

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



Making Social Care
Better for People



Dr Ian Birnbaum
Strategic Director
Children, Young People and Learning Services
London Borough of Sutton
The Grove
Carshalton
Surrey
SM5 3AL

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Dear Dr Birnbaum

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF SUTTON

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment (APA) 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

The authority consistently delivers above the minimum requirements for children and young people. All services demonstrate clearly how they are improving the achievement and well being of children and young people. The authority has robustly addressed the recommendations identified by last year's unpublished, pilot joint area review (JAR). There is an effective children and young persons' plan that is supported by good and growing multi-agency working. The authority has a good and improving capacity to improve further.

Being healthy

The authority makes a good contribution towards improving the health of children and young people in this area. It works successfully with health partners to identify, and meet, health needs as evidenced through the Sutton Disability Partnership for Children and Young People (formerly Children's Trust). The needs of vulnerable children are also met well through the effective targeting of work. A good range of initiatives is in place to promote healthy lifestyles, including the Sutton Sport and Physical Activity Strategy 2006-09 produced in conjunction with the Primary Care Trust and a school health project worker to focus on reducing obesity in children and young people. There is good progress towards all schools achieving the Healthy Schools standard, with 70% of schools expected to reach this by December 2006.

The rate of teenage conceptions amongst 15 to 17 year olds is reducing and is comparatively low. Promoting sexual health is a priority for the authority. For instance, a redeveloped South West London sexual health website was launched earlier this year.

Access to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) has improved. All non-urgent referrals are accepted and waiting times have improved. Capacity in the service has been increased through additional posts. However, a full range of services is planned, but not yet in place, for children and young people with learning disabilities.

The particular health needs of children and young people are being met to a high level. For instance, annual health checks for looked after children are consistently delivered. Looked after children have good access to the CAMHS and this service will be extended to care leavers in 2006/07. Young offenders with substance misuse problems receive a timely response for specialist assessment and interventions.

Staying safe

The authority makes a good contribution towards improving outcomes for children and young people in this area and has worked hard, and successfully, to address the recommendations of the pilot JAR last year.

All children on the Child Protection Register now have an allocated social worker and arrangements for the supervision and support of child protection chairs have been put in place. The authority has now introduced a clear policy and procedure for carrying out Criminal Record Bureau checks for designated posts. Access to the Child Protection Register has been improved and is now available online.

There was a reduction in the numbers on the Child Protection Register last year. The proportion of children registered from Black and minority ethnic groups also fell. This should be monitored as planned to ensure that a consistent level of service is being provided. All child protection cases were reviewed within the appropriate timescale. De-registrations from the Child Protection Register, together with re-registrations, are comparatively good. While the timeliness of initial and core assessments have improved, the authority should continue to raise performance on initial assessments to bring this in line with neighbouring authorities.

A Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) was established earlier this year accountable to the Children and Young People's Strategic Board; effectiveness will be monitored through the receipt of an annual report and business plan. Increased numbers of staff attended multi-disciplinary child protection training and a new post was established to target the training of school staff, making a good contribution to keeping children safe. In addition, peer counselling is available in secondary schools to support pupils worried by bullying.

There has been a significant improvement in the stability of care for looked after children with fewer experiencing three or more placement moves during the year. However, longer-term placement stability should continue to improve as planned. Most looked after children are placed locally in foster placements or placed for adoption. However, the number of adoptions has only marginally improved on last year's figure and the timeliness of placements has fallen. This cohort of children is small with complex needs, and the authority continues to work towards placement of these children and to improve the rate of adoptions. All looked after children have their care plans reviewed on time, and all of those eligible have a personal advisor and pathway plans. However, the authority recognises the need for all looked after children to have a qualified social worker, which just falls short of their target of 100% for 2006/07.

The authority has worked hard and successfully to improve support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through the Sutton Disability Partnership Board, including systems for the early identification of need and coordination of interagency intervention to prevent escalation. The percentage of over 14 year olds who have transition plans has increased to 90% through improved focus and effective joint working within the Supported Living Team.

Good progress continues to be made with the implementation of the 'Child Concern Framework', which has successfully strengthened interagency responses to the early identification of need and support for children, young people and families with moderate degrees of need. However, the authority's response to referrals of children in need

resulting in initial assessments and re-referrals occurring within 12 months should be improved.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution made by services in raising standards and improving the quality of provision remains good. Standards in all key stages are rising and children and young people achieve well, particularly in secondary education. The authority knows the quality of its educational settings well, particularly its schools, and what should be done to raise standards further. Most of these schools provide a good quality of education. Its strategy for challenging underachieving schools is successful and targeted intervention and support is decreasing the relatively small proportion of schools that do not help pupils to make the progress they should. The progress made by previously underachieving groups of pupils is improving and is now mostly in line with Sutton averages. Only Black Caribbean pupils do less well at GCSE but the gap is closing.

There is a higher proportion, than is found nationally, of early years settings providing good or better quality provision. The authority is developing its strategy well for coordinating services for young children with relevant partners.

There is effective collaboration with schools to promote attendance. As a result, attendance is stable; it is around average in primary schools but above average in secondary schools. The authority has put in place a clear protocol for more appropriate recording of absence and lateness in primary schools. Permanent exclusions are low and good provision is made for many such pupils at the pupil referral unit (PRU). There has been very effective collaboration with schools and the PRU to enable all excluded pupils, other than those with health problems, to receive full-time education. This is a significant improvement since the pilot JAR.

Many of the small number of looked after children attend school well and achieve good results, particularly in Key Stages 1 and 2. The authority is fully aware of the few children that do not attend school as often as they should and whose achievements are poor. It is employing effective strategies to reduce this number, such as the provision of a teacher-caseworker to work with the identified children and young people. The authority has made good progress in helping children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to achieve well. Effective cross-agency work continues and the majority of statemented pupils are involved in annual reviews of their progress. The authority is working well with schools to enable all pupils to be included in these reviews.

Making a positive contribution

The authority makes a good contribution towards improving outcomes for children and young people in this area. Most children and young people are supported well in managing changes in their lives. The proportion of looked after children who contribute their opinions at reviews has increased as well as the percentage of reviews completed within statutory timescales. The authority has put in place effective strategies to help children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to manage the transition between

specific phases in their lives. Young people at risk of exclusion from school can access alternative curriculum support provision and a specialised project, 'Building Bridges', helps them to remain in school.

The number of young people entering the youth justice system has fallen, with a wide range of initiatives in place to combat offending. The rate of re-offending has increased and the authority is putting in place measures to reduce this, including a risk management panel. The youth offending team works successfully with the Children and Young People's Inclusion Support Panel to identify and support vulnerable children at risk of offending. The Panel also coordinates the allocation of referrals to programmes across the borough. The level of offending of looked after children has improved and is now more in line with the national average. However, further improvement is required to bring the rate closer to that in neighbouring authorities.

The authority has established a number of forums to elicit the views of children and young people. Specific projects have been established to improve the level of consultation with disabled young people, for example, Jigsaw4U and Can We Talk (2). Monthly meetings take place between young people and the lead councillor and head of children's services. As a result, the views of children and young people are being taken more into account in providing for their needs.

Achieving economic well-being

The contribution made by the authority in improving the economic well-being of children and young people is good and better than at the pilot JAR. This is because it has taken effective steps to coordinate educational provision from 14-19. In addition, the Sutton youth service provides good quality support for young people.

Sixth form provision is good and enables young people to achieve well at A-level, exceeding national and local averages. Local collaboration between schools and Carshalton College is extending curriculum choices for young people, including a wider range of vocational options. Success rates in level two courses are improving and close to those found in level one courses. The appointment of a consultant leading the 14-19 core group and the setting up of a headteachers' strategic group, demonstrate the authority's commitment to working with the Learning and Skills Council and the Connexions service to improve the learning opportunities for young people.

Good work is done in supporting young people in their transition to working life or further education, particularly for those most vulnerable. As a result, the proportion of 16 to 18 year olds in education, employment or training has improved and is now better than local averages and the national target. Looked after young people have good access to the Leaving Care team, are provided with suitable work experience programmes and are given priority for permanent accommodation. The authority is working productively to enable all such young people to enter employment, training or further education. The authority has significantly increased the uptake of direct payments to carers of disabled young people and improved their participation in employment or education. The newly formed Transition

Unit is working effectively to ensure that all young people with disabilities have continuity of care and are supported well.

There is effective partnership work with the voluntary and private sectors that results in good information for parents and carers about children's services and a consequent improvement in their use. The number of children from the most disadvantaged areas in the borough who attend neighbourhood nurseries has increased. Community regeneration is bringing more services to children and young people to where they are most needed and the quality of housing is being improved.

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

Overall the management of children's services is good, including social care. Outcomes for service users are improving. The authority has worked hard and successfully to address the recommendations of the pilot JAR held last year. Capacity for further improvement is good.

There is a strong commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people, reflected in the Children and Young People's Plan 2006-09, which details clear priorities and targets. All the one year actions have been costed. Greater clarity about partnership and governance structures has been achieved and clearer and consistent linkages are now in place. The Children and Young People's Partnership monitors progress against priorities with regular reporting to members. The framework for the joint commissioning of all services for vulnerable children and the establishment of a strategic commissioning group has been agreed and will be implemented during 2006-07.

Interagency working is well established with some good examples of joint working that have led to improved outcomes for children and young people, particularly the pooled resources of the Children and Young People's Inclusion Support Panel for those at risk of school and social exclusion and offending. To date over 500 children and young people have been supported, exceeding the original target of 400 for 2005.

Personal social services expenditure is increasing year on year but remains below the authority's comparator group and the national average. The budget is well managed and generally linked to priorities; efficiencies have been achieved through reducing 'back office' costs in order to ensure that front line services are protected and improved. However, the cost of services for looked after children are comparatively high but the authority is working to ensure continued cost effectiveness.

Performance management systems have been improved through a range of measures to strengthen business planning and monitoring. The authority has successfully merged the finance and information management teams across the former education and social care departments. Challenging priorities are in place for 2006-07, which should be implemented as planned.

Good progress has been made by the authority in improving the recruitment and retention of social workers through an enhanced employment package. Retention is comparatively good, as well as sickness levels. However, the vacancy rate remains comparatively high and should be reduced as planned.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low rate of teenage conceptions • annual health checks for looked after children • partnership work • improved CAMHS access • progress of schools in achieving Healthy Schools status. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • full CAMHS service for children and young people with a learning disability.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Concern Framework • interagency working • all child protection cases allocated; timely reviews; de-registration and re-registration rates • timely core assessments • most children in local foster placements or placed for adoption; stability of placements for looked after children; timely reviews; pathway plans • transition planning for children and young people (14+ years) with disabilities. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • timely initial assessments • long-term stability for looked after children; adoptions • response to referrals of children in need.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic achievement of pupils • secondary school attendance • low level of permanent exclusions • high proportion of successful schools • effective intervention and support strategies. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • looked after children absent from school.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • looked after children contributing their opinions to reviews; timeliness of reviews • participation framework/consultation with children and young people • initiatives to combat youth offending. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the level of offending of looked after children • rate of re-offending.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • achievement of 16-19 year olds • local collaboration to improve curriculum provision from 14-19 • support for young people in their transition to FE or employment • uptake of direct payments. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation of all care leavers in education, employment or training.
<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Young People's Plan • interagency working; agreed joint commissioning framework • budget management and control • improving performance management and monitoring • improved recruitment and retention. 	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cost effectiveness of services for looked after children • further reduction in vacancy levels.

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

- CAMHS for children and young people with learning disabilities.
- Response to children in need.
- Long-term stability of placements for looked after children.
- Recruitment of social workers/all looked after children have an allocated social worker.
- Rate of re-offending.
- Cost effectiveness of services for looked after children.

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