

Every Child Matters

Inspection of children's services: grade descriptors
April 2006

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Introduction

The joint area reviews (JARs) and annual performance assessments (APAs) evaluate and report on the outcomes for children in the area and assess and judge the contributions made by public services to sustaining and improving them. The judgements of a review team are made through scrutiny, analysis and discussion of evidence and are detailed in the report. These grade descriptors have been developed to support the overall judgement for the council's children's services, the capacity to improve judgements and the judgements for the outcomes area of: being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; achieving economic well-being; and service management.

The grade descriptors identify key aspects in determining the contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people. They have been devised to:

- make inspection judgements more transparent
- enable judgements to be derived securely from a consideration of outcomes
- ensure consistency in gathering evidence and making judgements.

For each grade, the descriptors for the following outcome areas are built on a series of generic demands around the following four themes:

- the impact of actions on sustaining/improving outcomes
- response and engagement of children and young people
- factors that contribute to outcomes
- value for money.

For reference, the generic demands are outlined on pages 4 and 5

Partnerships may find the criteria helpful in formulating their self-assessment and as a guide to identifying areas for improvement.

The descriptors will be used during JARs and to support the graded judgements for APAs. Inspectors will use the illustrative examples to decide on the appropriate grade on the balance of evidence on a 'best fit' model. It is not necessary to have met all of the descriptors to be awarded a particular grade, nor, in a complex system, does failure in one aspect necessarily lower the overall judgement. An authority will not necessarily be judged inadequate on the basis of a failure to meet one requirement. Judgements will be made in a rounded way balancing all of the evidence and giving due consideration to local and national contexts, priorities and decision-making.

In order to take into consideration any new requirements, and the expectation that performance will improve continuously, the descriptors will be subject to regular/periodic revision and updating. This might mean annually, especially in the first instance.

Judgement terms

Grade 4: Excellent/outstanding

A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users

Grade 3: Good

A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users

Grade 2: Adequate

A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users

Grade 1: Inadequate

A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users.

Generic demands continued

<p>↑</p> <p>Incremental</p> <p>↓</p>	<p>Outcomes/actions having impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes and provision are inadequate in no major respect, and may be good in some respects. • Some evidence of impact and outcomes for the majority that are in line with comparators/similar areas.* • Some evidence of impact and outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. <p>Response and engagement of young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people are consulted through representative groups. • The responses of the majority of children and young people to provision are positive.* <p>Factors contributing to outcomes <i>(including analysis of need, focus and quality of work and working in partnership)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement in services are being made where necessary (or in the absence of formal needs analysis across services a clear and accurate awareness of what needs to be done, especially for vulnerable children and young people and those at risk). • Partnership working includes voluntary and private sector partners, is coordinated, underpinned by shared goals and has led to some measurable improvement. • Resources and expertise, including from private and voluntary agencies, are generally used effectively. • Referral and assessment services identify and respond promptly to the needs of children and young people at risk. In particular, child protection systems and processes are working effectively across the local area. • Statutory requirements are met or reasonable steps are taken to meet them. <p>Value for money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The costs of key services are known and there is some benchmarking of costs and quality against national comparators and/or other areas. 	<p>Generic demands for a grade 2</p>
	<p>There is a failure on one or more respects to meet the requirements for a grade 2.¹ Key features of this might be –</p> <p>Outcomes/actions having impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited evidence of impact or discernable benefits for only a few.* <p>Response and engagement of young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people have major and well-founded reservations about the quality of some services. <p>Factors contributing to outcomes <i>(including analysis of need, focus and quality of work and working in partnership)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reactive services/limited needs analysis/insufficient focus on preventative activities. • Lack of timely response to children and young people at risk. • Partnership working is not well coordinated and is insufficiently built on shared goals and priorities. Some key partners are not engaged fully. There is limited evidence of partnership working making a difference. • Ineffective use is made of private and voluntary agencies. <p>Value for money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient knowledge of the costs of some key services and a lack of understanding of how costs and quality of local services compare with national and/or other areas. 	<p>Generic demands for a grade 1</p>

¹ Inadequacy is not automatic as a result of a failure to meet one requirement. Failure in one aspect has to be weighed carefully for its seriousness in determining whether it brings the whole judgement down. Inspectors' professional judgement is used to weigh and balance the issues against other aspects and judgements.

Section 1. Guidance and descriptors for grading the overall effectiveness of the council's children's services and the judgements for capacity to improve

1. The overall effectiveness of the council's children's services

The overall judgement for the council's children's services incorporates the contribution made to delivering all five Every Child Matters outcomes. The grade is based on inspectors' professional judgement, and is made by taking a balanced view of the full range of key judgements and evidence in the five outcome areas and in service management. The judgement encompasses more than the activities in *Staying safe* and *Enjoying and achieving* and is not, therefore, a simple aggregation of those two grades. This having been said, social care and education activities can obviously be expected to weigh heavily within the overall score.

Due weight should be given within each of the five outcome areas and in service management to the contributions the council can reasonably be expected to make. Similarly, an assessment needs to be made of the extent to which the effectiveness in delivering the outcomes can be attributed to the activities of the council, rather than to those of its partners.

Examples of activities within the five outcome areas in which the council can be expected to make a contribution include:

- promoting healthy lifestyles for children and young people and preventing them from taking illegal drugs, for example through work in schools and youth activities
- ensuring that children and young people with mental health problems have access to services, and that their additional needs are supported in schools
- ensuring that proper social care support is provided to protect children and young people at risk of abuse and neglect
- ensuring children and young people are safe from bullying, discrimination and anti-social behaviour in schools and within the wider community through the promotion of effective strategies
- contributing to raised standards and improved performance, through, for example, early years education and effective monitoring, challenge and support for schools
- ensuring sufficient school places and robust admission arrangements through, for example, a consideration of vulnerable children and young people and those who do not attend school
- involving children and young people in making key decisions about their future, in the council's decision making and in enterprising behaviour
- supporting the preparation of young people for employment and helping to ensure that they engage in further education, employment or training on leaving school
- ensuring that community regeneration strategies take proper account of the needs of children and young people

- promoting increased social and educational inclusion, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children and young people looked after and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, for example through high quality preventative and support services, early identification and assessment of need and smooth transition to adult services.

Importantly, inspectors should consider performance compared with similar areas, and whether there is sustained progress over time or whether high standards of performance are being maintained in the five outcome areas. It is very important to discern the contribution made by council service functions outcomes, bearing in mind the local context and circumstances. In making judgements account should be taken of the challenge of the targets set and the progress in meeting priorities, objectives and targets.

For councils to be graded good overall in the effectiveness of their children's services, clear evidence is needed of demonstrable impact on the delivery of outcomes as a result of the authority's actions. This might, for example, be found within:

- contribution of service functions to good/outstanding outcomes for children and young people in the majority of the five outcomes, with signs of improvement evident in the weaker ones
- contribution of service functions to good/outstanding outcomes for specific groups of young people, such as looked after children, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those from Travellers' communities/minority ethnic groups
- contribution of service functions to favourable performance indicators overall, despite a very small number (no more than one or two) falling below an acceptable or adequate level
- service functions that are overall effective with no major weaknesses.

Conversely, for those councils graded adequate the impact of service functions will have been more limited. This might be because initiatives are at a very early stage in their development and/or implementation and have not yet made a difference to outcomes.² For inadequate authorities there will be significant inconsistencies in provision with little positive impact on outcomes.

Where there are wide variations in the quality of service functions there are some key influential factors that contribute to outcomes that inspectors will take into consideration when reaching an overall judgement. These include:

- the quality of political control and corporate leadership
- the quality of strategic action planning, and especially the extent to which corporate policy and strategic planning defines and determines well focused actions

² For services that have recently been reconfigured it will be important to consider evidence of the effectiveness of individual service functions before restructuring.

- the extent to which challenging but realistic targets for improvement are set
- the effectiveness of the use of resources, especially in supporting and sustaining improvement in a cost effective way
- the effectiveness of performance management and the use of evaluation and review to secure improvement
- the effectiveness of partnership working across services within and beyond the local authority, and the extent to which solutions to problems cut across traditional sector and area boundaries
- the extent to which children and young people are consulted and engaged in decision-making.

In reaching the overall judgement inspectors will:

- consider the impact of any differences in the quality of social care and education service functions on children and young people overall, and their combined overall impact
- not give different weightings to universal and specialist/targeted services;
- consider the impact of any differences in the quality of education and social care services on children and young people overall
- place emphasis on strengths or weaknesses found regularly in systems, procedures and practice as opposed to more isolated examples of success or problem areas
- recognise the rights of councils and their partners to set local priorities, as well as their responsibilities to respond to national and regional priorities.
- identify the key elements from the trail of evidence that lead to the final judgement
- judge the pace of developments and the rate of progress.

Grade descriptors: The overall effectiveness of the council’s children’s services

<p>Excellent/outstanding (4)</p>	<p>In addition to meeting the requirements for a grade 3:</p> <p>The council’s contribution to delivering outcomes for children and young people is at least good in almost all service functions across the five outcome areas, and is outstanding in the majority of service` functions. There is evidence of notable impact for almost all children and young people (or high performance is maintained) through the reduction of vulnerability and an improvement for those in mainstream. No service function is inadequate, and for those graded adequate there are clear signs of improvements in outcomes for children and young people. Service management is at least good.</p> <p>The following factors contribute significantly to outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • highly competent and determined leadership skills of senior officers and elected members champion the needs of children and young people and respond effectively to
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	<p>needs. Senior officers empower effective staff contribution within the organisation and across the partnership to planning and delivery of key priorities and to meeting suitably ambitious outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • young people contribute routinely, widely and effectively to decision making and to judging the effectiveness of provision. Contributions have made a discernable difference across the five outcome areas. The responses of children and young people to almost all service provision and delivery are very positive • strategic planning is highly effective, anticipating necessary change and representing a timely response; associated action planning across services is almost always effective • accurate information and data analysis is used effectively to challenge performance, raise aspirations, set and meet ambitious targets and secure rapid/sustained improvement • performance management is comprehensive and highly effective, including financial management and planning • good use is made of joint commissioning and embedded partnership working to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness of local services and to empower users, especially communities • informed choices are made about the balance of cost and quality in, for example, planning at all levels and in commissioning and decommissioning services.
<p>Good (3)</p>	<p>In addition to meeting the requirements for a grade 2:</p> <p>The council’s contribution to delivering outcomes for children and young people is good in most service functions across the five outcome areas. Services are making a discernable difference and are of clear benefit for most children and young people through reducing vulnerability or increasing improvement for those in mainstream. Most service functions are good. Where weaknesses/inadequacies occur, these affect a very small minority of children and young people.</p> <p>The following factors contribute significantly to outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is effective leadership and direction from senior officers and elected members, resulting in a shared vision and agreed, sharply focused priorities and challenging targets for improvement and successful actions for improvement. • Services are aligned well to needs, are accessible to most users and are sufficiently bespoke to meet a range of individual circumstances. • Children and young people are increasingly engaged in strategic planning, and have made a notable difference in key areas. The responses of most children and young people to service delivery and provision are positive. • The vision and priorities are supported by well coordinated

	<p>and deliverable multi-agency plans, which enable challenging targets to be met, remedy weaknesses and secure continuous improvement, including efficiency and effectiveness (value for money), all within a realistic timeframe.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium term financial plans are in place and demonstrate there is the financial capacity to deliver the priorities in the plans and sustain good quality core services. • Performance management is effective. • Partnership working is increasingly coherent with clear remits for all key partners. • Information about costs in relation to quality is used in some areas of strategic and service planning and in commissioning and procurement to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
<p>Adequate (2)</p>	<p>The council's contribution to delivering outcomes for children and young people is at least adequate in almost all service functions across the five outcome areas. Services are making a difference for the majority of children and young people, including some evidence of impact for vulnerable children and young people. Most service functions are adequate. Service management is at least adequate. For key service functions graded inadequate there are clear signs of progress and improvement.</p> <p>The following factors contribute to outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership by senior officers and elected members in key areas is clear and supports the necessary action for securing improvement. • Vision is shared and understood and priorities are emerging on the basis of a clear analysis of need. • There is regular consultation with representative groups of children and young people and some evidence that this has made a difference. Vulnerable and other minority groups of children and young people are involved fully in making decisions that make a difference to their own lives. The responses of the majority of children and young people to service provision and delivery are positive. • Plans are increasingly comprehensive, linked strategically and identify national and local priorities. • Extensive and realistic targets are set and the majority are met. • Financial planning is clearly linked to priorities and is realistic. • Coordinated working arrangements both across the council and with external partnerships are reflected in strategic planning and there is evidence that this practice has resulted in a demonstrable contribution to improvements. • Joint procurement and commissioning are leading to some

	<p>improvements, including in value for money.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The costs of key services are known and there is some benchmarking against national comparators and/or other areas of cost and quality.
<p>Inadequate (1)</p>	<p>There is a failure in one or more respects to meet the requirements for a grade 2.³ Key features of this failure might be that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is limited evidence of impact of service functions or discernable benefits for only a few children and young people • a substantial minority of services are at the threshold of adequate and inadequate • there has been limited improvement in key service functions graded inadequate • there is little or no improvement in service functions or performance data compared to similar areas or there may be deterioration in key aspects • service management is inadequate. <p>The following factors are evident:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership by senior officers and/or elected members is insufficiently clear and/or effective. • Vision and priorities are not sufficiently shared or well matched to need. Key plans are not in place to deliver improvements in priority areas. • Children and young people are not consulted regularly or sufficiently engaged in decisions that affect them as individuals. Conversely children and young people are repeatedly asked similar things by a range of services to no discernible effect. Children and young people report that consultation is no more than tokenistic. • Children and young people have major and well-founded reservations about the quality of some services. • Performance management and evaluation processes are under-developed within a range of services and there is limited evidence of improvement. • Partnership working is not well coordinated and is insufficiently built on shared goals and priorities. Some key partners are not engaged fully and there is limited evidence of partnership working making a difference. • There is insufficient knowledge of the costs of some key services and a lack of understanding of how costs and quality of services compare with national and/or other areas.

³ Inadequacy is not automatic as a result of a failure to meet one requirement. Failure in one aspect has to be weighed carefully for its seriousness in determining whether it brings the whole judgement down. Inspectors’ professional judgement is used to weigh and balance the issues against other aspects and judgements.

2. The capacity for improvement

Judgements about the capacity for improvement are not just a matter of how services are planned and managed; they also encompass the effectiveness of arrangements in delivering improvement. Again the grades awarded are based on inspectors’ professional judgement, and are made by taking a balanced view of the full range of key judgements and evidence.

The basis for making judgements includes:

- the trend in improvement and whether this is consistent and improvements sustained
- the extent to which improvements in outcomes are linked to improvements in services
- the accuracy of self assessment and its application to evaluation and performance management to secure continuous improvement
- the quality of leadership, and especially the extent to which senior managers have a track record in securing improvements
- the strength and quality of strategic planning and the extent to which there is clear and sustained focus on value for money
- workforce planning and development.

For the council and the council and its partners to be graded good overall in the capacity for improvement there needs to be clear evidence of effectiveness in delivering improvements. This might be found in:

- a good track record in securing improvement, including in responding to recommendations from previous inspections/reviews/assessments and in meeting its own priorities, objectives and targets
- proven ability to prioritise issues, target resources and secure improvements
- a rigorous and accurate self-assessment
- timely and effective action to remedy weaknesses
- robust performance management
- leadership with vision, with substantial capacity and strong capability to drive improvement
- a strategy for recruitment, retention and staff development that seeks to anticipate difficulties and identifies relevant training needs
- an ability to work in partnership with institutions and stakeholders across council services.

Grade descriptors: capacity for improvement

Excellent/outstanding (4)	<p>In addition to meeting the requirements for a grade 3:</p> <p>There is a history of delivering innovative solutions to especially intractable problems and this leads to secure, sustainable and notable improvements in outcomes for children and young</p>
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	<p>people. High quality core service functions are maintained.</p> <p>There is very active, visible and highly effective leadership at all levels which empowers staff to contribute fully and to inform the planning and delivery of key priorities. Young people contribute routinely to strategic planning and in judging the effectiveness of provision. The vision and priorities are supported by comprehensive, coherent, well linked and coordinated, carefully resourced and deliverable multi-agency plans.</p> <p>As a result of systematic long-term forward planning, there are the people, skills and capability in place at all levels to deliver service priorities and to maintain high quality core services.</p> <p>Performance management is comprehensive and highly effective, including financial management and planning.</p> <p>Informed choices are made about the balance of cost and quality in, for example, planning at all levels and in commissioning and decommissioning services. Optimum use is made of joint commissioning and partnership working to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness of local services.</p>
<p>Good (3)</p>	<p>In addition to meeting the requirements for a grade 2:</p> <p>There is strong track record of improvement in key service function areas and performance data, including satisfaction data and outcomes for minority ethnic, vulnerable and other groups. This is sustained and compares well with local and national comparators.</p> <p>Change is implemented well and has delivered clear benefits for service users, and in particular vulnerable groups.</p> <p>There is effective leadership and direction resulting in a shared vision and agreed sharply targeted priorities for improvement, which are understood within and beyond the organisation. Children and young people are increasingly consulted on provision as part of strategic planning. The vision and priorities are supported by well coordinated and deliverable multi-agency plans, which remedy weaknesses and secure continuous improvement, including efficiency and effectiveness (value for money), all within a realistic timeframe. Medium term financial plans are in place and demonstrate the financial capacity to deliver the priorities in the plans and sustain good quality core service functions.</p> <p>Systematic forward planning ensures that there are the people, skills and capability in place to deliver service priorities. The Human Resource framework maximises internal capacity and ensures that service developments are provided for, through,</p>

	<p>for example, staff training and development and also absence management policies.</p> <p>Performance management is effective where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the arrangements are secure, and mostly consistently comprehensive, with ambitious targets, which are met in most cases; ▪ progress is monitored, reported and timely and effective remedial action is taken when slippages occur; ▪ financial management is secure and integrated with strategic and service planning ▪ self-evaluation and learning is used effectively to make improvements. <p>Information about costs in relation to quality is used in some areas of strategic and service planning, joint commissioning and procurement, and changes to services, to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness.</p>
<p>Adequate (2)</p>	<p>There is a track record of improvement in services and performance data in some areas including outcomes for vulnerable groups. For the majority of areas this is sustained and in line with local and national comparators.</p> <p>Leadership in key areas is clear and staff, service users and partner agencies participate in some service planning and improvement. Vision is shared and understood and priorities are emerging on the basis of a clear analysis of need. Plans are increasingly comprehensive and linked strategically and address key developmental areas. Financial planning is clearly linked to priorities. Joint commissioning and procurement are leading to some improvements.</p> <p>Sufficient people, skills and capability to deliver plans and improvements are mostly in place. Clear HR frameworks are in place and are suitably targeted on key areas with evidence of impact.</p> <p>Performance management arrangements are in place and are increasingly comprehensive when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ there is some evidence of impact ▪ realistic targets are set and the majority are met ▪ progress is monitored and reported and there is some effective remedial action ▪ financial management is feasible at all levels ▪ self-evaluation is generally accurate and is used to secure continuing improvements ▪ learning is used to make improvements and there are some strategies to maximise and share this within and across organisations.

	<p>The costs of key services are known and there is some benchmarking against national comparators and/or other areas of cost and quality. There is joint procurement and commissioning and some improvements in value for money. Necessary changes are made and result in some improved services or outcomes for service users.</p>
<p>Inadequate (1)</p>	<p>There is a failure in one or more respects to meet the requirements for a grade 2.⁴ Key features of this failure might be that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is little or no improvement in services or performance data compared to similar areas or there may be deterioration in key aspects • leadership is insufficiently clear and/or effective and vision and priorities are not sufficiently shared or well matched to need. Key plans are not in place to deliver improvements in priority areas • there are notable gaps in, for example, staffing, skills, capability, finance, and approaches to procurement and commissioning. Self-assessment is inaccurate or incomplete in important areas and learning is not maximised • performance management is not always leading to improvement • there is insufficient knowledge of the costs of some key services and a lack of understanding of how costs and quality of services compare with national and/or other areas • change is not always implemented effectively and there is limited evidence of positive improvements for service users, in particular minority ethnic, vulnerable and other groups. Internal changes do not always support service development.

⁴ Inadequacy is not automatic as a result of a failure to meet one requirement. Failure in one aspect has to be weighed carefully for its seriousness in determining whether it brings the whole judgement down. Inspectors’ professional judgement is used to weigh and balance the issues against other aspects and judgements.

Section 2. Grade descriptors for the five outcome areas and service management

Being healthy: based on the combined work of all local services in keeping children and young people healthy.

<p>Excellent/outstanding (4)</p>	<p>In addition to meeting the requirements of a grade 3:</p> <p>The national targets for the health of children and young people are met in all and exceeded in most areas. There is a demonstrable link between health improvement and investment in preventative services. Outcomes match or exceed those for similar authorities. Children and young people contribute routinely to strategic planning, judging the effectiveness of services and are positive about almost all service provision. Support is well targeted at vulnerable groups (for example young and single parents, those with housing needs and/or socially excluded groups). Support is coordinated at all levels across different agencies, including the private and voluntary sector. It is signposted and targeted and is effective in identifying, preventing and tackling health inequalities.</p> <p>There is effective and coherent multi-agency working in promoting healthy lifestyles for almost all children and young people, especially those at risk of poor health and coordinated support is well targeted. Services are having notable impact: for example reduction in smoking, drugs, alcohol, obesity, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and improvement in birth outcomes.</p> <p>Physical health needs are well anticipated to inform current and future service provision at strategic level. Most services, including those from the private and voluntary sector, work together effectively and resources are pooled to enable joint commissioning. Improved outcomes follow action and timely access to appropriate services.</p> <p>There is prompt access to a full range of assessment and treatment services for all children and young people, including transition to adult services and children and adolescent mental health (CAMH) services. Prevention strategy is aligned with age-appropriate support services that are well coordinated across all children’s services to form a secure continuum of support.</p> <p>There is notable improvement in the health of vulnerable groups as a result of effective monitoring and reviewing of identified needs to provide the basis for commissioning additional services, timely preventative and specialist intervention services’ provision.</p> <p>Informed choices are made about the balance of costs and</p>
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	<p>quality in, for example, planning at all levels and the commissioning and decommissioning of services.</p>
<p>Good (3)</p>	<p>In addition to meeting the requirements of grade 2:</p> <p>The health national targets for children and young people are met in most areas and exceeded in some, and a range of multi-agency support services are available and accessible to most parents and carers. Children and young people are increasingly consulted as part of strategic planning, judging the effectiveness of services and a majority are positive about service provision.</p> <p>Well embedded multi-agency working in promoting healthy lifestyles and coordinated support is targeted on most children and young people at risk of poor health. Services are having an impact: for example reduction in smoking, drugs, alcohol, obesity, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, and the council has robust systems to measure progress.</p> <p>Physical health needs are identified to inform current service provision at strategic level. Most services, including those from the private and voluntary sector, work together effectively and resources are pooled to enable joint commissioning. Improved outcomes follow action and timely access to appropriate services. There is good and appropriate access to sport activities for children and young people, including those from vulnerable groups.</p> <p>There is prompt access to a full range of assessment and treatment services for all children and young people, including transition to adult services and CAMH services. Prevention strategy is aligned with age-appropriate support services that are well coordinated across some children’s services to form a secure continuum of support.</p> <p>There is improvement in the health of most vulnerable groups (for example young and single parents, those with housing needs and/or socially excluded groups) as a result of effective monitoring and reviewing of identified needs to provide the basis for commissioning additional services, timely preventative and specialist intervention services provision.</p> <p>Information about costs in relation to quality is used in some areas of strategic and service planning and in commissioning to improve the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of local services. Private and voluntary services are commissioned to make an increasingly notable contribution.</p>
<p>Adequate (2)</p>	<p>Health care targets for children and young people are met in many areas and outcomes are in line with similar authorities.</p>

	<p>There is a common framework for universal screening of health needs, timely access to assessment services, local services are aware of the health needs of children and young people and children are reasonably healthy. There are clear plans to target support to vulnerable families or those at risk of poor health. All parents, carers, children and young people are involved in the assessment and referral process. Assessments and referral processes are largely well coordinated, including access to therapy and other services managed by the authority.</p> <p>All parents and carers receive timely access to suitably qualified named health care professionals following notification of pregnancy/birth of a baby or movement into the local area. Access results in early intervention and suitable support for services.</p> <p>There is multi-agency working, including private and voluntary agencies, in a range of preventative services that are accessible to the majority of children and young people and parents in the local area, including Sure Start and sexual health services. The responses of most all children and young people to provision are quite positive. There is good support for healthy schools.</p> <p>Mental health services provision is well integrated, targeted to need and accessible to the majority of children and young people resulting in some improvements in the time they have to wait to receive services. Mental health needs are known and indices are used to monitor provision.</p> <p>Looked after children receive the necessary health assessments, checks and care. Health needs are reviewed regularly. Identified health care needs and actions taken are recorded sufficiently. There is a designated doctor/nurse in place for children looked after and information on health issues and services.</p> <p>There is some effective multi-agency commissioning of specialist services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most needs are met or reasonable steps are taken to meet them.</p> <p>The costs of key services are known and there is some benchmarking of costs and quality against national comparators and/or other areas.</p>
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<p>Inadequate (1)</p>	<p>There is a failure in one or more respects to meet the requirements for a grade 2.⁵ Key features of this failure might be that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parents and carers do not have timely access to suitably qualified named health care professionals following notification of pregnancy/birth of a baby/movement into the local area resulting in lack/delayed support and early intervention services provision • there is no multi-agency working in a range of preventative services that are accessible to children and young people in the local area. Support available to children and young people to embark on health enhancing activities is ineffective • several health care targets for children and young people are not met or performances on targets are not in line with similar comparators. There is no common framework for universal screening of health needs, undue delay in accessing assessment services, local services are unaware of the health needs of children (particularly vulnerable groups) and the health of young people and children is poor • mental health services provision for children and young people is not integrated/targeted to needs across the local area and there is a delay in accessing services available. Mental health needs are not known and indices are not used to monitor provision
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is a lack/limited access to necessary health assessments, checks and care for looked after children. There is also no designated doctor/nurse for looked after children and there is a lack of/limited information for CLA on health issues and services • there is no effective multi-agency commissioning of specialist services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most needs are not met. Parents, carers, children and young people are not involved in the assessment and referral process. Assessments and referral processes are uncoordinated • there is insufficient knowledge of the costs of some key services and a lack of understanding of how costs and quality of local services compare with national and/or other areas.

⁵ Inadequacy is not automatic as a result of a failure to meet one requirement. Failure in one aspect has to be weighed carefully for its seriousness in determining whether it brings the whole judgement down. Inspectors’ professional judgement is used to weigh and balance the issues against other aspects and judgements.

Staying safe: based on the extent to which children and young people are safe, have security and stability and are cared for.

<p>Excellent/outstanding (4)</p>	<p>In addition to meeting the requirements for a grade 3:</p> <p>In almost all cases outcomes are significantly and consistently higher than in similar authorities. There is a sustained trend of significant improvements or high standards are maintained.</p> <p>Almost all children report feeling safe, were consulted with and that their concerns are listened to and responded to with very suitable actions that promote self protection and personal empowerment. Life chances of almost all looked after children and young people leaving care have been improved significantly. Services to almost all looked after children significantly improve their life chances by providing access to leisure, healthy living, education, training and employment opportunities.</p> <p>Outcomes are reviewed regularly to ensure that information, support and guidance is sharply targeted to meet all needs and is increasingly empowering individuals, groups and the community as a whole in ensuring local children stay safe. Almost all workers are aware of and routinely use a wide range of high quality preventative support services and this has led to a discernable, significant and sustainable reduction in the incidence of child abuse and neglect and is clearly enabling children to be well cared for who otherwise would become looked after. Almost all services are of a consistently outstanding quality and provide very good value for money. Partner agencies, including the voluntary and private sectors, jointly commission mainstream and innovative new services to meet current and future needs. These services are secure and almost all are having a notable impact in improving economies, efficiencies and outcomes.</p> <p>Relevant agency and inter-agency strategies, policies, procedures and standards are all very well established. They are effective and comply fully with statutory requirements, current government guidance and local standards. Strategies and protocols are well established for routinely sharing information, and applying consistently the agreed individual and inter-agency thresholds and responsibilities for safeguarding children. This leads to the early identification of potential risk and the prompt provision of cohesive and versatile support services that appropriately enables children to be safely cared for within the family unit.</p>
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<p>Good (3)</p>	<p>In addition to meeting the requirements for a grade 2:</p> <p>In most cases outcomes are higher than in similar authorities and/or the rate of improvement in outcomes exceeds the average improvement rate in similar authorities. Most children report feeling safe and feel that their concerns are listened to and responded to promptly.</p> <p>Most looked after children have a secure and stable placement and have easy access to secure and stable education and health provision that is contributing to improved outcomes. There are effective contracting, support and monitoring arrangements for children placed outside their local areas. The workers allocated to the majority of looked after children and children on the Child Protection Register provide continuity and a regular service that is valued by most children. Support for care leavers includes access to health and other services along with suitable accommodation. In most cases assessments of need are undertaken in a timely way. Well focused support or intervention is put in place and most cases are closed appropriately so there are very few unnecessary re-referrals and reassessments. Safeguarding children and ensuring effective child protection are evident as core elements in the commissioning, planning, delivery and review of all services for children and young people.</p> <p>A wide range of information, support and guidance is easily accessible to children and their carers that reflect the well targeted action being taken to combat the local safeguarding issues and the diversity of needs. Children, including those with disabilities have access to high quality, independent advocates. Most workers are aware of and use a wide range of preventative support services and this is reducing the incidence of child abuse and neglect and preventing children having to be looked after. Most services are well targeted on needs; increasingly engage with children and their carers; and there is a strategic focus on securing value for money to improve the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of local services. Partner agencies jointly plan, procure, resource and review key services to meet current needs and these services are increasingly innovative and improving outcomes significantly.</p> <p>Partnership working is increasingly coherent,</p>

	<p>characterised by clear remits for all partners, including the voluntary and private sectors. Relevant agency and inter-agency strategies, policies, procedures and standards are almost all in place and comply with statutory requirements and current government guidance. Strategies and protocols are in place for routinely sharing information and for applying consistently agreed individual and inter-agency thresholds and responsibilities for safeguarding children. Almost all groups of workers are trained to identify and respond to safeguarding issues in accordance with national and local arrangements.</p> <p>Almost all children and their carers are actively participating in planning and reviewing the services they receive and how effective these are. There are discernable improvements as a result. The experience of children and their carers is routinely collected, collated and used in the design, decommissioning and re-commissioning of services. There is regular and innovative consultation with those groups of children who are traditionally harder to reach and harder to engage. This consultation is impacting positively on service design.</p>
<p>Adequate (2)</p>	<p>Outcomes are in line with similar authorities or the trend is one of notable and sustained improvement.</p> <p>Referral and assessment services promptly and accurately identify children at risk of significant harm and services to minimise risk are delivered in a timely way. The majority of children report feeling safe and that their concerns are listened and responded to. All children, including looked after and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have a safe environment and are protected from abuse and exploitation. Looked after children do not change placements on a frequent basis and all placements are regularly monitored and meet statutory requirements. All children on the Child Protection Register and/or looked after are allocated a suitably qualified worker who is actively coordinating a care plan or child protection plan which is regularly reviewed in accordance with standards set out in national guidance. There is some sustained improvement in outcomes for children. Serious case reviews have been focussed correctly and action plans have been agreed and implemented to address identified concerns. In the majority of cases, assessments of need are undertaken in a timely way to inform support or intervention and cases are closed appropriately so as to minimise the incidence of unnecessary re-referrals and</p>

	<p>reassessments.</p> <p>A range of information, support and provision is readily available to the majority of children and their carers, including the most vulnerable. This range reflects the diversity of needs and the action being taken to combat the local safeguarding issues. The majority of workers are aware of and use a suitable range of preventative support services to minimise the incidence of child abuse and neglect and prevent children having to be looked after. All services comply with the requirements to detect and deter people who are unsuitable to work with children. The majority of services are generally of a consistent quality and there is some focus on securing value for money. There is some evidence of the partner agencies jointly planning, commissioning and delivering key services. The costs of key services are known and there is some benchmarking against national comparators and/or other areas of cost and quality.</p> <p>There is an established culture of safeguarding which is evident in the routine work of individual agencies and key partnerships such as the Children’s Strategic Partnership and Area Child Protection Committee/local safeguarding boards. Partnership working involves the voluntary and private sector agencies. Relevant agency and inter-agency strategies, policies, procedures and standards are mostly in place and comply with statute and current government guidance, including the practice recommendations from the inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Victoria Climbié.</p> <p>Arrangements are in place to check routinely for compliance with the policies, procedures and standards and corrective action is taken promptly where necessary. Strategies are being developed and protocols are being put in place for sharing information and agreeing individual and inter-agency thresholds and responsibilities for safeguarding children, including those children at risk of becoming lost to monitoring arrangements such as those excluded from school or who move between different local authorities and hospital trusts. Key groups of workers are trained to identify and respond to safeguarding issues in accordance with national and local arrangements.</p> <p>Most children and their carers are actively involved in planning and reviewing the services they receive and how effective these are. The responses of all children to provision are quite positive.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">Inadequate (1)</p>	<p>There is a failure in one or more respects to meet the requirements for a grade 2.⁶ Key features of this failure might be that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outcomes are lower than in similar authorities with little or no trend in improvements and/or outcomes are deteriorating • referral and assessment services are not always timely and some children might be left at risk of harm. Cases are closed inappropriately in order to deal with demand resulting in repeat referrals and reassessments. There are cases of looked after children looked after and/or on the Child Protection Register who wait too long to have a suitably qualified worker and/or are not always reviewed in accordance with the National Standards • services are sometimes limited in range, reactive and/or demand led with little or no evidence of the basic components of effective commissioning such as an accurate needs analysis, systematic procurement and contracting and reviewing arrangements. As such there is insufficient knowledge of costs of some key services and a lack of understanding of how the costs and quality of local services compare with national and/or other areas • partnership arrangements are underdeveloped resulting in some fragmented services operating in relative isolation from other services, poorly coordinated information sharing, less than clear thresholds for individual and inter-agency service provision and less than coherent multi-agency strategies, policies and procedures • the arrangements to detect and deter people who are unsuitable to work with children and young people are underdeveloped and do not always comply with current national requirements • the involvement of children and carers in planning and reviewing the services they receive is not always systematic and is not secure. Children and young people have major and well-founded reservations about the quality of some services.
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⁶ Inadequacy is not automatic as a result of a failure to meet one requirement. Failure in one aspect has to be weighed carefully for its seriousness in determining whether it brings the whole judgement down. Inspectors’ professional judgement is used to weigh and balance the issues against other aspects and judgements.

Enjoying and achieving: based on how much children and young people enjoy learning and make progress.

**Excellent/outstanding
(4)**

In addition to meeting the requirements for a grade 3:

Progress in raising standards, improving attendance and reducing exclusions is good or better against similar areas in all or nearly all respects. It is sustained over time in notable elements, such as the value added across key stages, or high standards are maintained. Almost all vulnerable, minority ethnic and other groups of children and young people make better than expected progress given their starting points, and achieve high standards in relation to their capability. The effectiveness and range of school provision is 'very good' in almost all cases. Sharply targeted support and intervention ensure that schools do not fall into categories of concern. There have been no additional schools placed in special measures for 12 months.

There are systematic and well-established procedures for monitoring the costs of services across the range of education functions. Regular cost comparisons are made with services in similar areas. The cost-effectiveness of alternative mechanisms or means of provision is considered. Services are commissioned to meet emerging needs and all provision is sufficiently diverse, relevant and highly sensitive to the present and future needs of all groups of children and young people, including those out of school. Necessary changes are anticipated well and there is a timely, sustained and successful response to national requirements and emerging local needs. Schools, other partners and children and young people contribute routinely to strategic planning for enjoying and achieving and to the evaluation of the effectiveness of provision. Effective partnership working, including links with voluntary groups and private providers, is well established and contributes strongly to outcomes which are of clear benefit to children and young people. The responses of most children and young people to the vast majority of service provision are very positive.

Services empower parents and carers and this facilitates self help between parents thus building the capacity of communities to provide their own support. A well-conceived strategy supports an integrated approach to development in the Early Years and this contributes strongly to provision that is of very good quality. The availability of childcare support meets the

needs of diverse groups of parents and carers such as those requiring 'out of hours' provision or care for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Recreational, cultural and leisure facilities are wide-ranging, imaginative, and accessible. They demonstrably meet the needs, wishes and diverse interests of most children and young people and consequently are used very well.

**Good
(3)**

In addition to meeting the requirements for a grade 2:

Most children and young people, including vulnerable, minority ethnic and other groups generally make better progress than expected given the starting points, and achieve well in relation to their capability. The responses of the majority of children and young people indicate that life is very enjoyable and that they feel very happy at school. The overall effectiveness and progress of the majority of nursery, primary, secondary and special schools are high and the progress made by children and young people is 'good'. A high percentage of early years settings receive at least a 'good' grade in Ofsted inspections. Proportionately few schools cause concern and the number is declining.

Education services match need, are progressively more innovative and diverse, and are accessible. Partnership working is increasingly coherent with clear remits for all, including voluntary and private providers. Children and young people are increasingly consulted about provision as part of strategic planning. Information about costs in relation to quality is used in key areas and there is a clear and successful focus on securing value for money.

Attendance is above local and/or national averages and exclusions are well below average or it shows a rapid improvement over time, especially for vulnerable, minority ethnic and other groups. There is strong and successful collaboration between relevant services, including detailed analyses and clear focus on those children and young people at greatest risk of non-attendance and from being excluded and on those schools in greatest need. Strong multi-agency working has a demonstrable effect on improving attendance and reducing exclusions. Attendance and behaviour are judged as good in the vast majority of schools.

Data are used effectively to determine future trends

and predicted needs in relation to school places, and necessary action is taken as a result of analyses. The numbers of children unable to attend schools by reason of illness, exclusion or otherwise is comparatively low and evidence shows schools manage different needs effectively. There are thorough and efficient procedures agreed between education and other agencies to exchange information at an early stage and allow preventative measures to be taken. Most providers, parents and children and young people are clear about the range of alternative provision available and referral systems and costs are transparent. Re-integration is prompt, planned carefully and supported well.

Support for parents and carers is coordinated effectively across different agencies and is well targeted, especially for traditionally hard-to-reach groups such as single or teenage parents. Information is readily available in the full range of community languages and is accessible to most users. Provision in the Early Years is of high quality and there is a wide and flexible choice for most parents in balancing their children's needs, their work commitments and family life. Provision of childcare support and training for staff who work in the Early Years is closely matched to needs and deprived areas are especially well served.

There is a wide, shared understanding in schools and partnerships and among parents and children and young people about the meaning of inclusion. Most parents, carers and children and young people contribute well to the identification and assessment of individual needs. Very productive use is made of local, regional and national data to monitor the progress made by children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and to ensure that they achieve the highest possible standards of attainment. Statements are of high quality and reviews are thorough and lead to improvements in school practice and provision.

There is a clearly defined and successful strategy for securing improvements to recreational, leisure and cultural facilities based on a clear audit of needs and wishes of children and young people and the identification of gaps in provision. Strenuous and successful efforts are made to ensure targeted groups of vulnerable children and young people benefit from the facilities on offer.

Adequate

Progress and enjoyment are inadequate in no major

(2)

respect, and may be good in some. Standards of attainment are at least in line with similar areas or show a clear and sustained improvement.

The responses of children and young people indicate that almost all of them feel that life is at least quite enjoyable and that they are at least quite happy at school. Proportionately few schools are in special measures. The numbers of schools causing concern are reducing as a result of effective monitoring and well focused intervention and support. The overall effectiveness of most nursery, primary, secondary and special schools and the progress made by their pupils are at least 'satisfactory.' The costs of services are known and there is some benchmarking against national and/or other areas which is used to secure improvements. Partnership working includes voluntary and private providers, is underpinned by shared goals and has led to some discernible improvement. Statutory requirements are met, or reasonable steps are taken to meet them.

Attainment and progress for vulnerable, minority ethnic and other groups, are at least in line with similar areas, or the trend is one of improvement over time and the gap is closing. The progress made by vulnerable, minority ethnic and other groups is monitored closely and successful action is taken to address identified needs.

There are sufficient, suitable and accessible school places. Admission arrangements give priority to the most vulnerable groups of children and young people. Rates of attendance and exclusions are in line with national averages or the trend is one of improvement over time and the gaps are closing. There is specific monitoring and evidence of impact of the support for attendance and/or exclusions for targeted schools, or identified groups of vulnerable children and young people. Attendance and behaviour are at least satisfactory in most schools.

The range of alternative and flexible provision for pupils educated other than at school (EOTAS) meets the needs of most learners and allows them to make at least satisfactory progress. The children and young people are reintegrated into mainstream provision in a timely way. There is a shared and up-to-date list of those on the EOTAS register and those children and young people educated otherwise, with clear details of their current educational placement and provision.

The majority of parents know where they can seek help and support, and guidance is readily available and accessible, including for parents whose children have specific learning needs. Nursery provision is freely available for all 3- and 4-year-olds whose parents request places. There is a clear policy on the use of Foundation Stage profiling and assessment and some well established and successful strategies for raising achievement and improving the quality and range of provision in Early Years. Those working in Early Years settings have access to valued training which improves their ability to raise standards and to meet the needs of vulnerable or underperforming groups.

There is early identification and assessment of the needs of vulnerable groups, especially looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Parents, carers and children and young people receive support to contribute to this process. Vulnerable groups of children and young people receive a full entitlement to education which meets their needs, including out of school hours learning opportunities, and participate in recreational and enrichment activities in line with their wishes (for looked after children this includes a comprehensive personal education plan). Education and social care staff (including those working in schools) work in close partnership with children and young people and their parents to make satisfactory improvement to educational attainment. Most children and young people have their needs met within their local neighbourhood.

For children and young people with learning and/or disabilities, there is a broad range of support for low incidence needs which reduces the number of out of area placements. Statementing procedures are efficient. Intended outcomes for pupils are clearly stated and the provision specified is made. Placements outside of the authority are monitored routinely.

A broad range of recreational, leisure and cultural facilities are available and used well by many children and young people.

**Inadequate
(1)**

There is a failure in one or more respects to meet the requirements for a grade 2.⁷ Key features of this failure might be that:

⁷ Inadequacy is not automatic as a result of a failure to meet one requirement. Failure in one aspect has to be weighed carefully for its seriousness in determining whether it brings the whole judgement down. Inspectors' professional judgement is used to weigh and balance the issues against other aspects and judgements.

- overall, many children and young people do not achieve high enough standards when set against their capability and starting points. In a significant minority of schools the overall effectiveness and progress are unsatisfactory. The proportion of schools in special measures, with a notice to improve or causing concern is increasing or remains high
 - partnership working is not well coordinated and some key partners are not engaged fully. Children and young people have major and well-founded reservations about the quality of key services
 - insufficient action is taken on school places. Admissions criteria lack objectivity and/or clarity. Support for improving attendance and reducing exclusions, especially among the most vulnerable, is not targeted, or matched to the needs of schools or groups of children and young people
 - there are limited procedures for tracking, identifying and arranging provision for children of school age not on a school roll or who are unable to attend school for medical reasons
 - recreational and leisure facilities are limited in range, do not meet the needs and wishes of young people or are not easily accessible to some groups because of transport or other difficulties. Vulnerable groups, including looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not make sufficient use of facilities and are not encouraged to do so. There are few opportunities for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to take part in activities with their peers in mainstream school, especially those children and young people attending special provision
 - there is insufficient knowledge of the costs of some key services and a lack of understanding of how costs and quality of local services compare with national and/or other areas.
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Making a positive contribution: based the contribution of services to delivering the outcomes.

**Excellent/outstanding
(4)**

In addition to meeting the requirements for a grade 3:

There is coherent, innovative and effective partnership working, including with the voluntary and private sectors. Integrated service delivery meets the needs of wider economic, social and environmental well-being of the area and empowers different communities to support themselves. This has demonstrable impact with very positive trends of improvement, evidenced, for example, by comparatively low (or a sustained reduction in) levels of anti-social behaviour, much lower than average rates compared with similar areas of offending and re-offending (or a sustained reduction in levels), a much higher than average proportion compared with similar areas of supervised juveniles in full time education, training and employment and comparatively high levels of children and young people willing to be enterprising and take on responsibilities.

Channels through which children and young people are consulted with, are involved and their voices heard are embedded and formalised through, for example, the founding of key principles of engagement, standards against which the success of active involvement can be judged and training and participation accredited. Children and young people are involved fully in issues that affect them, and their views are built into the decision making processes and demonstrably inform the shaping of services for children. Strategies include capacity building to ensure that there is a regular flow of children and young people willing and able to take on lead roles. The responses of the majority of children and young people indicate that it is very easy to be involved and that they are able to make a notable difference in key areas.

Informed choices are made about the balance of cost and quality in, for example, planning at all levels and in commissioning and decommissioning services. Optimum use is made of joint commissioning and partnership working to improve the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of local services.

**Good
(3)**

In addition to meeting the requirements for a grade 2:

Consultation builds upon successful models of active involvement of children and young people, including local (for example school councils) and national initiatives (for example the British Youth Council, the youth parliament,

the National Council for Voluntary Youth Service and the National Black Youth Forum). Consultation is regular, frequent and inclusive, especially engaging traditionally hard-to-reach vulnerable and other groups of children and young people. It discernibly makes a difference.

All groups of children and young people are encouraged strongly to participate in decisions that affect them across health, education and social care, and to engage in a positive, informed and successful way in the democratic processes. Views and opinions are increasingly informing strategic planning and the range of provision available.

There is close and successful targeting of support from a wide range of multi-agency services for individuals and groups of children who are not developing socially and emotionally, and sharply focused parenting programmes for those that need them. Children and young people are very involved in design, delivery and evaluation of training and support programmes.

Partnership working is increasingly coherent and innovative with clear remits for all key partners, including the voluntary and private sector. Well targeted initiatives in a range of areas are making a notable difference. Information about costs in relation to quality is used in some areas of strategic and service planning and in commissioning to improve the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of local services.

Information, advice and counselling provision is signposted well and targeted effectively at those in most need. For example, young carers have regular opportunities to get help from specialist support groups, including study support, to socialise in integrated provision, to participate in 'out of school activities' and have time for themselves.

Anti-bullying strategies are well established and linked clearly to the wider agendas of keeping children and young people safe and healthy. Effective inter-agency working is informed by a shared understanding of community safety issues, has a strong commitment towards unified approaches and is successful in reducing anti-social behaviour by children and young people. Ongoing support is offered to children and young people considered vulnerable to anti-social behaviour. There are sharply focused and successful parenting programmes for those that need them.

Data on youth offending shows that strategies and initiatives are having an impact – trends over time indicate that rates are reducing. Compared with similar areas, an

above average proportion of young people who offend are in full time education and are attending regularly. There is clear strategic direction in relation to commissioning and resourcing and multi-agency working is effective. There is very effective intervention when young people first offend, efficient procedures from arrest to sentence and highly focused support to help offenders, and their parents, face up to offending behaviour and take responsibility for it. The use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and similar measures is well coordinated.

**Adequate
(2)**

Strategic planning takes account of the needs and wishes of children and young people, including vulnerable and other groups. There is regular consultation with children and young people, especially through representative groups, and some evidence that children and young people's views have made a difference. Children and young people are encouraged to take part in and to initiate voluntary activities and the majority report feeling involved in and well supported by their local communities.

Vulnerable and other groups of children and young people are involved fully in making decisions about their own lives, including decisions about their health care and treatment. There are valued independent advocacy services for vulnerable children and young people and their parents/carers and suitable procedures for representations and complaints. For looked after children and young people, corporate parenting roles and responsibilities are well established, known and understood. Elected members meet children and young people regularly to hear their views.

There are a wide range of opportunities for children and young people within schools and the wider community to learn to share, be tolerant, listen to others, communicate thoughts and feelings positively, develop responsibility, experience team working, develop secure relationships with adults and care for others and the environment around them. Some mentoring and other support, including from children and young people themselves, is provided for those having difficulty in developing and maintaining positive relationships with others. Some highly valued parenting programmes are available if needed.

Partnership working includes voluntary and private sector partners, is coordinated, underpinned by shared goals and has led to some measurable improvement. The costs of services are known and there is some benchmarking against national and/or other areas which is used to secure improvements.

Children and young people, and their parents/carers, are supported well at key transition points, especially at times of transfer of schools or between one key stage of education and the next, and in coping with traumatic events and major changes. Young carers are known and have access to some support, especially someone to talk to who will listen. The assessment and review of vulnerable and other groups of children and young people are supported by clear criteria for accessing services and undertaking assessments.

Successful action within a clear strategic framework is taken to identify those at risk and to reduce anti-social behaviour by children and young people. Major emphasis is placed on deterrence and prevention, and all interventions are monitored and evaluated. Agencies cooperate well and there has been a reduction in anti-social behaviour in local trouble spots.

Rates of youth offending are in line with similar areas and/or are not increasing. The youth offending team is resourced according to statutory requirements. Data are used well to inform strategy and practice and interventions are based on assessment. A wide range of services are available, including those for addressing specific mental health needs of young offenders. Strategic oversight is provided by a management board at which all the statutory partners and other relevant bodies are actively represented.

**Inadequate
(1)**

There is a failure in one or more respects to meet the requirements for a grade 2.⁸ Key features of this failure might be that:

- children and young people are not consulted regularly or sufficiently engaged in decisions that affect them as individuals. Conversely children and young people are repeatedly asked similar things by a range of services and agencies to no discernible effect. The majority of children and young people report that consultation is no more than tokenistic
- there are limited opportunities for children and young people to develop secure and positive relationships with adults and other children or insufficient support for parents and carers having difficulties in maintaining positive relationships with their children
- children and young people are not supported sufficiently at key transition points in their lives or for traumatic

⁸ Inadequacy is not automatic as a result of a failure to meet one requirement. Failure in one aspect has to be weighed carefully for its seriousness in determining whether it brings the whole judgement down. Inspectors' professional judgement is used to weigh and balance the issues against other aspects and judgements.

events and major changes

- practitioners and agencies are not making sufficient use of powers to reduce anti-social behaviour. Anti-social behaviour is not reducing and there is a lack of strategic planning and auditing of needs
- rates of youth offending are above those nationally and/or are not reducing. There is no clear strategy to prevent offending and re-offending by children and young people. There is insufficient action to help offenders, and their parents, to face up to their behaviour and take responsibility for it. Intervention is insufficiently prompt, especially for first time offenders
- partnership working is not well coordinated and insufficiently built on shared goals and priorities. Some key partners are not engaged fully. There is limited evidence of partnership working making a difference. Insufficient or no use is made of private and voluntary agencies
- there is insufficient knowledge of the costs of some key services and a lack of understanding of how costs and quality of local services compare with national and/or other areas.

Achieving economic well-being: based on the extent to which young people engage in further education, employment or training, are ready for employment and live in decent homes and sustainable communities.

Excellent/outstanding

**g
(4)**

In addition to meeting the requirements of a grade 3:

The numbers of young people in education, training and employment is well above the average found in similar areas or there is a sustained and significant trend of improvement or high standards are maintained, including for all vulnerable, minority ethnic and other groups. The innovative quality of the curriculum, teaching and learning leads to high retention rates and consistently high performance, including well above average outcomes when compared with similar areas at levels 2 and 3 by age 19. The outstanding quality, coordination and range of advice empower young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to be independent, achieve highly and be well prepared for adult life. There is a wide choice of pathways and flexibility to meet diverse needs, including those of hard-to-reach groups. The partnership between the local authority, the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions is constructive and the very high quality collaboration between partners leads to very effective advice and guidance to all groups of young people, including vulnerable and minority ethnic groups, and those with complex needs.

Partnership working is embedded and coherent, for all key partners, including the voluntary and private sector. It has led to a range of sustainable initiatives which are making a demonstrable impact across a broad range of areas. Almost all services are high quality, innovative, diverse, accessible and empower/enable users. There is a clear and successful focus on prevention. Informed choices are made about the balance of cost and quality in, for example, planning at all levels and in commissioning and decommissioning services. Optimum use is made of joint commissioning and partnership working to improve the economy, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of local services.

High quality childcare provision is based on a comprehensive needs analysis which predicts future needs effectively; it meets the needs of diverse groups of parents and carers. Economic renewal programmes are innovative and significantly improve employment opportunities. The economic well-being of families, children and young people is evident in the low number of/rapid decrease in the rate of children living in poverty.

Almost all young people live in accommodation that meets the Decent Homes Standard and action is taken to ensure that all young people are so housed quickly. High quality accommodation and tenancy support for young people and homeless families who need it is readily accessible. Housing strategies and plans in relation to vulnerable groups are comprehensive and making a notable impact.

**Good
(3)**

In addition to meeting the requirements of a grade 2:

The numbers of children and young people in education, training and employment is above the average in similar areas or the rate of improvement in outcomes exceeds that in similar areas, including the majority of vulnerable, minority ethnic and other groups. There are effective procedures to assess learning needs, which result in a relevant 14–19 curriculum for all groups, with well matched vocational options and a wide range of work placements, including for hard-to-place young people. The local authority works well with the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions to ensure that young people have pertinent advice and guidance at all key transition points. Rigorous referral systems between agencies ensure that young people with complex needs also receive good advice. There is effective coordination between health, education and social services which results in well targeted action to meet the educational, personal and welfare needs of students. The clear routes of progression at 16+ enable the great majority of young people 14–19 to participate in education or training of their choice and help them to acquire the self-confidence and key literacy/numeracy/ICT and leadership/team skills which they need.

Pathway and transition plans for vulnerable and other groups are monitored effectively and reviews are used to make improvement. Almost all young people contribute to their reviews and are positive about service provision and delivery. Transition to adult services is well coordinated and successful. Young people are able to participate in the education or training of their choice.

The 14–19 strategy has led to notable improvement in attainment and in participation and retention rates; these are above those of similar areas or the trend is one of substantial and notable improvement. High quality teaching and learning lead to good progress of young people 14–19. Effective action is taken to improve poor performance.

Partnership working is increasingly coherent. Private and voluntary services are commissioned and make a notable contribution. Information about cost effectiveness is used in both strategic and service planning and in commissioning to improve the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of local services.

There is a wide range of childcare provision, with effective plans to develop it further. Access issues are addressed well, particularly for disadvantaged families and vulnerable children. Economic renewal programmes improve employment opportunities significantly. The benefits service promotes entitlement and take-up is good. There are effective links between childcare provision, job centre plus and the Learning

and Skills Council. The children's information system is effective in providing comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date information, which is readily accessible to young people. There is positive impact on the economic well-being of young people, such as an increase in employment opportunities and a decreasing rate of children living in poverty.

Most young people have access to decent affordable housing. No homeless families are in bed and breakfast/hostels. Temporary accommodation is good and there is good availability of supervised semi-independent housing for vulnerable groups. There is good support for vulnerable young tenants and families that have been homeless to help them maintain their tenancies. There are robust plans to meet the housing needs of vulnerable groups and some impact is evident.

**Adequate
(2)**

The numbers of children and young people in education, training and employment is in line with the average in similar areas or the trend is one of notable and substantial improvement, including the majority of vulnerable, minority ethnic and other groups. Action is taken to ensure that most groups are represented in these figures and the proportion of young people not in education, employment and training is reducing. The local authority works with the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions to ensure that most children and young people, including children in care and care leavers, have sound advice and guidance at all key transition points. Children and young people are quite positive about service provision and delivery.

The quality and range of advice to children and young people is evaluated and the range of opportunities is extended accordingly to ensure that services reflect the diversity of need. There is some effective coordination between the health, education and social services to meet educational, personal and welfare needs of children and young people, especially of vulnerable and other groups. Transition to adult services is mostly satisfactory.

Vulnerable and other groups of young people have Pathway and transition plans which are regularly reviewed and almost all young people contribute to their reviews. Most vulnerable young people make steady progress post-16 against their predicated targets and are successful in obtaining a range of accredited qualifications.

The development of the 14–19 strategy is collaborative and based on a sound needs analysis. Effective monitoring ensures that most providers meet the minimum standard. Recruitment, retention and success rates are in line with the national average and the average in similar areas. The curriculum includes a range of vocational pathways and progression routes relevant to the needs of most learners. Teaching and learning is monitored and action is taken to improve poor performance.

Partnership working includes voluntary and private providers and has led to some measurable improvement. The costs of key services are known and there is some benchmarking against national comparators and/or other areas of cost effectiveness.

Childcare provision is available and is geographically distributed over the area. Action is taken to fill gaps and to meet the needs of disadvantaged families. Employment opportunities are improved through targeted action and economic renewal, while parents and carers are encouraged to take up their benefit entitlement. There are some links between the Learning and Skills Council, Jobcentre Plus and childcare provision. The children's information system meets the National Standards.

The majority of young people have access to decent affordable housing. The length of stay for homeless families in bed and breakfast/hostels meets national targets and is in line with the national and similar area averages. There is sufficient semi-independent housing for vulnerable groups. The housing needs of vulnerable groups are known and there are plans to address any shortfall.

**Inadequate
(1)**

There is a failure in one or more respects to meet the requirements for a grade 2.⁹ Key features might be that:

- the number of children and young people in education, employment or training is below the average in similar areas and the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training is too high, especially for some vulnerable, minority ethnic and other groups. Advice and guidance is not sufficiently available to young people at key transition points and collaboration between the local authority and the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions is limited
- the proportion of young people achieving at least a level 2 qualification by age 19 is low. Support to help children in care and care leavers to secure places in education, employment and training is weak. Children and young people have major and well-founded reservations about the quality of some services
- the 14–19 strategy is weak with limited needs analysis and insufficiently rigorous monitoring. As a result a notable number of providers do not meet minimum standards. Recruitment and retention rates are below national and statistical neighbours' averages. The range of vocational pathways is narrow. Access to education and training opportunities for young people seeking entry and level 1 qualifications post-16 is very limited. The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent which means that young people, including those with learning

⁹ Inadequacy is not automatic as a result of a failure to meet one requirement. Failure in one aspect has to be weighed carefully for its seriousness in determining whether it brings the whole judgement down. Inspectors' professional judgement is used to weigh and balance the issues against other aspects and judgements.

difficulties and/or disabilities, do not make adequate progress

- there is insufficient childcare provision and gaps remain across the area. Employment opportunities are limited. Advice on entitlement to benefits is inadequate and consequently the proportion of parents/carers taking up benefits is low. There is insufficient coherence between the work of the Learning and Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus. Childcare provision is underdeveloped and the Children's Information Service does not meet minimum requirements
- the majority of vulnerable young people are not housed and/or homeless families are housed for too long in temporary accommodation. Robust plans are not in place to address weaknesses
- partnership working is ineffective. There is insufficient knowledge of the costs of some key services and a lack of understanding of how cost effectiveness of local services compares with national and/or other areas.

Service management: based on the contribution that services make to delivering the outcomes and the effectiveness of the management of services.

Excellent/outstanding **In addition to meeting the requirements of a grade 3:**

g
(4)

The council and its partners champion the needs of children and young people in the area by providing innovative and creative community leadership to address local and national challenges.

Steps have been taken to identify the longer-term, sustainable outcomes that can realistically be achieved and that will make real improvements in the lives of children and young people in the area. Ambitions and priorities are based on a comprehensive analysis of needs. Effective use is made of mechanisms for community engagement so that the views and needs of children, young people, parents and carers are understood clearly. Children and young people and their carers are involved fully in the development of services. The needs have been mapped against the provision made by local services and gaps in service provision have been identified. This information is shared and is used to develop priorities. There is a prompt response to emerging needs, especially through integrated service delivery or the commissioning of new services. There is understanding and support for the partnership's ambitions and priorities among the community and among children and young people.

As a result of the needs analysis and community engagement, the council and its partners share common objectives and targets. These are specified clearly in the Children and Young People's Plan and are translated into a wide range of highly focused and well resourced activities that are designed well to secure improvement or to maintain high standards. The needs of individual children and their families are recorded and there are good mechanisms for sharing of information. There are effective inter-agency processes for planning and reviewing provision for individual children and young people. The partnership moves resources from areas that are not priorities and towards those that are. It actively considers the impact of resource shifts on particular groups of children and young people. The responsibilities placed on the Director of Children's Services and the lead member for Children's Services are discharged effectively.

Priority is given to providing a wide range of high quality preventive services for children and young people and needs are addressed before problems become intractable. A single assessment and recording system is in place to ensure that information about individuals is provided to local services only once and that the actions which agencies take are well coordinated and facilitate tracking of individuals.

Partnership working is very well embedded across all partners including the voluntary and community sector, whose capacity to

provide services is enhanced by local cooperation. Partners have established effective Children's Trust arrangements. Reviewing risks and opportunities is a fundamental part of all decision making, planning, delivery and review of services across the partnership.

The council and its partners have the people and skills it needs to deliver its priorities for services for children and young people. Key post-holders are in place and of sufficient calibre to provide effective leadership. Workforce planning across the partnership anticipates future needs of services. Innovative action is taken in areas where there are especially intractable recruitment and retention issues. The partnership has the financial capacity needed to deliver agreed priorities and has a good track record in accessing funding.

Almost all services are of outstanding quality and provide very good value for money. The partnership has improved value for money in services for children and young people. Effective policies and processes for reviewing and further improving value for money have been implemented. Regular cost and quality comparisons are made and good use is made of joint commissioning and partnership working to improve the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of local services. Unintended high spending is speedily identified and addressed effectively. The council and its partners have well established and highly effective commissioning and decommissioning processes based on current and anticipated needs, costs and outcomes. Contracts are reviewed regularly to ensure required changes can be incorporated and to protect the partnership from risks.

There are highly effective performance management arrangements in place across and within organisations which inform the improvement of services and outcomes, and which have led to significant improvement in outcomes. Services are aware of strengths and weaknesses and effective use is made of internal and external evaluation and challenge. Children and young people are routinely involved in the performance management process. Regular, robust and balanced intelligence and information about performance is produced routinely; key performance information is regularly scrutinised; and underperformance is tackled effectively. Comparisons and benchmarking are well used to increase the self-awareness and success of the partnership.

**Good
(3)**

In addition to meeting the requirements of a grade 2:

The council and its partners provide mostly effective leadership for children's services in the area.

The ambitions and priorities of the council and its partners are mostly based on a thorough analysis of needs which takes into

account the views of parents, carers, children and young people. They consult well especially with hard to reach, vulnerable and other groups of children and young people. Consultation is seen to make a difference. Ambitions are sufficiently challenging.

The Children and Young People's Plan sets out clearly focused activities, across the five outcome areas, which are designed to lead to improvements for children and young people, and which demonstrate the contributions of all partners and action is taken to ensure that most priorities, resource allocation and budget changes are linked. The plan identifies the resources required to deliver the improvements. Partners are clear about respective roles and responsibilities, and the responsibilities placed on the Director of Children's Services and the lead member for Children's Services are mostly discharged effectively. Work is progressing well in establishing a Children's Trust arrangement. Decision making is transparent, timely and anticipates need. Reviewing risks and opportunities is a fundamental part of most planning, delivery and review of services. Councillors and senior officers maintain their focus and are not distracted by minor operational matters.

Most inter-agency processes for planning, delivering and reviewing provision for individual children and young people are effective. The needs of individual children and their families are recorded and there is sharing of most information. There are a number of inter-agency processes for planning and reviewing provision for individual children and young people.

Local commissioning strategies ensure that most children's services are developed flexibly to avoid gaps in local services and to meet needs as they arise. The voluntary and community sector is engaged in developing the strategy and delivering the service. Budgets are aligned or pooled where this provides improved impact.

Within most service areas, the council and its partners have the people, and skills it needs to deliver its priorities. Most training and other development activity for councillors and council staff is generally well attended, valued and is making a difference. The council has effectively built financial and other capacity through the strategic use of partnerships.

Service strategies are linked to the council's medium term financial plan. Overall costs and most unit costs for services for children and young people are consistent with other councils providing similar levels and standards of service, allowing for local factors. There is a strategic focus on securing value for money and there are policies and processes for reviewing and improving value for money. Most unintended high spending is identified and generally addressed effectively. The council and its partners have developed effective joint commissioning. Most

contracts are reviewed regularly to ensure required changes can be incorporated and to protect the council from risks.

The partnership reviews service performance to ensure that needs are identified, value for money is provided, and services are contributing to improving outcomes for children and young people. Scrutiny on most services for children and young people is effective, and services are aware of most strengths and weaknesses. Regular, robust and balanced intelligence and information about performance is produced on most key areas. The partnership compares and evaluates most processes, costs and outcomes. It increasingly uses comparison and benchmarking to improve its self-awareness and efficiency. Children and young people are involved in some of the performance management processes.

**Adequate
(2)**

The council and its partners are taking steps to provide effective leadership for children services in the area.

The council and its partners have an understanding of the majority of the local context in which they operate. They have a vision of what they want to achieve for children and young people. Children, young people and parents and carers are consulted through representative groups and steps have been taken to improve the level and quality of engagement with those from minority ethnic groups and groups at risk of disadvantage. Priorities and plans are emerging on the basis of a clear analysis of need. Decisions about ambitions and priorities are communicated well to councillors, officers and staff; and to children and young people, local people and communities, partners and stakeholders.

Strategic objectives, targets, actions and resources are set out in the Children and Young People's Plan. Strategic accountability for each priority is clear. The council communicates decisions about these ambitions and priorities to councillors, officers and staff; and to children and young people, local people and communities, partners and stakeholders. Lead responsibilities, resource requirements, action milestones, and target outcomes are also identified in action plans, as are the contributions expected from the majority of partners.

Local partners cooperate as defined in the Children Act 2004. The roles of Director of Children's Services and the lead member for Children's Services are developing. The Children and Young People's Partnership is in place and Children's Trust arrangements are developing. The majority of decision making processes within the partnership are transparent, timely and result in some notable improvement. There are procedures for resolving disputes within the partnership. There is some involvement of voluntary and community groups in the partnership. Reviewing risks and opportunities is a strand of the

majority of planning, delivery and review of services. Changes in the council's ambitions and priorities are very often reactive rather than proactive.

Some priority is given to providing a range of preventive services for children and young people and to addressing needs before problems become intractable. The majority of inter-agency processes for planning and reviewing provision for individual children and young people are effective. The needs of individual children and their families are recorded and there is some sharing of information. There are some inter-agency processes for planning and reviewing provision for individual children and young people.

Within services for children and young people in the majority of areas, the council and its partners have the people, skills and capability it needs to deliver its priorities. Workforce planning is progressing and takes account of the development needs of the service. Action is taken to recruit and retain staff. There are training and development programmes for key council staff and councillors which are generally well attended and valued. The council has taken some steps to build financial and other capacity through the strategic use of partnerships.

Overall costs and the majority of unit costs for services for children and young people are consistent with other councils providing similar levels and standards of service, allowing for local factors. The costs of key services are known and there is some benchmarking of costs and quality against national comparators and similar authorities. The council and its partners are developing its processes for improving value for money. There is some joint procurement and commissioning and some improvements in value for money. The majority of unintended high spending is identified and generally addressed. There is some alignment or pooling of budgets. The council and its partners have developed some joint commissioning, planning or delivery.

The partnership is starting to develop rigorous and effective performance management, and there are clear signs of some discernable impact. Scrutiny is beginning to develop its effectiveness. Information about key areas of performance is produced within the partnership and this is generally regular, robust and balanced. It includes some financial, budgetary, and value for money information. The partnership makes some use of opportunities to capture learning and has some awareness of its strengths and weaknesses. Most vulnerable children and young people and their carers are actively involved in planning, reviewing and evaluating the services they receive.

**Inadequate
(1)**

There is a failure in one or more respects to meet the requirements for a grade 2.¹⁰ Key features of this failure might be that:

- outcomes for key services are not good enough
- the service is mainly reactive
- there is limited needs analysis
- there is limited engagement with children and young people to identify needs and evaluate services. The partnership takes no steps to improve the level and quality of the engagement with groups at risk of disadvantage
- the council and its partners have no vision of what they want to achieve for children and young people in the area
- there is limited focus on preventive services
- there is insufficient knowledge of the costs of some key services and a lack of understanding of how costs and quality of local services compare with national and/or other areas
- a significant number of key action plans fail to identify lead responsibilities, resource requirements, action milestones and target outcomes
- performance management and evaluation processes are underdeveloped within services and do not always lead to improvement
- financial management is poor
- partnership working is not well coordinated and is insufficiently built on shared ambitions and priorities
- some key partners are not fully engaged
- there is limited evidence of partnership working making a difference on outcomes for children and young people
- local commissioning strategies are not being developed
- workforce planning is not being developed.

¹⁰ Inadequacy is not automatic as a result of a failure to meet one requirement. Failure in one aspect has to be weighed carefully for its seriousness in determining whether it brings the whole judgement down. Inspectors' professional judgement is used to weigh and balance the issues against other aspects and judgements.

Proportions

Proportion	Description
80% +	Almost all
65% +	Most
51% +	Majority
Less than 20%	Few

The above proportions constitute a rough guide to the descriptions. The sample size and context need to be taken into account in deciding if the proportions and descriptions are meaningful; for example, in respect to looked after children where the numbers might be small.