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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Mr Traves

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTY 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 awarded ¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	2
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	2

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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 Staffordshire County Council's children's services deliver adequate outcomes for children and young people. Young people are well supported in making a positive contribution and are well engaged in the democratic process. The council's services make a good contribution in helping children and young people to be healthy. Partnership working with other organisations has greatly improved during the last year and is now good. Other services ensure children's achievement and well-being are adequate. The Joint Area Review (JAR) in September 2005 found that children's social care services were unsatisfactory and in particular that there was variable practice around staying safe. Immediate action taken by the council has brought about an improvement resulting in outcomes for children and young people that are now adequate. The Children and Young People's Plan is based upon evaluated need and consultation with a representative range of groups and organisations. It is ambitious, challenging and effective in co-ordinating multi agency working. Progress in implementing the plan is vigorously monitored. As a consequence, services for children and young people are steadily improving. However, the council's self assessment recognises there is still much to do. Achievement post 16 is below average. Support for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in achieving economic well-being is inadequate. The council recognises that consolidating the good progress made since the JAR is a priority in ensuring the overall performance of services continues to improve. The council is now judged to have a good capacity to do this. The contribution of the council's social care service has demonstrated good progress since the JAR and is now judged as adequate.

Being healthy

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improve outcomes in this area is good.

Recommendation for action emerging from the JAR:

For action over the next six months:

- improve access to mental health services for children and young people.

Progress in addressing the recommendation since the JAR has been good with waiting times showing a significant improvement with government targets being met in five of the seven areas of the county. The council is rolling out a school based Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) following a successful pilot project during 2005/06. There is a multi-agency CAMHS Strategic Commissioning Group and the plan is to provide CAMHS as a multi-agency provision of a universal service across the county. This will be done through the Community Learning Partnership initiative, children's centres and the extended schools scheme. The plan and work to date also identifies specific at risk or need groups, needs of parents/carers and improved transition arrangements.

There is improved partnership working with a designated nurse for looked after children who tracks and monitors both in and out of county placements. This has seen the performance improve to good and is in line with national expectations. Teenage conception rates are falling and are now in line with statistical neighbours. There are a number of projects with schools, the youth service and the youth offending team to

provide information, support and work with young people in all areas of their health needs. Access for children with disabilities has improved and there is innovative work being done to promote 'sex and relationships education'. There is no national guidance in this area and the council has been contacted by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) with a view to using this strategy as part of a national approach. Staffordshire's children's commissioner is also working with a group of children and young adults to involve them in further developing policies and services to meet the needs of children who self harm. A change to the referral process has meant speedier access to occupational health and physiotherapy. There is significantly improved governance and monitoring through the Corporate Parenting Panel, Health Scrutiny Committee and performance reports to the Directorate Management Team (DMT).

Staying safe

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improve outcomes in this area is adequate. The JAR highlighted one recommendation for immediate action:

- Establish with partners the strategy for implementing the common assessment framework and associated processes including referral, review, and risk analysis and performance management. Develop shared arrangements to manage 'gate-keeping' to ensure all children at risk of being looked after have been fully assessed and every effort has been made to provide family support services. Where care is deemed necessary, action is required to increase placement choice, preferably within the county. Develop commissioning and joint commissioning arrangements to support the provision of targeted services to the most vulnerable groups.

The council has demonstrated good progress within a short timescale in meeting this recommendation. Outcomes for children and young people are now adequate. The council has prioritised the work it needs to do. Although the performance indicators during 2005/06 have fluctuated there is a better understanding of the data and further improvement is anticipated as a result of the actions the council is taking. New policies have been implemented at operational and strategic level. This has included improved management information, supervision systems and governance from senior managers and the elected members. A major restructure of assessment and care management is being phased in to improve preventative strategies.

The Safeguarding Children Board was established in March 2006. Together with the Children's Trust, this multi agency approach supports partnership working and ensures good outcomes for all aspects of children's safety.

The council has made significant improvements with their own children's homes, with two unsuitable homes being closed and numbers reduced in other homes to achieve higher standards of care and improved stability of placements. The use of the three new homes due to open this year has been revised to include a residential resource centre to support family placements, foster carers, a short stay unit for children including a 'crash pad' facility and a short break unit/resource centre for children with disabilities.

Resources and activities have focused on anti-bullying, use of physical intervention training and promoting children and young people to speak out. This is further supported by the appointment of a Children's Commissioner whose brief is to ensure the rights of children are protected and promoted within the county.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is adequate. The JAR made one recommendation in relation to this outcome for action within the next six months:

- improve the quality of education provision for looked after children and children not educated in school to ensure statutory requirements are fully met and consistently being met.

Good progress has been made in addressing this recommendation. The range of alternative and flexible provision for pupils educated other than at school meets the needs of most learners and allows them to make at least satisfactory progress. The achievement of looked after children is still unsatisfactory. Action taken by the LA brought about rapid improvements last year and is closing the gap between the LA's performance and the national average.

Children make good progress in the foundation stage and Key Stage 1 and standards are above average. During Key Stage 2 progress slows so that by the end of this Key Stage, standards are broadly average. Progress is satisfactory in secondary schools and standards are just below average. There has been a strong improvement in overall progress at Key Stage 4 from 2004 to 2005. Achievement post-16 is below average. The rate of improvement in comparison to the national trend indicates that standards will be in line with national averages by about 2010. Attendance is good. It is above local and national averages. Exclusions are well below average. Overall the enjoyment and achievement of children and young people is satisfactory and standards are broadly average.

Making a positive contribution

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is good. The JAR made no recommendations in relation to this outcome. Recent information and the authority's self assessment show that many elements of good performance are being sustained. The children's commissioner has been in post since January 2006. All groups of children and young people are encouraged strongly to participate in decisions that affect them. Children are successfully engaged in the democratic process. Their views inform strategic planning, for example in prioritising action to reduce levels of self-harming.

Achieving economic well-being

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is adequate. The JAR made no recommendations in relation to this outcome. Good progress has been made on improving vocational and work-based learning opportunities in secondary schools. Good support for looked after children from age 15 supports their successful progression in becoming independent. The council has rightly prioritised in its planning the need to improve the support to young people with LDD in achieving economic well-being. It is too early yet to see any impact from this initiative. However, achievement post-16 for young people with LDD is below average. The vast majority of young people now have access to decent affordable housing.

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

The JAR recommended two actions be taken over the next six months to improve the quality of performance management:

- improving the systems for identifying, reporting on and taking the necessary management action regarding service performance (including the systematic use of complaints, user feedback and performance information to challenge service quality and performance)
- ensuring that the management information systems for all partners are compatible and that a formalised system for passing and sharing operational information is developed.

The local authority has made good progress in acting upon these recommendations. Capacity at senior management level has been increased with three assistant directors now responsible to a deputy director for children's social care. One of the assistant directors has been specifically appointed to oversee performance management. A well thought out project plan has been approved to implement a new management information system (SAP). The plan has been approved and appropriately resourced. Phased implementation has prioritised implementing managing information relating to vulnerable children first. This phase will be operational from December 2006. Further phases of implementation will enable information from education, health and social services to be shared for every individual living in the county.

There has been a sea of change in the work of the council since the JAR. There is now an ambitious and challenging vision for the future. Strategic planning and the arrangements for monitoring and evaluation are excellent. The council has reorganised many of its services. Senior managers are of high calibre and they have created the infra-structure and provided the resources which have the potential to bring about sustained improvement. Coordinated multi-disciplinary working is good and developing. Performance management has improved. Plans are being implemented at a good pace and there is clear evidence of the impact they are beginning to have across a range of children's services. However, these improvements are at an early stage and the council recognises the need to consolidate these gains remains a priority.

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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