The Plans: A Comparative Review of Content

This paper is one of a series of 12 that set out findings from NFER's analysis of Children and Young People's Plans (CYPPs) from a representative sample of 75 Local Authorities.[1] This area of analysis covers the following aspects of content within and across the CYPPs:

- The local context described in the plans
- Partners' contribution
- Links with other plans
- How the plans reference the ECM outcomes
- The links within plans of ECM priorities to actions, and of actions to targets
- The inclusion of key groups across the ECM outcomes
- Coverage and comprehensiveness of the areas of analysis
- The format and presentation of the plans.

By looking at these different areas, the paper captures some of the diversity in the way each plan has been written, as well as the comprehensiveness and level of detail in some of the areas of analysis.

Summary of findings

- The majority of the 75 plans use a general introduction or a discrete section to present **contextual information** about the LA. A smaller number of plans site their contextual information in needs analysis sections.

- Four fifths of the plans contain at least a statement about **local partners' involvement** in producing the plan. Logos and lists are other conventions used.

- The vast majority of plans acknowledge **links between the CYPP and other strategic plans** by lists and diagrams. In addition, over a quarter demonstrate where ECM outcomes link to related plans.

- References to the **ECM outcomes** and priority areas vary. There are references to: (i) ECM outcomes with direct mapping to its PSA (Public Service Agreement) area; (ii) ECM outcomes but adapting or conflating the areas normally covered in the ECM framework; and (iii) ECM outcomes using non-ECM headings. Within each plan, most include a mixture of type i and type ii references.

- Across the sample of 75 plans as a whole, 'Enjoy and achieve' and 'Be healthy' are the outcomes showing most **direct mapping of ECM outcomes to PSA areas**. 'Achieve economic wellbeing' is the most likely to have been conflated, whilst 'Make a positive contribution' is interpreted more freely.

- Overall, the majority of plans demonstrate **diversity in levels of coverage of priorities** across the five ECM outcomes. This diversity is likely to reflect local decisions around prioritising.

- Overall, there is greater linkage of priorities to actions, than of actions to targets across the sample of 75 plans as a whole.
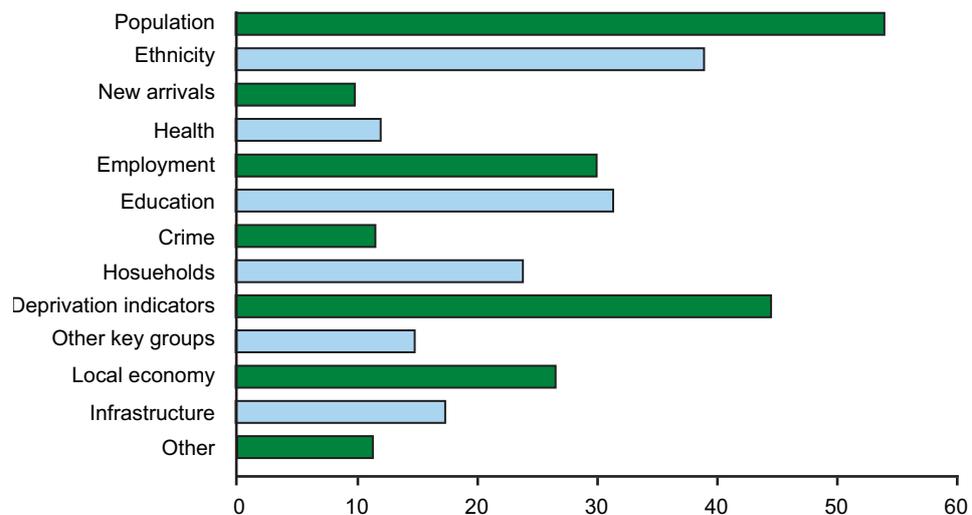
Local Government Association

department for education and skills

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The National Youth Agency

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- Well over half of the 75 plans refer to at least one '**key group**' of young people in all five outcomes areas. Moreover, almost half refer to at least two key groups in all five outcome areas. Over 70 different key groups are referenced across the sample of plans.

- Plans vary in their degree of coverage for different areas of analysis. While half of the 75 CYPPs demonstrate detailed coverage regarding key groups, less than one in ten provide such detail for resourcing, commissioning or performance management arrangements. No one plan is comprehensive in all the areas outlined.

- Diversity in **presentation and format** is evident across the sample of plans. Just under half of the 75 plans are desk-top published and have a high content of design elements, including, images, columns and charts. About three quarters use colour. Use of images within the plan occurs in about half of the sample: twenty of the 75 plans have images on most pages.

- The CYPPs vary in length from 13 pages to 143 (some with extensive appendices). Most commonly, they range between 40 and 60 pages.

- There is no apparent association between comprehensiveness and the presentation and format of the CYPPs.

Local context in the CYPPs

Across the CYPPs, information about the local context is presented in three main ways. Most frequently, this information appears within a discrete section, for example, sections entitled 'Setting the Scene', 'Key Facts about xxshire', 'The YYY authority Context', 'Demographic Profile'. To a lesser extent, such local context information is located under other general section headings such as the 'introduction', 'why we want to make changes' or the 'Strategic Position Statement'. Finally, and rather less frequently, context information can be found in needs analysis sections of CYPPs.

As Figure 1 shows, a wide range of data is referenced in the plans.

Figure 1 Data referenced in the CYPPs

- The most frequently cited **socio-economic information** includes population data e.g. birth rates and age profiles, deprivation indicators and ethnicity data including community diversity and BME groups.

- Less frequently, plans include specific data on crime, 'other' forms of data e.g. service related data and information about new arrivals and refugees.

- In several plans, the **socio-economic data** of the local authority is compared to national figures.

- Where information referenced in the CYPPs relates specifically to children and young people, **ethnicity and population data** are also presented most often, along with data on education (e.g. schools and qualifications). In local context sections, there are fewer examples of plans referring to specific data on young people and crime, health, employment; infrastructure (e.g. transport, technology access) or by locality.

Partners' contribution to CYPPs

Sixty of the 75 CYPPs contain a statement about local partners' involvement in producing the plan. The majority of plans contain at least a statement about local partners' involvement in producing the plan. Lists and logos are other conventions used.

The most common way in which partners' contributions are acknowledged is through an explicit statement.

> *'This plan is the end product of a great deal of hard work by many people in the wider partnership of XX Children's Trust.'* (County LA)

Many plans specifically cite members of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership board (e.g. representatives from Primary Care Trusts, Hospitals, Schools, Colleges, Mental Health Trusts, Police, Connexions and Voluntary groups amongst others) as having contributed to production of the CYPP. Of the plans which contain a statement referring to partnership contribution, nearly a third include a reference to a lead partner which acts as a steer in the development of the CYPP, for example:

> *'The Children and Young People's Plan has been developed with the engagement of a wide range of partners. Work on the plan has been overseen by a Project Group chaired by the Lead Service Director for XX Federation, developed with full multi-agency involvement.'* (Unitary LA)

> *'The Children's Plan sub-group contained three officers from the County Council (one from education, one from social care and one from strategy and performance), three health service colleagues, a voluntary sector partnership member, a representative from both police and fire and rescues services, Connexions, the Learning and Skills Council and a teacher representative. In addition to this, at its later stages, the planning group included a performance management officer and financial management representative.'* (County LA)

Links with other plans

The majority of plans acknowledge links between the CYPP and other strategic plans. About half of the plans include a statement regarding the status of the CYPP in relation to other related plans, commonly describing the CYPP as the 'lead plan', for example:

'The CYPP as an over-arching plan acts as the "glue" that holds these together in developing and promoting an integrated approach to Children's Services. As each existing operational strategy and plan is reviewed it will be amended to ensure it supports and is consistent with the strategic direction set out in the Children and Young People's Plan.'
(Unitary LA)

Presentation of related plans

Related plans are also presented in the CYPPs in other ways, such as lists of related plans, hierarchy/ flow diagrams, references within the section on ECM outcomes, references to plans superseded by the CYPP and descriptions of other plans. Plans generally use a combination of these referencing techniques. In around a quarter of the sample, related plans are set out in a section on ECM outcomes (or equivalent) and may link priorities and actions to these other plans. A smaller number of plans contain tables of related plans and indicate how they link to the ECM outcome (or equivalent). Examples of these are given below.

List of related plans
(Metropolitan LA)

Community Strategy
Council's Corporate Plan
Primary Care Health Trusts' Local Delivery Plans
Policing Plan and Crime and Disorder Strategy
Connexions Local Delivery Plan
Youth Justice Plan

A hierarchy/flow diagram
(County LA)

Related plans set out in section on ECM outcomes
(Metropolitan LA)

Priority	Key actions	Plans linked to
Improving sexual health	Reduce the rate of under-18 conception	Every Child Matters framework National Service Framework Choosing Health Sexual Health Strategy

List/reference to plans superseded by CYPP
(Metropolitan LA)

'The Plan supersedes a number of local authority plans, for example, the Education Development Plan and the Children's Services Plan…'

Related plans set out with details of how they link to the ECM outcome
(Metropolitan LA)

	Be Healthy	Stay Safe	Enjoy and Achieve
Housing Strategy	✓	✓	✓
ICT Development Plan			✓
Integrated Employment Strategy			✓
xxx College Business Plan	✓		✓

Description of related plans given
(London borough)

'The Cultural Strategy has priorities and targets to:

• develop the infrastructure to make a range of high quality cultural activities accessible to all residents

• encourage young people to participate in the arts, sports, reading and other community based activities, with an emphasis on encouraging participation by vulnerable children and young people.'

How the plans reference the ECM outcomes

The analysis specifically sought to ascertain how plans reference the five ECM outcomes and the accompanying PSA areas. References to ECM outcomes vary in the following ways:

• Type i: reference to an ECM outcome with direct mapping to its PSA area

> *Reference to 'Be healthy' and its five PSA areas, e.g. 'Be healthy' made up of: 'Helping children and young people to … be physically healthy … be mentally and emotionally healthy … be sexually healthy … have healthy lifestyles … choose not to take illegal drugs'* (County authority).

> *Reference to 'Achieve economic wellbeing' and its five PSA areas, e.g. 'Engagement in further education, employment or training on leaving schools', 'ready for employment', 'live in decent homes and sustainable communities', 'access to transport and material goods', 'live in households free from low income'* (County authority).

• Type ii: reference to an ECM outcome but adapting or conflating the areas normally covered in the ECM framework.

> *Reference to 'Be healthy' with **adapted** areas, e.g. 'Be healthy' made up of 'maternal health', 'early years', '5–12 year olds', 'adolescent health and wellbeing', 'vulnerable children and young people'* (Metropolitan authority).

> *Reference to 'Achieve economic wellbeing' with **conflated** areas, e.g. 'Achieve economic wellbeing' made up of 'a place to work' and 'a place to live'* (London borough).

• Type iii: reference to an ECM outcome using non-ECM headings

> *'Be healthy', referred to as 'Safeguarding, health and wellbeing'* (London Borough).

> *'Achieve economic wellbeing', referred to amongst 'Creating the conditions in which children and young people thrive' and 'Support for young people and teenagers'* (London Borough).

Across the sample of 75 plans, 'Achieve economic wellbeing' is the most likely to have been conflated, whilst 'Make a positive contribution' is interpreted more freely.

To what extent is each ECM outcome referenced in a similar way within each plan?

A small minority of plans directly refer to the ECM outcomes and PSA areas across all the ECM outcomes (i.e. type i references across all ECM outcomes). Most plans include a mixture of type i and type ii references (in these cases 'Enjoy and achieve' and 'Be healthy' show the most direct mapping to ECM outcomes and PSA areas). Some plans refer to the ECM outcomes in a variety of ways (i.e. types i, ii and iii) for example, perhaps using the 'Be healthy' outcome and its PSA areas, but referencing 'Make a positive contribution' with non-ECM headings.

> *Within the same plan, reference to 'Be healthy', including direct mapping to 'healthy lifestyles', 'substance misuse', 'sexual health' and 'mental health'; but reference to 'Make a positive contribution' using a non-ECM heading entitled 'Increased opportunities to influence the way services are provided'* (County authority).

To what extent are the ECM priorities covered within each plan?

Using the full range of priorities that each ECM outcome might include overall, as found in the full range across the 75 plans, (e.g. 'Stay safe' priorities are: child protection and issues of neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, crime, accidents or deaths, antisocial behaviour, local community facilities, bullying and harassment), the analysis tried to determine whether the plans cover the priorities across all the five ECM outcomes to the same extent.

Full coverage of all priorities across all five ECM outcomes occurs in a minority of plans. About one-third of the plans provide full coverage of some priorities, but are slightly less detailed within other priorities (mainly 'Make a positive contribution' and 'Achieve economic wellbeing'). Just over half of the plans show different degrees of coverage of priorities across all five ECM outcomes (in these cases 'Be healthy' shows the fullest coverage). A small minority of the 75 plans show some variation in their coverage of priorities across the ECM outcomes, for example, priorities for 'Stay safe' might be sparsely covered, whilst those for 'Enjoy and achieve' might receive full coverage.

Overall then, the majority of plans demonstrate diversity in their levels of coverage of priorities across the five ECM outcomes. This diversity is likely to reflect local decisions around prioritising.

The linkage of ECM priorities to actions, and of actions to targets

The extent to which priorities are linked to or underpinned by actions was explored in the plans, as was the extent to which actions were linked to or underpinned by targets.

The linkage of priorities to actions occurs in the following ways:

- Type i: direct linkage of all or almost all priorities to actions
- Type ii: direct linkage of some priorities to actions
- Type iii: no direct linkage of priorities to actions.

The linkage of actions to targets[2] occurs in the following ways:

- Type i: direct linkage of all or almost all actions to targets
- Type ii: direct linkage of some actions to targets
- Type iii: no direct linkage of actions to targets.

To what extent does each plan underpin priorities with actions for each of the ECM areas in a similar way?

Plans are generally consistent in their linking and underpinning of priorities to actions across all the five ECM outcomes. A third of the CYPPs link all or most of their priorities with actions in each of the five ECM outcomes. Only two plans show some discrepancy in this type of priority-with-action linkage. In the sample of plans as a whole, detailed linkage of priorities to actions is particularly evident for the 'Be healthy' and 'Stay safe' outcomes. There is therefore evidence of LAs' contribution to health outcomes, an area not traditionally part of their remit.

To what extent does each plan underpin actions with targets for each of the ECM areas in a similar way?

Plans generally show some variation in the extent to which they underpin actions with targets in each of the ECM areas. Over half of the plans link some or most of their actions to accompanying targets in each of the five ECM outcomes. A quarter link actions and targets to different extents across the ECM outcomes (in these cases, actions are not directly underpinned by targets in at least one outcome area). A small minority of plans do not directly link actions to targets in any of the ECM outcomes.

Overall, there is greater linkage of priorities to actions than of actions to targets across the whole sample. However, the plans that do link actions to targets are often the same plans that also link priorities to actions (i.e. a whole plan approach).

The inclusion of key groups across the ECM outcomes

Within each plan, what reference is made to key groups (e.g. Looked After Children, Children with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities, and others) across the ECM outcomes?

The analysis showed that well over half the plans refer to at least one or more key groups in all five outcome areas, and a further quarter of plans nominate key groups in four ECM areas. Moreover, almost half refer to at least two key groups in all five outcome areas. The outcome least likely to have a reference to a key group is 'Make a positive contribution' (one in five plans does not contain this).

Over 70 different key groups are referenced across this sample of plans. This volume of specialist need across the population of children and young people is illustrated in Box 1.

Box 1   Key groups referenced

Looked after children (LAC)

Children with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD)

Black minority ethnic (BME)

Teenage mothers (specific)

Teenage/young parents

Young homeless

Young offenders (including those at-risk of offending, supervised juveniles in education, employment or training (EET)

Young carers

Children and young people refugees/asylum seekers/recent arrivals

Children and young people Travellers (including Gypsy Travellers)

Children and young people who are chronically/terminally ill

Children and young people who are ill/have medical needs

Children and young people with asthma

Children and young people in hospital

Obese children

Children who are bereaved

Special educational needs (SEN)

Autism/conduct disorder (ADHD)

Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD)

Children and young people with additional needs

Children and young people complex and multiple special needs

Boys

Girls

Children and young people with mental health and emotional problems

Children and young people who are substance misusers

Children and young people living in residential schools

Care leavers

Children and young people in temporary accommodation

Children and young people at risk of violence/abuse

Children and young people on CPR

Children and young people who are victims of crime, gang members

Children and young people gay/lesbian

Underachievers (including in one instance locally underachieving FSM and white working class children and young people)

Young people in jobs without training

Children and young people at risk of not in education, employment or training (NEET)/ those with long periods of NEET

Young people non-school attendees (including those in pupil referral units (PRUs))

Young people who are truants

Children and young people with English as an additional language (EAL)

Gifted and talented

Children and young people who are home educated

Re-engaged students

Fathers and male carers

Foreign students

Disaffected youth

Young white

Sexually exploited young women

Forced marriages

Children and young people at risk of social and educational exclusion

Under 5s

6–13 year olds

8–13 year olds

5–19 year olds

11–19 year olds

13–19 year olds

Year 7

Key stage 2

Key stage 3 at risk

Key stage 3

Key stage 4

Vulnerable groups general (includes 'at risk', non specific)

Young people in rural areas

Children in prison

Areas/wards of disadvantage

Faith communities

Families with English as an additional language (EAL)

Low income families

Families described as high need / vulnerable

Single parent families

Children of homeless families

Parents with mental health problems

Children and young people with parents in prison

Children and young people with parents who use drugs

Runaways and 'missing' children

Coverage and comprehensiveness of the areas of analysis

How do plans vary in levels of coverage and comprehensiveness?

By looking across the individual themes and areas of analysis as outlined in subsequent papers 3–11, the research considered the overall 'comprehensiveness' (i.e. level of detail) in the plans. Based on the analysis, Table 1 shows comprehensiveness descriptors that might apply to different aspects of the plans. The coverage of these areas of analysis is presented in rank order.

Table 1   Areas of analysis: a rank order

Area of analysis	Most comprehensive where plans …
The inclusion of key groups across the five ECM outcomes	include differentiated priorities/actions/targets for two or more key groups in all five ECM outcomes
Making links between priorities and actions	set out priorities underpinned by actions – i.e. *what* they want to achieve, underpinned by *how* they will achieve it/what they will do to achieve it
Making links to other plans	include details of how their priorities link to other plans, with related plans set out within the ECM sections
The range of types of data used for needs analysis	refer to having used *all* of the following types of data to inform the needs analysis: information from inspections/self-evaluations, official statistics, views of children and young people, views of others and information from other agencies
Partnership arrangements	include diagrams of partnership arrangements, and details of the roles and responsibilities of individual agencies or groups (e.g. Connexions, police, local safeguarding board)
The nature of targets	include targets that predominantly those that set out baselines and projected numerical figures (e.g. numbers, percentages, proportions)
Identifying the children and young people involved in consultation	include details about the number of children and young people involved in consultation, their age-range and any sub-groups (e.g. shown by key group, location/ward, etc)
Linking children and young people's views to the development of priorities	state that the views of children and young people are linked to priorities, using quotes and visuals
Coverage of priorities across the ECM outcomes	cover all or almost all of the priorities in each of the five ECM outcomes (according to the full range found across all 75 plans)
Referencing children and young people's future involvement	include *where* children and young people will be involved e.g. in design, development, planning, decision-making, review and evaluation; and *what* this might refer to e.g. Hear By Right, UNCRC
Reference to commissioning strategies	set out commissioning models/frameworks, as well as the identification of joint commissioning teams, and priorities for commissioning
Performance management arrangements	include details of when monitoring and review will take place (e.g. timescales), who is responsible for undertaking the review (e.g. roles and responsibilities are assigned), and what is being measured (e.g. performance indicators)
Making links between actions and targets	set out what they intend to *do* (i.e. actions) linked to how they will *measure* it / what they will measure (i.e. targets)
Reference to the ECM framework across the ECM outcomes	refer directly to the ECM framework and its PSA areas across all of the five ECM outcomes
The identification and allocation of resources and budgets	set out budgetary figures against priorities (e.g. ECM areas, level of need, service responsible) and describe types of resource allocation (e.g. aligning budgets, pooling budgets)

Half of the CYPPs demonstrate detailed coverage regarding key groups, a third of the plans are comprehensive in their linkage of priorities and actions and just under one-quarter of the plans refer to a comprehensive range of data used for needs analysis. Around one in six plans directly identify the children and young people involved in consultation, including detail about the number, age-range and any sub-groups consulted. A small number of plans (less than one in ten) provide this level of detail for resourcing, commissioning or performance management arrangements.

No one plan is comprehensive in all the areas outlined and the majority are comprehensive in at least one of these thematic areas.

Format and presentation of the CYPPs

The analysis looked at the format and presentation of the plans. The following features were considered:

• Type of layout

• Length

• Use of images

• Use of colour

• Display of numerical data.

Layout

In terms of layout, the plans fall quite evenly into two categories. Just under a half are desk-top published, highly formatted and with a high usage of design elements such as columns, side-bars, call-out boxes, images, etc., while just over a half are mainly word-processed, using a single column of text and minimal graphics.

Length

The plans vary considerably in length. While the average page length is 54 pages, they range from the shortest at 13 pages to the longest at 143. Only two plans are under 20 pages, and the most common length is 40–60 pages. Among the longer plans, a few contain extensive appendices of 25 or more pages, which in some cases are longer than the main body of the plan. About a half of the plans have a high density of words per page (mainly solid text with little or no graphics or other objects, typically in a 12 point font). About a third have a medium density (text with some objects such as images or boxes on some pages), and a smaller number have a low density (a combination of text and objects on most pages, and/or larger fonts).

Use of images

Around 60 per cent of the plans use images, as shown in figure 2.

Figure 2 Use of images

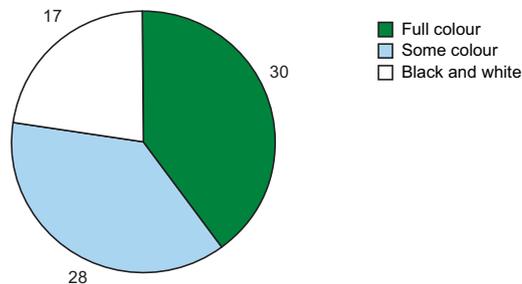|	
On most pages	20
On a few pages	14
On the cover only	12

0 — 75

Images are used to illustrate content (with captions or a clear link to the text), or for branding and design purposes (to achieve a distinctive look, independently of the accompanying text). A few plans use images for both purposes, and some use images with no clear purpose.

Use of colour

About three-quarters of the plans use colour to some extent.

Figure 3 Use of colour

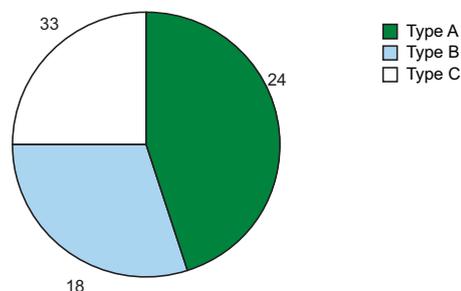

- Full colour
- Some colour
- Black and white

Display of numerical data

Most plans contain some form of numerical data. Of these, around 40 per cent display this data in a visual, often colour-coded form, such as pie charts, bar graphs, or tables with tinted boxes or bars. The remaining 60 per cent use simple tables or text to present numerical data.

Types of plan

In terms of format and presentation, and based on a combination of the features analysed above, the plans fall into three categories:

Figure 4 Types of plan

- Type A
- Type B
- Type C

Type A

Full-colour, desk-top published publications with a **high content of design elements**. Most plans combine a range of these, such as images, call-out boxes, columns, coloured side-bars, graphs and charts. Around half of the plans use colour to signpost the structure. For example: different coloured title pages; coloured side-bars to indicate chapters or sections, different colours used for sections on each EMC outcome.

Images are used extensively, whether to illustrate content or as a design feature. A few plans use photographs for both purposes, and a smaller number use photographs without a clear purpose.

The most common length for this type of plan was between 40 and 60 pages. Only two plans were over 100 pages in length and only four were under 40. All plans had a **medium to low density of words per page**.

Type B

There is some **use of design elements** such as graphs, charts and boxes. Most plans make **some use of colour**, but this is mainly limited to the front cover, graphs or headings.

About half the plans do not use images. Those that do use them sparingly, and mostly only on the front cover.

Again, there is variation in length, ranging from 21 pages to 142, with an average length of 57 pages, but most plans have a **medium to high density of words per page**.

Type C

Mostly **black and white** documents with a simple, word-processed style of layout (single column, mostly solid text), and **very limited or no use of design elements**. If colour is used, it is only in isolated maps or charts.

Only one plan in this group uses images on the front cover; in the rest **no images are used**.

The average length was 52 pages, and the most common length was 40–50 pages, with only one plan over 100 pages. All plans have a **high density of words per page**.

Finally, there is no apparent association between comprehensiveness (i.e. detail and coverage in the areas of analysis shown in table 3) and the format and presentation of the CYPPs. However, there is a slight association between comprehensiveness and the length of plans, particularly where plans are shorter than 20 pages in length.

Notes

1   When interpreting these findings from analysis of 75 plans, it is necessary to bear in mind that LAs had freedom to draft their CYPPs in order to meet their needs and circumstances best. Therefore, there would be no imperative for every plan to include all the pieces of information and detail discussed in the findings in this paper.

2   i.e. targets as they appear in the plans (these include targets for children and young people, and service delivery targets).

The full series of papers are available from www.nfer.ac.uk/emie: