



Joint area review

Coventry 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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Introduction

1. This joint area review was conducted using the arrangements required under Section 20 of the Children Act 2004. It was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of eight inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), 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.
3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in the Coventry area and evaluates the way local services, taken together, contribute to their well-being. Joint area reviews focus on the extent to which children and young people are healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and are well prepared to secure economic well-being.
4. The review evaluates the collective contribution made to each outcome for children and young people by relevant services in the area. It also judges the contributions made by the council's services overall and, specifically, its education and children's social care services. Particular attention is given to joint action by local services on behalf of those groups of children and young people who are vulnerable to poor outcomes. Two such groups are covered in detail: children and young people who are looked after by the council; and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
5. The review took place in two stages consisting in total of three weeks over a six-week period. The first stage reviewed all existing evidence including:
 - a self-assessment undertaken by local public service providers
 - a survey of children and young people (the Tellus survey)
 - performance data
 - the findings of the contemporaneous inspection of the youth service
 - planning documents
 - information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day-care provision
 - evidence gathered during the earlier Youth Offending Team inspection
 - briefings from staff within inspectorates, commissions and other public bodies in contact with local providers.
6. The second stage included inspection fieldwork. This included studies of how far local services have improved outcomes for a small sample of children and young people, some of whom have the most complex needs, and a study of provision in the neighbourhoods of Willenhall and Foleshill. It also included

gathering evidence on nine key judgements, selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. This included discussions with councillors 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. Coventry is a West Midlands city with a culturally and ethnically diverse population of 300,848 people. It has a long-established history of architectural and economic regeneration as it has moved successfully through recession, evolving from manufacturing to service industries. Coventry has grown in prosperity since 2000 and has been successful in reducing unemployment. However, this increasing affluence has been coupled with a widening gap between the most deprived areas and the most affluent. There is considerable deprivation and economic disadvantage in the north and north east of the city, with smaller pockets in other locations. Figures from the 2001 Census show that a fifth of 0 to 19 year-olds live in areas with very high levels of deprivation.

8. The population is younger than the national average with 27% aged between 0 and 19. Nearly one fifth of children and young people live in households where there is overcrowding, unemployment or a lone parent. Ten per cent of babies born in Coventry in 2004 had low birth weights. Just over 20% of the population come from minority communities, which is higher than the national figure and nearly a quarter of the 0 to 19 population is from Black and minority ethnic communities. There are approximately 5,000 asylum seekers, refugees and new arrivals from European Union (EU) countries in the city but the profile has changed significantly since 1999, with an increase in the number of children and young people within this population.

9. The Children and Young Persons Strategic Partnership Board reports to the Local Strategic Partnership. It is chaired by the Chief Executive of the council with the Chief Executive of the Primary Care Trust (PCT) as vice-chair. The Partnership includes the city council, PCT, NHS acute trust, voluntary sector, Coventry and West Midlands police force, local colleges and training providers, Connexions service and the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Council services are currently being restructured to meet the requirements of the Children Act 2004. An interim director of Children, Learning and Young People is in post, pending the appointment of a permanent director for the new integrated service. The interim director is working alongside a senior leadership team comprising the acting directors of education and libraries, the manager of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and the service heads for children's services from education, social care and the PCT. The council established the new single directorate for children, learning and young people which became operational on 1 April 2006. A shadow Safeguarding Board has been established and is due to become operational in April 2006.

10. Coventry has 116 maintained schools. There are 85 primary schools, of which 57 have nursery classes with one early excellence centre. Of the 19 secondary schools, 14 are specialist colleges. There are 11 special schools, two pupil referral units and 11 independent schools in the borough. The council has 492 children who are looked after by the council, of whom six are unaccompanied asylum-seekers.

11. Coventry and Warwickshire LSC works very closely with the local authority, colleges, training providers and schools in planning and implementing the 14–19 strategy. Post-16 education and training is provided by 19 school sixth forms, 22 work-based training providers, including voluntary sector organisations, two general further education (FE) colleges and one national general FE college with specialist facilities and provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Entry to Employment (E2E) provision is offered by four main providers. All 14–19 education is co-ordinated through four well-established federations, involving primary, secondary and special schools, the colleges, and most of the work-based training providers. Adult and community learning, including family learning, is provided by Coventry's Adult Education and Children and Family Education Service.

12. Primary care for children and young people in Coventry is provided by the Coventry Teaching Primary Care Trust, which also provides Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust is the main provider of acute health services. The trusts providing health services for the children of Coventry fall within the West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority.

13. Prior to the Children Act 2004, the council had established strong partnership working with other agencies to develop improved services for children and young people. The council has adopted the principles of Every Child Matters as the basis for the community plan (2006–10) with an additional local priority to develop supportive families, friends and communities.

Summary report

Outcomes for children and young people

14. **Outcomes for children and young people in Coventry are good. Children and young people appear safe.** Children and young people are generally healthy. Teenage pregnancy rates are still above the national average, but are reducing more quickly than the national rate, particularly over the last two years. Immunisation rates have improved. Almost all children and young people who took part in the Tellus survey reported feeling very safe or quite safe. The systems and processes for safeguarding children and young people are effective and supported by strong local partnership arrangements. Children and young people are generally well prepared for school and make satisfactory progress. Attainment in 2004 compared very favourably with similar areas and nationally for most pupils. Results are generally improving but there

remain significant variations in the amount of value added by schools for students between the ages of 11 and 16. Coventry has been successful in narrowing the attainment gap for 14-year-old Bangladeshi students in mathematics and science and for 16-year-old Pakistani and Black Caribbean students. Within the youth service, young people's achievement is generally good. Children and young people have an outstanding range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility and many make an excellent contribution to their communities. Significant numbers of children and young people, including those who are looked after by the council, those who offend and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have the skills and confidence to comment on and influence issues that matter to them. Children and young people are able to achieve economic well-being and are prepared well for working life. Good advice and guidance and an extensive flexible curriculum are helping to retain a high proportion of young people in education and training. Achievement rates for most 16 to 19 year olds are improving. The council works effectively with partners to attract inward investment and develop services to support new jobs.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

15. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Partnership working on health issues in Coventry is well led and generally effective. Universal and targeted services support parents and carers in keeping children healthy. A well co-ordinated approach to promoting healthy life-styles for school-children and young people is effective in raising understanding of this issue. Emergency admissions to hospital of children and young people with gastroenteritis and lower respiratory infections are falling. Access to CAMHS is good and there is good provision to promote mental health. There is no overarching CAMHS strategy to ensure effective planning and delivery of services.

16. Healthcare for looked after children and young people is good. There is effective interagency working with children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and access to health professionals is generally good. The partnership is at an early stage of measuring outcomes to demonstrate the impact of initiatives on improving the health of children and young people.

Staying safe

17. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.** There are good strategic and local partnership arrangements in place that work effectively to address the needs of vulnerable children and young people. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has strong support and commitment from all agencies and partners and is contributing to improved outcomes for children and young people. The Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) is strong and has made timely preparations

for moving from the current interim shadow Safeguarding Board to a full Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). There is however, some inconsistency between social care staff and the police in the application of thresholds for neglect. The use of police powers with regard to child protection is also inconsistent. Working arrangements between children's social services and adult community mental health teams are good, but respective responsibilities have not been made explicit.

18. Looked after children and young people appear safe and are protected from exploitation. The range of targeted resources to meet the needs of children and young people, including those looked after by the council and with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is good. Casework practice has improved significantly in the last three years and is now generally good, but a few cases show a pattern of premature case closure followed by re-referrals.

Enjoying and achieving

19. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** The council and its partners give a high priority to ensuring that children and young people enjoy and achieve. Parents and carers have effective support, particularly in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The strategy for early years and childcare is satisfactory and there are sufficient places for three and four-year-olds across the city. Standards are broadly in line with national averages and better than those found in similar areas. Targeted intervention has resulted in impressive improvements for 14-year-olds. However, for those aged 16, although improving steadily, standards are below those found elsewhere. The commitment to improving standards and inclusion is impressive. Relationships between the council, schools and other partners are strong. The management of primary school places is good and the council is monitoring carefully the increasing need for school places as more families move to the city. Attendance is improving with a clear focus on reducing unauthorised absence, but the capacity of the education welfare service to support further improvement is under some pressure. A good range of well-targeted strategies is improving behaviour and preventing exclusions and schools have a high regard for the support they receive.

20. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally achieve well and their progress is monitored carefully. Support for the education of looked after children is adequate but 16-year-olds do less well than their peers in Coventry. A small group of these children miss too many days from school. Good partnerships and funding by the council enable children and young people to access a wide range of learning and recreational activities outside the normal school day. There is an extensive range of sporting, outdoor education, music, theatre and cultural events with high participation rates. The quality of youth practice work is good. Young people's achievement in youth work settings is generally good.

Making a positive contribution

21. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is outstanding. Children and young people are very actively engaged in working with a wide range of council services and partners to contribute to and influence policy and practice. A strategic-level multi-agency forum is influential in ensuring the effective engagement and participation of children and young people and councillors respond well to their views. The youth council and a forum for looked after children have been very influential in securing councillors' agreement that the likely impact on children and young people must be included in all reports. The roles and responsibilities of corporate parenting are well understood and carried out by a core group of councillors. Anti-social behaviour and offending have reduced because of effective partnership work although concerns exist about funding to sustain some projects. The Youth Offending Service (YOS) has involved young people well in developing restorative justice strategies. Through school councils, young people make important contributions to their schools and local and wider communities. The youth service significantly exceeds the national target for working with young people aged 13 to 19. Approaches for involving some groups of older young people are less well co-ordinated.

Achieving economic well-being

22. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. Young parent advisers working in colleges or the 'one-stop shop' in the city centre offer good support and help for young parents. Around 70% of primary schools offer some form of childcare provision, as do 15 neighbourhood nurseries in disadvantaged areas. A high proportion of young people remain in education and training beyond the age of 16 but too few progress to higher education. The council and its partners have made good progress in reducing the disproportionate number of young people from Black and minority ethnic communities not engaged in education, employment or training. Collaborative working across the partnership has been effective in developing and rationalising a range of flexible provision. Achievement rates for most 16 to 19-year-olds are improving. NVQ success rates in work-based training have improved significantly over the last two years. The authority puts a clear emphasis on regeneration activities to support the local economy and many national and multinational companies have been attracted to the city. The number of homeless families with children and young people who are in temporary accommodation has remained low for the past 18 months. Most children and young people in special schools take up education, employment or training options beyond the age of 16. There are not enough work-based learning opportunities or vocational programmes at level 1.

Service management

23. The management of services for children and young people is good. Strong partnership working and a genuine commitment to improve

outcomes for children and young people underpin services in Coventry. The Children and Young People's Plan builds on effective multi-agency services; it is clear with shared ambitions and priorities agreed by all agencies. It is also strongly influenced by impressive wide-ranging consultation with children, young people, parents and carers. Partners prioritise well, based on an analysis of need, leading to resources being redirected. Responsibilities for delivery are clear with named leads. Partners have agreed to delegate control of large parts of budgets to a new commissioning trust. There is a good range of preventative services.

24. The overall capacity of the local partnership's services is good. All partners cooperate well and commitment at the highest level is demonstrated by the Council Chief Executive chairing the partnership and the PCT Chief Executive who is the vice-chair. Partners are working effectively towards establishing a commissioning trust and for the transition of the ACPC to an LSCB.

25. Leadership and management of the council are good. The council's medium-term financial strategy to support the partnership's priorities is adequate. The strategy confirms the policy of spending more than government targets on children's social care and education. Financial management is adequate. However, there is a projected shortfall in the children's services budget caused by increased costs of agency placements for looked after children. Despite similar budget challenges in recent years, services have been developed and budgets have been successfully balanced by making other savings, for example, reducing management posts. The council's costs and performance are comparable to similar councils and it provides adequate value for money. There is some benchmarking of costs but this is not sufficiently linked to improved outcomes for children and young people. Arrangements for performance management are good and service improvements are informed by children and young people. Based on improvements over the last four years, the capacity to improve is good. The self-assessment is accurate and demonstrates a good knowledge of strengths and weaknesses across the partnership. It does not, however, fully acknowledge the future budget uncertainties.

Grades

Grades awarded:

4: 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	4		
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

- Ensure that medium to long-term financial planning by all partners identifies the resources necessary, including those to be delegated to the commissioning trust, to meet the needs of children and young people in Coventry and to deliver the priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan.

- Develop a strategy for CAMHS to ensure effective planning and delivery of services.
- Ensure good practice in social care is consistent in all areas, including the use of police powers in relation to child protection.

For action in the longer term

- Maintain and further improve educational outcomes for all children and young people by:
 - improving the success rates for young people, especially those aged 16 and those looked after by the council, so that more are able to progress to higher education
 - expanding the range of vocational education options, especially at level 1
 - improving the capacity of the education welfare service to support further improvements in school attendance.
- Improve the processes for assessing the value for money of services for children and young people by linking resources to outcomes.

Main report

Outcomes for children and young people

26. **Outcomes for children and young people in Coventry are good.**

27. **Children and young people are generally healthy.** Most children and young people who responded to the Tellus survey reported feeling quite or very healthy. Parents, carers, children and young people are provided with good information, advice and support. Teenage pregnancy rates are still above the national average but are reducing more quickly than the national rate, particularly over the last two years. Breastfeeding rates have increased and are better than in similar areas. Immunisation rates have improved. Deaths of babies in their first week after birth and of infants in their first year are above the national average. Dental decay is low and emergency admissions to hospital are below the national average. The annual health check rate for looked after children has improved significantly and is now above the national average. Healthcare for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.

28. **Children and young people appear safe.** Almost all children and young people who took part in the Tellus survey or who spoke to inspectors reported feeling very safe or quite safe. There are areas where they feel less safe, and avoid going there. Deaths and serious injury from road traffic accidents have reduced and are below the national average. There are effective

systems in place to ensure children and young people are known to education and health services and to trace children when they move within or away from the city.

29. The systems and processes for safeguarding children and young people are effective and supported by strong local partnership arrangements. The children's social care workforce is stable and Criminal Records Bureau checks take place for all staff working with children and young people in the local area. Significantly more children and young people are having their needs assessed promptly than in the past. The numbers of children on the child protection register have reduced steadily over the last three years, but remain higher than national and local comparators. Good, targeted multi-agency work assists and supports families most in need to access appropriate services. The number of referrals for children in need is lower than local and national comparators but too many cases are closed and then re-referred.

30. All children and young people who are looked after the council have regularly reviewed care plans but the number of looked after children and young people remains high. There are good arrangements in place for looked after children and young people and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to transfer to adult social services.

31. **Children and young people generally achieve well.** A high proportion of children and young people responding to the Tellus survey identified themselves as doing quite well or better at school. Early years education provision is well planned and there are sufficient places for three and four year olds. The quality of childcare provision is adequate but there is some variation in standards across the sector.

32. Attainment in 2004 compared very favourably with similar areas and nationally for most pupils. The unvalidated data for 2005 confirms that for seven year olds, attainment is generally in line with that found nationally. There is a continued trend of improvement for 11-year-olds when results are compared with similar areas. Action begun in 2002 has led to notable improvements for pupils aged 14. For 16-year-olds, attainment remains below the national average although Coventry had its highest proportion of 16-year-olds gaining five or more A*-C GCSEs this year. While there are variations across the city, all Coventry secondary schools met the required minimum level of performance by pupils at GCSE. Within the youth service, young people's achievement is generally good. Of those aged 13 to 19, 37% have contact with the service, which is well above the national target.

33. Differences remain in the educational achievements of children from minority ethnic backgrounds. However, Coventry has been successful in narrowing the attainment gap for 14-year-old Bangladeshi students in mathematics and science and for 16-year-old Pakistani and Black Caribbean students. Children and young people for whom English is an additional language make good progress. Children who are looked after by the council

make adequate progress up to the age of 11 but at 16 they perform significantly below the level of other young people in Coventry. The attainment of children and young people permanently excluded from school is satisfactory. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally make good progress. Provision for these pupils in mainstream schools is at least satisfactory, and much is good or very good.

34. Overall attendance figures have improved and unauthorised absence is below that of similar areas and the national averages. The rate of permanent exclusions has reduced significantly over the last three years during which no looked after child has been permanently excluded.

35. **Children and young people have an outstanding range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility and many make an excellent contribution to their communities.** Most children and young people, including those who are looked after by the council, young people who offend and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have the skills and confidence to comment on and influence issues that matter to them through participation in an impressive range of consultation activities. Young people have been very influential in securing councillors' agreement that the likely impact on children and young people must be included in all reports. Almost all children and young people contribute to their statutory reviews and transition plans. Effective partnership work provides excellent support to vulnerable groups of children and young people who face change and challenge in their lives. There has been a reduction in the numbers of young people who offend and anti-social behaviour has dramatically reduced. The YOS has amended restorative justice programmes based on the views of young people and developed positive and effective strategies to work with their families.

36. **Children and young people are able to achieve economic well-being and are prepared well for working life.** Parents and carers access a large number of good quality family learning courses. Good advice and guidance and an extensive flexible curriculum are helping to retain a high proportion of young people in education and training. The number of young people leaving care and entering further education, employment or training dropped in 2004/05, but is now recovering and currently stands at over 75%. Achievement rates for most 16 to 19 year olds are improving. NVQ success rates in work-based training have improved significantly from around 47% in 2003/04 to 53% in 2004/05, compared with 51% nationally. The council works effectively with partners to attract inward investment and develop services to support new jobs. Almost all children and young people responding to the Tellus survey said their life is quite or very enjoyable. Coventry is on target to meet its 2010 target for decent homes in social housing.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

37. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** There is a high level of commitment by partner agencies to improving health. A strong lead on integrated working is given by senior managers.

38. A good range of universal and targeted services helps parents and carers in keeping their children healthy, although not enough information is readily available in languages other than English. Maternity services are well co-ordinated and accessible. Support from midwives and the health-visiting service, linked with the four Sure Start programmes, promotes healthy lifestyles for pre-school children. Particular emphasis is placed on support for young parents, which is good. Smoking in pregnancy, while still above the national average, has been reduced. Breastfeeding rates have increased and are better than in similar areas. Immunisation rates have increased to around the national average. There is a dedicated health visitor for families from different Traveller communities, but health services are not fully effective in meeting the health needs of refugee and asylum-seeker families.

39. There is a well co-ordinated approach to promoting healthy lifestyles for children and young people. There is good progress in the Healthy Schools and Food in Schools initiatives. Responses to the Tellus survey and fieldwork interviews with children indicate a high level of understanding in these areas. Work on a local obesity strategy is proceeding. All secondary and half of primary schools have a drug education policy. The sexual health, alcohol and drug outreach project (SHADOW) delivers imaginative education and preventive work on sexual health, teenage pregnancy, drugs, smoking and healthy lifestyles to students in school, college and youth settings. A city centre 'one-stop shop' offers confidential counselling and advice. Sexual health advice, contraception, and pregnancy testing are available in a number of locations through 'clinic-in-a-box'. Rates of sexually transmitted disease are reducing and are significantly lower than nationally for young people aged between 16 and 19. Partners have worked together well to reduce teenage pregnancy rates which, although still above the national average, have fallen more quickly than the national rate with particular improvement over the last two years. Participation in sport is generally good. The partnership is at an early stage of measuring outcomes to demonstrate the impact of initiatives on improving the health of children and young people.

40. Emergency admissions to hospital with the diagnoses of gastroenteritis, asthma and lower respiratory infections are falling and are below the national average. The incidence of whooping cough has fallen. Access times to primary healthcare meet national standards and children and young people attending the accident and emergency department are dealt with promptly. A new paediatric unit is due to open at Walsgrave hospital and young people have

been involved in the planning process. Environmental health risks are reduced through joint working between the accident and emergency department, and the health visiting and school nursing services. Deaths of babies in their first week after birth and of infants in their first year are above the average for England.

41. Good multi-agency work, involving voluntary agencies, promotes positive mental health. Good support and training on mental health issues are provided for staff such as midwives and school nurses. Access to CAMHS is good with self-referrals accepted. Waiting times are now better than the national average. Two areas of strength are that a CAMHS worker is allocated to the hospital paediatric service and there is a specific team for looked after children. Joint assessment of mental health problems in children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities promotes integrated care planning. A dedicated team deals with substance misuse problems, managing these in the community where possible. Partnership working with the YOS is strong. There is no CAMHS in-patient unit in the city and occasionally young people in the 16 to 19 age range are admitted to an adult unit which is not desirable. Although at operational level CAMHS is providing a good service, there is no overarching strategy to ensure effective planning and delivery of services.

42. The healthcare of looked after children is good with 85% having dental and health checks, which exceeds the national average. There is good support and training for foster carers and residential staff to meet health needs, and good liaison with health providers for children who move area. Some looked after children have produced a DVD on sexual health and relationships and have provided training on this issue for foster carers. Access to sport and leisure is subsidised.

43. There is effective interagency working with children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Access to health professionals is generally good and services are available across a variety of settings in the community. The multi-agency clinical care team has developed some innovative practice, for example it has enabled children to be involved in developing their own care packages. Families consider overnight respite care good but report a mixed experience of community-based respite. A transition protocol is used well to support young people in the move to adult health services.

Staying safe

44. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.** There are good initiatives in place to inform and assist children, young people and their parents/carers to reduce risks in their daily lives. The long established 'Safe as Houses' project is effective in reducing risks by providing information to and installing safety equipment for 450 targeted families each year. Coventry has already exceeded the 2010 national target for the reduction in the number of children and young people killed or seriously

injured in road traffic accidents. There are effective systems in place to monitor the whereabouts of children and young people known to services.

45. The systems and processes for safeguarding children and young people are effective and secure. Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out on all adults working with children and young people. Strong local partnership arrangements contribute positively to good outcomes for most children and young people. Good, targeted multi-agency work, for example between Sure Start and CAMHS, is helping those families most in need to access appropriate services. A good range of local multi-agency forums monitors the effectiveness of interventions for individual cases. All agencies and partners are enthusiastic about the introduction of the CAF and agencies use it well to deliver more co-ordinated and targeted support for children, young people and their families. The CAF training programme is comprehensive and well managed, and has provided training for over 700 people across all agencies.

46. Casework practice has improved significantly in the last three years. Family support work is generally effective in producing good outcomes for children and families. However, a few cases show a pattern of premature case closure followed by re-referrals: these are higher than national and local comparators. This is partially explained by the local practice of accepting all police notifications of domestic violence incidents as referrals. A new policy, which came into effect during the review, aims to alter this practice but it is too early to measure its impact. The council's protocol for alerting staff to potential safety issues is not sufficiently clear or consistently implemented.

47. Working arrangements between the children's social services teams and the community mental health teams are sound, but respective responsibilities have not been made explicit. Four locality-based community resource officers with expert knowledge of council and local resources are very effective in identifying targeted support for children, young people and their families. The range of services to meet the needs of children and young people in the voluntary sector is good but there are significant waiting lists for some.

48. Generally, there is stability in the council's social work teams. The long-term locality teams have more agency workers than others, although the number and turnover of agency staff is low. All child protection cases are allocated, caseloads are manageable, supervision takes place regularly and workers report that they receive good general support from their managers. Not all looked after children have a named qualified social worker. As part of a national pilot project, the council is developing an initiative to allocate support staff to those children who are in stable long-term placements to enable qualified social workers to concentrate on working with those who may be at risk. The local authority is taking action to reduce the number of children becoming looked after by the council, but strategies to reduce the number already in the care system are not yet having a significant impact on the overall numbers.

49. The council has been creative in developing improved skills and knowledge in working with the police and the courts. It has established a domestic violence worker post and appointed a court liaison officer who is developing joint training opportunities with legal services. Thresholds for neglect are not consistently applied by the police and children's social services. The use of police powers with regard to child protection is also inconsistent.

50. Managers and the shadow Safeguarding Board make good use of high-quality data and management information to pinpoint specific areas of underperformance. The shadow Safeguarding Board and its sub-groups work well together and are having a positive impact on practice. The quality assurance sub-group has initiated a programme of audits, which is informing a comprehensive multi-agency training strategy.

51. Services work well together to keep looked after children safe. Effective systems are in place for them to report concerns or complaints, including sending text messages to the dedicated complaints officer. Foster carers are well supported and empowered in their role of caring for looked after children. A good range of training courses is available for them and for workers in residential units to ensure that they understand and can meet the specific needs of the children and young people in their care. The diverse ethnic and cultural needs of looked after children are met well by the recruitment of foster carers from different cultural and religious backgrounds. There is ample provision for contact sessions between children, young people and their parents and carers. Dedicated advocacy arrangements are in place for looked after children and young people.

52. Services work well together to ensure children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are safe and protected from abuse and exploitation. These children and young people are supported well in contributing to reviews and making their wishes known, although there is no independent advocacy service for them. Parents' and carers' views about access to day care and respite services are mixed, with particular concerns about limited short-break provision for those with more severe needs. Some parents and carers report difficulty in identifying and accessing services. The multi-agency transitions forum ensures good planning for young people transferring to adult social care services.

Enjoying and achieving

53. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** Effective collaborative arrangements ensure there is a wide range of support for parents and carers to help their children succeed at school. The network of parenting classes and family support arrangements are well regarded. The parent partnership service offers good support and advocacy to parents.

54. The strategy for early years and childcare is satisfactory. A well-managed process has ensured there are sufficient places for three and four-year-olds across the city, particularly in those areas with the greatest disadvantage. The strategy builds creatively on existing Sure Start programmes, for example in Willenhall and Foleshill. The rapid development of the new children's centres is improving the access parents and carers have to specialist services.

55. Monitoring and challenge of, and support for, early years providers to improve the quality of their provision have been limited. However, the recent expansion of staffing to support childminders and the systematic work of partnership teachers and special educational needs co-ordinators are improving the overall quality of childcare and early years provision. The portage service, pre-school service and multi-agency teams working with schools provide good advice for parents of children and young people with developmental delay, learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

56. Standards of attainment are broadly in line with national averages and better than those found in similar areas. Targeted intervention has resulted in impressive improvements for 14-year-olds. In its self-assessment the council recognised a weakness in the attainment of 16-year-olds. There has been a steady improvement since 1999 and the overall number of young people attaining five or more A*-C GCSE grades in 2005 is the highest yet. Firm action has been effective in improving standards in the lowest achieving schools. However, the rate of improvement is not as rapid as the national rate and standards remain below the national average. The council is far from complacent and the Children and Young People's Plan prioritises further improvements in attainment, particularly for those aged 16.

57. A key feature of the council's school improvement work is the very strong collaborative partnership with and between schools. Good quality analysis of data is used well to identify weaknesses in the performance of individual schools or the under-performance of specific groups of children and young people. Action to bring about improvement is rigorous and well targeted. Successful interventions at two under-performing secondary schools have raised overall levels of GCSE performance above the minimum required by the government. In primary schools, the national strategy programme has been fully implemented. Schools receiving targeted support, such as the intensified support programme, are improving at a faster rate than the city average.

58. Admission arrangements are well managed. A high proportion of parents receive their first preference of primary and secondary schools for their children. The management of primary school places is good but there are surplus places in secondary schools. The council is planning to manage these through Building Schools for the Future and consultation on academies, but is also monitoring carefully the increasing need for school places for children newly arrived from other EU countries. Attendance is improving with a clear focus on reducing unauthorised absence, but the capacity of the education

welfare service to support further improvement is under some pressure. The council is aware of the need to modernise the service.

59. A good range of well-targeted strategies is improving behaviour and preventing exclusions. Schools have a high regard for the support they receive. An appropriate range of provision is available to ensure those children and young people who are permanently excluded benefit from full-time education. The pupil referral unit for 11 to 14 year olds offers a good educational experience and is increasingly successful at reintegrating pupils into school. Good provision is made for children and young people unable to attend school for medical reasons. The support for pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers is good and well integrated within the council's wider strategy to reduce teenage pregnancy. The progress of children educated at home by their parents or carers is monitored closely and a useful guide is available to support those who make this choice.

60. School inspections indicate that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally achieve well and that their progress is monitored carefully. The commitment to the inclusion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities by the council and schools is impressive. The strategy is clear, funding is delegated to schools, and good training and support processes are in place. Special schools are developing good examples of outreach activities to support pupils in mainstream schools, and an increasing number of children with special educational needs get opportunities to learn with their peers. The number of young people with statements of special educational needs has fallen. The quality and speed of making statements have improved.

61. Support for the education of looked after children is adequate. The council funds additional support for this group of children and young people, providing a variety of extracurricular activities including mentoring, home tutoring and extra needs payments. Looked after children are consulted and listened to well. All schools have designated teachers for looked after children and 97% of these young people have personal education plans that are regularly monitored and reviewed. Schools now track rigorously the educational performance of looked after children and young people. Although attainment is satisfactory at 7 and 11, the performance of 16 year olds is below the average for similar areas and these young people do less well than their peers in Coventry. Attendance is monitored effectively but a small group of looked after children still miss too many days from school. There have been no permanent exclusions in the last three years, but fixed-term exclusions contribute to the absence of a small number of looked after children.

62. Good partnerships and funding by the council enable children and young people to attend a wide range of safe and accessible learning and recreational activities outside the normal school day. There is an extensive range of sporting, outdoor education, music, theatre and cultural events with high participation rates. Primary schools provide good curriculum enrichment

activities and secondary schools offer good provision for learning outside the school day. The youth service provides a good range of informal learning opportunities.

Making a positive contribution

63. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is outstanding. Support for children and young people in their social and emotional development is excellent. Effective work by education providers, the youth service and other partners enables children and young people to form very positive relationships with adults and with each other. A wide range of very well-attended programmes is in place to support parents and carers particularly of children of primary school age. Effective mentoring opportunities are available to younger children and many have trained as 'playground pals', successfully mentoring other children. A buddy scheme for children of newly-arrived and asylum-seeker families has proved highly beneficial in one area. School learning mentors give very effective support to vulnerable young people and independent visitors offer similar support to looked after young people. Fewer planned opportunities exist for older children to engage in mentoring work and it is not consistently available to all those who would benefit from it.

64. Children and young people who face change and challenge are provided with excellent support to cope with difficult periods in their lives. Outstanding partnership work ensures that the needs of vulnerable groups of children and young people are met appropriately. Anti-bullying strategies, including measures to deal with race hate and homophobia, successfully help to reassure children and young people that their concerns are listened to and acted upon even if they are not always resolved. Arrangements to support young carers are excellent and highly valued. Some older young people from Black and minority ethnic communities, particularly those who have left school, have more limited access to suitable support.

65. Children and young people make outstanding contributions to the development of a wide range of council services and partner organisations. Significant impact has been made on the direction and quality of services. The youth council and Voices of Care forum have been very influential in securing councillors' agreement that all reports must account for the likely impact on children and young people. The roles and responsibilities of corporate parenting are well understood by a core group of councillors who actively engage with those duties. The partnership has established 'MAGIC', a multi-agency group of senior officers across the partnership, to ensure that children and young people are actively involved in consultation and planning. An independent children's champion ensures that the needs of young people are central to the work of the Children and Young People's Partnership. All partners are committed to achieving the Hear by Right standard. The Co-operating with Children award, designed and assessed by young people, has been gained by many services. Children and young people have had a major impact in reshaping medical and

hospital services that affect them; for example, the NHS Trust has implemented recommendations made by the trust's youth council on the planning of the children's department for the new hospital. The views of young people have also influenced the strategic direction for special educational needs and inclusion services, and the appointment of staff.

66. Partners enable children and young people to move to greater levels of involvement and responsibility as their skills and experience develop. Work in the early years and with nursery children begins to develop skills of participation and the Key Stage 2 Achievers Award helps to sustain engagement. School councils are well managed and monitored. The youth service democracy project effectively supports the development of citizenship and large numbers of young people participated successfully in a simulation of a Commonwealth Heads of Government conference. A very high proportion of young people engage informally in volunteering through notable contributions to consultation and participation activities and through a flourishing Millennium Volunteers programme.

67. Significant reductions in levels of anti-social behaviour have been achieved through a targeted partnership approach and the judicious use of the positive activities programme. A programme of local activities targeted at young people at risk of displaying anti-social behaviour has resulted in reduced levels of offending, Connexions, local schools and the police provide well-managed and constructive daytime activities at The Tooth for young people not in education or training. Comprehensive data-sharing protocols are in place and there is excellent knowledge of children and young people, and their families, at risk of anti-social behaviour. A very effective multi-agency approach ensures local intelligence is shared regularly and partners agree speedy responses tailored to the seriousness of issues. Twilight football, for example, can be made available anywhere in the city using portable floodlighting. Community safety officers offer cheerleading sessions and signpost young people with peewee bikes to suitable venues. However, overall there are not enough activities available to divert more young people from anti-social or criminal behaviour and the fragility of some funding streams threatens the sustainability of others.

68. A comprehensive action plan has been fully implemented following a positive inspection of the YOS. Work with victims of crime has been greatly enhanced and is a focus for all interventions with young people who offend. Support for parents and carers has improved significantly with the appointment of specialist staff and counselling services commissioned by Relate. Two YOS workers, dedicated to looked after young people who offend or are at risk of offending, visit residential care homes as part of an effective prevention strategy. All young people who complete a court order are consulted about the quality of service they have received. The YOS has involved young people successfully in developing restorative justice strategies.

69. Arrangements to support the contribution of looked after young people are excellent. The Voices of Care forum works alongside councillors and

contributes successfully to the council's corporate parenting role. The Children's Rights Service, commissioned from an independent body, provides a very good advocacy service and a children's complaints officer investigates thoroughly all concerns referred by young people, foster carers and other adults. Some looked after young people, however, reported limited access to collective social activities.

70. Arrangements to support children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very good. Outstanding and innovative work enables children with complex needs and others who have communication difficulties to be consulted about services. A very high proportion of young people contribute to their special educational needs reviews. Connexions personal advisers contribute effectively to all transition reviews and there is very good sharing of information between agencies.

Achieving economic well-being

71. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.** Coventry has a good range of well-publicised services and activities to support families to improve their economic well-being. Approximately 1,000 parents and carers a year attend a large number of good quality family learning courses. Young parent advisers offer good support and help, and direct young parents to wider support services. There are many examples of successful initiatives to support young parents to re-enter education, employment or training such as taster courses in non-traditional settings, a photographic course for young Asian mothers and lunchtime clubs in the colleges. Around 70% of primary schools offer some form of childcare provision, as do 15 neighbourhood nurseries in disadvantaged areas.

72. Good advice and guidance, and an extensive flexible curriculum are helping to retain a high proportion of young people in education and training. High participation rates extend to young people who offend, those leaving special schools and teenage mothers. Partners have made good progress in reducing the disproportionate number of young people from Black and minority ethnic communities not engaged in education, employment or training. Achievement rates for those aged 16 to 19 are satisfactory and most are improving. NVQ success rates in work-based training have improved significantly. The proportion of young people who progress to higher education is low. The local authority is working with its partners to improve this through raising the profile of vocational pathways.

73. The 14–24 strategic partnership effectively oversees joint planning across all educational provision for children and young people. Partners have introduced a common timetable at post-16, a broad and flexible 14–19 curriculum, a comprehensive online prospectus and enterprise topics into many courses. Nearly half of 14 to 16-year-olds are following vocational programmes that are designed to attract high-achieving young people as well as those

disaffected or at risk of leaving education early. Many young people aged 15 and over have part of their courses away from school or attend more than one school or college for some of their courses. Additional activities, for example out-of-school personal and social development programmes, lead to external qualifications such as Open College Network credits or NVQ units. Realistic planning and close working among partners has led to rationalisation of provision, with fewer level 3 courses and more courses at levels 1 and 2. However, partners recognise more places are required to meet need on some level 1 courses, such as E2E programmes.

74. Regeneration work is having a positive impact on improving the city. The council works effectively with partners to attract inward investment and develop services to support new jobs and many national or multinational companies have been attracted to the city. The local authority puts a clear emphasis on regeneration activities to support the local economy, for example by commissioning an information bus to tour the area when the Ricoh arena was developed. Coventry was the first UK city to host the international children's games, which generated £250,000 worth of media coverage and an enhanced community spirit and pride in the city.

75. Coventry is well on course to meet its 2010 target for decent homes in social housing. Guidance to those working with young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and a transition protocol between housing and social services staff, emphasise the importance of meeting individual needs. There is a strong emphasis on promoting independent living for vulnerable young people through placements in suitable accommodation. The number of homeless families with children and young people who are in temporary accommodation has remained low for the past 18 months. However, there is not enough accommodation to meet the needs of 17-year-olds who are not living with their parents, or those leaving the youth justice system. In some cases, there is little or no choice of accommodation.

76. The authority takes positive action to encourage young people who are looked after and those leaving care to remain in education, employment or training. The number of young people leaving care and entering further education, employment or training dropped in 2004/05, but is now recovering and currently stands at over 75%. Support includes financial help with transport, mobile phones and computers, and advice on the wide range of accommodation available to them. They are encouraged to maintain contact with foster parents until they are ready to become fully independent. Not all these young people have their pathway plans early enough and not all are allocated an after-care worker.

77. Provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is improving. All three colleges, but particularly Hereward, have facilities to cater for young people with disabilities. Most children and young people in special schools take up education, employment or training options beyond the age of 16. The advice and guidance these young people receive is

good and they have individually planned work experience while at school to prepare them for transition. Some courses are successful at integrating young people from special schools or units into mainstream provision, such as a BTEC certificate in performing arts and dance. However, there are fewer work-based opportunities, and the range and type of courses is not sufficient to meet the diverse needs of all these young people. Most courses focus well on personal and social development, but not always on the development of vocational or work-related skills. The authority is currently working with a major provider of employment for disabled people to address this.

Service management

78. The management of services for children and young people is good. Strong partnership working and a genuine commitment to improve outcomes for children and young people underpin services in Coventry. The Children and Young People's Plan is clear, it is agreed by all agencies and builds on some effective multi-agency provision. Based on improvements over the last four years, the capacity to improve is good. The self-assessment is accurate and demonstrates a good knowledge of strengths and weaknesses across the partnership.

79. Ambitions are good and are shared well across the partnership. The vision in the plan is clearly defined and focuses on what children and young people want to improve and on supporting families. Staff across the partnership at all levels show an understanding and commitment to the ambitions and vision.

80. Partners' commitment to consultation and involvement is impressive and longstanding. Wide-ranging consultation with children and young people, parents and carers contributes significantly to strategic and operational planning. The needs of children and young people and their families have been mapped against current services and plans are in place to deal with gaps and overlaps.

81. Prioritisation by partners is good. Priorities are based on an analysis of need and resources are redirected. For example, savings from reducing surplus nursery places in primary schools have been re-invested into integrated nursery and childcare provision in 12 maintained schools in partnership with private and voluntary sector providers. The Children and Young People's Plan sets out clear aims, priorities and outcomes but is less precise about measurable targets. However, there are clear priorities, actions and measurable targets in operational plans. Partners' responsibilities for delivering the plan are explicit, with named leads for delivering the priorities. Partners have a strong commitment to joint working. For example, the agreement to create a commissioning trust includes delegating control of large parts of some partners' budgets. However, detailed resource information is incomplete, particularly in health.

82. The needs of disadvantaged groups, including those from Black and minority ethnic communities, are incorporated well into the priorities. All

partners have a range of equality strategies and undertake appropriate impact assessments, leading to targeted services. Multilingual assistants, for example, support newly arrived families who do not speak English as a first language.

83. There is a good range of preventative services. Plans are progressing well to deliver services in neighbourhoods and localities and for redirecting staff into more preventative work. There are effective interagency processes for planning and reviewing provision for individual children and young people. One example is the September contract, initiated by Connexions and the LSC, which guarantees a suitable education or training place for all young people.

84. The overall capacity of the local partnership's services is good. All partners co-operate well and commitment at the highest level is demonstrated by the Council Chief Executive chairing the partnership and the PCT Chief Executive who is the vice-chair. Partners are working effectively towards establishing a commissioning trust and for the timely transition of the ACPC to a LSCB.

85. In the council, there is a lead member for children's services and there are sound interim arrangements in place, pending the appointment of a director of children's services. Council services outside the new children's directorate are included in improving outcomes, for example sports programmes to reduce youth offending and social housing for teenage parents. Senior officers provide good leadership and management and are respected by a broadly stable workforce. Despite overseas recruitment and the use of agency staff, some staffing shortages persist. 'Grow your own' approaches have been developed in the youth service, education and social care. These initiatives have not been co-ordinated although a workforce planning sub-group of the partnership has been established recently.

86. The council's medium-term financial strategy to support the partnership's priorities is adequate. The strategy confirms the policy of spending more than government targets on children's social care and education. Financial management is adequate. However, there is a projected shortfall in the children's services budget caused by increased costs of agency placements for looked after children. Despite similar budget challenges in recent years, services have been developed and budgets have been successfully balanced by making other savings, for example, reducing management posts.

87. Council services for children and young people provide adequate value for money. Costs are in line with similar councils, while outcomes are broadly average and improving, with some that are good such as in the youth service. There is some benchmarking of costs, but this is not sufficiently linked to improved outcomes, for example for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The council recognises the need to improve value for money and is tackling this centrally. There is some joint commissioning of services involving statutory and voluntary agencies. Plans for a joint commissioning trust are well developed. Effective partnerships and pooling of

resources have increased cost-effectiveness, for example in reducing anti-social behaviour and youth crime.

88. An effective information-sharing protocol and a well-used and effective single assessment system are in place across the partnership. An electronic information sharing system is being developed to support these.

89. Performance management across the partnership is good overall. All agencies share the monitoring of a common set of performance indicators which are used to inform decision-making. Feedback from children and young people leads to improved services, for example changing the Connexions one-stop shop opening hours. The council's use of performance management in children's services is good. Scrutiny of high quality management information by councillors and managers is improving outcomes.

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

1. Partnership working in the city is longstanding and strong and is effective in improving the range of services for children and young people. The council has a clear vision for the development of an integrated children's service which has been developed with partners and children and young people. While some service costs remain high, these are in line with similar councils and outcomes are improving. Services provide adequate value for money.

2. The council has worked well with local partners to reduce teenage pregnancy rates. Although still above national levels, these are reducing more quickly than average with particular improvement over the last two years. There is effective interagency working with children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The annual health check rate for looked after children has improved significantly and is now above the national average.

3. The systems and processes for safeguarding children and young people are effective and supported by strong local partnership arrangements. The children's social care workforce is stable and Criminal Record Bureau checks take place for all staff working with children and young people in the city. Significantly more children and young people are having their needs assessed promptly than in the past. Casework practice has improved significantly over the last three years but a few cases show a pattern of premature case closure followed by re-referrals. There are some inconsistencies in implementing protocols between different social care services and in the use of police powers. Good, targeted multi-agency work assists and supports families most in need to access appropriate services. The introduction of the Common Assessment Framework has been well supported by all agencies and is beginning to have a positive impact on children and young people. The numbers of children on the child protection register have reduced but remain higher than national and local comparators.

4. Most schools perform well. Where improvement is required, the council is good at identifying timely action to bring this about. No schools in the last two years have been identified as having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures. There is a continued trend of improvement for most pupils when results are compared with similar areas. However, for 16-year-olds, attainment remains below the national average although Coventry had its highest proportion gaining five or more A*-C GCSE this year. Differences remain in the educational achievements of children from minority ethnic backgrounds, but the council has been successful in narrowing the attainment gap for some young people from Black and minority ethnic groups. Children and young people for whom English is an additional language make good progress. Good support is available for looked after children who make adequate progress up to the age of 11. However, at 16 they perform significantly below the level of other young people in Coventry. Attendance is improving but the capacity of the education

welfare service to support continued improvement is limited. A small group of looked after children miss too many days of schooling. Effective support helps children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make generally good progress.

5. Most children and young people, including those who are looked after by the council, young people who offend and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have the skills and confidence to comment on and influence issues that matter to them through participation in an impressive range of consultation activities. Councillors respond well to their views and have agreed that all reports presented to them will include an assessment of the likely impact on children and young people. Excellent multi-agency partnership activity has dramatically reduced anti-social behaviour.

6. The council works well with partners to ensure that children and young people are able to achieve economic well-being and are prepared well for working life. Good advice and guidance and an extensive flexible curriculum are helping to retain a high proportion of young people in education. Achievement rates for most 16 to 19-year-olds are improving. The council works effectively with partners to attract inward investment and develop services to support new jobs. Of the children and young people who responded to a survey carried out for the inspection, 95% said their life was quite or very enjoyable. The authority takes strong positive action to encourage young people who are looked after by the council to remain in education, employment or training. Collaborative working across the partnership is improving provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.