



Making Social Care Better for People



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**1 November 2006**

Dear Mrs Tomlinson

**2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SLOUGH 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 and the updated self-assessment provided by the council. We are grateful for the information that you provided to support this process and for the time that you and your colleagues have given to discussing 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.	3
The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people	4
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	3

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 highly competent leadership within Slough Borough Council has successfully brought together a single children's directorate which has fully embraced the principles of Every Child Matters. The Director of Education and Children's Services, the senior management team and the Chief Executive have very effectively engaged with all stakeholders to agree, and implement, the vision for coordinated children's services in Slough. The joint area review (JAR), completed last year, judged all services to be good with few recommendations. The council has taken significant action since the JAR to successfully tackle all the recommendations indicated in the JAR plus others identified by their own self-evaluation data to secure value for money in delivering services.

The council has included children and young people fully in formulating and prioritising their vision. Their views are highly valued and reflected fully in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP).

The highly effective partnership across agencies has culminated in the publication of a CYPP which clearly sets out immediate, medium and longer term priorities. The plan includes challenging and measurable milestones and targets. Performance management is embedded within the culture of the directorate and data is used effectively to identify trends, patterns and action. The council have robust systems for information and data collection and analysis, which are used very effectively to challenge performance and set continuously higher expectations throughout all services for children and young people. The council has acted swiftly to implement many identified strategies with demonstrable impact. For example, changes to the traveller children education service provide a next day response for school placements and procedures for reporting racial incidents in schools to the authority have been effectively reviewed and implemented.

The council has very good understanding of its services and priorities are being tackled swiftly, already showing a positive impact for children and young people. This response coupled with evidence of previously sustained improvement clearly demonstrates that Slough Borough Council has excellent capacity to improve services further for children and young people.

## **Being healthy**

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is good. One recommendation for action emerged from the JAR:

In the next six months:

- improve the provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) by ensuring that it meets the needs of children and young people from Black and minority ethnic communities, young people in transition and young people with substance misuse problems.

The council continues to have good partnership arrangements with health to promote the health of children and young people. Involvement in the Healthy Schools programme is very high with the majority of schools already having achieved the award ahead of targets.

The CYPP, together with the Children 1st Charter has prioritised improved health outcomes by supporting children in exercise, healthy eating, reducing obesity, and smoking cessation. This approach is fully inclusive, ensuring that vulnerable groups and Black and minority ethnic communities are included in all programmes.

The council's action plan to develop CAMHS addresses fully the recommendations in the JAR and further extends the age appropriate and 24-hour urgent access to the service.

Despite significant improvement since 1998 in reducing the rate of teenage conception by 25% there has been a slight increase this year. The council is fully aware of the change and is working closely with partners to ensure improved management.

## **Staying safe**

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is good with further improvements since the JAR. The JAR highlighted two actions to be taken immediately:

- improve schools' reporting of racist incidents by instigating procedures to ensure records of racist incidents and nil returns are sent to the authority by all schools
- improve the quality of social care case files by ensuring that plans and key information are comprehensive, up-to-date and readily accessible.

The council continues to provide robust child protection procedures that have been enhanced by the successful creation of the Local Children Safeguarding Board. All children on the Child Protection Register (CPR) continue to be allocated a qualified social worker and all CPR reviews are completed within the required timescale. The majority of children in need have an allocated qualified social worker, which is an improvement over the past year. Where assistant social workers are allocated they are fully supervised. The council's performance is marginally below comparator councils.

The timing of core assessment for children in need has significantly improved but there has been slight slippage in completing initial assessments within seven days. The council had already identified this and taken appropriate remedial action. The JAR recommendation to improve case files has been fully met. The recent inspection of Slough fostering services confirmed the improvement to case file content and structure.

Following the JAR, the council has worked with schools to raise the profile of reporting racial incidents. The improved reporting forms resulted in 100% returns from schools in the early part of this year.

Overall the council's contribution to staying safe is judged to be good as its responses to the JAR recommendations need time to take full effect and to show sustained impact on outcomes for children and young people.

## Enjoying and achieving

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is good. The JAR highlighted the following actions:

Immediate:

- improve the continuity of learning support for looked after children after the age of 16.

In the next six months:

- ensure there are sufficient and accessible school places for traveller children and improve the arrangements for supporting them while a suitable place becomes available
- raise further standards of attainment by:
  - improving the progress made by pupils between the ages of seven and 11
  - securing improvement in the performance of underachieving groups, including children and young people of Pakistani heritage and White heritage boys entitled to free school meals.

The council has a robust system for reviewing its schools and consequently knows them very well. They make highly effective use of the information to deploy support and secure further improvement in standards and attendance.

Places for early years have increased during the year and all settings provide above national average provision for enjoying and achieving. Attainment of pupils in all key stages, except Key Stage 2, is above national averages and has shown continuous improvement in recent years. The council has robust plans to improve standards at Key Stage 2. For example, the reviewed deployment of advanced skills teachers and the use of mathematics learning networks to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Data clearly demonstrates that, where focused support has been implemented in schools, standards in English and mathematics have improved significantly throughout the year.

The council's ethnic minority achievement team specifically concentrates on the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and has recruited bilingual teaching assistants to support these activities. Services for traveller children have been successfully incorporated into the council's raising achievement team and this ensures a more rapid response to meeting the needs of these children and young people. The appointment of additional staff helps to ensure all traveller children have next day access to school places when they arrive in the area.

Attendance is in line with national averages for the majority of age groups with the exception of children aged 7-11 which the council had already identified as below average and needing improvement. The council has worked with local communities to improve the position especially by tackling authorised absence rates; however, this has had a more positive impact on secondary attendance rates than with primary schools. Recent school inspection reports indicate the vast majority of pupils enjoy learning, especially in secondary schools.

Looked after children in Slough do not attain overall results in line with averages for looked after children nationally. The number who sit at least one GCSE has significantly improved and attainment is in line with national averages. However, attainment of five A\* - C GCSEs has shown a slight decline and the rate of progress is slower than the national average. In response to the JAR recommendation, the council has recently appointed a learning mentor to enhance the support for care leavers. Consequently overall provision is good. The council also provides additional support to reduce the absence of looked after children and this is having a positive impact.

The performance of the council, in placing looked after children close to home, is not as good as other comparator councils. Children placed at a distance from home are more likely to achieve poorer educational and social outcomes than those living in their own communities; however the council carefully considers individual placements and has evidence to demonstrate that each is in the best interest of the individual child. For example, a teenage mother is placed in a mother and baby unit and a young child is fostered with relatives outside the borough boundary.

### **Making a positive contribution**

The contribution that the council services are making for children and young people in improving outcomes in this area is good with significant strengths. The JAR made one recommendation and actions have already been initiated.

In the longer term:

- provide more opportunities for children and young people to participate in democratic decision making processes.

Significant action has been taken to engage all children and young people fully in shaping the vision set out in the CYPP. For example, they have been consulted on, and have contributed to, the development of the Children 1st Charter, which is web-based, interactive and will enable young people to record how the charter is making a positive difference for them. Involvement of children and young people in the authority wide consultation reflects the council's commitment to include children of all ages in decision making. One example is the significant number of children involved from all age groups, in prioritising consultation responses with age appropriate activities such as priority trees for younger children or data analysis using laptops for older students. Youth forums and school councils are very well established and have played an active role in the creation of the Children and Young People's Cabinet. The Cabinet, when fully operational, is due to

assist in making decisions on the strategic development of services for children and young people in Slough.

The few weaknesses previously identified by the council, and confirmed by the JAR, in youth services are being tackled fully and have resulted in increased numbers of young people accessing publicly funded services. Robust plans have been agreed to improve further the youth service and strengthen partnerships with schools, by placing youth workers on school sites.

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

The contribution that the schools services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is good. The JAR highlighted two actions to be taken.

In the next six months:

- increasing further the proportion of young people achieving qualifications equivalent to five good GCSE passes by age 19.

In the longer term:

- improve the skill levels of young people living in Slough so more possess qualifications and competencies needed for the work place.

The 14-19 strategy is in place and the management group has good representation from all partners. The partnership is successfully increasing opportunities for flexible learning. For example more availability of Level 2 vocational courses and the re-designation of two schools to accept students up to the age of 18 to increase the number of opportunities further. Good arrangements for school consortiums have led to an increase in the number of pupils remaining in post-16 education. A significant improvement in the percentage of young people in education, employment and training has been achieved in a relatively short period of time.

Three quarters of care leavers are assessed as living in suitable accommodation. This is currently below comparator and national averages. However, the reduction relates to a very small number of care leavers all with specific reasons for not requiring accommodation.

### **Service management**

The JAR made the following three recommendations about service management:

Immediate:

- enhance the capacity of councillors to provide a strategic lead by using external mentors to coach and develop lead councillors in their leadership role.

In the longer term:

- develop information management systems that will support assessment of the impact of joint initiatives by integrating performance management information across partners and providers
- improve the quality of information and support received by parents by considering how best to target guidance and support to parents and carers from hard to reach groups, especially those whose first language is not English.

Service management continues to be good with some significant improvements. The council has demonstrated very good progress in the short time available in meeting all the JAR recommendations although it is too early to show the full impact of these actions for children and young people across all the services. Partnerships are strong and have helped shape an ambitious vision for further development of services for children and young people in Slough. Information gathered by the council is used very effectively to secure continuous improvement.

A full training programme to enhance the capacity of councillors to provide a strategic lead has been agreed, including the development of the 'corporate parenting role'. This has been supplemented with training for lead members by looked after children as part of the council's Total Respect Programme. It is too early to assess the full impact of these programmes as councillors were newly appointed following the May elections.

Overall, Slough Borough Council has demonstrated excellent capacity to continuously improve its services for children and young people.

Yours sincerely



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