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Making Social Care  
Better for People



Mrs Susan Richardson  
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**1 December 2005**

Dear Mrs Richardson

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on the 4 July 2005 to assess the performance of the education and social care services within your council. 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 generally good, with the exception of the rate of reduction in teenage pregnancies. Healthy lifestyles are promoted through partnership between key services; for example, participation in sport is satisfactory overall and is a strength in primary schools. There are good initiatives in primary and secondary schools to promote the drinking of water. The proportion of schools participating in the National Healthy Schools Standards is high compared with the national average. 100% of schools have at least one standard accredited of the National Healthy Schools Standard.

However, the incidence of teenage pregnancy has declined very slowly since 1998 from a very high baseline and remains much higher than the national figures. The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy has been reviewed by the council with a view to more effective implementation. The Teenage Pregnancy Unit at the DfES reported in June 2005 that, 'the overall progress of the local strategy and its associated delivery action plans shows promising prospects...St Helen's demonstrates good progress over the last year, there is a clear agency approach to tackling the problems they face'. The council now needs to monitor the success of this strategy over the next one to three years to ensure that it is successful in terms of achieving the required outcomes, and be prepared to undertake a more radical review if this is not the case.

The health needs of looked after children are met effectively with 90% of this group having had their health needs assessed during the year; this performance exceeds that of similar councils. Looked after children's mental health needs have been identified as an area of priority by the council and specific targeted posts have been recruited to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team (CAMHS) in this respect. In addition, looked after children's health needs are monitored monthly by a multi-agency Health Strategy Group.

The actions taken to promote the mental health of children and young people are effective. Through the development of multi-disciplinary teams, the council and its partners have developed well-integrated support models for children and young people with mental health difficulties, including the most vulnerable. The council and the Primary Care Trust (PCT) recognise that the CAMHS higher level activity delivered through the 5 Boroughs Trust team has the capacity to improve further, and work is currently underway to address this. The CAMHS team has commenced 100% of assessments in the stated timescales following referral from the Youth Offending Team.

## **Staying safe**

The majority of outcomes are demonstrating very good performance by the council, and it is aware of the weaknesses that remain. Children and young people are provided with the safe environment to which they are entitled. Overall, the council's policies show good recognition of what constitutes a safe environment and their implementation is monitored consistently and rigorously.

Child protection is an area of strength and the council has made good progress in relation to the formation of the Local Safeguarding Board. The children in need procedures underpin the child protection procedures. Their implementation has resulted in a decrease in the overall numbers of children on the child protection register with a decreasing number of new registrations being the major contributory factor, although the figure remains acceptable. All cases on the child protection register are now reviewed within timescale, an improvement on the situation twelve months ago. The council has clear referral systems; families and children at risk are identified early within the context of underpinning children in need procedures and the quality and range of preventative support is good. However, as the children in need processes were only introduced at the beginning of the year, they have not yet been subject to audit. This is planned as part of the monitoring and review process. The council has seen reducing numbers of referrals with high levels of initial assessments completed in a timely fashion, which would indicate that referrals are appropriate in the first instance. There is also a very low rate of re-referrals which indicates closure of cases is appropriately undertaken. However, the council has reported a significant decrease in the rate of core assessments that have been completed. This would be of concern, but it is reportedly due to problems with data accuracy. The integrity of the data will need to be verified in the coming year.

The council has reported that there has been a shortage of foster carers, and this has reflected in poor performance in terms of family placements for looked after children, but particularly for children under 10 where a significant proportion have been placed to live with foster carers out of borough. There has been a significant increase in the percentage of looked after children living with their parents, and whilst this can be considered to be positive, the figure is now quite high. A strategy is needed to ensure that care orders that are no longer needed are promptly rescinded. The council has reported issues around accessing court time in order to progress these cases and rescind care orders where appropriate. The proportion of residential care for looked after children remains higher than that of similar councils although the reduction has been achieved at a steady pace. There has, however, been a sustained performance in the support for looked after children; all children in this category have had an assigned social worker since 2001. Protocols have been established between education and social services in supporting looked after children and those with disabilities and special educational needs. There is a clear process within the council for collating, monitoring and reviewing information from Criminal Record Bureau checks. Responses to serious case reviews are monitored regularly by senior managers and elected members.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

The majority of outcomes in this area are good and the authority's performance is improving. Early years provision is generally good and there was a lower than average percentage of visits with actions following inspections for all early years providers. The quality of teaching was very good or good in all inspections. Early years provision is identified by the council as one of ten key priorities in its Foundation Children and Young People's Plan.

Attainment at Key Stage 1 has been consistently in line with or above national and statistical neighbour averages for a number of years; Key Stage 2 results have been consistently above both of these averages. Value added measures, however, are below average. The council has recognised the need to raise attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4 and the need to improve value added measures between Key Stages 2 and 3 and GCSE and equivalents. Raising attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4 is a key priority in the Foundation Children and Young People's Plan.

The proportion of looked after children gaining one or more GCSE passes is higher than the national average and similar councils. However, no looked after children gained five A\* to C grades at GCSE or equivalent and this performance is very poor. Poor attendance of looked after children remains a concern and the council will need to address this issue over the next twelve months in order to improve outcomes for this very vulnerable group. Despite their current strategies, attendance levels of looked after children remain unacceptable.

Authorised absence rates in both primary and secondary schools are in line with statistical neighbours and national figures. Unauthorised absence in primary schools has declined since 2001. In secondary schools the picture is more varied. Improving attendance has been identified as one of the top ten priorities in the Foundation Children and Young People Plan. The council has taken positive action to deal with the number of surplus places both in primary and secondary school settings. A planned programme of school closures is currently underway.

The percentage of schools requiring special measures since 1993 is slightly above statistical neighbours, but below the national figures. The proportion of schools identified as having serious weaknesses since 1994 is below statistical neighbours and national figures. No school has been judged by Ofsted to be under achieving since 2000. In the eleven primary schools inspected between 2003 and 2004, leadership and management was judged to be satisfactory or better in all cases. However, three secondary schools were inspected in the same period and in two cases leadership and management were judged to be unsatisfactory. The council has improved the monitoring and provision of support.

Protocols with the health service are improving and the council has had to work hard to overcome delays in the completion of assessments for statements of special educational need. A very low proportion of children and young people are educated other than at school. Permanent exclusions in both the primary and secondary phases are significantly lower than those found nationally and in similar authorities.

### **Making a positive contribution**

Outcomes in this area are generally good, but there are some areas for improvement. The Youth Offending Service is consistently ranked in the top 20 in the Youth Justice Board National League Tables. It is cohesive and effective, and benefits from co-location and integration with key partners.

However, the rate of youth crime overall has increased between October 2003 and September 2004 and is above the national average, whilst rates of re-offending are also higher than the national average (based on 2001 cohort). The council has a wide range of projects to combat first time offending and re-offending, but their impact has not been analysed. The rate of final warnings and convictions of looked after children have fallen slightly and the council has maintained acceptable performance.

The council has reported very high levels (95%) of looked after children who contributed their opinions at reviews and this represents good performance. The council also report that 100% of reviews of looked after children have been completed within statutory timescales. The council has put strategies in place to help children and young people with disabilities, special education needs and looked after children to manage the transition between specific phases in their lives. There is no evidence as to the effectiveness of the transition services and this is an area that the council should

now investigate. The council has established a number of fora to elicit the views of children and young people. There is no adequate system for eliciting the views of very young children. It is unclear, with the exception of the work undertaken in respect of the Children's Fund, how the views of children and young people influence policy or how elected members take account of them, as the majority of consultation with children and young people has been at an operational level rather than at a strategic level.

The Youth Service budget per head of population and as a percentage of the overall education budget is significantly below that of statistical neighbours. However, there is an impressive youth engagement strategy involving a broad range of different agencies and organisations. The Youth Council manages the process of elections for the UK Youth Parliament. There is a high level of participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award and the Millennium Volunteer Awards and this includes all special schools. The council has an Ofsted licence for citizenship training and nine of the eleven secondary schools have taken up this training.

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

Outcomes in this area are good overall. There has been a significant increase in the percentage of care leavers in employment, training and education in the past year. The council is aware of the destination of all sixteen year olds. In 2004, 93% of school leavers progressed into employment, training or education and this compares well with 90.5% achieved across Greater Merseyside. The numbers of young people leaving school who are not in education, training or employment is low at 6.5%, in comparison with a partnership average of 7.9%. Significant progress has been made in this area, although the council still considers that much more can be done to remove the barriers to participation in learning or employment and this is reflected in the Foundation Children's and Young People's Plan. There is good collaborative work involving the learning partnership and the local Learning Skills Council in planning and developing provision for 14 to 19 year olds across the borough. Schools are organised into clusters to encourage collaboration. Three out of the five schools with sixth forms perform within the top performing groups of Merseyside providers. The average point scores in GCSE examination results is above the national average.

The council has demonstrated good performance in respect of the take up of direct payments. Thirty children and young people or their carers receive direct payments. Two of these are using the payments to support their employment; the remaining twenty-eight are using them to support their leisure and learning activities.

## Summary

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<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>CAMHS delivered by the council and its partners</li> <li>the health of looked after children.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reduction in teenage pregnancy.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>providing children and young people with a safe environment</li> <li>child protection procedures</li> <li>support for looked after children.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased local provision of foster carers (particularly for under 10s)</li> <li>low numbers of core assessments.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>low levels of exclusion</li> <li>performance at Key Stages I and 2</li> <li>the proportion of schools identified as having serious weaknesses since 1994 is below statistical neighbours and the national figures.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4</li> <li>attendance rates (including looked after children)</li> <li>value added key stages 2/3 and GCSE/equivalents</li> <li>attainment of looked after children.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Youth Offending Service</li> <li>looked after children contributing to reviews.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increasing the range of consultation with children, young people and very young children in terms of influencing policies.</li> <li>increases in re-offending rates.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>good collaboration with learning partnership and LSC in delivering 14 - 19 education and training.</li> <li>care leavers in Employment, Training and Education</li> <li>take up of direct payments.</li> </ul>	

## Service management

The council has collaborated closely with relevant partners in analysing needs and setting priorities for improvement. Together they have produced an initial Foundation Children and Young People's Plan one year ahead of the statutory requirement. This plan identifies ten priorities linked to success criteria and monitoring procedures. However, there is insufficient focus on outcomes thus making it difficult to judge

impact and to establish the extent to which strategies and policies provide value for money. The document states that the council will now consult more widely with parents, carers, children and young people in order to take into account their views when establishing priorities for development.

The quality of the self-assessment was poor in some respects. For example, it was difficult to identify weaknesses from the self-assessment and subsequent action plans to address those weaknesses. There was insufficient attention given to outcomes throughout the document. It is recognised that this is within the context of the first year of a revised methodology.

The council has developed strategies to increase collaborative work both internally and externally across a range of agencies and there are sound examples of services beginning to work together. An example is the integration of health and social care in terms of services for children with disabilities.

There are some issues to address in respect of social care data collection which have had an adverse impact upon the performance indicators.

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

### **Being healthy**

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

- is the teenage pregnancy strategy being successfully implemented?

### **Staying safe**

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

*Agencies collaborate to safeguard children according to the requirements of current government guidance:*

- how is the system working between the Children In Need and the Child Protection processes?

### **Enjoying and achieving**

*Action is taken to ensure that educational provision 5-16 is of good quality:*

- attainment at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

*All children and young people can access a range of recreational and voluntary learning provision:*

- the quality and range of youth service provision.

### **Making a positive contribution**

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

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

- action taken to prevent re-offending
- the range of activities and support to assist children and young people in leading law abiding and constructive lives.

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

- the support for children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities.

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

- consideration of the effectiveness of support at times of significant transition.

### **Final judgements**

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

Yours sincerely



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Office for Standards in Education



**JONATHAN PHILLIPS**  
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Methods  
Commission for Social Care Inspection

## APA final judgements 2005: St Helens 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>3</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>3</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