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Making Social Care
Better for People



Ms Therese Gillespie
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1 December 2005

Dear Ms Gillespie

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 6 July 2005 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 good overall. The rate of teenage conception is decreasing and positive action is taken to promote drug awareness. Children and young people participate well in sport and there is a successful Healthy Schools programme. Outcomes relating to the health of looked after children are also good: performance remains in the top band nationally and middle band for the comparator group. Their health is promoted by a dedicated team, which includes nurses and will include a child psychologist when the current recruitment is completed. Effective structures are in place to identify and plan for the needs of individual disabled children. However, the council also recognises the need to review overall provision in this area and to develop a joint commissioning strategy.

Current Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provision does not consistently meet children's needs and is identified as a priority for improvement. The council and its partners have developed a new strategy which intends to re-organise the service under the sole management of the primary care trust to ensure improved access and to recruit suitable professionals. Several new appointments have been made and the service is expected to develop rapidly over the coming year.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are good overall. Schools ensure children and young people have safe environments and recent inspections show many schools are effective in ensuring children are free from bullying. The Children's Safeguarding forum regularly monitors incidents of racism, harassment and bullying.

There is a low number of children on the child protection register and a reduced rate of registration this year. Family group conferencing has resulted in a reduction in child protection conferences. All children on the register have a social worker. While the percentage of reviews conducted this year has improved, this performance is still below average in the comparator group. However, as there are small numbers of children involved, this indicator has been affected by the particular circumstances of a large family moving into another area. Agencies collaborate well together to safeguard children and systems for referral and monitoring operate effectively. The authority is leading on the development of consistent child protection processes across the region. There are good arrangements to identify schools where child protection training is not up to date and clear follow-up procedures. There are systems that ensure schools are challenged when they do not comply with child protection procedures. A single database is held by the education service of all young people up to the age of 18 years and a new tracking system is in place to identify children who have left schools. This will form the basis for the information sharing and assessment index in the future.

The indicator showing referrals of children in need has reduced substantially this year. The council reports this is due to system changes as local data show that overall numbers of contacts have increased. Service requests have been streamlined and formalised through multi-agency processes. Assessment data show a reduction in the number of core assessments undertaken and the percentage of initial assessments started in seven working days. These have been affected by an emphasis on early referrals to other agencies and an increased expectation that all agencies take responsibility for seeking the best options to support children. However, staff turnover and vacancies, which have been higher this year, have had a negative impact.

The stability of placements for looked after children is good and all children under ten years of age are in family settings. The situation for older children is more complex. Although this year has shown a slight improvement in the numbers of children looked after for four or more years who are in foster placements, this is still an area for further improvement. Overall adoption figures remain low against the comparator group, however there has been a slight increase in the number of looked after children placed for adoption. Although these indicators are affected by the low numbers of children involved and the relatively high age of the children becoming looked after, the development of a commissioning strategy, the re-modelled foster care service and the treatment foster care project are all anticipated to increase the range of placements and improve outcomes in this area.

A high number of children with disabilities are placed out of the area. There is close monitoring of these arrangements and care pathways are tracked. A comprehensive review of the disabled children's strategy has been designed to take account of the full range of services involved in supporting them.

The largest ethnic minority group in the area is the traveller community and a recent serious case review has highlighted the need to work more closely with this group and develop more effective partnerships to ensure protection.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good overall. However, after 4 years of improvement, standards at Key Stage 4 fell below the national average in 2004. Provision in early years is generally of high quality and supports children well in achieving early learning goals. The council is developing more robust planning processes to respond to the changing demography of young families in the area.

Children and young people attend school regularly and there are effective strategies to support individuals and schools where attendance difficulties are identified. Exclusion rates in primary schools are below the national average, however, there has been an up-turn in permanent exclusions from secondary schools in the last 12 months. Good collaboration between schools and the council ensures that those who are excluded are re-instated promptly or receive appropriate alternative provision. At present, many children and young people with acute behaviour difficulties are educated out of the authority. The council is taking steps to provide dedicated support to improve the educational outcomes of this vulnerable group. South Gloucestershire has a slightly higher proportion of statements of special education need than the national average, although there was a significant reduction in new assessments started in 2004/5. Children and young people with special educational needs perform well compared to the national picture. A review of provision, including special schools, is currently underway.

Achievement in primary schools is good overall and compares very favourably with national averages. Key Stage 1 results are particularly good in writing and reading. Children also perform well at Key Stage 2. Standards at Key Stage 3 are more in line with statistical neighbours. A significant minority of young people make insufficient progress to Key Stage 4. Achievement in GCSE results fell sharply in 2004 in comparison with similarly authorities. This is a priority improvement area for the education service, alongside the difference in performance between boys and girls. The proportion of looked after children achieving one GCSE is high, but few gain 5 or more A* - C grades. Education and other staff continue to work closely with this group and their carers to raise aspirations. There is a strong commitment to promoting race equality and raising the achievement of specific groups, including traveller children and those with special education needs.

Compared to similar authorities, there are relatively low numbers of unsatisfactory schools and also a relatively low proportion of good and very good schools in both the primary and secondary phase. There are clear priorities set for improving education outcomes and effective strategies in place to achieve them. The council adopts a rigorous approach to challenging and supporting schools which are not performing as well as they should. The integration of the school improvement team and the inclusion service has already had a positive impact. Lessons learned from joint work are being applied elsewhere. Innovative residencies which bring together specialist advisors and consultants are beginning to have a positive effect on the leadership and management of targeted secondary schools. The council makes good use of data to monitor progress and performance.

Many children and young people benefit from positive enrichment opportunities in school and through their participation in leisure-time activities provided by the youth service and the voluntary sector.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. Effective partnerships, such as the post-16 partnership for children at risk of homelessness or unemployment, support children and young people in managing change in their lives, particularly at key points of transition. A high proportion of looked after children contribute to their statutory reviews and the council has a lead officer to support their participation in decision-making. A dedicated care leavers' team works with the housing department to help young people move into independent accommodation. The council recognises the particular challenges faced by the most vulnerable groups: for example, a multi agency transition panel for young people with learning difficulties brings together key partners. Young people have been able to shape the development of a new short break and sitting service.

Offending and re-offending rates are low compared to national averages. Programmes which aim to address anti-social behaviour and to provide diversionary activities, for example in school holidays, have successfully engaged many young people considered at risk. However, there has still been a slight increase in offending by looked after children in the last 12 months and this remains an area for improvement.

Many children and young people make a positive contribution through a wide range of activities and opportunities in their local community. Schools and youth councils enable children and young people to participate in decision making. At present there is insufficient co-ordination of these and other initiatives across the area to maximise the potential of young people's involvement. This is recognised by senior managers as a priority for improvement. In addition, further work is required to ensure the views of children and young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are fully represented. The recent audit of participation work undertaken in partnership with Connexions and the council's commitment to the 'Hear by Right' standards provide a sound basis for further development.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory overall. There is a good strategy for 14-19 education and training, and the council provides effective leadership in partnership with the LSC. All key stakeholders have agreed a comprehensive action plan to address areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection of 14 – 19 provision. An increasing proportion of 16 – 19 year olds progresses into further education and training. The number of young people outside of employment, education and training is low. Overall, the quality of education provided for 14 – 19 year olds is satisfactory. Overall attainment post 16 in schools is just below the national average. Attainment is well above national averages in schools with large sixth forms, but below in the remaining schools. With its key partners, the council is developing more robust processes to ensure greater consistency in the quality of provision across the area as a whole. Young people’s access to impartial information, advice and guidance to help them make choices is identified as a key priority. At local level, good partnership arrangements are increasing the breadth of courses available; however, in some areas, young people who wish to follow vocational programmes have relatively few options. The 14-19 strategy and post action plan are addressing this.

Compared to the national picture, a high proportion of young people with disabilities are also positively engaged in education, employment or training. The take-up of direct payments is generally low and work done to raise awareness and promote their use by young people and their carers has not yet had a discernable impact. The corporate parenting strategy usefully includes provision of work experience inside and outside the council and all looked after young people have pathway plans to support their transition.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decreasing rate of teenage conceptions • food participation in sport and effective health promotion through the Healthy Schools programme • dedicated health professionals for looked after children. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop the CAMHS service • integrate services for disabled children.

<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • schools provide good support for the care and welfare of children • multi-agency systems for referral and monitoring operate well • family group conferencing has resulted in a reduction in child protection conferences • stability of placements of looked after children is good • all looked after children under 10 are in family settings. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase the number foster and adoptive placements, in line with national priorities • develop a commissioning strategy • ensure appropriate levels of core assessment are completed • safeguard traveller children and ensure preventative strategies take account of diverse needs.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • achievement in early years and primary phase is good • effective strategies support good attendance • prompt re-integration following exclusion • positive enrichment opportunities and recreational provision • identification of and work with schools causing concern. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve achievement at GCSE, particularly of boys • address the recent rise in exclusion from secondary schools • raise the educational aspirations and achievement of looked after children.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support for vulnerable groups at transition points in their lives • good involvement of children and young people in wide range of decision making • low offending rates. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop greater coherence between participation activities and consultation events • ensure the views of children and young people from minority groups are represented.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing participation in further education and training at 16 • good partnerships at local level leading to more curriculum options • comprehensive action plan and agreed priorities for improvement • effective leadership provided through the 14 – 19 strategy. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve educational outcomes post 16 and better support groups at risk of under-achieving • with partners, continue to develop the range of opportunities for 16 – 19 year olds and the provision of information, advice and guidance • increase the use of direct payments.

Service management

South Gloucestershire has a focussed new department for children and young people with a strong leadership team and an increasing capacity to respond to national priorities. The authority has a collaborative and inclusive approach to the planning and development of strategies. A draft children and young people's plan is being updated following extensive consultation. There are good examples of service users influencing the development of policy and practice.

The council makes effective use of national and local data to analyse need and inform priorities. It has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for development and is proactive in tackling underperformance and addressing weaknesses. There is a well-developed performance management system in the department, which translates into team and individual targets at operational level. The council is seeking to develop coherent management information systems across partners and all departments, in line with national priorities and recognises the challenges faced.

Effective partnership work with a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies is increasing the range of services to support children and young people. Multi-agency collaboration is now starting to show dividends. The council rightly identifies the need for common processes to review and evaluate the work.

The council has gained Beacon status for workforce development and high quality social care training. A new recruitment and retention strategy has responded appropriately to the high turnover in social work staff, job descriptions have been reviewed and new posts created for assistant team managers and senior practitioners.

There are clear strategies in place to manage the complexities of the budget which now represents approximately 70% of council spending. The development of a commissioning strategy is recognised as important to ensure improvement in the range of placement options and to improve overall value for money. The council has good capacity to further improve its services for children and young people.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

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

- the development of a joint commissioning strategy for disabled children.

Action is taken to promote children and young people's mental health:

- the development of the CAMHS service.

Staying safe

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

- new systems of interagency working and the development of preventative strategies have resulted in changing assessment patterns and a reduction in child protection conferences - the impact of these new systems on outcomes for children and families.

Enjoying and achieving

Action is taken to ensure that education provision 5 – 16 is of good quality:

- the effectiveness of strategies to improve outcomes at GCSE and to raise standards in schools which are under performing.

Making a positive contribution

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

- the overall coherence of participation work across the council and its partners and inclusion of the views of children and young people from black and minority ethnic groups.

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:

- progress made in the implementation of the post Ofsted action plan and, in particular, the impact on outcomes for young people aged 16 – 19.

Final judgements

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

Yours sincerely



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Divisional Manager
Office for Standards in Education



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

APA final judgements 2005: South Gloucestershire Council

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

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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