. Further education and adult and community learning, including family learning, are provided by the borough council and Doncaster College. Plans are well underway for Doncaster Education City to link schools, training providers and further and university-level education to business and the wider community through virtual networks. South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council works closely with the borough council, the college, schools and training providers in addressing the 14–19 strategy.

12. Administered by the South Yorkshire Strategic Health Authority, eight health organisations including three primary care trusts, offer a wide range of services to children and young people. Of these, one National Health Service (NHS) trust provides substance abuse services and some mental health-care, and one hospital trust provides acute health services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

## Summary report

### Outcomes for children and young people

13. **Outcomes for most children and young people in Doncaster are at least adequate, but provision for vulnerable groups is inconsistent. From the evidence gathered, children and young people appear safe.** Strong political commitment, good strategic partnerships and a range of effective multi-agency work result in outcomes that are at least adequate. Children and young people are generally healthy and there is good support to encourage healthy lifestyles. Agencies work well together to protect children most at risk. Provision for vulnerable children and young people varies as there are inconsistencies in planning for need and arrangements for establishing their whereabouts do not extend to all groups. In recent years, education services have had a positive impact in raising aspirations. Standards are improving, but not all children from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as their peers. Too many pupils excluded from school do not receive the full-time education to which they are entitled. The proportion of young people continuing successfully in education and training beyond the age of 16 has improved significantly but some vulnerable groups are less likely to continue in education, employment or training. There is insufficient supported housing to assist vulnerable young people, including those who offend, to overcome personal instabilities. There are many opportunities for young people to take part in making decisions about local services; these have led to many improvements.

## Being healthy

14. **The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Given the long-standing health issues in Doncaster, there are many examples of good outcomes such as a reduced incidence of whooping cough, a below-average death rate of newborn babies and a dramatic reduction in respiratory tract infections. Children and young people receive good health support and are generally healthy. The health of looked after children is improving. Successful Sure Start programmes involve all relevant agencies in the promotion of health activities. Hospital services for children offer good outreach care. Agencies are working to co-locate key services on the hospital site as their current positioning poses a potential risk in an emergency. The limited budget for equipment is not delegated appropriately to specialist staff in the hospital children's services. All schools are engaged in some aspects of healthy eating and physical exercise campaigns, but oral health projects are not routinely evaluated for their effect on improving dental health.

15. Considerable investment in resources to reduce the rates of teenage conception and pregnancy is slow to have an impact, although numbers have reduced over the last six years. Effective work with homeless young people who abuse substances is made more difficult by the lack of supported accommodation. CAMHS have improved and waiting times, although still too long, have reduced. Health provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Transition planning is comprehensive, but for young substance abusers and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, provision sometimes reduces on transfer to adult services.

## Staying safe

16. **The combined work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** Children assessed as most at risk are protected by multi-agency collaboration, but arrangements for establishing the whereabouts of vulnerable young people do not extend to all groups. There is a strong commitment among statutory and voluntary partners to the local safeguarding children board and there are examples of good interagency collaboration in schools. The council has reduced significantly the number of social work vacancies. The number of children on the child protection register is in line with the national average and all children on it are allocated a qualified social worker. A good range of family support services is available for children and young people. Disabled children and their families are generally positive about the support they can access. The lack of agreed thresholds for intervention causes some delays in accessing services for some children. There is a lack of consensus about what constitutes a full assessment. The quality of assessment, planning and record keeping for individual children is just satisfactory, but with some very good and some poor practice, the range is too variable. Care leavers are well supported by the leaving care service, but there is a lack of supported accommodation for them. The council's analysis of its

performance in social care is unsatisfactory due to a limited range of management information.

## **Enjoy and achieve**

**17. The combined work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is adequate.** There are some good features. Doncaster has been relentless in its quest to raise standards. The council contributes to a good integrated strategy for childcare and early years education. Improving educational standards is seen as fundamental to economic regeneration and it has a high profile across all council services. In recent years, education services have had a positive impact on raising aspirations, engagement in learning and improving achievement. Standards have risen more rapidly than is the case nationally, but at the age of 16 they continue to be below those found elsewhere. There are good arrangements for working in partnership with schools and the voluntary and private sector to improve the quality and range of provision. The council gives effective support to the national strategies to improve standards and behaviour. These initiatives have had a demonstrable impact on pupils' attainment and schools' capacity to improve behaviour has strengthened. However, behaviour problems continue as an issue in some schools. While local services have been successful in challenging and improving provision, practice across schools is inconsistent. There continue to be more permanent and temporary exclusions than elsewhere. Not all excluded pupils receive sufficient time in education. The attendance of looked after children is below the national average. Not all children from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as their peers. Comprehensive assessment guidance helps schools identify the level and type of support that they should provide for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The quality of support for children with complex needs at times of transition, especially into adult services, is inconsistent.

## **Making a positive contribution**

**18. The combined work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.** The council and its partners do much to help children and young people develop socially and emotionally. Children and young people develop good relationships and many take part in a broad range of activities that help them develop a sense of responsibility. There are many opportunities for young people to take part in making decisions about local services, including as elected youth councillors. These have led to many changes in what is available. Consultation with young people of all ages from diverse backgrounds and vulnerable groups is systematic, but young people are not always aware of how they can take part in this or of the outcomes. Good support is available to young people to help them cope with a broad range of personal problems, difficulties and changes in their lives, often in places they can access easily. Implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy has been slow. Good programmes have been



developed to reduce anti-social behaviour in the community. The number of young people who offend has reduced.

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

19. **The combined work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.** Doncaster has been particularly successful in encouraging a wide range of partners to contribute to the planning and development of a coherent 14–19 curriculum. The proportion of young people continuing successfully in education and training beyond the age of 16 has improved significantly in recent years and is now comparable with similar authorities. Young people are increasingly receiving good quality advice and guidance about the range of education and training opportunities available to them and there are some successful curriculum developments linking academic, vocational and work-based learning into a single 14–16 or 16–18 programme. The proportion of young people in work-based learning is slightly higher than average, but there are too few entry-level or level one vocational courses for school leavers. Provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate for those with low-level needs but less well established for those with complex or profound needs. Young people leaving the youth justice system and those leaving care are less likely to continue in education, employment or training than their peers.

### **Service management**

20. **The management of services for children and young people is adequate.** The community leadership of the council is a strength, as is partnership working at both strategic and operational levels. Prioritisation is adequate but provision for some vulnerable groups is not sufficiently coordinated. The importance placed on the integration of services is reflected in the restructuring of the council and in establishing the coordinated delivery of services in local neighbourhoods.

21. Overall capacity and capacity to improve are adequate. Senior officers and senior elected members of the council are enthusiastically committed to improving services, but for some elected members knowledge of the scope and extent of change is underdeveloped. The director of children's services has additional strategic roles which reduce the focus on children and young people. The council manages its resources adequately but there has been limited budget monitoring during restructuring, and budget responsibilities have only recently been re-allocated. Overall, the council provides adequate value for money.

22. Performance management arrangements are also adequate although the links between improving performance and the use of resources is not strong. The self-assessment recognises most of the issues facing the council, except for a number of weaknesses in safeguarding such as the lack of a common agreement on the threshold for referrals. The impact of inclusive practice in education is less strong than portrayed in the self-assessment. However, the

capacity of the council to improve its arrangements for managing performance is good now that the restructuring of the council is nearing completion.

## Grades

Grades awarded:

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

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

## Recommendations

### For immediate action

- The council should provide full-time alternative education for those permanently excluded from mainstream schools.

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

- The council should review the appropriateness of the wide range of areas for which the director of children's services is accountable.
- The council and its partners should:
  - evaluate and improve oral health initiatives for their impact on dental health
  - re-assess provision for reducing the rate of teenage pregnancies.
- Healthcare providers should review the location of key children's services on the hospital site.
- In relation to safeguarding, partners should agree:
  - thresholds for referral between services and agencies
  - a common approach to full assessment
  - arrangements to establish the whereabouts of all vulnerable children and young people.
- The council should ensure greater consistency in the quality of assessment, planning and recording in social services case files.
- The council should continue work with its partners to address the needs of children and young people with behavioural difficulties.
- Councillors and council employees should implement their responsibilities for the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- The council should improve transition arrangements for:
  - children and young people with complex or profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities to post-16 education and training
  - care leavers and children and young people who offend to enter education, employment or training
  - the transfer of disabled young people to adult health and social services.

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

- The council should improve the availability of appropriate accommodation for vulnerable young people living independently; young people leaving care who have the most complex needs; homeless young substance abusers, and children and young people who offend.
- The council should monitor and review the effectiveness and the impact of new ways of working, following the reorganisation of

children's services and the proposed merger of the primary care trusts, for consistent provision and improved outcomes for vulnerable groups.

## Main report

### Outcomes for children and young people

23. **Children and young people are generally healthy. Health promotion is supported by comprehensive and well-coordinated multi-agency services that are reducing long-standing health inequalities.** All schools are engaged in some aspects of healthy eating and physical exercise campaigns. Immunisation rates for all age groups are above the national average, as are the frequency of health assessments for children aged under 5. There has been some reduction in the high rate of whooping cough but this still remains above the national average. The death rate of newborn babies is lower than average and indicators for child protection structures and processes are good. There has been a dramatic reduction in the number of emergency admissions to hospital of those aged under 16 years with lower respiratory tract infections and figures are now equal to the national average. Sexually transmitted infection rates, in particular chlamydia, are higher than average, as are the teenage conception and pregnancy rates. Oral health in children and young people is poor and too many children have decayed or missing teeth. The health of looked after children is improving. The majority of children and young people surveyed are positive about their health.

24. **On the basis of the evidence gathered, children and young people appear safe.** Suitable action is taken to protect those most at risk. Indicators are broadly in line with the national average, including the number of children on the child protection register. Inspections of schools, childcare providers and children's homes are good, and agencies undertake the appropriate checks of staff. Young people's perceptions of whether areas are safe vary, but danger spots are known and avoided. All child protection cases are allocated to qualified social workers. There has been a significant increase in the number of looked after children adopted, providing them with more security. A number of children-in-need cases are not allocated to a social worker, but these are initially screened and monitored. There is no common understanding within the council about what constitutes a full assessment and this leads to some delays in the provision of services. Agencies have not agreed the threshold for making referrals to social care, resulting in delays and variable responses in cases which do not require a prompt response to ensure children and young people are safe.

25. **Children and young people are well prepared for school and achieve adequately.** A high proportion of children responding to a survey for this inspection identified themselves as doing quite well or better at school. Educational standards achieved by most children are improving and are now broadly in line with the national averages for primary-aged pupils. There has

been significant improvement in the achievement of 14 and 16 year olds. However, children in secondary schools still do not make the same progress or achieve as well as young people of the same age nationally. Not all children from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as their peers. Recently, the achievement of children who are looked after by the council has improved, but a high level of authorised absence accounts for attendance that is continuously below the national average. There is a good integrated strategy for early years. There are enough early education and childcare places to meet the needs of children, and parents and children are prepared well for school. School attendance is improving, with a generally upward trend, but continues to be below national figures with a higher-than-average level of unauthorised absence in secondary schools. The number of permanent exclusions from primary schools is rising. In special schools, exclusions are well above the national figure. Children and young people permanently excluded from school do not always receive the amount of full-time education to which they are entitled. Analysis of recent data indicates that overall children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in mainstream schools are not doing as well as those in similar schools nationally.

**26. Children and young people have a good range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility; many make a good contribution to their schools and to their communities.** There is a good range of opportunities for children and young people to contribute to making decisions about services. Many take part in these, particularly through schools and the youth service. Children and young people are involved in a good range of activities that help them to develop social skills and positive relationships. Just over half of those surveyed consider they are able to have a say in and influence the way things happen in their local area. Three quarters feel they are able to contribute in some way to decisions in schools. A high proportion of looked after children and young people and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are involved in their reviews. Most looked after children and young people surveyed are very satisfied with their placements. Rates of offending by young people have decreased substantially. In general, young people feel that they experience too much bullying in schools and in public places and they do not all feel sufficiently safe on the streets. They would like more things to do and safe places to go within their local area.

**27. Most young people are prepared well for working life, and an increasing number are able to achieve economic well-being.** Young people benefit from the increasingly varied curriculum available to them from the age of 14 and through the good partnership between schools, the college and work-based learning providers. The proportion of young people continuing in education after the age of 16 is increasing significantly, and their chances of success on their chosen course are improving. Success rates at GCSE and A level have improved significantly and are now close to national comparators. Success rates in work-based learning are also improving, and are good in the small number of advanced apprenticeships. Education and training

opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities vary but are generally more limited than for other groups.

## **Impact of local public services**

### **Being healthy**

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

29. The strong partnership between the council and the three primary care trusts secures good outcomes in the improvement of health for children and young people. The Local Area Agreement (LAA) integrates and aligns public services and all major agencies are committed to this document. Community and voluntary organisations are well integrated into the Doncaster Strategic Partnership, and their role is expanding into mainstream health activity. As there is no single strategic lead for children's health within the council or the primary care trusts, staff and families are concerned about the future direction of health services for children and young people.

30. Doncaster continues to develop a satisfactory range of supportive maternity services based on individual need. Provision includes parent participation in proposals for changes in practice, midwives working from the new Children's Centres, the Mexborough 'Green Gables' project that supports and accommodates young parents, and Sure Start multi-agency support initiatives. Midwives and health visitors promote breastfeeding. Successful community-based Sure Start projects include locally-trained volunteers to support parents and carers in keeping their children healthy. Positive parenting programmes, such as those in Lower Wheatley are run by local groups including the National Children's Home Family Centre. These are successful in promoting family activities and are well attended. The Healthy Schools initiative, which focuses on healthy eating, drinking water and tooth-brushing clubs facilitated by Sure Start, is becoming embedded in all schools. This provides very good support to parents and carers to keep their children healthy. Outreach teams work well, especially in offering support, care and treatment. All activities demonstrate effective partnership working and efficient referral between agencies, but healthcare staff identify delays in responses from children's social services.

31. The promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and young people is a clear priority for the council and its partners, and there are many examples of improved health outcomes from this investment. Notably, the Healthy Children Project provides a sports pass to young people that enables entry to facilities for £1. Sporting success is also encouraged through financial support, equipment and clothing grants. The youth service is strongly focused on promoting health. The Better Deal drugs project has extreme difficulty in finding housing for young people who are misusing substances or who are in an alternative substance programme and there is no provision for supported housing. Children and young people receive appropriate sex and relationship

education in schools and through projects such as Jigsaw, Choices and Streetreach. All three are clear about their core purpose to reduce the harm young people can do to themselves and to others through inappropriate sexual conduct. Outreach teams from these projects are active in schools and use peer educator schemes successfully to promote positive sexual health messages.

32. The borough strategy and the LAA accurately identify health challenges that include: teenage conception and pregnancy rates; sexual health and, in particular, rates of chlamydia infections; childhood obesity; and the improvement of mental health services for children and young people. In a challenging context, partners have invested considerable resources to reduce teenage pregnancies. Numbers have decreased over the last six years and slowly continue to do so. Access to NHS dentistry is slightly better than elsewhere in the country but oral health, including the number of missing, decayed or filled teeth in children and young people under 15 years, is poor. Healthy eating campaigns and tooth-brushing initiatives are well targeted in improving these outcomes but they lack coordination and impact. Immunisation rates are good across the age range as are child protection structures and processes. Health assessment and health promotion activities positively improve health outcomes.

33. During the past two years the promotion of mental well-being and provision from CAMHS have been prioritised to meet demand. The primary care trusts and the council have increased funding to mental health services and CAMHS have developed an innovative range of services in line with national guidance and an analysis of local need. Waiting times, although still too long, have now reduced. The range and reach of services has increased and service users report improved access. There is now a Primary Mental Health team, an Early Intervention into Psychosis team, a Youth and Adolescent Mental Health Service offering care to 16–19 year olds, and mental health workers based in other agencies. Therapeutic services for looked after children are delivered in partnership with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. These are effective in maintaining the stability of placements. All school-based professionals and residential foster carers have good access to training and advice on mental health issues.

34. The health needs of looked after and fostered children are met well. Personal health plans are in place and monitored. Care leavers are given a helpful 'life box' that contains useful information about health and access to services. Joint budgets between the council and the three primary care trusts ensure good arrangements for securing places for children whose health needs cannot be met in Doncaster. A nurse specialist for looked after children works through the network of health visitors and school nurses. In partnership with colleagues she has developed a looked after children database that is proving useful to healthcare staff and other agency partners in tracking and tracing health records or notes.

35. Parents and carers appreciate the Together Information Exchange that offers a comprehensive range of information on services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Effective protocols between all relevant agencies result in early identification of need. CAMHS are funding three posts to provide specialist mental health support to children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to enable swift access to appropriate mental health services. Children and young people with disabilities are able to access a number of appropriate mainstream and specialist activities that help to promote their health and well-being. Transition planning by the Children's Disability Service is comprehensive, although the level of provision and care is not as high once young people are in receipt of adult services. The budget for equipment is not appropriately located to specialist staff in the hospital children's services. This results in delays in the purchase of specific equipment such as walking and standing aids for disabled children.

### **Staying safe**

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

37. Suitable action is taken to assess and protect children and young people who are most at risk of abuse. The proportion of children on the child protection register is similar to the national average, and their cases are reviewed within appropriate timescales. Child protection planning and decision-making are robust. However, children placed at home remain on care orders for too long. There is no agreement with the police on thresholds for prioritising referrals of incidents of domestic violence to social care.

38. A range of good collaborative work among staff working with children ensures safeguarding and care. However, this collaboration is not consistent, with examples of poor assessment, planning and coordination among agencies when cases do not require a prompt response to ensure the protection of children and young people. The quality of responses to initial referrals is also inconsistent, although systems ensure that those most at risk are protected. The council is taking action to create a single team to remedy this. Initial referrals are suitably screened before decisions are made about allocation. Cases are regularly monitored, but there are long delays before those for some children in need are allocated. Nevertheless, interim services are provided for some families. All child protection cases and a higher-than-average proportion of looked after children have a named social worker, but because of inefficient use of staff, this is not the case for all children in need. In some cases, this results in delays in provision. When needed, there is good access to services for children and young people from minority ethnic groups.

39. Social work case files vary in the extent to which key information is accessible, in the rigour of assessment and planning, and in the quality of recording. Fewer assessments are completed within the required timescale as there is no consensus about what constitutes a full assessment. Work within



the council is ensuring a slow but steady improvement in the number of social workers' reports that are provided in advance of the reviews for looked after children.

40. There has been strong interagency commitment among statutory and voluntary agencies to the development of the local safeguarding children board which is now operating. The role of the board has been carefully planned and discussions are taking place among partners to finalise its structure of sub-groups. Multi-agency child protection training is well attended and positively received. There are strong partnerships between the council and community groups, and good relationships among frontline staff in the different agencies. These ensure positive collaborative action to protect and care for children.

41. A good range of family support services is well used and valued. These enable more children to live at home and improve the quality of their lives. However, agencies have not agreed common thresholds for intervention, resulting in delays to responses to referrals when social care assess them as a lower priority. The council's self-assessment recognises the need to reinforce a widespread 'culture of responsibility' and for further awareness-raising among agencies, but this does not adequately address the extent of this issue or the need to establish a common understanding and agreement. Plans to develop five neighbourhood Family Action Support Teams are being implemented. These are designed to address the shortfall identified in the self-assessment and enable agencies to respond promptly and in a coordinated way to families' needs at an early stage. This approach will also assist agencies in a better understanding of each others' roles and responsibilities.

42. A good range of services for disabled children and young people are valued by families and improve the quality of life for both children and their families. Transition arrangements have been strengthened to support disabled young people to move to adulthood but some do not secure suitable support into adult services.

43. The council has done well in ensuring that high numbers of looked after children are adopted. The in-house adoption service will enable increased placement choice and better value for money. Care leavers are well supported by Barnardo's who are contracted to provide this service. Necessary action is improving the preparation of young people for transition from the looked after system, but does not yet ensure a confident move into independence. There is a serious shortage of supported and safe accommodation for care leavers and other vulnerable young people, so leaving them living in poor-quality housing with insufficient support. Residential and foster care placements for looked after children provide safe and good personal care.

44. Young people in the area have mixed views about whether the area is safe, but they are aware of, and avoid, known danger spots. Young people, parents and carers receive a good range of information from schools, the youth service and the council about key risks and how to deal with them, including

road safety, sexual relationships, and running away. The youth service provides welcome safe havens for a number of vulnerable groups. Arrangements for establishing the whereabouts of specific groups of children and young people at risk are in place. These do not extend to all vulnerable groups but protocols minimise risk.

45. The council has taken effective action over the past year to reduce the number of social work vacancies and these are now generally at an acceptable level. Staff are positive about the new structures and the ability of senior managers to deliver the changes. Social workers receive good support and supervision from their managers, although a lack of sufficient training opportunities prevents some staff from developing required skills. Management information is limited in scope and availability and is not widely used to analyse performance and drive improvement. An electronic recording system has been in place for a year with further important modules still to be introduced. This leaves staff recording both manually and electronically, resulting in wasteful duplication and the risk that information may be lost.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

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

47. Improvements to services for education are having a demonstrable impact on provision and standards. The new structure strengthens educational services for schools but the interface between education and services designed to improve multi-agency working for vulnerable children within neighbourhoods is too new to evaluate. Currently, some young people are not receiving the support they need and there is insufficient identification of action to address the underachievement of some children from minority ethnic groups.

48. There is a wide range of support for parents and carers wishing to help their children enjoy and achieve well at school, with an extensive network of family support facilities. Good-quality information is available to help parents in finding a school place for their child. Parents and carers receive good support to increase their skills to deal with difficult behaviour. Innovative local ideas extend parents' and carers' awareness of their role in supporting their child's learning, for example, local media coverage explaining how parents can help their child at the time of examinations. However, the quality of support received by parents of children with complex learning difficulties varies. While the contribution of some services is very successful in gaining the confidence of parents, others are insensitive to the needs of families and are not well coordinated across agencies.

49. There is a good integrated strategy for early years. Arrangements for monitoring the quality of provision in all settings are effective and additional training and support is provided when necessary. Children with learning difficulties are identified early and supported well. Children are well prepared

for school. Good links with primary schools ensure continued good progress on transfer and achievement above the national average at the end of the Foundation Stage.

50. There are sufficient school places in secondary schools, but too many surplus places in primary schools. The promotion of inclusive practice and parental confidence has been adversely affected by delays in implementing the outcomes of a review of special school provision. However, there are detailed building plans with increased location of special school provision on mainstream school sites. Improvements to the acknowledged poor-quality accommodation for pupil referral units are not a feature of either special or mainstream school building plans.

51. The council gives effective support to school self-evaluation, engaging governing bodies well. A good range of performance data is used to monitor schools, providing a good system for identifying and intervening in schools that may be failing to provide an adequate standard of education. Effective additional challenge and support is given to schools not performing well. The council gives effective support to the implementation of the national strategies for raising attainment and this has resulted in a more rapid rate of improvement in the schools involved. The council is committed to promoting inclusive practice but as yet, services are not coordinated well enough to ensure that the needs of more vulnerable groups are met consistently.

52. Currently, the provision for behaviour support is not fully effective. Almost half of the children surveyed felt they would do better if classes were quieter and if pupils behaved better. Recent action and new appointments signal good capacity for improvements in the coordination and implementation of the behaviour strategy. National strategies for promoting good behaviour have been implemented well with schools increasing their capacity to meet a wider range of needs. However, more pupils, including those looked after by the council and those with learning difficulties are excluded on either a temporary or permanent basis than is the case nationally. Unofficial exclusions continue in some schools. As a result, the whereabouts of some young people is unknown. A significant proportion of young people in residential placements only attend on a part-time basis. Attendance at school is improving, with a generally upward trend, but remains below the national average. The authority is providing firm leadership and the educational welfare service makes good use of the full range of available strategies, including prosecution, to encourage good attendance.

53. The amount of provision for pupils excluded from school is inadequate as not all young people receive their entitlement to full-time education. Not surprisingly, the achievement of this group is well below the national figures. Young people attending pupil referral units receive a good-quality education. There are creative distance learning packages to re-engage those at risk of becoming lost to learning. Opportunities offered by local voluntary groups and

work-related placements increase the relevance and enjoyment of learning and more young people return to mainstream school than is the case nationally.

54. Support for the education of looked after children and young people is adequate. Good support is provided by the multidisciplinary looked after children team. This is having a positive impact on communication and coordination of services although schools continue to find inconsistent practice in their contacts with social workers. All schools have designated teachers who monitor attendance and ensure appropriate personal education plans are in place. However, some schools do not readily admit young people who are known to be looked after. There is a good range of well-coordinated therapeutic and carers' services in schools to support troubled children to cope with the school environment. While there have been improvements in the achievements of children looked after by the council, their absence rate is still far too high.

55. Provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate. Comprehensive guidance helps schools identify the level and type of support that they should provide. Schools are effectively challenged to monitor and evaluate their provision and the progress of individual children is regularly reviewed. Schools receive good support from local services supporting individual children with, for example, a recent focus on improving the involvement of young people in their annual review. An increasing number of children are attending mainstream schools. However, there are weaknesses in relation to early intervention and assessment. Funding is delegated to schools to meet the needs of children with learning difficulties. This arrangement is appropriate in providing greater flexibility to meet children's identified needs, but there is not yet a consistent understanding of the range of support that schools should be providing with this funding prior to making a request for a formal assessment. Recent local data suggest that children identified as needing additional learning support do less well than children with similar needs nationally. Key workers are not allocated to all families with children with complex needs. Support from a range of services working with individual children is not always coordinated well, increasing the pressure on parents and carers.

56. Schools generally provide an appropriate curriculum, with an increasing range of vocational courses at Key Stage 4, and give young people good opportunities for out-of-hours learning. There are strong links between education and cultural services, for example the accreditation of local schools with 'artsmark' and 'activemark' and a number of initiatives contribute to play and voluntary learning provision. The youth service contributes well to these activities. However, some young people express concern that transport costs reduce their access to available activities. Community leisure activities include children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For some, difficulties with transport and access to toilets reduce opportunities for them to participate. Local voluntary organisations, for example those for children and young people with autism, provide additional targeted leisure activities.

## **Making a positive contribution**

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

58. Good support from Sure Start, schools, the youth service, the Youth Offending Team and voluntary agencies helps children and young people of all ages to develop socially and emotionally and to establish positive relationships. The youth service and Youth Offending Team make a particularly strong contribution, engaging some of the most vulnerable young people in a broad range of programmes, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and the Youth Engagement Programme. Many services work effectively with young people and their families, for example, through parenting programmes. Very good examples of mentoring programmes include the Youth Inclusion Support Scheme which works to reduce re-offending, peer mentors who tackle bullying, and the work of learning mentors who support young people experiencing difficulties at school.

59. In general, children and young people receive good support in managing change and in coping with the difficulties they experience. Access to advice and guidance on a broad range of health, social and educational matters is good. This is often provided in easily accessible locations and premises, such as the 'Bridge' in the town centre, and from youth information workers in youth centres. Youth workers, Connexions personal advisors for vulnerable young people aged 14 and above, and community projects such as SMART support young people well. They make appropriate referrals to other support services where necessary, including health, social services and housing. This support often continues until young people have received the service they need, however long that takes. Learning mentors are particularly effective in enabling young people to remain engaged with school. Despite the broad range of information and advice available through these services, some young people who responded to the survey for this inspection are not aware of what advice and guidance schools and youth clubs provide.

60. The views of children and young people are taken very seriously by the council and its partners. A very good range of opportunities for young people of all ages, from diverse backgrounds and from vulnerable groups, enables them to contribute to decision-making within the council, and to shape the provision of services. Their views have influenced policy, plans and practice, strategically and at local level, most notably through the very effective youth council and its representation on strategic boards. School councils provide good opportunities for most children and young people to contribute to decision-making and, for those in secondary schools, to elect representatives to the youth council. Examples include changes made to where young people can go to get advice on sexual health matters, and in the location of pedestrian crossings. These opportunities occur frequently. They turn the aspirations of the mayor and senior officers into the genuine involvement of many children and young people in decision-making at all levels. A significant number of young people are

involved with the youth service and take part in checks on the quality of the work of services. Innovative work, such as the junior wardens, enables children and young people to support the work of adult community wardens. Nevertheless, a large number of children and young people do not find it easy to influence the way things are done within their local area. The council has correctly identified a need to provide more feedback to young people.

61. Work to reduce anti-social behaviour is good. Statutory and voluntary youth organisations work together effectively, well supported by the Youth Crime Reduction Group. This results in very successful projects, for example, a very well-attended disco, organised in an area known locally for widespread acts of anti-social behaviour. No incidents were reported to the police. However, long-term funding for a number of these programmes is not secure beyond the current financial year. An anti-bullying policy has been written by young people for young people. Young people who are part of a multi-agency group set up to tackle bullying in Doncaster are trained to offer advice and support those at risk of being bullied. Despite some good initiatives, too many young people still experience bullying. They and their parents consider bullying in schools and anti-social behaviour within public places as problematic. Many young people identify a limited range of leisure activities available to them outside of schools and few places where they can go to be together safely.

62. Effective systems identify young people at risk of offending. Well-targeted initiatives, such as the Youth Engagement Programme, are clearly contributing to a reduction in the number of offences committed by young people. The Youth Offending Service provides a broad range of interventions with young offenders, which are clearly focused on individual causes of offending. Combined with high-quality support and rigorous enforcement practice this is effective in reducing the likelihood of re-offending. Strong professional networks ensure that young people in need of support are referred to the appropriate services.

63. High priority is given to the contribution of looked after children. In the Youth Justice Service particular focus is placed on reducing further the number of looked after young people who enter the youth justice system. Notably, a celebration of achievement was organised by the young people themselves. Most looked after children and young people express high levels of satisfaction with their placements. Very good work by the children's rights officer has had a major impact on reducing unofficial exclusion from schools. Looked after children are well represented on the youth council and a high proportion, together with their carers, contribute to their annual reviews. Progress in implementing the Corporate Parenting Strategy has been slow and not all councillors and council workers are sufficiently aware of their responsibilities towards looked after children.

64. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well consulted and a range of good opportunities enable them to express their views. The proportion involved in their annual reviews is good. They are well

represented on the youth council and on school councils. Good examples of changes made to services include the setting up of Street Dance which provides increased leisure opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the provision of a drop-in advice and information centre in a school. Good arrangements are in place for obtaining and acting upon the views of young people in some but not all residential settings. There is a good focus on improving transition between schools for young people, but there are individual examples of poor support to young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in making the change to post-16 education and training, and to adult services. Good-quality respite care is available to families of children with complex needs.

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

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

66. Strong mayoral and political determination drives improvements in economic well-being. Doncaster has a satisfactory strategy to support families seeking to enter employment. A good range of activities informs parents and carers about services and facilities available to them, and there has been a significant increase in the provision and take-up of childcare places in the past four years. Some initiatives have been targeted at hard-to-reach groups, such as subsidised transport and outreach provision by both the council and Doncaster College, particularly in family learning and essential skills. The Homestart project has been successful in supporting families to manage their household budgets, guide them to childcare services and improve their self-esteem. Some of the volunteers working on the project have also progressed into further education or employment as a result. However, in total around 10,000 children live in families not engaged in employment.

67. Support for most young people to help them prepare for work is good. This begins with well-planned transition activities for children moving between primary and secondary schools, for example, work in schools to introduce anti-bullying mentors. Young people are well supported by the business and education partnership to make informed decisions when choosing a work placement, for example through a website that young people and their parents can access at home. Effective team working by Connexions advisers is helping to improve the quality of advice and guidance for young people in Year 9, and the council has supported schools well in introducing individual learning plans for all Year 9 pupils. Work-based learning providers have contributed successfully to a roadshow to raise the profile of the work-based learning option. Many successful projects are helping young people who do not attend school regularly to re-engage in education, employment or training. Good examples include the pre-entry to employment pilot, aimed at 14–16 year olds, the work with Traveller parents and their children, and the work with teenage mothers which has improved their essential skills and their readiness and ability

to accept their parental responsibilities. The overall effect of these activities has been a significant improvement in both post-16 participation and success rates.

68. The proportion of young people who gain GCSEs and A levels has increased. Success rates in a range of accredited courses at Doncaster College are also improving. Results are now roughly comparable with statistical neighbours. The proportion of young people who choose work-based learning is slightly higher than in other regions in south Yorkshire as a result of successful activities to raise the profile of this training route. The quality of work-based learning is at least satisfactory. Young people who continue in education or training beyond the age of 16 are visited by students from neighbouring universities as part of the Aim Higher initiative to encourage them to progress to higher education. However, this initiative is too recent to have had a significant impact on the number of young people progressing to higher education.

69. Doncaster has been particularly successful in planning and coordinating coherent education and training for 14–19 year olds. An impressive range of partnerships enables the council to offer a wide range of academic, vocational and work-based learning opportunities to young people from the age of 14. Secondary schools have aligned their curriculum provision with the college to enable them to provide some curriculum options jointly. The education strategy is well integrated into the strategy for the economic regeneration of the borough and advisers have begun to help schools develop curriculum support packs in shortage occupational areas such as construction, logistics, health, and retail and distribution. Good progress has been made in outreach provision to hard-to-reach groups and in producing a single source of information on education and training opportunities for young people aged 14 and 16. Activities with work-based learning providers have been particularly helpful in preparing them to work with young people under the age of 16.

70. Good cooperation between secondary schools, Doncaster College and work-based training providers has led to the introduction of vocational options for young people from the age of 14. These option choices are not confined to the less able, and schools are increasingly supporting more able young people to consider vocational routes to university. Approximately 10% of 14–19 provision is currently offered through partnership working. In 2003/04 the number of young people gaining vocational qualifications doubled. Significantly, the success of cooperation in benefiting young people and the economic prosperity of Doncaster is resulting in schools now assuming a leading role within in the partnership.

71. Despite increased provision there is not enough entry-level or level one vocational provision to meet needs or demands. The council is working with its partners to try to overcome this. The proportion of young people in education, employment or training who were previously in care is lower than for other groups, and the corresponding proportion of those leaving the youth justice system is unsatisfactory.



72. The council has successfully targeted funding and initiatives at areas most in need. Community regeneration activities are well supported by the coherent and well-considered education strategy that ensures that community needs, employers' skills needs, the aspirations of young people and the provision of education and training opportunities are at the centre of plans. The analysis of the employment skills needed by new companies and industries to develop the economy is used well in planning. Helpful initiatives such as subsidised travel support the number of out-of-work adults with children. Doncaster uses a good range of activities to involve members of the community, including children and young people, in planning its services.

73. Doncaster has been less successful in ensuring that all young people have decent housing. The quality of housing generally has improved, and some successful projects have targeted particular groups, such as the housing plus education project for teenage mothers or mothers-to-be where the young mothers live in one of eight flats or eight houses and attend a weekly baby clinic as well as literacy and numeracy outreach classes provided by Doncaster College. However, there are shortages in the availability of housing for vulnerable young people, including for those who offend. The shortage is also being made worse by an increase in the number of young people becoming estranged from their parents.

74. Arrangements to encourage and support children and young people who are looked after to engage in education, employment or training are satisfactory. Careers advice and guidance, particularly from Barnardo's, provide well for those leaving care. However, outcomes in respect of care leavers need improvement. The council has not made clear to all young people in care their entitlement to support up to and beyond the age of 19. Transition arrangements for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not as good as they have limited access to suitable education after the age of 16. Advice and guidance for young people with moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory, particularly through the Connexions team. For these 16 or 19 year olds who wish to progress into full-time education, there are enough places available, but some courses repeat too much learning covered in school, and so do not offer sufficient challenge. Opportunities for young people with complex needs to attend college are not well established. There is insufficient provision for young people with challenging behaviour and for those who have completed an initial post-16 or post-19 course. Few young people or their parents or carers have heard about direct payments; although improving, the take-up is low. Parents do not receive enough support when the time comes to access adult services. For those young people with low-level support needs, Year 9 transition plans are implemented inconsistently.

### **Service management**

**75. The management of services for children and young people is adequate.**

76. The ambition of the council and its partners for children and young people in the area is good. The mayor's manifesto and strategic, corporate and community plans clearly have children and young people at the centre of economic regeneration. This vision, and its consequent priorities, have been developed through an effective interagency audit of need. A shared geographic information system provides community-based data on health inequalities, crime statistics and educational attainment to enable sharper targeting of resources. The views of children and young people are taken into account through a range of successful processes, with positive outcomes such as the establishment of sexual health outreach clinics.

77. Prioritisation is adequate. The Doncaster Strategic Partnership effectively provides the over-arching strategic framework in the Borough Strategy and the LAA. The council has a recently developed corporate plan which reflects some of these priorities for children and young people. However, the importance placed on the integration of services is reflected in the restructuring of the council to prioritise outcomes for children and young people and establishing the coordinated delivery of services in local neighbourhoods. The introduction of a small team dedicated to managing the development of integrated services is good. The Children and Young People's Plan is embryonic, but existing strong plans, such as the Education Development Plan and the LAA which clearly define actions and demonstrate the contribution of key partners, provide a firm basis upon which to move forward. Another positive, if recent, development is the production of a council-wide template for service plans which sensibly ensures that service managers identify their key priorities. However, the quality of service plans, which provide the strategy for delivering priorities varies, with some having imprecise outcomes and few having adequate resource information.

78. Raising educational aspiration and attainment is at the heart of the priorities for services to children and young people. There is also clarity around prioritisation in health, as demonstrated by the successful reorganisation of CAMHS and by the provision of a range of preventive services. Although some account is taken of a range of equality and diversity issues such as provision for the children of Travellers, concerns facing vulnerable groups, such as the achievement of some minority ethnic children and young people, those excluded from schools, transition to adult services for those most in need, and the promotion of the council's Corporate Parenting Strategy, are not sufficiently coordinated.

79. The track record of partners on achieving their priorities is mixed. Examples of positive developments include: improvement in educational attainment; good adoption figures; a successful supported housing scheme for young mothers; a positive trend in reducing youth offending; and an impressive youth service. However, the following examples demonstrate the scale of the task still to be tackled: the failure to meet requirements in respect of children excluded from school; the low proportion of care leavers and children and young people who offend in education, employment or training; the

shortcomings in housing provision for certain groups of vulnerable young people such as care leavers, those who have the most complex needs, young people who offend and those who abuse alcohol and drugs; the slowness in the reduction in teenage conception rates despite considerable investment; and inconsistent coordination among agencies for children in need.

80. Appropriately, there has been movement of provision and resources towards a range of preventive services. However, the inclusion agenda is hampered by the council's inability to ensure that all schools contribute to admitting looked after children and hard-to-place pupils. There are also inconsistencies in interagency planning and reviewing of provision for individual children and young people. This ranges from being very effective to being poor.

81. The capacity of the council and its partners to deliver better outcomes for children and young people is adequate. Senior officers and senior elected members of the council are enthusiastically committed to improving services, but the knowledge of some elected members is underdeveloped, for instance over their responsibilities for the Corporate Parenting Strategy and in ensuring value for money. The capacity of the council and of local services to improve further is also adequate. A range of actions is addressing priorities, for example, considerable success in raising standards in a challenging context, but some are not yet fully implemented and others are too recent to have improved outcomes. In addition, there are some long-standing unresolved concerns, such as the level of sickness absence. The recent radical restructuring of services within the council has unsurprisingly adversely affected the morale of some staff but, in addition, it has detracted from some important service developments such as the improvement of management information systems, especially in social services. The proposed merger of the primary care trusts has caused some disquiet among healthcare staff over the possible fragmentation of health services.

82. The director of children's services and the lead councillor, who as deputy mayor gives status to the role, are in place and their roles are being developed. However, the director of children's services has additional strategic roles which reduce the focus on children and young people.

83. There is a strong culture of partnership working in Doncaster in which the voluntary and community sector are effectively integrated. There are generally good interagency relationships at both strategic and at local operational level and the council fulfils its community leadership role well. Doncaster's Tomorrows, a multi-agency partnership, is leading the Change for Children agenda and the newly instigated Children and Young People's Partnership Trust, which plans to function as a commissioning board, comprises all major partners and appropriately has two representatives from the youth council on it. Joint commissioning strategies are strengthening and there are some effective examples of joint and aligned budgets such as the arrangement for commissioning out-of-council placements for children with complex needs. An information-sharing protocol has been developed and is in the final stages of

consultation and a resourced plan is in place for a single assessment and recording system.

84. Use of resources and value for money are both adequate overall. Alongside the structural reorganisation there has been a restructuring of budgets. As a result, the budgets for the children and young people theme have been integrated, but there has been limited monitoring during this process and budget responsibilities have only recently been reallocated. However, there is a clear forward-funding plan in the Youth Offending Team joint budget and the budgets of all three primary care trusts are balanced.

85. The council meets government spending targets for both education and children's social services. With its partners, it attracts considerable external funding which is targeted well at areas of disadvantage. Education costs are generally in line with national averages although attainment is at or just below national averages. The council has made slow progress in tackling falling rolls in primary schools since the recommendation in the local education authority inspection report of 2003. Similarly, the delay in special school reorganisation does not demonstrate value for money as some schools are running with spare capacity. In addition, a considerable number of schools are carrying high balances despite the council having a challenge process in place. In social services, performance indicators are broadly in line with comparator and national averages. Through joint commissioning there has been a significant decrease in the overspend on out-of-area placements over recent years, although costs have increased again this year. The youth service demonstrates very good value for money with costs at national average for an excellent service. Although benchmarking data is used across the partnership, performance data is not systematically reported alongside financial data and the council does not have in place a formalised framework for monitoring and improving value for money under its new structures.

86. There have been successful initiatives to recruit and retain social workers, but there remain areas of staff shortages such as educational psychologists and family therapists in CAMHS. Although vacancies are low, sickness absence has a significant impact on children's social services. Management competencies have been introduced and there are effective leadership and management skills training programmes in place. However, as recognised by the council, the qualification levels of residential and social care staff remain low. In contrast, there is a nationally recognised toolkit for the continuing professional development of teachers and one for those who work in health. There is an effective training programme for work-based training providers.

87. The council and its partners adequately manage the performance of their services. The involvement of children and young people in performance management is not widespread but there are pockets of good practice such as in the youth service where they are supported to carry out inspections of specific services. The Doncaster Strategic Partnership and some of its key partnerships, including the Doncaster Learning Partnership, have implemented

performance management frameworks which are developing well. In the council, quarterly monitoring reports against performance indicators, key targets and mayoral commitments are produced for senior management and overview and scrutiny. Although scrutiny members monitor data, they have not yet developed their role into robust performance management.

88. The self-assessment for the joint area review recognises most of the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership except for a number of significant weaknesses in safeguarding such as the lack of a common agreement on the threshold for referrals. The impact of inclusive practice in education is less strong than portrayed in the self-assessment.

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

1. The council is performing adequately in this area. Strong political commitment and good multi-agency partnerships, including with the voluntary and community sector, result in generally positive outcomes. However, provision for vulnerable groups is inconsistent. The council's youth service is excellent and its Youth Offending Service is good. Services are provided at a cost comparable with similar authorities. Use of resources and value for money are both adequate overall.

2. The mayor's manifesto and strategic, corporate and community plans clearly put children and young people at the centre of economic regeneration. The priority placed on the integration of services to improve outcomes for children and young people is reflected in the restructuring of the council. Provision has been reshaped and structures are now in place for the coordinated delivery of services in local neighbourhoods. The Children and Young People's Plan is embryonic, but existing plans provide a firm basis upon which to move forward. Budgets for children and young people have been integrated. Financial management is adequate, but there is no formalised framework for monitoring and improving value for money. Performance management is adequate. Senior officers and senior elected members are enthusiastically committed to improving services, but the knowledge of some elected members is underdeveloped, for instance over their responsibilities for corporate parenting and in ensuring value for money.

3. A range of actions is addressing priorities, for example there has been considerable success in raising standards in a challenging context, but some actions have not yet been fully implemented and others are too recent to have improved outcomes. In addition, there are some long-standing unresolved concerns, such as the level of sickness absence. There is a mixed track record on achieving priorities. While positive outcomes include improvements in educational attainment, the council fails to meet requirements for education in respect of children excluded from school. Not all schools accept collective responsibility for the admission of looked after children and hard-to-place pupils. There are inconsistencies within services in planning and provision for individual children and young people.

4. The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. Health promotion is supported by comprehensive and well-coordinated multi-agency services that are reducing long-standing health inequalities.

5. The combined work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate. Agencies work well together to protect children and young people most at risk, but arrangements for establishing the whereabouts of vulnerable young people do not extend to all groups. The quality of

assessment and planning for individuals is inconsistent. Disabled children and their families are generally positive about the support they can access from a good range of family support services. There is a lack of supportive or safe accommodation for young people leaving care and for other vulnerable groups.

6. The combined work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is adequate. The council contributes well to a good integrated strategy for childcare and early years education. In recent years, education services have had a positive impact on raising standards, but young people in secondary schools still do not make the same progress or achieve as well as those of the same age nationally. Schools' capacity to improve behaviour has strengthened, but there continues to be more permanent and temporary exclusions than found elsewhere. Not all excluded pupils receive sufficient time in education. The council is committed to promoting inclusive practice but as yet, services are not coordinated well enough to ensure the needs of more vulnerable groups are met consistently.

7. The combined work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. There are many opportunities for young people to take part in making decisions about local services and these have led to many changes in what is available. Consultation with young people of all ages from diverse backgrounds and vulnerable groups is systematic, but young people are not always aware of how they can take part in this or of the outcomes.

8. The combined work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. Strong mayoral and political determination drives improvements. The council has been particularly successful in encouraging a wide range of partners to contribute to the planning and development of a coherent 14–19 curriculum. The proportion of young people continuing in education and training beyond the age of 16 has improved significantly in recent years and success rates are also improving. Provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate for those with low-level needs, but it is less well established for those with complex or profound needs. Young people leaving the youth justice system and those leaving care are less likely to remain in education, employment or training than their peers.