

Joint Area Review of North Somerset



In March 2006, North Somerset underwent the Joint Area Review (JAR) and associated inspections of services for Children and Young People. The inspection covered all services provided by a range of statutory agencies. This summary identifies the main findings.

One of the best inspection outcomes in the country

That's the message from the inspection. **Across the range of services provided in social care, education, health and youth services, the inspectors concluded that all were found to be Good or better.** This places North Somerset as one of the best areas nationally in terms of the support provided to children and young people and the outcomes they achieve, which set against a backdrop of low levels of central government funding for all partners, is even more remarkable.

The judgements reflect the passion, professionalism and hard work of all those involved in supporting young people. They also reflect very significant progress made over the last few years e.g. the inspection of education services in 2002 concluded that a number of areas were poor.

Despite the positive judgements, there is no complacency amongst partners, with a commitment to achieve excellent judgements across the full range of services when we are all inspected again in three years' time.



Colin Diamond
Director of Children and Young People's Services



Cllr Peter Kehoe
Executive member for Children and Young People's Services

Main inspection findings:

What's good...

- Most children and young people are healthy and there is equity of health care provision with a strong focus on health education and preventative programmes in the areas of greatest deprivation.
- Overall children and young people are safe and those most at risk are well protected.
- The significant majority of children attend school regularly, enjoy their education and achieve well.
- The work of all services to ensure that children and young people make a positive contribution to society is good.
- The overall work of local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.

Area for improvement...

- A need for more employment opportunities and accommodation for vulnerable young people in the area.

Contribution of services to keeping children healthy...



What's good...

- There is an accessible and high performing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).
- The co-location of children's community health services and the single point of entry into specialist health services are improving inter-professional working for the benefit of children and their families.
- Services for young children and their parents and for families with young disabled children particularly benefit from good inter-agency and multi-disciplinary approaches.
- The rate of teenage conception shows a significant reduction.
- Front-line staff from a range of agencies work well in providing multi-disciplinary services.
- Health visitor services are good and, where support is required, extended contacts with families are maintained.
- Speech and language therapy services provide strong support and are well integrated in the work of partner agencies.

Area for improvement...

- Health outcomes are less favourable in a few areas of high deprivation.



"Health services and the council work well in addressing the preventative and healthy life styles agenda, and in developing accessible front-line services."

Contribution of services to keeping children safe...

What's good...

- Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements work effectively for the most vulnerable children and young people.
- The Area Child Protection Committee (now the Local Safeguarding Board), has made significant improvements to single and joint agency practice and co-ordination.
- There is a range of accessible family support services for different levels of need which offer purposeful good quality interventions for both children and parents.
- The response to incidents of domestic abuse is effectively co-ordinated between agencies.
- For looked-after children, services work well together to plan and achieve good outcomes.
- There has been good progress on implementing the placement strategy which has improved the fostering service.
- Children most at risk and on the child protection register receive good support and monitoring through child protection plans, to keep them safe.

Area for improvement...

- Agree thresholds and eligibility for services at different levels.
- Ensure that a detailed strategy is in place to develop a wider range of placement options for care leavers and is being progressed.



“The overall impact of services is effective in minimising the incidence of child abuse and neglect, and in preventing children and young people becoming looked after.”

Contribution of services to ensuring children enjoy and achieve...



What's good...

- The overall support for parents and carers is effective particularly for those facing the greatest difficulties.
- The quality of nursery education is good.
- Children with learning difficulties and disabilities are identified early and receive good multi-agency support. The achievement of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good in the majority of schools.
- The overall quality of educational provision is good and there is effective challenge and support for school improvement.
- The achievement of some pupils in special school provision is very good.
- Support for behaviour and pupil attendance is good and levels of fixed term and permanent exclusion are low.
- Pupil Referral Units are supporting young people well by providing a broad curriculum with vocational enrichment and accreditation at Key Stage 4.
- The overall provision of leisure opportunities is effective particularly through schools, the youth service and the council's leisure services.
- Educational support for children and young people looked after is effective with a strategy in place to achieve consistent outcomes and raise attainment.
- The attainment of black and minority ethnic pupils is in line with that of other groups.



“The vast majority of pupils enjoy school and believe they are achieving well. Attainment overall is good especially at the end of Key Stage 2.”

Contribution of services to ensuring children make a positive contribution to society...



What's good...

- In early years settings and schools, a good range of activities help to build young people's social skills and develop their confidence and self-esteem.
- There is a good range of support to help children and young people, especially those at risk of social exclusion, to manage and respond to difficulties and challenges in their lives.
- The number of children and young people who have offended for the first time in the youth justice system is below average and the numbers of young people re-offending is reducing.
- Young people are effectively involved in decision-making.
- Parents, carers and young people are provided with good support as they move through their educational experiences.
- Arrangements are particularly good for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those young people looked after by the council.

Area for improvement...

- Develop an independent advocacy service for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those looked after by the council and those in need.



"Young parents, young carers and others requiring help are well supported by good collaboration between the council, agencies and voluntary groups."

Contribution of services to ensuring children achieve economic well-being...



What's good...

- Parents and carers are well informed about the wide range of childcare facilities and activities. Childcare provision has increased significantly in recent years.
- Connexions has strong working links with partners and provides good information, advice and guidance to all young people.
- The proportion of young people in education, employment or training is higher than the national average, including looked-after children.
- The quality of educational provision is generally good and qualification outcomes for young people are good.
- Achievement rates for young people on education to employment schemes are good.
- Opportunities for vocational studies have increased.
- The proportion of young people entering higher education is higher than the national average.

Area for improvement...

- Improve and extend access and choice to the full range of the 14-19 curriculum.
- Ensure that there is sufficient and suitable housing provision for young people, particularly vulnerable groups.
- Increase employment opportunities within the area for young people, particularly for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.



“Local services are making a good contribution to the economic well-being of children and young people.”

Governance Arrangements and Partnership Working



What's good...

- Major partners, including the voluntary sector, and the Police are actively involved. Partners have invested strongly in time and resources to develop their partnership approach.
- The overall capacity to deliver the plans of the Trust Board is good.
- Value for money is good and costs of services are generally in line with national comparators.
- Consultation and engagement with children, young people, parents and carers is good especially when looking at changes and developments.
- The Lead Member for children's services is established and development of this role is underway.

Area for improvement...

- Improve member training and clarify the specific roles and responsibilities of new structures such as the Children's Trust Board to enable stakeholders to engage with them.



“Relationships between local partners are good and the council provides effective community leadership.”

How the Joint Area Review was conducted



The Joint Area Review (JAR) was an inspection of all services to support children and young people in the North Somerset area. The judgements and outcomes relate to the council and a range of partner agencies. As a consequence of the Children Act 2004, the council has the responsibility to co-ordinate arrangements in relation to the JAR. The review, whilst covering the full range of services, also had two focussed inspection elements within it relating to the Youth Service and the Youth Offending Team.

The review involved a team of 12 inspectors on-site in February and March of this year. As part of the arrangements, inspectors analysed some 260 performance indicators and also reviewed a number of key documents prior to arriving on-site. One of the key documents produced was a self-evaluation document produced by the council and its partners. Inspectors applauded the council and its partners on this document and the arrangements for producing it.

The inspection also involved two surveys – a survey of the views of over 600 young people and a survey of all schools on the services they receive, and two neighbourhood studies, which involved members of the inspection team speaking to local people within two geographical areas over a two-day period to obtain their views on the services provided.

As part of the Enhanced Youth Inspection element of the Joint Area Review, inspectors also visited 11 youth work projects to experience provision first hand.

In total, in excess of 300 people were directly interviewed by members of the inspection team.

The Joint Area Review has 12 scored judgements. In addition to this, there are 4 separate scored judgements for the Enhanced Youth Service Inspection element of the Joint Area Review. There are also 5 scored judgements for the inspection of the Youth Offending Team. The judgements scores are on a 4 point scale, with 4 being an excellent outstanding service delivering well above minimum requirements. A score of 2 for a judgement area means that the council and/or its partner agencies are delivering the minimum requirements. A score of 3 is 'Good'. The council and its partners have achieved good ratings across all of the scored judgement areas for the JAR, and Youth inspections and judgements ranging from 2 to 4 for the Youth Offending Team inspection. This is one of the highest recorded outcomes from the new inspection arrangements.

A full copy of the inspection reports are on the council's website at www.n-somerset.gov.uk. The council will be producing a post inspection action plan in relation to the areas for development identified within the reports and this will be placed on the council's website in the autumn.

