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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Mrs Richardson

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

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 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	4
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

St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements for children and young people. The council is working well with its partners and has developed a Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) over the past year which contains the agreed local priorities. The council demonstrates sustained and continuous improvement across a range of services and performance measures. It is achieving improved outcomes for most children and young people. The authority's capacity to improve its services further is excellent.

Being healthy

The contribution made by the council to outcomes in this area is good. There is a strong partnership arrangement with the Primary Care Trust, in addition to secondary and tertiary health care providers. There has been an increase in the percentage of obese and overweight four and five year olds but the council and its partners have suitable strategies in place to address basic health inequalities and to promote good health. The Sure Start local programme is having an impact in helping families have access to health care and support and there are demonstrable improvements in some health care targets; for example, there are increasing levels of immunisations, increasing levels of breastfeeding and reductions in the levels of smoking in pregnancy. While these remain below national figures, the baseline was extremely low and the trajectory is very positive. The council has achieved well in excess of its target of schools achieving Level 3 of the national Healthy Schools standard, is applying for Beacon status this year and good numbers of children and young people access sport in schools. The council has also provided opportunities for carers/parents to improve their knowledge about health issues for families and children.

The health needs of looked after children are met effectively and performance indicators exceed national averages. There has been a reduction in the rate of teenage pregnancy. This was identified as an area for improvement last year. The council has excellent strategies, implementation plans and monitoring in place to sustain this reduction. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is developing well from a previously poor baseline. The CAMHS provides very timely responses to referrals for assessments. The STAR centre is providing specialist support and guidance for children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also supports other community services based in the area.

Staying safe

The contribution made by the council to outcomes in this area is good. Proper policies and procedures are in place in all settings. The council continues to roll out its information sharing and assessment (ISA) pilot and this has been cited by the Department for Education and Skills as an example of good practice. The increasing use of ISA underpins children in need procedures and the implementation of the common assessment framework.

The council's referral and assessment process for children and young people is good. The rate of referrals per 10,000 population has reduced from 679 last year to 552 this year. Low levels of core assessments were a feature of the council last year and this has been

appropriately addressed; there have been higher levels of both initial and core assessments. Although there has been a reduction in performance in the time taken to complete assessments, this remains acceptable.

Child protection and safeguarding is good. There is a good strategy for training in place across statutory and voluntary services. There has been a significant increase in the activity in terms of child protection with high levels of conferences and corresponding increases in numbers of children placed on the register. However, the number of children on the Child Protection Register (CPR) has been disproportionately affected by the inclusion of some large family groups. The figure for de-registrations has increased whilst re-registrations have reduced.

The number of looked after children has risen this year and is now well above the figure for similar councils. The majority of looked after children have a named social worker, and this is good when compared to similar councils. There have been difficulties in the recruitment and retention of foster carers in the area. However, the council has robust and well resourced plans in place to secure significant improvements for looked after children by recruiting more local foster carers. This has not yet delivered results for looked after children and the percentage of looked after children in residential care overall has risen from 16.9% in 2004/05 to 18.1% in 2005/06. Stability of looked after children placements has reduced below that of similar councils, but this is in the context of the small number of children and young people in this group. Adoption and fostering services have improved this year and performance is good. Both services have had regulatory inspections and were considered good overall.

The council reports that up to 75% of children and young people with disabilities have a transition plan in place, and this is an improvement on last year's performance. The transition process has improved through multi-agency involvement, supported by a dedicated transitions worker based in the Connexions service for young people with disabilities.

There is a clear process within the council for collating, monitoring and reviewing information from the Criminal Record Bureau checks. Social care service's responses to reviews of serious cases are appropriately monitored by senior officers and elected members.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution of the council's services to outcomes in this area is good. Children are getting a good start to their education in the early years. The vast majority of three and four year olds are in receipt of nursery education and the quality and standards in the Foundation Stage are judged to be good or better in almost all of the schools inspected since September 2005. At Key Stage 1 the proportion of pupils at the expected Level 2 in reading, writing and mathematics is higher than in similar councils and the national figure despite there being slight dips in reading and writing when compared to the previous year. At Key Stage 2 performance is consistently better than similar councils and national figures and has been enhanced by further improvements in English, mathematics and science in 2005. The added value between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is better than average.

Results at Key Stage 3 and 4 are also improving. The council has judiciously reshaped its strategy for improving secondary education; this is now good and is having an impact on improving educational outcomes, particularly Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 3, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected Level 5 improved in all three core subjects in 2005 and is higher than the figure for similar councils in science and mathematics. At Key Stage 4, there has been a marked improvement of nearly 8% in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to C GCSE grades in 2005. This figure is now above that for similar councils and the national figure, and represents a rate of improvement twice that of similar councils and three times that found nationally. No schools failed to meet the five or more A* to C GCSE grade floor target of 30%. The proportion of pupils gaining at least one GCSE pass increased modestly in 2005, although it remains well below that of similar councils and below the national figure; around one in twenty pupils leave school at 16 without any GCSE or equivalent qualification and this figure is too high. Overall, the added value to pupils' Key Stage 2 results as they progress through Key Stage 3 and 4 is weaker than is the case nationally.

The number of looked after young people gaining at least one GCSE at A* to G or a General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) has improved over the past two years and is above the national average at 58%. The proportion of young people leaving care with five or more A* to C GCSE grades has also improved, albeit to a modest level, from none in 2004 to 5.3% in 2005. Of the 12 schools inspected since September 2005, pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities made satisfactory or better progress in all but one school and good or better progress in over half. The availability of recreational activities is good as are the outcomes for young people including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Last year the council ran the top performing Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme in the north west.

Although the proportion of schools causing concern is higher than in similar councils, and nationally, small numbers are involved. Currently one primary school is in special measures and one secondary school has a notice to improve. The council has good arrangements for monitoring and reviewing its schools and the support and challenge provided to these two schools has been effective; they are progressing well.

Attendance in primary and secondary schools has been improving over the past few years and is broadly in line with similar councils and national figures, although attendance in secondary schools dipped in 2005 and is further away from the national figure than primary schools. Unauthorised absence in secondary schools is higher than in similar councils and nationally. The council did not meet its attendance targets in 2005. However, the attendance rate for 2006 has improved a little in both sectors. The council has made attendance a key priority in the CYPP as it recognises its pivotal link with attainment, health and safety. The attendance of looked after children is low but there are signs that this is improving with a 2.8% increase between 2004 and 2005.

The behaviour of pupils was found to be good or better in all but one school inspected since September 2005 and the behaviour improvement programme is having a demonstrable impact in the targeted schools. The council has worked effectively with schools to reach agreements on alternative strategies to exclusion and as a consequence,

there have been no permanent exclusions this year. Fixed-term exclusions were above the rate in similar councils and national figures in 2005. However, the 2006 figure shows an impressive 26% drop.

The proportion of surplus places in primary schools is less than half that in similar councils and nationally. There are no surplus places in secondary schools and across both sectors and 96% of applicants gain their first choice of school.

Making a positive contribution

The contribution made by the council to outcomes in this area is excellent. There is ample evidence of coherent and innovative partnership working, including with statutory, private and voluntary sectors. The council has demonstrated significant improvement in the range of consultation it undertakes with children and young people this year, including looked after children and young people with learning disabilities. The outcomes of this consultation, often involving local and national initiatives, can be seen clearly to influence the council's strategic direction and helped to shape the CYPP. Consultation with very young children is particularly innovative and impressive. In addition, the council acted decisively by implementing policies and procedures in respect of bullying and harassment following consultation with children and young people who stated that this was of concern to them. Children and young people are well supported in developing socially and emotionally. The council has an effective preventative strategy focused on 100 children and young people, 'The St Helens 100', who are at risk because of a number of issues including attainment, attendance, high risk of exclusion or risk of offending.

The youth offending team (YOT) performs very well across a range of indicators. The council reports much lower levels of first time entrants to the criminal justice system than similar councils and also a decreasing trend. Re-offending rates are reducing, and they remain in line with those achieved by similar councils. The YOT has also recently met the national target of 90% of young juveniles being supported into education, employment or training which is better than most councils. There has been a reduction in the percentage of final warnings, reprimands and convictions of looked after children. This is acceptable and remains in line with the performance of similar councils. The percentage of looked after children who participated in their reviews is good at 94%. All looked after children have personal education plans and all who wish to have them have Pathway Plans and all have been involved in their construction (95%).

Achieving economic well-being

The contribution of council services to outcomes in this area is good. There is a strong partnership with the local Learning and Skills Council and there has been good progress in implementing the 14–19 strategy. There has been effective collaborative work with schools, colleges and work-based learning providers in developing learners' entitlement to wide ranging study and training opportunities. Vocational studies and work-based learning are available for all Key Stage 4 pupils, although the council recognises that the quality and extent of these varies. Standards of attainment at A level as measured by average points score (APS) per student, has risen and is higher than in similar councils, although the APS achieved for each examination entry is lower. Achievement in Level 3 vocational

qualifications has risen substantially. The council is working effectively with the Chambers of Commerce, Connexions and other partners in developing further opportunities, guidance and support for young people in preparation for working life. A key priority for the council is the number of young people not in education, employment or training. Information provided by the council demonstrated that the figure worsened in 2005 to 10.5% and is now above the comparative figure for Greater Merseyside. The council has suitably robust plans and challenging targets to address this issue and there are emerging signs that they are having some impact. Only 2% of young people are not known to the council which is much lower than the Greater Merseyside average. It has tracked Year 11 leavers for the last three years and 92% were in learning in 2005/06. Nevertheless, the retention rate beyond Year 11 is a concern and the council has rightly recognised that it is another key area for development. Again, however, some improvement is already evident in 2006.

There are positive outcomes for looked after children with Pathway Plans, with the ratio of care leavers engaged in education, employment or training being very good and slightly improved in 2005 compared to all young people. An increasing percentage of looked after young people aged 16–19 are in education, employment or training; 30% more than in 2001/02. Similarly, there is an increasing percentage of care leavers at age 19 living in suitable accommodation; and this is above the national average. All young people who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities have transition plans and are fully involved in compiling and reviewing them. Good practice is evident in the quarterly meetings of a transition group, which tracks looked after young people to monitor their education, work and health to ensure they settle well into their placement.

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

The management of services is good and the capacity to improve is excellent. The council benefits from very good partnership arrangements with statutory, private and voluntary agencies in the area. The council has demonstrated a significant contribution to the improvement of outcomes in education, social care and health for children and young people. The council and its partners have produced the CYPP based on a thorough analysis of need, which has taken into account the views of parents, carers and young people. The CYPP sets out clear and challenging ambitions to improve the well-being of children and young people, clearly demonstrating that partners share a common understanding of local needs. Objectives and targets are based on a comprehensive needs analysis, taking account of the high levels of deprivation in the area. Priorities are identified and planned across services in a clear and coherent manner. The CYPP has benefited from the council's improved consultation processes with stakeholders.

Inter-agency processes for planning, delivering and reviewing provision for children and young people are effective. The recording of needs is shared effectively via the ISA pilot, and this is being extended further this year. In addition, effective and updated children in need procedures are in place which also support the effective sharing of information for relevant children and young people.

The council has a strong track record of sustained improvement in performance across a range of indicators when compared to similar councils. This includes improved outcomes for minority and vulnerable groups.

The council has commenced work towards the production of a commissioning strategy with its partners, building on its previous experience of joint commissioning. The council has a good workforce strategy in place, which has yielded good results in respect of recruitment. It has appropriately allocated additional financial resources to address the training requirements of recognised childcare qualifications for social workers and residential childcare workers. This is in addition to the wider training and development opportunities taking place in the council, which are well funded and resourced.

In response to the increasing numbers of looked after children, the council has an appropriate strategy in place and has suitably financed this initiative by the allocation of an additional £1.7 million to the children and families budget.

The Audit Commission reported the council performs well in terms of achieving value for money. The council has a clear focus on value for money and uses integrated financial and performance management effectively to improve services.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • health of looked after children • percentage of schools achieving the national Healthy Schools standard • STAR centre • high numbers of children and young people accessing sport • reduction in the rate of teenage pregnancy. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduction in the levels of overweight/obese four and five year olds.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • safeguarding practices • development of ISA pilot • fostering service • low levels of re-registrations on the CPR. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increases in numbers of looked after children • increases in looked after children living in residential care (including out of borough) • insufficient availability of foster carers.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • early years provision and outcomes • Key Stage 1 and 2 outcomes • availability of school places • rate of permanent exclusions. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • added value through Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 • reduce the proportion of 16 year olds leaving school without any qualifications • looked after children attendance.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partnership working • consultation with very young children, children and young people which influences strategic policies • low and reducing numbers of first time entrants to the criminal justice system • high levels of young juveniles in education, employment or training • 'The St Helens 100'. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong partnership work • tracking of young people • improving provision for care leavers. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • numbers not in education, employment or training • retention rates.
<p>Management of children's services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • well developed CYPP • strong performance management culture • good workforce strategy in place. 	<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • levels of suitably qualified social care staff (NVQ Level 3 and Post Qualifying Level 1 Award)

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

- Impact of preventative services.
- Impact of the council's strategy for improving attainment and progress in secondary schools.
- Increase in the numbers of looked after children and the impact of this issue.
- Impact of CAMHS.

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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