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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Mr Webb

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN STOCKPORT METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment process for your local authority. The judgements reflect the outcomes of the joint area review (JAR) and the updated self-assessment provided by the 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.

Summary

| Areas for judgement | Grade awarded ¹ |
|---|----------------------------|
| 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 <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people | 3 |
| The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes 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 | 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 |

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council delivers above minimum requirements for children and young people. All of the services can demonstrate how they are improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people. In the updated self-assessment the council identifies effectively where it has begun to address the recommendations from the recent JAR. Several of the recommendations related to involving young people more in the process of consultation, decision-making and feedback. In addition the council was required to ensure that more effective systems were in place for measuring and monitoring outcomes. The council has made some good progress in addressing these recommendations. A range of strategic plans have been produced or finalised since the JAR. These include a participation strategy, a 14–19 concordat, and a finalised Children and Young People's Plan. Some good progress has been made in promoting partnership working. There has been some evidence of improved performance. For example, work with looked after children has benefited from carefully targeted action and this has led to improved outcomes in health, adoptions and entries for public examinations. The authority's capacity to improve its services further is good.

Being healthy

The council makes a good contribution towards improving the health of children and young people and has continued to make good progress since the JAR. Teenage pregnancy rates amongst 15–17 years olds have dropped in 2004/05 to 36.8, which is below comparators and England averages. Sexual health advice and information is available in a range of settings. A sex and relationship education curriculum has been developed and is delivered in 80% of both primary and secondary schools.

The council is well positioned to deliver the healthy schools programme targets and 96% of all schools are signed up to the scheme. In summer 2006 all Year 6 pupils will be weighed and measured by school nurses to establish baseline figures as part of the council's obesity strategy. A number of schools have developed a school travel plan to promote walking and cycling to school. During the last 12 months, 44 looked after children received leisure keys allowing them free access to various recreational opportunities.

The health assessments of looked after children are undertaken within statutory timescales and are all screened to ensure their emotional and mental health needs are met.

The council has continued to make progress in promoting the mental health of children. Protocols and plans are in place for 16 and 17 year olds who require Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services relevant to their age. Twenty-four hour cover is available to meet urgent mental health needs of children. Partnership working protocols and plans are in place but not yet fully implemented for children and young people with a learning disability and complex, persistent and severe behavioural needs. The council acknowledges that this remains an area for improvement in the coming year.

Staying safe

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people makes to promoting and securing the safety of children and young people is good. The JAR made no recommendations in relation to this outcome.

Children and young people are well informed about key risks to their safety and generally know how to deal with them. Victim support workers are based within the Youth Offending Team to provide support for young people who have been the victims of crime, bullying or harassment. Preventative strategies are underpinned by multi-agency family support to ensure that there is a coordinated approach to early intervention to prevent family breakdown.

There is an effective recruitment strategy for foster carers. The number of looked after children adopted within 12 months of their best interest decision has increased from 64% in 2004/05 to 91% in 2005/06. Performance in this area is exceptional.

The council recognises that the safeguarding of children remains a priority for all agencies. The number of referrals that led to an initial assessment has almost halved to 29.1% in 2005/06, but the number of assessments completed within seven working days has dropped slightly from 79.7% in 2004/05 to 75.1% in 2005/06. The number of children on the Child Protection Register has increased from 19.9 in 2004/05 to 21.2 in 2005/06. Whilst this remains in line with the comparator (21.7) and the England average (25.3), given the low number of referrals, initial and core assessments, the council should continue to closely monitor this area of its performance.

Transition arrangements for young people moving from children's to adult social care remains an area of concern and was highlighted in the JAR as being inadequate. Of the 80 young people transferring to adult services only 59 (74%) have transition plans. The council needs to take urgent action to improve its performance in this area.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution the authority makes to ensure young people achieve well at school and enjoy their education and leisure activities continues to be good. The JAR made no recommendations in relation to this outcome. There has been no change to the 2005 performance as schools await the results of the 2006 tests and examinations. Nevertheless, the authority's self-assessment and discussions with authority officers indicate that the aspects of good performance are being maintained. Early years provision continues to be a strength. The authority is confident that the pending results will show some improved performance at both Key Stage 3 and 4 but it is less confident that the target of 61% five A* to C at GCSE will be reached.

The partnership between the local authority and schools is good. There is good support and information available for parents and carers in helping them ensure their children achieve well. The progress made by pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly good. The authority has rightly identified the need to improve further performance at Key Stage 4, which is presently adequate.

Making a positive contribution

The contribution that the authority makes to improving outcomes in this area is good. The JAR highlighted one action to be taken over the next six months:

Ensure that, following consultation with children and young people, there is systematic and regular feedback on the outcome of consultation.

Since the JAR, the authority has made good progress in developing a 'participation strategy' which is aimed at increasing young people's involvement in the processes of consultation, feedback and decision-making. This is a good strategy, which is leading to a more comprehensive approach to young people's involvement across the authority. The number of looked after children who participate in their reviews has dropped from 64% to 54% and is significantly below comparators (82%) and the England average (83%). The council needs to improve its performance in this area.

Partnerships within the authority continue to develop well, for example work with Connexions and the Youth Service. Connexions has extended its range of support for young people who are vulnerable or in transition. Two new projects are looking to provide greater access to training for those in employment and also to engage disaffected young people into some employment, training or education. New work is taking place in relation to young offenders who are looked after. The authority is tracking young people who have committed offences via the national police computer system. This is developing a better understanding of offending rates and helping to reduce the incidence of reoffending.

Achieving economic well-being

The contribution that the authority makes to improving outcomes in this area is good. The JAR highlighted two actions to be taken over the next six months.

- The council and local LSC should clarify their expectations of local clusters of schools, colleges and work-based learning providers to ensure they implement the requirements of the 14–19 strategy.
- Improve the extent to which neighbourhood renewal strategies address the need to improve leisure and recreational facilities and access for young people in more deprived areas.

The council has made a good response in starting to address the areas for improvement. Good progress has been made on the 14 –19 strategy as seen through the agreed concordat between the local authority, Connexions, local Learning and Skills Council and key providers. The strategy is supported by a good quality action plan and an agreed set of strategic aims. The underlying priority for the strategy is to ensure that the needs of all learners are met. The 14 –19 action plan seeks to address issues relating to inequality in relation to young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those who are looked after and other under-achieving groups.

In order to ensure that regeneration initiatives address the needs of the communities they target, the local Strategic Partnership has reviewed its prioritisation of 'needy' areas based on an analysis of the 2004 index of multiple deprivation and means-tested benefit information. The review has led to the identification of three priority areas across the borough, which will be targeted for renewal activities. There are plans to set up a neighbourhood renewal team with associated community development support to ensure initiatives address the broad range of family needs in an integrated way.

The many good features identified by the JAR in support of this outcome area continue to remain in place.

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

The JAR highlighted the following actions to be taken over the next six months.

For immediate action

- Ensure that all plans for new service developments include measurable output targets in order to monitor progress and barriers to implementation.

For action over the next six months

- Ensure that all new service developments are monitored and reviewed so as to determine their contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people.
- Ensure that partners and children and young people are more extensively engaged in monitoring the performance of services against outcomes in a coordinated way.
- Ensure a more cohesive approach to the wide range of activities addressing issues of equality and diversity.

To meet these recommendations the council has the following actions underway:

A revised performance management and service development framework for the directorate has been drafted which identifies individual manager's roles in securing improvements. The framework is underpinned by the development of results-based accountability, and is also a focus for staff training.

The council, through its participation strategy is applying the principles of the 'Hear by Right' framework across all the council's departments and its partners. This is improving the involvement of younger people in the role of scrutiny.

To improve cohesion in respect of diversity, the council has focused on the introduction of an equalities scheme across the directorate and in schools. Business planning seminars for managers are being designed to cover the key requirements for planning for diverse groups.

The council has demonstrated good progress in the time available in meeting the JAR recommendations. It has good capacity to further improve its services for children and young people.

Yours sincerely



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