

Joint Area Review

West Berkshire 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
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Introduction

1. The 2006 annual performance assessment for West Berkshire judged the council's children's services as good, and its capacity to improve as excellent.
2. This report assesses the contribution of local services in ensuring the following for children and young people:
 - effective care for those at risk or requiring safeguarding
 - the best possible outcomes for those who are looked after
 - the best possible outcomes for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
3. Beyond those outlined in paragraph 2 above, there were no additional investigations conducted as part of the joint area review.

Context

4. West Berkshire has a population of just over 146,000, spread across a primarily rural area covering 272 square miles. The area is comparatively prosperous, ranking 245th out of the 354 local authorities in England in the national Index of Multiple Deprivation (2004). There are, however, pockets of relative deprivation, both in urban and some of the more isolated rural communities. Location in terms of road and rail access is good, although many workers commute long distances.
5. The proportion of the population from Black or minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average (2.6% compared to 10% nationally). The largest ethnic group is Asian-Indian. Around a fifth of the population is aged under 16, in line with the position nationally. Just under half of the 110 looked after children have some form of special educational need (SEN) and 35 of the children have an SEN statement.
6. Pre-16 education is provided through: 79 early years settings (44 operated by voluntary bodies and 35 privately run); 305 childminders; two children's centres/nursery schools; eight infant schools; seven junior schools; 51 primary schools; 10 secondary schools; two special schools; and five pupil referral units. Four independent schools also provide free nursery education.
7. Post-16 education is provided through sixth forms in all secondary schools and the two special schools. Provision is also made at Newbury College and Thames Valley University in Reading. Work-based training is provided by West Berkshire Training Consortium and Newbury College.
8. Entry to Employment (E2E) provision is managed by West Berkshire Training Consortium, offering up to 22 places at any given time.

9. Adult and community learning, including family learning, is provided by Newbury College, the Community Council for Berkshire, West Berkshire Mencap, P2E, Turning Point, Berkshire West Primary Care Trust, the Community Mental Health Team, the Family Resource Service, Victoria Park Nursery and Children's Centre, the Riverside Community Centre, Open Studios/the Downs School, Denefield School, the Teenage Pregnancy Unit and Thatcham Medical Practice.

10. Primary care is provided by the Berkshire West Primary Care Trust, which was formed in October 2006 following the merger of the former Newbury and Community, Reading and Wokingham primary care trusts. Berkshire West Primary Care Trust covers the whole area of West Berkshire Council as well as the areas of Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council.

11. Acute hospital services are provided by the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, formed in June 2006. The Trust provides acute medical and surgical services to the people of West Berkshire, Reading and Wokingham and specialist services to a wider population. Accident and emergency services are provided at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading. The Trust also manages the day surgery unit and the acute out-patients department of the West Berkshire Community Hospital near Newbury. Other acute care is commissioned from Basingstoke District Hospital and The Great Western Hospital in Swindon.

12. Mental health services are provided by the Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. The Trust also provides specialist substance misuse services. In-patient services are provided at Prospect Park Hospital in Reading, Wexham Park in Slough, St Mark's in Maidenhead and Heatherwood in Ascot.

13. Children's social care services are provided at two children's centres and through a range of teams. A family resource service is based in two locations but works throughout the district. There are six field social work teams, two of which contribute to integrated locality teams. A disabled children's respite unit (Castle Gate), a youth offending team and 'The Edge', which is a substance misuse service, provide further support.

14. There are no young offender institutions in the area.

Main findings

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

- the contribution of local services to improving outcomes for children and young people at risk or requiring safeguarding is good. Operational arrangements have improved significantly over the last 12 months. However, support for young carers is inadequate
- outcomes for looked after children are good and improving and the contribution of local services to these is good. Supported housing for

care leavers is, however, limited, with the result that a minority are not adequately or appropriately housed on leaving foster care

- the contribution of local services to improving outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. However, there is limited access to work-based learning and not all leisure facilities meet the needs of children with disabilities
- the management of services for children and young people and the capacity to improve services further are good. Partnerships are strong, but the capacity of the voluntary sector to support children and young people is limited. Not all elected members fully understand their role as corporate parents.

Grades

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

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

Recommendations

For immediate action

The council and its strategic partners should:

- ensure that an appropriate way is found to successfully disseminate the findings of this report to children and young people in the area
- improve consistency in the use of procedures for monitoring and responding to racist incidents in schools and the local community
- ensure support mechanisms are restored for young carers and that these are accessible to all such children in the area
- increase access to Connexions advice for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who do not have a statement of special educational need

- increase support for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities making the transition at 16+ into work-based learning
- ensure that all elected members are aware of their responsibilities as corporate parents.

For action over the next six months

- draw up and implement an effective long-term workforce strategy for the partnership covering, for example, social workers and the youth service.

For action in the longer term

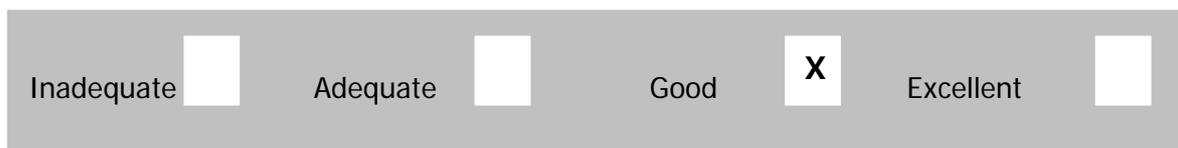
- improve the availability of supported housing to meet the anticipated needs of all care leavers
- draw up clear plans and identify funding to ensure that within two years all leisure facilities, particularly parks, playgrounds and swimming pools, are accessible to children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and are suited to their needs
- review the role of the voluntary sector and develop its capacity to ensure that it is able to make a wider contribution to supporting children and young people.

Equality and diversity

16. In its 2005–08 Strategic Plan, West Berkshire states that the children at risk of poor outcomes are its collective priority. The plan is not, however, specific in identifying all vulnerable groups of children and young people or the actions required to support them. Analysis and mapping of current provision are underway but the council does not yet have a full picture of how to fill the gaps in services. Just under half of young people live in rural areas and those without access to transport face difficulty in accessing services outside of school. The current strategy of extending provision in rural areas relies heavily on the voluntary sector, which has limited capacity.

17. The support for looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is better and more well-established than that targeted at other vulnerable groups, for example Travellers and Black and minority ethnic groups. The council has recently introduced a number of initiatives for these groups which are beginning to have a positive impact. For example, new arrivals to England are receiving support with language development and integration into schools. However, such initiatives are not yet routinely followed through to ensure that young people in these groups are as well supported as their peers.

Safeguarding



18. **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>Improved arrangements in the child and adolescent mental health service, including sharply reduced overall waiting times and improved access for vulnerable groups, such as looked after children.</p> <p>Good progress in reducing teenage smoking.</p> <p>Good safeguarding arrangements for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.</p> <p>Effective initiatives in place to deter and reduce anti-social behaviour by young people.</p> <p>Significant improvement in children's social care practice.</p> <p>The well developed Local Safeguarding Children Board.</p> <p>Effective multi-agency public protection arrangements.</p> <p>Good performance on key child protection indicators.</p> <p>Significant reductions in the number of pupils being excluded from secondary schools.</p>	<p>Low percentage of schools achieving the Healthy Schools standard.</p> <p>Lack of support for young carers.</p> <p>Underdeveloped procedures to ensure consistency of follow-up after racist incidents.</p>

19. Most safeguarding outcomes are good or better than those achieved by similar authorities. There is a very positive culture of safeguarding and strong inter-agency partnership working makes a major contribution to this. The council and its partners systematically review their work and changes are implemented appropriately to improve outcomes. The 2006 annual performance assessment recommended improvements to the child and adolescent mental health service to meet the needs of young people more effectively. Good

progress has been made, with overall waiting times reduced from 20 weeks to 10 and improved access for vulnerable groups, such as looked after children. Child and adolescent mental health assessments for young people known to the youth offending team are completed well and on time.

20. A range of appropriate strategies, policies and multi-agency initiatives is in place to promote healthy lifestyles at school and in the community. A 'stop smoking' adviser, jointly-funded by the council, the Primary Care Trust and through the Local Area Agreement, has helped to achieve a high success rate in the number of teenagers who have given up smoking. 'Drop-in' centres at four schools and at Newbury College, promoting healthy lifestyles including good sexual health, are well used. Young people also make good use of 'The Edge' service giving advice on avoiding substance misuse. Close links have been developed between health visitors and the children's centres. Participation of schools in the Healthy Schools programme is in line with similar authorities but the proportion so far achieving the standard is low. The attitudes of children and young people in West Berkshire to health issues and practices to achieve healthy lifestyles are broadly in line with those nationally.

21. Partners work together well to safeguard children and promote a culture of safeguarding. All agencies have adopted the 'strengthening families' model to drive preventative work. Effective use is made of family group and restorative conferences to assess and support families and children who are vulnerable. The number of referrals to this provision has increased by 30% in the last year. The engagement of families and children is high and the outcomes are good. Good systems are in place across health, education and social care for monitoring private foster placements. The proportion of children and young people who report that they feel safe is broadly in line with the national average.

22. Young people and their carers are well informed about key risks to their safety and how to deal with them, particularly by health visitors and school nurses. Good road and fire safety publicity has contributed to a significant reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured year-on-year. Early years settings give high priority to safety and many demonstrate outstanding practice. The anti-bullying policy, 'Safe to Live and Learn', has good general background information but does not contain sufficient detail on how it should be implemented. Children and young people are, however, aware of the procedures for countering bullying and make good use of them. Where bullying occurs in schools, accuracy of reporting and levels of support to victims are improving. There is monitoring of racist incidents and responses are made to these, but procedures to ensure consistency of follow-up are not well developed.

23. There is a broad and effective range of supportive early intervention to promote young people's safety. Mothers suffering from post-natal depression are given good support by a group funded by the Primary Care Trust. The West Berkshire Domestic Violence Forum also runs an effective service, helping to prevent domestic violence from affecting children. Good group and individual

work with families takes place in a variety of locations across West Berkshire, including in rural areas. Good inter-agency child protection procedures and protocols are in place and these are reinforced by effective child protection training. There are good arrangements for staff supervision in children's social care and within other agencies. The Local Safeguarding Children Board monitors the impact of multi-agency work on a regular basis.

24. Safeguarding arrangements for all settings supporting children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good. There are currently no disabled children on the child protection register and the local safeguarding children board is undertaking research to establish whether any children have been missed. Overall, arrangements to secure the safeguarding of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are robust.

25. Effective initiatives are in place to deter and reduce anti-social behaviour by young people, and numbers of young people entering the justice system are well below similar authorities. An outreach model of youth work has helped to promote a more tolerant attitude among young people and a multi-agency week of action in South Newbury resulted in anti-social behaviour being significantly reduced. Personal and social education in most schools is good and the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme is having a very positive impact on the attitudes and behaviour of children in many primary schools.

26. Support for young carers is inadequate. A support group was provided until recently, but was discontinued following the sudden withdrawal of the external provider. A new service is planned and families are contributing to its development, but it is not yet in place. Although the council has identified over fifty young carers, it acknowledges that there are others who have no access to services, particularly in rural areas.

27. The council has been effective in reducing the number of permanent and fixed-term exclusions at secondary level. However, fixed-term exclusions are increasing in primary schools and a significant proportion of these are for lengthy periods. Progress is being made in re-integrating excluded pupils but several are not receiving their statutory entitlement to learning. In such cases, responsibilities for the whereabouts of these young people for the entire week are not sufficiently clear. The council's procedure for tracking missing/lost children is clear and includes guidance on what to do and the legislation that underpins it. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is reviewing the procedure to ensure that systems are sufficiently robust to cope with the growing migration of children into and out of the area.

28. Strategic management of safeguarding arrangements are good. Agencies collaborate well to safeguard children in line with current government guidance. The Local Safeguarding Children Board has developed well and has good links with other local strategic groups – Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing (MARAC). A safeguarding manager has been appointed. There are good links with the local

allegation management adviser, the Primary Care Trust and other statutory partners. The Local Safeguarding Children Board training sub-group has developed a good system to meet the needs of all staff and further work is underway to plan its implementation. Good information-sharing protocols are in place and are used effectively by staff. Schools submit an annual report to their governing bodies (copied to the Local Safeguarding Children Board) on safeguarding. This is excellent practice. The council has thorough arrangements for vetting staff, including those in the voluntary and community sectors.

29. Arrangements for referring and managing concerns about children and young people most at risk appear safe. During the last year, shortcomings were identified by the council in its social care referral processes. New recording arrangements have been implemented and duty systems have been tightened up to achieve substantial improvements. The duty and assessment action plan is being monitored rigorously by senior management. Referral rates have increased from a low base to a more appropriate level. The level of re-referrals has also improved and is now more in line with similar authorities. Due to the previous difficulties, the completion of initial core assessments in a timely way is not yet being consistently achieved. However, good progress has been made recently in improving performance in this area. Multi-agency work on thresholds for referring cases has led to an appropriate rise in child protection referrals and levels of registration. Foundations have been laid to employ the Common Assessment Framework, but its implementation is at an early stage. Timeliness of child protection reviews improved from 94% in 2005–06 to 100% in 2006–07. The number of children on the child protection register is in line with similar authorities. All children on the register are allocated to a social worker and outcome indicators, such as duration on the register and child protection registration and de-registration, are good.

Looked after children and young people



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

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>High rate of looked after children participating in their reviews.</p> <p>Strong emphasis on consulting looked after children.</p> <p>Wide range of effective preventative services available to prevent children coming into care.</p>	<p>Lack of appropriate supported housing for a minority of care leavers.</p>

<p>Very good short and long-term placement stability.</p> <p>Good placement choice with high availability of well trained and supported local foster carers.</p> <p>High rates of adoption of looked after children.</p> <p>Multi-agency life chances team provides effective coordination and tracking of responses to supporting looked after children and progress made.</p>	
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31. Outcomes for looked after children are good and improving. Multi-agency planning and work to support the children is well coordinated through the life chances team. The corporate parenting panel undertakes its responsibilities effectively. Planning to meet the education, health and care needs of looked after children is prompt and purposeful. Placement stability is very good and the number of looked after children who are adopted is high.

32. The 2006 annual performance assessment was critical of the timeliness of reviews for looked after children. The percentage of looked after children participating in their reviews improved from 82% in 2005–06 to 89% this year, which is slightly better than in similar authorities. More recent unvalidated data shows that 100% of reviews have been on time since April 2007. In 2006, GCSE results for looked after children were better than in similar authorities, with 80% gaining at least one pass, 50% gaining at least five passes and 40% achieving at least five passes graded A*–C. However, unvalidated results for 2007 suggest that the percentage of looked after children achieving at least one GCSE pass fell slightly to 77.7%. The council's ambition to close the gap between the performance of looked after children and that of their peers is not yet being met.

33. The number of looked after children is stable, in line with similar authorities and well below national levels. Preventative services are well-established and support families well to prevent children coming into care. The health needs of looked after children are regularly reviewed and effectively addressed through health assessments, the frequency of which is in line with that nationally. The young people receive good advice and support about all health and well-being issues and the percentage not accepting an assessment is steadily declining. Foster carers and looked after children are provided with helpful information and training about healthy lifestyles and are helped to access sporting activities through free leisure passes. Following the introduction of a 'rapid access' system, waiting times for the child and adolescent mental health service for looked after children have recently fallen and are now good.

34. Looked after children experience very few moves and stability of placements is very high, well above that achieved by similar authorities and the England average. Moves are carefully planned with good involvement of the child. All looked after children are allocated to a qualified social worker, but increased turnover of staff in some teams last year resulted in more changes of social worker than previously. Successful recruitment to vacant posts has partly resolved the issue, but several of the new staff are from overseas and are on time-limited contracts. Care planning for looked after children is very good and is managed within acceptable timescales. The rate of adoption of looked after children has increased and is good. Placement choice is good, with a high number of local in-house foster carers available following effective recruitment processes. Residential provision is well targeted at those with the most complex needs. Support for children in placements is very good and highly valued by foster carers. Very few children are placed out of area or in independent placements. A relatively high percentage of looked after children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. Services have been tailored effectively to address the needs of this group.

35. The council and its partners have high ambitions for looked after children to achieve and to develop well and there are currently three looked after children at university. Services to promote learning and confidence are planned for each child through the life chances team and progress is closely monitored. The team has succeeded in reintegrating several children into mainstream school, as well as preventing the need for residential schooling outside the area. The attendance of looked after children at school is good and better than in similar authorities and nationally.

36. Looked after children are supported to develop personally and to raise their self-esteem through programmes of activities arranged by a dedicated youth worker. Several young people have benefited from study grants, which have helped to raise their self-esteem and to improve attainment. Music lessons are provided for looked after children who want to learn an instrument. Seven young people are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award with two more about to start. This has enabled these young people to try out new activities and to be challenged. The percentage of looked after children given a final warning or reprimand or convicted during the year for an offence in 2006–07 was slightly above similar authorities and nationally, but lower than in 2005–06.

37. The most recent fostering inspection report (February 2007) was positive, noting good and improving services. Looked after children feel listened to by their foster carers and excellent systems are in place to consult looked after children and to gain their views about placements and their needs. The fostering service ensures that diversity is valued. All looked after children have access to advocacy support through the 'Rights 4 U' service, which is provided by a voluntary organisation. Looked after children who are not regularly in contact with family are supported through the independent visitor service. Almost 90% of children and young people are involved with, and communicate their views to, their child care reviews and this in line with similar authorities and nationally.

38. Care leavers are supported to independence by the after-care team through effective pathway plans. However, over the last year staff shortages have meant that there have been delays in completing the plans for a few young people. New staff are in post and the service is now fully operational. Young people who attend Newbury College, if identified as looked after children, are assigned a student adviser who offers personal and study support. There is limited supported housing for care leavers and a minority of these are not adequately or appropriately housed on leaving foster care. Care leavers who need housing are presented to a young people's housing panel which prioritises the availability of housing, but the housing stock available is insufficient to guarantee timely appropriate housing for all care leavers.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities



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

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Well-focused inter-agency planning and delivery.</p> <p>Close involvement of parents/carers in identification and assessment of needs.</p> <p>Active involvement of children and young people in making decisions about their lives.</p> <p>Improvement in attainment and progress of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.</p> <p>Good support for transition into adult health services.</p> <p>Low proportion of children and young people with additional needs who are not in education, employment or training at 16+.</p>	<p>Poor access to Connexions advice for children and young people without statements.</p> <p>Limited access and support for transition into work-based learning.</p> <p>Difficulty of access to some leisure facilities for children and young people with a disability.</p>

Increasing involvement of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in leisure and other mainstream activities.	
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40. The council provides well to meet the needs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities within the locality. It has made additional investment and realigned services effectively to ensure that an increasing number of children receive support within the authority and within mainstream schools. The number of statements of special educational need has fallen. The co-location of provision, dual placements for pupils, and the development of good outreach consultancy ensure that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have as much access to mainstream education as possible. The local authority has been effective over the last year in sharply reducing the number of permanent exclusions of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at secondary level, through targeted intervention. Fixed-term exclusions also fell at secondary level but increased in the primary phase.

41. The needs of individual disabled children and their carers are promptly assessed by the specialist disabled children's team. Brookfields School makes very good provision for those with complex needs and visual and hearing impairment. An appropriate range of short breaks is available to children with a disability and their families. For example, many children are supported at home, while others are supported within family placements. For those children with complex needs who require residential respite care, there is good provision at the Castle Gate unit. Although the authority has increased its support for young people on the autistic spectrum, a significant number do not have access to speech and language therapy and therefore these children do not make as much progress as they could. Access to child and adolescent mental health services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good, with referrals being treated as a priority.

42. Inter-agency planning is well focused on the needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Effective use is made of multi-professional assessment and of regular multi-agency reviews, including health needs, from early years through to the post-16 stage. Resources are prioritised and directed to where they are needed. There is a good range of early intervention strategies. Pre-school counsellors and the 'Early Bird' projects for children with autistic spectrum disorders provide valuable support to parents and staff. This helps them develop understanding and appropriate strategies for supporting the children with disabilities. The close collaboration between statutory, private and voluntary organisations ensures that resources and expertise are used to good effect for the benefit of children and young people.

43. Parents and carers are closely involved with the assessment and identification of needs of their children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, insufficient attention is given to the support needs of their

siblings. The good information and guidance given to parents and carers encourages their participation in decisions relating to their children. Thirty-six children with the most complex needs receive comprehensive care packages. Of these, ten receive direct payments. Uptake of childcare provision by parents of children with statements has risen by 74%. Parents are making increasingly productive use of the multi-agency team for children (MATCh) drop-in centres.

44. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities play an active part in decisions about their lives. The council has been successful in ensuring that children and young people's opinions are taken into account at reviews and in increasing the number of children attending those reviews. Children's views are also sought on strategic issues, such as the establishment of the resource base at Theale Green Community School.

45. The council has been very successful in improving the attainment and progress of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Over the last year, there have been improvements in the performance of pupils with statements at Key Stage 2, GCSE, and in the number achieving Level 2 qualifications by the age of 17. In 2005/06, there was an increase in the pupils on 'school action' gaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE. Significantly, in 2006, the proportion of this group achieving no passes fell to zero. During the same period, the proportion of pupils on 'school action plus' gaining five A*-C grades fell but again the proportion gaining no passes was reduced considerably.

46. Transitions are managed well for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The transition to adult services for health needs is good, apart from those with mental health needs, where it is adequate. The community team for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities from the adult services directorate becomes involved with young people and their families from the age of 14. This ensures a seamless transition to adult services and is seen as positive by young people, parents and carers. Well-conceived plans are being put in place to improve transition planning for post-16 education but it is too early for the impact to be demonstrated. A specialist team of Connexions personal advisers provides good support but this is only available to pupils with statements. Young people who choose to attend discrete provision at college benefit from good partnership work, facilitating effective transition. There is more work to do on transition to mainstream provision at colleges, and also into work-based learning where the range of opportunities is limited. However, the proportion of young people with additional needs who are not in education, employment or training on leaving school is low, having reduced from 14.7% in 2005 to 9.1% in 2006.

47. The council provides effective support to enable children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to gain access to leisure and community-based activities. Special and mainstream schools provide children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities with a good range of extracurricular activities and visits, which have increased their self-confidence and social skills. The Castle Gate outreach project prepares young people and staff successfully,

to enable young people to participate independently in a mainstream environment. The Buddy scheme has supported more than 20 children with varying additional needs to participate in 14 different mainstream opportunities they would otherwise have missed. However, some leisure facilities, particularly parks, playgrounds and swimming pools, are not sufficiently well-adapted to the needs of children with disabilities and this limits their use. Similarly, access to some transport is hard for wheelchair users.

Service management



Capacity to improve



48. The management of services for children and young people is good. There is good capacity to improve further.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Effective leadership of children's services.</p> <p>Good record of service improvement.</p> <p>Long-established strategic partnerships.</p> <p>Good engagement with children and young people.</p> <p>Good financial management.</p> <p>Good value for money.</p>	<p>No shared understanding of the role of corporate parenting by all council members.</p> <p>Lack of clarity about the role of the voluntary and community sector and its limited capacity in contributing to support for children and young people.</p> <p>Lack of a longer-term workforce strategy for the partnership to include social workers and the youth service.</p>

49. Partnership working is built on good relationships and effective in delivering identified priorities. Partners have a strong commitment to multi-agency preventative work and allocate resources to support this well. Difficult decisions are made to redirect resources to areas of need. There is good engagement with children, young people, families and carers to develop priorities and in designing services. Performance and achievement are generally good. However, although there is a strong focus on reducing inequality of outcomes, this is not yet being consistently achieved. The council works well

with partners on joint commissioning, jointly-funded and cost-effective provision and provides good value for money.

50. Capacity to improve further is good. The council and its partners were among the first to adopt the children's trust model and were quick to develop services to progress the Every Child Matters agenda. The Children's Trust is now well established and provides effective strategic leadership. The council's portfolio holder for children and young people is relatively new but is strongly committed to delivering good quality outcomes for all children. Partners have demonstrated improvements year-on-year and progress made has been sustained in the majority of areas. Senior managers have a good record of securing service improvements and these contribute consistently to better outcomes. Review, research and evaluation, led by the council's Policy Development Commissions, have contributed, for example, to improvements in underperforming schools. When performance is not meeting targets, appropriate corrective action is taken. There are clear links between the Local Area Agreement, Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and Children and Young People's Plan. Purposeful managerial leadership and effective planning have laid a good foundation for developing integrated, locality-based provision, which is now being supported by multi-disciplinary locality teams. These are already in place in two districts and are being developed to cover the rest of West Berkshire.

51. Ambition for children and young people in West Berkshire is adequate. The council and its partners are clearly ambitious for the children and young people in the area and high level ambitions are clear. Shared objectives and targets are also based on a mostly thorough needs analysis and most targets are challenging. However, a few strategies to deliver on the partners' ambitions are incomplete or fragmented and there are a few vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups which are not included. The strategy for Travellers, for example, focuses predominantly on delivery through permanent sites and so does not address the needs of those who are transient. The council-wide performance management group has recently been given the role of quality assuring all strategies and action plans to challenge such inconsistencies.

52. Consultation with children and young people is good and partners' commitment to involve all young people is strong. The council uses a range of effective consultation methods to allow children and young people with a variety of learning difficulties and/or disabilities to put their views across and help plan services. With training and support, young people are able to participate as 'young evaluators'. The 'involving young people' group has had a positive impact on policy and decision making, for example helping the council to decide where play and activities are placed. Parents and carers are also extensively consulted on strategic planning and on specific issues that affect them.

53. Prioritisation is good. The priorities of the council and its partners reflect both local needs and the national agenda and are focused on localities where there is greatest need. Priorities are clearly identified in the Children and Young

People's Plan and are linked to both service and team plans. The priorities are mirrored in the Corporate Plan and Community Strategy and are aligned with those of partners. The council, through an established working group, is working with other authorities and partners to prioritise areas of concern and seek economies of scale, for example, to establish a shared facility for children with autistic spectrum disorder. Shifting resources from young people with special educational needs to looked after children has already contributed to a reduction in numbers of looked after children and these are now stable. While there is a strong focus on reducing the inequalities, educational achievement for looked after children, for example, is not yet in line with other groups.

54. Current capacity of the local partnership is good. Staff turnover and vacancy rates are below the national average and the council is aware of recruitment and retention 'hot spots'. The 2006 annual performance assessment found the council's capacity to improve to be excellent. However, although it has filled social worker posts by successfully recruiting from abroad, its long term workforce plans and joint workforce planning, for example to recruit and retain social workers and fill vacancies within the youth service, are underdeveloped. As a small unitary authority, West Berkshire faces significant challenges in delivering the Every Child Matters agenda. Capacity is maximised through jointly-funded posts, which also ensure that policy decisions are linked across the council and the Primary Care Trust. The council has also improved capacity, for example, using Section 106 money to merge Turnpike and Shaw House schools, releasing resources to create additional social housing, as well as improving the learning environment for pupils. Work is underway to develop integrated teams and co-locate workers to create more coordinated services. The voluntary and community sector runs a range of provision for both young people and parents, but is very small and mostly localised in parishes or villages, with few national or regional organisations represented.

55. Financial management of children's services across the Trust is good. The council has a clear and sustained focus on value for money. All services have the clear aim to produce high quality outcomes at reasonable cost and the extent to which they achieve this is monitored and challenged by the 'value for money' task group. The resources allocated to children in need are in line with similar authorities, but West Berkshire spends a high amount on family support, reducing the need for children to be taken into the council's care. Budgets are pooled or aligned where appropriate and budget management is good, with a clear focus on managing and anticipating overspends. Partners take proactive action to keep finances on track.

56. Performance management within the Trust is good. There are good systems in place at all levels for regular reporting of performance. Performance and financial management are not currently integrated into one system but are reviewed together. The council has good appraisal and support programmes for new and established staff, both of which are rated by staff and Investors in People assessors as good. There is a web-based system to allow partners to report and review the Trust's performance. Scrutiny reviews within children and young people's services contribute positively to improvement. For example, the

review of the impact of the piloted life chances team resulted in the development of the service into one which is valued by many children and young people. The corporate parenting panel oversees the interests of the most vulnerable children and young people within the community. Panel members have a clear understanding of their role as corporate parents, but this is not consistently understood by all council members.

Annex A

MOST RECENTLY PUBLISHED ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WEST BERKSHIRE

West Berkshire Council consistently delivers services above minimum requirements for children and young people. Outcomes in each of the five main areas are good overall. Children's services are making a number of significant contributions to improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people in the area. The Directorate of Children's Services was set up early. It has evolved very effectively. The integration of services is very well established at senior level. Collaboration with external partners is good.

The clearly articulated CYPP, and the reviews of progress on it, demonstrate a good capacity for further improvement. Areas of need have been identified and addressed precisely and the few emerging gaps are being tackled. There are signs of progress in many outcomes over the last year and most of the items identified for improvement in the 2006 APA have been dealt with successfully. In particular, much good work has taken place to strengthen provision and outcomes for some vulnerable groups, particularly looked after children and young people.

The full annual performance assessment can be found at:

http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/pdf/?inspectionNumber=270226&providerCategoryID=0&fileName=\\APA\\apa_2007_869.pdf

Annex B

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SECTION OF THE CORPORATE ASSESSMENT REPORT

1. Outcomes for children and young people in West Berkshire are good. The majority of pupils in schools, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress through the various key stages. Attainment in the Foundation Stage is mostly good and, by the age of 16, the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*–C at GCSE is above the national average and in line with those in similar local authorities. Post-16 attainment in secondary schools, for students taking Level 3 courses, has improved with average point scores per student showing a year-on-year increase taking the local authority's performance further above the national average. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), has fallen but is still above the target of 3.5%.

2. Service management in West Berkshire is good. Services are characterised by high levels of staff commitment, clarity of purpose and exceptionally high levels of coordination and collaboration. Partnerships with schools, other agencies, parents and young people are strong. This has led to a range of sustainable initiatives making a demonstrable impact across a broad range of areas to deliver high quality services. Performance is kept under review very well and actions for improvement are regularly evaluated for their impact. There is optimum use of joint commissioning, for example, helping young people with disabilities to remain in the community. The local authority makes good use of funding to meet and improve the needs of children and young people.

3. The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. The Children and Young People's Plan includes a preventative strategy with a good emphasis on early intervention. The youth offending team (YOT) provides effective sexual health advice services and assists young people through signposting to other health services. Virtually all schools have a drugs policy and the local authority's smoking cessation programme has helped many young people to give up this habit. Physical health is promoted and an increasing percentage of school children spend time on high quality physical activity. The percentage of looked after children who receive medical and dental checks is good.

4. Children and young people appear safe and arrangements to ensure this are good. Children and young people are provided with a safe environment. The child protection policy is fully developed and implemented. All children on the child protection register have a qualified social worker. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board has developed well. Stability of placements for looked after children is excellent in the short term and good in the long term. Good systems are in place across health, education and social care for identifying, reporting and assessing private fostering placements. The number

of adoptions of looked after children is in line with similar authorities. Following difficulties identified by the council during 2006, not all initial core assessments are being completed in a timely way. However, good progress is being made in tackling this. Early intervention and a multi-agency approach have resulted in better targeting of services. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families are well supported.

5. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is good. The local authority is working effectively with weaker schools to remove shortcomings and continues to develop its support and challenge to all schools in order to raise standards. The work of the pupil referral units (PRUs) is particularly effective in helping pupils to gain qualifications or return to mainstream education. However, a few excluded pupils are not receiving their full entitlement to full-time learning and responsibilities for the whereabouts of these young people for the entire week are not sufficiently clear.

6. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society and achieve economic well-being is good. Consultation with young people is good and they have many opportunities to express their views on the quality of services. Looked after children are helped to make a positive contribution to their reviews. A good proportion of looked after children engage in education, employment or training on leaving school. This is also the case for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The Connexions service supports young people with disabilities through transition well, but those with learning difficulties without a statement are not as well supported. The extent to which learners develop workplace and other skills is predominantly good, but access to work-based learning for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is not made easy. The range of qualifications offered to sixth form students has been limited, but has broadened over the last year. The prevention of re-offending is good.

7. Capacity to improve further is good. The 2006 annual performance assessment found the council's capacity to improve to be excellent, whereas the joint area review found long-term workforce plans within the council and joint workforce planning with partners to be underdeveloped. The capacity of the voluntary and community sector to support further service improvements is also uncertain. However, senior managers have a good record of service improvement and purposeful leadership has laid a good foundation for developing integrated, locality-based provision. The council provides good value for money.

Annex C

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 annual performance assessment 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 West Berkshire and evaluates the way local services, taken together, contribute to their well-being. Together with the annual performance assessment 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 and children at risk or requiring safeguarding and a few additional investigations. 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).