

Joint area review

Stockton-on-Tees Children's Services Authority Area

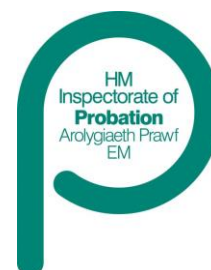
Review of services for children and young people

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

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Contents

Introduction	2
Context	2
Main findings	3
Grades	5
Recommendations	3
Areas for investigation through fieldwork during the joint area review	
1. Safeguarding	6
2. Looked after children and young people	10
3. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	12
4. Additional investigations	16
5. Service management	19
6. Capacity to improve	19
Annex A: The annual performance assessment letter	24
Annex B: Summary of the Enhanced Youth Inspection Report	25
Annex C: Children and young people's section of the corporate assessment report	27
Annex D: Summary of joint area review and annual performance assessment arrangements	30

Introduction

1. This report assesses the contribution of local services in ensuring that children and young people
 - at risk or requiring safeguarding are effectively cared for
 - who are looked after achieve the best possible outcomes
 - with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve the best possible outcomes.
2. The following investigation was also carried out:
 - the impact of partners in improving the outcomes of diverse and hard-to-reach children and young people, with particular reference to those of Black and minority ethnic origin.

Context

3. Stockton-on-Tees is the largest Unitary Authority in the Tees Valley. It is a borough of contrasts, with a mixture of busy town centres, urban residential areas and picturesque villages. Areas of disadvantage are situated alongside areas of affluence. The population is approximately 189,000, living in over 76,900 households. The population within Stockton-on-Tees has risen by 7.9% since the 1991 Census, compared with the North East average of a 1.8% fall. There has been a growth in the numbers of Black and minority ethnic communities, from 1.6% in 1991 to 2.8% in 2001 (over 5,000 people) and this trend is set to continue.

4. There are 48,200 children and young people aged 0–19 years living in the borough. Of these, 10,700 are under five years of age and 29,983 are of school age. There are 938 children and young people with a statement of special educational need, and 1,786 of Black and minority ethnic heritage.

5. The arrangements for the Children's Trust Board were established in February 2006. This has brought together strategic planning, joint commissioning and integrated delivery of services for children and young people. The borough is taking forward the establishment of integrated teams serving localities based on the existing Area Partnerships.

6. Pre-16 provision comprises:
 - 333 private and voluntary early years settings and six children's centres, plus three satellite centres in place with a further four children's centres to be in place by March 2008
 - 62 primary schools

- 14 secondary schools
- four special schools
- two pupil referral units.

7. Post-16 provision is provided through two schools, three colleges and six work-based learning providers.

8. Primary health care is provided by North Tees Primary Care Trust (PCT). The main provider of acute hospital services is North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust (University Hospital of North Tees). South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust is the second provider of children's acute services. Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Trust is the main provider of children's mental health services and the North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust serves the whole of the borough as well as other areas. North Tees PCT has both a commissioning and provider role and is co-terminus with the borough.

9. The council looks after 200 children and young people. Children's social care services are provided through 88 foster carers, including 15 family and friends, four residential care homes, two respite units for children and young people with disabilities and five field social work teams.

10. Services to children and young people who are at risk of offending or who have offended are provided by the youth offending service.

Main findings

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

- The arrangements for safeguarding children and young people are good. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) provides an effective strategic lead. Multi-agency working is well established and strong collaboration between partners is ensuring good sharing of information. Most children and young people report feeling safe in their school and in the community.
- Services for looked after children and care leavers are good. All looked after children have an allocated social worker and reviews are held in a timely manner. Education standards are similar to the national average but individual pupils are making good progress overall. School attendance is improving well. Too many looked after children receive final warnings or convictions. Care leavers feel well supported and a high number are in education, employment or training.
- Provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. Early and accurate identification of health, social care and learning needs of these children and young people ensures they

make very good progress. Strong multi-agency working and particularly good deployment of resources ensures that the needs of these children are very well met.

- The council and its partners effectively promote equality and diversity for children and young people. Strong collaborative working is improving the range of provision for children and young people from hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups. Targeted actions are having an impact on reducing barriers to learning. However, measures used to assess the effectiveness of some projects targeted at hard-to-reach groups are not always applied consistently at a local level. Progress has been made in narrowing some of the gaps in educational performance between majority and vulnerable groups. However, outcomes for children and young people of Pakistani heritage at Key Stages 1 to 3 are below those of their peers. This group represents between a third and a half of all Black and minority ethnic groups in the area.
- Service management is good. The Children's Trust Board is well established and has successfully brought together strategic planning, joint commissioning and integrated delivery of services for children and young people. The Board and its partners are very ambitious for children and young people and this is reflected in the well thought out priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). Effective action has been undertaken to effect significant change in outcomes for many and to ensure that the necessary resources are identified to deliver priorities. These include reducing out-of-borough placements and teenage pregnancies. However, work on a children's workforce development strategy is only just starting and there is some variation of quality and recording in both social care and the youth offending service.
- The capacity of council services to improve is outstanding. Partners have clear ambitions, strategies and plans. There is strong leadership and management capacity, and the prospects for securing significant further improvement through the development of integrated area-based services are very good. Value for money is very good; education spending is average and social care spending below average. Performance management is good and there is a strong improvement trend in most areas. The recent annual performance assessment (APA) judged outcomes to be of a consistently high standard.

Grades

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

	Local services overall
Safeguarding	3
Looked after children	3
Learning difficulties and/or disabilities	4
Service management	3
Capacity to improve	4

Recommendations

For immediate action

The local partnership should:

- ensure that an appropriate way is found for the successful dissemination of the findings of this report to children and young people in the area.

For action over the next six months

The local partnership should:

- improve quality assurance to eliminate inconsistencies in practice and recording that exist in some services
- improve robustness of performance monitoring and challenge to secure more consistent improvement at Key Stage 3
- ensure there is a strategy to further improve educational performance by children and young people from Pakistani communities
- take effective action to reduce re-offending rates and improve links with the youth offending service to ensure that looked after children receive effective support to prevent them receiving final warnings and convictions
- ensure that processes are applied consistently to evaluate the effectiveness of all projects and initiatives targeted at vulnerable groups

- ensure the effective delivery of the children's workforce strategy.

Equality and diversity

12. The council and its partners have made good progress in promoting equality and diversity. This is particularly so for children and young people from diverse and vulnerable groups in response to the changing demography of the area. The draft community cohesion strategy, informed by the views of young people and external research, gives priority to tackling anti-social behaviour and disadvantage. All partners are particularly sensitive to the specific needs of families from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds and good arrangements are in place to ensure their needs are well met. Progress has been made in narrowing a number of the gaps in educational performance between majority and vulnerable groups. However, those with Pakistani heritage do not achieve as well as they should. The numbers of Black and minority ethnic young people who remain in education, employment or training at the age of 16 is higher than the average for all young people.

13. In conjunction with the Asian Women's Forum, fostering has been promoted among Black and minority ethnic communities, and the local authority targets the recruitment of school governors from these groups. The dedicated Asylum Support Team is well versed in the particular needs and vulnerabilities of children and young people from this background. The team uses presentations to white British communities to dispel the myths about asylum seekers and refugees.

Safeguarding

Inadequate Adequate Good Outstanding

14. The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for children and young people at risk or requiring safeguarding is good.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Effectiveness of integrated multi-agency work to provide early recognition, intervention and support to children and families.</p> <p>Good work to reduce bullying in schools.</p> <p>Very good performance on the completion of initial and core assessments within timescales.</p>	<p>Variability in the quality of practice with regards to recording across social work teams and the youth offending service.</p>

Good support to vulnerable pregnant women and their unborn babies.	
Well coordinated, multi-agency approach to identifying, reporting and responding to domestic violence incidents.	

15. All agencies have a good awareness of their role in helping parents keep their children safe, and they ensure that concerns about significant harm are referred for appropriate action. Early years settings and schools provide safe environments for children and young people and most report feeling safe in school. In two different surveys carried out by the council in 2006, most children and young people reported that more could be done to address bullying. As a result, good measures have been put in place. There are clear policies on the recognition, management and reduction of bullying led by the council's anti-bullying officer. A number of initiatives have increased the confidence of children to report bullying. This is particularly evident in schools, with several schools already awarded anti-bullying accreditation and a number working towards the award. Priority has also been given to ensuring that young people are safeguarded through the promotion of positive sexual health, reducing substance misuse and improving mental health. An effective partnership between the fire and rescue service and the local authority has reduced incidents of fire setting and the number of false alarms. The council has already exceeded government targets for the reduction in road deaths for 2010.

16. Young offenders have appropriate access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Access to support for smoking and substance misuse, both within the school setting and within specialist services, is good. Specific support for alcohol misuse is less well developed, but a review has been undertaken and recommendations have been agreed to improve this aspect of the service.

17. There is a well coordinated approach to identifying, reporting and responding to domestic violence incidents through the police and the Social Care Duty Team, which includes a specialist domestic violence worker. Children involved in domestic violence are identified as children in need and are appropriately referred to children's services. Agencies are clear about protocols for sharing information and do so at an early stage, facilitating the care and support to families and young carers. Good work with children and young people at risk of family breakdown has prevented children becoming inappropriately looked after. All agencies use a common referral form and some agencies are using the Common Assessment Framework. Plans are in place to implement this within the national timescales.

18. Social care duty arrangements are well managed, and child protection referrals are appropriately identified and their allocation effectively monitored. There is one point of contact for all adults' and children's referrals; this service is well resourced and managed and provides an effective intake service. Threshold criteria are in place and are effective, with good systems to differentiate between contacts and referrals. Responses to referrers by the Social Care Duty Team, to inform them of what is happening, are inconsistent and are not always in writing, which could result in messages being lost and information not being conveyed promptly and accurately. Communication between the daytime service and the Emergency Duty Out-of-Hours Team is good. Effective links have been developed with housing services that identify families and young people at risk of homelessness at an early stage. These good links are ensuring that support can be provided early and, where necessary, alternative arrangements made.

19. The proportion of assessments completed within timescales is very good at 90.9% for initial and 91.6% for core assessments, which is a much better performance than that of similar authorities and the national average. The percentage of referrals of children in need that lead to initial assessments has increased from 60.4% to 73.6%; again, this is a better performance than that of similar authorities and the national average. Assessments and recording are generally of a good quality. However, a small number of chronologies, assessments and care planning lack depth and clarity. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to clearly monitor the impact of actions required.

20. Numbers of children on the child protection register have risen. The number of registrations per 10,000 increased to 42 in 2006/07, taking the council from below the 2005/06 national average to above in 2006/07. The number of initial conferences has also risen, and whilst there has been a fall in de-registrations to 36.2, this still remains higher than the 2005/06 national average. However, effective work with families and children at risk has reduced the length of time that children remain on the register, and up to the end of the first quarter of 2007/08 no child had been on the register for more than two years. Re-registration rates have reduced from 10.1% to 5%. All children on the child protection register are allocated promptly to a qualified social worker and individual protection plans are reviewed on time. Social workers visit children regularly, children are seen on their own to identify their wishes and feelings and these are appropriately documented in reports and reviews.

21. Agencies work well together to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect. A good range of early support services are provided by integrated children's centres and community partnerships with the voluntary sector. These include access to health and development monitoring, checks and speech and language development. Priority is also given to reducing the numbers of teenage pregnancies; and the rate is reducing. Pregnant women, who are at risk, are identified at an early stage and provided with supportive antenatal care. Unborn babies at risk are also provided with appropriate protection plans and monitored closely when they are born. In addition, good skills-based

courses are improving parents' emotional well-being and the care of their children, reducing their social isolation and assisting them in accessing the world of work. Children's centres are effective in improving the confidence of some women. For example, women from ethnic minority backgrounds have increased in confidence to such an extent that they are now assisting other families in the centres. The plan to roll out integrated areas is at the second stage and will build on the success of the integrated children's centres, which have proved to be highly successful. The council has exceeded its target for the number of schools gaining the Healthy School Standard and its performance is among the best in the North East region.

22. Arrangements for identifying, tracing and tracking children missing from care and education are very good. Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements are well established. These contribute effectively to the safeguarding of children from adults who present a risk. The management of allegations against professionals suspected of abusing children is good, with effective monitoring of investigations by the LSCB. The LSCB is an effective strategic body led by a highly regarded chair. It has produced good guidance for the public and a very useful guide for voluntary organisations and others on how to develop safeguarding policy and practice. It has established good links with other agencies and achieved its aim to raise the *Every Child Matters* agenda widely. The council and its partners maintain emergency plans which ensure clear contingency plans for the safe care of children. Serious case reviews are managed in accordance with national guidance and the implementation of recommendations is well monitored. Internal management reviews on cases that do not meet the criteria for serious case reviews are also undertaken and the lessons learned are disseminated across agencies.

23. Supervision and access to training for social workers is good in most cases. Some of the files scrutinised contained evidence of positive management intervention, although this was not consistent. Audits of practice are frequent, but the application of the findings of these is not clear and they are not consistently used to improve practice or to develop relevant training. Inter-agency child protection training has been delivered through online learning during the absence of a training officer. Funding has very recently been agreed to fill this post to enable more frequent and detailed training to take place.

24. Effective action has been taken by the children's directorate with regard to safe recruitment. Good measures are in place to ensure that all retrospective Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are undertaken. Good support is provided to schools and has ensured that outstanding CRB and List 99 checks are made. However, practices for ensuring safe recruitment through the central human resource service are not as robust; a small number of files indicated out-of-date CRB checks, missing references and qualifications unchecked.

Looked after children and young people

Inadequate Adequate Good Outstanding

25. The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for looked after children and young people is good.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Looked after children are well supported and safeguarded in their placements.</p> <p>Good children's rights and advocacy services, which are responsive to the views of looked after children.</p> <p>Good virtual school arrangements.</p> <p>Good progress on reducing school absence and minimising fixed-term exclusions.</p> <p>Effective corporate parenting.</p> <p>Innovative and flexible work by the Youth and Leaving Care Team.</p>	<p>The inconsistent quality of field social work practice and recording of some reviews.</p> <p>High rates of young people receiving a final warning or conviction.</p>

26. A good range of well-targeted preventive services and interventions, delivered through children's centres, extended schools and the development of integrated services, support children in need well and prevent them moving into the looked after system. Multi-agency working is well established and good use is made of voluntary and community groups to provide targeted activities.

27. A range of effective measures is in place to ensure that looked after children are safeguarded in their placements. All looked after children have allocated qualified social workers, whom they see regularly, with opportunities to be seen alone. All reviews have been held within timescales for the past two years. However, recording of some reviews lacks clarity and detail; for example, actions and recommendations are not always clearly recorded in all cases.

28. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) play an active quality assurance role in reviews of care plans. Their independence is strengthened by their location within the Children and Young Peoples Strategy group and their role is valued by parents, carers and children. All care leavers, both eligible and relevant, have their reviews chaired by IROs. Performance data show that all looked after children contributed to their reviews for the past two years.

29. A high percentage of looked after children have an annual health assessment and dental check. The service has responded flexibly to the views and needs of older children and care leavers to increase take-up. Carers report that they receive good training and are well supported to promote young people's health. Looked after children have good access to emotional and behavioural support services and CAMHS are targeted, with evidence of effective interventions and good outcomes.

30. Placement stability is a high priority for the council. Strong action is taken to support current placements and increase provision, particularly for the most challenging young people. Unexpected placement disruption has been kept to a minimum. Comparatively low numbers of looked after children are placed in residential care, with the majority, including older children, in good quality foster placements. Robust monitoring arrangements are in place for out-of-area placements. An effective children's rights service ensures that children placed out-of-area are seen twice yearly. The advocacy and independent visitor services are well promoted and use of these services is good. Both these independent services report good, prompt responses from the council to issues raised on young people's behalf.

31. A higher proportion of looked after children have statements of special educational need than nationally. The three young people who did not have statements and who took GCSEs achieved high grades: one achieved 16 GCSEs, one achieved five, and the other four. The majority of looked after young people who did not sit GCSEs achieved alternative accredited qualifications, including the Duke of Edinburgh Award, literacy and numeracy at Levels 1 and 2, wider key skills and units of GCSEs and GNVQs. Support to improve achievement for these young people includes the provision of mentors for older looked after pupils and individualised programmes that include relevant and realistic work placements.

32. School attendance is improving. During 2006/07, absences fell from 14% to 8.2%, which is better than the national average and rates in similar authorities. There are no permanent exclusions and fixed-term exclusions are kept to a minimum. Attainment for looked after children remains a key priority. To address this, the council has recently developed an innovative virtual school (with headteacher, school improvement partner and additional support team) to ensure that the attainment of looked after children is effectively tracked, monitored and improved. All schools now have a comprehensive Virtual School Handbook, developed with their involvement over the past year. Comprehensive tracking for all looked after children has been in place since autumn 2007 and is being actively followed up by the school improvement partner.

33. Corporate parenting is very good. An established corporate parenting group, with effective membership, including elected members from all parties, actively monitors and addresses priorities for looked after children and reports to the Children's Trust Board. The Chief Executive uses funds to support looked

after children in accessing a range of hobbies and interests. This is used effectively to support attendance at out-of-school activities that incur significant expenditure. Children and young people have good access to leisure activities, including provision of free leisure passes. They have very good opportunities to participate in a range of activities, including the annual Riverside Festival which is well supported by the youth service. Annual achievement celebrations are well promoted and supported. There is a strong commitment to listening to the views of looked after children and they are well included in borough-wide participation arrangements.

34. Whilst there is good support for looked after young people to prevent re-offending, final warnings and convictions doubled during 2006/07 following many years where performance was highly creditable, although numbers in this group are small. The need for stronger links and protocols with the youth offending service has been recognised by the council.

35. Care leavers feel well supported by the Youth and Leaving Care Team, which provides a good service. Innovative ways of working, in response to feedback from young people, have been developed, including employing a former care leaver as a development worker and training others as volunteer peer supporters. A high number of care leavers are in employment, education or training, and effective partnership working with Connexions supports this. Accommodation for care leavers has improved significantly, with a good and expanding supported lodgings scheme and more young people enabled to stay on in foster care post-16. However, for a small number of young people with the greatest support needs, for whom other options have broken down, there remains an over-reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation. The council is working actively to address this.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Inadequate Adequate Good Outstanding

36. The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Highly effective joint commissioning arrangements.</p> <p>The good quality and timely completion of statements over the last three years.</p> <p>The excellent range and breadth of respite provision.</p> <p>Particularly effective and well-used tracking and monitoring of the progress of all young people.</p> <p>Outstanding early years provision, in particular through the key worker and Early Birds support and training programme.</p> <p>Well coordinated collaborative provision to ensure early identification and support for all children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.</p> <p>The very good progress that all children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make.</p>	

37. Highly effective use of joint commissioning and pooled budgets ensures that all children and young people have access to a good range of resources. Clear protocols and strategies are in place to ensure consistency of working practices. Joint appointments between the council and health services, together with the co-location of health, education and social care staff, have reinforced existing strong inter-agency working. Joint commissioning and joint assessments are well used to provide services that meet the specific needs of children and their families. All partners are particularly sensitive to the specific needs of families from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds and good arrangements are in place to ensure their needs are well met.

38. A prompt and highly responsive service is provided by the High Flyers Children's Centre, the designated single referral and assessment agency for children aged five and under. Children over the age of five have their needs equally well met through the well-established multi-agency Complex Needs Panel. An outstanding key worker system is proving highly effective in supporting parents to access services and to enable children to remain within their home setting. The Portage home visiting service and Early Birds

programme provide outstanding high quality early years support. Children and young people with autistic spectrum disorder are well served by a dedicated multi-agency team. All parents receive a comprehensive assessment of their needs, which is reviewed as part of their child's annual review process. During inspection, a small number of parents identified a lack of clarity about how to access free nappies and ongoing occupational therapy services. The council responded positively to this feedback and has already implemented appropriate actions.

39. Excellent support services offered by a broad range of organisations, in particular the Parent Partnership Service, make a significant difference to children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families. This support includes specific support groups for parents of children with complex needs, individual parent support workers and a very broad range of impartial advice and information on disability services. Very good support is also offered through Stockton-on-Tees Carers Support, a parent-led group which provides a range of social activities as well as support to access specific services and professionals.

40. Safeguarding of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Very effective links are developed with other agencies so that appropriate support is available to those who meet the criteria for services. Very good progress is being made in the introduction and use of the Common Assessment Framework and care and annual reviews are well linked. High quality respite care provides a wide range of options and is effective in meeting the different religious and cultural needs of young people. The number of families who receive direct payments has increased, and most families are appreciative of the flexibility this gives them. However, a minority of parents report that they find it difficult to find reliable, consistent support, for example in supporting a child with autistic spectrum disorder to attend out-of-school activities. The council has identified this as a priority area and has been proactive in changing the provider of the service. School support staff are used flexibly to provide continuity within and outside of the classroom.

41. The number of statements of special educational need completed within statutory timescales has remained at 100% from 2003/04 to 2005/06, placing Stockton as one of the top performing councils nationally. These statements are well written and contain detailed information. The number of new statements issued has reduced significantly and is now well below the national average. The council has also taken effective steps to reduce the numbers of children placed outside of the authority, with currently only 14 children placed out-of-area. Effective procedures are in place to monitor the effectiveness and impact of this provision. The council and its partners make every effort to support children with life-limiting illnesses to attend school, through innovative and flexible support. For example, city learning centres and virtual learning environments enable them to participate in lessons and to remain in contact with their peers even when they are unable to leave hospital. In addition, outstanding collaborative support between schools and health care services

enables children and young people who require significant medication and other very specialised support to attend some lessons at their school.

42. Challenge and support through the special educational needs service is outstanding. Educational progress is particularly well monitored by all schools and the council. All pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are set individual and challenging targets that are moderated and monitored by a dedicated data monitoring team. Data are regularly shared with schools and used to plan training, identify areas for improvement, monitor the spend on placements and to plan future provision. Schools very effectively capture and measure the small steps of progress that pupils make and information on individual needs, attainment and progress is used well to indicate starting points for further progress. A notable strength is the way the borough has encouraged schools to discuss the progress made by particular pupils in different settings so that a common understanding of pupils' achievements can be achieved. This is important because of the varied and complex nature of specific need being provided for. School inspection evidence indicates that this work is a notable strength.

43. In 2006/07, the Foundation Stage profile of the bottom 20% of children in all authorities ranked Stockton-on-Tees performance as 13th highest out of the 150. The attainment of a significant majority of these children was above the average level of attainment across England. All schools effectively evaluate the progress of those children working below Key Stage 1 through the use of P-scales. Outstanding use of adaptive and assistive technology, in particular in schools, is effectively supporting the inclusion and progress of all children and young people. Success rates for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities aged 16 are consistently improving and were above national rates in 2007.

44. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have particularly good opportunities to contribute within their schools, for example in reviews and through school councils. Their views are taken into account in council surveys and Stockton-on-Tees Disability Youth Forum and very effectively used to bring about change. They are engaged in the appointment of staff, for example social workers and home care support, and most recently in the appointment of the new provider of the direct payments service. They are supported well by the youth service to take part in a good range of activities, such as public performances of dance and song with the Stockton Inspirations.

45. Post-16 provision is very good and young people have a broad choice. A recent inspection of the local general further education college judged education and social inclusion to be outstanding. The college provides an excellent range of support, in particular through the hearing impaired service and support for young people on the autistic spectrum. The proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in education, employment or training increased by 5% in 2006/07 to 80%. This is higher than the national figure. A 20-place council-run Workstep programme provides very good support

and good progression opportunities for those young people needing additional support at the age of 18. Learners from this programme have very good opportunities to access supported employment across all council departments.

46. Services work together particularly well to ensure that transition arrangements are successful. Strong transition planning and effective work by the multi-agency Transition Group take place to ensure families are well supported through change. A very well used pupil needs analysis provides clear information on the level of support needed by each child. Dedicated Connexions personal advisers make very good use of this information to provide detailed and specialist information, advice and guidance. The multi-agency Complex Needs Panel closely monitors the needs of all young people moving towards transition, including those young people placed out-of-area. A minority of young people and their parents have identified that they did not have a positive experience when transferring into adult services, in particular with regard to continuity of support. The council has identified this as a priority and a review of transitions is currently being undertaken.

Other issues identified for further investigation

The impact of partners in improving outcomes of diverse and hard-to-reach children and young people, with particular reference to those of Black and minority ethnic origin

47. **The impact of partners in improving outcomes of diverse and hard-to-reach children and young people, with particular reference to those of Black and minority ethnic origin, is good.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Good progress by the local authority and its partners in promoting equality and community cohesion.</p> <p>Some good initiatives to close the gap between the educational performance of vulnerable and majority groups.</p> <p>Strong local partnerships that enhance the capacity to respond effectively to the needs of vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Good measures to engage hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups through children's centres, leisure, arts and enrichment activities.</p>	<p>Low educational performance by children of Pakistani origin.</p> <p>Inconsistent application of evaluation measures to assess the effectiveness of projects targeted at vulnerable groups.</p>

Good opportunities to participate in activities that promote personal development.	
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48. The council and its partners are responding well to the changing demography of the area and are making good progress in promoting equality, particularly for children and young people from diverse and vulnerable groups. As a result, most children and young people from these groups are enabled to achieve highly, be healthy, stay safe and acquire a sense of belonging. A draft community cohesion strategy, informed by the views of young people and external research, has been written to provide strategic drive and direction. Key priorities within the strategy are the tackling of anti-social behaviour and disadvantage and the integration of equality and diversity issues throughout all children's services.

49. Schools are taking effective action to promote anti-bullying initiatives. There is little evidence of racial tension in the area and most children and young people report that any issues of bullying or racism are dealt with decisively. New activities in primary schools such as whole-class involvement in holistic ideas and therapies, has helped unite cultures, with children and parents happy to engage in all activities that previously might not have been part of their culture. Children have good opportunities to contribute their views and make a positive contribution to the wider community. Asian young people have made films about topical issues, such as racism and drug abuse, which have been effectively used to enhance the knowledge and understanding of children and adults. The Asylum Support Team uses presentations to white British communities to dispel the myths about asylum seekers and refugees.

50. Good targeted actions have been effectively implemented to address barriers to successful learning and to close the gap between the educational performance of vulnerable groups and that of the majority. The Star Children's Centre successfully engages refugee and asylum-seeker parents and their children in play, healthy eating and language development. For some young children, this provides them with their first opportunities to play constructively and with an educational aim. Early years settings provide a wide range of innovative programmes and activities and place a strong focus on the development of speech and English as an additional language. Primary schools report that as a result of these initiatives, children are starting school with better communication skills. Children with emotional and behavioural difficulties receive particularly good support, and increasing numbers are remaining within mainstream education. A well used distance learning pack supports continuity of learning by young Travellers living in the borough. The creation of an innovative virtual school is enhancing the monitoring of the performance of every child who is looked after. Headteachers speak very positively of the targeted action to improve school performance. More effective use of data has increased the capacity of service managers and school heads to monitor the attendance and educational performance of vulnerable groups.

51. Progress has been made in narrowing some of the gaps in educational performance between majority and vulnerable groups. The achievements of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly good. The numbers of Black and minority ethnic children who remain in education, employment or training at the age of 16 is higher than the average for all Stockton-on-Tees groups, and overall figures are improving by comparison with most local authorities in the North East. The numbers of young mothers, young offenders, children leaving care and those looked after who are in education, employment or training is increasing and exceeding the authority's targets. The numbers of fixed-term exclusions from secondary schools are reducing steadily. The tracking of young people who might become missing is particularly effective.

52. Children and young people of Pakistani origin are the largest constituent Black and minority ethnic group in Stockton-on-Tees, representing between a third and half of all ethnic minority groups in the area. The educational performance of this group has not kept pace with improvements made by others. Whilst overall the attainment of other Black and minority ethnic groups improves from Key Stages 1 to 4, with a slight dip at Key Stage 3, Pakistani children under perform at Key Stages 1 to 3. The numbers attaining five A*-C grades at GCSE in 2006/07 were similar to white British groups, but their attainment of English and mathematics at this level was more than 10% below that of white British children.

53. Strong partnership and collaborative working ensures that local services respond effectively to the needs of vulnerable groups. The 14-19 collaborative partnership has been effective in the planning and development of a broad vocational curriculum, with progression opportunities between schools, colleges and training providers. Significant developments include increased Level 1 provision, including Entry to Employment programmes, and a broader and more relevant range of provision for disaffected young people aged 14-16. Sharing of information between service providers, including the youth service, to support the development of children's services and provision for asylum seekers and refugees is good. Specific needs are effectively identified, understood and responded to well through the strong local networks that include public, voluntary, community and faith organisations. These networks are effective in enabling children, young people and their parents to have a voice in shaping policies and provision for young people. Partners actively seek to tackle drug and alcohol related anti-social behaviour and crime amongst young people and there is positive family and police support. The local authority has managers who act as champions for the needs of smaller local groups such as Travellers.

54. The council and voluntary providers offer good quality opportunities for young people to participate in activities that promote personal development and progression to accredited learning. Leisure, arts and enrichment activities are used well to attract harder to reach and vulnerable groups. Young carers are well supported to access a wide choice of free recreational activities. Youth projects successfully attract refugees and asylum seekers, who highly value the

strong personal support they receive. Young offenders are supported in attending leisure activities of their choice. Tailored training programmes are devised for disengaged young people through the pupil referral units to help them prepare to return to school or the world of work. Connexions personal advisers work well with young people and teenage mothers who are not in education, employment or training to encourage them to return to education or training.

55. Most services meet their targets to engage young people in activities, but not all pay sufficient attention to ensuring these lead to accredited outcomes. The measures used to assess the effectiveness of some projects targeted at hard-to-reach groups are not always consistently applied. The outcomes do not always consider the longer term benefits to participants or a wider dissemination of good practice. Some projects have been slow to lead to engagement and outcomes. The youth offending service gives insufficient priority to promoting education and training for young people who have offended and in the youth service there is insufficient monitoring and review of young people's achievements.

Service management

Inadequate Adequate Good Outstanding

Capacity to improve

Inadequate Adequate Good Outstanding

56. The management of services for children and young people is good. Capacity to improve further is outstanding.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Clear commitment to and high ambitions for children and young people.</p> <p>Comprehensive needs analysis aligned to plans and driving improvements.</p>	<p>Workforce planning needs embedding.</p> <p>Performance monitoring of improvement at Key Stage 3 and high re-offending rates.</p>

<p>Strong and coherent planning on a partnership basis, integrated with resource planning.</p> <p>Ambitious plans for integrated area-based provision are being implemented.</p> <p>Extensive and influential consultation with children and young people.</p> <p>Effective action taken to secure major change in service configuration and outcomes.</p> <p>Very good value for money.</p> <p>Strong improvement trend.</p> <p>Rigorous and comprehensive performance management.</p>	
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57. Ambition of the local partnership is outstanding and is based on a strong trend of improvement in recent years. There is widespread commitment to securing the best possible outcomes for children and young people and this is central to the area's wider ambitions. This is one of the five key improvement themes in the community strategy for 2005–08. It states specific timed targets for each of the *Every Child Matters* outcomes. The CYPP is of very high quality and is based on comprehensive intelligence and needs analysis. Partners have ambitious plans for the development of integrated area-based provision for children and adults. This development will be based on early intervention and prevention, closely linked to the roll out of children's centres and extended schools; integrated area managers have already been appointed.

58. There is very extensive consultation with young people. Stockton-on-Tees has a citizen's panel specifically for children and young people. The panel is called Youth Viewpoint and has over 500 members aged eight to 18. Members receive regular questionnaires about a variety of issues relating to their community and council services, and also receive a regular newsletter which feeds back what has happened as a result of consultation. It is evident that such consultation has real influence, for example in the development of youth cafés and youth buses in response to young people's requests for a choice of more informal provision than conventional youth clubs and better access to facilities in outlying areas. Stockton Disability Youth Forum is self-directed and the forum members choose the issues which they want to address. They have developed their own award scheme, called MB Awards, accrediting sport and team working. Young people are also directly involved in some commissioning activity and in the Area Partnership Forums established by the local strategic partnership. The Participation, Involvement and Consultation Network provides a good focus for consultation activity and for promoting participation. Young people therefore feel that their views count.

59. Prioritisation of the local partnership is outstanding. There is very good alignment at all levels of planning, including the community strategy, CYPP, council plan and Service Improvement Plans (SIPs). The CYPP and SIPs are very clear and specific about what needs to be improved and the actions required to achieve them. They are also clear about resource implications, which are integrated with corporate medium-term financial planning.

60. Strong partnership with schools has enabled reallocation of resources to key priorities. The Schools Forum has agreed that some of the resources for which it is responsible should be used to prevent exclusions and for early intervention on language delay. The strong partnership with schools and the strong capacity of the council is illustrated by the Audit Commission's school survey results. Stockton-on-Tees schools' responses were within the best 25% of councils for 73% of the questions and above average for 98%. Strong partnership working is also evident at the individual level where needs are identified well, thus ensuring child-centred interventions.

61. Action is taken to effect significant change necessary to deliver priorities. These include reducing the number of children and young people placed out-of-borough, reducing teenage pregnancies, switching emphasis from residential to foster care for looked after children and reviewing roles and remits for staff such as speech and language therapists. This means that partners are able to achieve step change improvements in services.

62. There has been a good response to particular needs arising from diversity. In conjunction with the Asian Women's Forum, fostering has been promoted among the Black and minority ethnic community. There is a dedicated Asylum Support Team which is well versed in the particular needs and vulnerabilities of children and young people from this background.

63. The capacity of the local partnership is good. Elected members have a positive impact on improving services for children and young people. There is strong leadership and commitment from the lead member and this is also shared more widely among elected members. The lead member has taken up membership of the governing body of schools in difficulties on occasion so that he can take an active and personal role in resolving problems. A scrutiny review of corporate parenting raised the profile of this responsibility among all elected members. In-depth scrutiny reviews, which have had an impact on policy, have also been undertaken on teenage pregnancies, oral hygiene (by the Health Select Committee) and bullying. There is good partnership working with a number of large voluntary and community organisations; however, some smaller voluntary and community organisations are not engaged well enough in strategy development. In consequence, their members feel that they are not given opportunities to contribute their ideas at this level.

64. The capacity of senior management is strong. The way in which key jointly funded management posts carry dual responsibility within the council and the PCT, and associated extensive joint commissioning arrangements, is a notable

feature in Stockton-on-Tees. The overall level of partnership working is impressive. There is also a wide range of specialist services which are commissioned jointly by the four Teesside councils, for example advocacy services and a sexual assault referral centre. In this way, resources are used to best effect.

65. Value for money is very good. Education spending is average and social care spending below average, while most outcomes are at least good. Action to reduce primary surplus places has resulted in these being less than half of the average level, and consultation is underway with a view to reducing the number of secondary schools from 14 to 10. Action has also been taken to encourage schools to use surplus balances and this has reduced them from £6 million to £4.5 million. The PCT has tackled value for money on a systematic basis, as part of its financial recovery plan. This has helped it to achieve a financial surplus. Financial management within the council is very robust and children's services were forecasting an under-spend at mid-year.

66. A children's workforce development strategy is just starting, with a project plan and project manager in place to deliver the strategy by autumn 2008. There are a few gaps in training provision, for example for front line staff in using new ICT systems, though there is a higher than average level of qualifications among social care staff and managers.

67. Performance management of the partnership is good. There is a strong improvement trend in most areas. In 2006/07, over half of the Audit Commission's key performance indicators for children and young people's services were among the best 25% of councils, none were in the worst 25%, and 80% showed improvement over the previous year. There is a very robust performance management framework at all levels, from the local strategic partnership through to the individual level, including a range of partnership groups which report to the Children's Trust Board. Outcomes include reductions in out-of-borough placements, reductions in school balances, improved progress by pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and actions to combat youth homelessness. However, the response to persistently high re-offending rates has not been sufficiently coherent. Quality assurance of practice in the youth service and social care is not systematic enough to ensure that practice, while generally at least satisfactory, is consistently good.

68. There is effective use of data to track individual progress of pupils in vulnerable groups, with children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities making particularly good progress. Performance monitoring of schools' performance is generally thorough and challenging. However, it has not had sufficient impact on Key Stage 3 results in those secondary schools that are failing to improve, and this was a factor in two schools recently being placed in Ofsted categories.

69. Joint commissioning arrangements incorporate rigorous monitoring. A thorough review has been undertaken of all projects commissioned through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and the Children's Fund. This included self-assessment, analysis of regular monitoring information and on-site evaluation by specialists. This analysis led to recommendations for each project about continuation of funding (for one or three years), reconfiguration, changes to improve matching with priorities or cessation.

70. Capacity to improve further is outstanding. Overall, there is a very strong improvement trend in performance, which is at least good and in some areas outstanding. There is notable innovation in responding to the needs of some of the most vulnerable children and young people. The review of the CYPP is thorough and identifies well where improvement is needed. Partners have clear ambitions, strategies and plans for children and young people, which are integral to their wider high ambitions. The partnership responds positively to the views of children and young people. There is strong leadership and management capacity. The approach to integrated management and commissioning of services is outstanding and the prospects for securing significant further improvement through the development of integrated area-based services are very good. Workforce planning is lagging but there are plans for this to be in place by autumn 2008. Value for money is very good and performance management is strong.

Annex A

MOST RECENTLY PUBLISHED ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN STOCKTON-ON-TEES

Stockton-on-Tees Council consistently delivers outstanding services for children and young people. As a result, an improving trend is being sustained and there are improved outcomes for children and young people. In an area that faces significant social and economic challenges, services are making a number of very significant contributions towards fulfilling Stockton's vision of 'no child left behind'. Strategies and actions are well targeted, particularly to address the needs of the most vulnerable. The quality of strategic thinking, high levels of reflection and analysis, and excellent use of management information are clearly evident throughout all documentation, such as the CYPP 2007–10 and the recent self-evaluation and review. In a letter to the council in March 2007, the Audit Commission recognised the improvement in children and young peoples' services, resulting in Stockton being the first council in the North East to be judged as excellent.

The full APA can be found at:

http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/pdf/?inspectionNumber=3109&providerCategoryID=0&fileName=\\APA\\apa_2007_808.pdf

Annex B

SUMMARY OF THE ENHANCED YOUTH INSPECTION REPORT

Main findings

1. Stockton-on-Tees provides a good youth service and sufficiently secures the provision of youth work. The service effectively targets provision to meet the needs of vulnerable and minority groups and offers a good range of activities that contribute well to the authority's education leisure time provision. There is insufficient provision in some localities. Young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice are good. Curriculum documents provide excellent guidance that is used effectively by youth workers to plan programmes and activities. Full-time staff are fully qualified; a high quality training programme is enabling the majority of sessional workers to gain qualifications and it also promotes good practice. Leadership and management are good at all levels. Good progress has been made in setting up structures for the management of integrated youth support services. Performance management and quality assurance activities lead to improvements but systematic review across the service is not fully in place. Partnership working is good but links with the voluntary and community sector are limited in scope and are not sufficiently strategic. Young people are influential in shaping youth work provision.

Key aspect inspection grades

	Key Aspect	Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	3
	Quality of youth work practice	3
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	3
3	Leadership and management	3

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale
4: excellent/outstanding; 3: good; 2: adequate/satisfactory; 1: inadequate*

Strengths

- The standard of young people's achievement is good.
- Youth work practice is good.
- The curriculum plan and toolkit provide excellent guidance for planning youth work and youth workers use them effectively.

- The high quality training programme is enabling sessional youth workers to gain qualifications and it also promotes good practice.
- Young people are influential in shaping youth work provision.

Areas for development

- Partnerships with the voluntary sector are limited in scope and are not sufficiently strategic.
- Systematic monitoring, review and reporting of the quality of provision are not fully in place.

Annex C

CORPORATE ASSESSMENT ACHIEVEMENT – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Outcomes for children and young people in Stockton-on-Tees are good. The 2007 APA reported that the council consistently delivers outstanding services for children and young people. However, the joint area review, which is a more in-depth investigation into services, found some inconsistencies in social care and youth offending practice, for example with regards to the completion of care plans and recording of chronologies. Arrangements for safeguarding children are good, with an effective range of preventative services in place to keep children and young people safe. Continued investment in resources and joint commissioning are leading to improved health outcomes for children and young people, including those who are looked after by the council. Educational outcomes are good and improvements are being sustained across most of the core subjects. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make very good progress. There is a strong culture of engagement with children and young people, including vulnerable groups, with very good structures for consultation and participation. Children and young people are very well supported to achieve economic well-being.

2. Service management in Stockton-on-Tees is good. The Children's Trust Board is well established and has successfully brought together strategic planning, joint commissioning and integrated delivery of services for children and young people. There has been good progress in taking forward the establishment of integrated teams and this work has been further enhanced through the appointment of four key strategic jointly funded posts between the council and the PCT. The Board and partners are very ambitious for children and young people and this is reflected in the CYPP. Good attention has been paid to directing resources to priorities with demonstrable outcomes. For example, targeted action is leading to a reduction in teenage pregnancies. However, some areas have been slower to develop; for example, the children's workforce development strategy is in its early stages and some smaller voluntary and community organisations are not engaged well enough in strategy development. There is a strong performance management culture and framework in place, with good performance monitoring arrangements.

3. The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. Joint funding of senior management posts with the council and the North Tees PCT has resulted in strong partnership work which is embedded within strategic planning and service delivery. Continued investments and joint commissioning are leading to improved outcomes. For example, the number of teenage conceptions shows a sustained reduction to the same level as statistical neighbours, and the teenage pregnancy support unit is held in high regard by teenagers who use the service. The council has exceeded its target for the numbers of schools gaining the Healthy School

Standard and its performance is among the best in the North East region. There is good access to health services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those who are looked after by the council. Good access to early intervention and treatment for children and young people who misuse substances is having an impact on reducing admissions of young people into hospital with substance misuse and behavioural problems. CAMHS continue to provide services with short waiting times in most areas.

4. Children and young people appear safe and arrangements to ensure this are good. The 2007 APA reported that the contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this respect was excellent. However, the additional depth of on-site investigations during the 2007 joint area review found some variable and inconsistent practice in some services, for example in relation to care plans and recording of chronologies in social care and in the youth offending service. Actions to tackle bullying and road safety are effective. Services provide good support for improving young people's sexual health. Most children and young people report feeling safe in their school and in the community. Agencies work well together to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect and there are a good range of early support services provided by integrated children's centres and community partnerships with the voluntary sector. The LSCB is an effective strategic body led by a highly regarded chair.

5. The 2007 APA reported that the impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is good. Most children make good progress throughout their early years and the proportion of children achieving 78 points or more at the end of the Foundation Stage is much higher than found nationally. Most pupils make good progress throughout their schooling and gaps in attainment continue to close. Standards of attainment have risen year on year since 2001 and improvements are being sustained across most of the core subjects. However, there are variations in performance at Key Stage 3 and the joint area review found that this remains the case, as two secondary schools were very recently placed in Ofsted categories. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make very good progress. Children and young people who are looked after by the council are well supported in their education and they make good progress.

6. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. The 2007 APA reported that there is a strong culture of engagement with children and young people, with good structures in place for consultation and participation. The joint area review found that it is evident that such consultation has real influence, for example in the development of youth cafés and youth buses in response to young people's requests for a choice of more informal provision than conventional youth clubs and better access to facilities in outlying areas. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are actively engaged through student councils and the Stockton Disability Youth Forum. All looked after children and young people participated in their reviews last year, making Stockton-on-Tees

one of the best performing councils nationally in this respect. In contrast to this very positive picture, re-offending rates of young people remain persistently high, despite reductions in the last two years, and the number of looked after young people who have received a final warning or conviction has doubled in 2006/07, albeit with only low numbers involved.

7. The contribution of services to enabling children and young people to achieve economic well-being was judged as excellent in the 2007 APA. The joint area review found that children and young people continue to be very well supported to achieve economic well-being. The council is taking an effective lead role in the 14–19 strategy, which is progressing well. Post-16 progression and participation in education, employment or training continues to improve in Stockton-on-Tees. The NVQ success rate for work-based learners aged under 19 showed a rising trend, from 49.2% in 2005 to 57.7% in 2006, which was slightly higher than that found nationally. The proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are not in employment, education or training reduced from 17.5% in 2005 to 13.5% in 2006; improving at a better rate than that found in the Tees Valley, North East and nationally. Looked after children and care leavers aged over 15 years all have pathway plans in place. Care leavers feel well supported by the Youth and Leaving Care Team which provides a good service, although there is an over-reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation for a small number of vulnerable young people.

8. The capacity of council services to improve is outstanding. Partners have clear ambitions, strategies and plans. There is strong leadership and management capacity, and the prospects for securing significant further improvement through the development of integrated area-based services are very good. Value for money is very good; education spending is average and social care spending below average. There is a strong improvement trend in most areas.

Annex D

SUMMARY OF JOINT AREA REVIEW AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS

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