



Joint area review

Brent 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
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INSPECTORATE



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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 multidisciplinary team of eight inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Audit Commission. The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the inspection of children's services*.
2. The review was linked to the contemporaneous corporate assessment of the local council by the Audit Commission and its findings are represented in the relevant part of the corporate assessment report. There were also links with HMI Probation's inspection of the Youth Offending Team (YOT) that took place at the same time. Findings from the YOT have been represented in this report where relevant.
3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in the Brent 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:
 - self-assessment undertaken by local public service providers
 - a survey of children and young people
 - performance data
 - the findings of the contemporaneous reinspection of the youth service
 - planning documents
 - information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day-care provision
 - briefings from staff within inspectorates, commissions and other public bodies in contact with local providers.
6. The second stage included inspection fieldwork. This included studies of how far local services have improved outcomes for a small sample of children and young people, some of whom have the most complex needs, and a study

of provision in the Church End neighbourhood in Brent. It also included gathering evidence on 10 key judgements, selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. This included discussions with elected members of the local authority and their equivalents in other public agencies, officers from these agencies, service users and community representatives. A review of case files for children and young people receiving support from a number of local agencies was also included.

Context

7. Brent is situated in north-west London, and is the seventh largest London borough. It has a population of approximately 270,000 which is rising at a steady rate. It is the most densely populated outer-London borough.

8. Brent's population is highly diverse. It is one of only two council areas nationally where the majority of residents are from minority ethnic communities. Between 7 and 8% of the population are classed as refugees or asylum-seekers. The level of mobility of the population is high, with four in 10 children finishing their primary education in a different school from the one they attended in their first year. Almost a quarter of Brent residents are aged under 19 and, within the five renewal neighbourhoods, one third are under 16 years, compared with one fifth across London. Seventy four per cent of children in schools are from ethnic minorities, and over 130 languages are spoken. Over a third of children live in low-income households and nearly a third receive free school meals, while nearly a quarter live in social housing and over a fifth live in single adult households.

9. The north of the borough is more affluent and the south more deprived. Nearly 15% of the population live in the most deprived wards in the country, and the proportion of people who are long-term unemployed is higher than the London average.

10. Brent Council has been led by a majority Labour administration since 1998. There are 63 councillors operating within a leader, cabinet and scrutiny/overview model. There are 35 Labour councillors, 18 Conservatives and 10 Liberal Democrats. The cabinet comprises 10 executive members, including a lead member for children and families.

11. The council's unified children's service, the Children and Families Department, came into operation on 4 July 2005, with a single director of children's services. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board was set up in January 2005, with representation across all council departments, partner agencies and voluntary-sector representatives. The Board has identified six key themes, which, while not mirroring the five *Every child matters* outcomes, fully contribute to that agenda. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) held its first meeting in December 2005. Progress has been made on more integrated ways of delivering services, through children's

centres, extended schools and pilot projects for earlier intervention, and plans for locality based working.

12. The Brent Teaching Primary Care Trust is responsible for commissioning healthcare and providing primary care and community services. Acute services are delivered through the two hospital sites of the North West London Hospitals NHS Trust and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) through the Central and North West London Mental Health NHS Trust.

13. There are 60 schools for primary-aged children, 14 secondary schools including one city academy, all with sixth form provision, five special schools, two secondary pupil referral units and four nursery schools

14. London West Learning and Skills Council has partnership agreements with the local authority, College of North West London, Connexions, the education business partnership and schools to address the 14–19 strategy. Post-16 education and training in the area is provided by one further education (FE) college, the school sixth forms and four work-based training providers. Entry to Employment (E2E) provision is managed by three providers based in the area. Adult and community learning including family learning is provided by the local authority.

Summary report

Outcomes for children and young people

15. **Outcomes for most children and young people in Brent are good.** Agencies are working well together to protect children most at risk. However, children do not always feel safe in certain localities or at certain times, for example on journeys home from school. There are strong child-protection systems which keep children safe and, overall, the work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate with some significant strengths. Strong political commitment and challenging ambitions for children and young people, developing strategic partnerships and effective multi-agency work are beginning to result in good outcomes. Agencies are working hard to improve children's health although the challenges within the area mean that outcomes are below national averages. Children's health is being effectively promoted through outreach work and the Healthy Schools initiative, and there is positive promotion of mental health. There are indications that this work is beginning to improve outcomes. Immunisation rates are rising and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in young people are reducing. However, teenage pregnancy rates are high and rising. The health needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are addressed well. An adequate range of local services is available for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but there are sometimes delays in assessing family need. The council works very effectively with its partners to ensure that children and young people enjoy life and achieve well. Schools are well supported and children of all abilities generally make good progress in school,

although children from some minority ethnic groups are underachieving. Children who are looked after by the council, particularly in the older age group, are underachieving, but educational outcomes are improving and a good proportion is in education, employment or training. Social workers and foster carers are working well to meet the complex needs of children looked after by the council.

16. Local services are very effective at helping children and young people to develop socially and emotionally. Children and young people increasingly feel that their views are listened to and taken seriously. Good preventive programmes reduce young people's involvement in anti-social behaviour and support them to re-engage with education programmes. The overall strategy for 14–19 education and training is still in development, but a high proportion of young people, including those from vulnerable groups, are in education, employment or training. Well-developed strategies are in place to regenerate the most deprived neighbourhoods, but some families and young people spend a long time in temporary accommodation.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

17. **The combined work of local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Low birth weight and infant mortality rates have been higher than comparable areas, and this is being addressed as part of the review of maternity services in the area. Low rates of breastfeeding, immunisation coverage and poorer oral health are also being addressed and there is evidence of improvement. As in other London boroughs, teenage pregnancy rates are high and rising but, following local research, different interventions are now being implemented. Emergency admission rates to hospital are lower than nationally and deaths from accidents are also lower than comparable areas. The standard of services and facilities for treating acute illness is high. There is systematic effort to understand the cultural and practical issues which influence uptake of preventive services. Community initiatives and opportunistic work during attendance at Central Middlesex and Northwick Park Hospitals and in the early years and school settings are having some success in reaching groups that are hard to engage. The Healthy Schools programme is a major vehicle for coordinating health promotion programmes to children and young people and schools value the input of school nursing and health promotion staff. Positive mental health promotion is a high priority and there is good evidence of anti-bullying policies and a high level of racial harmony in schools contributing to this. There is no CAMHS worker in the YOT, and no formal referral system, which the YOT workers had circumvented by referrals through GPs. Health checks for young people and children looked after by the council have been low at 73%. The designated service for looked after children has been refocused to make it more accessible and indications are of increased uptake by young people. Clinical provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. There is a well-resourced child

development service with effective multi-agency working and involvement of parents and carers.

Staying safe

18. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** A high priority is given by the council and its partners to keeping children safe, as evidenced through its regeneration work and community safety initiatives. Front-line social care services have shown rapid and consistent improvement, and are well managed. Insufficient progress has been made as yet on recruitment and retention of permanent staff. The referral and assessment service is now working effectively to ensure children are safeguarded. Staff across agencies are generally well trained and supported to carry out their roles. Case-tracking evidence shows agencies are working very well together, resulting in improved outcomes for children. Some work is taking place to redress the poor practice in ensuring children's safety in the past. Thresholds for intervention are high, but developments such as the integrated services pilot projects are planned to address this.

19. Some good family support services are provided through Sure Start and On Track programmes, and voluntary-sector provision. The newly established LSCB has clear and appropriate priorities and is developing in an effective way. There are some good services in place to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families, but the social work team for children with disabilities is not currently assessing and planning to meet family support needs in a timely way. Safeguards for looked after children within their placements are improving. A high proportion of looked after children over 12 are in residential placements and placed outside the borough. Timeliness of reviews has improved, but there is often a delay in holding the first review of looked after children, which may hinder plans to rehabilitate a young person with his or her family.

Enjoying and achieving

20. **The overall contribution of services in helping children and young people to enjoy and achieve is good.** The council works very effectively with its partners to ensure that children and young people enjoy life and achieve well. Good information and guidance is available to support parents. Very good support is given to schools and early years settings, so that the needs of a broad range of children are met. The council is successful in helping to remove schools from the Ofsted categories of concern. The majority of early years settings and schools are at least satisfactory or good and provide for a wide range of needs. The council makes good use of national strategies to improve pupils' attainment. Pupils generally make very good progress in school and attainment is above national averages. The council is targeting support to groups of pupils they have identified as underachieving, within some minority ethnic groups and looked after children. Pupils in special schools achieve well.

21. Many children and young people enjoy life and are proud of Brent's diverse community. There are insufficient leisure and recreation opportunities for all children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who would like them. Support for improving behaviour is coordinated well. Attendance at school is generally good, although there is a high percentage of authorised absence in primary schools. The rate of exclusion for secondary age pupils is higher than average. A small minority of the most challenging pupils excluded from schools does not currently receive its statutory entitlement to full-time tuition, although provision for pupils excluded from schools is generally good.

Making a positive contribution

22. **The combined work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.** Local services are very effective at helping children and young people to develop socially and emotionally. Children and young people increasingly feel that their views are listened to and taken seriously at a strategic, local and personal level. Those involved in Youth Forums are aware that local politicians are keen to hear their views. However, young people feel there is insufficient feedback on decisions made on their behalf. Children and young people serving on school councils have a good understanding of democratic processes and know their ideas are listened to and acted upon. Consultation with minority groups and vulnerable young people, such as Black African boys, teenage mothers and those in local authority care is systematic and supportive action is taken as a result. Good support is available for vulnerable groups including asylum-seekers, young carers and youth offenders. The management of transition for children between schools is variable. The cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds of looked after children are considered carefully when decisions are made about foster or residential care placements. The ways of involving young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are developing well; these pupils make a positive contribution to consultation events through the Youth Forum and school councils. The range of respite care is good, but insufficient to meet the needs of all families who need it.

23. The Youth Crime Prevention Strategy Group consists of a number of partners, including the YOT, and ensures prevention programmes meet the diverse needs of the community. These preventive programmes reduce young people's involvement in anti-social behaviour and support them to re-engage with education programmes. Work with children and young people who offend is generally good, although orders are not always enforced. The rates of re-offending, as shown by examination of the Youth Justice Board performance data over a 24-month period, were below the average of their statistical neighbours and other London boroughs.

Achieving economic well-being

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

schools make good progress at A level, although attainment remains below national averages. The proportion of children and young people continuing in education at 16 is higher than average and many continue in higher education. Some good progress has been made on developing collaborative working between one consortium of schools, and the local college offers some vocational options for 14–16 year olds. There are good partnership arrangements to support transition for vulnerable groups into education employment or training, with good success. However, the overall strategy for 14–19 education and training and collaborative partnership working is still in development. Partners are starting to work towards cohesive and comprehensive provision, but there is insufficient reliable information and data to inform planning to meet both young people's needs and local labour market trends. There is insufficient good-quality provision for young people who wish to follow apprenticeships. Well-developed strategies are in place to regenerate the most deprived neighbourhoods and improve the economic prospects for families and young people. Suitable housing for families and young people is in short supply and many spend significant periods of time in temporary accommodation.

Service management

25. The management of services for children and young people is good. Brent's strategic vision and improvement agenda includes challenging ambitions for children and young people. These are clearly set out in the draft Children and Young People's Plan. The council's priorities and corporate and community strategies also demonstrate a shared commitment to putting children and young people at the centre of Brent's ambitious economic regeneration programme. Children and young people's views are gathered in a variety of ways. Consultation activities are not yet sufficiently coordinated and there is not consistent feedback to young people, although there are plans in place to improve on this. There is a strong commitment to the integration of services, reflected in the careful planning towards the establishment of a single Children and Families Department from July 2005, and continuing incremental developments. Coordinated delivery of priority services in disadvantaged localities is already beginning to produce some early results.

26. The capacity of the council and its partners to deliver better outcomes for children and young people is adequate. The capacity to improve is good. The director and the lead member for children and families services are in place, and senior officers and councillors are committed to improving services for children and young people. Recruitment of professional staff in children's social care remains more of a challenge than in education where teacher recruitment is currently more stable. Relationships are constructive at strategic and operational levels, but new partnership structures put in place to support integrated services will need time to embed fully. The council uses its resources well, with good consideration of getting value for money. Since 2003/04 the council has addressed historical underfunding in social services and education through year-on-year increased funding. Although resources remain limited,

budgets and targets are generally well controlled and restructuring of budgets is accompanying the integration of services. Joint commissioning and pooled budgets are at an early stage of implementation. Performance management arrangements are good and have resulted in improved services. However, performance management across new partnerships is as yet underdeveloped.

Grades

Grades awarded:

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

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

Recommendations

For immediate action

- Implement rapidly the plans to provide full-time provision for all pupils permanently excluded from schools.
- Ensure all first reviews for looked after children are held on time.

For action over the next six months

- Set challenging targets to deliver improved recruitment and retention of social workers in all teams.
- Improve services to looked after children by taking action to:
 - raise their educational attainment
 - reduce the proportion of older children in residential placements or placed at a distance from the borough
 - ensure foster carers and relevant staff are able to provide good support in matters of sexual health and relationships
 - ensure care-leavers are appropriately prepared for independent living.
- Increase the rate at which planned changes are implemented through the following development projects:
 - integrated services covering all age groups
 - transition arrangements

and improve collaboration between these projects.

- Improve services to children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families through:
 - increasing the responsiveness of Children and Families Services to meeting their support needs
 - ensuring services to meet their assessed needs are reliably delivered.
- Finalise and implement the 14–19 strategy and action plans, to include improved data in order to plan suitable progression routes for young people.
- Ensure rigorous monitoring of targets and performance indicators by key strategic and operational partnership groups to ensure outcomes are being achieved.

Main report

Outcomes for children and young people

27. **Outcomes for most children and young people in Brent are good.**

28. **An adequate proportion of children and young people are healthy.** Outcomes for children and young people are good in many areas of the borough as a result of the support parents and carers receive to develop healthy lifestyles. The quality of care overall is improving and the systematic efforts to understand the cultural and practical issues which influence the use of services is helping to ensure access for more vulnerable populations. The majority of young people surveyed for this review considered themselves to be quite healthy. Compared with national rates Brent has relatively low rates of smoking and alcohol use in pregnancy. Low birth weight and infant mortality rates have, however, been higher than in comparable areas. Immunisation rates for infants and pre-school children are improving and specific action to promote oral health is showing signs of positive impact. The services and facilities for treating acute illness are of a high standard and emergency admissions to hospital are below the national average. Healthcare for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good overall. Looked after children are now receiving dedicated health support. Teenage pregnancy rates are high and rising; additional research on this is now guiding different approaches and interventions. There is evidence that sexually transmitted infections in young people are reducing.

29. **Good child protection systems are now keeping children safe, but many children and young people feel less safe in the community.**

Children who responded to a questionnaire generally felt safe at school, but girls in particular felt less safe in the local area. Young people are clear about which areas are unsafe. In general, more young people than those responding to the survey nationally feel uneasy about bullies and gangs and would like to see more police on the streets. The approach to community safety in hotspot areas and through regeneration work has reduced the level of anti-social behaviour. The number of children injured in road accidents has reduced.

30. Agencies work well together to safeguard children most at risk. Staff are well trained and supported in carrying out their role in protecting children. The number of children on the child protection register has reduced, with no increase in the number re-registered, which indicates improving practice. All children on the child protection register have an allocated social worker. The proportion of initial assessments completed in a timely way has decreased and is below the performance of similar councils, but the completion of core assessments has improved. Systems for ensuring safe staff recruitment appear to be robust.

31. The numbers of children adopted from care are low, although plans are in place to address this. All looked after children have care plans. The timeliness

of reviews has improved, but initial reviews are not consistently held on time. Good attention is paid to any child protection needs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but these children and their families do not receive timely support.

32. Children are prepared adequately for school and most achieve very well. Overall, there are sufficient early education and childcare places to meet the needs of children and parents, and the quality of provision is generally satisfactory. The educational standards achieved at school by most children are better than the national averages and for similar areas and they make very good progress. The achievement of pupils in special schools is good. However, looked after children, Black African and Black Caribbean children do not always achieve well. Attendance at schools is in line with the average in similar areas. It is in line with the national average in secondary schools, but is below the national average in primary schools. Rates of unauthorised absence are low in both primary and secondary schools. The number of exclusions from secondary schools has risen recently to a high level. The majority of children and young people responding to a questionnaire find life very enjoyable.

33. Children and young people have a good range of opportunities to make decisions that affect their lives both at school and in the wider community. They make a good contribution, especially in areas of local regeneration. There are a number of ways in which all children and young people, including those with significant difficulties in their lives, can contribute to service planning and can make their views known. Looked after children are regularly involved in their reviews and they have a say about the arrangements and quality of provision provided for them. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with complex needs, make a positive contribution to borough-wide consultation events and school councils. Hard-to-reach groups, such as those involved in street crime, drugs, alcohol-related problems and bullying are effectively encouraged to express their views. Two thirds of young people feel it is relatively easy to have a say and make a difference to the way things are run both at school and in their local area. Young people at risk of offending enjoy a good range of activities which encourage them to re-engage with learning, and targeted work with young offenders is beginning to reduce rates of re-offending. Consultation with these young people, although developing, is not yet robust. Those living in areas recently improved through regeneration are very positive about how much safer they now feel and express optimism about their future.

34. Young people are adequately prepared for working life and many are able to achieve economic well-being. The proportion of young people continuing in education at 16 is high and the number accepted onto higher education programmes is above the average for London. Young people in Brent's schools make good progress. The success rates at GCSE have improved and are above national averages. A-level success rates have also improved but remain below the national average. Data is unreliable on the number of young people who achieve level 2 by the age of 19, one of the government's targets.

The proportion of young people on apprenticeship programmes is small and the success rates are low. The number of young people between the ages of 16 and 18 not in education, employment or training has been successfully reduced from 8% in 2004 to 5.9% in 2005. Good progress has been made in monitoring and supporting young people, particularly those from vulnerable groups, including those at risk of offending, and most are engaged in education, employment or training. Significant regeneration has taken place in some neighbourhoods, improving the economic prospects for families and young people. Appropriate housing for families and young people is in short supply and many spend significant periods of time in temporary accommodation.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

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

36. There has been a systematic effort to understand the cultural and practical issues that influence uptake of preventative services. Community initiatives and opportunistic work at both hospitals, and outreach work in the early years and school settings, aim to reach groups that are hard to engage. This has resulted, for example, in rising rates of immunisation, and this trend is being maintained. However, unsatisfactory housing conditions, particularly in temporary housing in parts of the borough, are adversely impacting on the health of families and constrain the impact of this preventive work.

37. Maternity services for the population of Brent have been under review in the last 12 months and this has provided an impetus to look at the factors which seem to be associated with poorer outcomes for mothers and babies in certain groups in the community. Community midwifery services are being enhanced to support more vulnerable groups of women through pregnancy. Breastfeeding is being actively promoted. There is a relatively low rate of smoking in pregnancy, and families with young children are signposted to smoking cessation services.

38. Advice on healthy eating is provided in a number of settings and there are imaginative schemes to enable access to fresh fruit and vegetables for more deprived communities. The Healthy Schools programme is effectively coordinating health promotion programmes for children and young people and schools value the input of school nursing and health promotion staff. The present national focus on school meals and tackling obesity is providing additional resources to take this work forward. Physical activity is being promoted in schools and through community settings. Free swimming in school holidays, promoting activity through dance, and encouraging the use of parks in the borough is increasing the level of involvement of young people in physical activities. The health surveillance programmes at pre-school and school ages

follow national guidance. Parenting programmes developed through Sure Start are delivered to the wider community through trained health visitors.

39. The young people's element of the substance misuse work in the borough appears well resourced and schools are supported in developing and delivering associated policies. There is particular emphasis on children and young people excluded from school and input to the YOT, although communication between staff is not always effective. There has been a major focus on sexual health and teenage pregnancy in response to the rising rates of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. There is clear shared ownership across health services and the local area is aware of the need to address these issues. Outside consultants have been used to review the existing interventions and to advise on approaches which will target the attitudes and behaviour of the different communities in the borough. These initiatives are to be closely monitored and evaluated. Genito-urinary medicine services are specifically aimed at young people and access targets are met. There is evidence emerging that transmission rates of sexually transmitted infections are reducing at a faster rate than nationally and than in comparable areas.

40. Positive mental health promotion is a high priority and there is good evidence of anti-bullying policies and a high level of racial harmony in schools that contribute to this. There is also open access to counselling, advice and specific programmes to develop self-esteem and reduce anti-social behaviour. Mental health needs are being effectively addressed through community-based initiatives; there is open access to young people through Place to Be and Place to Talk, which are well used and are viewed positively by young people. Schools report that CAMHS are accessible for advice and referrals are seen within target waiting times. The service is well integrated with behaviour support programmes. The lower uptake of CAMHS by Asian families is an issue which is being looked at with faith leaders and other representatives of these communities. The African Child voluntary organisation has been successful in helping Black families and young people work with CAMHS. The access of the YOT to CAMHS, however, is unsatisfactory. There is no CAMHS worker in the YOT, and no formal referral system, which the YOT workers had circumvented by referrals through general practitioners.

41. There is high use of accident and emergency (A&E) services. Different cultural experiences of health services outside the UK and varying understanding of the role of primary care and hospital services in the NHS may be influencing this. The paediatric A&E services in the two major hospitals in the area, and the ambulatory care facilities and the in-patient children's provision, are of high quality, child-focused and well coordinated with community services, which will be further enhanced through the new Central Middlesex Hospital facilities. The specific health needs of the community are well understood and services such as sickle cell provision demonstrate a good response to these. There is a well-resourced community nursing service and palliative care provision is in place funded by a Neighbourhood Opportunities Fund grant, but recruitment difficulties have delayed its full implementation.

42. The designated service for looked after children has been refocused to improve access for young people. Health checks for these children have been low at an uptake of 73%. Interventions are now based on a health promotion rather than a medical approach, and there is early evidence that this is more acceptable to young people. A CD-Rom resource package for pregnant teenagers has been developed with looked after young women as the main focus, but there is no clear strategy for training and providing advice to social workers and foster carers on sexual health.

43. Clinical provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. There is a well-resourced child development service with effective multi-agency working and involvement of parents and carers. Complex care packages are agreed in a responsive way for home and school support through jointly funded agreements and protocols. There are well-established arrangements and responsive assessment and support to children who may have a disability. Multidisciplinary approaches in the two NHS children's centres and in special schools reduce duplication and provide flexible and appropriate input to meet the needs of individual children and families. This approach is now being extended to the multi-agency assessment process and the pilot projects of the common assessment framework.

Staying safe

44. The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.

45. Corporately, the council understands its responsibility to keep children safe and works effectively with its partners, including the voluntary sector, to do so. In particular, the council and its partners have used the opportunities arising through regeneration to improve the safety of children and young people. The delivery of social care services is continuing to improve in quality through good management and recent progress in recruiting permanent and skilled team managers. The recruitment and retention of social workers is a constant problem, as staff turnover is affecting the service delivered to children, families and carers. A high priority has been given to ensuring services continue to protect children while council services are integrated and this is being achieved.

46. A range of good initiatives is in place to improve community safety. This includes the Not Another Drop programme to reduce the impact of gun crime. Schools and colleges are providing a safe environment and helping children to increase their personal safety, and children responding to a questionnaire generally felt safe within school. Bullying is dealt with effectively in schools. Children and young people whose neighbourhoods had been improved through regeneration felt safer as a result, but others continue to have high concerns about personal safety, particularly at the end of the school day and when using public transport. Initiatives to address this are being developed in some hotspot

areas using wardens or outreach workers, but are not yet having sufficient impact across the borough.

47. Agencies are liaising well to share information about children's whereabouts in their day-to-day work. A high-level information-sharing policy is in place, and agencies are effectively developing information sharing through the integrated services pilot projects, which can then be used across the council area.

48. The newly established LSCB has set a comprehensive agenda with clear priorities covering national and local issues, including safe recruitment of people working with children. The council's recruitment procedures appear robust, and cover both permanent and agency staff. Serious case reviews have been undertaken by the previous Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC), with lessons learned disseminated through training. Written procedures are comprehensive and up to date. Performance management by the LSCB and, previously, the ACPC is improving practice across agencies. The LSCB has appropriate links to the Multi Agency Public Protection Panel, which has a child-focused approach to keeping children safe from adults who may present a risk to them.

49. Child protection training is given high priority in Brent. Staff across all settings, including the voluntary sector, confirm that they receive adequate levels of training to equip them to carry out their individual roles. Social work staff are supported in working effectively through regular supervision and workloads are generally manageable. Evidence from case tracking shows agencies are now working well together, resulting in improved outcomes for children.

50. The Referral and Assessment Service is producing some good assessments and the team has a positive working partnership with the police on child-protection investigations. Previous poor performance is now being addressed through effective management, good systems and staff training. Some children's cases had been re-referred, having been inappropriately closed in the past. Referring agencies feel a good service is delivered. The service does not have sufficient capacity to respond to a recent sharp rise in referrals. Although the work is prioritised well to ensure that children are not put at risk, this is leading to a delay in allocating work and in undertaking assessments promptly.

51. The Common Assessment Framework pilot work in Kingsbury and Stonebridge is designed to achieve earlier intervention to support families, and will also bring structure and coordination to the range of family support work currently carried out through Sure Start, On Track and voluntary-sector organisations. A range of organisations within the diverse communities in Brent also assists families to provide safe care for their children and provides valuable links between families and agencies. Schools visited during this review worked well to support vulnerable children, using multi-agency meetings to link children to appropriate agencies and meet their needs.

52. The monitoring work of the placements panel and the recently established contracts service, as well as the independent reviewing service, is now bringing a better focus to safeguarding looked after children within their placements. Social workers and carers are knowledgeable about the complex needs of looked after children. The council acknowledges that too high a proportion of young people aged over 12 are placed in residential care or outside the borough, and is now taking steps to address this. Kinship care is well developed and case tracking shows that extended families are appropriately considered as the first resource when children have to leave their immediate family. The rate of adoption is low.

53. A significant proportion of looked after children has been accommodated following family breakdown. The multidisciplinary Family Support Team, recently established through CAMHS funding, works with young people and their families to avoid this, and there is evidence of some good practice. The work will need to be clearly evaluated to ensure its impact is maximised. Although the timeliness of statutory reviews is in line with national averages, there is often a delay in holding the first review, which research shows may hinder plans to rehabilitate a young person with their family.

54. An adequate range of local services is available for disabled children and their families. However, while the social work service for children with disabilities appropriately prioritises child protection work, it is not offering a responsive service for assessment of family need or providing sufficient support. Good use is made of local voluntary and private agencies to provide additional relevant and specialist support. Children and young people are supported in expressing concerns about their treatment or care. Staff in all settings are well trained and aware of how to safeguard children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A multi-agency transition planning group is well ahead with identifying improved approaches in supporting children and young people and their families as they move from one setting to another, although this group is not sufficiently linked to the integrated services project group. There is insufficient respite care available for all families who have been assessed as needing it and planned respite sessions are often cancelled at short notice due to emergency cases.

Enjoying and achieving

55. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** There is a wide range of generally good-quality support for parents and carers to enable them to assist their children to achieve well and enjoy life. Information from the Children's Information Service enables parents and carers to select suitable early years providers. Parents in more deprived areas where Sure Start has been developed are generally satisfied with the support they receive. There are good systems for ensuring parents of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are aware of their entitlement to financial support.

The council has also provided training that has helped schools to improve the quality of their support to parents and carers.

56. The council has provided a strong lead in developing provision for the early years, which is resulting in improvements in the amount and quality of what is available. It has carried out a comprehensive and thorough analysis, identified shortcomings clearly and accurately, and taken appropriate action, for example provision for Traveller children has been made on-site. New places have been made available in areas where there is need and plans to fill remaining gaps are being implemented. There is a thorough and systematic process for monitoring the quality of early years education and a structured programme of training and support, which is bringing about improvements, for example in developing outdoor play.

57. Recent inspection reports show that most schools are satisfactory or good. Where there are weaknesses, the council has taken action swiftly and robustly, with good results. Systems for monitoring and challenging schools are thorough and carried out rigorously. Schools are given effective support with their self-evaluation. Partnerships with schools are good and these are used well to provide effective support for improvement. Good use is made of national strategies for raising attainment. The council makes good use of data on pupils' performance and has accurately identified groups of children and young people, such as looked after children and some minority ethnic groups, who are underachieving. The council was described by a group of headteachers as going 'above and beyond' in its work to support inclusion. This is helping schools to meet the needs of a broad range of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good multi-agency working and responsive services, such as the Brent Outreach Autism Team, are helping schools to meet the needs of an increased number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

58. Parents and carers are provided with clear advice on admissions to schools. Although there are currently surplus places in schools, these will soon be filled by the population growth in the area. Attendance at school is generally good and the education welfare service and schools work well together to target areas where it is not. Despite this, the level of authorised absence in primary schools is above the national average. Schools are provided with effective support for maintaining good behaviour and schools collaborate to provide places for pupils who are difficult to manage. Good use is made of programmes such as On Track with pupils in primary schools, and voluntary organisations make a significant contribution to supporting children and young people, raising their self-esteem and, as they described it, helping 'pennies to shine like pounds'. Children and young people in Brent schools generally achieve well and there is a good trend of improvement for most pupils, including those with a statement of educational need. Support is being directed to pupils within some minority ethnic groups where there is underachievement, which is beginning to have some impact. Brent Young Carers Project provides a good range of interesting activities and visits in a regular and reasonably

frequent programme during term time. There is good support available to schools to support the learning of looked after children. 'Booster classes' are provided to improve their attainment, but a large proportion of this group is not entered for GCSEs and their achievement is generally lower than that of their peers. When placements of looked after children have broken down, this has sometimes resulted in a lack of continuity in their education. The council has identified this as a reason for underachievement and is taking action to improve continuity of educational placement through the Placements Panel.

59. The number of pupils excluded permanently from secondary schools has risen significantly recently. The council has monitored the reasons for exclusions thoroughly and has a clear picture of the causes of the recent rise. It is using this information intelligently to plan improvements in services to schools and provision for young people. A greater proportion of pupils from particular groups are excluded than others, including looked after children and pupils with statements of special educational needs. Overall, there is good provision for excluded pupils, but a small minority with very challenging behaviour who are more difficult to place receive less than full-time provision. Programmes such as 'Not School' have enabled some pupils to complete their GCSEs who would not otherwise have done so.

60. The local authority's Play and Sports Strategies are leading to tangible improvements in the range and quality of opportunities for children and young people's leisure and recreation. Schools provide good opportunities for activities outside the classroom and around 4,000 children are involved with the Play Service. Free swimming sessions are available in the summer and there is a discount scheme for older young people. Transport is provided for children to attend the Youth Inclusion Programme homework club, which provides social activities as well as helping them with their homework. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is a popular programme run by the youth service. However, only 15% of young people use the youth service. Despite significant improvements made to the facilities in parks, some young people strongly expressed views that anti-social behaviour by others made them unsafe. Most children and young people responding to a questionnaire say they find life enjoyable and the majority find it easy to find things to do, but generally they would like more. In particular, while there is a range of activities for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, these are not sufficient for all who would like them. Children and young people are proud of their diverse community and think the local authority does much to celebrate this.

Making a positive contribution

61. **The combined work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.** Local partners do much to promote and support the emotional, social and personal development of children and young people in Brent. Actions targeted in areas of regeneration and known crime hotspots are very effective in developing young people's social awareness. The local authority is a key partner in this work and gives

good support and encouragement to many voluntary and community programmes. The work in local communities is wide ranging and mainly of good quality, and also provides valuable support to families and carers. Families having difficulties with relationships are able to refer themselves to supportive parenting programmes.

62. Early years settings help the youngest children learn to make relationships and become confident, although provision for social and emotional development has occasionally been found to be unsatisfactory in full day-care nursery provision. All schools provide satisfactory or better opportunities for children and young people to develop positive relationships, to take responsibility and value diversity. Some of the extended schools provision that is developing is very good. The neighbourhood study in Church End and its recent regeneration demonstrates how well many children and young people have respect for and pride in their community and take growing responsibility for the environment and its residents.

63. Generally, children and young people have good guidance and support at the times when change and transition are most difficult. Personal mentors, school tutors and counsellors are available for older children with particular needs, and the Connexions service personal advisers are a valuable part of this support. Good support and advice is available for the most vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers, youth offenders, looked after children, young carers and teenage mothers. This support is well targeted and wide ranging. Voluntary agencies also play a vital role with the disaffected and hard-to-reach groups, as does the police service through its safer neighbourhoods teams. However, other less vulnerable young people reported that there are insufficient places and services for them to access good advice on health and safety issues.

64. The management and effectiveness of transfer and transition for children between educational settings, primary and secondary schools, is variable. The authority is developing with schools a policy to improve the experiences that children have and the efficiency with which information is transferred. The Brent Community Friends group effectively gives a voice to children who are looked after. There is great emphasis on encouraging them to contribute to planning and decision-making about their lives through their reviews. The number involved in review meetings is higher than the national figure and foster carers feel their views are listened to. Multi-agency planning for transition at key times for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well supported by initiatives such as a 'transitional buddy'. However, the views of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not consistently recorded in annual reviews. Currently, some families are not receiving sufficient support with delays in accessing services such as play therapy.

65. The local strategic partnership's commitment to involving children and young people, including vulnerable groups, in decision-making processes is strong. Most children are encouraged to participate in decision-making at local level and a small number of young people are involved at a more strategic level

through the Brent Youth Forums. Evidence from the concurrent inspections of the youth services and the YOT report their good work in targeting young people to gather and use their views, ideas and energy and involve them in planning and decisions about their provision. School councils are a major arena where all ages of children and young people contribute to decision-making in their school and locality. They plan and organise events and take seriously their responsibility with staff for matters such as bullying. Meetings with these young people demonstrate how much they contribute, and the social confidence that they gain as a result. Careful consideration has been given to increasing the ways in which children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities participate. They have their voice heard at a strategic level and they have been active participants in consultation events. Nevertheless, while children and young people contribute to planning for the services provided for them, their involvement in the evaluation of provision is not common and they do not always receive feedback on decisions taken. Where they do evaluate, such as youth services programmes, the young people are robust in their judgements about the quality of provision.

66. Initiatives to reduce anti-social behaviour are effective, with some dramatic improvements in particular areas. There are good working practices and relationships across agencies, such as the YOT, the youth service, the police, social housing organisations and voluntary groups. This is having a positive impact on the range of activities available to prevent young people at risk of offending becoming offenders and in re-engaging them successfully in education programmes. There is an increasing trend in the number of young offenders in full-time education, employment or training. The rates of re-offending, as shown by examination of the Youth Justice Board performance data over a 24-month period, were below the average of their statistical neighbours and other London boroughs. The proportion of looked after children who receive final warnings and convictions is below the national average and reducing. The Safer Neighbourhoods police teams are building strong relationships with many children and young people in local communities. In the neighbourhood studied in detail during this review the partnership between the team and the regeneration company has reduced complaints about anti-social behaviour to one fifth of the previous level.

Achieving economic well-being

67. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.** Brent has good strategies to support families seeking employment, particularly in areas of neighbourhood renewal. The 'Brent in2 Work' project effectively coordinates a range of good programmes that have been successful in helping unemployed parents update their literacy and other skills to equip them to return to work. Parents are provided with a good range of information about the services and facilities available to them. Action is being taken to ensure sufficient good-quality childcare provision is available to meet the local needs. However, the take-up of

education maintenance allowances has reduced, and information is not observed to be readily available.

68. Support for most young people to help them prepare for working life is adequate. Careers education and guidance in schools is good and increasing support is planned from the Connexions service. Many schools make effective use of a range of events and activities organised through the education business partnership to support the work-related curriculum. A good variety of mentoring schemes, including business mentors, is available to young people. The Brent and Harrow work experience consortium arranges a satisfactory range of work experience for most schools, including appropriate placements for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The 14–19 steering group recognises the need to improve the links between the different agencies involved in work-related learning. As part of the Aim Higher initiative, visits by school pupils have taken place to various higher education institutions in the London area to raise aspirations, especially among those from under-represented groups.

69. The Connexions service changed to a borough-based structure in 2004 and this has improved the links with the local authority. An increasing number of personal advisers are being recruited to support vulnerable young people, in particular teenage parents, to assist them back into education, employment or training. Effective strategies have been implemented to improve the tracking and monitoring of young people in the borough and the number of young people whose destination is not known has been significantly reduced. Participation in education, employment and training has improved for all groups and is above the average for west London. A high proportion of young people from vulnerable groups, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those leaving the youth justice system and those leaving care, is in employment, education or training. Most 16 year olds continue education after Year 11, a considerably higher proportion than the national average. Around half of young people stay on in Brent school sixth forms or go to the College of North West London, while the other half move to other institutions outside the borough. While this is consistent with the encouragement of parental and student choice, the local area has not researched whether this outflow is due to any gaps in provision or quality within Brent.

70. Brent schools and the College of North West London offer a good range of academic and vocational studies for 14–19 year olds. The proportion of young people who stay on in education at 16 has shown a consistent increase and the number accepted onto higher education programmes is above the average for London. The proportion of young people who gain good A-level qualifications has improved. Although attainment remains below the national average, affected by the different cohort of students following changes of educational setting after Year 11, progress is good. The success rates in the college are below the national average, but improving in some areas. Courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and some level 3 courses are above national averages. The progress made by young people in this borough with

high diversity, deprivation and population mobility indicates a positive impact on their economic well-being in adult life. Participation rates and success rates in work-based learning accessed by Brent residents are low, although E2E programmes are satisfactory.

71. The overall strategy for 14–19 education and training has evolved from previous strategies but is still in development. Outcomes are good through contributions of single agencies or partnerships, but the overall strategic approach needs to be developed further. However, a good start has been made on collaborative working arrangements for 14–19 provision. A partnership has been established to provide an effective alternative curriculum for young people who do not attend school regularly. The College of North West London offers all Brent schools places on four vocational increased flexibility programmes. Achievement rates have been low but improvements to the courses have increased the current retention rates. Some good partnerships have been established between schools and a well-coordinated 14–19 curriculum is offered in some parts of the borough. The 14–19 strategic coordinator is working with schools to improve self-evaluation and to develop further the post-16 curriculum. The school improvement service is supporting a review of teaching in sixth forms, starting in spring 2006.

72. There are two large-scale pan-London economic development projects in the area, Park Royal and Wembley. The local authority has effective strategies for regeneration and neighbourhood renewal. Initiatives have been developed with the close involvement of local community groups, families and young people, which have improved the economic prospects for children and young people in these neighbourhoods. The development of the Wembley Stadium complex has increased employment prospects in construction, and an effective partnership between Brent Council and the college is enabling local people to develop their skills and find employment. The college is currently developing a range of new programmes to meet the needs of employers. The 14–19 steering group is aware of the need to develop a greater knowledge of the local labour market so that appropriate progression routes can be developed to meet employers' needs and skills gaps.

73. In common with other London boroughs, affordable accommodation is in short supply. A high number of families and young people stay in temporary accommodation for long periods of time. The council does ensure that families and vulnerable young people spend no more than six weeks in bed and breakfast accommodation. Young people's access to affordable housing is limited, although agencies are working in partnership to increase resources and to educate young people about housing issues including homelessness. The council is making good progress towards meeting the decent homes standard by 2010.

74. The support and transition arrangements for young people who are looked after and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to help them into employment, education and training are effective. Young people who are

looked after have satisfactory pathway plans and high proportions are in education, employment or training compared with other local authorities. Some care-leavers felt they were required to live independently before they were ready. Transition arrangements for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into employment, education and training are being reviewed by a multi-agency team to improve support and sharing of information across agencies. There have been improvements to the range and quality of college courses for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and better achievement rates, but there are fewer opportunities for young people with complex needs. Good advice and guidance is provided through the Connexions service, and health service professionals provide valued support in ensuring personal and welfare support is identified. More young people or their parents or carers are beginning to take up direct payments and local authority officers are active in promoting this option.

Service management

75. The management of services for children and young people is good and the capacity to improve is good. The shared ambition of the council and its partners for children and young people in the area is good. Brent's strategic vision and improvement agenda includes challenging ambitions for children and families which are clearly set out in the draft Children and Young People's Plan. The Local Preventative Strategy also rightly places a strong emphasis on preventive services, for example in children's centres and extended schools. The Youth Crime Prevention Strategy is attended by a range of partners, ensuring an integrated approach and implementation of the prevention strategy. The council's corporate and community strategies demonstrate a shared commitment to putting children and young people at the centre of Brent's ambitious economic regeneration programme. This strategic vision and agreed priorities have been developed through an initial needs assessment. Further work has been commissioned to ensure it fully reflects partners' input as well as quantitative and qualitative feedback from young people themselves.

76. The views of children and young people are routinely taken into account through a range of consultation mechanisms including active engagement in school councils and the Youth Forum. Future plans include the establishment of a Youth Parliament from September 2006. Young people and families have also been involved in neighbourhood renewal housing projects. Consultation activities are not yet sufficiently coordinated and there is not consistent feedback to young people, although there are plans in place to improve this.

77. Prioritisation is good. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board has set a challenging, collaborative agenda and key priorities. It provides the basis for an effective overarching strategic framework with appropriate links to the Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement (LAA). The council's commitment to children and young people is reflected well in its current Corporate Strategy, which has children and young people as one

of its five key priorities. A stronger focus on a number of priority areas has resulted in improvements across education, children's social care and health, supported by targeted investment. Improvements are still being sought in a number of challenging priority areas, including raising the educational attainment of looked after children and improving the rate of adoption.

78. The importance placed on the integration of services is reflected in the establishment of a single Children and Families Department from July 2005. Coordinated delivery of services in local neighbourhoods with high levels of social deprivation is beginning to produce some early outcomes, including Sure Start and children's centre initiatives in Church End. The draft Children and Young People's Plan is currently being widely consulted upon and will be in place by April 2006. Existing plans, such as the Education Development Plan and the LAA, clearly define actions, demonstrate the contribution of key partners and provide a firm basis for the future delivery of integrated services.

79. The capacity of the council and its partners to deliver better outcomes for children and young people is adequate. Their overall capacity to improve is good. The director and the lead member for children and families services are in place. The appointment of an assistant director for strategy and partnerships in October 2004, responsible for managing the development and coordination of integrated services, confirms the council's commitment to ensuring sufficient senior managerial capacity. However, in some service areas, for example in the referral and assessment teams, there are currently limited resources to deal with fluctuations in demand.

80. The integration of Children and Families Services, undertaken on an agreed incremental basis rather than radical structural change, has proceeded relatively smoothly. There has been a sound management approach to the change process based on visible leadership, shared values and a strong emphasis on minimising disruption to front-line services. Good communication of the changes has resulted in staff having a generally positive sense of ownership. Although some progress has been made, recruitment of key staff in children's social care remains more of a challenge than in education, where teacher recruitment is currently more stable.

81. There is good representation of Black and minority ethnic staff in services working with children and young people, but there is an acknowledged need to increase the representation in teaching and senior management positions. A corporate-wide target has been set for this and is being regularly monitored as a critical performance indicator. There has been good investment in children's social care training with a greater percentage of the annual budget than similar councils. The appointment of a human resources strategy manager in Children and Families Services will enable a priority focus on workforce planning and development.

82. A stronger culture of partnership working in Brent is developing among statutory agencies and with parts of the voluntary and community sector. There

are generally good interagency relationships at both strategic and at operational level and the council actively fulfils its community leadership role. Relationships with schools and headteachers are a particular strength.

83. The council makes good use of its resources and gives priority to ensuring value for money. The council has acknowledged a historical underfunding in social services and education but since 2002/03 there have been year-on-year increases. Although resources remain limited, budgets and targets are generally well controlled. With its partners, it attracts considerable external funding which is targeted at areas of disadvantage. Education costs are generally in line with national averages and attainment is generally above national averages. The council has received a healthy grant settlement for education which will enable it to fund key developments, linked to plans in the medium-term financial strategy. Alongside the integration of services there has been an incremental approach to restructuring and integrating budgets. Robust monitoring of budgets and performance of children's social care and education continues to be undertaken within the new department.

84. Performance indicators have shown consistent improvement in the Children and Families Department and are broadly in line with similar authorities and national averages. Performance data are not systematically reported alongside financial data, but there are examples where this has been done with some success. For example, there was a reduction in costly out-of-borough school placements for children with complex needs following the special educational needs review.

85. Plans for joint commissioning are at an early stage, but there are some examples, such as with the voluntary sector for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There has been a cautious approach to pooled budgets, mainly because of the legacy of council deficits and implications of health service restructuring. An overall umbrella agreement is planned between the council and key partners which will give flexibility in agreeing specific pooled budgets, the first of which will be for children with disabilities.

86. The council and its partners adequately manage the performance of their services. The council has strengthened its performance management arrangements since 2002/03. Increased attention has been given at council and department levels to regular monitoring against performance indicators, key targets and stated priority commitments by senior management and councillors. Comprehensive management information for children and families is produced on a monthly basis, building on the previous robust high-level monitoring of social services. Commentary on variances is included but trend analysis and benchmarking are limited. Although service managers are aware of how their services are performing, not all action plans include measurable targets and outcomes. Scrutiny across the council is variable and not yet sufficiently robust.

87. Performance management across new partnership arrangements is as yet underdeveloped, for example there is limited collection and coordination of performance information on the effectiveness of their activities. An outline performance management framework has been agreed by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board, which is to be tested during 2006. However, there has been effective performance management across agencies through the ACPC, which resulted in improvements to the functioning of child protection conferences and core groups.

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

1. Overall, the council is performing well in meeting the needs of children and young people, although some services need to improve further, building on progress already made. Brent's strategic vision and improvement agenda includes challenging ambitions for children and young people which are clearly set out in the draft Children and Young People's Plan. The council's corporate and community strategies also demonstrate a shared commitment to putting children and young people at the centre of Brent's ambitious economic regeneration in a holistic way. The importance placed on the integration of services is reflected in the establishment of a single children and families department from July 2005. Coordinated delivery of priority services in disadvantaged localities is already beginning to produce some early outcomes.

2. Use of resources and value for money are both good overall. The council has acknowledged historical underfunding in social services and education and has addressed this since 2002/03 by year-on-year increased funding. Joint commissioning and pooled budgets are at an early stage of implementation.

3. The combined work of local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. Health promotion work is achieving some success through greater understanding of cultural issues influencing uptake, and is beginning to engage groups that are hard to reach. The Healthy Schools programme is a major vehicle for effective coordination of health promotion programmes for children and young people. The positive promotion of mental health is given high priority. A more accessible approach to health checks for looked after children is beginning to lead to better uptake. There is a well-resourced child development service with effective multi-agency working to meet the needs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families.

4. The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate with some significant strengths. The newly established Local Safeguarding Children Board is raising the profile of child protection issues. Social care services are now well managed and front-line services have shown consistent improvement, but continued progress is needed on recruitment and retention of permanent staff. The Referral and Assessment Service is now working effectively to ensure children are safeguarded, but is not consistently able to assess the needs of other children in need and their families promptly. Staff across agencies are generally well trained in child protection work, and agencies are now working very well together to safeguard and improve outcomes for children. Partner agencies are developing pilot integrated services programmes to offer support to families at an earlier stage. Looked after children are adequately safeguarded within their placements, but many are placed a distance from Brent. Some good services are in place to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but the social work team is not currently meeting families' support needs in a timely way.

5. The overall contribution of services in helping children and young people to enjoy and achieve is good. Good advice and guidance is available to parents. Schools and early years settings receive good support, and the council makes good use of national strategies to improve pupils' attainment. Pupils generally make very good progress in school and attainment is above national averages, although certain groups of children underachieve, such as looked after children. Many children and young people enjoy life and are proud of Brent's diverse community. There are insufficient leisure and recreation opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

6. The combined work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. Local services are very effective at helping children and young people to develop socially and emotionally. Children and young people increasingly feel that their views are taken seriously at a strategic, local and personal level, but there is insufficient feedback on decisions made on their behalf. Consultation with minority groups and vulnerable young people is systematic and supportive action is taken as a result. Looked after children's cultural needs are considered when placements are made, but some experience too many changes of school, affecting their achievement over time. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are being involved well, through the Youth Forum and school councils. Good preventive programmes reduce young people's involvement in anti-social behaviour and support them to re-engage with education programmes. Although youth offending figures are reducing, the rates of offending are still high and above the national figure.

7. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. Young people in Brent schools make good progress at A level, although attainment remains below national averages. The proportion of children and young people continuing in education at 16 is higher than average and many continue in higher education. There are good partnership arrangements to support transition for vulnerable groups into education employment or training, with good success rates. However, the overall strategy for 14–19 education and training and collaborative partnership working is still in development. Partners are starting to work towards cohesive and comprehensive provision, but there is insufficient reliable information and data to inform planning. Well-developed strategies are in place to regenerate the most deprived neighbourhoods and improve the economic prospects for families and young people. Suitable housing for families and young people is in short supply and many spend significant periods of time in temporary accommodation.