

Children's Services Interventions Evaluation

OPM



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1. Executive summary

The Office for Public Management (OPM) was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to conduct an evaluation of children's services interventions in five local authorities: Walsall, Waltham Forest, Swindon, North East Lincolnshire, and Plymouth. The five local authorities each had very different contexts, performance issues, partners, and models of intervention. They were chosen on the basis of having some basic similarities - they involved a partnership with another organisation, and would have been the chosen solution here because of the scale of concern and need to inject additional capacity or capability.

While the evidence gathering involved local authority-specific data collection, our analysis and reporting looks across all local authorities with the aim of distilling transferable findings. This reflects the emphasis on finding out 'what works' across the various models of intervention with a view to consolidating lessons for future policy and practice.

A range of methods was used to generate evidence, including:

- Desk-based review of relevant documents;
- Interviews with key stakeholders involved in developing the vision and implementation of interventions;
- Mapping and analysing existing secondary data; and
- Interviews with a wide range of key stakeholders in each local authority.

These methods are intended to:

- Establish a baseline, against which the actual implementation of interventions can be assessed;
- Identify specific performance/outcome issues in each local authority and associated sets of indicators;
- Assess the quality and usefulness of indicators in demonstrating outcomes;
- Identify actual implementation 'on the ground', and associated sets of processes, structures, partnerships and challenges; and
- Articulate perceptions of impact and the extent to which these may be attributed to the interventions.

Quite different intervention models were used in the different intervention local authorities, varying in scale, level of prescription and style of relationship with partners. Models had been tailored to local circumstances. The evaluation shows that *all* intervention local authorities were successful in bringing about improvements, with many of these being seen as sustainable outcomes. The indicators measured across the five local authorities show, on the whole, improved results and positive trends.

The main finding however is that the success of interventions in bringing about positive outcomes is not determined, necessarily, by the specific model in place. Instead, 'softer' factors around engagement, leadership, confidence building, communication, capacity building, doing with (not unto) are of critical importance in determining the success of interventions. These factors transcend any specific model.

The main findings are summarised below.

Pre-intervention considerations

There is a strong correlation between establishing the right **aims** of an intervention and achieving success overall. These aims should address not only improvement in performance but also 'softer' outcomes such as improving capacity, building relationships and boosting morale. Interview data highlights the importance of ensuring that both the strategic partner and the local authority are involved in defining the aims, with their relative input dependent on the model adopted.

Key to establishing an effective intervention is an **accurate diagnostic** assessment of the local authority's situation, the findings of which are **accepted by relevant personnel**. Failure to undertake a full assessment may lead to resources initially being wrongly deployed. Support from key staff is crucial, with evidence indicating that the success of an intervention depends on the willingness of the local authority to make improvements.

Interviews highlighted the importance of an **appropriate contract**. The most successful contracts were flexible and could be amended or extended in response to changes over the course of the intervention. These contracts included effective key performance indicators to assist monitoring, a clear description of roles and responsibilities, and a **focus on outcomes**. Successful contracts also **build in sustainability from the start** of the intervention, with a focus on maintaining both performance outcomes and 'softer' improvements.

Leadership

Leadership **from strategic partners and from local authorities** is considered to be strongly associated with improvement. Key factors included the importance of leadership in **recognising good practice and ability**; the need for leaders who are **confident in taking action against ineffective ways of working** and practices; and the role of leaders in **setting direction** and formulating and **articulating solutions** to existing problems.

Respondents reported that staff morale is typically low at the beginning of an intervention, so at this early stage it is crucial that strategic partners in particular are able to recognise and commend things that are working well. Stakeholders thought this would stabilise the relationship between the strategic partner and existing staff, and encourage staff to be more receptive to criticism in other areas of work.

This accepted the need to confront ineffective ways of working was also seen as a key area of leadership. Stakeholders reported that ineffectiveness and even incompetence would go unchallenged until intervention took place and that the removal or challenge of these behaviours was often a turning point in terms of local authority performance. Both these factors relate to visibility of leadership: stakeholders reported that they want their leaders to have a **presence** in the office and to present a **clear vision or direction** for the organisation. Again, the previous absence of such visibility and vision was cited as a factor in poor performance that was only addressed with an intervention.

The role of the strategic partner

Local authorities' experience highlights the importance of the strategic partner in **tailoring their approach to the needs of the local authority**, particularly in respect of the scale of improvement required and the capacity within the local authority. It is also important in the early stages of an intervention that the strategic partner:

- displays a professional approach which conveys the strategic partner's expertise and **credibility** to other stakeholders;
- provides clear vision and focus on outcomes; and
- adopts an **appropriate ethos**, specifically regarding a commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people.

Over the course of the intervention, the role of the strategic partner is particularly important in three main areas: **developing good communications processes** and thus strengthening trust, engagement and ownership among staff; **monitoring performance** and building accountability by improving the use of data and challenging poor performance; and **building sustainability**, through planning a successful transition and gradually transferring control back to the local authority in the period before full handover.

Partnership working and relationship building

Partnership working was another key factor in interventions, but referred to a wide range of relationships. The most significant relationship was considered to be that with the strategic partner, with partnerships and relationships with members, schools and the DCSF itself also being recognised as important.

Equality in the partnership between the strategic partner and local authority was seen as critical to success. This equality refers to a feeling of balance between the two in terms of decision-making, direction and vision. Whilst at the outset of an intervention, strategic partners often played a more directive and commanding role, as the capacity and robustness of the local authority increases, so should its influence with the strategic partner and its input into future direction.

Partnership and relationships with members were significant in their connections with external partners. Intervention occurred in some local authorities at the point of difficulties in relations between members and local authority staff. These difficulties have implications for local authority relations with schools and other external agencies as members often have high levels of contact with these external organisations and agencies. Stakeholders commonly reported improved partnership with schools during and after intervention as stronger communication was established and maintained. The **DCSF were broadly seen as a positive partner** in the intervention process, although respondents did comment that **increased support would be desirable** especially towards the end of an intervention.

Capacity building and workforce issues

Building capacity was reported by respondents as one of the most significant contributions made by strategic partners during the intervention process. Prior to intervention, local authorities were typically facing **workforce shortage** and **gaps in the quality of staff** and finding recruitment of appropriate employees a challenge. The strategic partner could literally increase capacity simply by adding numbers to the workforce, often relieving existing staff of unmanageable levels of work.

The expertise brought in by the strategic partner was crucial to having an immediate impact on performance and more **gradually transferring skills** to existing staff. This skills transfer continues as the strategic partner begins to withdraw from the Authority, slowly transferring responsibility over to local authority counterparts. This change in activity was cited by many stakeholders as being the turning point in the intervention, when local authorities began to regain authority and resume decision-making independently using the skills and capacity initially provided by the strategic partner.

2. Introduction

The Office for Public Management (OPM) was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to conduct an evaluation of children's services interventions in five local authorities: Walsall, Waltham Forest, Swindon, North East Lincolnshire, and Plymouth. The evaluation had the following aim and objectives:

Aim

- To provide an independent, external view on the impact of recently ended major DCSF interventions.

Objectives

- To design an evaluation that compares the reasons for underperformance;
- To establish the extent to which the intervention led to improvement in outcomes and local authority performance, including the impact on progress in implementing Every Child Matters (ECM) reforms both compared to each other and, as far as possible, to more general evidence of progress by local authorities;
- To compare the intervention models in terms of how they operated and their impact; thereby identifying the element(s) of each that were most or least successful; and
- To identify lessons to inform future intervention work.

A number of evaluation questions were specified, including:

- Did services improve in these five local authorities?
- What barriers were there and how were they managed?
- What was the contribution of the intervention?
- What does that tell us about the relative effectiveness of the contracting out variants adopted?
- How did the intervention help or hinder the delivery of ECM?
- Was the exit from intervention well managed and did it lead to sustainable improvement in services?

The evaluation was conducted between November 2008 and March 2009. The approach was designed to minimise data collection burden on schools and local authorities, and to minimise research burden in general¹.

In relation to the five local authorities included for evaluation, a number of considerations influenced our approach:

¹ Paragraph 31, Invitation to Tender.

- **The changing policy context:** These interventions took place during a period of considerable change and upheaval in education and children's services. This has implications for causality as it can be difficult to distil the reason for better outcomes and the exact impact of the intervention given the multiplicity of drivers and factors involved.
- **Complex corporate agenda in local authorities:** It was important to consider the need to separate these interventions from strategic change. As the Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) has shown, it is unusual for local authorities that are very strong corporately to have failing services in one area so the interventions were often set against a backdrop of wider service improvement programmes.
- **Organisational memory and change:** As well as the practical implications of sourcing interviews when jobholders had moved on or there had been a change in political leadership of the local authority since the intervention was put in place, there was the more general problem of trying to tap into the organisational 'memory'.
- **Comparability:** the intervention models in the five areas varied as did the structures and organisation of the local authorities. It was therefore important to look across the five areas to distil findings that could be generalised and feed into future improvements to policy and practice.
- **Partnership working:** Policy changes in children services such as Every Child Matters and the Children's Act had focused on change to be delivered through a partnership approach. There is some anecdotal evidence that ECM policy changes were more difficult to push through in services that were wholly or partly outsourced to a strategic partner. This evaluation balances analysing how well an organisation or services are working with evaluating the management of change to more effective partnerships.
- **Cross-sector focus:** The success of interventions was not necessarily restricted to any one sector / service. We therefore included the perspectives of a wide range of key stakeholders.
- **Sustainability:** This is difficult to evaluate in areas where the intervention had only recently ended. Preparedness for sustaining improvement needed to be considered in light of a changing policy environment.
- **Exit from 'poorly performing' status:** How 'exit' from the intervention is defined and managed are important to consider.

2.1 Reading this report

It is important to note that this evaluation looked at five local authorities, with very different contexts, performance issues, partners, and models of intervention. While the evidence gathering involved local authority-specific data collection, our approach to analysis and reporting did not take a local authority-specific focus. As agreed with the DCSF, this evaluation and its accompanying report is intended to look across all the local authorities. It is not five separate evaluations.

The emphasis is therefore on distilling transferable findings. Our approach to data analysis and reporting has reflected the need to identify and reflect upon a number of overarching themes, as opposed to describing individual local authorities and process within local authorities. This reflects the emphasis on finding out 'what works' across the various models of interventions with a view to consolidating these lessons for future policy and practice.

The remaining sections of this report are as follows:

- Section 3 situates the evaluation against the wider local and national contexts. It identifies key drivers around interventions;
- Section 4 sets out the methodology;
- Section 5 presents the key overarching findings. This section examines trends in a number of performance indicators across the five local authorities. It proceeds to discuss the key change mechanisms that are likely to have brought about positive outcomes. A number of key challenges and barriers are also identified and discussed. This section contains summary boxes at the end of sub-sections to draw attention to the key findings;
- Section 6 reflects on the implications of the findings and makes a number of recommendations.

3. Context

3.1 National context and drivers

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the government passed a range of legislation that introduced market mechanisms into the UK education system and changed the role of Local Authorities (LAs). This was in response to poor LA performance and falling standards in schools in some areas and started with the Education Reform Act in 1988.

The legislation was designed to increase the independence of schools and offer greater managerial flexibility. Schools were also given the opportunity to become grant maintained or to be more independent of LAs as City Technology Colleges. Other important changes included: the introduction of the national curriculum and testing; increased parental choice about schools; and a greater focus on publicly available performance results.

Many at that time predicted the demise of LAs, especially following the 1992 White Paper 'Choice and Diversity' which indicated that the role would wither away when the majority of schools had opted out of LA control. In contrast however, the 1996 Self Government for Schools White Paper identified a continuing role for LAs whilst at the same time extending the Local Management of Schools (LMS) agenda and the Grant-Maintained Schools programme.

The new political administration in 1997 re-affirmed a continuing role for LAs and recognised the urgent need to drive up the speed of improvement. Poorly performing schools were proving an area of concern, and the Government wanted to ensure that these schools received the pressure and support needed to become positive learning environments for their pupils. The 1998 Schools Standards and Framework Act gave greater powers to the Secretary of State to intervene in LAs judged as 'failing' as well as new powers and duties to LAs to monitor schools. At around the same time, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) was empowered to undertake LA inspections.

The approach of the political administration at the time was also driven by:

- a growing interest in markets, alternative providers and outsourcing in order to drive up the quality of public services
- a greater focus on improvement, outcomes and targets
- increased rigour applied to inspections in schools
- increased capital and revenue investment in education requiring a greater level of accountability.

In 2002, the Secretary of State's powers of intervention were reaffirmed and extended in the Education Act 2002. Following this legislation, LAs were encouraged to form new and different types of partnerships in education delivery, involving the voluntary, private and public sectors. The Government also sponsored a number of 'first wave' interventions to address underperformance in a number of local authorities.

More recently, the Children's Act of 2004 introduced a range of new structures and policy aspirations to promote effective whole systems approaches across all children's services to deliver the five outcomes² for children and young people as set out in the Every Child Matters (ECM) White Paper. Arrangements for Children Trusts aim to provide integrated services through new forms of partnership working.

The Government's powers of intervention in LAs form part of a wider interest in the performance of local government as a whole. Section 15 of the Local Government Act 1999 gives the Secretary of State the powers to intervene at the corporate level within local authorities. A report by the (then) Office for the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) highlighted a change in the Government's approach to working with poorly performing local authorities since 2002. In 2007 the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 introduced a new performance framework - the Comprehensive Area Assessment from this year, National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy and the LAAs / National Indicator set.

The onus is now on local authorities to accept responsibility for leading their own improvement within a context of external support and challenge, with legal interventions regarded as a last resort.

3.2 The changing nature of LA interventions

There has been no 'one size fits all' approach applied to LA interventions; rather, each has been determined by the performance issues identified at each local authority as well as the national and local context and drivers at the time. As there was no existing blueprint for interventions, the Government has adjusted its approach according to the outcomes and lessons learned from earlier intervention.

The first wave of LA interventions were directed at Education Services and were designed to drive up school performance and pupil attainment as evidenced through improved Ofsted reports. The earliest interventions, described by one stakeholder in the scoping interviews as '*major top down solutions*', could be considered as designed to demonstrate the Government's 'no nonsense' approach to failing schools and to send a message across the sector as a whole.

Interventions policy is increasingly taking more account of wider corporate issues such as leadership, financial management, partnership working and performance management to ensure that interventions address the root causes of problems across the whole system, rather than focusing on specific services or policy areas. The amended legislation allows interventions to consider functions that are performing well alongside the poorly performing ones to help ensure that the whole system is analysed. The aim is to address children's services as a whole, and ensure greater performance on the five ECM outcomes.

3.3 Walsall, Waltham Forest, Swindon, North East Lincolnshire and Plymouth

The five interventions of interest in this evaluation were implemented at different times between 2000 and 2008 and varied in relation to the model used, the strategic partner involved and the length of the intervention. Two local authorities - Walsall and Waltham Forest - have continued to outsource certain functions to their strategic partners following the end of the Secretary of State's direction. These were two of the earlier interventions and both involved major outsourcing of education functions in order to address a wide range of issues relating to leadership, management, planning and school performance, amongst other things.

² Be Healthy; Stay Safe; Enjoy and Achieve; Make a Positive Contribution; and Achieve Economic Wellbeing

Swindon was the subject of two interventions. The first involved outsourcing only the top tiers of management within education, with the rest of the staff remaining within the employ of the local authority rather than the strategic partner. The second involved a partnership with Kent County local authority to drive up standards in social care.

The interventions in North East Lincolnshire and Plymouth were implemented after the Children's Act 2004 and the development of integrated children's services. Whilst the intervention in North East Lincolnshire focused on children's services as a whole, in Plymouth it was directed only at social services.

The following paragraphs provide a very brief overview of the intervention in each area, with concise overviews of the key features provided in the five intervention summaries in Appendix C.

Walsall

The intervention in Walsall followed an Ofsted inspection in 2000 which identified significant weaknesses in education. Subsequent to direction from the Secretary of State, Walsall entered into a partnership with Serco Ltd in 2001 to provide a range of support services to schools. Following another unsatisfactory Ofsted inspection in 2002, further functions were outsourced to Serco. The terms of this contract were that the intervention should run until expiry or satisfaction of its terms and in April 2008 the Secretary of State confirmed the end of the direction. The authority has, since the end of the direction, entered into a voluntary contract with Serco for the continued provision of services.

Waltham Forest

As with Walsall, the intervention in Waltham Forest followed an unsatisfactory Ofsted report in 2000 which identified a large number of weaknesses in education services. In July 2001 the Secretary of State gave direction for the outsourcing of a large number of Waltham Forest's education functions. EduAction (Waltham Forest) Ltd, a partnership between Nord Anglia and Amey, was appointed to deliver a five-year intervention contract, beginning on 1 September 2001. This was due to end in July 2006, but was extended until March 2008. The local authority has since retendered the contract to an alternative provider and brought certain functions back to the local authority Children's Services Department.

Swindon

Following an Ofsted inspection in late 2001, the Secretary of State gave a direction to intervene in Swindon in order to address weak or unsatisfactory performance in relation to: management; corporate and strategic planning; leadership and decision making; and targeting of resources. The top tiers of management within the Education Service were outsourced to the Tribal Group and the contract ended in 2005. At the same time, and as a result of ongoing weaknesses in social services performance at the end of 2003, DfES, the Department of Health and the ODPM agreed that steps would need to be taken to secure corporate improvements. This led to a new partnership agreement with Kent County local authority which lasted until 2007.

North East Lincolnshire

In May 2005 a contract was established with Children First (a partnership between Mouchel and Outcomes UK) to work with the whole of the local authority's children's services. The contractor was required to fill posts at Director of Children's Services (DCS), Assistant Director and Head of Service level with their own interim staff at the outset. These posts were to be filled substantively during the first 18 months. The new recruits would become

local authority employees and be performance managed by the contractor. An additional Assistant Director post, jointly funded by the local authority and the PCT, was created during the contract to improve Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The three year contract came to an end in May 2008.

Plymouth

A Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) report in June 2005 identified that the local authority had made little progress since a previous poor inspection in July 2004 and this led to the direction for intervention. Plymouth City local authority appointed Cambridge Education and OLM to work with the local authority to improve performance in social services. Although the education and children's social services departments combined in April 2006 to form a children's services department, the partner was only to provide support to social services. The partner was involved in a mix of project-based work on development initiatives, implementing change, providing greater capacity and assisting in long-term recruitment, and managing certain service areas. The intervention ended in March 2008.

4. Methodology

4.1 Our approach

In order to meet the aims and objectives of this evaluation, we designed an approach that:

- Is grounded in a robust theoretical framework, to ensure that findings have wider theoretical generalisability. An iterative process of theory generation and theory testing enables us to generate evaluation findings that have wider applicability beyond the intervention areas;
- Is built on methods that allow us to map out a series of processes and pathways, with attendant structures. This enables us to assess the integrity of actual implementation against the intended logic of implementation, highlighting any resultant intended and unintended impact;
- Facilitates the identification of what works (or what components have worked) and why these have worked;
- Acknowledges the complex human and organisational systems involved in delivering complex interventions of this nature;
- Recognises the potential role of workforce, leadership and team (and partnership) practices in influencing potential outcomes;
- Is conducted efficiently and effectively by making the best use any existing data, material, and local knowledge so that the burden on evaluation participants is minimised; and
- Is conducted and managed transparently so as to facilitate clear assessment of the reliability, validity and plausibility of findings.

The evaluation was designed to generate answers to the following questions³:

1. **Know why:** knowledge about why action is needed, and why doing something in a particular way is thought to bring about intended outcomes. This relates to the logic of interventions;
2. **Know how** (to put into practice): knowing what should be done is not the same as being able to do it effectively; knowledge about effective programme implementation is also required. This involves a good understanding of processes and structures;
3. **Know who** (to involve, and when): such knowledge involves understanding local needs as well as information on key stakeholders necessary for potential solutions; and
4. **Know what works:** that is, what specific interventions / activities will bring about desired outcomes with few enough unwanted consequences. This additionally involves questions about how outcomes may be measured in a robust manner.

³ Adapted from P. Ekblom (2002) 'From the source to the mainstream is uphill: the challenge of transferring knowledge of crime prevention through replication, innovation and anticipation', in N. Tilley (ed) *Analysis for Crime Prevention*, Crime Prevention Studies, volume 13, Monsey, N.Y.: Criminal Justice Press, pp. 131-203.

Our approach is presented visually in Figure 1 below.

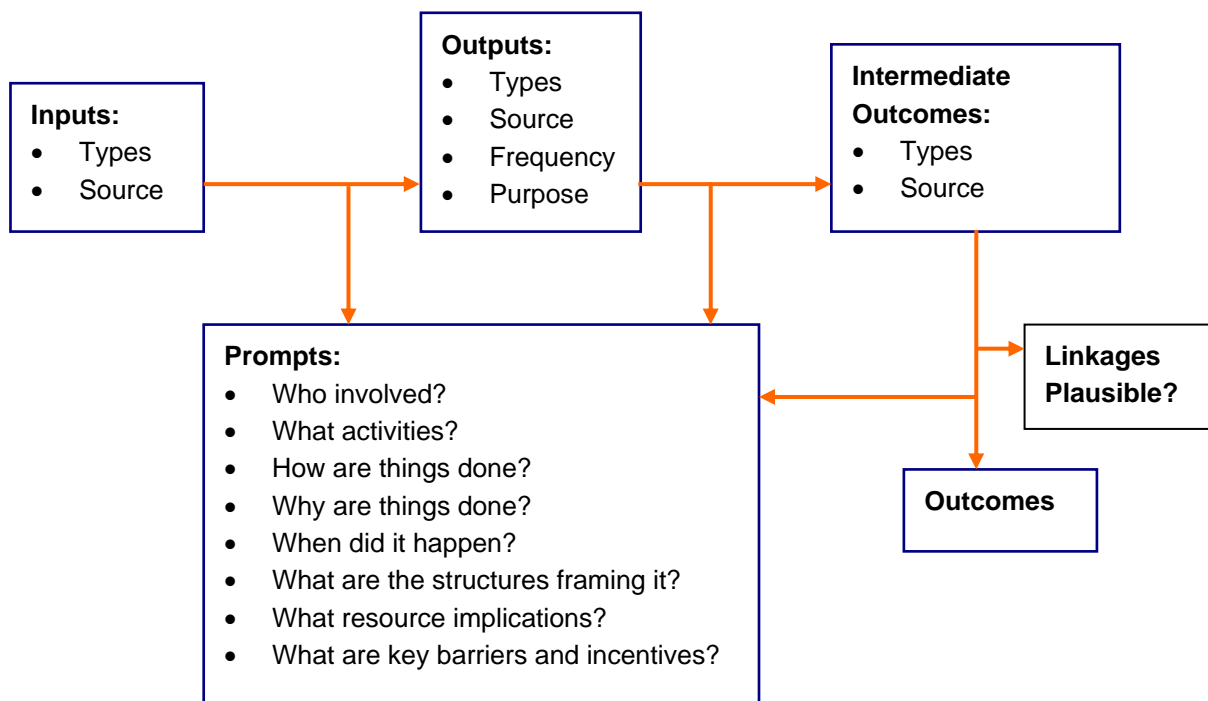


Figure 1: Framework for our approach to evaluating children's services interventions

As Figure 1 demonstrates, our approach helps:

- specify the key components involved in delivering each of the key interventions (e.g. types of inputs, outputs, intermediate outcomes, etc);
- articulate the linkages between the various components;
- identify the sequence of linkages;
- prompt clarity of processes, structures, and key stakeholders involved in moving from one component to another;
- identify resource requirements associated with each stage; and
- establish the relationship between implementation and the achievement of specific outcomes.

A critical issue relating to this and any other evaluation is the extent to which we can attribute causality to interventions (i.e. ascertaining impact more robustly). Possible evaluation designs were constrained by the following:

- The five intervention local authorities were selected purposively by the DCSF prior to us starting this work, and not randomly as they were selected because of their similarity around having a strategic partner, similar scale of intervention and all finished around the same time. This rules out any experimental evaluation designs (i.e. the most robust form of impact assessment);

- The five interventions being evaluated have completed. This rules out a genuine 'pre-and post-test' evaluation design (i.e. a 'before and after' study design) as some of the evidence had to be gathered retrospectively;
- Non-intervention areas have not been randomly selected for non-intervention. This limits the types of comparators possible in quasi-experimental designs. Quasi-experimental designs are those that involve establishing scenarios of what would have happened in the absence of interventions. There are different ways of establishing comparators.

These have different levels of ability to attribute observed outcomes to the intervention, with the more robust designs having far more intensive data and resource demands. During the scoping stage, we assessed the feasibility of different designs by mapping out the available outcome indicators, their coverage and quality. As a result of this, we identified the use of a mixture of 'static group comparison' and 'generic group comparison' approaches as being most appropriate for the purpose of this evaluation. A 'static group comparison' approach means that each intervention local authority is compared with non-equivalent groups (in this case, all local authorities in England). A 'generic group comparison' approach means that each intervention local authority is compared with relevant normative standards (in this case, local authorities that are statistical neighbours). (See Appendices for detailed analysis of available data in intervention and non-intervention local authorities). It was agreed with the DCSF that no primary data gathering would be conducted in non-intervention local authorities.

4.2 Methods used

A range of methods were used to generate evidence, including:

- Desk-based review of relevant documents;
- Interviews with key informants involved in developing the vision and implementation of interventions;
- Mapping and analysing existing secondary data; and
- Interviews with a wide range of key stakeholders in each local authority.

These methods are intended to:

- Establish a baseline, against which the actual implementation of interventions can be assessed;
- Identify specific performance/outcome issues in each local authority and associated sets of indicators;
- Assess the quality and usefulness of indicators in demonstrating outcomes;
- Identify actual implementation 'on the ground', and associated sets of processes, structures, partnerships and challenges; and
- Articulate perceptions of impact and the extent to which these may be attributed to the interventions.

Desk-based review of relevant documents

A comprehensive review of key documents was conducted in order to establish, retrospectively, a baseline of strategic intent and intended actions. National and local authority-specific documents were included for review.

The purpose of reviewing these documents is:

- To identify the high level thinking behind why interventions are felt to bring about intended outcomes (i.e. **knowing why** - the 'logic' of interventions);
- To identify whether there is clarity in how interventions are supposed to be implemented, and why doing things a particular way is thought to bring about desired outcomes (i.e. **knowing how** - the processes and structures underpinning implementation);
- To identify whether there is clarity and specification of who is supposed to be involved in doing what and at what stages (i.e. **knowing who** - key stakeholders to be involved); and
- To identify specific performance/outcome issues in each of the local authorities.

It became apparent that there are a number of key gaps. The gaps relate to the fact that:

- Not all local authorities had specific sets of documents relating to strategy and/or implementation; and
- Not all documents included useful information that supported the identification of answers to the questions of 'why, how, and who'.

These gaps have a number of implications. In the absence of clear strategies and/or action plans (or where information contained within such documents is vague), local stakeholders are likely to face considerable challenges in translating policy intent into clear sets of actions 'on the ground'.

In order to plug some of the gaps identified in the document review, a small number of semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants.

Interviews with key stakeholders involved in developing the vision and implementation of interventions

Interviews were conducted with six key stakeholders who helped provide valuable context to enhance the findings emerging from the document review, and helped plug some evidence gaps. The interview topic guide is illustrated in Appendix A. This set of interviews helped:

- identify key considerations of those who shaped the interventions, and/or who helped shape the implementation strategy;
- clarify, partially, the logic behind interventions and their implementation.

The interviews together with the document review elucidated strategic intentions (i.e. a retrospective 'baseline') so that actual implementation of interventions could be assessed against these in terms of programme fidelity and whether the unfolding logic of implementation diverges from the original vision.

Mapping existing secondary data

As mentioned above, the document review helped identify specific performance / outcome issues relevant to each local authority. The definition of 'performance' derives from reports on reviews and / or inspections for each local authority (e.g. Ofsted report, Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) report, etc.). Performance / outcomes are, unfortunately, not always clearly described or defined. In addition, the majority of performance / outcome issues do not have readily available sets of indicators. This is a result of a number of factors:

- The performance / outcome issue is reliant on more qualitative forms of assessment (e.g. 'good management structures', etc.);
- The performance / outcome issue has not been measured consistently through time (i.e. using the same indicator). This affects comparability and trend analysis; and
- The performance / outcome issue has only been measured at one point in time and the measure has never been repeated (e.g. surveys).

Where available and relevant, indicators for identified performance/outcome issues were extracted from the DCSF's Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT) database. These types of indicators tend to relate to measures of educational attainment and access, as well as to the numbers of looked after children. They, therefore, only represent a sub-set of 'performance measures'.

For all indicators extracted from LAIT, further technical assessments were conducted that involved mapping out:

- The time period over which the indicator exists (i.e. when was the indicator first collected and reported, and what is the most recent set reported?);
- The reporting interval (i.e. is the indicator reported on a monthly or yearly basis?); and
- The comparability against other areas (i.e. is the same indicator collected and reported for other areas that do not have the intervention?).

This technical assessment enabled us to be clear about whether an indicator exists pre- and post-intervention, and whether it exists pre-/post-intervention for other areas that do not have the intervention. This assessment clarifies the extent to which we are able to compare changes in measurable outcomes demonstrated within each local authority temporally and geographically.

As a result of indicator mapping, it became clear that existing data do not support robust analysis of changes in outcome measures in a way that attributes any manifest changes to specific interventions. Instead, analyses of indicators are illustrative of broad trends. They are unable to support claims that interventions brought about any manifest changes directly. The interpretation of trends in identified indicators needs to take into account the framework generated by the stakeholder interviews. The triangulation of various data sources enables us to explore whether it is plausible that interventions have brought about changes in measurable outcomes.

A concise overview of each intervention local authority together with associated performance/outcome issues and related indicators is set out in the intervention summaries in Appendix C.

Interviewing stakeholders in each intervention local authority

In order to get a good sense of implementation of interventions 'on the ground', a wide range of stakeholders were interviewed in each intervention local authority, including:

- Officers from the local authority, with both strategic and operational responsibilities
- Professionals from the strategic partners
- Members
- Government Office advisors
- Primary, secondary and special school heads and teachers and governors
- Police, safeguarding, social care and health representatives
- Business representatives
- Voluntary sector providers.

These stakeholders represent a range of perspectives, which allowed us to develop a more comprehensive picture of how interventions have been delivered and to what effect.

Some initial challenges had to be overcome when identifying the sample of interviewees:

- There were some sensitivities due to the nature of the policy being quite directive and resulting in sometimes large numbers of job losses;
- In some cases there were particular sensitivities, for example in one local authority the DCS passed away shortly before the evaluation started;
- Some key individuals had moved on since the intervention and we were unable to contact them;
- Many of those who were initially contacted did not feel they could contribute to the evaluation as they had not been present at the local authority in question before, during and after the intervention or they had little knowledge of the model and strategy of the intervention.

We encouraged the participation of a diverse sample of interviewees by assuring them that both the design of the evaluation and the interview guide allowed them to provide feedback on the topics of which they had knowledge. Responses from different individuals were collated and triangulated to generate a comprehensive and composite picture of the intervention at their local authority.

The topic guide is provided in Appendix B.

As the primary evidence-gathering for this evaluation was conducted retrospectively (i.e. post-intervention), there are important caveats in approaching the data generated as accounts offered by respondents were with the benefit of hindsight. Interviews were conducted in a way that prompted respondents to cast their minds back and describe experiences / processes at different points in time.

To ensure consistency of approach, the topic guide was designed to retain core focus on the range of 'why', 'how', 'who', and 'what works' questions so that the evaluation model (Figure 1) could be developed and refined, enabling us to test whether implementation has been aligned to strategic intentions. The relative emphases on different questions varied depending on the individual being interviewed (e.g. the specific role of that individual, when the individual was involved, etc). This flexible approach enabled us to interrogate more deeply items relevant to particular local authorities, and/or particular individuals.

4.3 Analysis

A standard review template was used to facilitate data extraction for the purpose of the document review. The information was analysed using broad content analysis procedures to identify themes of significance. Themes are finalised once saturation has been achieved. Conflicting views can easily be identified and further interrogated. Our approach towards the handling and analysis of qualitative information is informed by guidelines of good practice published by the Cabinet Office⁴.

Detailed notes were taken for each interview, with informed consent. These are anonymised for analysis. The results of the interviews are imported into NVivo - analysis software designed to facilitate the management and analysis of qualitative data. Documents are read in their entirety and coded according to an agreed coding structure designed to identify salient information. The coding structure is informed by the themes guiding the evaluation, and by the findings generated via the document review and early scoping interviews. Coding was conducted through a combination of pre-determined codes and emergent codes. Emergent themes were assessed for importance through repetition⁵.

⁴ L. Spencer, J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, L. Dillon and the National Centre for Social Research (2003) *Quality in Qualitative Evaluations: A Framework for Assessing Qualitative Research Evidence*, London: The Cabinet Office.

⁵ H. Priest, P. Roberts and L. Woods, An overview of three different approaches to the interpretation of qualitative data. Part 1: theoretical issues, *Nurse Researcher*, 10(1), 30-42, 2002.

5. Key overarching findings

5.1 Performance

Trends within local authorities

As mentioned above, our data mapping identified a number of performance indicators for each local authority. Trend analysis was conducted on these indicators, and we were able to compare trends for each local authority against documented changes in other local authorities that are broadly similar to the intervention local authorities, but where there has not been any intervention (i.e. 'nearest neighbours'). It is important to note that these performance indicators represent only a small sub-set of the performance issues identified in each local authority. They should, therefore, not be interpreted as being representative of changes across all performance issues.

Looking across all identified performance indicators, it is clear that all intervention local authorities showed improvement in real terms from the start of intervention to the end of intervention for most indicators. This trend is consistent for social care speed of referral figures, education attainment and school exclusion data. Whilst there is often fluctuation in performance over the course of the intervention period, the majority of the indicators return to an upward trajectory of improvement towards the end of the intervention.

A small number of indicators, however, show a downward trajectory by the end of the intervention (even though they still end up being higher than at the start of the intervention). This may reflect the change in focus towards the end of an intervention contract when the strategic partner across three of the five local authorities was starting to withdraw and input less. Due to the frontloaded nature of input in most interventions, it may be that improvements ease off as the intervention comes to a close.

'The ending of these contracts is much more difficult - how do you manage the exit. There were plans about this, but planning is not the whole solution. You can't avoid the divergence of interests and incentive.'
(Former Strategic Manager, local authority, local authority 4)

Appendix D provides graphs showing performance trends across the relevant indicators identified for each local authority.

Trends within local authorities against other comparators

When mapped against statistical neighbours and regional data, and data for the whole of England, in the majority of indicators the relative rate of progress is approximately the same as neighbours and national figures (see Appendix D). For example in North East Lincolnshire, GCSE results:

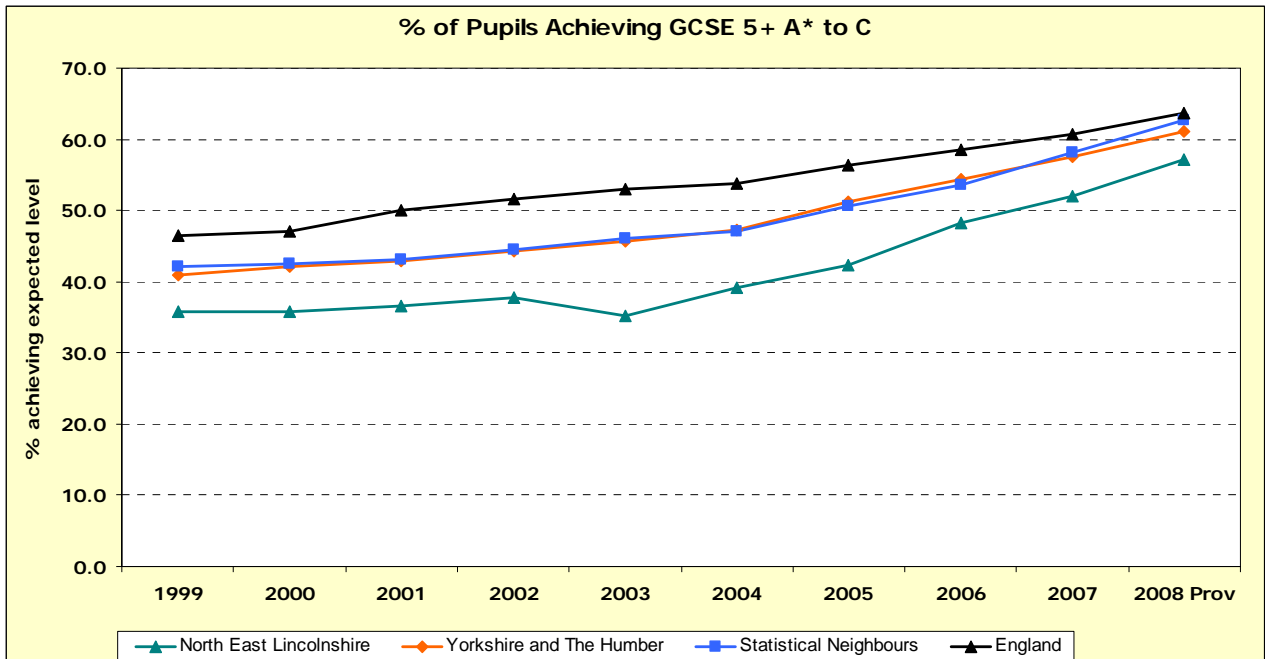


Figure 2 - North East Lincolnshire: Percentage of pupils achieving GCSE 5+ A* to C

There are a number of ways of interpreting these comparative trends. First, it may be plausible that the interventions have served to improve outcomes as measured by the indicators available. However, comparative analysis suggests that the interventions have rarely improved outcomes in intervention local authorities faster than the rate of improvements in nearest neighbours or nationally. In the Swindon example below, the gap between the intervention local authority and the regional and statistical neighbour comparators actually widened by the end of the intervention.

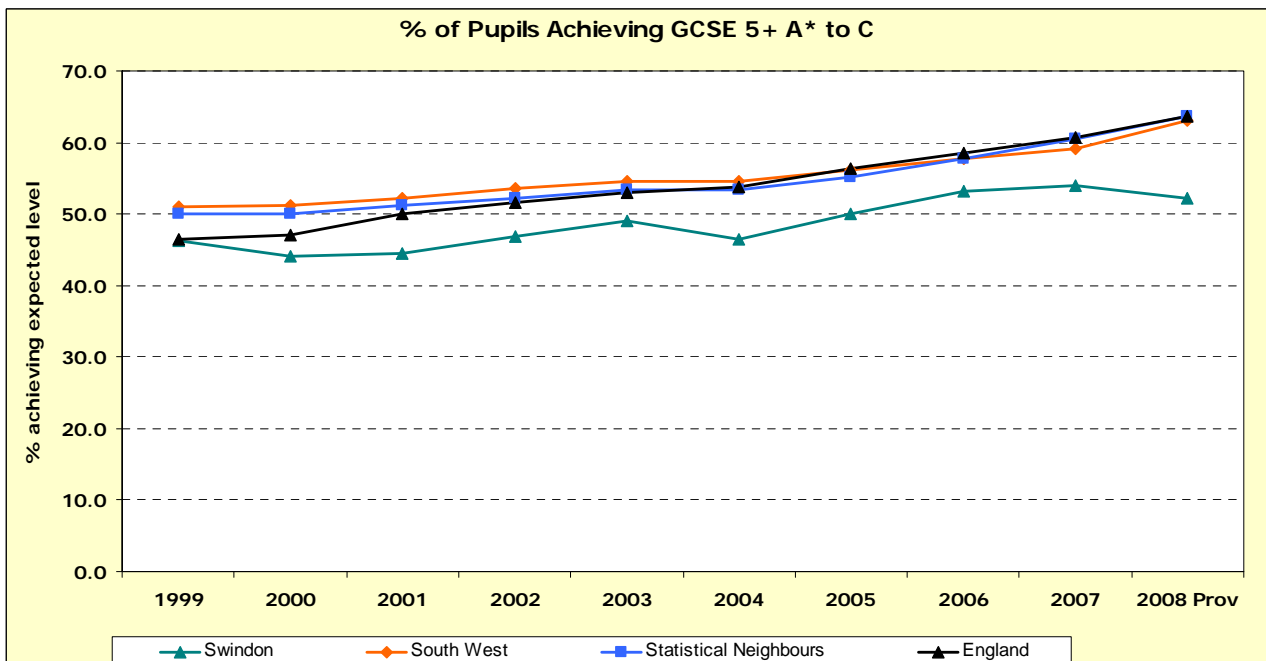


Figure 3 - Swindon: Percentage of pupils achieving GCSE 5+ A* to C

Some respondents questioned whether the local authority would have 'improved' anyway, regardless of whether or not there had been an intervention. This argument is commonly known as the 'maturation' effect (i.e. 'natural' changes over time, independent of any intervention effect).

'When the contract was coming to an end ... we did a large benchmarking exercise regarding improvement in attainment. ... the benchmarking was very ambiguous about how much difference having the private provider actually made. When compared with other local authorities, we couldn't see any significant improvement in attainment compared to others where there was no intervention. So what difference did this intervention make to performance?' (Head of Resources, local authority 4)

Alternatively, it may have been that the intervention prevented the local authority from deteriorating further. In this scenario 'moving at the same rate' as neighbours is in itself a positive outcome. A number of respondents felt that performance in the local authority was extremely poor and that the intervention did indeed contribute significantly to there being some level of improvement, though almost all felt that 'more could be done'. Similarly, respondents often indicated that they felt these improvements may have happened without the intervention but that the intervention accelerated the pace of improvement and in some cases stopped performance worsening.

'I have to conclude that it [improvement] must be down to the intervention, if only because of the pace of change. Had the DCS arrived anyway, we would have got there, but further down the line. As a consequence the kids might have been let down.' (Police, local authority 1)

Other performance issues for which there are no quantitative and/or trend data

As mentioned above, while a wide range of performance issues were identified in each local authority, most of these had no clear indicator(s) associated with them. These tend to relate mainly to issues around 'leadership', 'management', 'structure' and a number of other dimensions less amenable to quantitative measurement.

In general, our interviews with stakeholders in each local authority identified that the overwhelming majority of respondents felt that the intervention had been a positive factor in improving outcomes. Respondents further felt that the intervention often accelerated the pace of improvement.

'If you look at state of education service in 2001 and then in 2008, yes. There was a clear trajectory of substantial and sustained improvement started in 2002/3 and it is still going on.' (Former Strategic Manager, local authority, local authority 4)

Some felt the improvements under the intervention could not be attributed to the intervention without considering other external variables which may have impacted upon change and improvement:

'The passage of time, better general partnership working between different agencies responding to wider policy such as the Every Child matters agenda. It is difficult to say, we continued to shape things as we went on and in one sense we almost forgot we were an intervention. (Head of Young People's Services, local authority 1)

Respondents overwhelmingly tended to discuss 'performance' generically rather than to discuss performance on each key outcome identified for the area as being the target of intervention. When probed as to the evidence for the improvements, most cited either statistical data as captured above, or also referred to the 'soft' outcomes such as staff morale and confidence, communication, engagement and relationships with external partners such as head teachers.

'The department now has a new sense of value and purpose, which has made a real difference on the ground. There is now fantastic morale, a sense of purpose and organisational wisdom.' (Chair of Intervention Board, local authority 2)

It is clear that there are challenges in evidencing progress against the full range of performance issues identified as being of concern in each local authority. For outcomes that are more clearly and easily measured, progress can be tracked more transparently. However, there are challenges in interpreting any documented changes in measures. In particular, the extent to which any change can be attributed directly to interventions is open to debate. For the 'softer' outcomes, evidencing progress is overwhelmingly anecdotal. There is little opportunity for validating these subjective accounts transparently. These are often instinctive and proffered from an individual perspective. The extent to which such perceptions are shared by others is unclear. More will be said of these 'softer' outcomes in remaining sections of the report.

Unintended outcomes

The evidencing of outcomes is further complicated by the fact that interventions were felt to have brought about a number of unintended positive outcomes that were not part of the original aims. These types of outcomes related especially to benefits accrued to other local authority departments.

'IT and HR for example. [The authority] realised that these issues would have to be tackled corporately, not just within [the service area]. It invited the Director of HR for example to be involved in working groups and discussions. He then went back to his department and fed this back. The learning from [the strategic partner] was very much deployed on a wider corporate basis.'
(Local Authority Chief Executive, local authority 3)

This exemplifies the 'diffusion effect' of benefits that are often not easily measured as they are not predictable in advance. The implication for this evaluation is that there are likely to be additional outcomes as a result of the interventions that may be indirect and/or diffused; that may manifest at different time periods and at different levels. The true impact of children's services interventions can therefore be under-estimated if we look only at the stated performance outcomes that are the focus of the interventions.

These improvements in other departments were mainly process based outcomes, for example the introduction of robust evaluation techniques and use of data in evidencing changes. In one local authority, the strategic partner enabled the local authority to bid for and win significant extra funding for a new initiative, which was felt to be largely down to having the strategic partner involved in the competitive bidding process.

5.2 Intervention aims

The attribution of impact to interventions is also complicated by the fact that some respondents in our local authority interviews referred to deviation from original intent and implementation during the course of the interventions. This means that caution needs to be exercised in establishing a connection between the stated intervention and measurable outcomes. It is likely that in some instances, the 'real' intervention (i.e. what was actually implemented 'on the ground') could have been quite different from the stated intervention. Hence the change mechanisms associated with the actual intervention can be different from those that were intended in the original stated intervention.

'When we started looking...it transpired that (service) was actually very good. This was confirmed by the strategic partner who came in so they had to quickly refocus. (Service) wasn't part of the issue and it would have been foolish to blindly follow the original contract and spend time and resources fixing something that wasn't broken.'
(Head of Young Children's Services, local authority, local authority 1)

Where there had been deviation from the original contract and action plan, local authority personnel generally felt that this flexibility had been positive and that a shift in focus or intent had prevented time and resources being wasted. An additional effect was that stakeholders and partners saw the intervention as less of a rigid imposition. They welcomed the fact that those with the power to shape and direct the intervention were willing to refocus priorities and actions outlined during the set up of the contracts. Flexibility of the contract to enable responsive approaches to meet needs allowed the intervention to become more effective and better able to target problems and address gaps in performance.

'I don't believe anyone who says that an Implementation Plan doesn't change. We had to review the Implementation Plan constantly...We had weekly meetings and the thrust of this was the Implementation Plan - it was continually expanded, contracted, revised. It was constantly being changed in terms of its detail...'
(Head of Education, strategic partner, local authority 3)

'The company had a clear focus on what they needed to do and getting it done, but they were very focused on the letter of the contract. They didn't have the flexibility to vary things that you would have done without a contract. You need to be very careful about how you specify in the contract to allow reaction to changing circumstances.'
(Business partner, Education Board, local authority 5)

A note of caution running alongside this is that 'flexibility' had to be qualified in order for it to generate positive outcomes. In all cases, there needs to be clarity of communication between strategic partners and stakeholders and key members of staff regarding the aims and intent of the intervention. Flexibility of implementation lends itself well to the achievement of desired results when set against a clearly communicated outcomes-focused approach. Messages had to be consistent to ensure buy-in to the process and that change should be backed up by evidence of need:

'Clearly the action plan needed to be adjusted from time to time. For example, we didn't realise how much would need to be done to support (service). We were trying to improve a big operation, with large numbers of people who were effective and ineffective, and you can't understand that fully until you work on the ground. The overall strategic objectives very clear - to redress key inadequacies - an objective must be at that sort of level, but tactics changed.'
(Chair of the Intervention Board, local authority 2)

5.3 Key triggers and enablers and barriers and challenges

Analysis of the qualitative data highlights the key triggers for improvement as being strongly associated with the following:

- The role of key **stakeholders** - the strategic partner, officers and key personalities and relationships,
- key **processes** - building of capacity, leadership, prioritising and setting some aims at the start of the intervention,

- activity in key **stages** of the intervention - early implementation, steady operation of the intervention and the exit stage.

Important but less strongly associated factors for success included the role of members, schools and colleges, good communication, ensuring sustainability, performance monitoring and the set-up phase of the intervention. Finally other factors mentioned as triggers for improvement, but to a lesser extent, included local authority departments where there was no intervention taking place, national policy drivers, removal of staff and interim and long-term recruitment.

Key barriers to success included some aspects of the strategic partner, intervention aims, implementation issues, activity towards the end of the intervention and the role of officers and of schools / colleges. These enablers of, and barriers to, improvement are explored in greater detail below.

Establishing the right preconditions for the intervention

Identifying the right aims

Establishing the right aims for the intervention at the outset was highlighted as absolutely fundamental to the success of the intervention. Indeed it was the factor most often correlated with success by interview respondents, regardless of what model of intervention was in place.

Further in-depth analysis of the data shows that there are some core issues / processes that the aims need to address regardless of the types or scale of intervention, usually 'softer' outcomes regarding capacity, relationship building and boosting confidence and morale. There are also a number of other issues that are less important and more peripheral to the achievement of success which were more about the process needed in achieving these soft outcomes.

In relation to the key stakeholders that need to be involved in defining and driving forward the intervention aims, the strategic partner and the local authority were seen as the main enablers. Key individuals and personalities fulfilling leadership roles are important in driving forward actions to achieve key priorities and outcomes. The relative importance of different groups of individuals seemed to be dependent on the type of intervention model. In local authorities where there had been a 'full takeover', the individuals from the strategic partner were felt to be more important. In local authorities with more of a partnership approach, it was important to involve individuals equally from both the strategic partner and the local authority in establishing the aims.

Although members were referenced by some of the interviewees, their role was seen as less crucial in relation to setting outcomes at the start. Nonetheless, getting appropriate cross-party 'buy-in' as early as possible was identified as being essential (see below under partnership working and relationships for a more detailed analysis of this finding).

The intervention aims should incorporate considerations of building capacity within the local authority, especially at senior management level. Aiming to 'get the right people in' at the top before the intervention was implemented was seen as crucial in ensuring plans were driven forward. Some respondents felt that building the capacity and capability of the workforce needed to be a clearly established aim of the intervention set out at the start and reaching all levels of staff.

*'One of the key factors was that the contract involved the whole workforce being part of the new vision...
(Head of Organisational Development, strategic partner, local authority 5)*

The success of the approach to building capacity was thought to be dependent on the severity of situation and the willingness to change. These influenced the model chosen. For example in one local authority, there was effort to build capacity and give those who were underperforming a chance to excel in other positions. On the other hand, another local authority had a more assertive programme of removal of poorly performing staff.

Some respondents also felt that linking the intervention aims to national policy aims was quite beneficial, especially in relation to the Every Child Matters outcomes. This ensured that the outcomes that the intervention was trying to meet locally were the 'right ones' in relation to national outcomes. This also involved needing to embed change in the wider Children's Trust and Children Plan agenda for the area.

'Most staff didn't get involved or know about the various strategic boards delivering the intervention, but the key messages were filtered down and linked into the Government and ECM agenda. There were newsletters going out to advise staff and celebrate some early successes and get that band wagon rolling. People could see that things were starting to improve and that raised morale and commitment to the plan. One of the key areas that I think was acknowledged early on was that the local area was behind on the whole partnership agenda, and hadn't moved on and needed to pull together a children's plan. When they managed to pull together the children's plan, there was both some regional and national recognition that it was a good plan. This was shared widely and celebrated.' (Deputy Director, local authority, local authority 1)

There was less reference amongst interviewees to the need to ensure that the aims of the intervention related to schools and to children and young people. This related back to the legacy of poor relationships, accountability structures and low expectations in relation to schools.

'I don't personally get very in knots about attainment, but it has had a positive impact on our results and now it is so much better that there is an open dialogue. There is far more openness and willingness and a culture of us doing it together rather than being done to. We now have steering groups, committees, working groups, head teachers are involved more - the fact that they realised that you can't bully 100 head teachers, if you can get them on side it will help. That was a big development.' (Headteacher, local authority 5)

There was very little reference to children and young people being consulted or involved in setting the outcomes for the interventions.

'There was from my understanding a certain level of engagement with CYP, but I'm not sure it started happening right from the outset when they were defining outcomes. I think they just had to get things moving at this stage, and that came later.' (Police, local authority 1)

Finally, respondents felt that having aims that referred to producing sustainable outcomes was also a key factor in success.

Scoping stage

It is of some concern that respondents highlighted the lack of an accurate assessment of the situation in an area prior to implementing an intervention. This ranged from the wrong diagnosis being made by a contractor prior to an intervention being implemented, to a failure to identify what was failing and what was working well in an area.

Ofsted reports do not provide enough information, on their own, to help local authorities target interventions. It is therefore of vital importance that Ofsted findings are translated into a detailed action plan during the diagnosis phase. Our review of key documents from local authorities found that there is a dearth of such translation. This compromises severely the ability of all key personnel to be clear about what is supposed to take place and what it might mean for them. This process was often been rushed, resulting in resources being initially channelled in the wrong direction in some cases. The diagnosis and review process needs to be revisited regularly throughout the duration of an intervention.

'It was unfortunate that this initial scoping stage was inaccurate... they were totally unaware they had an excellent internal manager who was actually turning the performance... on its head.' (Project director, strategic partner, local authority 1)

Another precondition for the achievement of successful outcomes at scoping stage is the acceptance of that 'diagnosis' as appropriate and correct by all relevant personnel. Some local authorities accepted the diagnosis and were therefore more willing to accept intervention, or to see the point of where there needs to be an intervention.

Contract issues

Many respondents highlighted the nature of the contract and how that was established at set-up stage of the intervention as being critical to the achievement of success. The key attribute of a 'good' contract was the potential for it to be flexible and responsive to any changes. In one area it was felt that the contract was not flexible.

'You end up stuck with something that's fit for purpose in year one but not in year two or three.' (Deputy Director Children's Services, local authority, local authority 4)

The key characteristics of a flexible contract included the ability easily to adapt and amend the contract as the intervention proceeded and as some outcomes were being met, so that efforts could be re-focused legitimately on some other areas. The potential to extend the contract was seen as useful and as a good incentive for the strategic partner to maintain quality right up until the end of the contract as they may be able to continue into an extended period.

In one area where the contracting stage was particularly complex there was a need to be regularly reviewing the contract throughout the intervention. There were issues regarding trust between contractor and local authority about differing interpretations of the contract. In relation to a robust but flexible contract, respondents highlighted the importance of regular contract review meetings, clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that can be assessed and reviewed for relevance, and the involvement of lawyers at the initial stage of drafting.

In some cases the contract was cited as a barrier and as an extra burden. Respondents suggested that there needs to be clear descriptions of roles and responsibilities; what is within the contract; and what is 'extra'. A contract that is too heavily focused on process and activity was felt to be less useful than one focused on outcomes.

One example that illustrates this is in an area where there was significant cost and bureaucratic impact of contract disputes between the strategic partner and the local authority. Disputes related to the activities of the contractor that could be billed under the core fixed charge and activities that should be billed under a variable charge. These disputes resulted in numerous invoices being exchanged between the two parties.

Attitude towards the intervention

A key factor in explaining success was the pre-intervention attitude of partners towards the failings that led to the intervention.

'The Government Office and the DCSF putting in interventions is a waste of time unless the local authority wants to make improvements in itself. There are real issues if the local authority is in denial.' (Chair of Intervention Board, local authority 2)

This also spilled over into ensuring that the transition from normal operation to the intervention stage is sensitively managed. This was especially highlighted in relation to the management of the relationships with, and securing buy-in from, elected members.

'One of the downsides was the initial anxiety - it was all down to how successfully you managed that transition period... for people who want to continue life in local government they were worried about the association with a private sector organisation. As was I if I'm honest.'
(Head of Organisational Development, strategic partner, local authority 5)

Respondents across all intervention areas cited significant concerns about low staff morale prior to the intervention and a legacy of blame and negativity for years, if not decades, following the intervention. This was felt to be a huge stumbling block that needed to be addressed quickly at the start. Staff morale was also found, in some instances, to have determined the form and nature of the intervention with a more entrenched feeling of low staff morale requiring a more intensive role for the strategic partner.

Exit strategy and sustainability of outcomes

It appears that some local authorities and strategic partners managed their exit strategies better than others. Some local authorities have seen changes in leadership following the end of the intervention, leaving people concerned about the ability to sustain change without continuity in leadership and vision. Some local authorities did not feel that they were at full strength at the end of the intervention and felt that further help or investment was needed.

There was consistency in the message from across the local authorities on two points; firstly, the exit strategy is of considerable importance and sustainability needs to be built in from the start of the contract:

'I think a key thing in terms of ensuring sustained change was that we worked out an exit strategy in good time... There was a gradual withdrawal - based on a carefully constructed audit of what needed to be done... It was a phased tapering out and it was well thought through and constantly discussed. Just disappearing would be the worst scenario - what was well gauged was a reduction in the [department] staff, so we were left at the end with people on the ground in school improvement and they slowly left.'
(Member, local authority, local authority 1)

Secondly, in order to support the delivery of the 'harder' outcomes 'soft' improvements (e.g. improved communication between all partners, enhanced capacity, improved leadership, positive and strong personalities and relationships and regular and transparent monitoring) must be sustained:

'The partnership agenda that allows people to work together is now in place and that wasn't there before. There is also a raft of systems and processes that are in place to support sustainability and that was considered from the outset - the performance management arrangements, ability to challenge internally and externally, scrutiny, accountability, formal and informal performance reviews, school challenges, scrutiny, elected members and officers are challenged. Informally too there is now a culture in which people understand that they will now be held to account and that is ingrained now looking forward'. (Deputy Director, local authority, local authority 1)

Other outcomes from the intervention which are likely to influence each area's ability to sustain improvements in performance included an improvement in relations between members and officers, and a positive impact on recruitment and retention:

'Political leadership was really important in helping embed change and political continuity. The end of direction was very difficult but the transfer was managed from the local authority very skilfully at political and officer level. The consideration of what to do at the end was thought through. Taking the best bits of the intervention forward.'
(Strategic Manager, strategic partner, local authority 4)

'There has been a huge change in our politicians - they have a very clear understanding of the needs of children and young people.... There's a huge difference in the relationship between the Cabinet and the directors - it is much more of a dialogue now.'
(Director of Strategy and Commissioning, local authority, local authority 3)

'We're now fully staffed, and are not struggling to recruit social workers. Once you start being seen to be improving, staff want to come and work here.'
(Director of Children's Services, local authority, local authority 3)

The majority of respondents across all local authorities felt that both 'hard' and 'soft' improvements had been made, and that these were largely sustainable:

'We are focused on ensuring that we are doing the things we should be doing, doing them well and trying to improve. The improvements arose because the Strategic Partner was able to focus on important elements...and really understand them and model what needed to be done. I feel their guidance has become embedded in my practice and I am trying to support my colleagues to continue with this work. The key messages have not been lost and are now core business.'
(Service Manager for Looked-After Children, local authority, local authority 2)

'It's led to improvements. The key contributions were capacity and experience and this added considerably to the speed and effectiveness of the change agenda...They took a very strong lead in workforce development, and that was to some extent the final piece of work they did. They helped set up systems to ensure that our training and workforce development systems were in place. That in itself is sustained improvement.'
(Assistant Director of Children's Services, local authority, local authority 2)

Summary of findings

There is a strong correlation between **establishing the right aims** of an intervention and achieving success overall. These aims should address not only improvement in performance but also 'softer' outcomes such as improving capacity, building relationships and boosting morale. Interview data highlights the importance of ensuring that both the strategic partner and the local authority are involved in defining the aims, with their relative input dependent on the model adopted.

Key to establishing an effective intervention is an **accurate diagnostic assessment** of the local authority's situation, the findings of which are accepted by relevant personnel. Failure to undertake a full assessment may lead to resources being wrongly deployed. Support from key staff is crucial, with evidence indicating that the success of an intervention depends on the **willingness of the local authority** to make improvements.

Interviews highlighted the importance of an **appropriate contract**. The most successful contracts were flexible and could be readily amended or extended in response to changes over the course of the intervention. These contracts included effective key performance indicators to assist monitoring, a clear description of roles and responsibilities, and a focus on outcomes. Successful contracts also build in sustainability from the start of the intervention, with a focus on maintaining both performance outcomes and 'softer' improvements.

Leadership

Leadership was one of the factors associated strongly with improvements. This manifested itself through different processes carried out by leaders and leadership at different stages.

The **stakeholders** that displayed the most effective leadership were the strategic partners and the local authority officers. Strong leadership was critical to driving forward the intervention plans and processes.

The **processes** associated with effective leadership were: building capacity; communication and relationship building; setting aims; and providing support for implementation of intervention plans and activities.

Effective leadership was felt to be particularly important in the **stages** of early implementation and steady operation of the intervention. The early implementation phase is critical, and is characterised by the imperative of not only having to implement the strategy and action plans for their local areas, but also having to rapidly get up to speed with the realities unfolding 'on the ground'. This phase is also characterised by the need for adjustments within each local authority, which may result in a range of creative (and potentially divergent) local responses. The steady operation phase is characterised by the 'firming up' of structures and processes. Local authorities would tend to have ironed out any teething problems associated with early implementation. While adjustments may still be necessary, these are likely to be minor as local authorities settle into a 'steady state' of operation. During the steady operation phase, issues around formalising and maintaining good partnership working (e.g. through the establishment of joint protocols, etc) tend to be important.

Processes

Respondents felt that visibility of the leaders during the course of the intervention was important in building confidence and boosting staff morale.

'The leadership were clear in their ambition to be accessible. That made a difference...also a deliberate policy of management by walking around the floor.'
(Head of Children's Service, strategic partner, local authority 5)

This also contributed to another key characteristic of effective leadership of an intervention - that of visioning. Intervention areas had faced poor performance and staff were unsure about how things were going to improve. It is unsurprising that staff appreciated leaders setting out the direction of travel, and being clear about the roles of individuals, teams, the local authority and the strategic partner in contributing to delivering outcomes:

'People could see their place in the bigger picture - they saw how their team plans fed into the service plans and then into the organisational plan.'
(Project Director, strategic partner, local authority 1)

'Over the years I have heard a number of leaders who have been able to understand and articulate our poor performance, but it wasn't clear from them if there was a solution. Under [the AD's] leadership there was clarity about what we needed to do and how the strategic partners were able to assist us. I remember one distinct meeting where I came out feeling confident that [the AD] meant business.'
(Service Manager, local authority, local authority 2)

The interviews highlighted the importance of staff being able to see what the solution is and what it means to them and to others. These need to be communicated effectively - above and beyond the production of a plan or strategy for improvement. Mere reliance on official documents as a means of conveying vision and action is inadequate. Our review of key documents at the start of the evaluation identified that this stage or process of leaders testing, developing and agreeing the vision for the achievement of outcomes was important. Similarly the clarity around what was going to be achieved, and by whom, was also important. However, awareness of these processes amongst the stakeholders we interviewed was low, and the issues were very rarely articulated by respondents. Whilst some referred to the need to have a shared vision between the local authority and the strategic partner, the process for generating this shared vision lacked definition and clarity. Linked to this, respondents wanted their leaders to be visible, robust and consistent in dealing with poor performance and in recognising good practice.

'One of the ways of securing buy-in [from de-motivated staff] was to celebrate success - and that was led from the director'
(Head of Organisational Development, strategic partner, local authority 5)

This balanced approach is reported to be of critical importance. As mentioned previously, the diagnosis process can often be focussed overwhelmingly on the identification of what is 'bad' or failing. While it is important to diagnose failings accurately and to ensure that these are dealt with, it is also important to recognise success and good practice. This is particularly so in the context of low staff morale at the commencement of interventions.

'Positive communication: Early messages were given out by the local authority that senior management and consultants were brought in to build on some good work that was already taking place and to recognise that this was added capacity so that we could all move forward together. Rather than giving out the message that everyone was failing and that we were in trouble. It is about getting the right balance between people knowing that it is serious but also looking at it in a positive way. So that got people involved at that time' (Deputy Director, local authority, local authority 1)

'There is a softer issue around confidence building and motivation and inspiration around leadership - their work indirectly enabled us to believe in ourselves, and because the area was one that had a plethora of inspections and damning reports, there had been a lack of confidence that we were doing some good things already. There was no confidence in where we were trying to get to and a lack of focus. The partners to the local authority previously were ready and able to drive forward, but the local authority weren't going in the right direction.' (Police, local authority 1)

'Also important was the recognition from the Strategic Partner. When they came into the advice and assessment service, they were able to say, 'actually, you weren't doing too badly...'. The Strategic Partner could see that people were struggling to do good work and were not generally failing. It was the first time in 6-8 years that someone from outside said, 'you're doing OK - there are areas of weakness and we can help you improve, but it's not too bad.'

(Service Manager for Looked-After Children, local authority, local authority 2)

In relation to dealing with poor performance, leaders were seen as key enablers to ensuring that there were consequences of poor performance, where previously there had not been. This relates to the issue of accountability. Some respondents raised the power of the unions and a culture of fear that prevented poorly performing staff from being replaced as being major inhibitors to achieving positive change. With the intervention in place and the leaders visibly tackling incompetence, the local authority was no longer seen as 'the land of no consequence'.

'The new Director [of children's services] was a very good operator... I think it's difficult to call whether it was her (and her sacking of inefficient staff) or the intervention. So the first thing I would look for would be a Director who was willing to tackle incompetence.' (DCSF contract lead, local authority 2)

Summary of findings

Leadership from strategic partners and local authorities is considered to be strongly associated with improvement. Key factors included the importance of leadership in recognising good practice and ability; the need for leaders who are confident in taking action against ineffective ways of working and practices; and the role of leaders in setting direction and formulating and articulating solutions to existing problems.

Respondents reported that staff morale is typically low at the beginning of an intervention, so at this early stage it is crucial that strategic partners in particular are able to recognise and commend things that are working well. Stakeholders thought this would stabilise the relationship between the strategic partner and existing staff, and encourage staff to be more receptive to criticism in other areas of work.

This accepted, the need to confront ineffective ways of working was also seen as a key area of leadership. Stakeholders reported that ineffectiveness and even incompetence would go unchallenged until intervention took place and that the removal or challenge of these behaviours was often a turning point in terms of local authority performance. Both these factors relate to visibility of leadership: stakeholders reported that they want their leaders to have a presence in the office and to present a clear vision or direction for the organisation. Again, the previous absence of such visibility and vision was cited as a factor in poor performance that was only addressed with an intervention.

Types of leaders

Local authority officers - the Chief Executive and the DCS - and managers from the strategic partner - usually the Project Director - were consistently highlighted as the key leadership roles that enabled change and improvement.

'We had strong support for this from the CE and members and this helped raise the importance of children's social care across the whole of the local authority.'
(Chair of intervention board, local authority 2)

The type, expertise and focus of the leadership from the strategic partner were seen as key determinants of success, requiring a combination of policy expertise and management expertise.

As well as the background knowledge and expertise of the leaders, key personality traits were also highlighted as useful:

'Leadership is important. It takes real strength to accept weakness and welcome outside help, even for a local authority. Not only do you have to eat a lot of humble pie, you also need to be robust about your own purpose and direction as a department.'
(Service Manager, local authority, local authority 2)

It was also important for leaders to display cohesion between organisations and individuals from different agencies, and look united to the outside world even if this was not actually the case.

'I think the leadership was a key feature of the success of the intervention and the way in which it was set out right from the start. There was a united front presented to all staff - even if there were cross words behind doors...we had to give the impression that everyone was 100% on board and travelling in the same direction.'
(Member, local authority, local authority 5)

'We had some hard words both ways, but always presented a clear unity to the outside. It is absolutely vital that the people running the contract from both the contractor side and the local authority itself appear to be in line with each other in their thinking. It was down to the relationship that I managed to establish with the DCS that things went so smoothly - that was crucial.' (Project Director, strategic partner, local authority 1)

Whilst the role of lead members was also referenced, this was often seen as positive and sometimes seen as negative. Getting support from members was key in maintaining and building relationships.

'...there was a change in political leadership in education...when the current portfolio holder lead became the cabinet member for education. He's a very skilled politician and played a major part in regaining that confidence [from schools].'
(Acting Chief Executive, strategic partner, local authority 4)

Key individuals

An overwhelmingly consistent message from across the local authorities was the importance of key individuals and personalities in truly driving forward the intervention. These were usually people who displayed most of the characteristics of effective leadership as described above - vision, experience, relationship building skills and focus.

'[x] was hugely significant as an individual. He had great intellect and very wide experience of having studied failing authorities. He had a particular kind of personality, able to marshal disparate groups together. He had a strong focus on the objectives of the intervention.' (Headteacher, local authority 3)

A key implication of this finding is the need to consider sustainability of momentum and outcomes if success is so strongly dependent on key leaders. In one area, a crucial leadership role was filled by a new appointee on the basis they would stay for a minimum period of two years and that was clearly communicated to staff, which enhanced staff confidence in leaders as well as ensuring sustainability.

'The Assistant Director came in and said 'I've committed for three years', so that helped. People just not staying was unhelpful previously. We needed commitment from top.' (Head of Service, local authority 2)

The role of the strategic partner

Approach and attitude of strategic partner

On the whole, respondents felt that a consultative relationship with the strategic partner was more beneficial than a directive one. However, this varied depending on the scale of the poor performance and the shift that was required in order to improve outcomes. Interviewees suggest that where the pre-intervention performance is extremely poor and a culture of a failure has been established, an aggressive external strategic partner is helpful in directing the authority towards improvement.

The implication of this is that the type and approach of the strategic partner needs to be tailored depending on the stage the local authority is at, and the scale of the improvement needed. Initially, a swift and directive approach can be especially effective in strengthening the local authority structures, procedures and governance. After this stage, a much more 'soft', consultative and facilitative approach from the strategic partner was preferred. This is related to the need for the local authority to become empowered, become stronger and develop their own internal capabilities, and for that to be sustained, which was seen as difficult to achieve if the strategic partner is too directive throughout the intervention.

'The strategic partner was very directive at the start, and became more facilitatory as they went on. There was a shift in responsibility over time from the intervention partner to the local authority itself. I am a strong advocate of this type of intervention. It helped build the confidence and capacity to address the issues that were previously ducked and has left a strong organisation.'

(Deputy Director of Learning, local authority, local authority 1)

'[The strategic partner] were good at strengthening governance. But their role was more like having a conversation - they were very consultative. [The previous strategic partner] tended to be more directive because of the stage we were at.'

(Assistant Director of Children's Services, local authority, local authority 3)

Another key characteristic of the strategic partner highlighted consistently as being important was a professional approach that conveyed expertise and credibility. This was important not only in relation to the local authority but also in relation to external partners, who may have previously lost faith in the department under intervention.

'They were able to talk at a professional level very well and had the respect of other partners... they came together as a team.' (Headteacher, local authority 3)

Finally, the visioning capability of the strategic partner was key. This did not seem to be related to the background/type of the strategic partner, but more related to their ability to provide an outcome focus and clear vision.

'The main thing for this was their [strategic partner's] vision...in both cases it was about having clear visions. [The strategic partner] worked with us through things and helped us develop our vision. [The previous strategic partner] came in with a vision. Both were appropriate for the situations as they were at the time.'

(Assistant Director of Children's Services, local authority, local authority 3)

'I think the 'partnership approach' intervention (rather than a full take over) was one of the key facilitators that meant it worked well and was accepted. This was partly on the basis that it was seen as a partnership rather than a take over of any form...It was fairly clear these were consultants brought into work in partnership to add capacity and expertise, rather than to start telling people what to do and take people's jobs away. This way round it got support from the local staff and population and the impetus required. It was a key decision not to go for different model - the partnership was the drive behind the communication strategy from the outset, and these were the messages that were given out.' (Deputy Director, local authority, local authority 1)

The attitude, values and culture of the strategic partner were highlighted as being important regardless of the type and background of the partner. Respondents talked about the key attributes: these may not be associated with any particular sectoral background. These attributes have been discussed in detail elsewhere in this report, but include the importance of strategic partner being committed to outcomes for children and young people and softer outcomes which may not be included in initial contracts.

One example of poor practice in relation to the attitude of the strategic partner contrasted with this, and referenced an over-focus on financial gain:

Key processes

The most strongly correlated successful processes attributed to the strategic partner were their role in:

- setting aims, building capacity, leadership, relationship building (detailed elsewhere),
- communication,
- monitoring performance and building accountability,
- building sustainability and the 'exit strategy'.

Communication

The strategic partner was seen as a crucial instigator in developing good communication within the local authority and also with external partners prior to the start of the contract and throughout the intervention.

'There was a sense of increased communication straight away...information sharing was suddenly on a two-way basis.'

(Head of Organisational Development, strategic partner, local authority 5)

In some areas there were formal communication channels that the strategic partner set up, both internally and externally, for example a regular newsletter issued for staff, and one for headteachers. In other areas, communication channels were left informal but strengthened by the strategic partner through regular meetings, briefing sessions, greeting staff, one-to-one meetings etc, and cascading of messages through line management routes. One crucial aspect of the communication was the benefit of clarifying roles and responsibilities.

'There was clear communication through that chain about what needed to be done and who was going to do it.'

(Assistant Director Children's Services, local authority, local authority 3)

This was seen as being more beneficial as a process of engaging and building ownership of the improvements by staff as opposed to the importance of the content of the communication itself.

'People thought at one point thought there was too much communication but... We had systems put in place to engage people... and people felt part of that process.'

(Head of Organisational Development, strategic partner, local authority 5)

Again the implications of this are that communication as a process was important in building positive 'soft' outcomes of shared vision, engagement and confidence, and less about the actual processes and activities used. Respondents felt that effective communication needed to be two-way and allow staff to share concerns and also get involved further if they wanted to.

'...some of it was about communicating the over-arching vision and values [the strategic partner] would bring... but also about giving people the opportunity to share in the process and voice their anxiety.'

(Head of Organisational Development, strategic partner, Local authority 5)

'I think the skeleton of the framework had been communicated but what was reassuring was that we would be able to contribute to fleshing that out in terms of how we felt it would be possible to deliver the new contract, so there was room for negotiation and involvement for those who wanted to get involved.'

(Head of Organisational Development, strategic partner, local authority 4)

Monitoring performance and building accountability

Accountability and performance management structures were another area of activity that respondents felt was greatly enhanced by the strategic partner. This was mainly around linking activity to achieving outcomes, better use of performance information and challenging poor performance.

'The local authority for the last 10 years had been blaming and getting rid of people, but they didn't understand how to hold people to account for outcomes in their area. So we started with the data... using it effectively and challenging people...'

(Project Director, strategic partner, local authority 1)

'We fed back to staff the conclusions and messages from our review and monitoring meetings at core staff team meetings - there are heads of service meeting every week, and now a new system put in for better communications. Consultants used to come to those, and regular newsletters were put in. It really did set the scene for sharing information - one of the factors that helped cross-directorate learning - saw social care colleagues working more closely with educational colleagues. This is all pinned on the communication and key messages that come out of this monitoring process.'

(Head of Young Children's Services, local authority, local authority 1)

However, a key part of strengthening accountability and effective challenge was the need to build confidence in the robustness of the performance management frameworks and the establishment of consequence that was related to activity, and not just a culture of blame.

'Nobody was prepared to put their head above the parapet until we gave them the confidence that we weren't there to shoot them down, but they had to be accountable for what they were doing.' (Project Director, strategic partner, local authority 1)

Finally, the role of a more participatory process of accountability was another important activity of the strategic partner, where a range of partners are engaged in processes. Again, the actual process used itself is not as important as the 'soft' outcomes of trust and engagement.

'The partnership board which they [the strategic partner] set up actually engaged with schools regarding the decision making process, not just about education but children's services as whole.'
(Assistant Director of Children's Services, local authority, local authority 3)

Building sustainability and the 'exit strategy'

Many respondents highlighted the need to have a well managed exit strategy and one that ensures that on detachment of the strategic partner the local authority can continue to embed new ways of working and that outcomes are sustained. The strategic partner was seen as a crucial factor in the success of an effective exit and handover at the end of the intervention. It was important that there was not a sudden 'falling-off' and removal of the strategic partner, and that the exit was planned for months in advance and was gradual. This links to performance indicators for the local authorities, discussed above. In some local authorities, indicators showed that improvements 'tailed off' and went slightly downwards towards end of intervention.

To avoid this, a change in activity by the strategic partner was needed which focussed on shifting more control back to the local authority.

'The Partner adapted their plans as the relationship matured. One person, the Programme Manager deserves credit... as we got stronger he tapered off.'
(Deputy Director of Learning, local authority, local authority 1)

In relation to continuity of performance after exit, the respondents felt that formal plans and strategies were beneficial.

'They worked with us to develop strategies and procedures and practice that would allow us to continue the improvement in their absence.'
(Deputy Director of Learning, local authority, local authority 1)

Summary of findings

Local authorities' experience highlights the importance of the strategic partner in tailoring the intervention approach to the needs of the local authority, particularly in respect of the scale of improvement required and the capacity within the local authority. It is also important in the early stages of an intervention that the strategic partner:

- displays a **professional approach** which conveys the strategic partner's expertise and credibility to other stakeholders;
- provides **clear vision** and focus on outcomes; and
- adopts an **appropriate ethos**, specifically regarding a commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people.

Over the course of the intervention, the role of the strategic partner is particularly important in three main areas: **developing good communications** processes and thus strengthening trust, engagement and ownership among staff; **monitoring performance and building accountability** by improving the use of data and challenging poor performance; and **building sustainability**, through planning a successful transition and gradually transferring control back to the local authority in the period before full handover.

Partnership working and relationship building

The strategic partner and the local authority

The most important relationships for a successful intervention were overwhelmingly seen as being those involving the strategic partner and local authority officers. This was described as often being difficult, but most beneficial for improvement when it was 'two-way'.

'There was a continuously changing relationship between [the strategic partner] and the local authority and that developed all the time. At the beginning there was suspicion and reluctance, and that developed into what was a real sense of partnership. That contributed to the success of the partnership.'

(Head of Organisational Development, strategic partner, local authority 5)

The key to building effective relationships was working alongside - working with, not doing to - a 'partnership of equals' and one where problems were overcome together as opposed to apportioning blame.

'The approach was not 'this is what we think' more 'this is what needs to happen'... they did this mainly by observing how we worked...'

(Assistant Director of Children's Services, local authority, local authority 3)

This 'working with' approach involved a focus on strengths and new ways of working, as opposed to apportioning blame and criticising.

'If an assessment is taken quickly that says 'nobody is up to the job', it becomes a takeover. In this case it worked well because people were given credit for what they were doing, and the way they worked with people on the ground was about saying 'we don't think what you are doing is rubbish, but have you tried this?'

(Member, local authority, local authority 1)

This is in contrast to previous ways of working which were led by the centre and were 'doing to' staff:

*'What happened previously, we had people at the centre telling us what to do, giving us workshops, training, nobody worked alongside us and said this is what you're doing wrong, so [the strategic partner] was informing practice and filling capacity.
(Head of Service, local authority, local authority 2)*

A core component of a partnership of equals was not just about support from the strategic partner, but also its ability to challenge the local authority.

*'...someone needed to challenge these aspects and nobody had up until that point.'
(Service Manager, local authority, local authority 2)*

An underlying view of respondents was that the local authority had to, at some point, reach a level of strength and robustness in order for the partnership with the strategic partner to be truly that of equals. An example of this is the intervention model of an external contractor coming in first 'to sort the basics out' before a mentoring phase with another local authority could be appropriate and beneficial.

Another important aspect of partnership working between the strategic partner and the local authority was the need to build relationships with staff and communicate the role and approach of the strategic partner to staff,

*'it was partly down to the relationship that developed with the local authority at the time...one of the challenges was communicating that, yes, we were going to make some key appointments at the top but we were going to work alongside the service heads... it was down to the relationship that I [strategic partner project director] managed to establish with the [DCS] that things went so smoothly - that was crucial.'
(Project Director, strategic partner, local authority 1)*

*'Managers had to buy into this new system - so the first process was engaging [staff]'
(Head of Organisational Development, strategic partner, local authority 5)*

A basic pre-condition for effective partnership between the local authority and the strategic partner was the need for both to have a shared vision and values, especially shared by the leaders of the two partners. This did not seem to be dependent on the background and type of strategic partner - what was more important was a shared approach and vision.

*'So having a DCS with the same value system as the contractors is very important'
(Project Manager, strategic partner, local authority 1)*

Members

The role of members in partnership working was referenced to a much lesser extent, in comparison with the role of the strategic partner and the local authority. Nonetheless, members can be important, for example in building external relationships with schools.

*'The political engagement of the local authority was moved further away from the service. Previously members would have informed the micro detail of what the local authority did. It was much more strategic and appropriate political involvement than previously.'
(Acting Chief Executive, strategic partner, local authority 4)*

'I think at the time what the intervention successfully did was take the education of children in this borough out of a political maelstrom that was having a disastrous impact on children's ability and outcomes.'
(Deputy Director of Children's Services, local authority, local authority 4)

Other local authority functions

Non-intervention local authority departments and health were mentioned infrequently but still seen as important.

'Another thing was importance of taking a whole-authority approach and raising the profile of children's services within the local authority.'
(Chair of Partnership Board, local authority 5)

'I think that the work we did build into the overall improvement of the local authority as a whole. The fault was initially in the local authority - so we needed internally to raise the self understanding and self-evaluation and the performance culture. We identified rising stars within the local authority and promoted them into key jobs for us, which were then build into the local authority structure. There was a very junior member of staff in the policy division...and we brought her on because she was a key person in the children's plan. She is now a key person in the policy team, and in driving through performance and the performance culture. Getting that internal challenge in place is something that has spread through the local authority and will continue to benefit things from now on.'
(Project Director, strategic partner, local authority 1)

External partners

Working with external agencies was referenced less frequently by interviewees than other partners in relation to key partners and relationships. Partnership boards were seen as beneficial if they were truly wide ranging in representation and all partners were equal. This ensured partners felt they had a voice so built trust and confidence.

In relation to other stakeholders, respondents cited the relationship with schools and colleges as the next key factor across all local authorities, not just those interventions that only related to education. This builds on the point made earlier in this report about the importance of referencing schools in the intervention aims.

'Our relationship with schools became more adult - it was really about support and challenge...'
(Head of Organisational Development, strategic partner, local authority 5)

'It was the changing nature of the relationship between schools and the local authority from a relatively confrontational one towards partnership where roles were clarified. At the start the local authority wanted to control budgets and tell schools what to do and schools wanted to kick out the local authority of any involvement in achieving attainment etc.' (Assistant Chief Executive, local authority, local authority 4)

Engagement with children and young people was referenced infrequently and seemed to be something that was being taken forward in the area more widely as part of the ECM agenda and the development of Children and Young People's Plans. In relation to their involvement in the intervention, this did not seem to be embedded at strategic level.

'It always feels as if engagement with CYP can be a bit tokenistic, so you have to watch this one. I'm not sure they were actively involved in the monitoring process at all, as this was all carried out at quite a high and strategic level.'
(Chief Executive, police, local authority 1)

In some areas, health was cited as an important partner to involve and work with.

'We developed a better relationship with the local health authority as a result of the intervention, with school nurses and health visitors working more closely with education welfare officers and nursery nurses. This new relationship between health and social care was one example of good practice in delivering Every Child Matters outcomes.'
(Deputy Director of Learning, local authority, local authority 1)

Relationship with government - DCSF and Government Office - was on the whole welcomed and some respondents felt more support would have been beneficial, especially towards the end of the intervention.

'The Government Office were very supportive... [their] task was to determine whether there was capacity to continue the improvements throughout the intervention and beyond.' (Deputy Director of Learning, local authority, local authority 1)

Respondents also highlighted the key role that the Government Office played in overseeing the contract, reviewing progress and chairing and attending key monitoring meetings, and linking in with local authority and strategic partner managers and staff.

'The Government Office has learned the importance of taking a robust approach to local authority performance, in order to help local authorities to do well. A more collaborative process allows both parties to raise their concerns when they arise.'
(Director, Government Office, local authority 2)

Processes of relationship building

Communication with key partners through steady operation of the intervention was highlighted as the most important process in relationship building, although this did not need to necessarily be a formal channel of communication (see section on communication). Asking 'how do we fit in with other agencies' seemed to trigger a process of partnership working and relationship building.

'X established the Partnership Board. All senior officers were accountable to [the strategic partner]. All policy decisions went through the Partnership board and X was the Chair. All the schools were represented, as were trade unions, governors, and elected members, although this latter group were in the minority. Also the LSC was involved. It was a very strong board. The agenda was set by [the Chair], and the Partnership board almost acted as a scrutiny function. Head Teachers were very keen on this Board. It was a very different way of working.'
(Director of Strategy and Commissioning, local authority, local authority 3)

Summary of findings

Partnership working was another key factor in interventions, but referred to a wide range of relationships: the most significant was considered to be that with the strategic partner, with partnerships and relationships with members, schools and the DCSF itself also being recognised as important. An equality of partnership between the strategic partner and local authority was seen as critical to a successful intervention. This equality refers to a feeling of balance between the two in terms of decision-making, direction and vision. Whilst at the outset of an intervention strategic partners often played a more directive and commanding role, as the capacity and robustness of the local authority increases, so should its influence with the strategic partner and its input into future direction.

Partnership and relationships with members were significant in their connections with external partners. Intervention occurred in some local authorities at the point of difficulties in relations between members and local authority staff. These difficulties have implications for local authority relations with schools and other external agencies as members often have high levels of contact with these external organisations and agencies. Stakeholders commonly reported improved partnership with schools during and after intervention as stronger communication was established and maintained. The DCSF were broadly seen as a positive partner in the intervention process, although respondents did comment that increased support would be desirable.

Capacity building and workforce issues

An overwhelmingly strong message from the interviews was the crucial role that the strategic partner played in building the local authority's capacity and capability. This ranged from appointing extra staff, bringing in policy and management expertise, attracting extra funding etc. As well as this, workforce issues were seen as extremely important in relation to removing staff, building existing and new workforce qualifications and competencies, embedding clear supervision and line management processes. The quality of the staff recruited to new and vacant posts was also crucial (i.e. getting the 'right' people).

In the majority of the interventions there were significant vacancies in key local authority posts at the start of the intervention. As well as filling these vacant posts, the strategic partner was helpful in bringing in people to work alongside existing staff. This had significant implications for ensuring the sustainability of any outcomes produced as a result of the intervention.

'In relation to success they were a launch pad. They helped sow and collect the seeds.'
(Strategic Manager, local authority, local authority 2)

The implication of this is the need to ensure that the local authority does not become dependent on the extra capacity created and that they are able to gradually supplement this with their own staff, whether new or existing. An example that illustrates this is an area where the strategic partner appointed staff to vacancies or new posts and on exit these posts were filled by existing staff through competitive recruitment. Here, it was felt that these staff would not have previously been successful at meeting the requirements of these posts in a competitive situation. As a result of the intervention (and how it was delivered) the quality of existing staff had increased significantly.

It was felt that as the strategic partner withdrew gradually, their remaining activities needed to change in order to facilitate handing over more control and responsibility back to the local authority. The contractor staff that remained needed to be more focussed on where their efforts were directed. They needed to target the capacity at any remaining areas where improvement was still needed.

'As areas receiving support improved, the support from the strategic partner peeled back...where the most help was needed, the strategic partner stayed longer...'
(Lead Member, local authority, local authority 2)

This suggests that a change in activity is important towards the latter part of an intervention to support the transition of services back to the local authority.

'The types of activity changed as the authority became successful in building capacity in the children's services directorate towards taking responsibility and addressing issues without support from the strategic partner.'
(Deputy Director of Learning, local authority, local authority 1)

A large number of respondents felt that an unintended positive outcome of the intervention was the strengthening of the local authorities' long-term recruitment and retention of staff. There are some good examples of new links being formed with the local training providers and universities etc. This contributed further to ensuring outcomes around workforce development are sustained and embedded across the intervention area.

'We have prioritised workforce development planning and recruitment initiatives...this has led to improvements in recruitment over the past year.'
(Strategic Manager, local authority, local authority 2)

In relation to the processes used to build capacity, it is important to provide extra support for the local authority, and not to 'take over' its activities and responsibilities. The most effective focus of the extra capacity from the strategic partner was to support staff in taking forward their existing activities and in kick-starting initiatives and the basic work of the local authority.

'[The strategic partner] brought capacity in terms of volume of time...they filled in gaps...they didn't replace, they augmented. They also had access to back office support.' (Headteacher, local authority 1)

'There was a lot of work done on policies...these sort of things should have been routine...but they hadn't... the strategic partner made sure it happened - it provided reinforcement and allowed for more detailed work to be done.'
(Strategic Manager, local authority, local authority 2)

Another key message relating to this is the legitimacy with which the strategic partner was able to remove staff that were not performing well. A number of respondents mentioned the need to counteract the power the unions had over dismissing staff as well as the political reluctance from members to instigate significant removal of staff. There is some suggestion from respondents that if the strategic partner is external or from the private sector, they may be more able to remove staff and have the legitimacy to do this.

'The strategic partner have brought in expertise. Because they were not part and parcel of the local authority and brought in a company operating a different sort of system, they were much more able to hire and fire and push people and make sure goals were met... it was far too cosy previously - we've always said that [the local authority] is almost incestuous. It is now far from that.' (Primary Headteacher, local authority 5)

Another aspect of building staff was the importance of deciding where best to keep staff in relation to their line management etc. In some areas it was felt that it would have been more beneficial to keep staff employed by the local authority, others felt that it was important to ensure the management of staff was removed from the local authority to the strategic partner.

'Whereas in other contracts there have been interventions where a leadership team have been brought in but the workers are still local authority employed.... Far easier to secure that engagement if talking to your own employees.'
(Head of Organisational Development, strategic partner, local authority 5)

Building capacity was not just limited to staff - the strategic partner being appointed was also associated with the potential to attract new funding.

'They [the strategic partner] helped financially as well as practically... the local authority had done very little to support us prior to that.'
(Primary Headteacher, local authority 5)

Finally, in relation to the key external stakeholders involved in workforce issues, the appointment of extra staff was welcomed by partners. For example, a primary school headteacher comments:

'From a personal point of view it was having the cavalry arrive and having the insight and intuition to know that I needed help that was most supportive.'
(Primary Headteacher, local authority 5)

So the appointment of new staff and filling of vacancies was also useful in sending out a message to external partners that capacity had increased and hence there was more support for them in getting their job done.

Summary of findings

Building capacity was reported by respondents as one of the most significant contributions made by strategic partners during the intervention process. Prior to intervention local authorities were typically facing workforce shortage, gaps in the quality of staff and finding recruitment of appropriate employees a challenge. The strategic partner could literally increase capacity simply by adding numbers to the workforce, often relieving existing staff of unmanageable levels of work. The expertise brought in by the strategic partner was crucial to having an immediate impact on performance and more gradually transferring skills to existing staff. This skills transfer continues as the strategic partner begins to withdraw from the authority, slowly transferring responsibility to local authorities counterparts. This change in activity was cited by many stakeholders as being the turning point in the intervention, when local authorities began to regain authority and resume decision-making independently using the skills and capacity initially provided by the strategic partner.

6. Discussion and recommendations

The overwhelming message from the evaluation is that the success of interventions in bringing about positive outcomes is not determined, necessarily, by the specific model in place and/or the specific contracting out variants. It is apparent from our research that all of the interventions were designed to be tailored to the specific local authority in question using slightly or very different models of intervention based on the very particular local and regional circumstances. All of the interventions were on the whole successful in improving outcomes for children and young people, regardless of the variance in the intervention model and formal structures in place.

While clear thinking and planning around the type of intervention model relevant to particular local authorities is essential, this needs to be complemented by attention to a range of factors that support the delivery of positive outcomes. Our research identified a number of overarching common factors in a successful intervention that were not related to the type of intervention model chosen. These include the systems and culture around engagement, leadership, confidence building, communication, capacity building, doing with (not unto) etc. These factors transcend any specific model and relate to the behaviours and approach undertaken during the intervention by key stakeholders.

Respondents across all local authorities consistently highlighted these factors as the key factors for a successful intervention despite significant differences in the type and form of the intervention and associated sets of processes and activities.

While these factors are identified as being of great significance in accounting for success, they can be manifested very differently in different contexts. For example, confidence building was manifested in terms of demonstrating accountability and managing poor performance in some local authorities, and in terms of celebrating successes in others. It is also vital for interventions to have a clear outcomes-focus, and to enable flexible and creative local responses over time. This recognises the complex and often shifting needs and priorities and the different actions that will be appropriate at different times.

We set out below key points to be taken into account in the design and delivery of interventions.

Design of the intervention model

- It is important to have detailed consideration and clear planning about the model of intervention required for specific authorities and to tailor these to the locality in question, as demonstrated by these five interventions. For example, some interventions may need to be more directive than others, depending on the situation and need.

Ownership of the scoping stage and pre-intervention considerations

- The stage immediately after a poor review/inspection outcome which led to the direction (the scoping stage) is essential. In this stage there should be a feeling of ownership of designing the intervention so that the model chosen does not feel imposed on staff and members. The key stakeholders to be involved in this dialogue should be the leaders from the Council, Members, Government Office and the DCSF.
- It is important to have a flexible, outcomes-focussed contract that incentivises the strategic partner to commit to focussing on delivering outcomes.

- Overarching issues identified in review/inspection reports should be translated into clear sets of locally-specific aims and actions. All relevant personnel should be able to see what the intervention means in practice, and their role in contributing towards the achievement of desired outcomes.
- Clarity of aims and generation of shared vision are important. These should be communicated to all staff and partners. Reliance on documentation to convey aims and vision is inadequate.

Capacity building style and approach

- Support and challenge from the strategic partner is crucial - it cannot be one without the other. The challenge aspect may need to come first to 'sort out the problems' early on and act as a catalyst to kick start change, before change can be enabled through a facilitative and supportive approach by the strategic partner. Examples of effective support include modelling of behaviour in improving professional practice - working side by side with staff to show them new and better ways of working, so that these methods are embedded more widely.
- Building capacity of staff (filling posts) is important but equally, if not more, important is building sustained capability of staff - getting the right people with the right expertise and ensuring there is work to develop the continued competencies of the existing and potential workforce.

Clear and consistent communications

- All levels of staff across the intervention department(s) need to feel engaged from the start of the process until the end, and after the direction has been lifted. So the approach cannot be 'from the centre' or only 'top-down'.
- Communications should be two-way. Staff should be able to voice concerns and anxieties. They should also feel listened to.

The role of certain leaders and stakeholders

- Key individuals in leadership roles need to commit visibly to driving forward the intervention (through e.g. a minimum stay contract or 'walking the floor' frequently etc.)
- Member buy-in is important in driving forward the intervention in a leadership role and in showing commitment to the intervention. It can be useful to separate out roles and responsibilities so that members are less involved in day-to-day intervention processes and to keep decisions about the services under intervention out of a highly political arena.
- Support from the Government Office and the DCSF is useful and should be visible, with increased involvement needed at the exit stage, which needs to focus on building sustainability.

7. Appendices

Appendix A - Scoping interview guide

Introduction

DSCF has commissioned the Office for Public Management to undertake an evaluation of five recent major interventions in (insert areas). We are currently scoping the work, through desk based research and a series of telephone interviews, in order to:

- identify the contextual factors and issues to be explored through the work; and
- clarify the rationale for interventions in children's services.

(Insert name of client) at DCSF has identified you as someone we should speak to at this stage. The interview will last up to 45 minutes and we will record what you say by hand. Please let me know if there is anything that you wish me to treat as confidential.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Context

- Could you please confirm your job title and give me a brief overview of your remit. What is your role in relation to the policy and practice of interventions in children's services?
- Which individuals or other organisations do you work closely with in relation to this?
- Which other relevant organisations are you affiliated with, if any?

Policy context and rationale

- What were the external and internal drivers that led to the development of government policy around interventions in children's services?
- Why do you think such a policy was necessary? What was the rationale for it?
- How does the policy and practice of interventions in children's services sit within the wider context of changes to the children's agenda (i) in the past? (ii) the present, and (iii) the future?

Intended outcomes

- What outcomes were interventions in children's services intended to bring about? (At the national level? local level? Probe to get a full answer)
- Why did you think that the policy and practice of interventions would bring about these positive changes? What was the evidence for this?
- Who were the main beneficiaries of the policy and practice intended to be?

Intended processes and structures

- How was the policy intended to be implemented in order to bring about the outcomes you identified? Please describe the structures and processes involved. (probe to get a detailed response)
- Who were the key stakeholders who needed to be involved?
 - Why were these stakeholders required?
 - What was their role?

Turning policy into practice

- What are the opportunities and challenges involved in turning national policy around interventions in children's services into local practice? Please explain your answer fully.
- Have you had any specific involvement with any of the five interventions under consideration?
 - If so, what are your views in relation to the intervention processes and outcomes in the children's services in question?

Evaluation process and outcomes

- Thinking about the work that we are doing to evaluate the five interventions:
 - What do you see as being a successful study outcome?
 - Which stakeholders should we be involving at each children's service?
- Are there any other relevant contextual factors that we need to be aware of?
- Do you have any other comments?

Appendix B - Stakeholder interview guide

Introduction

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) have commissioned us, the Office of Public Management (OPM), to evaluate the effectiveness of Departmental interventions in Local Authorities such as yours. The DCSF considers this an important opportunity to gain a clearer picture of the different intervention models, and personal reflections on barriers and challenges faced during the process, in order to inform future policy in this area.

The evaluation also provides an opportunity to **celebrate improvements in outcomes** for children and young people and **share best practice** with other areas. Your area has been specifically chosen by the DCSF as having shown great success, so we are keen to learn as much as we can from you about how you overcame the challenges you faced and achieved outcomes in order to share learning with other areas and shape future policy.

Work to date

We have undertaken a document review and data analysis to form a picture of some of the contextual issues in this area. We are now conducting telephone interviews with a number of key stakeholders across the area who will have been involved in the intervention at some stage and able to help us fill in any gaps in our understanding of what happened during the intervention. Our work will include both qualitative and quantitative research, which will feed into a written report to be published by the DCSF.

Confidentiality

This interview will be entirely confidential, and at no stage will personally identifiable data be shared with the DCSF or any other third party. The interview will last up to 45 minutes and we will record what you say by hand.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Context

Could you please start by confirming your job title and giving me a brief overview of your involvement in the intervention in this area:

[Probes:]

- What is your current role within your organisation (where are you situated in the structure of the organisation)?
- What has been the role of your organisation in relation to the intervention?
- At which stage of the intervention were you involved (start, middle, end - dates please)
- During course of the intervention what was your role, and what were your responsibilities?
- Did your role change during the intervention at all?

- Is there any issue, theme or policy area that you were specifically involved in during the intervention (e.g. a particular service area, management issues, partnership working etc.?)
- Am I right in saying that your primary involvement in the intervention was around [x]? If so, I will start by asking some specific questions about this area.

Why - The policy intent

[Particularly important for certain individuals in sites where doc review yields little in terms of the logic / rationale for the specific intervention]

Local aims and objectives

- Were you involved in determining the exact form of intervention in your area? If 'yes', who else was involved? Why was it thought that this particular intervention would bring about intended outcomes?
- Were you aware of, or involved in, defining the intended outcomes of the overall intervention plan? Why were these outcomes thought to be important?
- Were you involved in devising the plan in relation to [x] or part of it? If not, were you involved in implementing it?

Communication of aims

- How were the aims of the intervention first communicated to you?
- Who was involved in the process of communicating to you what needed to happen re [x] area? (both internal and external partners and individuals)?
- Were there any documents disseminated at the time about policies and procedures? Was there anything written down about how to communicate and share information during the intervention?
- Did you know exactly what was hoped to be achieved, and who the beneficiaries of the improvements were intended to be, and how they would benefit?

The influence of national policy

- What role did national or regional policy play in shaping your activity around [x] during the intervention?
- Did this change at all over the course of the intervention (e.g. a new initiative or statutory guidance issued by government)?
- If change occurred, what were the reasons for change? Did this lead to changes in the process, activities and outcomes? Who made decision about this change?

How and what - Processes and activity

- How was the intervention implemented in [x] area that you were involved in?

(Note - ask for brief outline of details, and focus on plugging gaps from document review)

- What particular processes and activities were put in place in [x] area as part of the intervention? (e.g. staff training, workshops, etc)
- What were the key facilitators for helping to deliver the intervention?
- Did these remain consistent over time, during the intervention, or did the types of activities or any of the processes change?
- If activities and processes did change, then what was the reason for this? (If unclear, who made the decision for this?)
- Which of these activities do you think were crucial to the success of the intervention, and which were secondary? Why do you say this?

Deviation from original intention

- Was the process used, and the activities undertaken in [x] area, the same as what was originally planned and intended? Or was there a need for adjusting the plans or changing the process?
If so, why?

(Probes:)

- Was the previous approach not working?
- Was a blockage highlighted?
- Was there a block in terms of resources?
- Were there new objectives highlighted?
- Was a stakeholder requesting a changed process? etc.
- If there were adjustments to the intended and original plan, were the same outcomes still expected, or were the intended outcomes also revised? Did you have to adjust the stakeholders involved, e.g. bring in other different people, etc.?

Monitoring and reviewing

- How were you involved in monitoring and reviewing of the intervention - both your own progress and the actions you were undertaking, as well as monitoring changes more generally?

- How were you measuring the impact of your actions and work, and whether that was leading to any improvement?
- Do you think the performance has been adequately measured (e.g. do you think you've been collecting the right information? Is it clear-cut what you should be measuring)? (probe for reasons for answers, and evidence if there is any)
- What was the role of reporting mechanisms in the work you were involved in?
- Who was involved in monitoring and reviewing progress?

Communications

- What policies, protocols, procedures were put in place during the intervention? Were these clearly communicated?
- To what extent was communication formalised, or left informal?
- What was your feeling about the quality of this communication?

What works - Sustaining improvements

Attribution

- Do you feel that the intended outcomes of the intervention were met?

If yes:

- Do you think these outcomes were as a direct result of the activities and process associated with the plan and the intervention? [*Probes: Why do you say this? How do you know, e.g. what evidence?*]
- If not, then what do you feel led to these outcomes not being realised?
- Were there any unintended positive/negative outcomes of the intervention?
- What do you think worked particularly well in delivering intended outcomes? Why do you say that [*Probes: Why do you say this? How do you know? What evidence is there?*]

Challenges

- What, in your opinion, were the main barriers to change?
- How did you overcome barriers to change? Did you need to involve additional or different people to overcome these barriers?
- What further do you feel could have been done to overcome these barriers?
- What were the unexpected opportunities found during the process? E.g. were you able to use this intervention as a means of transforming and improving other aspects of the organisation, staff, services etc?

Who - partners, leaders, CYP

- Who are the different stakeholders you've been working with during the intervention to bring about change?

Prompts - Internal, external, cross departmental and cross organisational.

- What were their roles and responsibilities in this process (who was leading, who was for consultation only etc.)?
- Were the same people doing the same things over the course of the intervention, or did this change?
- If change occurred, then:
 - Why was this the case?
 - Who made decision?
 - Was this proactive change, or did it just happen?
 - Did this lead to changes in processes and outcomes?
- Were there any people who you feel should have been more involved than they were?
- If so, why weren't these people more involved? At what point do you feel they should have been involved? What benefit do you feel their involvement would have had?

Partnership working

- What was the role of partnership working in implementing the plan and bringing about improvements?
- Who did you involve, how and why were these particular partners and individuals chosen?
- What were the incentives for different partners to play a role in the intervention?
- Do you feel that the partnership worked well? If so, why?
- What do you feel have been the biggest challenges faced in partnership working? What have been the reasons for this?

Leadership and management

- What role did the leaders involved (either in your area [x], or the organisation as a whole) play in driving forward the plan?
- What do you feel were the main challenges faced by those with the responsibility of leading and driving forward the plan?

- Did they display effective leadership in your opinion?

Probes:

- If so, what activities and processes did they go through to bring change and improvement?
- If not, what do you feel could have been done better?

Engagement with children and young people

- What role did engagement with CYP play in implementing the plan and bringing about improvements?

Probes:

- Consultation to define intended outcomes?
- Letting users know what was going on?
- Involvement in processes and activities such as workshops or training?
- Monitoring whether users did actually experience improvements when measuring outcomes?

Conclusions - looking to the future

Sustained change

- To what extent have new ways of working have been embedded in the area, going forward?
- To what extent has the intervention led to sustainable improvements? Do you feel that these outcomes one-offs?
Probes:
 - What do you feel has facilitated embedding/ sustainability?
 - What do you feel has prevented it?

Generalisability

- To what extent to you think the lessons from your area are applicable to other areas? (both about successes and reasons for successes, as well as challenges) Why do you say that?
- What do you think are some of the challenges of replicating what you've done in your area elsewhere? Why do you say this?
- What do you think other areas may be able to learn from your experience? Why do you say that?

Appendix C - Summary documents

North East Lincolnshire

Context

North East Lincolnshire is a unitary authority in the North East of England. The following data for the area have been taken from the Children and Young People's Plan 2007-2010 to provide a flavour of the area.

- In 2006, North East Lincolnshire had an estimated young population of 41,200 0 - 19 year olds, of these 21,100 were male and 20,100 were female. This means that almost 26% of the population were 19 years or younger.
- In 2008, the vast majority of children and young people in the area were white British with 4.1% from black and minority ethnic backgrounds compared to 3.58% in 2007 (2008 Pupil Level Annual School Census). In March 2008, North East Lincolnshire Children's Services had a population of 1152 children in need, which included 149 looked after children, 10 unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children and young people, 4 under 18 years of age (SWIFT database management information report March 2008).
- There are 6960 children and young people identified as having some form of special educational needs. This is 31% of children and young people of compulsory school age (reception to year 11 inclusive). Of these 3.6% have statutory statements (January 2008 PLASC).
- All schools are developing a range of extended services and activities to meet the needs of children, families and the wider community. At the end of March 2008, 45% of schools were providing access to the full core offer, in comparison with the regional average of 49% and the national average of 47% and access to individual elements is being provided at many more schools. The figures for June 2008 show that 59% of schools now provide access to the full core offer.

Performance issues

Areas deemed weak or unsatisfactory by Ofsted in 2004 are set out in the table below, along with any quantifiable and other indicators we were able to identify.

	Quantifiable Indicators	Other indicators
Attainment		
Support for 14-19 education	Number of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE - 1999-2008 NI 91: Participation of 17 year olds in education or training (%) - available for 1999-2006	None

	Quantifiable Indicators	Other indicators
The performance of schools (GCSE performance, attainment at KS 3, pupil progress between Key Stages)	<p>Number of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE - 1999-2008</p> <p>NI75: Number of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE, including English and maths - 2005-2008</p> <p>Number of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades at GCSE - 1999-2008</p> <p>Achievement at level 5 or above at both English and maths at KS3 - 2005-2007</p> <p>NI 95 - Progression in 2 levels in English between KS2 and KS3 - 2005-2007</p> <p>NI 96 - Progression in 2 levels in maths between KS2 and KS3 - 2005-2007</p> <p>NI 97 - Progression in 2 levels in maths between KS3 and KS4 - 2005-2007</p> <p>NI 98 - Progression in 2 levels in maths between KS3 and KS4 - 2005-2007</p>	None
Corporate planning for education and its implementation		
The implementation and effectiveness of corporate planning for the education of children and young people	None	None
Monitoring, challenging and intervening in schools	None	None
The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	None	None
Identification of and intervention in underperforming schools	None	None
The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	None	None

	Quantifiable Indicators	Other indicators
Targeting of resources		
The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities	None	None
The LEA provision for pupils who are educated other than at school	Number educated outside schools	None
Support for school attendance	<p>NI87 - Secondary school persistent absence rates - available for 2006-2007</p> <p>Total secondary absence - available for 2001-2007</p> <p>Secondary unauthorised - available for 2001-2007</p> <p>Secondary authorised - available for 2001-2007</p>	None
Support for behaviour in school	<p>NI 114: Total permanent exclusions from school as percentage of the school population - available for 1998/9-2006/7</p> <p>Primary permanent exclusions from school as percentage of the school population - available for 1998/9-2006/7</p> <p>Secondary permanent exclusions from school as percentage of the school population - available for 1998/9-2006/7</p> <p>Primary fixed period exclusion - 2003/4 - 2004/5 and 2006/7</p> <p>Secondary fixed period exclusion - 2003/4 - 2006/7</p>	None
Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection	None	None
Provision for looked after children	Percentage of LAC with education placement?	None

	Quantifiable Indicators	Other indicators
	<p>Percentage of looked-after pupils receiving 5+ A*-C grades - available for 2000-2007</p> <p>Percentage of looked-after pupils receiving 1+ A*-G grade - available for 2000-2007</p> <p>Percentage of children looked-after for at least 12 months who missed 25 days or more schooling during the previous school year - available for 2000-2007</p> <p>NI 99 - LAC Key Stage 2 - English - available for 2000-2007</p> <p>NI 100 - LAC Key Stage 2 - Maths - available for 2000 - 2007</p>	
Strategy		
Progress in developing the combined directorate	None	None
Effective strategies to promote continuous improvement (including performance management), including Best Value	None	None
The LEA's strategy for school improvement and its progress in implementing this strategy	None	None
The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion	None	None
The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality	None	None
Leadership		
The leadership provided by elected members (including quality of advice)	None	None
The quality of leadership provided by senior officers	None	None

	Quantifiable Indicators	Other indicators
SEN		
The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money	None	None

The intervention

An Ofsted report in December 2004 found *overall effectiveness* in North East Lincolnshire to be ‘unsatisfactory’ and *capacity to improve* to be ‘poor’. The area was directed by the then Secretary of State to enter into a three year strategic partnership contract across children’s services with external supplier *North East Lincolnshire Children’s First*.⁶ The primary reason for intervention was attainment, most notably at KS4⁷. It was the first intervention of its kind as it focused on Children’s Services as a whole.

In May 2005 the contract was set up. The contractor was required to fill all posts at DCS, Assistant Director and Head of Service level with their own interim staff at the outset. These posts were to be filled substantively during the first 18 months. These new recruits would become council employees and be performance managed by the contractor. An additional Assistant Director post was created during the contract to improve CAMHS, this was jointly funded by the local authority and the PCT. A Strategic Partnership Board⁸ was put in place as an advisory body to the local authority in respect of its responsibilities for children’s services. The Chair of the Board, Peter Kemp was jointly appointed by the DfES and North East Lincolnshire Local authority.

As a result of the intervention, NEL was directed to appoint a strategic partner to work with the local authority to improve performance in social services.

Areas of focus as outlined in the Invitation to Tender Output Specification were:

- maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people
- increasing capacity to improve its services for children and young people (as measured by the APA)
- improving performance in:
 - providing a safe and secure service for children, young people and families
 - core social work practices and the quality of children’s social work
 - establishing effective children’s trust arrangements and meeting the statutory requirements of the Children Act 2004

⁶ A company formed by Mouchel Parkman plc and Outcomes UK

⁷ Key Skills 4

⁸ Set up as part of contract to provide external challenge and advice to the local authority

- effectively integrating children’s social care services with those of key partners in addressing need and delivering improved outcomes for children
 - meeting statutory requirements, particularly for services subject to separate inspection arrangements, e.g. adoption and fostering
 - providing cost effective services and achieving financial stability
 - providing a stable workforce with an appropriate skill mix and good levels of motivation
- In all cases, performance measures were expected to comprise APA and PAF measures.

The contract was front-loaded, putting greater support in place at the start of the contract and a phased reduction towards the end to enable Plymouth City Local authority to take over provision of services fully. The strategic partner team was recruited over 10 weeks

Progress made

The 2006 APA rated services as ‘adequate’ or better. The local authority’s 2007 JAR judgements were ‘good’ for staying safe and capacity to improve and ‘adequate’ for all other judgements, including ‘enjoy and achieve’. The Independent Chair of the Strategic Partnership Board confirmed there had been continuous progress in key areas and that succession arrangements were sound. Officials agreed⁹

Peter Kemp’s last report in 2008 answered specific questions from the Secretary of State. It noted very good progress on the NEET strategy whereby the 2010 target had been reached; marked improvement in CAMHS services and marked improvement in effective partnership working across the children’s services agenda. The Local authority and its partners had made considerable effort in addressing levels of teenage pregnancy but in recognising the need to accelerate this, reducing the U18 conception rate became a part of the new LAA. The local authority asked GOYH to review the management and governance of this strategy. The local authority also agreed to stretch targets for KS4 and agreed that the achievement of 5 or more A*-C at GCSE including English and Maths should be a designated indicator in the LAA. They also successfully opened three new academies (September 2007) and replaced 11 head teachers.

Ending the direction

Three year contract came to an end on the 31st May 2008 when the contract then had to be either re-issued or revoked. The decision was taken to revoke the contract based on satisfactory evidence regarding the local authority’s overall performance, its capacity to sustain ongoing performance and strength of succession planning. The council’s succession planning and exit strategy were considered sound. There was a commitment from the local authority to accelerate progress and sustain improvement beyond the contract. The contract had ensured a full leadership team was in place following the end of the intervention.

⁹ Chris Olsen, Children’s Services Intervention Unit

Plymouth

Context

From the CSCI report on the inspection of children’s services (2005):

‘Plymouth City local authority became a unitary authority in April 1998 taking responsibility for services previously provided by Devon County local authority. Plymouth is the second largest city, after Bristol, in the South West with a population of 241,000.

The latest available census identified Plymouth’s black and ethnic minority population as one point seven per cent of the population. This compared to five per cent nationally. Plymouth has a varied mix of deprivation and affluence. A quarter of the city’s population lived within areas identified as within the top ten per cent most deprived areas in England according to the most recent index of multiple deprivation. Within the South West Region, only Bristol exceeded this level of deprivation.’

This inspection, in June 2005, follows an inspection in July 2004, which concluded that ‘services for children and families in Plymouth were not serving people well and that prospects for improvement were uncertain’. The July 2005 inspection found areas of improvement, particularly in leadership, performance management and developing accountability. There was also progress in the management of the care leavers’ service and the development of IT in the department.

Performance issues

The intervention came into being following poor inspection in June 2005, which reported that little progress had been made since a previous poor inspection in July 2004. Areas deemed weak or unsatisfactory are set out in the table below, as are the indicators that we were able to identify for each area.

	Quantifiable indicators	Other indicators
Safeguarding children		
Leadership in safeguarding	None	None
Compliance in safeguarding procedures	None	None
Thresholds for safeguarding and access to social services	None	None
Fostering service		
Safeguarding practice	None	None
Placement matching	None	None

	Quantifiable indicators	Other indicators
Foster care training and support	None	None
Children Act 2004		
Implementation of the Change for Children initiative	None	None
Looked after children		
Numbers of children looked after by the LA	<p>Numbers of Children Looked After</p> <p>Numbers of children looked after for at least 2.5 years - available for 1999-2008</p> <p>Children looked after per 10,000 population under 18 - available for 1999-2008</p>	None
Types and costs of placements for looked after children	<p>Percentage of children looked after who are placed in local authority placements and independent agency placements - Plymouth City Local authority Figures</p> <p>Percentage of children looked after who are placed residential placements, family placements or at home with parents - Plymouth City Local authority Figures</p> <p>Weekly unit cost of placements - Plymouth City Local authority Figures</p>	None
Consultation and feedback		
Engagement of service users and stakeholders in planning	None	None
Consultation process for children in need	None	None
Mechanisms for receiving and using feedback from parents and C&YP	None	Service user satisfaction questionnaire, distributed by CSCI / Ofsted to parents, children and young people

	Quantifiable indicators	Other indicators
Assessments		
Process, quality and timeliness of assessment, case planning and providing QA	<p>NI 59: Initial assessments of children's social care carried out within 7 working days of referral (%) - data available for authority (and statistical neighbours) for 2002-2008</p> <p>NI 60: Core assessments for children's social care that were carried out within 35 working days of their commencement (%) - data available for authority (and statistical neighbours) for 2002-2008.</p>	None
Management		
Instability and uncertainty at senior manager and service manager level	None	None
Structure		
Restructuring of district teams	None	None
Recruitment and retention		
Recruitment and retention arrangements and use of agency staff	None	None
Training		
Provision of race equality training	None	None
Service access		
Thresholds to service access, particularly for disabled children	None	None

The intervention

As a result of the intervention, Plymouth City Local authority was directed to appoint a strategic partner to work with them to improve performance in social services. Although the education and children's social services departments were combining in April 2006 to form a children's services department, the partner was only to provide support to the social services element. Unlike previous social services interventions, the model was neither one focusing on consultancy advice / support nor one in which the Partner managed the whole directorate; instead, the partner was to be involved in a mix of project-based work on development initiatives, implementing change, providing greater capacity and assisting in long-term recruitment, and managing certain service areas. The rationale for this model was based on an analysis that posited that the new DCS was robust and needed support in key areas for a limited period and to fill vacancies. Thus a model in which the external partner managed the whole directorate was not deemed necessary.

Areas of focus as outlined in the Invitation to Tender Output Specification were:

- maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people
- increasing capacity to improve its services for children and young people (as measured by the APA)
- improving performance in:
 - providing a safe and secure service for children, young people and families
 - core social work practices and the quality of children's social work
 - establishing effective children's trust arrangements and meeting the statutory requirements of the Children Act 2004
 - effectively integrating children's social care services with those of key partners in addressing need and delivering improved outcomes for children
 - meeting statutory requirements, particularly for services subject to separate inspection arrangements, e.g. adoption and fostering
 - providing cost effective services and achieving financial stability
 - providing a stable workforce with an appropriate skill mix and good levels of motivation

In all cases, performance measures were expected to comprise APA and PAF measures. The contract was front-loaded, putting greater support in place at the start of the contract and a phased reduction towards the end to enable Plymouth City Local authority to take over provision of services fully.

The strategic partner team was recruited over 10 weeks between April and June 2006. The recruitment of all interim managers was undertaken jointly by the Assistant Director for Social Care and the Programme Director, and the interim managers were embedded in the Department's line management structure. The Strategic Partnership Team on site included:

- one Programme Director
- two Heads of Service
- two Service Managers 'working alongside' managers in post
- one Service Manager
- two Commissioning Managers
- eight Team Managers
- one Lead for Member Development
- one Project Officer

The intervention ended in March 2008.

Swindon

Context

Swindon is a new local education authority which was formed in 1997. Over recent years, its population has increased rapidly and Swindon will continue to be one of the fastest growing areas nationally. In contrast to the buoyancy of the local economy, funding for public services is based on historically low standard spending assessment. The LEA has faced exceptional challenges because of the combination of a small central staff, low funding and considerable local variations in social and economic circumstances. It has to plan for an exceptional growth in school places in some parts of the borough, while managing a contraction in other areas. It also has to meet the needs of the high proportion of its schools which are in difficulties.

Performance issues

The following table sets out the performance issues identified in an Ofsted inspection of the LEA in 2001 along with the quantifiable and other indicators that exist to measure these issues.

	Quantifiable indicators	Other indicators
Management		
Provision of monitoring, challenge, intervention and support to schools	None	None
Effectiveness of services to support school improvement	None	None
Support to schools causing concerns	None	None
Technology for curriculum and school administration	None	None
Corporate and strategic planning		
Clarity and consistency of corporate plans and their implementation	None	None
Property services and asset management planning	None	None
Strategy and support for SEN	NI 104: Attainment Gap SEN/ Non SEN Key Stage 2 incl. English and Maths NI 105: Attainment Gap SEN/ Non-SEN GCSE incl. English and Maths Possibly, the number of pupils receiving support for behaviour from the pupil referral unit?	None

	Quantifiable indicators	Other indicators
Strategy for improving behaviour and discipline in schools	NI 17: 16-18 year olds that are known to Connexions that are not in Education, Employment or Training	
Strategy for education otherwise than at school	None	None
Education Development Plan and its implementation in secondary schools	None	None
Strategy and support for development of information and communication	None	None
Leadership and decision-making		
Speed, openness and effectiveness of decision-making	None	None
Leadership of elected members and advice which they receive	None	None
Leadership of senior officers	None	None
Targeting resources		
Extent to which LEA targets resources to priorities	LEA's average funding per pupil delegated to primary and secondary schools through the ISB was consistently lower than that for comparable authorities (see table in Ofsted 2001). Capital expenditure per pupil (£86) was about forty per cent of the average for similar authorities (£214) and national averages (£207)	None
Extent to which LEA has in place structures for achieving Best Value	None	None
Extent to which LEA support is focused on areas of greatest need	None	None

Children’s Services intervention (Kent 2004) - taken from ‘End of Swindon-Kent arrangement’

	Quantifiable indicators	Other indicators
Management		
Improving child protection practice, supporting managers of raising standards, commissioning of services, contracting and increasing managerial capacity	None	None
Raising awareness of all staff of indicators used by CSCI and how they could be improved, supporting SBC wide programmes, advising on presentation of annual reports and presentations to CSCI.	None	None

The intervention

After an Ofsted inspection in late 2001, the Secretary of State gave a direction to the council’s Head of Paid Service under section 497A(4) of the Education Act 1996. This direction, being satisfied that the local authority was failing to perform its functions to an adequate standard, required that the relevant functions under sections 13 and 13A of the Education Act 1996 were performed by Tribal Group on behalf of the local authority. An Education Partnership Board (EPB) was put in place at the same time in order to provide independent advice and guidance to the local authority on education matters. The EPB consisted of:

- Independent Chair
- Lead Member for Children Services
- Representative of Police
- Representative of Learning Skills Local authority
- Local authority or Members (non-administration)
- Director of Children Services
- Children’s Champion Primary Care Trust
- Head Teachers
 - one representative of Swindon Association of Secondary Heads

- one representative of Swindon Association of Primary Heads
- one representative of Swindon Association of Special Schools
- Governor (to encompass parent and governor representation through the Association of Swindon Governors)
- Chair of the Youth Forum
- Representative of Voluntary Sector
- Representative of Swindon & Marlborough NHS Trust
- Representative of Child and Adolescent Mental Services
- Representative of Adult Services
- Representative of Connexions
- Union Representative (representing all union interests for agencies on the board)
- Diocesan representative

The contract with Tribal ended in 2005. The Direction was also revoked in August 2005, however another Direction was issued simultaneously as the Secretary of State was still not satisfied that the local authority would adequately perform functions under sections 13 and 13(A) of the Education Act 1996. The new Direction replaced the Education Partnership Board with an independently chaired Children's Partnership Board. A JAR in mid-2006 showed significant improvements, and this intervention was due to end in August 2007 assuming improvements continued.

Alongside these interventions and as a result of ongoing weaknesses in social services performance at the end of 2003, DfES, DoH and ODPM agreed that in order to secure individual service improvements, steps would need to be taken to secure corporate improvements. The Government Monitoring Board (GMB) was charged with ensuring the local authority put in place a planned recovery strategy and having responsibility for monitoring progress under the leadership of a ODPM lead official. A Corporate Governance Inspection (CGI) was planned for autumn 2004 to assess progress.

Although the CGI report is relatively positive about continued progress in education and adult social services, weaknesses at the corporate centre continue to outweigh strengths, and children's social services continue to give cause for concern. In order to secure social services improvements, the GMB worked with the local authority on its proposal to secure a new partnership agreement with Kent. This arrangement was the first of its kind and resulted in lengthy negotiations between Kent and Swindon, facilitated by ODPM, DfES, DoH and CSCI. ODPM contributed around £1m towards the three year agreement, with DoH providing some £200,000.

Lead Managers from within Swindon and 'mirror' Leads within Kent were assigned to work alongside each other to facilitate and monitor the progress within each of the above areas of improvement. Also regular visits were made by Swindon staff to Kent and Kent policy sessions to observe how Kent staff managed key processes, and created a '3 star environment'. In 2007, the APA judged Swindon's staying safe provision adequate (grade 2). This was a significant improvement given the history of underperformance. As a result of this improvement, following the Swindon / Kent arrangement, no further intervention was required and close monitoring of performance by the CSA and GOSW colleagues was considered sufficient.

Walsall

Context

The Metropolitan Borough of Walsall is a diverse urban area, including areas of intense deprivation. At the time of intervention forty-five per cent of the population lived in wards that were in the ten per cent most deprived in England. Walsall ranked as the 31st most deprived local authority area according to the national indices of multiple deprivation. At 4.6 per cent, unemployment remained above the national average.

The total pupil population was a little over 50,400. Some 18.1 per cent of pupils are of minority ethnic origin compared with about 12 per cent nationally. The largest minority groups are Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi. The proportion of pupils entitled to a free school meal had declined since the first inspection; from 23.2 to 20.7 per cent in primary schools and from 19.5 to 17.8 per cent in secondary schools. Both figures were broadly in line with the national averages.

Through its extensive provision of early years education, the LEA guaranteed every three year-old at least a part-time place. There were eight nursery schools, seven special schools, 94 primary (75 of which have nursery classes) and 20 secondary schools (of which seven are foundation, including two grammar schools).

The popularity of schools, particularly secondary schools, varied widely with some being heavily over-subscribed. There were two pupil referral units (PRUs) for secondary aged pupils which between them had 16 places for school phobic and pregnant pupils. One nursery school and a special school had Beacon status and three secondary schools had specialist school status. Walsall has recently been recognised by OFSTED as the fastest improving LEA service in the country ever.

Performance issues

Following two failed Ofsted inspections of the LEA and an aborted CPA Corporate Governance inspection in 2002, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Local authority was perceived as the worst local authority in the country. Walsall LEA's Ofsted inspections in 2000 and 2002 both identified significant weaknesses in education services, rating them as '7' or 'Very Poor'. Ofsted's reports on the LEA in 2000 and 2002 identified a number of areas as unsatisfactory or weak as set out in the table below. We have also indicated where we were able to locate quantifiable and other indicators to measure these performance issues.

	Quantifiable indicators	Other indicators
Management		
Poor management of the education service	None	None
Leadership		
Monitoring and improvement of educational provision for LAC	LAC absence	None
Planning		
Planning of the education budget	None	None
The maintenance and improvement of school buildings	None	None

	Quantifiable indicators	Other indicators
LA support to schools		
Support for schools causing concern	NI91 Total participation,	None
Support for school management	NI79 achievement of level 2 qual by 19;	
Support for governing bodies	NI80 achievement of level 3 qual by 19	
Support / provision for SEN pupils worse than national	NI117 16-18 NEETs	
Support for behaviour	NI91 participation of 17 yr olds in education or training	
	NI103 SEN statements issued within 26 weeks	
	NI104 SEN / non-SEN gap KS2	
	NI105 SEN / non-SEN gap GCSE achieving 5 A*-C Eng and Maths	
Admissions and admissions processes		
Education for pupils excluded	NI117 16-18 NEETs and NI114 rate of permanent exclusions from school: Stats in LAIT only go back to 2004 Stats not available in LAIT: NI110 Young people's participation in positive activities	None
Advice on school attendance	NI114 Total permanent exclusions, Stats in LAIT go back to 1998/99 for W and SNs - same is the case for Primary permanent exclusions; Secondary permanent exclusions Primary and Secondary fixed period exclusion data (Stats in LAIT only go back to 2003/04 for W and SNs)	None

	Quantifiable indicators	Other indicators
	Total school absence data; Primary and secondary authorised and unauthorised (Stats in LAIT only go back to 2001 for W and SNs) LAC absence (stats in LAIT only go back to 2000 for W and SNs)	
Attainment on entry to primary below national	None	None
School performance		
The provision of performance data and guidance on its use	None	None
Poor achievement (especially at KS2)	% of pupils achieving key stage 2 level 4+ English, Stats in LAIT go back to 1999 for W and SNs More relevant stats available in LAIT for KS2 performance but only for 2005/07 period including stats for BME attainment Key stage 2 English, Stats in LAIT go back to 1998/99 for W and SNs Stats in LAIT only go back to 2005 (NI 173 KS2 maths and English)	None
Support for ethnic minority achievement Pupils of Pakistani and African-Caribbean origin poorer performance than average LEA	NI107 KS2 attainment and NI108 KS4 attainment: Stats in LAIT only go back to 2005 NI107 KS2 attainment by race including black and Asian and NI108 KS4 attainment by race including black and Asian: Stats in LAIT only go back to 2005	
Attainment in core subjects at all levels below national	None	None

The intervention

The authority was directed in 1999 to appoint a service provide to deliver a range of support services to schools. Following tendering, private provider Serco Ltd was appointed. The first contract began July 2001. Following an unsatisfactory Ofsted inspection in early 2002 the direction was expanded and further functions outsourced to Serco (this is known as the second contract).

The information we have about the decisions regarding the model used for the intervention comes from the Education Development Plan 2002-2007 (EDP2). EDP 2 was seen as '*a major contributor to the new model of partnership between Serco - QAA and the LEA...it sets out clearly the actions that Walsall Education will take to ensure rising standards across the borough.*'

The EDP2 cites the following areas as key issues to address:

Early years

- Low attainment on entry
- Need to support the development of best practice in Early Years
- Need to analyse progress of individuals more systematically
- Need for enhanced systems to identify good / poor practice in Early Years settings
- Lack of qualified teachers in Early Years
- Underperformance of high ability pupils in Writing at KS1
- Low rates of progress at KS2
- Poor levels for boys writing
- Ofsted benchmarks are generally lower in Walsall when compared with our statistical neighbours.
- Insufficient analysis of performance data to identify specific targeted responses to raising achievement.

Attainment

- Transition from KS2-KS3. Pupils on entry are performing significantly lower than the national average and our statistical neighbours
- Gender gaps in achievement
- Underachievement of the most able

- Ofsted benchmarks are generally lower in Walsall when compared with our statistical neighbours.
- Insufficient analysis of performance data to identify specific targeted responses to raising achievement.
- Significant underperformance by Bangladeshi heritage pupils at KS2, and general low attainment of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage pupils.
- Lack of accurate information to enable a full appreciation of the range and levels of achievement of vulnerable groups.
- Lack of analysis of progress of pupils with SEN in mainstream settings at all stages on the code of practice.
- Achievement of pupils in deprived wards is generally lower than the Walsall average.
- There is a noticeable gap in boys' achievement when compared with girls.

Schools causing concern

- High numbers of schools causing concern
- Too little progress in addressing weaknesses
- Poor leadership and management and teaching and learning
- Too Little progress in moving out of the category of concern
- Poor self-review and development planning

Enhancing Educational Inclusion

- Underdeveloped multi-agency working
- High pupil absence levels
- Increasing difficulty in placing excluded/disaffected pupils
- Managing the provision for pupils identified as having special needs

ICT

- Maintaining an area of current strength
- Lack of uniform approach to MIS in schools
- ICT not used effectively to drive school improvement
- Lack of ICT ability with key people

Strategic Role of Walsall Education

- Strategic weaknesses highlighted by Ofsted, Audit Commission, Best Value Reviews
- The need for enhanced management information to facilitate effective support and challenge of schools.
- The need for enhanced pupil information to identify and meet the needs of underachieving groups and areas.
- Clarity and direction provided by corporate and strategic plans. Especially the implementation of this EDP.
- The need for significant CPD of WE staff to support the effective delivery of the EDP and other plans, linked to organisational development and culture change.
- Engagement of partner organizations, identification and sharing of best practice.
- Engagement with key partners to focus expertise and resource upon school improvement and the raising of pupil achievement.
- Recruitment of quality teachers and governors in a difficult climate.

The terms of this contract were that the intervention should run until expiry or satisfaction of its terms. In May 2007 the terms for ending the intervention were set out by the Secretary of State. In April 2008 the end of the direction was confirmed (subject to a successful JAR report). The authority has, since the end of the direction entered into a voluntary contract with the strategic partner Serco.

Waltham Forest

Context

Waltham Forest serves a growing population to the east of London. Almost 50 per cent of pupils come from minority ethnic communities. One third of children attending the Authority's schools are eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is similar to the national average.

There are 34,107 pupils on roll in mainstream primary and secondary schools.

The LEA provides four nursery schools, 65 primary schools, 16 secondary schools, six special schools, and a primary-age pupil referral unit. Of the secondary schools, two former grant-maintained and a voluntary aided school have sixth forms and four are single-sex. The LEA is a participant in the government's Excellence in Cities initiative.

Performance issues

The Ofsted report on the LEA in 2000 identified a number of areas as unsatisfactory or weak. These are set out in the table below along with the quantifiable and other indicators we were able to identify for each area.

	Quantifiable indicators	Other indicators
Management		
Strategic management Quality of professional leadership Support for school improvement	None	2000 school survey - A2: Consultation on the Education Development Plan 2007 school survey - 6.3: The effectiveness of the leadership of senior officers of your local authority
Leadership		
Quality of leadership from elected members	None	None
Relationship between members and schools, and members and officers	None	2007 school survey - 6.4: The effectiveness of the leadership of elected members of your local authority
Planning		
Provision of primary school places	None	2000 school survey - D8: Planning of school places 2007 school survey - 3.26: The effectiveness of your local authority's school place planning
Budget estimation and financial control	None	None
LA support to schools		
Support for HR Support for IT	None	2000 School Survey - G7: Personnel advice and guidance

	Quantifiable indicators	Other indicators
		<p>2007 School Survey - 6.16: The effectiveness of your local authority's support to improve personnel processes and management in your school</p> <p>2000 School Survey - G13: ICT in school administration; G14 - ICT in school administration</p> <p>2007 School Survey - 6.17: The quality of your local authority's support to improve the effectiveness and reliability of ICT systems in your school</p>
Support to raise standards in secondary schools	None	None
Support for improving behaviour	None	<p>2000 School Survey: D2: Support for improving pupil behaviour</p> <p>2007 School Survey: Q. 3.12 The effectiveness of your local authority's behaviour support programmes</p>
Admissions and transition processes		
Administration of admissions	None	2007 school survey - 3.29: The effectiveness of your local authority's co-ordination of the admissions process
Transition arrangements between KS 2 and 3, including transition of data	None	2000 School Survey - A12: Transfer of pupil data between primary and secondary schools
Liaison between primary and secondary schools	None	None
School performance		
Number of secondary schools identified as 'causing concern'	(There is data for numbers of schools in special measures (NI89) in 2006, but this is distinct from 'causing concern' - plus support for schools in special measures is deemed to be effective).	None
Standard of mathematics in secondary schools	% of pupils achieving level 5+ maths at KS4	None

	Quantifiable indicators	Other indicators
	<p>NI 75 - GCSE 5 A*-C including English and maths - 2005-8. (not specific to mathematics)</p> <p>NI 98 - Progression by 2 levels in maths between KS3 and KS4 - LAIT data only available for 2005-7.</p>	
Progress of pupils in IT	None	2000 School Survey - C8: Support for ICT in the curriculum
Information management		
Records concerning educational arrangements of excluded and out of school pupils	<p>NI 114 - Rate of permanent exclusions from school (% of school population) - LAIT data available for 1998/99-2006/7.</p> <p>Primary permanent exclusions - 1998/9 - 2006/7</p> <p>Secondary permanent exclusions - 1998/9 - 2006/7</p> <p>Primary fixed period exclusion - 2003/4 - 2004/5, 2006-7</p> <p>Secondary fixed period exclusion - 2003/4 - 2006/7.</p>	<p><i>School survey 2000: E1: the quality of its planning for SEN provision (all questions under 'E' address SEN)</i></p> <p>School survey 2007 - 6.9: The quality of your local authority's SEN strategy</p> <p>School survey 2000 - D4: Alternative provision for pupils excluded from school</p> <p>School survey 2007 - qn. 3.15: The effectiveness of local authority provision for pupils out of mainstream schools, including pupils who have been excluded</p>
Collection, analysis and use of data, particularly with regard to tracking attendance	None	<p>2000 School survey - A10: The quality of data on pupil performance</p> <p>2007 School survey - 6.14: The effectiveness of your local authority's strategy for data collection, and for managing information and data</p>
Monitoring and evaluation strategies (including target-setting and review) across the system, including those used by elected members	None	None

The intervention

The report directed the authority to appoint a service provide to deliver a range of support services to schools. Following a tendering arrangement, EduAction (Waltham Forest) Ltd was appointed a five-year intervention contract, to begin on 1 September 2001. EduAction consisted of a consortium comprising Nord Anglia and Amey.

A 2003 post-Ofsted Action Plan refers to the 2000 post-Ofsted Action Plan, citing the following as areas for attention then:

- SEN provision
- SEN support services
- Admissions
- Property services
- Leadership and management
- Quality of the EDP
- Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention of schools
- Collection and analysis of data
- Support for schools causing concern
- Support for school management
- Support for numeracy
- Support for governors
- Services to support school improvement
- Value for money of services to support school improvement

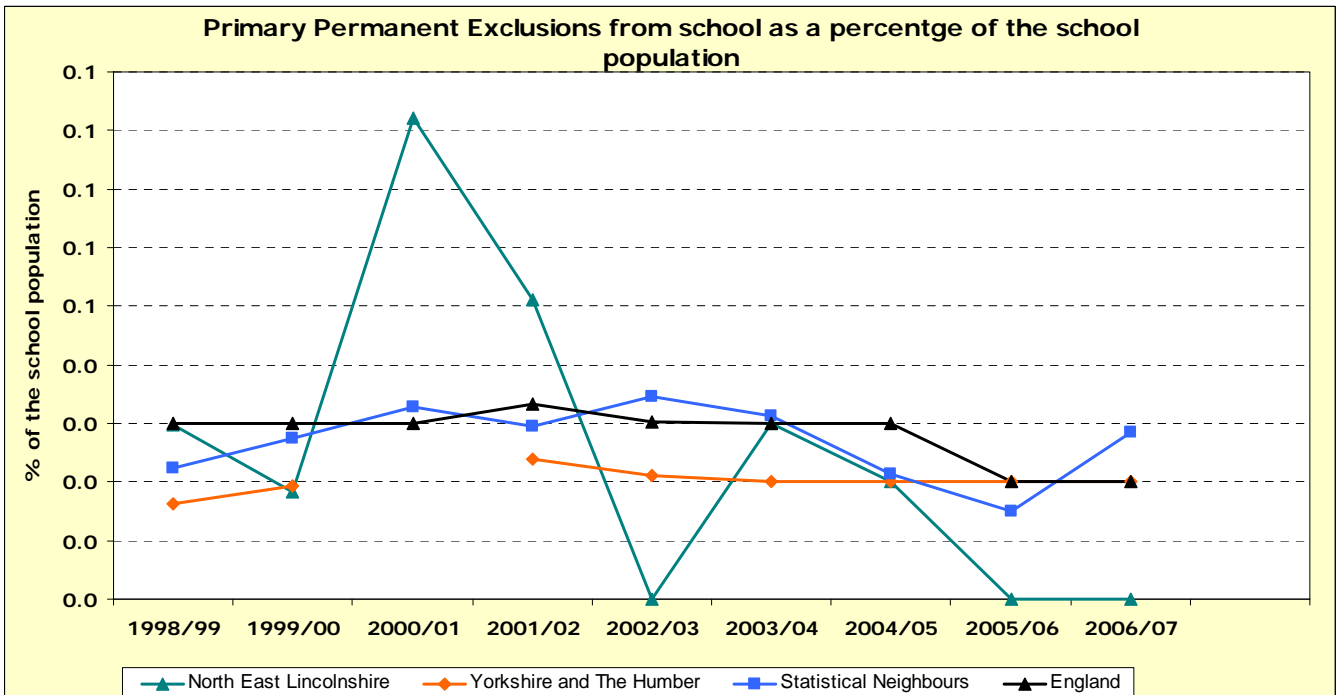
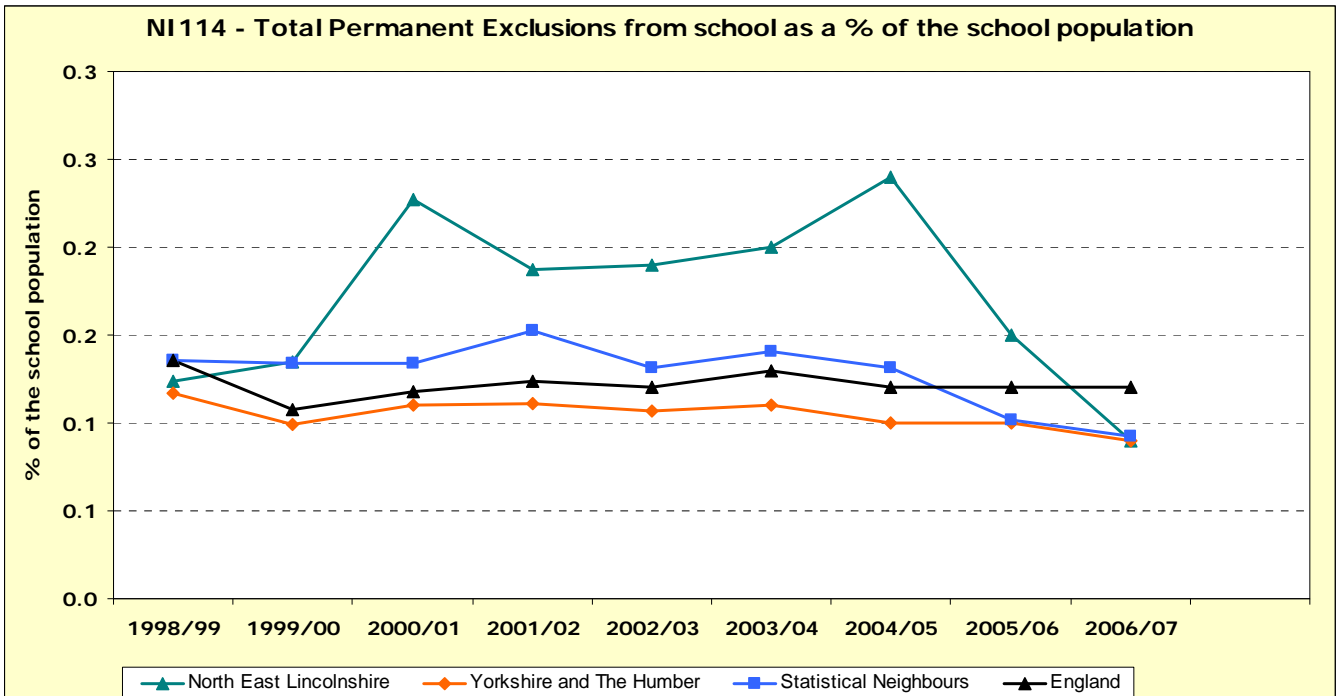
The decisions regarding the model to be used were taken after consideration of a series of reports prepared in the scoping phase by an independent consultancy, for the local authority and the DCSF.

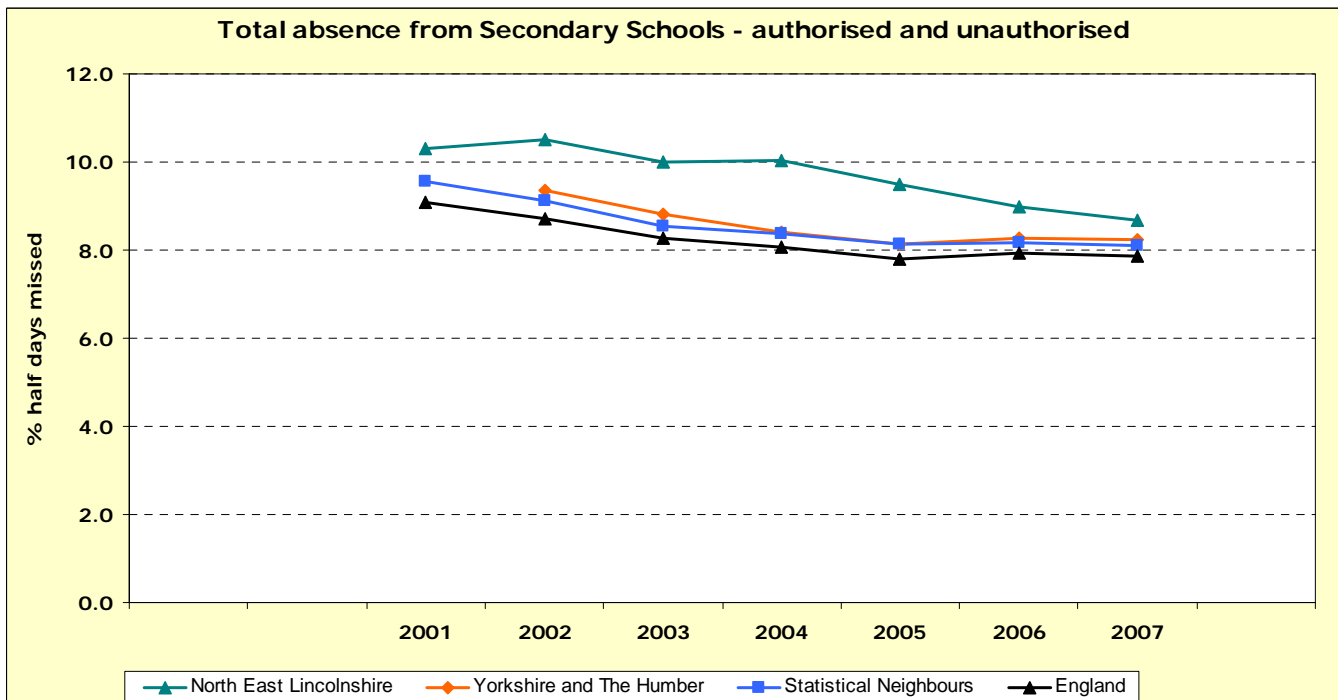
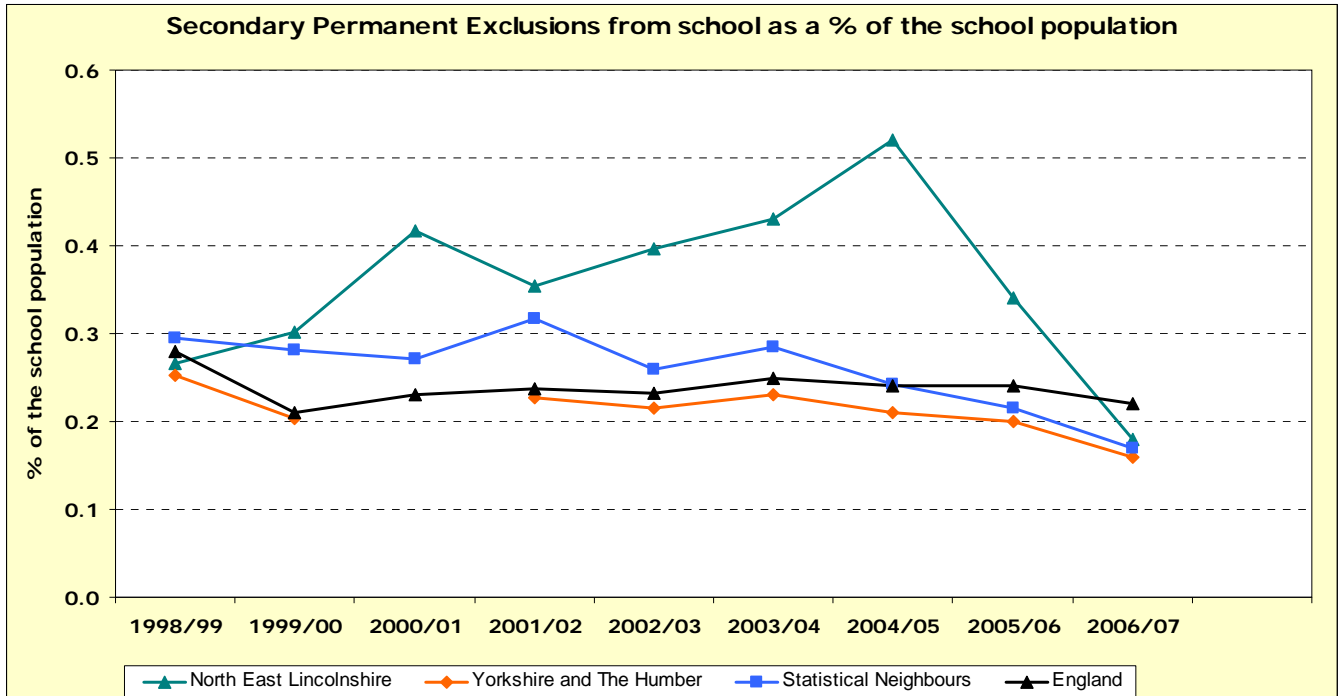
A Strategic Partnership Board was appointed, but this did not have an independent chair until 2003. Documents received from 2002-3 suggest that the Partnership was not proceeding successfully at that point: it appears to have missed performance targets and been poorly regarded by Members.

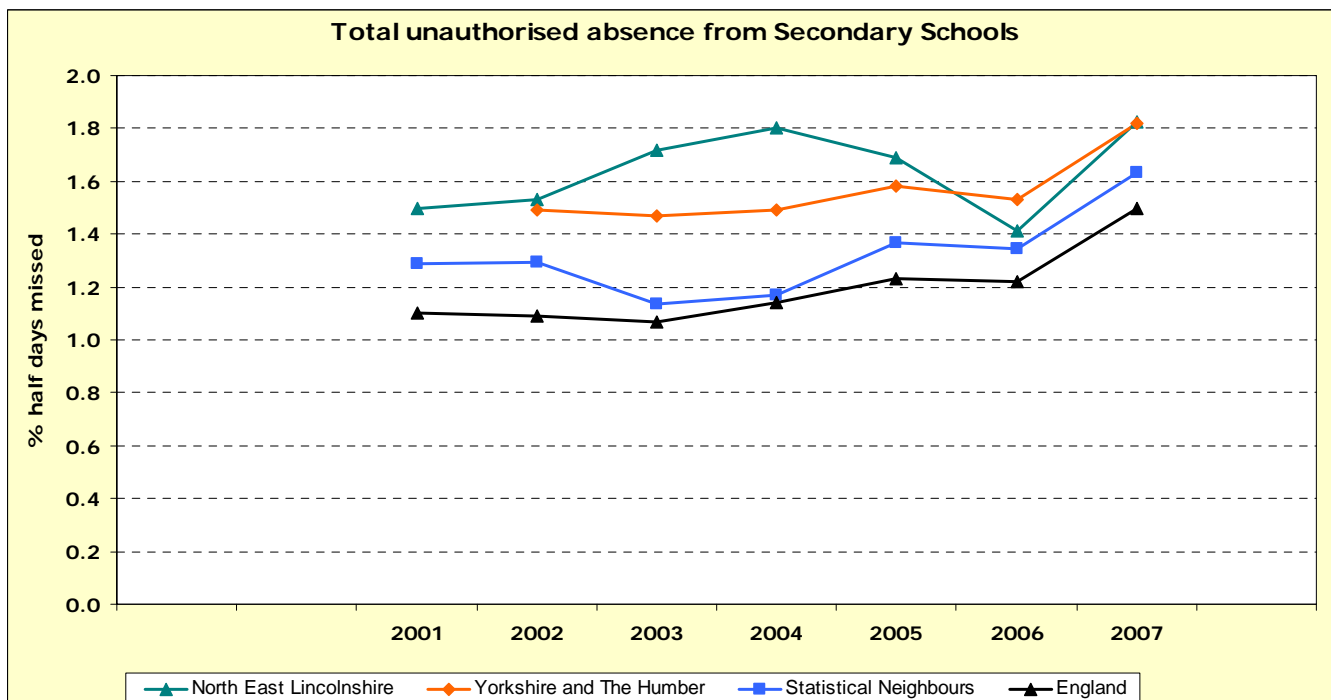
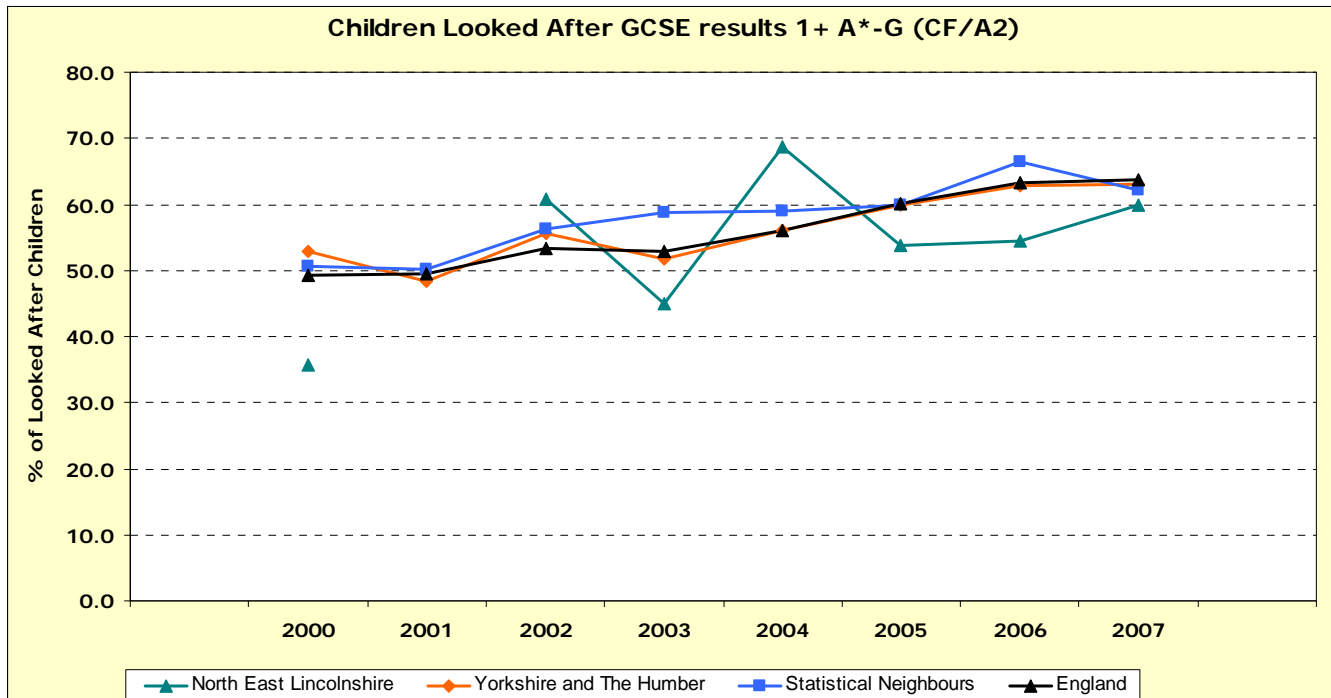
The contract with EduAction was due to end in July 2006, but was extended until March 2008. The direction was revoked when officials (including GOL) were confident the Local authority had put in place robust succession arrangements and had sufficient capacity to sustain improvements.

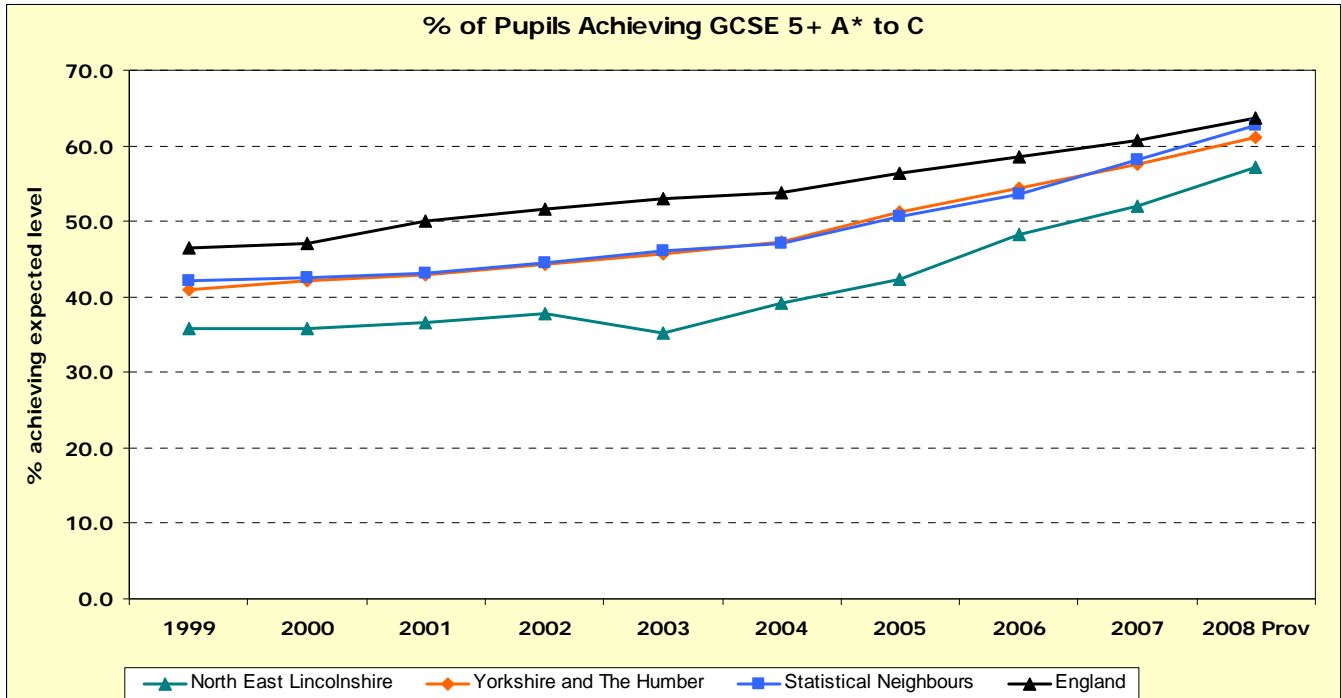
Appendix D - Graphs of Performance Data

North East Lincolnshire

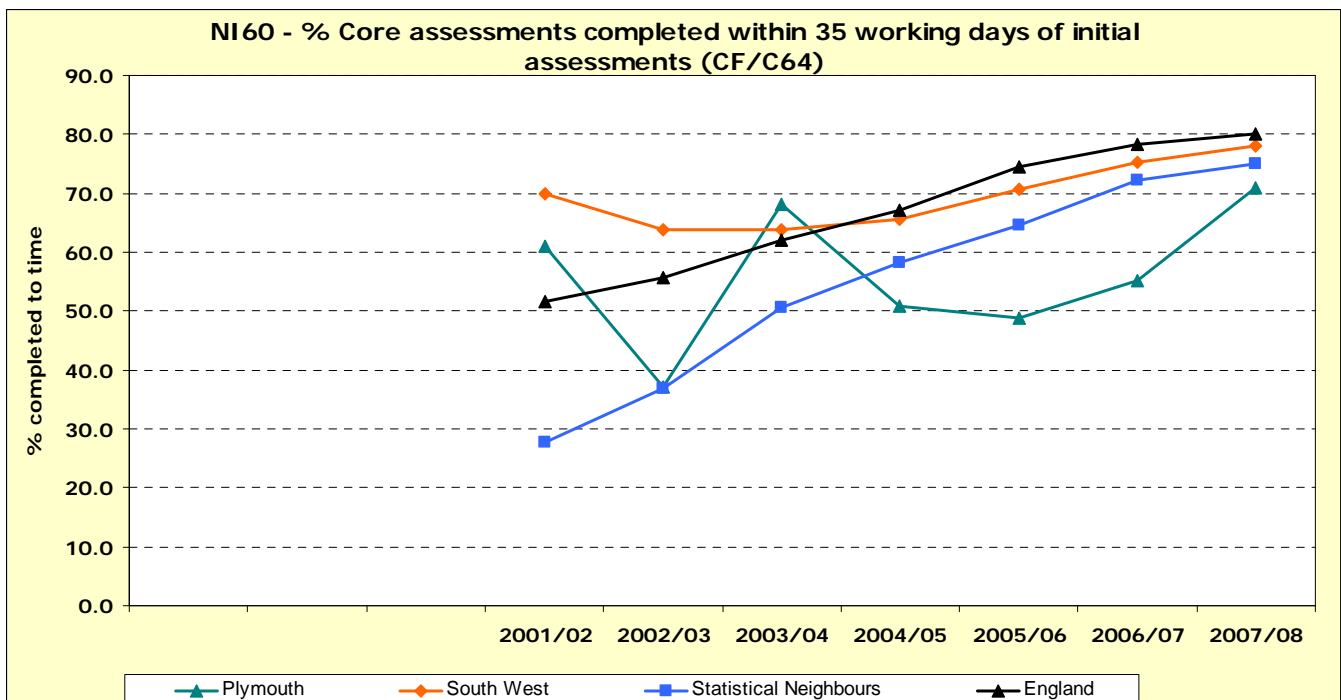
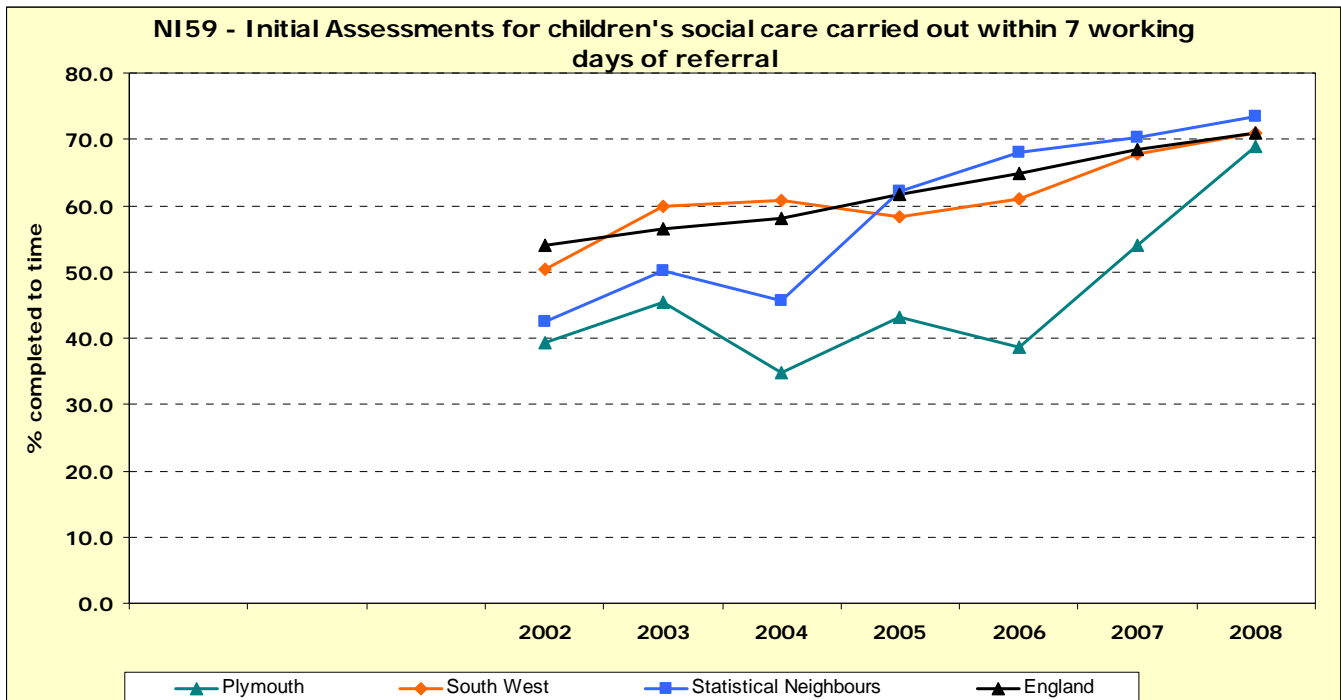


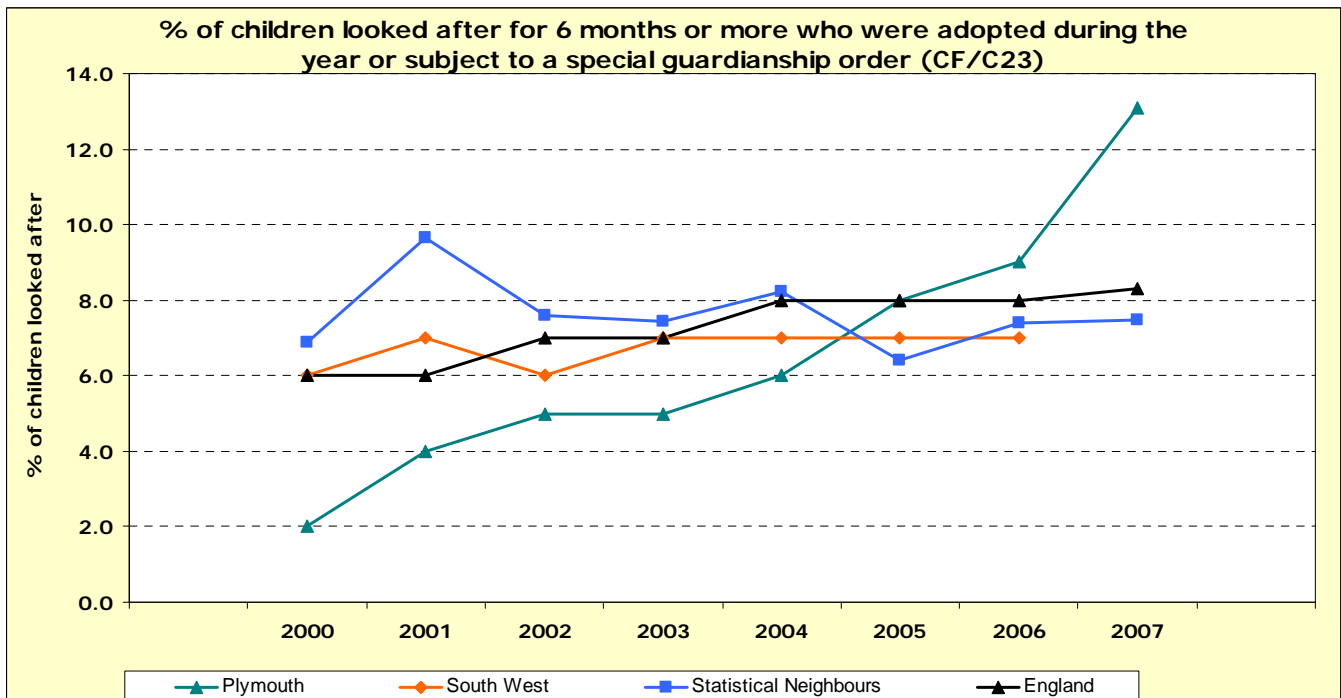
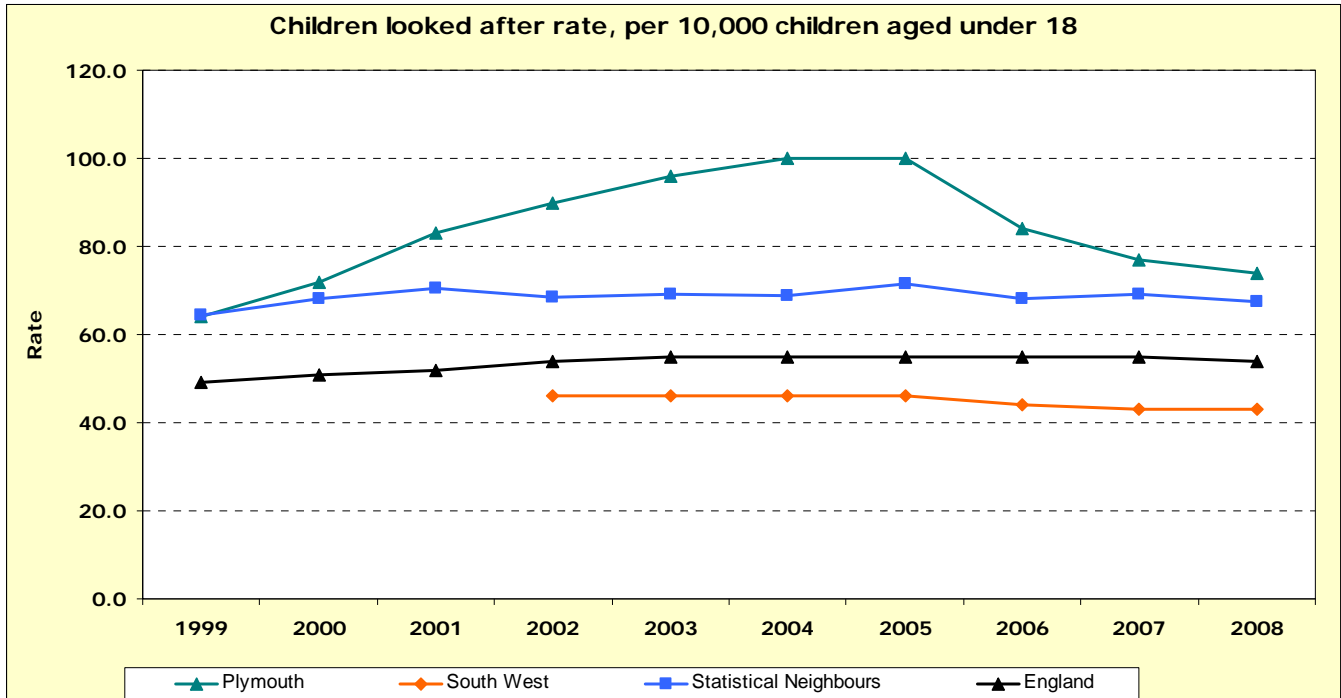




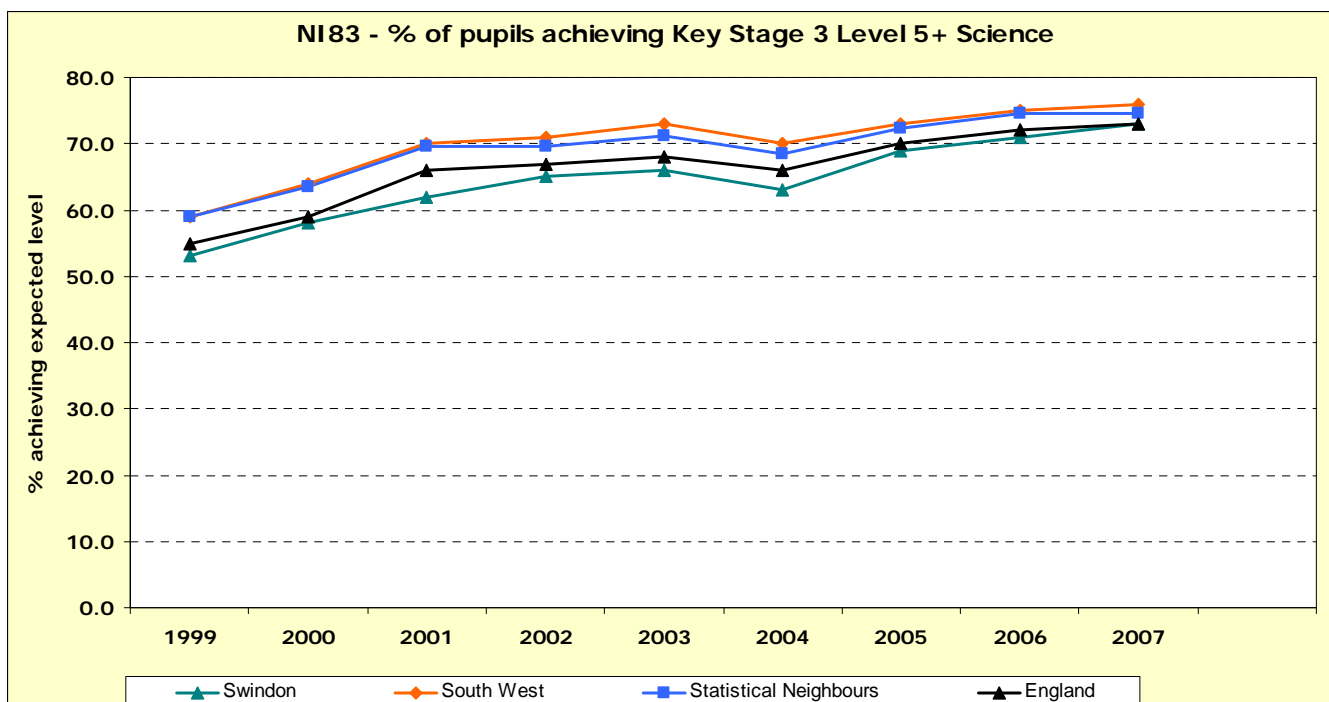
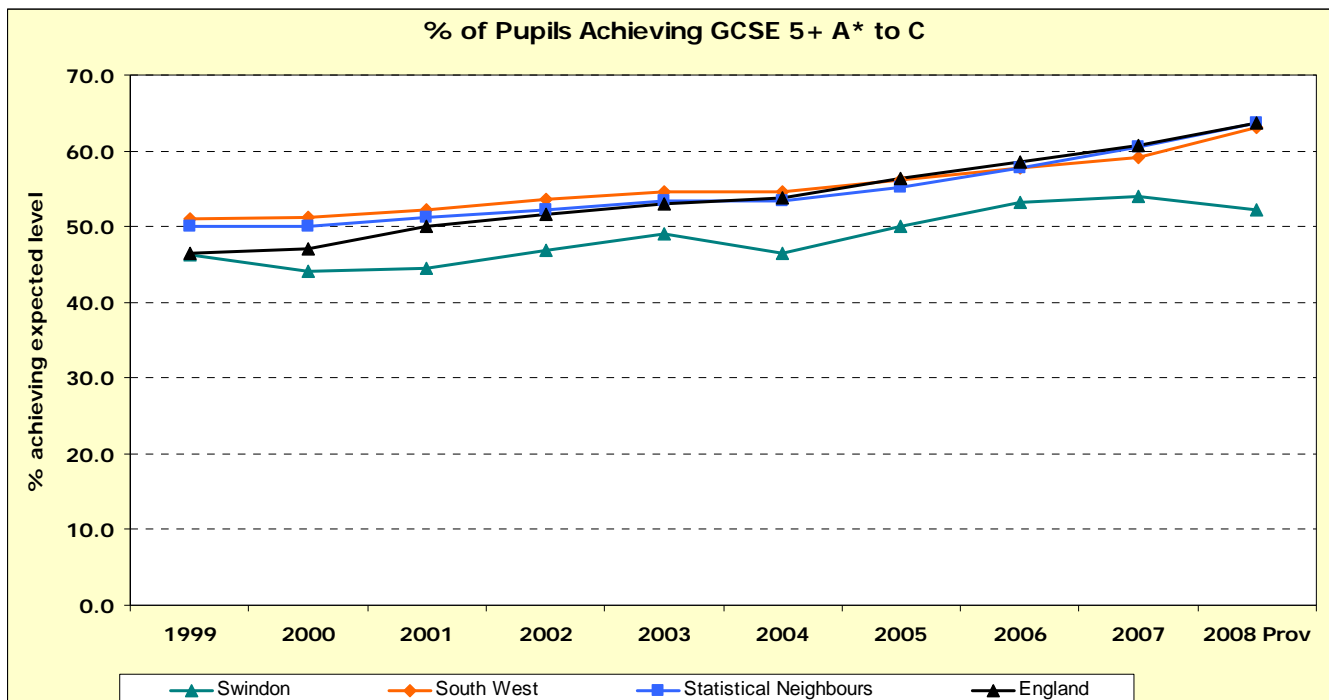


Plymouth

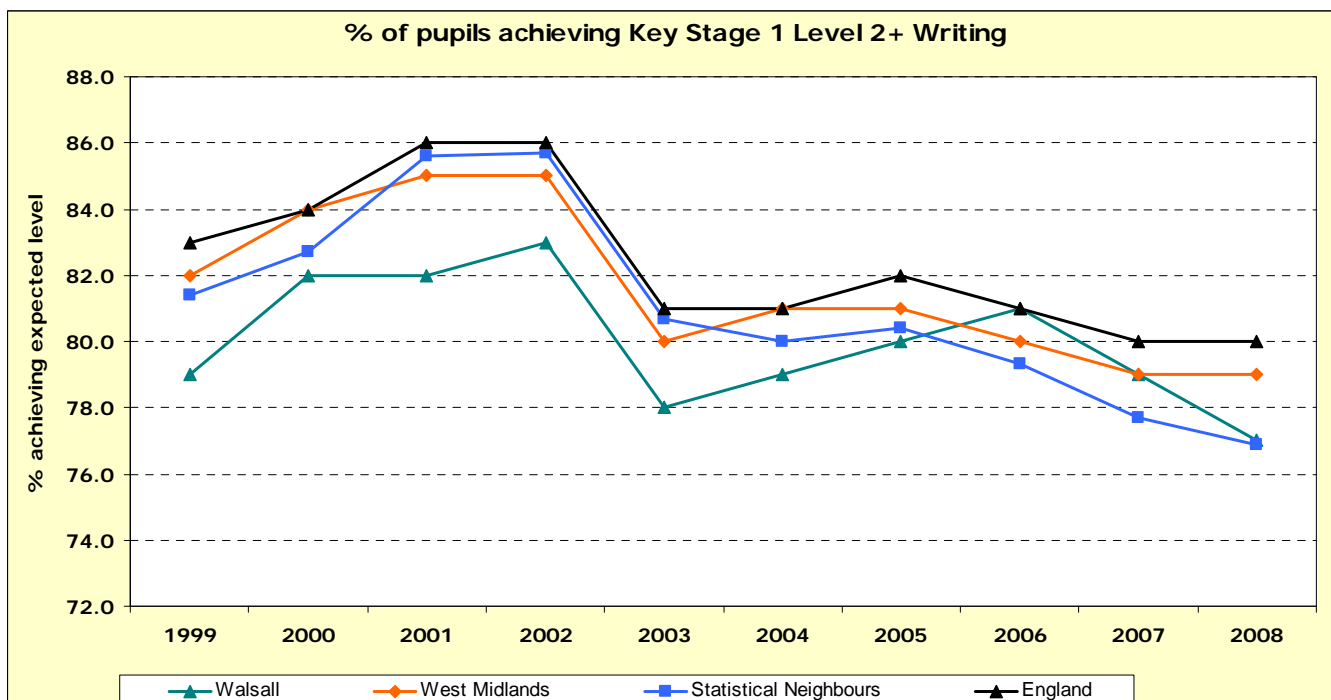
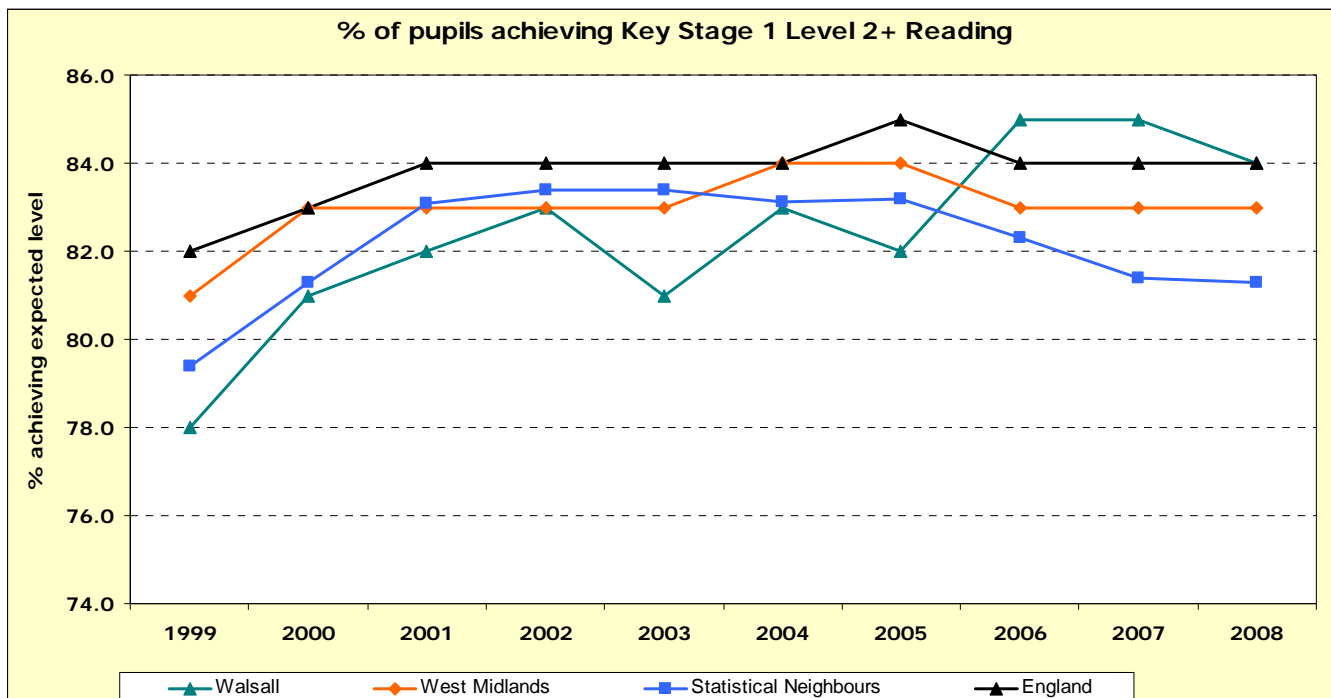


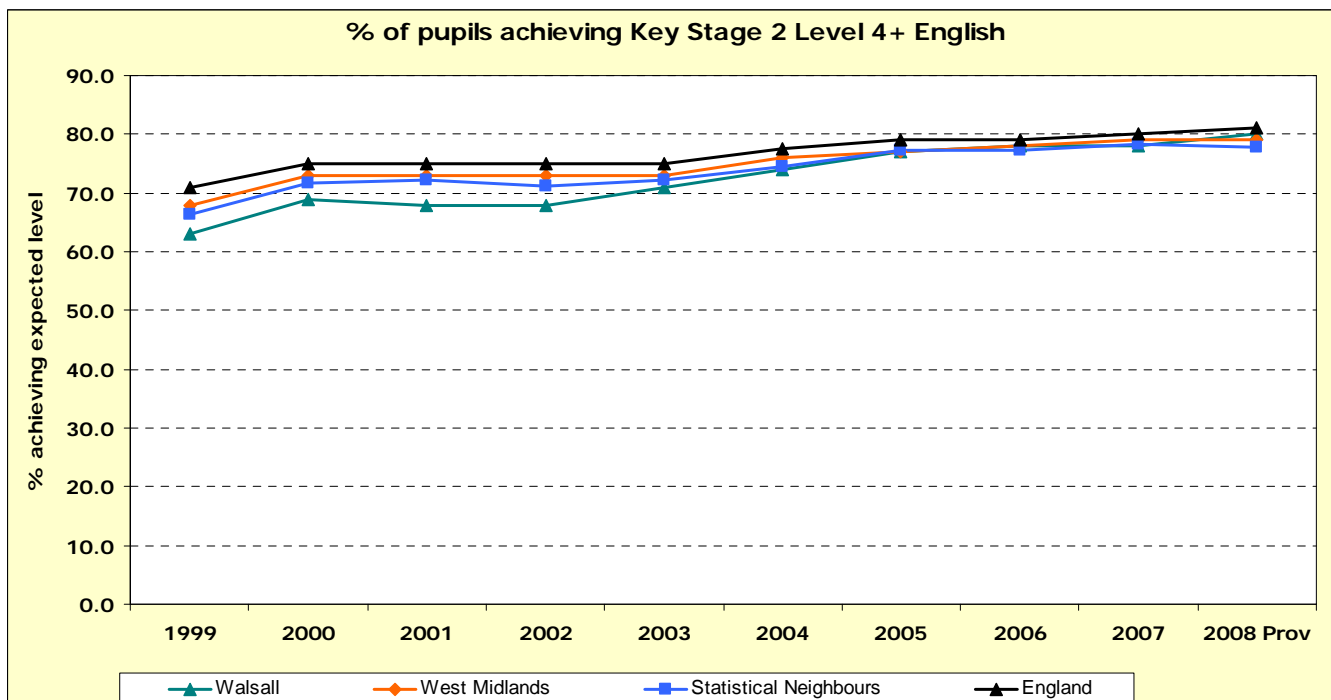
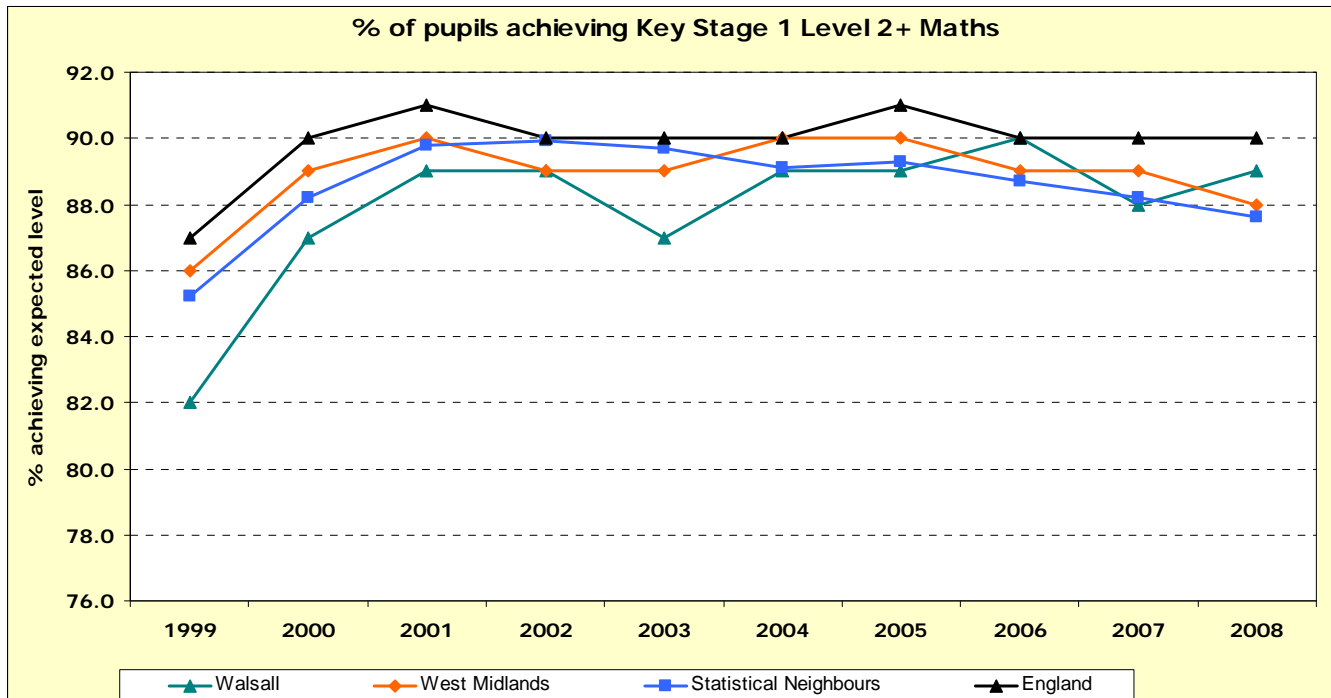


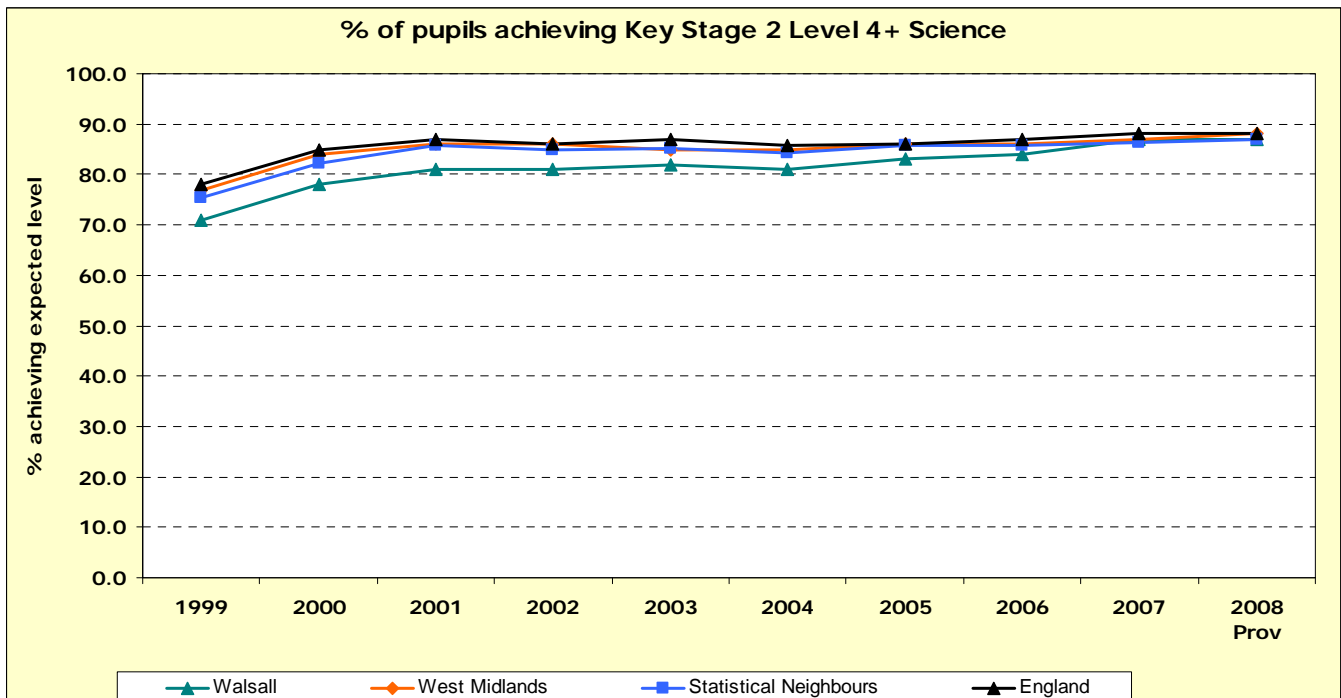
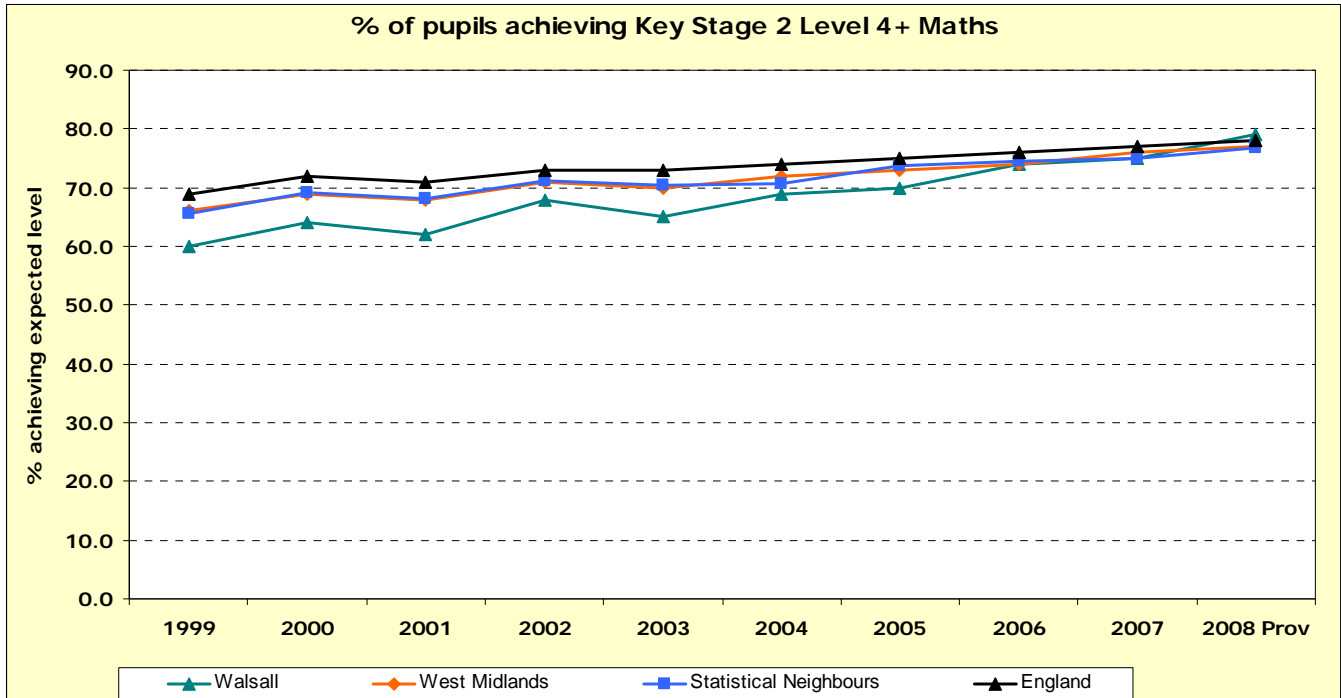
Swindon

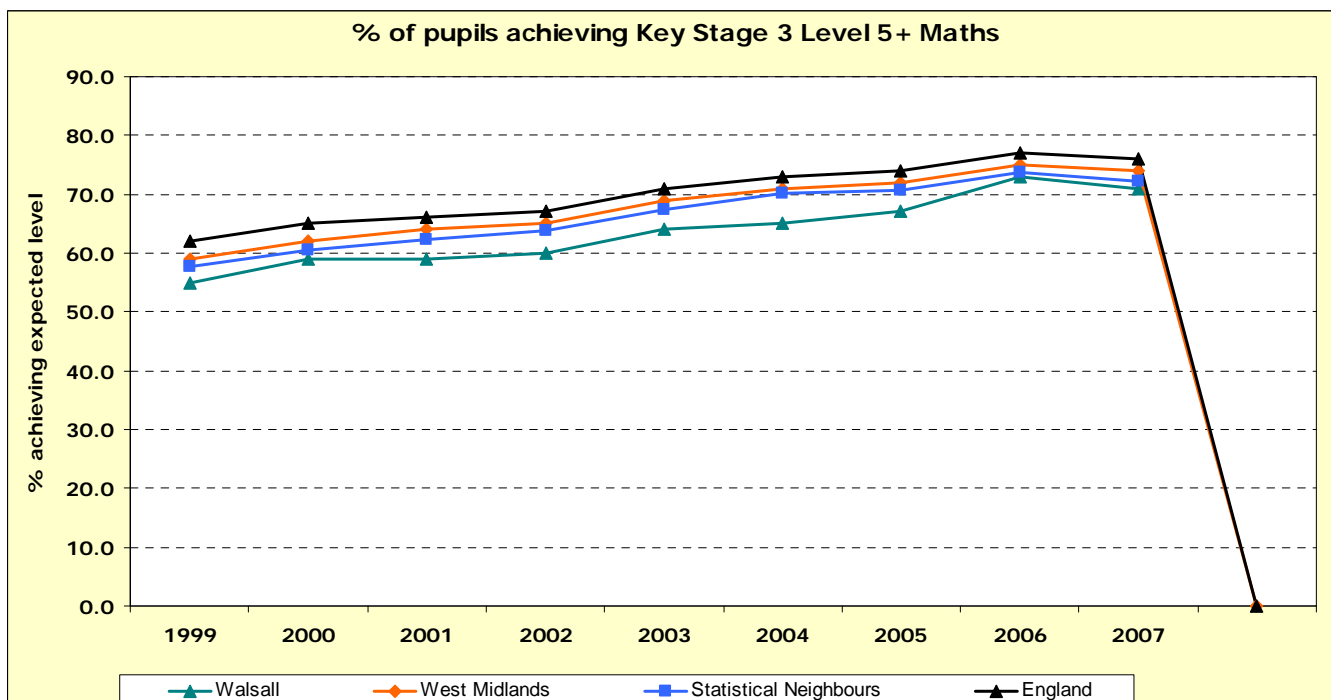
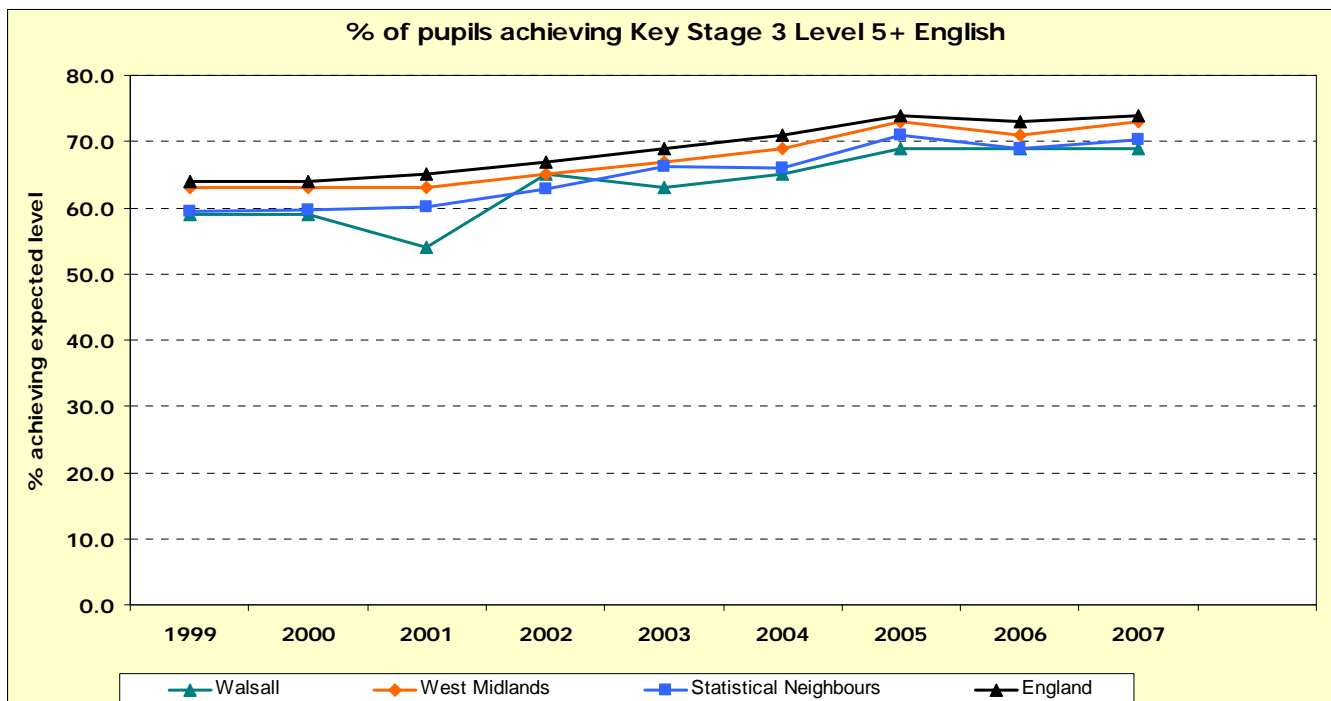


Walsall

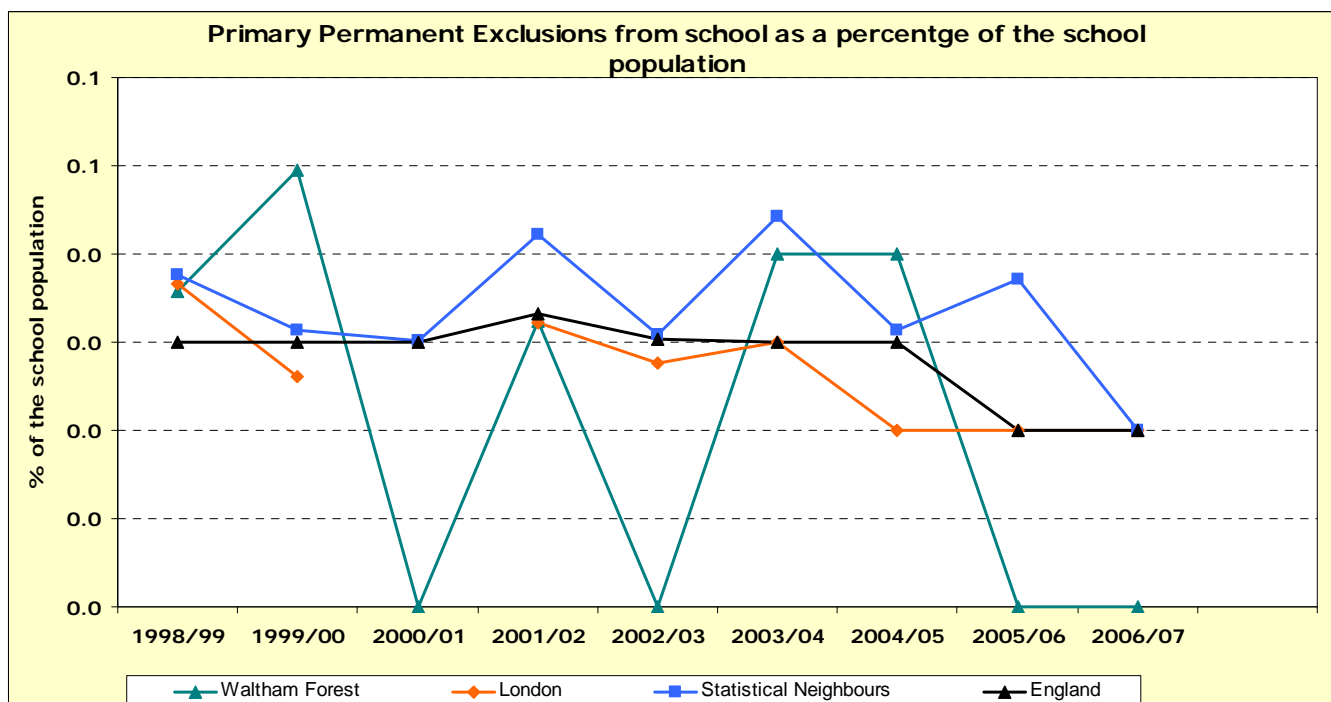
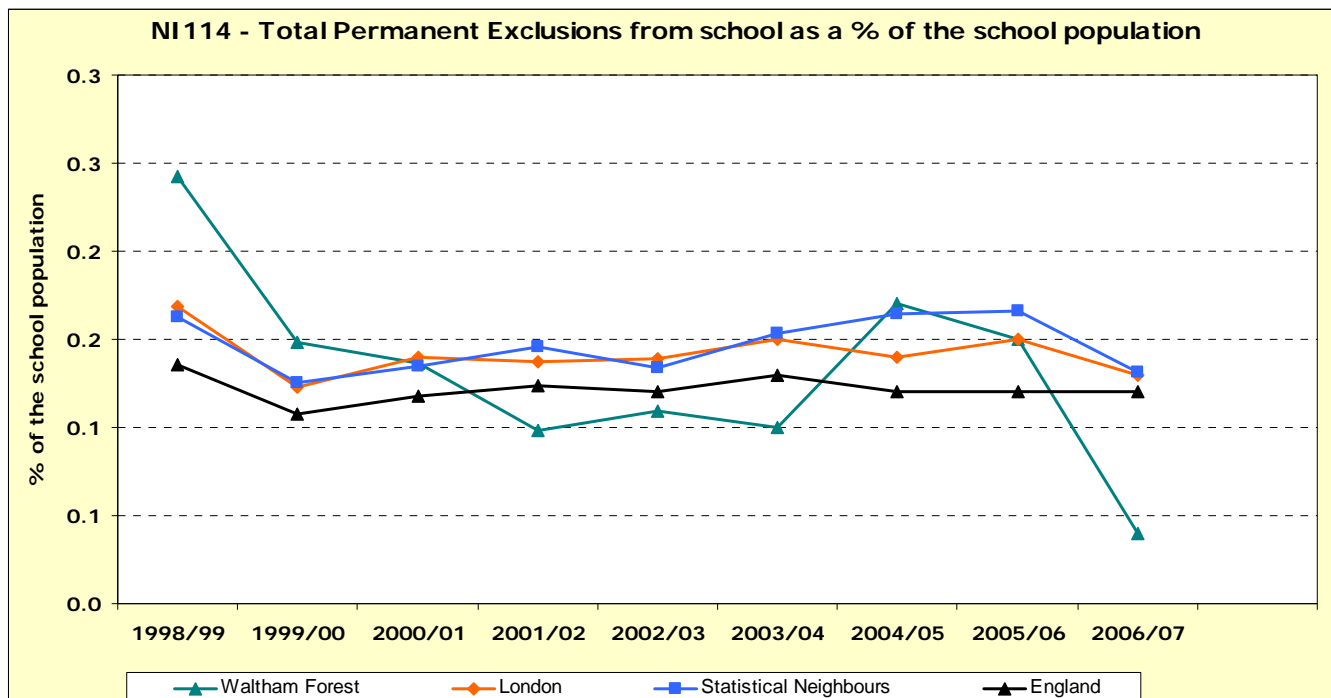


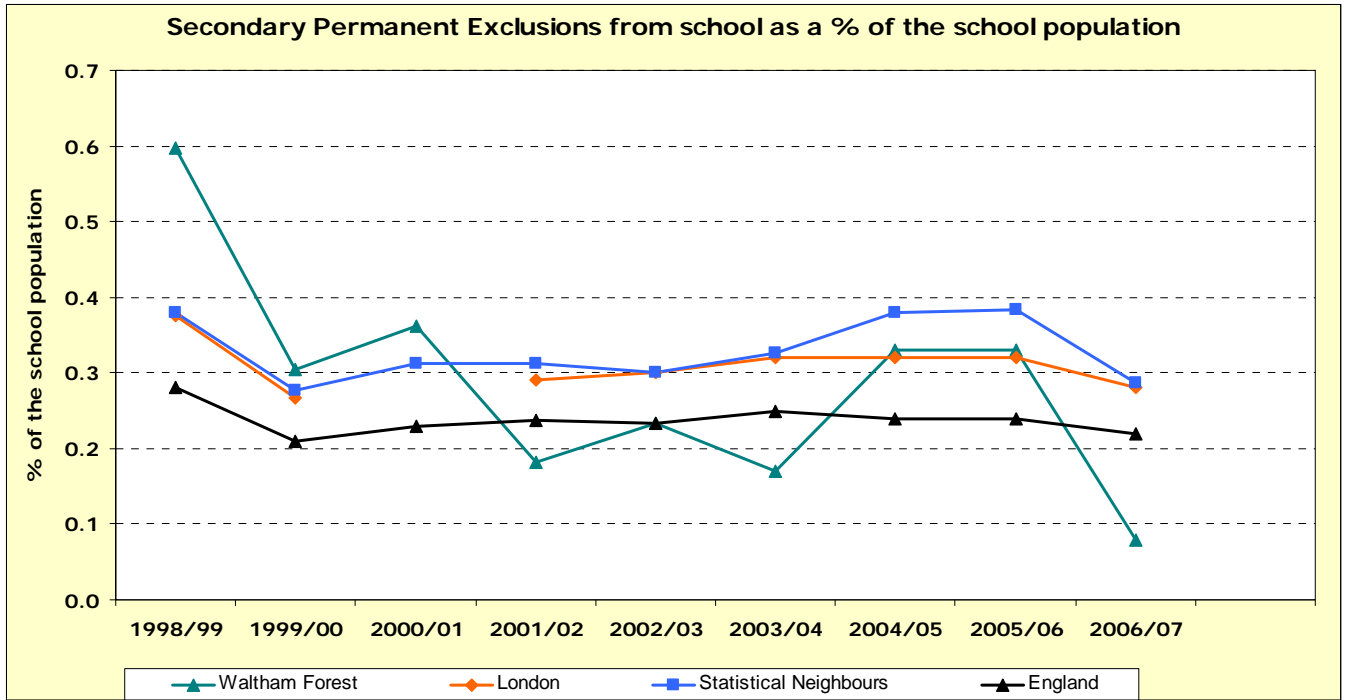






Waltham Forest





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