



Making Social Care  
Better for People



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**01 November 2006**

Dear Mr Rigby

**2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN STOKE-ON-TRENT CITY COUNCIL**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 Annual Performance Assessment process for your local 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.

**Summary**

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

1

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

The Joint Area Review (JAR) in September 2005 found that the contribution of Stoke-on-Trent City Council's children's services in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people in Stoke-on-Trent was adequate. However, the contribution of the local authority's social care services was judged as inadequate. This led to Stoke-on-Trent being judged as a zero star council in relation to its children's social care services.

The current annual performance assessment for 2005-06 has found that overall Stoke-on-Trent City Council delivers inadequate services for children. Whilst the education of children and young people remains adequate there is a decline in some aspects of schools' performance. However there are serious concerns with outstanding issues regarding safeguarding arrangements, assessment and care management and the lack of timely responses to requirements arising from regulatory inspections. A social care improvement plan, which forms part of the JAR action plan, is now in place but these plans do not clearly prioritise the issues and some of the timescales have already slipped. The scale of improvement needed makes prioritisation essential. The pace of improvement and change has been too slow in some areas and many of the recommendations from the JAR have not been fully addressed. The council continues to have difficulties with capacity which it has failed to sufficiently address.

The council has produced a Children and Young People's Plan, which satisfactorily sets out the vision together with identified strengths and areas for development.

## **Being healthy**

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is adequate.

Recommendation for immediate action emerging from the JAR:

Improve mental health services for children and young people, in particular address appropriate access routes, threshold and resources for service provision quickly.

Progress in addressing the recommendation from the JAR has been adequate. Time has been spent on creating a robust understanding of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and clear criteria for referrals to this service. The CAMHS strategy group has agreed that the service is not for emotional, behavioural and anti-social behaviours. They are planning to commission a specialist service to respond to these needs that will focus on younger children, aiming to reduce mental health issues in teenage years. There is clear progress on developing a comprehensive service with partners and whilst there have been difficulties with capacity these have now been addressed. However, the council needs to ensure the prompt delivery of these plans. There is a service for looked after children, the 'Yellow House', which has been developed further and has strong education input. The Family Courts are interested in how this service can support their work and there is interest from independent sector children's homes in accessing the service. Teenage conception rates have increased since 2003 and are significantly above comparators and the progress to meet the 2010 national target has slowed and presents a challenge for the council. Additional support and plans include training for staff in

education and social care in sex and relationship education and the council is confident that these arrangements will help to ensure the position will improve. Performance against the health indicator for looked after children continues to be good, but this year's performance has seen a decline. The council believes this is because of the more robust collection of its data. Since April 2006 school nurses take a lead role in the health of looked after children. The council is confident that access to mainstream health for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate but recognises that the arrangements for children with complex needs to access appropriate specialist services is improving at a slower rate. They agree that timescales need to be improved and robust partnership working needs to be developed further.

## Staying Safe

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improve outcomes in this area is inadequate.

The JAR highlighted a number of recommendations for immediate action and, in addition, a full list of 20 specific actions that the council needs to take to achieve the recommendations were listed in an annex to the report. Only the main recommendations are given below, the actions are referred to in the text.

The council and its partners must improve the level of care provided to children and young people and:

- implement fully the recommendations from the Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié (VCI) and the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) inspection into safeguarding arrangements, as well as responding to the safeguarding concerns identified in this report
- address the weaknesses in capacity within children's social care services at all levels
- improve the level of accountability and performance management arrangements
- strengthen the safeguarding arrangements for the most vulnerable children and young people including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are currently living in environments likely to be unsafe and unstable
- ensure all looked after children have an allocated social worker
- ensure that the Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC), and subsequently the Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LCSB), fulfils its full interagency responsibilities effectively.
- for full details of actions recommended see annex B.

The council has failed to make satisfactory progress with the issues of concern identified in the JAR about arrangements for safeguarding. There has been a lack of leadership and expertise in children's services to deliver on the recommendations from the JAR. Since the JAR there have been capacity problems at management levels that have resulted in a lack of strategic management to implement and take forward the improvements.

The transition from the ACPC to a LCSB was delayed from December 2005 until March 2006 because policies were not satisfactory. The LCSB was established in March 2006.

However this is still not operating in a robust way. Whilst partner agencies are committed to this, there is no collective shared understanding or clear expectations of agencies and accountability to the board. Performance against the indicators in relation to the child protection register shows a variable picture relating to high numbers of referrals, low numbers of children from black and minority ethnic groups and low numbers on the register. There is also concern about the categories of children on the register and the very low number in the category of physical and sexual abuse. The council intends to audit all children placed on the register and to review the category and legal status of each child. There are plans to provide specialised training for staff through the LSCB for front line workers across all agencies.

Some progress has been made with the in-house children's homes. One home has been temporarily closed following an inspection by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). Investment has been made in the children's homes to improve the environment and increase the skills of managers and staff. Work has been done to reduce bullying and there is a programme of staff training. The council has recently opened two small children's homes. These are operating to a good standard. The function of existing in-house homes is being reviewed as part of a residential strategy, which will link to wider strategies to refocus the field social work teams to create a preventative model.

Concerns still remain about the fostering service. The council has recently recruited a consultant who will take a lead role in responding promptly to the requirements arising from inspections and make overall improvements to the service.

Progress since the JAR on practice around initial and core assessments is unsatisfactory. Performance against the assessment indicators is inadequate and is low against comparators. The timeliness of reviews for looked after children shows very low performance. The council accepts this performance is not satisfactory and has taken appropriate steps to implement a new eligibility framework across partner agencies. However, there is still concern regarding the threshold for risks and access into the safeguarding unit to initiate child protection investigations. The number of looked after children has increased, with high numbers of children placed out of city. This has led to significant budget pressures and because of weaknesses in placement arrangements there is concern over the appropriateness of some placements. All of the children on the child protection register have an allocated qualified social worker but, because of a lack of capacity, the council has not been able to allocate social workers to all looked after children.

The council accepts that time has been lost in implementing the JAR recommendations and that progress has been inadequate. There is also a recognition from the management team that this has to be urgently addressed. A lot of planning work has taken place but this has not yet impacted sufficiently on outcomes for safeguarding children.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is adequate with areas of significant concern. This outcome was previously judged as good. The JAR made one recommendation in relation to this outcome for action within the next six months:

Improve the outcomes for pupils in primary schools and for all looked after children.

There was a decline in standards in 2005, but there was some progress in improving the outcomes for primary pupils in primary schools but unsatisfactory progress for looked after children. The local authority has put in place robust systems to address the decline in reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1 and the weaknesses in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2. When compared with similar authorities the improvements are insufficient to prevent the gap widening further.

A range of strategies has been developed to address the improvements needed in Key Stage 1, for example, the Early Reading Development Pilot and Stoke Speaks Out. These have enabled schools to provide appropriately targeted pupil level support, together with clear intervention strategies for schools. Early indications from the council show that they have begun to successfully improve the outcomes for primary pupils.

During 2005, three secondary schools went into special measures and one secondary school was given a notice to improve, three primary schools were also put into special measures. This is double the national average. The authority now accurately monitors the quality of education provided by its schools. This has enabled the local authority to identify schools causing concern and to put in place intervention packages to address these issues. Achievement at Key Stage 4 is now in line with statistical neighbours and no schools are below floor targets. The variable progress of mixed heritage pupils has been identified and a three-year research project has been introduced to improve their progress. Early indications are that this is beginning to have a positive impact. Attendance remains an issue, which the authority local authority is working hard to improve. Both fixed and long term exclusions in primary schools are in line with national figures. Secondary schools have lower permanent exclusions than nationally, fixed term exclusions are broadly in line. Successful strategies have been developed by the local authority that have had a positive impact. However insufficient steps have been taken to improve the attendance of looked after children in children's homes.

The progress of children and young people with learning needs and/or disabilities continues to be a strength. The local authority has worked hard to ensure that early identification of needs and support is provided. It is developing a city wide database of pupils' attainment which are moderated to ensure that schools have robust evidence of pupil progress.

### **Making a positive contribution**

The JAR judged that the contribution the council's services for children and young people made to improving outcomes in this area is good. The JAR made no recommendations in relation to this outcome so the judgement is carried forward. Recent information and the authority's self assessment show that the involvement of young people in decision making has been made more routine and systematic. The views of looked after children and those with learning needs and/or disabilities are actively encouraged through their election to the Changes panel. All the members of the panel are linked with an adult and are trained to seek the views of all the young people they represent. Two members from the Changes panel now sit on the city wide youth forum.

## **Achieving economic well-being**

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is adequate. The JAR made no recommendations in relation to this outcome. Good progress has been made in improving vocational and work based learning opportunities in secondary schools. All secondary schools are part of cluster groups, which has strengthened the provision of courses for 14-16 year olds. A main focus is to develop new and interesting courses to reduce the numbers of young people who currently are not in employment, training or education. The local authority has identified the barriers that prevent young people remaining in colleges post-17, and has taken steps to address them. However, performance against the indicators for young people in education, employment or training (EET) shows that the proportion of care leavers in EET has declined in 2005-06. Looked after children are only half as likely to be in EET when compared to all young people. In addition the destinations of almost half of care leavers are not known compared with 25% nationally. In response to this data the local authority now effectively tracks the progress and attainment of looked after children and protocols have been established with the Leaving Care Team and Connexions to reduce the numbers of looked after children who are not in employment, education and training (NEET). Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities continue to be effectively supported when they leave school through the joint Approaches group, which meets to plan post-16 provision across Staffordshire.

## **The council's management of its services for children and young people, including its capacity to improve them further**

The JAR recommended three main actions for immediate action:

- implement fully the recommendations from the Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié (VCI) and the SSI inspection into safeguarding, as well as responding to the safeguarding concerns identified in the report
- address the weakness in capacity within children's social care services at all levels
- improve the level of accountability and performance management arrangements.

The council has made insufficient progress in implementing these actions. With the appointment of an interim Council Manager in March 2006, corporate support for the Director of Children's Services has increased. Children's social care was immediately prioritised, with the recruitment of two experienced consultants and two additional interim assistant directors to increase the strategic capacity of the children's services. The most recent assistant director was appointed in early July, with responsibility for social care, following the resignation of the previous post holder.

A performance monitoring board was established, chaired by the council manager, to oversee the implementation of the JAR recommendations. The elected Mayor and members are now involved. However no Corporate Parenting group has yet been established.

The council has been very slow to improve social work capacity, but in January under the leadership of the Director of Children's Services, a new workforce package was introduced.

However difficulties remain in attracting qualified staff, including team managers. The council recognises that this is fundamental in order for new practices to become embedded and sustain improvements.

The council has prioritised safeguarding and the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care will be the lead officer.

Insufficient capacity at senior level has led to an inability to improve the service in a number of areas, in particular arrangements for safeguarding, performance management, commissioning and the social care improvement plan. In view of this, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and CSCI have determined that an external support package is to be put in place. This has been agreed with the council and arrangements to implement it are underway. This work will be monitored by a board with representation from DfES, CSCI and Government Office in the West Midlands.

The council is developing an appropriate range of plans and has established a number of boards and groups to facilitate the aims of the Children and Young People plan. It is essential that these are well coordinated and a programme of implementation carried out with some urgency. The council recognise the need to work with partners at strategic and operational levels. A better and shared understanding of the improvement agenda is necessary in order for this to be successful.

The council has significantly increased the budget for children's social care. In order to deliver on the social care improvement agenda the council needs to maintain the 'invest to save policy'. Work must be continued on the budget pressures associated with the out of city placements, high residential costs and to develop robust commissioning to ensure best value.

We confirm that the children's services grade will provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) and will be published to the Audit Commission. The social care judgement is for CSCI information only.

Yours sincerely



**FLO HADLEY**

Divisional Manager  
Office for Standards in Education



**JONATHAN PHILLIPS**

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

## **Annex B: Full Recommendations from the JAR for Immediate Action in children's social care**

1. The legal requirements of children's social care and satisfactory baseline social care practice must be met and fully embedded as a priority before the other responsibilities of the Every Child Matters agenda.

2. To achieve this, the following key children's social care management actions are recommended:

- provide a satisfactory and consistent level of managerial support to social care staff and ensure the assistant director and the management team are able to focus on key priorities
- increase the number of permanent qualified social workers and reduce the current dependence on temporary staff
- identify and properly invest in the training and development needs of social care staff
- establish, implement and promote clearly the thresholds for risk and referral and access to social care services
- reduce the number of looked after children and dependence on out-of-city placements for them
- address promptly and fully the substantial areas of weakness in quality standards identified in recent regulatory inspections of fostering, adoption and residential care
- ensure all looked after children have a competent and suitably qualified worker
- review and strengthen immediately the capacity to effectively safeguard and provide satisfactory care and support for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- put in place satisfactory practice around assessment, planning and review for all children in need and those looked after, and effectively quality assure this as part of performance management
- strengthen arrangements to identify, monitor and support private foster carers and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children so that they comply with the Children Act 2004.

3. The council should ensure that the quality of services to children and young people is enabled by clarifying:

- the governance arrangements for the CYPSP board
- the governance arrangements for the LCSB
- the support arrangements for the lead member for children's services
- the connective and governance arrangements of the CYPSP and the LCSB with the Local Strategic Partnership and local area planning structures.

4. The ACPC and subsequently the LCSB should ensure that:

- clear and effective leadership is provided to address each of the

concerns raised in this report under 'Staying safe'

- all the outstanding recommendations from VCI and the SSI inspection of January 2003 are implemented and their effectiveness monitored
- sufficient capacity and resources are available to provide satisfactory levels of multi-agency training and coordination
- the ACPC conference and Review Service should be reviewed and strengthened to improve and expand the quality assurance of multi-agency safeguarding practice, including services to children not on the child protection register
- all children on the child protection register have an active qualified social worker at all times.