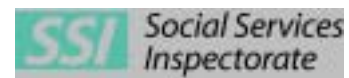


Office for
Standards
in Education



The Children's Fund

First wave partnerships

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Introduction

Context and background

1. The Children's Fund¹ was established by the government in 2001. It was introduced in response to the government's social exclusion unit's policy action team on young people, which highlighted the need for improved services to prevent the negative effects of child poverty and reduce the risk of social exclusion. The fund primarily targets 5 to 13 year olds who have needs which may fall outside of the remit of statutory services. The fund runs alongside other government initiatives which have similar objectives such as Sure Start for children aged 0 to 5 years and Connexions services for young people aged 14 to 19. It builds on some of the lessons learned by the On Track initiative which was established in selected areas with the intention of reducing juvenile crime.

2. The objectives of the fund are to:

- support services to identify children and young people who are showing early signs of difficulty in making full use of their opportunities at home, school and in the community
- provide children and young people and/or their families with the support they need to realise their potential and thereby overcome poverty and disadvantage
- secure long-term improvement in children's lives by creating opportunity and building strong local communities
- actively involve children, young people and their parents in planning and delivering services provided by the Children's Fund.

3. The fund is managed by local partnerships of statutory and voluntary agencies that carry out an assessment of existing needs and decide the programme of services which meets the needs and priorities in the local area. The range and variety of services that are provided are very wide and are summarised on page 24. The partnerships include representatives from local councils including the local education authority (LEA) and the social services department together with the police, primary care trusts, youth justice, as well as local and national voluntary agencies. Children and young people are expected to make an active contribution to developments and be involved in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation. Each partnership designates a lead agency to support the development of the programme and to appoint and manage the staff. An accountable body has responsibility for ensuring that appropriate procedures are followed for the management of the funding.

¹ The Children's Fund throughout this report is referred to as 'the fund'.

4. Initial funding of £380 million, allocated over three years, has now been extended for a further two years until 2006. The fund is distributed by the government's Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU) which also supports cross-government work on child poverty and youth disadvantage. Its staff in government offices provide support and monitor the work of the local partnerships. CYPU have provided guidance on how the fund should be managed and used. The fund covers the whole of England. It is unlike other similar grants; funding is not allocated on the basis of a bid but through a formula, with the largest proportion being allocated to areas with the highest incidence of child poverty. Forty areas were selected to receive funding in the first wave from 2001, a further 50 in 2002 and the remaining areas in 2003. Allocations of funding vary from the smallest of £500,000 to the largest of £6 million a year. The allocations represent relatively small sums of money when compared with the budgets for existing statutory services.

5. Between September 2002 and March 2003, 18 first wave partnerships were inspected. The inspections took place at an early stage in the development of the fund and the visits lasted around two days. Thirteen partnerships were inspected by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) and a member of the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI). Two visits were made by an HMI and a member of the Audit Commission Inspection Service. Three visits were made by only HMI. A full description of the methods used in the inspection is included in annex B at the end of this report.

6. This report reviews the findings of these visits. Inspectors made judgements about the outcomes, activities, planning and management of each programme. In addition, the outcomes, activities, planning and management of each service visited were evaluated. The percentages of programmes and services which were good, satisfactory and unsatisfactory for the four aspects of outcomes, activities, planning and management are included in the report. Examples have been selected to illustrate the effective practice. At the end of each major section, a key issue arising from the evidence is discussed with the intention of stimulating debate and development. The issues selected are those to which all partnerships² strive to find appropriate solutions. The inspection teams are grateful to all the people who willingly and helpfully contributed to this inspection, many of whom did so on a voluntary basis.

² Partnership refers to the group that takes responsibility for the local oversight of the Children's Fund programme. When reference is made to other partnerships, the name of the partnership will be given in full.

Main findings

- The Children's Fund provides a good model for organising local preventive services which help to reduce the negative effects of poverty and tackle early signs of social exclusion. It is flexible and makes the best use of the available expertise to seek local solutions.
- The programmes of services in most partnerships have only been in operation fully since September 2002 and, taking into account the early stage of the work, all of the programmes visited are satisfactory and two are good.
- The fund has met with a refreshingly enthusiastic response as those who use it recognise its importance in helping to fill the gap in preventive services.
- The work has encouraged partnership with, and the participation of, voluntary agencies. This has made an invaluable contribution to bringing new energy to seek local solutions, developing different approaches and releasing fresh skills.
- There is no shortage of good ideas. There are some outstanding examples of newly established services which are working imaginatively and effectively with children and young people. These provide for the needs of children as a whole and are not confined by the traditional boundaries of health, education and social care.
- Services are well targeted and are engaging children and their families and participation rates are good.
- The work is enabling a pool of expertise to be developed – people who have considerable skills in engaging, supporting and empowering disadvantaged children and their families.
- So far, priority has been given to setting up services and less attention paid to monitoring outcomes. While many services are still establishing themselves, positive benefits for individual children are already being achieved. However, not enough is known about what works well and whether the early preventive work which focuses on general health, better care and play activities converts into longer-term benefits in raising school attainment, reducing crime and lessening the need for specialist intervention by social care agencies.
- The co-ordinated and strategic local approach to the provision of preventive services is at an early stage of development in many areas. The Children's Fund partnerships can contribute to these developments, but are not solely responsible for them. With limited central staff, they cannot achieve the necessary developments on their own.
- Partnerships have good intentions but representatives are expected to contribute to, and manage, a number of different partnership arrangements and initiatives. The demands which this makes on the time of the various agency representatives can reduce their ability to make a productive contribution.

- Sharing information and discussion about developments between partners have improved, but evidence of genuine joint decision-making and pooling of resources – including staffing, training, expertise and data – are too limited.
- Statutory services have been willing recipients and providers of the newly funded services but the extent to which the lessons that are being learned have been used to stimulate local strategic developments varies. Often partnerships and statutory agencies use the fund, albeit profitably, as simply another grant. They do not always use the experience to reflect on the organisation of their existing services or to collaborate to support developments across the boundaries of the different agencies, but instead often work specifically within their distinctive areas.
- Against this background, programme managers have taken sensible decisions and have got on with the job in hand by establishing the programme of services. The work, even at this early stage, has the capacity to provide services which are both effective and represent good value for money.

Outcomes of local partnerships' programmes of services

Early outcomes

7. At the time of the inspections, most programmes of services in the local partnerships had been fully operational since September 2002. During the six-month period in which the inspections took place, substantial and impressive progress was made in establishing services and children's participation had improved considerably.

8. At this early stage in development, outcomes were good in 4 out of 18 programmes and satisfactory in the rest. In the 120 services visited, outcomes were at least satisfactory in 90% and of these, 40% were good. In programmes where the outcomes are good, the objectives of the services are clear and outcomes are defined so that they can easily be monitored without placing a heavy bureaucratic burden on the services. Visits to services and discussions with children show that the planned outcomes are already being met.

9. Children's participation is monitored and its rate is impressively high: often several hundred children are regularly supported within partnership areas. The activities successfully engage the targeted children, including some who are hard to reach and/or have complex needs. The children have access to a wide range of activities which they enjoy. Their confidence and self-esteem have improved measurably. They have opportunities to form relationships with responsible adults; they receive guidance, better care and their welfare is safeguarded. Importantly, the children themselves record that they are less likely to get into difficulties when they are occupied productively. Parents, too, have benefited. For instance, in one service, parents made productive use of effective advocacy to negotiate housing arrangements, manage debt or respond appropriately to a child's exclusion from school. Service providers generally see greater benefits when services are organised so that both the children and their parents are supported.

10. The following illustration provided by the Leicester Partnership shows the benefits the young people identified when they attended a service designed to prevent school exclusion. They spoke at length about:

- learning new things
- feeling empowered and involved through designing and decorating the project premises
- feeling increasingly confident about their individual strengths.

11. It is too early to say whether improvements in self-confidence and emotional security, combined with the better care, will reduce crime or the intervention by social care agencies or, in the longer term, improve school attainment and general health. However, in some programmes, there is already anecdotal evidence of an influence. For instance, in one programme the summer play schemes led to a reduction in local

crime statistics during summer holidays. Improvements in children's punctuality and attendance at school are also noted in several programmes.

12. Outcomes of the programmes are much wider than for just the individual children and their families. Improvements are visible in increasing the capacity of small local voluntary organisations to provide a service. This enhances the capacity of the local communities to support their own needs and assists with regeneration. Some organisations are being funded for the first time and record that drafting the bid and managing public money have enhanced the skill and capacity of the organisation.

13. Statutory services have also benefited so that staff have been able to deploy their time more productively. In one large service, family liaison officers are allocated to work in primary schools in disadvantaged areas. Headteachers acknowledge that they have been able to delegate, under supervision, to their liaison officer, much of the work in responding to parents' queries on routine issues, such as personal hygiene and health appointments. As a result, the headteacher is able to spend a greater proportion of time improving the teaching and learning in the school.

Identifying, monitoring and recording outcomes

14. All programmes have planned strategic outcomes in line with the national aims of the fund. In the best examples, outcomes are shared across the partnership and sensible targets have been set to measure progress towards achieving them. The outcomes are often wide ranging, although they are appropriately linked with other local strategic partnership and council targets such as local public service agreements.

The Portsmouth Partnership: programme outcomes

Local residents and young people helped in the development of eight outcomes. Targets have drawn from major strategic plans to measure progress towards achieving the outcomes.

Children should grow up:

- ***having an equal say in any development*** – by increasing involvement of users, children, young people and local adults in the delivery of identified services by 5%, by 2003/04. After six years of the programme, involvement should increase by 10%.
- ***healthy*** – 70% of 5 year olds should have no dental caries experience and on average 5-year-old children should have no more than one decayed, missing or filled primary tooth

- **having succeeded as far as they can at school** – to reduce unauthorised absence in primary schools to 0.9%, and to 1.5% in secondary schools by 2003. To reduce it to 0.6% in primary schools and to 1.0% in secondary schools by 2004. To increase the percentage of pupils achieving Level 2+ at Key Stage 1 to 84.3% in reading, 82% in writing, and 89% in maths by 2003. To increase the percentage achieving Level 4+ at Key Stage 2 to 71.3% in English, and 71.1% in maths by 2003. To increase the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4+ at Key Stage 2 to 74% in English and 72.7% in maths by 2004.
- **having stayed out of trouble** – to reduce unauthorised absence in primary schools to 0.9%, and to 1.5% in secondary schools by 2003. To reduce it to 0.6% in primary schools, and to 1.0% in secondary schools by 2004. There will be 80 less young offenders by 2005. 100 less if the PSA is successful. There will be 30 less re-offenders by 2005. 40 less if the PSA is successful. Youth crime and reconvictions will be reduced by 6% after 6 years of the programme.
- **living in a safe place** – there will be 80 less young offenders by 2005. 100 less if the PSA is successful. There will be 30 less re-offenders by 2005. 40 less if the PSA is successful. Youth crime and reconvictions will be reduced by 6% after 6 years of the programme.
- *having the opportunity to succeed in achieving their dreams*
- *emotionally secure and confident*
- *having facilities and opportunities to play safely.*

15. The way in which outcomes are set as targets, monitored and recorded for each service is weak. Targets are included within most service level agreements. However, there are few examples where the targets are closely related to the prime objectives of the service, are practical for the service to measure and provide useful management information for the development of the service. Mostly objectives are defined as processes or as broad strategic targets. These high-level strategic targets are not practical measures of the effectiveness of individual services. The contribution of an individual service is difficult to isolate because many services can contribute to achieving them. Targets are not broken down to match the objectives of the services more precisely. Hence, monitoring does not provide the individual services with useful, regular information about their effectiveness.

16. Routine monitoring depends mostly on the quarterly returns which are required by the Children and Young People's Unit. While these provide useful information, the extensive data on participation has not been analysed sufficiently. Practical examples of regular, feasible and systematic systems are infrequent. Programme and services managers recognise that monitoring is important but they are less confident about how to do it so that it provides relevant management information and

yet does not constitute an unnecessary burden. The proposed systems of identification, referral and tracking which the fund could use for this purpose are not sufficiently established. Some partnerships have appointed monitoring officers to help with developments, but their work is at a very early stage.

Leicester Partnership: a manageable monitoring system

The system is regular and manageable, yet uses a range of different evidence which is well linked to the purposes of the service.

Annual Review Plan

Project: Re-integration Mentors Annual Review Date: April 2003

The Service

Two Re-integration Mentors, employed to support the Learning Mentors, Education Welfare Officers and Attendance Support Assistants (ASAs). The mentors run a rolling four-week re-integration programme, supporting students and their families to develop positive attitudes towards education, to break through barriers to learning and raise levels of attainment.

Service Users

Students, aged 11 to 13, with long-term non-attendance or detachment from learning.

<i>Target</i>	<i>Performance Indicators</i>	<i>Progress Summary</i>
<i>Provide regular support to 40 students</i>	<i>Number of students completing re-integration programme</i>	
<i>Improve school attendance of students by 20%</i>	<i>Attendance records before and after re-integration</i>	
<i>Improve the mental health of students</i>	<i>Confidence/self-esteem measures before and after re-integration. Feedback from staff/teachers</i>	
<i>Increase the participation of students and families in the service</i>	<i>Number of students and families involved in the service</i>	
<i>Provide a satisfactory quality of service</i>	<i>Feedback from students. Feedback from parents/carers. Feedback from staff/teachers</i>	

17. The practical steps needed to monitor progress effectively are not always in place. Partnerships do not have the capacity to set up and maintain databases which screen and track all children who contribute to the programme. Similarly, small services do not have the necessary information technology or administrative support. Access to children's individual confidential health and education records has not always been possible. Even where this access could be provided, the mechanisms to receive the information are not sufficiently developed. In many services, appropriate baselines have not been set so that progress can be monitored.

18. There are a few examples that show the potential of the systematic use of different methods to capture outcomes for individual children. Valuable experiments in capturing progress use photographic and computer technology.

Recording outcomes using photographs and computer-assisted technology

In each example, outcomes are graphically recorded and the young person has benefited from involvement in design and the decision-making which is involved.

Hartlepool Partnership: using photographs

Good use was made of photographs to record special events such as trips and activities. They provided a good record, which the children used to discuss their experiences. In one case a boy had had a photograph taken at the time of joining a small group activity. It portrayed him as rather depressed, shy and lacking confidence. After attending activities which highlighted the different ways through which he could present himself more positively, he chose how he wanted to be photographed. The two photographs when compared showed the positive impact of the activities on the child's self-image and self esteem.

Tower Hamlets partnership: digital passports

Children with severe learning difficulties are prepared for transition to new schools. The well-planned activities make use of sophisticated computer technology such as video clips. Children and their families decide the design and information which will be included. The clips portray the child's personality, achievements and needs in a very positive way. The outcome is a sensitive and informative record that effectively transfers information to the new school. Preparing it built self-esteem and awareness; helped to manage a difficult transition; brought about an appropriate closure to the children's experience at the school; and enabled them to look forward to the future.

Points for discussion and development

Developing feasible monitoring systems

A system to record and analyse the outcomes of the programme and its services will provide regular management information to:

- improve the quality of services
- learn about what works well
- assist in planning for individual children and help to identify circumstances where children may require additional support
- help in the process of co-ordinating the work of the fund's services with that of the school.

What needs to develop?

The systems should:

- be feasible and not onerous
- require only limited information technology and administrative support to administer
- make use of existing data and targets collected by statutory organisations, in particular, education and schools, and procedures for identification, tracking and referral to avoid wasting any time in duplicating the collections
- be collected with the permission of parents or by solving issues of confidentiality in access and use of information.

The information which is collected should:

- focus on outcomes and be clear and useful
- be collected at two different levels for the whole programme and individual services
- be closely related to the prime objectives of the services
- include positive indicators as well as indicators which measure the reduction of negative factors
- lead to the development of management information which informs programme and service development
- use a variety of methods to collect information such as combining the monitoring of measurable targets with discussion/reviews with children, parents and carers

- lead to regular reports on participation, attendance and outcomes to the partnership.

Programmes of services

19. The programmes of services are well balanced and appropriate in eight partnerships, satisfactory in eight and unsatisfactory in two. The key characteristic of well-balanced programmes is that the provision of services is based on a clear rationale. The services are additional and provide well-targeted support to meet clearly-defined local needs.

Balance and organisation of Children's Fund programmes

20. A strength of most programmes is the very wide variety of different services which are funded. These are well targeted to contribute to the themes of work and focused on identified geographical areas. Most programmes also include one or two services which have general relevance across the whole of the partnership area, such as improving the participation of children and improving play facilities. Well-balanced programmes consist of a portfolio that combines large services alongside smaller ones. The latter are usually designed to improve the capacity of local estates and neighbourhoods to provide their own services. The grants made to these are relatively small. In some programmes, too many small services have been funded and this is a weakness. It leads to fragmentation but also has ramifications that stretch the capacity of the fund's small central staff to support, monitor and plan effectively for sustainability.

Programmes of services

In Islington, the programme of 30 services is organised through six themes of work. In a different approach, Camden funds eight large, strategically well-chosen projects.

Islington

The programme provides a framework for the development of inter-agency community-based work, strengthens preventive approaches, increases participation of children and young people in services and disseminates good practice. The 30 projects are organised through six theme areas and a network of services and developments has been created. These themes include:

- *training and skills*
- *information, counselling and support*
- *reducing exclusion*
- *improving performance, promoting health and well-being*
- *reducing crime and increasing child safety*
- *promoting participation.*

Camden

The primary school project

The project is delivered through a partnership consisting of Coram Family, local statutory agencies and three schools. It is developing methods for identifying early signs of difficulty in children and providing comprehensive support packages. Additional activities are organised in schools to improve children's well-being, including their mental and physical health, educational progress and social experiences, and also to strengthen home-school links through activities and services directed at parents.

The anti-bullying project

Develops community-based strategies to combat bullying and harassment among young people in public spaces. It will link up with the work already being done in Camden schools and build on the expertise of the voluntary sector and the youth service in the community.

The homeless families project

Run through NCH provides children and family support services to clients living in 25 hostels. The primary objectives are to ensure that families are strengthened, confidence built and that links are made with mainstream support services.

Inclusive play provision

Provides holiday play and social activities for young people aged 11 to 13 who have physical and/or learning disabilities or health problems.

Somali mental health project

Provides outreach services to improve knowledge of mental health issues within the community and encourage members to access mainstream services. The project is being delivered by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust in association with the Somali Community and Cultural Centre.

Somali homework club and supplementary school provision

Provides enhanced support to community-based homework clubs and supplementary schools by ensuring access to learning resources, specialist teaching staff and training. The project aims to establish a formally constituted association of Somali supplementary schools.

Youth Crime Prevention (Street Crime Initiative)

A range of enhanced holiday and half-term activities and projects delivered through the voluntary sector, Youth, Leisure and Play services to provide diversionary activities under this theme designed to combat anti-social behaviour and crime among children and young people aged 8 to 13.

Children's Fund IT referral system

Provides a system for recording data on clients who use Children's Fund services and provides links to the databases of other services. It permits the management of support packages for children.

21. Programmes sensibly include services which are both tried and tested combined with others, which on paper look interesting, but involve a component of risk. However, a comprehensive risk assessment has not always been conducted to assess the likelihood that services have the necessary expertise and management structures. Such a process also helps to determine the support they may require to be effective.

Tower Hamlets Partnership: using a risk assessment

Play Association of Tower Hamlets working with Barnardos

The projects were all assessed at three levels of risk, high, medium and low, on four aspects:

- *project plans*
- *management committee*
- *finance*
- *communication.*

For instance, the criteria for "high risk" on finance states – "no financial structures are in place, financial reports are not made. The organisation has been recently established and financial ability is unknown or the grant received is greater than the current annual turnover."

On the basis of the comprehensive risk assessment, the projects' needs for support are determined. This support may enable a small voluntary organisation, which does not have the capacity to manage the payment of staff, to make use of local authority payroll services.

Three part-time workers were employed to provide intensive support as required. The projects that were commissioned demonstrate a mixed profile of risks in terms of the support available with a manageable number of projects which are deemed to be of a high risk.

Progress in establishing additional preventive services

22. The vast majority of the work would not have been possible without the fund. Only a handful of services plug gaps in what is directly the remit of a statutory service. These services are trying to develop innovative approaches with hard-to-

reach groups and their work extends the definition of prevention because they hope to re-engage children who are already at risk of spending a large proportion of their adult life in some form of community care. However, although the services are few in number and they have a clear focus on prevention, more needs to be done so that they do not end up being a substitute for the statutory service.

23. Many partnerships have found that it has taken longer for the services to become established than had been expected. The reasons for this are diverse and discussed throughout this report. In an effort to set up services with a minimum of delay, proposals for services are matched to the needs of the audit, rather than identifying the services which are required and seeking providers who will tender to supply these. A robust commissioning process that procures new services, specifically to fill the gaps revealed by the audit, has only recently been established and then only in some partnerships. An effective commissioning process, however, involves a number of stages and requires time and capacity to manage effectively.

Tower Hamlets Partnership: effective commissioning

The Play Association of Tower Hamlets (PATH) has been established by Tower Hamlets Children's Fund to provide an advisory centre and support workers who work with voluntary play providers to establish services of a more consistent quality. This organisation in conjunction with Barnardos manages the development of eleven Children's Community Centres throughout Tower Hamlets funded by £900,000 of Children's Fund grant.

Managing the Commissioning process

The process of commissioning the projects that are funded was conducted within an eight-week period. A more realistic timescale for the efficient management of this process is six months.

The commissioning process included the following stages, and each stage is designed to increase the capacity of local providers and voluntary organisations so that the experience helps them to seek further sources of grant funding in future:

- expression of interest forms were sent to all youth and community centre organisations and advertised in local papers*
- initial shifts of expressions of interest were made by a small panel*
- support packs were prepared so that the organisations could make a bid*
- all organisations who expressed an interest and met the criteria for funding attended a briefing meeting and were given support with the application forms*

- *Play Association of Tower Hamlets' (PATH) workers provided support on the application process and visited projects needing additional support*
- *completed applications were passed to an assessment panel and checks made on budgets, charity status*
- *application proposals were assessed against clear and achievable criteria*
- *decisions were recorded and unsuccessful applications were given a brief summary of reasons why*
- *successful applications were informed and references and budgets scrutinised*
- *guidance was given to successful applicants on contracts and project files*
- *secure arrangements to ensure financial probity were put into place*
- *grant management, support and monitoring takes place by PATH project staff.*

Contribution of voluntary organisations to providing services

24. National and small local voluntary organisations have made an invaluable contribution to the success of the fund. Undoubtedly the partnerships which have been able to draw on the involvement of a large number of voluntary agencies have benefited. In those areas where there is no strong tradition of the work of voluntary agencies, partnerships have faced more difficulties in establishing the programme.

25. The traditional values and ethos of the voluntary sector have been beneficial in three ways. The tradition of commitment, service and volunteering has helped to reduce some of the workforce difficulties faced in the recruitment and retention of suitable staff. More than this, it has helped to identify a pool of talented people who have the skills and expertise required to conduct this work who might otherwise either have not had an opportunity or may not have been willing to work in the statutory sector. The flexibility, combined with lower levels of bureaucracy and regulation, has helped to encourage greater innovation and stimulated new ideas and approaches. The closeness to the communities, which is a feature of the work of most small local voluntary organisations, has assisted in engaging appropriate target groups and has helped to develop high levels of participation.

Referral

26. Children's participation in programmes is mostly good. However, the support which children receive can be unpredictable and is sometimes based on whether a

child falls into the client group or lives in the area, rather than on a systematic referral process which matches their needs to the most appropriate service. Most programmes encourage referral by many different local organisations and agencies. In one or two partnerships, the programme managers have feared that services may be swamped by referrals and have limited the extent to which services are publicised.

27. Some partnerships have taken the sensible step of publishing brochures on the services that are available locally, although information on the work of the fund and the services which it provides is still patchy. Not enough use is made of the knowledge of health workers, social workers or teachers, unless the service is provided in a school, in order to identify the children who require support.

28. There are very few examples of referral and signposting that are strong enough to match the child's needs systematically to the support available. This is clearly a wider development than can be met by the fund, although the work demonstrates the need for effective procedures and provides a few models.

Birmingham Partnership: signposting the services

This example of a unique and excellent service provided by the National Youth Advocacy Council, demonstrates the value of an accessible single point for referral and the importance of matching the request for support with the most appropriate available service.

The Signposting service holds up-to-date information on 3,500 services. Advisers and volunteers ensure that individual requests for support are matched to the most appropriate service. Children and others can contact the service by phone or e-mail or via the web site. The service has also instigated a confidential chat facility with an adviser through the secure web site. The intention for flexibility and choice in how contact is made is paying dividends because contacts from parents, carers, professionals and children themselves are exceeding the estimated 400 a week.

On the day that the inspector visited, 39 calls had been received by 11.30am and twice that number made out to services. Where it has been identified that groups or areas make lower use of the service than would be expected, more work is done to ensure that there is ease and equality of access.

Two principles drive the work: that speed in responding to the referral is of the essence and that services should work together to complement each other's strengths. Meeting both these principles is dependent on effective partnerships with other organisations and services and Signposts is working hard at developing this. It draws together information about organisations to establish one point of entry to a service and avoid duplication of effort as well as providing children, families, schools and other agencies with a simple route for accessing the services they need. Good links including procedures for effective transition are developing with Sure Start and Connexions services.

Ten advisers, including two team leaders, cover a period of 8am to 7pm weekdays and Saturday mornings in two shifts. They are ably supported by 34 volunteers, including college students on work placement. The advisers and volunteers have worked tirelessly to map providers within and outside the city in order to be able to provide the best match of activity to each individual request and to publicise widely the service that it provides. The service reported that, in a period of seven weeks, it had visited 69 schools, spoken at 38 heads' meetings, taken 15 school assemblies, spoken with 2,600 children, attended two parents' evenings, five teacher or governor meetings, visited 40 community groups, given 15 presentations and held three open days and five community events. As well as an extensive programme of visits to schools and attendance at other meetings in the community, there is a robust advertising campaign via billboards, electronic boards, and adverts on specific bus routes. There are also leaflet and card drops and attendance by Signposting staff at significant community events.

Hartlepool: identifying children and families who need the preventive support services

The original plan made good use of the expertise of primary schools to identify the children who most needed support. Headteachers were asked to identify the three children who they felt they had some concerns about, and who were not already in touch with statutory agencies. The children and their siblings initially attend one of four community play centres where their needs are assessed. Specialist services are then commissioned to respond to the identified needs.

Links with schools

29. The contribution which schools make to the design and delivery of the work of the fund varies between partnerships. At least one third of the partnerships have good relationships with schools where headteachers are represented on the partnerships. Schools host and provide services and individual schools make strategic use of the fund's services to help to meet school targets. Most, if not all, partnerships have set suitable overall targets for the improvement in participation and attainment at school. In one or two partnerships, schools are the main provider and recipient of the fund whereas in others there are insufficient links with the work of schools. In these partnerships schools have an insufficient understanding of the services and programmes, given schools' potential role as a universal preventive service.

30. Some individual schools have good links with particular services. However, these links are not consistent and the importance of the relationship between schools in general and any programme of preventive services is not made explicit.

This requires mutual development because a few services made reference to difficulties that they had faced in working together with schools. Generally, unless schools themselves are providing the service, they know little about how best they can support the development of the services and work together with them.

Points for discussion and development

How can systems of referral and assessment improve to ensure children's needs are matched to the services that are available?

What is working well?

- the variety of services which provide a balanced programme which is well targeted to meet needs
- effective services which are engaging appropriate children and families and where rates of participation are high
- services that are available in local neighbourhoods and thereby increase access and reduce the need for transport.

What needs to develop?

- improve the circulation of information about the services which are available and their target groups and objectives
- build the understanding of social workers, health workers and teachers about the services which are available locally to which they can refer those children and their families who may not be eligible for the support of specialist services but who need support
- develop the understanding of schools about their role as a universal preventive service, about how the strategic use of preventive services may assist the school in meeting its targets and the contribution which schools can make to the development, co-ordination and evaluation of preventive services in their area
- make better use of monitoring data to identify the needs which the individual services meet most effectively and provide this information to statutory agencies so that it can inform the referral processes
- give more attention to liaison between services at the points when children are in transition, in particular develop better links with Sure Start and Connexions services so that preventive services form a continuum

- provide a service/mechanism whereby children's needs are matched to an appropriate service
- use the developing procedures for identification, tracking and referral to identify children who require support and to monitor the effectiveness of the services that are provided.

Quality and effectiveness of services

Scope of the services

31. Visits were made to 120 services and the numbers which contribute to the different themes of work are listed below. The work of the majority of services focuses on more than one target group or theme of work and, therefore, have been included in more than one category to reflect their combined objectives. Given their importance, services to improve health and support the transitions which children make are not numerous.

	Target group or theme of work	Number of services visited
1.	Improving play and leisure opportunities	33
2.	Promoting better health	6
3.	Supporting parents	28
4.	Providing parental education	7
5.	Supporting children and families who suffer from domestic violence	5
6.	Supporting pupils who are at risk of social exclusion because they have special needs	23
7.	Supporting the inclusion of children of minority ethnic heritage	17
8.	Providing additional services for homeless children, refugees and asylum seekers	11
9.	Preventing juvenile crime	10
10.	Preventing school exclusion or the risk of exclusion	16
11.	Intervening to prevent school refusal and improving school attendance	13
12.	Providing additional services for young carers	5
13.	Consultation with children	11
14.	Improving transition	8
15.	Miscellaneous	6

32. The services are very varied in their size and scope, target group and service provider. This is a great strength. Many services are small, providing for targeted local neighbourhoods. In contrast, a few very large services are virtually universal and are provided across the targeted areas – for instance, Birmingham’s Signpost service, Kent’s Family Liaison Officers and the Play Association of Tower Hamlets Improving Play Project.

33. The majority are provided by voluntary organisations, many of them by small local community or religious groups. Schools are the second largest single provider, although this varies between the programmes and the areas of work. Schools are most likely to provide services for improving children’s emotional health, including their behaviour and attendance.

34. Most services have defined the scope of a preventive service very well. Encouragingly, their objectives focus on meeting children’s needs in ways which are not confined by the barriers of the traditional service areas of health, education and social care. The services reflect a combination of the following key characteristics of prevention. The activities:

- are enjoyable, productive and enriching
- are safe and provide conditions which achieve a suitable balance between supervision and freedom and thereby respond to the high level of concern which children express about their personal safety
- break down isolation and provide opportunities to mix with other children and form relationships
- provide guidance and advice to children which they find credible
- enable good relationships and constructive interaction with adults who have the qualities and values required to act as good role models and mentors
- nurture and provide emotional security through better standards of care and nutrition
- involve parents and improve parenting
- increase the capacity of communities and local organisations to meet their own needs
- improve children’s personal effectiveness by involving them actively in the processes of design, delivery and decision-making.

Quality of the services

35. The services that have been established are already proving effective. At the time of the visits, many services and projects were at a very early stage of development. However, a few were more established because they had been taken over from other funding regimes that had expired such as On Track, the single regeneration budget or the health action zone.

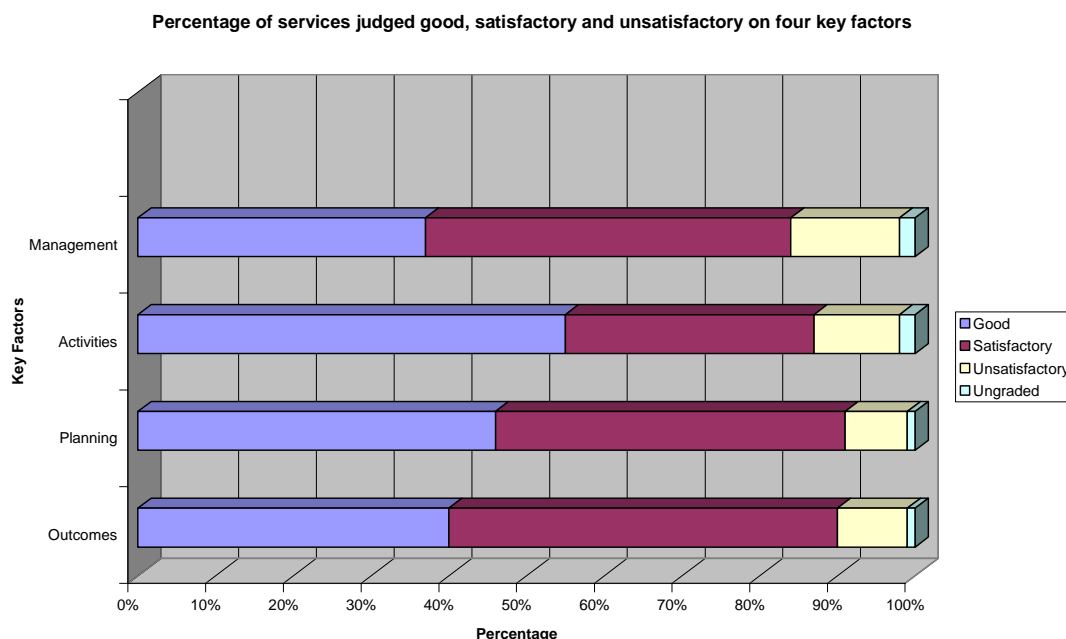
36. A high percentage of the services are good and just under a quarter of these (28) are consistently good across the four key aspects of outcomes, planning, activities and management. Nevertheless, there is a considerable difference between the quality and effectiveness of the good services and those that are unsatisfactory. Although very few in number, the quality and effectiveness of the unsatisfactory services are very poor and often inhibited by unsuitable accommodation, equipment or trained staff.

37. Good services share the following key characteristics:

- the service benefits a large number of children and has high participation rates
- the children are enthusiastic and enjoy themselves
- the children achieve high standards of behaviour, social skills, team work and personal effectiveness
- experiences are recorded using an appropriate medium
- planning is well focused on achieving outcomes
- activities are purposeful, appropriate and of high quality
- the children have considerable involvement in delivery, design and decision-making
- productive and regular links are made with parents
- relationships between staff, children and the community are good
- resources and accommodation are appropriate
- where possible, the service makes use of national standards and accreditation to seek improvements.

38. The profile of the quality and effectiveness of services which contribute to the different themes of work is fairly consistent. Services that support children of minority ethnic heritage, however, are more variable and overall, weaker than any other group. The aims of the services are often too broad. The children have little involvement in the selection and content of activities and there is insufficient

identification of their needs. Often staff lack the specific skills such as languages and cultural awareness.



39. A high proportion of services have good-quality activities which demonstrate that there is no shortage of ideas. A comparatively lower proportion of services have good management largely because of weaknesses in devising appropriate systems of monitoring and support and the need to build mutually supportive networks of providers.

Services which improve play and leisure opportunities

40. Of the 120 services visited, 33 targeted improvements in the provision of play. In the majority of partnerships visited, children’s first concern was about the limited opportunities for safe play. A worrying number of children do not feel safe to use the local parks either because of the poor state of cleanliness or because they are monopolised by older children. Children also raised concerns about the limited play equipment that is available. Their comments demonstrate the lack of suitable youth services and leisure provision for the 5 to 13 age group.

41. Most services are provided by local voluntary organisations in local neighbourhoods. One or two partnerships had valuably taken a strategic approach by establishing projects and organisations with the capacity to improve play activities across the whole partnership. Several services fill a gap by extending safe and appropriate play opportunities for children with special needs. These services break down isolation and provide opportunities for the children to take part in a range of activities from which they might otherwise have been precluded. The activities have added benefits in enabling parents and carers to feel confident that the children are well cared for, but also have given them much needed respite from their caring role and, thereby, have reduced the need to use specialist services.

42. About one third of the services are good. Good services result in visible outcomes especially in raising confidence and self-esteem and improving social and life skills. They work effectively to safeguard children. At least two projects have already led to a reduction in crime in their neighbourhood. The activities are varied. Children are involved in deciding and managing the activity and have opportunities for positive interaction with adults. There is plenty of choice and freedom. In one good initiative, the fund had provided children with vouchers which they could choose to exchange at affiliated holiday play schemes, leisure and sports facilities such as swimming pools. The vouchers very thoughtfully included one opportunity each week for the child to take part in an activity with their family.

Services which improve play and leisure opportunities

Salford: Peel United

This sports development centre provides coaching and supervision of sports activities for 315 children and young people. Funding provides for weekly football practice and weekly sports activities for 200 children with the police and drugs action worker making a contribution for both parents and children. The centre runs parent sports leader awards courses and community-based learning programmes of 15 to 20 volunteers.

Cornwall: Bishops Forum

Activities at an outdoor centre provided for groups of children who experience difficulties in building relationships because of their houses or communities are isolated. Children express great enthusiasm for the activities, they are more confident and are able to work in teams and with others.

43. About one in eight services have some aspect that is unsatisfactory. The most common reasons are marked shortcomings in staffing, expertise, accommodation or equipment.

Services for parents

44. Forty services are targeted to provide some aspect of support and advocacy for parents. About half of these provide support directly to parents and half focus on the children's needs and, within this context, enable parents to play their role better. Targeting specific support to parents and families is a necessary feature of any preventive strategy. Parents spoke frankly and emotionally about the stress caused because of difficulties, most frequently housing and levels of debt. Families display an unwillingness to seek support from statutory agencies and the difficulties which the parents face sometimes stem from their own experience of council services as seemingly impenetrable and inflexible bureaucracies.

45. Most services are satisfactory and about one in five good. These good services are often imaginative in their design and have clear and appropriate links to

other services, to which families can be referred should there be a need. The skills of the staff and quality and accessibility of the accommodation are important factors in success. The good services offer training to parents as volunteers and facilitators which is a strong and sustainable feature of their work.

Services which support parents

Tower Hamlets – Coram Strengthening families Strengthening Communities project

The project aims to trial early intervention work with families and help parents to use effective parenting strategies and techniques.

The team plans to provide three programmes providing 40 places for local parents. Training is provided so that individuals can become facilitators and contribute to running parenting skills programmes.

“I’ve found the programme really interesting and useful especially the bit around behaviour management and skills for encouraging positive relationships with children. The relationship with my children is beginning to improve”

Knowsley – Domestic Violence Support Service

A small group of young mothers attend weekly and with the help of a facilitator consider ways whereby tension and aggression can build up and be defused. The group provides mutual self-help and support to members and the activities are designed to raise self-esteem. Children attend a play group held at the same time and at the same location. At the end of the separate activities mothers and children can spend some enjoyable time together in a safe and comfortable location. A key factor in the success is that the fund arranges transport for the mothers who are often housebound, so that they can enjoy a much needed evening out of the home and in the company of other women and with their children.

Sheffield – Integrated Play

The overall objectives of the service are to promote social inclusion by giving children with special needs an opportunity to play with others. It gives the children a useful and enjoyable activity while providing parents with some respite. Referrals are handled by a multi-agency panel, and families known to social services have a priority. This well-planned provision is co-ordinated by the Out of School Network and run by seven community providers. The parents and children report high levels of satisfaction and there is evidence that the service prevents receptions into care. Previous opportunities for respite were very inflexible because they were residential only.

Services for vulnerable children and pupils with special needs

46. Twenty-three services have targeted children with special needs and all are well focused on prevention. The services are designed to break down isolation and enhance social opportunities. Another group of about 34 services target vulnerable

children with the objective of securing improved emotional health through nurturing, mentoring and in one or two partnerships, by forming multi-disciplinary teams. Many of these latter services are based in schools.

47. About half the services for special needs and about one third of the services for vulnerable pupils are good. These services define prevention in an imaginative way and have targeted needs which might not have otherwise been met. The work is highly skilled and typified by excellent relationships, high-quality care and appropriate, rich communication between children and adults.

Fostering better emotional and mental health

Nurture group, Lancashire

This is a facility for up to 20 children in two primary schools who are each supported by a teacher and a support assistant. The children continue to be part of their larger class group and rejoin them for the subjects of the curriculum where they can do well. Positive outcomes are already in evidence. The children were able to talk about how well they were doing. Activities were very well planned, providing individually tailored programmes for each child. Progress is carefully recorded.

Place to be, Greenwich

Situated in 10 schools. Each project has a secure base and offers:

Place to be – individual or group sessions for children referred by school or self-referred.

Place to talk – individual drop-in service for children who self-refer and take the lead in conversations and make decisions about activities and actions to be undertaken.

Place to think – an additional service for teaching staff.

The children are articulate about the ways in which the service has given them confidence, helped them to solve problems and cope with difficult situations.

The Malachi Trust, Birmingham

The Malachi Trust works with primary schools over a six-month period, looking at the choices that confront young people in their every day lives. It used song and role-play to engage children. This led to a performance of over 500 children in Birmingham's Symphony Hall. The standard of performance was very high. Children had gained in confidence and in their understanding.

Duchy group, Salford

Provision fully targets children 'at risk' as there is no other community or youth provision on the Duchy estate. The area has high crime, drug use and unemployment. It is bleak offering no safe play areas, few local shops and poor transport links. Children and their families have poor nutrition and diet and higher than average mental health needs, and many exhibit aggressive and violent behaviour. Self-esteem is low in this community and there is a general poverty of aspiration and lack of belief that they can change their situation.

The project is hugely successful and since the base was established it has acted as a magnet attracting large numbers of children. Provision outstrips demand and there has been an instant and dramatic impact on reducing referrals to social services. Children are becoming more confident, sociable and hopeful and enthused about their future. Several have already achieved sports coaching certificates for football and canoeing.

Purposeful activities both on and off the estate are designed to develop social inclusion, providing a good range of sport, music, art and drama activities and information sessions about rights, relationships and sex, drug and alcohol awareness. Certificates are awarded for attendance and participation in activities; for example, walking/rambling, canoe instructor certificates, football coaching, swimming, web page design course, pregnancy awareness, drama workshop, track cycling. The base provides security and access to warm food and hot drinks.

Staff are confident, relaxed and experienced in working with disadvantaged children. They engage children well in appropriate activities. All of this helps to create a welcoming and supportive climate.

Torrington Estates, Knowsley

These are two strands within a project provided by a community centre that targets children living on a local estate. One project organised in school time provides mentors for children with behaviour problems. The other provides an after-school club five nights a week and during the holidays and offers play activities in a safe, warm and relaxed atmosphere. The children are totally at home. The project also successfully encourages the training of parental volunteers and has produced a parents' handbook.

Tower Deaf Project, Tower Hamlets

A youth club for profoundly deaf British Bangladeshi children. Most of the children are proficient in British Sign Language and have learned to read in English. However, communication with the Bengali-speaking parents is restricted and it is difficult for the children to develop an appreciation of their culture and religious experience. This club targets the children and their hearing siblings. As one of the activities it provides a library of children's books about Islam for the children who read English but not Bengali or Arabic. This helps them to make sense of their religious experience when they attend the mosque.

Art therapy for asylum seekers, Nottingham

All children who attend this after-school session are refugees or asylum seekers. The children attend voluntarily and are totally absorbed in producing some attractive and thoughtful work. One child says that they could not do this at home because there are no paints. Some use is made of patterns from the child's community traditions. The activity is organised by an art therapist in conjunction with an asylum seekers' support worker. At the end of term, a support pack will be provided so that the teacher can continue the work.

The Primary School Project, Camden

The Primary School Project operates in three schools and illustrates links between preventive services and schools. The agencies agree that a lack of an overview of their work is detrimental to positive working practices. Co-ordination of services is perceived as better at higher levels of need but, in the preventive stages, professionals do not have sufficient time to liaise with other services and lack knowledge of how other agencies work in schools. Schools often make referrals to several services at once, with the hope that someone will pick this up. As a result, sometimes a child receives a plethora of services whereas a child with similar needs can receive none.

Multi-disciplinary teams, made up of services that already support the schools, such as Educational Psychologists and Children's Fund financed services, such as Learning Mentors, have been set up to address this. The impact of this development will be more cohesive and joined-up services working in all schools, supported by protocols for team working procedures and regular evaluation of the services provided. Multi-disciplinary teams are able to discuss casework, share perspective and use resources more efficiently. Development work has also focused on the systematic recording for individual children's progress against clear and measurable outcomes, as well as providing data that will enhance service development at a strategic level.

Points for discussion and development

What makes a good preventive service?

What is working well?

- varied services which target a wide range of needs and are also underpinned by an appropriate understanding of the characteristics of good preventive work
- services with clear objectives
- the engagement of children and good rates of participation

- good relationships between adults and children
- services which are provided locally
- good models of some effective services
- staff who are skilled and know how to meet the services' objectives
- services where activities are child-led and are directed at empowering children
- services that combine support for children with close contact with parents and schools.

What needs to develop?

- building the greater consistency of service provision
- networks to support service providers and disseminate their work
- a coherent strategic framework within which services understand their role
- unbureaucratic ways of measuring and assessing outcomes
- more effective signposting of services so that the child's needs are matched to the strengths of the service
- better links between Sure Start and Connexions services.

Planning

48. Planning is satisfactory at the strategic level in all but one programme. In six programmes planning is good. In these programmes, plans are informed by a thorough audit of need, which is based on varied and comprehensive data. This strategic analysis clearly identifies themes and geographical areas where risk factors predominate. The plans are informed by an understanding of the place of the fund within the priorities of the local strategic partnership and a regeneration strategy. Voluntary agencies play a full part in the partnership and as providers of services. However, even when planning is good, strategic management and decision-making by a partnership are at an early stage of development. While good services involve children in the design, decision-making and delivery, children's routine involvement in the decisions about the whole programme is not consistent. The limited extent to which performance information, monitoring and evaluation shape the plans for the sustainability of the work is a weakness.

Children's Fund plans

49. The strategic plans, which were an initial requirement in order to obtain the fund, are at least satisfactory and often good. Plans build on sensible strategic analyses based on an audit of needs and services. These are very comprehensive and useful. In many partnerships they have been compiled in the absence of any other local strategic overview of the needs and services. Nearly all make use of a considerable range of data shared effectively between education, health, social services and police. Generally, the audit of local needs is more comprehensive than that of service provision. Nevertheless, in the best audits, needs and services are helpfully mapped. Some, while comprehensive, lack a concluding summary which clearly identifies the priorities which have emerged. This reduces the strategic value of the comprehensive compilation of data.

50. The plans target the services and support effectively using a combination of specific themes and geographical areas. These bear a close relationship to the findings of the audit and provide an appropriate framework for decisions about the funding of new services. Usefully, small pockets of deprivation in otherwise more affluent areas have been identified which, in the past, have never attracted additional resources.

City of Portsmouth partnership – the audit of need

- housing including housing types and homelessness*
- population including children, families, ethnicity, large families, young and lone parents, unemployment, low income, transience, asylum seekers, index of local deprivation*
- education including school rolls, statements of special educational needs, schools attended by target groups, low achievement, free school meals, truancy, bullying, children with learning disabilities*

- *health including rates of attendance in accident and emergency units; levels of domestic violence; alcohol and drug use; nutrition among 5–13s; smoking among 5–13s; depression among 5–13s; levels of infant mortality, number of teenage pregnancies and eating disorders*
- *social services, including the number of children on social services child protection register; number of looked after children; number of children estimated to be at risk of social exclusion; and crime data including information on drug taking, number of crime locations, number of offenders.*

Leicester City Partnership: mapping to identify zones

At a local level, the ward level of analysis does not address need at a community level, and indeed the wards do not always form natural communities. The areas targeted for the fund have been chosen with reference to the natural communities of need. A mapping exercise was undertaken by a consultant for the partnership, and the report justifies the choice of the areas. Maps were used to show the relationships between the following indicators:

- *the standard mortality rates for all deaths*
- *coronary heart disease and cancer*
- *poor educational outcomes*
- *the 1991 index of deprivation*
- *the 2000 index of deprivation child poverty indicator ranking*
- *free school meals*
- *income support and low levels of employment*
- *taking cars without consent*
- *council tenure versus owner occupation*
- *ethnic diversity particularly for the African and African Caribbean communities*
- *child protection investigations.*

Birmingham Partnership: identifying small pockets of deprivation

Birmingham has access to a wealth of data that describe or measure poverty and exclusion. Traditionally, much of the data has been collated on a ward basis, with subsequent result that small pockets of deprivation become invisible in the data when they are surrounded by relative affluence in the ward in which they are based. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Index of Local Deprivation has been used to identify a total of 2,026 children aged 5 to 13 in these target pockets of deprivation. This has resulted in the identification of 12 areas, generally particular roads and estates which have become targets for the work of the Children's Fund.

Implementing the plans

51. The programme of services which has been established is well matched to the intentions of the original Children's Fund plan. Much of the responsibility for this has rested with the programme managers, who have taken the action necessary so that services are up and running quickly. A great strength has been that partners and providers have shared a clear understanding of the objectives of the fund. Programme managers have often worked hard against other local demands to ensure that decisions fulfil requirements to establish additional services that meet the criteria of the fund.

52. The accountable body provides sufficient and timely financial information for the partnership to make decisions. Planning has been inhibited in only two partnerships by the lack of accurate financial information. In both partnerships, compensating for this has consumed much of the programme managers' time and diverted them from other important work.

53. There is no shortage of ideas for services, but there has been some over-optimism about the time and capacity required to bring an idea to fruition. In particular, problems with the recruitment and retention of key staff have caused some decline in several partnerships. In the last year this contributed to significant levels of underspending. The pressure to allocate funding has led to the acceptance of a greater number of smaller and short-term services than original plans envisaged. While all of these add value, they have reduced the strategic thrust of some programmes and may be in danger of diluting the intention of developing sustainable services.

Planning and decision-making in partnerships

54. The partnerships are well intentioned and supportive. The speed of development has been so swift that the working arrangements have not always been able to keep up with the pace. Predominantly, however, there is a great deal of good will to make the new working arrangements effective. Terms of reference, protocols

and procedures have all required development. Debates about the appropriate representation have often assumed undue importance, although eventually most partnerships have achieved a suitable balance between statutory and voluntary agencies. Black and minority groups, however, are under-represented.

55. In the majority of partnerships a clear local overview of and strategy for preventive services within which the fund can work are at an early stage of development and have far wider implications than the fund's partnership on its own has the capacity to manage. In most areas, the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnerships are being established and efforts are being made to devise a local preventive strategy, but only after the Children's Fund partnership's work has begun. Although there was no requirement to establish a new partnership to steer the development of the programme, most areas have done so, either through a fully-fledged partnership group or a sub-group of an existing partnership. So far the roles of, and relationships between, these partnerships are not sufficiently clear. Several local authorities have plans to provide a more rational structure for partnership working but these are at an early stage. For example, the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership also acts as the Children's Fund Partnership in only one or two of these first wave areas.

56. An understanding of what constitutes effective partnership working is developing, but slowly. Weaknesses are less obvious because of the hard work and commitment of the programme managers who have had the major responsibility for commissioning the services. However, it is unlikely that programme managers will be able to compensate for any major strategic weaknesses when planning to sustain services becomes the priority, since this will require close co-operation between the agencies. To date, the leadership provided by the partnerships has overwhelmingly focused on steering developments and over-coming difficulties with co-ordination and administration. Partnerships provide effective fora for sharing information. At this early stage, they are mainly agreeing bids for project proposals and noting difficulties with recruitment.

57. Too often the partnership ratifies decisions rather than makes them. Their work in taking shared responsibility for planning services is less prominent. There is little to show that working arrangements in some partnerships involve more than the participation of partners or that a true sense of shared accountability has developed. In these circumstances, while an effective programme of services is being established, there is a tendency to see the work of the fund as too separate from the work of services funded and managed by different agencies. In consequence, agencies are not all well placed to make sufficient use of the valuable lessons that are being learned.

58. A number of factors account for this. There is wide disparity in the frequency of meetings which are sometimes too far apart to ensure effective and timely partnership decision-making. Some meet every month and others every three months. In about a third of the partnerships attendance is variable and the time required by representatives to come to the meetings has often prohibited their full participation. Participants are often required to attend a large number of meetings of different partnerships. The demand which this makes significantly reduces their effective contribution and the extent to which they can accept shared responsibility. There is a tendency to set up a large number of task groups, which obviously

increases the burdens on members. Managers who are entrenched in the day-to-day management have found it difficult to think more widely than their immediate concerns of service specific areas. In about a third of partnerships one of the major statutory agencies, of either health, education or social services, has been slow to make a suitable contribution.

59. Voluntary agencies have made a very valuable contribution to developments. They have generally felt that decision-making is transparent, although in two partnerships some reservations were expressed about whether they are able to play a full part. In one partnership, voluntary agencies are able to claim travelling expenses in order that they can attend meetings, but this is unusual. Sometimes voluntary agencies, even where relationships are good, perceive that their contributions are regarded as less professional than those of the statutory agencies and that voluntary status can be associated with amateurism: a perception which the findings of this inspection should help to dispel. In one partnership, relationships have been cemented by the council's clear and appropriate third sector strategy, which recognises the value of voluntary agencies in providing services across the council.

Tower Hamlets Council: The Third Sector Strategy – working in partnership with voluntary agencies

The council recognises the increasing significance of the voluntary sector to meeting the council's aims. The strategy is about changing the way the third sector is perceived and its role in public service delivery. Through the strategy, the council aims to:

- improve the quality and sensitivity of services to local people*
- develop innovative and optimistic partnerships with the sector*
- recognise the potential for increasing the sector's role in the delivery of excellent public services accessible to all.*

The council contributes an estimated £30 million a year to the third sector and is clear about how this expenditure contributes to achieving the council's goals, and the outcomes that are achieved.

The council believes that the voluntary sector has the ability to produce aspects of services better than the council. At their best, the third sector provides services that:

- are more culturally sensitive*
- are delivered by the community for the community*
- can be tailored at a neighbourhood level to meet real need*
- provide local employment.*

60. The partnerships' chairpersons are crucial to the leadership and the process of timely decision-making, although they have to combine this with a range of other duties. They are rarely in a position to exert anything more than influence in circumstances where any agency may not be contributing fully, or when incisive leadership is required to take developments forward. Chairing the partnership effectively, and in a way that enlists contributions, is often crucial to its success. Where the standard of chairing is good, even very large meetings prove effective. One large partnership has appointed an independent chairperson who receives payment for a small, but regular amount of her time so that she is able to make the necessary contribution.

Planning to sustain services

61. Planning to sustain the work of the fund is at an early stage although sustaining services is under active consideration, probably more than in other examples of short-term grant funding. There are many different opportunities, which include disseminating the lessons learned so that existing provision can be improved; empowering local communities, parents and children so that they have the capacity to provide their own services; and pooling funds so that permanence can be secured for services with proven effectiveness.

62. Discussion on the means to achieve sustainability is not sufficiently considered at the outset. Hard-pressed programme managers have acted quickly to get the services established. However, even when there are compelling reasons for the early consideration of the options, this does not happen. Although most services are additional to statutory provision, a small number provide new approaches to fulfilling an existing statutory responsibility, most notably the provision of education to children who have no school place. Even though these services contribute to support existing statutory provision, too little has been done to gain a commitment to discussing the continuation of these projects should they prove successful.

63. The importance of retaining the flexibility of the fund is not always understood. Programme managers assume that the services will be retained throughout the duration of the funding rather than their continuously reviewing the services and swiftly ending those that are not productive or securing greater permanence for those that are.

64. There is already much to celebrate but the lessons which have been learned, both within and between programmes, are not sufficiently disseminated. One or two partnerships have established good networks where services which contribute to a specific priority and theme meet regularly to learn about each other's developments. Other partnerships circulate newsletters and one or two have developed web sites.

65. There are too few examples of statutory services having used the potential to learn from the experience of implementing and managing the programmes. For instance, consultation with children and their parents often illuminates their experience of statutory services. Common areas of concern which are raised nationally include housing, the cleanliness and safety of local parks, personal safety, the crippling effects of mounting debt, the activities of loan sharks and exclusions

from school. However, the statutory agencies have made little use of these views to review or improve the services which they maintain.

66. Better prospects for sustainability exist where the capacity of local voluntary organisations has been enhanced. There are many examples where local communities are supported to manage their own services and where bidding for funding and managing the newly formed service provide opportunities to extend the skills and capacity of local residents so that the service can be sustained when grant funding ends.

Gateshead Partnership: working to improve neighbourhood facilities

Highfield Youth Group

Provision organised by a small voluntary group is targeted at children and families who live in an isolated semi-rural disadvantaged village, and currently provides a youth club which offers a range of activities one night a week in a primary school and a summer programme of special events and outings. It has plans to develop an integrated children and community service for the local area.

67. Good examples of matched funded services, mostly through collaboration between the fund and schools, provide better prospects of continuing the work when the fund ends. However, opportunities to secure alternative funding by the collaboration between different statutory services so that services can be commissioned jointly are underdeveloped. The fund has continued to finance some services which have proven their value and which were previously supported through a different grant. These services have been maintained only by using a series of different grants, rather than by seeking ways of establishing permanence and security.

Kent Partnership: collaborative commissioning of services

The Kent Partnership offered each school serving a targeted ward an opportunity to employ a part-time family liaison officer, with the costs met equally by the fund and the school. Over 90 family liaison officers have been appointed. A county project manager provided by the fund has taken up post to ensure support, training and co-ordination.

The aims of the family liaison officers are to:

- provide advice, support, information about education and other services to parents and children attending the school*
- establish and foster good relationships with parents and carers of children at the school so that problems which can hinder educational progress can be identified and tackled at an early stage*

- *encourage parental involvement in school and all its activities*
- *maximise parent's own skills and enable them to respond to family needs by communicating openly and providing good parenting.*

Involving children in planning and decision-making

68. The value of involving children in design and decision-making is widely established as the cornerstone of a preventive strategy. A key characteristic of the 28 services which are consistently good is the way in which activities are child-led. These services have developed excellent ways of involving children, enabling them to make real decisions about design and delivery. However, across the whole programme, consultation with children is variable. Partnerships recognise that involving children in decision-making requires more than simply using children as representatives in adult structures. Specific projects targeted at pioneering different approaches are established, but work is at an early stage.

69. When initially set up, all the programmes canvassed children's views on their needs and the services that they require. This has brought benefits in determining the appropriate content of the programme, developing services that are well targeted and encouraging high rates of participation. Most programmes have also involved children in some way in making key appointments of staff. In the best examples, this work is much more than a token approach. The children were well prepared. They understood the requirements of the job, considered the questions that they needed to ask and had a clear view of what might constitute an appropriate reply. They had thought out the best way in which they could relay their views to the appointment panel. The children made a pertinent and valuable contribution. One school, having benefited from children's involvement in the appointment to a post supported by the fund, went on to involve children in other appointments.

Kent Partnership: involving children in appointing staff

Cheney School Youth Action Project

"When we were interviewing them (the candidates) for the job we worked out what we wanted to ask them and listened hard. Two were good, one was really cool with kids and another seemed to be a good manager. But we didn't think any were good enough to run the project and be our worker's boss"

The qualified appointments panel had come to the same decision, but were impressed by the children's reasoning and the detailed case they had argued.

70. The examples below illustrate the considerable skills, planning and preparation that are required to ensure that the children can contribute effectively. The value of this is greater than simply canvassing children's views. It empowers children, so that they can articulate their needs in a responsible way and provides good opportunities to enhance confidence and personal effectiveness. However, links between this work and school citizenship programmes and school councils have not been made.

Consulting and involving children

The Work of the Children's Participation Officer – Thanet, Kent

Children aged 9-11 from a local housing estate show obvious enthusiasm and well-developed social and oral skills. The children ask and answer questions, intervene in an appropriate way and listen to one another. The quality of relationships is excellent. The children record their thoughts and feelings in an attractive and well presented way. They had discussed issues effectively with the district council and had interviewed the chair of the partnership. As yet the school had not been approached for information on whether the children's skills had had any impact on their achievements.

New and innovative ways are being developed to consult children. These included renting a disco so that children could access the facilities, asking them questions about their views at the same time. Frequent feedback and rewards were given when they responded. Several agencies contributed to this experience. Each agency provided two questions to the event and the feedback was shared with all agencies. This avoided the need for each agency to conquer the children separately.

Involving children in the design, delivery and decision-making of the service

Duchy group: Salford

The children are involved in the development of the services and this is a real strength. For example, all young people identified solutions to problems of overcrowding in the sessions. Various questions for children to think about during their session were posted on notices around the building. At the end of the evening a support worker led a meeting to collect their views. Issues were debated in a mature way and children put forward solutions. Eventually they voted and agreed to take a one-hour reduction in their contact time in order that younger children could use the facilities.

Fusion project: Camden

Fusion, run by Camden Play Service, is a project for children and young people aged 11–14 with learning disabilities. The aims are to: provide social opportunities; increase self-confidence and self-esteem; promote independence; promote emotional well-being; and ease the transition to youth provision.

Consultation with the young people over the design and delivery of the project aims to create a wide ranging child-led activity programme including sports, music, dance and trips out. The children keep a diary, which shows the activities they joined and how they rated their day. Play staff also include comments.

Points for discussion and development

What is required to involve children effectively in the planning and development of the programmes and services?

What is working well?

- agreement about the value of involving children
- consultation with children about their requirements and preferences at the start of the programme
- children's involvement in recruitment of the central programme staff
- the appointment of some specialist workers to foster greater consultation and involvement
- individual services which involve children in the management of the service and provide opportunities for them to take real decisions and about the delivery and design and through the process help to develop their personal effectiveness
- good relationships with staff.

What needs to develop further?

- systematic and regular opportunities for children and young people to contribute to an evaluation of their progress and the work of the services they use
- better links with the school citizenship programmes and school councils
- consulting children about a wider range of issues – such as resources, food and drink, behaviour, rules and policies, physical environment and decoration
- moving the direction of the work from consultation with children to their empowerment as the cornerstone of all preventive services

- moving services and activities from being adult-led to child-led by involving children consistently in the design, delivery and decision-making of services
- understanding that the involvement of children requires preparing them to make responsible, informed choices rather than giving them free choice
- building on good practice by developing greater understanding about the preparation children and young people require, so that their involvement and consultation with them is effective.

Management of the children's fund programme

Work of the accountable body and lead agency

71. In eight partnerships, the management of the programme is good; it is satisfactory in nine and unsatisfactory in one. With the exception of two partnerships, accountable bodies provide satisfactory support. In the majority of cases, the accountable body is the finance department of the local council. This has benefits as the department has established systems. However, there has been some nervousness about payments made in advance, although this is clearly important because of the number of small organisations.

72. Lead agencies from both the statutory and voluntary sectors are supportive and provide effective management and pastoral support for the programme manager. The character of the lead agency is less influential in determining the content and effectiveness of the programme than the quality of the individuals who perform the role. However, the lead agency is not well placed to provide the strategic leadership for the partnership nor does it have the mandate for this. It can only try to influence greater shared accountability and responsibility among partners. The culture of the lead agency and its priorities have an influence on the composition of the programme and the relationships which are formed, although this is not marked. For instance, when the education department is the lead agency, the partnership and the programme have at least sound relationships with schools, although other agencies have been able to construct relationships which are similarly sound.

Staffing, recruitment and retention

73. All partnerships have kept within the appropriate allowance for central and administrative costs and some are well below this. The central team is, therefore, generally small. The capacity has been reduced because about a third of partnerships have experienced difficulties with recruitment and retention either of the programme manager, or of development and participation workers. Police checks have held up appointments, although this is improving.

74. The staff who have been recruited demonstrate considerable expertise and skill in their work. Partnerships and lead agencies have successfully recruited programme managers from a wide range of different backgrounds. Much of the success of the programmes has depended on their skill and energy. Even in the absence of a strong strategic framework, the programme managers have taken sensible decisions and have managed, often in a very short space of time, to get services up and running, although sometimes at the cost of developing a strong infrastructure to support the work.

75. The involvement of the voluntary agencies has helped to identify people, including a corps of volunteers who have expertise and a range of skills, who have helped to compensate for staffing shortages. In those circumstances where there

has been an absence of formal qualifications, it has not inhibited the quality of the work.

Health and safety and child protection

76. Satisfactory policies and procedures are in place. Training has been provided but not in every partnership. Many programmes lodge the responsibility clearly with the service provider but there are inconsistencies in the implementation of policies and procedures. Some programme managers frankly acknowledge that they have reservations about the extent to which the policies are implemented consistently across the services and that monitoring is not sufficient to enable checks to be made. In a good example, however, one partnership withheld funding until the service complied effectively with the requirements for safeguarding children.

Service level agreements

77. Most service level agreements are satisfactory and cover the bare minimum requirements for an agreed contract of work such as contractual arrangements for finance and indemnity insurance. The majority include procedures for dealing with complaints, equal opportunities and health and safety issues. In the best, there are suggestions about targets for different milestones and the possible outcomes expected. However, most are weaker in offering guidance on intervention procedures or how targets will be delivered.

Training and support

78. Within the capacity that is available within the fund, some training and support has been provided in most partnerships. Working in isolation, few programmes have a central team of sufficient size to provide all the support that is required. The extensive resources from the agencies that make up the partnership have seldom been harnessed to support the much larger objective of establishing a network of local preventive services. This is one clear illustration where partnership working has contributed to steering the programme but has fallen short of taking collective responsibility for ensuring its success.

79. Methods for assessing the services' needs for support and training are underdeveloped. Most partnerships have appointed development workers to provide support to improve the consistency and quality of newly developed services and in particular, to enhance the capacity of local community organisations to provide services. Most of this work so far has necessarily focused on drafting appropriate bids for funding.

80. In one good example, the fund has helped to establish an association, which provides support and advice to many small and local providers. This association provides advice and training in many different ways including a telephone helpline. It has also commissioned centrally a number of local providers and supported them to provide services. It has managed to set and promulgate service standards. This is a very good example of how it is feasible to provide advice, training and support to

small organisations and thereby to continue to empower small grassroots local groups.

The partnership's work in monitoring and evaluating progress

81. The tone and content of reports to partnerships are in keeping with the supportive role which partnerships play, but this is rarely sufficiently incisive. Until better information is available on the outcomes of the work of the services, partnerships will find it difficult to assume a more challenging leadership role. Financial reports on total overspends and underspends are provided. Not all partnerships receive a formal report on the budget at each meeting; this does not assist prudent financial management.

82. The fund appropriately allocates a healthy proportion of expenditure for evaluation. Some partnerships have appointed external evaluators. Good use is being made of institutes of higher education. This is at a very early stage. One or two partnerships have received helpful reports on the early aspects of the work. Unfortunately, the reports are not always as formative as the partnerships require at this stage. For instance, evaluators are not always assisting partnerships to formulate information systems that will help with evaluation.

Points for discussion and development

Does the Children's Fund contribute to the development of the local preventive strategy and its implementation?

What is working well?

- widespread understanding about the objectives of the Children's Fund
- the contribution of the voluntary agencies to planning and delivery of services
- increasing the capacity of local community groups
- understanding the definitions and key characteristics of a preventive service
- targeting of services to particular geographical areas and target groups
- establishing a varied and appropriate programme of services
- developing models of innovative and effective preventive services
- well-attended services which are successful in attracting appropriate children

- improvements in children's confidence and care
- the development of good services for improving play and emotional well-being
- a pool of staff with the expertise to provide effective preventive services
- good relationships between adults and children
- renewed energy and enthusiasm – inspiring hope.

What needs greater consistency?

- the quality and effectiveness of services
- building the links and relationships between the programmes, services and schools
- developing the involvement of children in design, development and decision-making
- targeting support, training, and intervening when the service is not delivering an acceptable standard.

What needs to develop?

- better methods for measuring outcomes
- improvements in signposting and referral to services
- retaining flexibility by regularly reviewing the balance of the programme and taking appropriate action
- clearer procedures for commissioning services and conducting risk assessments to identify the service's which need support
- developing effective services to support children of minority ethnic heritage, to improve health and to support children through transitions, in particular, improving the liaison between Children's Fund programmes and Sure Start and Connexions Services
- disseminating of the lessons which are being learned
- building a better understanding of the opportunities and responsibilities of partnership working.

Recommendations

Local Children's Fund partnerships and staff, with the support of the Children and Young People's Unit should:

- improve the effectiveness and reduce the variability of services by:
 - developing routine procedures for assessing the capacity of the services which are commissioned
 - identifying clearly the support required by services
 - making arrangements for them to receive the support which they require
- improve the regular monitoring of the quality and effectiveness of the services and develop easy to collect performance indicators for this purpose
- improve the development of the programme by making better use of the monitoring information
- improve the dissemination of the learning and good practice gained from managing the programme
- ensure that all services provided by the fund adhere to the local Area Child Protection Committee's procedures, employment practices protect children and that all staff are appropriately trained and aware of child protection issues.

Local Authority Elected Members, Chief Executives and local strategic partnerships should:

- improve the quality and effectiveness of services and the potential for sustaining those which are successful by developing local partnerships' capacity and understanding about effective partnership working. This should include the pooling by agencies of funding, expertise, management information, training and support
- improve the capacity of partnerships to take strategic decisions by, wherever possible, rationalising the structure of partnerships at the local level
- clarify the roles and responsibilities of the local strategic children and young persons partnership in relation to the Children's Fund partnership.

Annex A – List of partnerships visited

Bristol
Birmingham
Camden
Cornwall
Doncaster
Gateshead
Greenwich
Hartlepool
Islington
Kent
Knowsley
Lancashire
Leicester
Nottingham
Portsmouth
Salford
Sheffield
Tower Hamlets

Annex B – Scope of the inspection

Before the visit, the inspectors reviewed a range of documents which included:

- a briefing about the context
- a list of the members of the partnership
- the most current version of the fund's plan
- minutes of the last three meetings of the partnership
- a list of the services funded by the partnership with contact name and brief details of the projects
- an example of the contract/service level agreement with providers
- a diagram or brief statement showing how the fund's partnership fits with other local partnerships
- any monitoring or evaluation of the activities
- policies on health, safety and child protection.

The visits included discussions with the programme manager, the chair of the partnership, representatives from the lead agency and accountable body, representatives from statutory agencies and voluntary associations who work in the local area. Discussions took place with children, their parents and carers about the benefits of the work and their hopes and aspirations for their future lives.

Short visits were made to at least three services funded by each partnership. Altogether 120 services were visited. These services reflect the great diversity in the activities, which are provided by the fund. The services visited were selected by the programme manager and were not a random choice. They included:

- the service which attracts the largest amount of funding
- the most successful service
- a service which is trying to overcome some initial difficulties.

While visiting the service the inspectors had an opportunity to:

- have a short meeting with the person who is responsible for the service
- observe the work which is taking place
- review any evidence which is provided about the outcomes of the service

- talk to groups of children.