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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Mr Rogers

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOLIHULL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH 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 awarded¹
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

Solihull Borough Council delivers a good contribution to maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people in the area. Service leadership is clear and effective, and partnerships are sound. Capacity for further improvement is good.

Being healthy

The contribution the council makes to health outcomes for children and young people is good. There is successful joint working in schools to promote healthy lifestyles and improved funding for school meals. Good support is provided to pupils to promote their mental, physical and sexual health in partnership with the Primary Care Trust (PCT). An advisory teacher provides effective support to schools with the most vulnerable pupils. All target primary schools are participating in the National Healthy School Standard and over half have been awarded level 3. The reduction in the number of teenage conceptions has not been maintained since last year. The council has recognised this and is targeting resources to improve outcomes in this area.

A new multi-agency screening tool, the Triage Assessment Process, has been developed within the Youth Offending Team (YOT). This has resulted in timely and successful intervention and substance misuse targets have been achieved. However, the treatment for young people regarding substance misuse is not always age appropriate and this is an area identified for improvement. To this end, the Solihull Young People's Substance Misuse Service was launched at the beginning of June 2006. A service level agreement is in place with the crime and disorder partnership and there has been significant improvement in the support given to schools to prevent exclusions due to drug related behaviours.

Access to preventative Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) has improved and this jointly commissioned service has achieved projected performance targets and received positive feedback from parents, carers and staff. The service works with vulnerable children by locating child and adolescent workers in multi-agency teams and delivers training to a range of professionals. The Solihull Approach, which effectively supports parents and carers, continues to be an example of good practice.

The Children's Trust supports an integrated planning and commissioning strategy. A comprehensive range of preventative services is accessible to vulnerable children and responsive to the health needs of children with disabilities and those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. As a result of increased funding, response times for the assessments of children with autistic spectrum disorders have improved.

The health needs of looked after children are met well and there is a high level of compliance with statutory requirements. Innovative practice within the Looked After and Adoption Team has exceeded statutory requirements with the positive outcome that no adopted child has returned to the care system. An initial health assessment of looked after children is undertaken by a community paediatrician within 28 days of referral. However, there is insufficient recording and monitoring of the health needs of looked after children.

Staying safe

The contribution the council makes to outcomes for children in this area is good and the majority of children report feeling safe. The council gives high priority to safeguarding children and to ensuring that looked after children live in safe and secure environments. Comprehensive information, including web pages and a handbook on safeguarding and keeping children safe, is made widely available. A high level of compliance with statutory and procedural guidance supports good outcomes for children in need of protection. There are good quality assessments and protection plans. Since last year, the re-registrations of children on the Child Protection Register have been significantly reduced.

Implementation of the Common Assessment Framework is well advanced and this has improved access to services. Joint working is developing well through the Safeguarding Board and its sub groups. Multi-agency child protection procedures are in place and promote effective collaboration between agencies. A good level of support is provided to schools and pupils regarding matters of health and safety and in particular to ensure pupils are safe from bullying and discrimination. Examples of innovative practice include a peer led anti-bullying scheme in some primary schools. However, there is more work to be done to promote anti racism in schools.

As part of the local joint CAMHS strategy, the council has gained Department of Health (DoH) project funding for an Intensive Community Outreach Service. This enables young people with severe or complex mental health needs to remain at home and so avoids the need for them to be placed out of borough. Procedures are being updated to ensure that privately fostered children continue to be provided with a safe environment.

The success of the Transforming Children's Service Project has led to a rise in referrals to the children's social care front door service known as the DART team. Whilst the percentage of initial assessments undertaken within seven working days has improved since last year there has been some slippage in timescales for undertaking core assessments and needs to be addressed. As part of the Transforming Children's Services Project, a contact service has been developed that ensures children have a safe environment for supervised contact with their family. The stability of placements for children looked after by the council is in line with comparator groups but the range of placements does not meet the specific needs of some looked after children. Residential childcare provision costs are high and this reduces funding available for preventative services. More needs to be done, using the commissioning strategy, to increase local capacity for placements to help reduce these costs.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution the council makes to outcomes in this area continues to be good. The overall quality of early years provision is good and supports children well by enabling them to meet the early learning goals. Since last year, the unsatisfactory quality of teaching in settings inspected under the Children Act has been addressed effectively. The authority is successfully developing an early years transfer profile to promote continuity between settings.

Standards at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 are above the national average and that of statistical neighbours. At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' performance is also above the national average but in line with that of statistical neighbours. In 2005, results at GCSE in relation to the percentage of pupils attaining five or more passes at grades A*-C were above the national average and most statistical neighbours. Results have been consistently above the national average for the past six years. However, this is not reflected in the percentage of pupils achieving one or more GCSE at grades A*-G, which is in line with the national average and statistical neighbours and has been so for the last three years.

Although standards are above, or well above, the national average at the end of each phase, pupils' achievement is only satisfactory given their starting points. The School Improvement and Advisory Service (SIAS) is aware of the need to ensure that all pupils' make good progress. This needs to be communicated more effectively to schools. The authority acknowledges that there are still significant issues relating to the achievement of different groups including Black and minority ethnic pupils and those living in disadvantaged areas. Under achievement, especially in schools in the north of the borough, is being addressed and the attainment gap has narrowed. However, there is insufficient tracking, monitoring and analysis of rates of improvement for groups of children and young people.

Attendance levels are in line with the national average and statistical neighbours. The attendance of looked after children has improved since 2005. It now compares well with the national average and comparators. The authority has targeted its resources effectively to improve the performance of looked after children. The majority are on course to reach their GCSE targets in 2006.

The number of children permanently excluded from primary schools is very low. Although permanent exclusions rose in secondary schools last year, numbers are still below the national average and similar authorities. The council has an effective early support system which identifies and meets the needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It has also successfully promoted accredited training for nurture assistants. Innovative restructuring of pupil referral units has resulted in good provision for those who do not attend mainstream school.

The quality of support for schools placed in formal categories of concern by Ofsted is good. The rate at which a school is removed from a particular category is better than the national average. However, since the introduction of the new inspection framework in September 2005, four schools have been placed into a category of concern. Two schools have a notice to improve and two schools require special measures. The need for this increased level of support had not been anticipated by the School Improvement Advisory Service (SIAS) and has placed additional challenges on the limited resources of the service.

Making a positive contribution

The council's contribution to outcomes in this area is good. Children and young people are listened to and their voice is heard. There is a wide range of mechanisms and processes integrated into service planning and decision making arrangements that include children, young people and carers.

Positive outcomes are demonstrated by a number of good examples including:

- the involvement of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in their own review procedures
- children and young people in foster care chairing their own reviews
- the involvement of young people in the recruitment of children's services staff including the recently appointed Corporate Director Education and Children's Services
- young people actively involved in the UK Youth Parliament
- children with disabilities producing user guides for other children.

The Youth Offending Team provides a wide range of diversionary activities targeted at specific young people. This has reduced offending behaviour and improved performance against targets since last year. The recording of convictions, and final warnings, for children looked after was a priority for improvement in last year's assessment. This has improved and the reported figure is now better than comparators.

Children are supported well to develop socially and emotionally. Nurture groups and assistants are used well and are having a positive impact in some schools to promote good attendance and greater parental involvement. The innovative use of personal advisers, co-funded with Connexions Partnerships, provide very effective support for young people in partnership with the Youth Service.

Achieving economic well-being

The council's contribution to outcomes in this area is good overall. On leaving school, young people are supported well to engage in further education, employment or training. Good work is continuing in the 14-19 age range. Two collegiates are developing planned opportunities to prepare young people well for employment including work experience placements and Key Stage 4 apprenticeships. The effective collaborative relationship and funding arrangements between the Learning and Skills Council and the authority has driven this successful development. The average points score of students entered for GCE/VCE A/AS by schools has fallen this year to below the national average and statistical neighbours. The authority has a clear understanding of the particular reasons for this decline and is working hard to address it. Negotiations are underway to develop collaborative arrangements between higher performing schools and those whose performance is weaker.

The authority is well advanced in developing partnerships for the regeneration of north Solihull, which will address the broad range of needs of children, young people, families and carers. The number of young people not in education, employment or training has reduced from an already low base line and is better than statistical neighbours, West Midlands and national averages. This reduction has been achieved by offering one to one support through personal advisers, targeting vulnerable groups and offering a range of varied activities. However, the collection of more detailed information about young offenders not in education, training or employment would enable even better targeted intervention. The support provided to care leavers is good. The percentage of care leavers in employment, education or training at the age of 19 is better than comparator groups. Inspections found that looked after young people were being prepared and supported well for independent living although a wider range of suitable accommodation needs to be available for this group of young people.

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

There is clear and effective leadership of the service. The responsibilities placed on the director and lead member for children's services are discharged proficiently. The Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP) is based on a comprehensive needs assessment across all agencies and based on agreed joint priorities and actions to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. The issues of recruitment and retention in social care services in last year's assessment have been resolved satisfactorily. However, there is a need to record the cost of staff training supporting the integrated work force strategy.

Current performance against national and local objectives and targets is improving in most areas and the rate of progress is good. There is evidence that services provided by education and social care are contributing to improving outcomes for most children. Although the development of preventative services is improving, more evidence is needed on outcomes for children who have disabilities. Furthermore, the rising costs of placements for looked after children and the amount of expenditure on children in need are too high. The CYPP acknowledges these issues and sets them out within its key priorities. Whilst numbers are low, the proportion of looked after children from Black and minority ethnic communities has reduced and is equal to comparators. The authority's work on race equality for children is satisfactory. There is a need to evaluate outcomes for children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. This is an acknowledged area for improvement.

The Children's Trust and a Safeguarding Board are in place and developing well. The Children's Trust is accountable for the performance of partners and responsible for improving outcomes for children, young people and families. Performance monitoring of all partner agencies will be coordinated through the Trust.

The council's capacity to improve continues to be good. It is well placed to make further improvements as it has ambitious and clear priorities set out in the CYPP. These are underpinned by comprehensive and well thought out strategies and implementation plans.

Effective partnerships across public and voluntary sectors support service delivery. The development of a comprehensive joint commissioning framework is set out clearly in the CYPP which will drive the development of Local Area Agreements (LAA) over the next 18 months. The new Corporate Director Education and Children's Services has recent, relevant experience of Change for Children and demonstrates a firm grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. He acknowledged that the APA self-assessment could have been more evaluative and more precisely focused on outcomes for children.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • joint working in schools to promote healthy lifestyles • all schools are participating in the National Healthy Schools Standard with over half of them gaining level 3 award • improved response times for the assessments of children and young people who have autistic spectrum disorders • Solihull Approach which provides support for parents/carers • improved funding for school meals • a comprehensive service provided by CAMHS. • timely referrals to services for young persons who offend • Early Support Project (ESP) which successfully addresses the health needs of children with disabilities. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce teenage conception • record and monitor the health of looked after children • provide age appropriate treatment for young people regarding substance abuse.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comprehensive information service • Transforming Children's Service project which ensures children have a safe environment for supervised contact with family • compliance with referral, review and training processes in child protection across all services • safeguarding board and functioning sub groups • re-registrations on CPR dropped significantly 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure the numbers of initial and core assessments are achieved within timescales • reduce the high cost of placements for looked after children • provide a wider range of placements to meet the diverse needs of looked after children.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improved access to services through Common Assessment Framework (CAF) • private foster carers routinely screened and supported • children and young persons with significant mental health needs helped to live at home • coordination of services for children with disabilities. 	
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good quality early years provision • targeted action to promote good attendance • attendance and attainment of looked after children • exclusions are below national averages • children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and their needs addressed • innovative restructuring of pupil referral units (PRUs) • accreditation of nurture assistant training. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raise awareness and provide appropriate training for schools regarding pupil progress and the significance of contextual value added data • demonstrate the rate of progress in closing the achievement gap between schools in the north and south of the borough • record, monitor and evaluate the performance of groups of pupils particularly those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effective support for social and emotional aspects of learning • children are listened to and regularly consulted through a variety of mechanisms • vulnerable children are well supported • good use of personal advisers to support children and young people • range of diversionary activities targeting the involvement of young people which has helped to reduce offending. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build on the integrated model which co funds personal advisers to provide effective support to children and young people.

<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • joint approach with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) regarding 14-19 developments • partnership working to improve employment and training opportunities for care leavers • reduction in the number of children and young people not in education, training or employment • regeneration project addressing the broad range of family needs • increased availability of childcare. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collect more detailed information about young offenders in education, training or employment to enable better targeted intervention • commission a wider range of suitable accommodation for care leavers.
<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fully integrated education and social care service for three years • Children's Trust Board and integrated commissioning strategy • Transforming Children's Services Project incorporated into mainstream • improved recruitment and retention of social care staff • existing joint approaches to service delivery • performance against national and local targets improving in most areas. 	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate the outcomes for children with disabilities and Black and minority ethnic backgrounds • improve the collection of information on training for staff working within children's services to support the integrated work force strategy.

Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA

Being Healthy

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

- Provide appropriate age related treatment for young people regarding substance abuse.

Action is taken to ensure looked after children's health needs are addressed:

- Record and monitor the health needs of looked after children.

Staying safe

Action is taken to ensure looked after children and young people live in safe environments:

- Provide a wider range of placements to meet the diverse needs of looked after children.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- Raise awareness and provide appropriate training for schools regarding pupil progress and the significance of contextual value added data.
- Demonstrate the rate of progress in closing the achievement gap between schools in the north and south of the borough.
- Record, monitor and evaluate the performance of groups of pupils particularly those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

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

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