

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045  
Email [edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk)



Making Social Care  
Better for People



Mr Chris Pratt  
Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services  
Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council  
Trafford Town Hall  
Talbot Road  
Stretford  
Manchester M32 0YZ

**1 December 2005**

Dear Mr Pratt

**ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF TRAFFORD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005**

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 4 July to assess the performance of the education and social care services within your authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

**Being healthy**

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. A high proportion (92%) of schools participate in the National Healthy Schools initiative. Sex and relationships education in schools, together with children and young people's participation in sport is generally satisfactory or better. The health needs of looked after children are met effectively. For example, the percentage of children who have had health checks is very high. There are some positive indications that the mental health of children and young people is being promoted, for example, by an increase in the number of social workers working in child and adolescent mental health teams. However, waiting times for children and young people with more complex mental health needs are too long. The needs of children with disabilities have been identified as requiring further improvement.

Whilst it remains below the national average, there has been an increase in the under 18 conception rate of 8% since 1998, requiring a very significant acceleration in progress if the authority is to reach the national targets for reduction. There is insufficient multi-agency commitment and senior level engagement on behalf of all partners to co-ordinate effective measures to reduce teenage pregnancies.

## Staying safe

Outcomes overall are satisfactory and the authority has a good understanding of those areas which require further improvement and has active plans in place, with partners, to tackle these. School inspections show that the care and welfare of pupils and child protection procedures in schools are satisfactory or better. The quality of childcare in early years settings is good. The youth service provides a healthy and safe working environment for young people.

The authority is continuing to review its arrangements for ensuring that children in need are referred and assessed appropriately. The proportion of children receiving initial assessments is low compared to the number of referrals actually made and the proportion of core assessments is very low compared to similar authorities. However, more initial and core assessments are being completed on time. Plans to set up a Family Intervention Team have been revised in favour of employing more outreach workers.

The authority remains committed to working towards family centred multi-disciplinary integrated services across the board. There is now clarity and firm agreement between the Council, local National Health Service (NHS) and other partners on the main tenets of the Children and Young People's Plan. This provides a shared strategic direction and specifies joint commissioning, governance, and management arrangements. The agreement identifies which integrated multi-agency teams are to be established, their functions and the current services to be included. There is a framework for the development and performance management of new multi-agency services.

All children on the child protection register and looked after children have a named social worker and figures for child protection re-registrations have significantly improved. Not all children on the register, however, had their cases reviewed within the required timescales.

Overall numbers of looked after children have continued to rise, including the proportion of children aged under 10. The authority does not fully recognise the implications of this trend in its self-assessment. Substantial progress has been made to improve the stability of short-term placements and performance in this area is now good. A recent inspection of the authority's adoption service found that a lack of suitable policies and procedures (for example, on the vetting of prospective adopters) has resulted in adoption practice that is unsafe. The authority reports that action has been taken to address similar inspection findings in relation to kinship carers earlier in the year and to ensure that only registered foster care agencies are used.

The authority accepts that information sharing between fieldworkers and family placement carers has not always been as consistent or as good as it needs to be, to promote children's well-being. Standards of care in the council's children's homes have improved and generally meet or exceed national minimum standards. The authority is reporting major success in the delivery of its Looked After Children Strategy, reflected by a reduction in the proportion of children placed in residential homes and an increase in the percentage of children looked after in foster placements. It is aware of the need to increase the proportion of children aged under 10 in foster placements which are in the local area, which decreased last year.

The authority is using a new management information system which is able to link health data with data held by the Children and Young People's Service. A comprehensive electronic database of information about all referrals to the service is also being developed. These two developments will enhance the council's knowledge and understanding of the needs of the children and young people who are referred to it. Further ways are being sought of identifying private foster carers.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

Outcomes in this area are good overall, with pupils' performance in end of key stage tests and examinations consistently above or well above those in similar authorities or nationally. Nevertheless, for some vulnerable groups of pupils there is room for improvement.

There is a high level of early years provision in a variety of settings. Evidence from recent inspections show that nursery education is good. However, the extent and nature of provision varies between different districts, and there are some weaknesses in the education provided by a few day care centres.

Attainment in schools is a major strength. Strong progress is made by pupils as they move through the phases of schooling particularly, at primary level. Attendance in both primary and secondary schools is good and again better than nationally and in similar authorities. The rate of permanent exclusion is in line with the national figure in primary schools, but below it in secondary schools. The authority has a good previous record in supporting schools to ensure they do not fall into Ofsted categories of concern. However, there are currently two schools in special measures.

Although numbers are small, the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) attainment of looked after children leaving care is rightly an area of concern to the authority. However, it is aware of the weakness and has produced an action plan to deal with it in collaboration with other agencies. The implementation of the plan has introduced improved information systems to monitor attainment and attendance and to make sure that looked after children are receiving the priority they should, for example in admissions to schools. Carers are now receiving improved training, and schools' link

advisers are to raise the issue of provision for this group of young people, in their autumn term visits. The percentage of young offenders in education, employment or training had risen to 92% by the end of 2004.

The proportion of statements of special educational needs completed within the target of 18 weeks has been very poor. At its lowest point, it declined to 19%, and, although now increased to 33%, remains too low. The authority has a coherent approach to improving performance which involves its own performance management, improving collaboration with the health service and working with external consultants. The improvement plans are realistic and evidence of improvement is beginning to appear.

### **Making a positive contribution**

Overall, outcomes in this area are good. The children's services plan lays considerable emphasis on consulting children and young people, and there is an extensive range of systems and settings in which consultation can take place. A participation strategy and delivery plan has been developed by a forum involving young people. Most schools have school councils and a youth cabinet has been elected. An inspection of the youth service reported that young people participated well in local democracy and decision-making activities.

A children's rights officer has developed good relationships with looked after children enabling them to voice their opinions, although there is room for improvement in the proportion contributing to their statutory reviews which is still well below the average of similar authorities. Children with disabilities have made a contribution through special schools' councils. The authority plans to focus more on the needs of children and young people with profound needs in future.

Consultation processes are beginning to have an effect on services. The views of looked after children, for example, played a part in the formulation of the current action plan to improve their attainment. However the authority does not tell young people enough about what action it has taken or planned in response to consultation.

The Youth Offending Team's performance has significantly improved and has moved up from a ranking of 148 in 2003/04 to 69 in 2004/05, in the Youth Justice Board national performance ratings. The authority accepts the further work it needs to do to reduce recidivism rates in the local area. There has been a significant rise in offending by looked after children compared with other Greater Manchester authorities and this requires targeted action to improve outcomes in the current year.

A Black Case Panel, established in April 2004 to review a selection of social care cases, has begun to raise awareness and share information to inform improved practice but an assessment of the impact of race equality and disabilities strategies has yet to be completed.

## Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good.

Attainment in schools with sixth forms, as measured by average points scores is above national standards and those achieved in similar authorities. Good progress has been made in developing a 14 to 19 years curriculum. The strategy for the age group has been developed in collaboration with all providers. It sets out corporate goals for lifelong learning. It is a significant step forward. It proposes flexible, relevant provision backed by comprehensive support and guidance for successful transition to further and higher education, and training. It has considerable strength in the emphasis it places on collaboration between services, for example, between education, Connexions and the youth service. There is evidence that the required collaboration has begun in, for example, work with business to prepare young people for the world of work. There has also been progress in involving the grammar schools in these developments and the local Learning and Skills Council is providing funding for new courses, for example, foreign languages for business. The percentage of care leavers in employment, education or training has improved significantly over the last two years and is now satisfactory.

The authority's self-assessment identifies provision for young people facing personal and social barriers to learning as an area for development. However, a number of projects are underway to respond to the needs of such children and young people. For example, a significant race equality programme has been introduced and progress has already been made in improving outcomes for black and minority ethnic groups of children and young people. Progress is also evident in broadening the Key Stage 4 curriculum, with increased numbers of young people involved in alternative provision in further education. A sixth form centre is being developed in one of the colleges to provide specifically for vulnerable young people. It is intended that increased behaviour support will begin next year.

## SUMMARY

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Areas for Improvement</b>
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and young people</li> <li>• improved social work input into mental health provision</li> <li>• support for looked after children on health issues.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduction in teenage conception rates</li> <li>• improved support to children and young people with learning disabilities.</li> </ul>

<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• providing children and young people with a safe environment in schools, youth services and early years settings</li> <li>• improved assessment timescales for children in need</li> <li>• reduction of percentage of looked after children in residential care.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitoring and improvement of vetting systems for ensuring that looked after children are placed in safe settings</li> <li>• completion of statutory reviews of children on the child protection register within required timescales</li> <li>• further increasing local alternatives to residential care for looked after children in line with local strategy.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• educational attainment in schools</li> <li>• levels of schools attendance</li> <li>• availability and quality of early years provision.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rate of completion of statements of special educational needs</li> <li>• educational attainment of looked after children.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promotion of children and young people's participation in decision-making</li> <li>• positive involvement of young people in youth services</li> <li>• good consultation mechanisms for looked after children in residential care.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduction in recidivism and offending by looked after children</li> <li>• further improvement in contribution of looked after children to statutory reviews.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attainment in schools with sixth forms</li> <li>• 14-19 strategy in place based on collaboration between partners</li> <li>• improvement in proportion of care leavers in employment, education or training.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• continuing the support for young people facing social and emotional barriers to learning.</li> </ul>

## Service management

There are clear and challenging ambitions for the council's children's services based on developing common objectives. Trafford's Children and Young People's Service, established in 2003, incorporates a wide breadth of services for children within one management structure and is working to increase collaboration between these services. New corporate leadership and continuing political support will assist this process. Working relationships with health partners have improved recently and a comprehensive joint commissioning framework has been agreed that includes a shared strategic direction; precise governance, and management arrangements; plans for which integrated multi-agency teams will be established; and a framework for

developing and performance managing new multi-agency services. Analysis of need has been consolidated by a recent jointly commissioned report which is providing the basis for future planning. Priorities are clearly outlined in the Children and Young People's Service Strategic Plan which is supported by detailed service plans. Expenditure on the Children and Young People's Service last year was within budget in the context of significant increases in funding for children's social care in the last two years.

The council has made further improvements in performance management systems which should ensure that improvements are well paced and addressed consistently. These include clear improvement plans; a performance management review system that is operating for all members of staff, where personal and team objectives stem from the corporate plans, which are systematically monitored; and an active system of monitoring service effectiveness to improve performance. Education services have sustained and built on previous good performance and are making progress on identified areas for improvement. Progress has been made in some identified areas for improvement in social care services, for example, care leavers in employment, education or training and assessment timescales. Improved performance is also reported in the stability of placements, health of looked after children, including access to mental health provision; significantly reducing children and young people in residential care placements and increasing those in family placements; enhancing preventative work through increasing the numbers of outreach workers; and child protection re-registration.

However, performance in some specific service areas has not shown improvement and in some cases outcomes have declined. This is the case in child protection reviews, educational attainment levels and increased offending by looked after children. The authority responds well to the findings of external inspections but its own quality assurance processes have not demonstrated past weaknesses. However, these are now supporting improvement in a more robust way. One example is the case file audit which enables issues of concern to front line staff and managers to be fed back directly to senior officers and elected members. This has resulted in additional resources being allocated to children's services.

The authority has identified a number of social care workforce issues which could put improvement at risk, including the need for adequate senior management capacity in social care, the recruitment and retention of experienced social workers and the need to continue to recruit and retain numbers of local foster carers and adopters. This reflects the pattern reported in many other local authority areas. Levels of training in the social care workforce are, however, high in comparison to similar authorities.

Overall capacity to improve is good.

## **Areas for exploration in the joint area review**

### **Being healthy**

*Healthy life-styles are promoted for children and young people:*

- impact of the teenage pregnancy strategy
- adequacy of services for children with disabilities and the extent to which they function as a coherent whole.

### **Staying safe**

*The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:*

- agencies collaborate to safeguard children according to the requirements of current government guidance.

*Looked after children live in safe environments and are protected from abuse and exploitation:*

- identification, assessment and provision of coordinated support for children in need
- effectiveness of measures to ensure safety of looked after children
- robustness of serious case reviews procedures and timely implementation of lessons learnt.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

*Early years provision promotes children's development and well-being and helps them meet early learning goals:*

- early years education – patterns of provision compared to local needs and impact of action to improve education provided by some day care centres.

### **Making a positive contribution**

*Children and young people, particularly those from vulnerable groups, are supported in managing changes and responding to challenges in their lives:*

*Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to make a positive contribution:*

- impact of race equality and disabilities strategies.

*Action is taken to prevent offending and to reduce re-offending by children and young people:*

*Children and young people who are looked after are helped to make a positive contribution:*

- impact of measures to reduce offending behaviour by looked after children.

*Children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision making and in supporting the community:*

- evidence of impact of consultation with young people and feedback to them.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

*Action is taken to ensure that 14-19 education and training is planned and delivered in a coordinated way, and to ensure that education and training (16-19) is of good quality:*

- evidence of impact of measures to improve support for young people facing barriers to learning.

### **Final judgements**

Please see your final annual performance assessment judgements attached at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely



**FLO HADLEY**  
Divisional Manager  
Office for Standards in Education



**JONATHAN PHILLIPS**  
Director – Quality, Performance and Methods  
Commission for Social Care Inspection

## APA final judgements 2005: Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council

Areas for judgement	Final judgements <sup>1</sup>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	<b>2</b>
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	<b>3</b>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	<b>2</b>
The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people	<b>3</b>

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### 1

Grade	Service descriptors	Capacity to improve descriptors
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Very good
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good/promising
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate