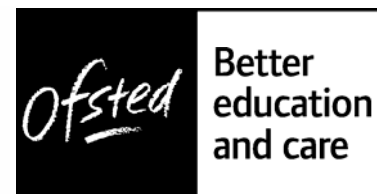


Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
Email edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr Andrew Webb
Director of Children's Services
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Town Hall
Stockport SK1 3XE

1 December 2005

Dear Mr Webb

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF STOCKPORT METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 4 July 2005 to assess the performance of the education and social care services within your 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.

Being healthy

Outcomes in this area are good. The council has performed well in this area and has shown progress over the last year. Rates of incidence of teenage pregnancy are currently low. There is good coverage of sex and relationship education in schools. Dedicated support for looked after children in respect of sexual and other health matters was clearly a strength. The council has a strong commitment to the healthy schools initiative with a clear commitment to the involvement of young people. The council has made progress in promoting the health needs of looked after children, where there is now very good performance. The council acknowledges in its self-assessment that its community is polarised between affluent and deprived areas. The council needs to ensure that strategies are in place to promote the health of children throughout the borough. Whilst there have been some positive developments over the last year in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), the council should ensure these are sustained, particularly in developing community resources to meet the requirements of the large number of children living in the borough who have mental health needs.

Staying safe

The council's performance in this area is good. It has continued to make progress over the last year. Child protection procedures are firmly in place in all schools. The numbers of referrals leading on to subsequent assessment is high and gives confidence in the screening processes operated by the council. There is a marked improvement on the

rate of completion of initial and core assessments of children and families within statutory timescales. The number of children requiring registration on the child protection register has dropped and the incidence of the need to re-register children is also good. However, children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are overly represented in the child protection statistics. This is an issue the council should focus on.

The council's performance on adoption of looked after children is strong, as is the stability of placements of looked after children. The council is carrying out a high number of file audits, which provides evidence that quality assurance systems are in place.

The numbers of children placed at home whilst the subject of care orders was raised as a significant issue during last year's performance assessment. Numbers remain unacceptably high and are a waste of the council's resources. Whilst some progress has been made, the council should have a continued focus on this issue.

The numbers of actions required of day carers both pre- and post-registration is higher than the national average. Consequently, there is a concern about the preparedness of carers for their task. The council should address this issue to ensure that adequate information and training for day carers is available.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good overall, with elements that are very good.

The expansion of early years providers matches national patterns overall, but full day care provision is not keeping pace with those nationally. The proportion of providers offering good quality childcare is in line with that found nationally for all settings, and it is above that found nationally for childminders. The percentage of providers offering good quality nursery education is in line with national figures. Overall places have increased in line with demand and the proportion of parents finding childcare has risen. The authority has a training and development programme for providers to aid consistency of practice, and progress towards early learning goals is above average.

The council currently has no school judged to be underachieving, and no school in special measures or in serious weaknesses. Since the categories were introduced the number of schools placed in special measures has been in line with national figures: it has had fewer schools with serious weaknesses and none which are underachieving.

The percentage of schools with more than a quarter of surplus places is higher than the national average and statistical neighbours. The council's programme to reduce surplus places in primary schools is proceeding as planned, and several hundred places have

been removed. The council is also reviewing provision in secondary schools, where at present there are no surplus places but pupil numbers are falling.

The overall standards achieved in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, are strengths and above the national average. The average performance in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) at Key Stage 4 for the percentage of higher grades in comparison is a weakness, acknowledged by the local authority. The percentage has now fallen to below the performance of statistical neighbours. The percentage attaining one GCSE grade A* to G has consistently been below that of similar authorities. The value added from the earlier key stages is as expected, but declines to below national expectations at the end of Key Stage 4.

National test results at the end of Key Stage 1 are above the national average. Reading and mathematics results have generally been higher than average over the last five years and generally in line with statistical neighbours. Results in writing have consistently been above the national average and in recent years have also been above statistical neighbours. Test results at the end of Key Stage 2 in English, mathematics and science are consistently higher than the national average and in line with statistical neighbours. However, science results have recently risen higher than the council's statistical neighbours. The value added between Key Stages 1 and 2 is in line with national expectations. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science has been broadly in line or above national figures. The value added between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 is in line with national expectations.

The percentage of pupils achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE is in line with the national average, it has now fallen below statistical neighbours, although it has been consistently in line with them for several years. The proportion of pupils gaining one GCSE grade A* to G is in line with the national average and has been for five years, but in this period it has been consistently lower than statistical neighbours. The value added between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 is below national expectations and well below between Key Stages 3 and 4. The performance in GCSE has been identified as a key area for improvement by the council. It has been a long standing issue that has proved stubborn to improve.

The authority uses an extensive range of data effectively to gauge its performance. It has identified that girls are underachieving compared with girls nationally, and that the majority of underachieving pupils across all key stages live in the most deprived wards.

Of the primary and secondary schools recently inspected most have very good or good leadership. All schools were judged to be effective, a third very effective and a third good. Achievement, the attitudes of pupils across all schools and the quality of teaching and learning were strengths overall.

The percentage of authorised absence in primary schools has improved and is lower than the national average. The percentage of unauthorised absence is in line with the national figure. Authorised absence in secondary schools overall has been reducing and is in line with the national average and unauthorised absence is also in line.

The rate of exclusions in primary schools is in line with the national average. The percentage of permanent exclusions in the borough's secondary schools is above the national average and above statistical neighbours. The percentage of permanent exclusions in special schools is well above the national average in special schools and well above similar authorities. More recent information gathered by the council shows the extent of exclusions in secondary and special schools has reduced significantly and that reintegration has improved.

The percentage of pupils receiving alternative tuition because of permanent exclusion is in line with the national average. However, the proportion of permanently excluded pupils receiving this tuition for longer than one year is much higher than the national figure and statistical neighbours. As a consequence, the reintegration of pupils into schools after exclusion is much lower than the national figure and statistical neighbours.

The percentage of children leaving care gaining one or more GCSE grade A* to C has improved and is now higher than the national figure. The proportion of pupils with five A* to C grades is lower than the national average. The absence of looked after children from school has been above the national average for these children, but is now at an acceptable level. The percentage of care leavers engaged in full-time employment, education and training has risen over the last three years; it is now very good. The proportion of supervised young offenders involved has consistently been below the national figure but it is rising. The timeliness of preparing statements of special educational needs for children and young people has been much lower than in similar authorities. The percentage of children with a Statement is in line with similar authorities: the percentage of these pupils permanently excluded is lower than in similar authorities.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good overall. The involvement of juveniles supervised by the Youth Offending Team engaged in full-time education, training or employment is lower than the national figure, but improving. There has been good progress on reducing persistent offending. There is a need to improve the offending behaviour of looked after children. The recent reduction is positive but more distinct strategies are required to tackle the issue in the deprived wards. More action is needed to ensure young people are initially diverted away from the youth justice system, where too many first timers are drawn. There has been progress in reducing recidivism and the number of final warnings for looked after children but further improvement is required. There is well

developed transition with a range of activities for looked after children and care leavers and young carers are well supported.

The authority's information is that the rate of youth offending is in line with the national average. The Youth Offending Team emphasises that there has been a rise in the population, by age group, that typically offends. The council reports a three-year downward trend for the offending rates of looked after children. However, there remains room to improve the number of first timers in the youth justice system and, for looked after children, reduce the final warnings, reprimands and convictions which has been higher than the national figure for the last two years.

The percentage of looked after children who contributed their views to their reviews, is acceptable but still needs to be improved.

The council recognise they need to focus even more on the small black and minority ethnic community. There is increased parent participation, and consultation assisted by the Children's Fund, which has led to support for specific groups.

The council's approach to gathering the views of children and young people is developing well. The Youth Council is elected from a wide constituency, using ballot and electronic voting and it has links with elected members. A group of young people are members of the local strategic partnership and their views have had an influence on the Children and Young People's Strategic Plan. The Youth Service engages young people in decision-making and most primary schools have school councils: there are arrangements for them to meet with elected members. The Youth Service, Connexions, and Children's Fund and regeneration strategies and leisure services also have mechanisms to consult, with the aim of influencing services and adjusting them to meet needs. Social care, education and health are working together to gather the views of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Educational achievement is well below average in the most deprived wards and participation post-16 is also well below average. Most looked after children and children on the protection register are from these areas; participation in leisure, recreation and culture and sport is well below average, and youth crime and drug abuse are above average. In these wards, teenage pregnancy remains a significant concern. The council is undertaking a range of activities to aid inclusion and regeneration in these wards.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good overall. However, there are also elements that need to improve, including the educational outcomes for looked after children.

The quality of education provided for 14 to 19 year olds is satisfactory. Post-16 provision is catered for by a further education college, and three sixth form colleges.

The borough has a 14 to 19 strategy which includes the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions. At this stage, it is focusing on improving the number of pupils leaving with GCSE or equivalent qualifications and engaging students more effectively.

The participation of young people in further education and training is in line with the national average. The number of young people not engaged in education, employment and training is below the national average. Although progression overall is high for young people, the council has identified as an issue the lack of progression at 16 and at 19 for most young people from the deprived wards. A significant minority of young people are underachieving and disengaging from education, particularly in specific schools and deprived areas. Only a small proportion of young people from the most deprived wards progresses into full-time education post-16. The retention and success rates in further education are good and results for work-based learning are satisfactory when compared nationally.

The area wide inspection report in 2004 judged provision for 14 to 19 year olds to be satisfactory overall, but that strategy, leadership and management were unsatisfactory. Joint working between the local Learning Skills Council (LSC) and the local authority had been slow to develop. The council has now developed collaboration and joint planning, responding to this issue. The report urged that there should be a reduction in the high number of young people not engaged in education, training and employment. This has improved and the authority is responding by developing vocational provision, the flexibility of the curriculum and seeking to increase participation. The authority has targeted its support on young people with learning difficulties, those leaving care to help them progress, and improving counselling and support for underachieving groups. It has also brought about an improvement in the engagement of young people through a joint public and private partnership that includes opportunities at the end of Key Stage 4 and a programme which leads to accreditation for most young people.

The engagement of looked after children has now improved. The participation of looked after children in education and training is much higher than nationally. Progression is good for care leavers.

The percentage of children in care gaining one GCSE grade A* to G is much lower than the national figure for these children, and it is lower for those gaining five or more higher grades. The educational progress and attendance for these children is monitored by a council team, and exclusions have reduced and their attendance has improved. There are also trained teachers in school to support looked after children and care leavers.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> incidence of teenage pregnancy is low strong commitment to healthy schools significant improvements in the health of looked after children. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> need to continue to develop community resources for children who have mental health needs continue to establish strategies which ensure the health of all communities.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> improvements in safeguarding children strong performance on adoption of Looked after children strong quality assurance processes in place. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the number of children placed at home on care orders remains too high, and requires further action more preparation and support is required for those undertaking the task of day care the council should investigate the reasons for the over-representation of black and minority ethnic children in the child protection system.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> standards achieved at Key Stages 1 and 2 and 3. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the standards achieved at Key Stage 4 the rate of exclusions in secondary and special schools.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> involving young people in consultation. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the rate of offending of looked after children the number of first timers involved in the youth justice system.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the improved engagement in education, training and employment in the increased participation of looked after children. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the lack of progression at 16 and at 19 for most young people from the deprived wards the below average educational outcomes for looked after children.

Service management

The council's strengths are strong leadership which provides a sense of direction and well developed partnerships to help it achieve its ambitions. There is potential for further sharing of budgets. The strategies introduced to show cost effectiveness and for commissioning, whilst improving, are in their early stages. An issue facing the council is that it is seeking to trim its budgets yet at the same time improve its service in the circumstances of an overspend in the social service budget in 2004/05.

The self-assessment from the authority is comprehensive and clear on the issues to be addressed, accurately rooting these in indicators and other local information. The issues identified are well judged: improve attainment in the most deprived wards, improve value added between Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4, improve education outcomes for looked after children, reduce exclusions and increase the number of children in the deprived areas, and looked after children, who are engaged in further and higher education and improve achievement overall in Key Stage 4.

The council is generally clear on the actions it is taking to resolve identified issues. There is scope to sharpen the strategic focus on the key issues for improvement.

There is a range of activities directed at them rather than a distinct and overarching strategy for each one. The council is using data well in relation to its deprived wards, and has an approach that uses specific local information to help regenerate neighbourhoods. Improving performance at GCSE is a long-standing issue that has proved stubborn to improve. The council is also sharing detailed data with schools as part of its approach to improve Key Stage 4 performance, and identifying schools that need intensive support and using the national secondary strategy, and its own projects designed to help teachers to tackle the issue. In its attempt to improve the value added between stages it is sharing detailed pupil performance data between schools and providing them with training and support in its use.

The authority has adopted a fundamental new structure to address the changed expectations of the provision for children and young people. The structure is supported by a strategic plan that has now been adopted and is on course to be implemented in 2006, the lead member is in position. Full restructuring is on course for April 2006, the Director of Children's Services has been appointed from autumn 2005, and the senior team is also now in place.

The council leadership has made clear its ambitions. The Children's Strategic Partnership has well judged priorities, which are appropriately ordered. The council does face its weaknesses, makes good use of data, has well developed partnerships, a new structure and plan, and these strengths give the authority a good capacity to improve.

The council has developed a range of partnerships, including with the Primary Care Trust. The LSC is involved helpfully in several of these, including the Children and Young Persons Strategic Partnership. The Surestart partnership involves all types of providers and Connexions has links with training providers and with the Youth Offending Team. The council has also developed links with groups that include teenage parents, young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Participation rates have improved for youth offenders.

The council has been successful in expanding its services to disadvantaged communities through use of new opportunities funding and has gained lottery funding to improve sports facilities.

The council's budget is largely stable, but the council is requiring social care services to make savings, particularly in relation to children's placements external to the authority. Spending on social care services and on children and families has been lower than national figures, and for the population aged below 18 is well below national spending. Spending on children in need is good. The spending on children's homes has been consistently higher than the national comparison. There is a budget overspend in social care, due mainly to the cost of placing looked after children in external residential care, and independent fostering agencies, where the weekly cost is higher than the national figure. The issue of financial viability will need careful management to ensure it does not potentially weaken the council's capacity to improve. Partnerships are strong and well embedded but further development is required, including pooling budgets where it would be helpful.

The authority reports difficulties in recruiting and retaining several categories of social care staff. Residential workers have better than national comparison in the numbers gaining qualifications, and this is an improvement. The percentage of teachers leaving their posts is much lower than the national figure and statistical neighbours, as is the number of unfilled vacancies.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

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

- the robustness and sustainability of Community Mental Health Services for children and adolescents.

Staying safe

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

Agencies collaborate to safeguard children according to the requirements of current government guidance:

- children placed at home on care orders are safe and appropriately placed
- those undertaking the task of day care are adequately prepared.

Enjoying and achieving

Educational provision is made for children who do not attend school:

- the rate of exclusions in secondary and special schools and the council's strategies to reduce them.

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

- performance at the end of Key Stage 4 in GCSE, and the council's strategies to improve overall performance.

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

Children and young people who are looked after are helped to enjoy and achieve:

- the performance of children and young people in the most deprived parts of the council area, and of looked after children and children in care, and the effectiveness of the council's strategies to help them to achieve and progress.

Making a positive contribution

Children and young people, particularly those from vulnerable groups, are supported in managing changes and responding to challenges in their lives;

- the overall quality of 14-19 education, with particular emphasis on the progression and outcomes for young people from the deprived wards.

Achieving economic well-being

Children and young people who are looked after are helped to achieve economic well-being:

- the performance of looked after children and children in care at the end of Key Stage 4.

Action is taken to ensure that 14-19 education and training is planned and delivered in a coordinated way, and to ensure that education and training (16-19) is of good quality:

- post-16 progression overall, and the strategies from the council, working with partners, to bring about improvement
- the activity by the council to develop collaboration with relevant partners to bring about improvement in the organisation of 14-19 education and outcomes for children and young people.

Final judgements

Please see your final annual performance assessment judgements attached at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY
Divisional Manager
Office for Standards in Education



JONATHAN PHILLIPS
Director – Quality, Performance and
Methods
Commission for Social Care Inspection

APA final judgements 2005: Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

Areas for judgement	Final judgements ¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	3
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
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 capacity to improve its services 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	Very good
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good/promising
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate