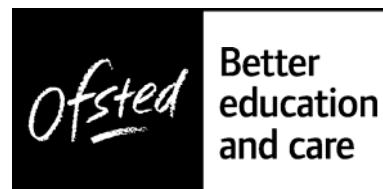


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Making Social Care
Better for People



Paul Greenhalgh
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1 December 2005

Dear Mr Greenhalgh

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 25 July 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. There is evidence of effective multi-agency partnership working which has contributed to an above average fall in teenage pregnancy rates over the past 5 years. There has been successful joint working and investment in the Milton Road Sure Start programme, in opening an integrated children's development centre for children with disabilities, and in developing a network of children's centres and extended schools services where opportunities for co-locating teams are being taken. Southend-on-Sea has a pattern of deprivation familiar to seaside towns in the south, concentrated in four wards, involving high levels of unsafe sex, substance and alcohol abuse, and a transient population due to use of temporary accommodation by London boroughs. Multi-agency services are focused in these wards and there is a need for a highly focused strategy to counteract social exclusion in the town.

Performance in improving the health of looked after children is very good. A team coordinator has now been appointed to the child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and response to Youth Offending Team (YOT) referrals has been good. Nevertheless, progress has been slow in improving services and a full needs assessment needs to be completed to inform a joint commissioning strategy with the South Essex Mental Health Trust to improve access to effective treatment and reduce waiting times. Schools contribute to promoting healthy lifestyles and many are either accredited or working towards accreditation as part of the Healthy Schools programme.

The capacity of the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and behaviour outreach support work need to be enhanced to achieve higher productivity and develop more preventative work. The coordination of the large variety of projects launched under various government initiatives - such as Teenage Pregnancy; Drugs Action Team and Children's Fund - presents a real challenge and demands clear integrated management and monitoring arrangements. Issues faced by the town's Black and ethnic communities are now receiving a higher profile in the Council's priorities.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are mixed but are overall satisfactory. Plans are in place to promote the safety and good behaviour of pupils in schools under special measures. There are clear strategies to monitor these schools and target relevant support. Although child protection activity has increased markedly, performance on re-registrations and timely de-registration retain very good and good bandings. However for the second year running, an unacceptably high proportion of reviews failed to be held on time, though the proportion has reduced on the previous year as corrective action was taken in mid-year. All children on the Child Protection Register are allocated. Both initial and core assessments are completed quickly, well above national average performance. There has been greater success in finding placements for looked after children with parents, relatives and friends, and the proportion in residential care is relatively low. Short-term stability of placements is banded very good, and the longer-term stability of foster care placements is acceptable though a CSCI inspection found a number of national fostering standards were not met.

The care management arrangements for children with disabilities, highlighted as poor during the 2004 SSI inspection, have been reviewed. Services for children with disabilities - a newly introduced national performance indicator - shows Southend-on-Sea to be below average, with a rate half of the national average. The rate of adoptions, though higher than the previous year, is still low by national standards, and local foster parent capacity, although improving, continues to be insufficient, resulting in continued heavy dependency on independent fostering agency placements that are expensive, and not always local. Too many looked after children, care leavers and pupils with special educational needs are placed at a distance from the town. The level of looked after children continues to be high and above average, and though the rate of growth of looked after children has slowed somewhat, it is still above national and IPF group trends. The Council intends it to fall this year, but there are few signs this will be achieved, despite the need for £500,000 savings in children's spending to balance the budget. The scale of Southend on Sea's problems - commissioning, workforce, performance management and budget - remain daunting, despite all the Council's efforts and there is a large projected overspend on children's social services budget this year. The DfES has entered into a partnership project with the Council to provide business support arrangements to assist in improving the pace of change in the authority and this will commence in September. The Council has recognised the need

for additional investment to escape from this “reactive cycle of high cost for low returns” and has contracted with Barnardos to offer consultancy to the adoption and fostering service.

Southend-on-Sea’s relative spend on family support at 29% has not increased in the past year, and remains well below comparator group and national averages. The ratio of Black and ethnic children in need, to all children in need is at an acceptable level.

The Council has successfully introduced two multi-agency clusters in two school areas, and is planning a third. These are designed to identify and meet the needs of vulnerable children early, reducing the need for possible eventual statutory intervention. Preparations are underway for the new Local Safeguarding Children’s Board, whose procedures will be coordinated with Essex and Thurrock councils.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. The overall quality of early years provision is good and supports children well in enabling them to meet the early learning goals. Results at the end of Key Stage 1 are above national averages and in line with statistical neighbours. However, results at Key Stage 2, although in line with the national averages, are below the results of similar authorities. The progress made between Key Stages 1 and 2 is currently too low in too many schools. The council acknowledges this particular weakness, particularly in the performance of boys in English and literacy skills. The support provided by the education service in implementing the national literacy strategy is now being reviewed to ensure earlier intervention and better coordination through the School Improvement Adviser (SIA). Schools not achieving the floor targets receive additional support and the tracking of individual pupil’s progress is now more rigorous.

Standards in Key Stages 3 and 4 are rising. They are above the averages nationally and in line with those of statistical neighbours. However, there is large variation between schools and groups of pupils. The progress in non-selective schools is fragile with huge fluctuation in results year on year and a rising number not achieving the floor targets. The gap between the achievement of boys and girls is widening, with boys making unsatisfactory progress. The education service has recognised the need to provide a more rigorous challenge to its secondary schools and align the work of the national strategy teams with the work of the SIA. A number of strategies are in place to raise standards of vulnerable groups with some good initiatives in the Excellence Cluster.

The Council is committed to maintaining looked after children in local schools. There are good links between education, foster carers and social services staff. The attendance by looked after children, though improved in the past year, is too low with negative impact on their achievement on their results at GCSE. The proportion of looked after children who achieve one or more passes at GCSE has improved

significantly and is acceptable, though it is still lower than the national average. The proportion of care leavers in higher education is also rising. The Council works effectively with carers to increase the proportion of looked after children who take advantage of extra-curricular activities provided by schools. The youth and the library services provide resources specifically for this group of young people.

Attendance has improved but is still too low. The rate of exclusions are above average and a cause for concern in secondary schools in spite of the good focus on reintegration and widening opportunities through alternative provision. Specific strategies, such as the work of learning mentors and the behaviour improvement programme, have yet to have an impact.

Support for the three schools placed in formal categories of concern by Ofsted is satisfactory. However, the removal of one school from the special measures category has been particularly slow and the Council is now taking radical action to improve provision. Weaknesses in other schools causing concerns are known and a more effective multi-agency approach to supporting groups of young people and their families is now being developed. Support for schools' self-evaluation requires improvement, and strategies have been put in place to engage all schools in a programme of training and development.

The Department of Leisure and Culture and schools promotes participation in sport, leisure and cultural activities. A wide range of voluntary and statutory organisations provide recreational activities for young people and the Council is also part of an "Out of School Hours Learning" DfES pilot project. The proportion of young people registered as a member of the Youth Service is above average. The Council's monitoring of provision shows that support has enabled particular vulnerable groups to have fun in a safe environment and to take part in programmes to increase their knowledge and skills. Over the past three years, the "Being Here" arts programme has enabled a large number of socially excluded young people to develop community leadership skills.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. The Council has a wide range of projects to prevent offending and combat re-offending. These projects are evaluated in order to target resources effectively. The number of young offenders and the rate of re-offending are decreasing, demonstrating the very positive impact of the local Prevent and Deter strategy. Work with families in Southend-on-Sea's most deprived areas is particularly successful in preventing entry into the youth justice system. Final warnings and convictions for looked after children have reduced significantly and are at an acceptable level. The Council recognises that further improvements are needed, in particular to improve the percentage of young offenders in education, training or

employment, which is currently below the national average and well below the national target.

Children and young people are given good support in managing changes in their lives. There has been a significant improvement over the last two years to a good level in the proportion of looked after children who contributed their opinions at reviews. The Council has put strategies in place to help children and young people with disabilities and special education needs to manage the transition between specific phases in their lives. The Disabled Children and Parents Group is active with good support so that all young people engage fully in the young person's "Voice and Influence" initiatives. Schools make a positive contribution to pupils' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development. Many have a school council. The Council acknowledges the need to monitor schools' provision to ensure equality of access and opportunity. Currently, the views of children and young people are sought and a Participation Strategy is being developed to increase their engagement further. The work of the Young Person's Voice and Influence Unit, the Youth Council, and the Youth Mayor are examples of good, innovative practice that seek to increase children and young people's influence on the strategic direction of the Council.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory overall. Childcare provision is good. Four Children's Centres were planned of which three are already operational. The quality of education provided for 14 to 19 year olds is satisfactory and collaboration to plan post 16 education and training is managed well.

Standards achieved by young people in GCE/VCE/A-AS examinations are rising and are above the averages for England and similar authorities. However, these overall results mask variable performance between schools. The Council has agreed, with the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC), a joint process of monitoring schools' sixth form provision to ensure that they all add value against students' outcomes at GCSE. There are weaknesses in the take up of post-16 education and training because of limited offer of relevant courses and this is being addressed effectively through the 14-19 strategy. The education service works effectively with the local LSC and a review of courses is currently underway to ensure provision of a wider range of relevant vocational options.

The percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training at age 19, in relation to the age group as a whole is acceptable though well under the national average. All care leavers have personal advisers and 94% had pathway plans. The quality of pathway plans requires improvement and this is being addressed. The Leaving Care Team has moved to improved facilities with better access for young people but the impact of this provision is as yet unproven. Support for children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities is satisfactory, and there is a

dedicated transition worker who works to achieve a smooth transition for young people to adult services. The Connexions personal adviser attends all reviews and young people with severe and complex needs have access to a specialist adviser. Opportunities for young people with complex needs to access sheltered employment have been improved through partnership with the Adult Community College. These young people are supported effectively in making the transition to adult life and economic independence.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contribution of schools to promoting healthy life-styles • joint investment with Primary Care Trust • overall progress on teenage pregnancy • health of looked after children. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • integrated strategic, managerial and reporting arrangements • evidence of impact of joint strategies in high deprivation wards • delivery of targets for CAMHS services.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting safety and good behaviour in schools • evidence of safer levels of activity and good performance in child protection • completion of assessments against government timescales. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reducing the level of looked after children and rising trend • better value local placements • adoption orders in line with national targets • improved quality of fostering and services.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the quality of early years provision • overall improvement in standards of achievement • multi-agency approach to supporting vulnerable groups • targeting of national strategies to support underperforming groups • provision of recreational activities. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards at Key Stage 2 • performance of boys • attendance and rate of exclusions • attendance and attainment of looked after children.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wide range of effective projects to prevent offending and combat re-offending • decline in number of young offenders and the rate of re-offending • work with families in most deprived areas • good contribution of children and young people to reviews • support given to children and young people at significant points of transition. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of young offenders in education, training or employment • wider participation of children and young people.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • results in the GCE/VCE/A-AS examinations • support for children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities • collaboration with LSC in planning post-16 education and training. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take up of post-16 education and training • percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training at age 19 • quality of pathway plans.

Service management

The Council is effectively under new management since the elections in May 2005 although there has been no change in party political control. New high-level performance and budget monitoring arrangements have been introduced. There has been an early move to the establishment of an integrated children's department, a strengthening of the senior management, and discussions are continuing with the Primary Care Trust about further integration of services, joint appointments and the joint workforce agenda to explore new, multi-skilled roles. The council has welcomed the Every Child Matters agenda enthusiastically, and has made rapid progress in strategic appointments. Using the good existing partnership arrangements, the Council has published for consultation an Interim Children and Young People's Plan to guide more detailed needs assessment work and discussions with the community and partner agencies about priorities and resources. The Council recognises that it has lacked management information systems in the past and that the new department offers economies in streamlining this vital element. Human resources' capacity has also been drawn into the corporate centre to tackle more effectively long-standing recruitment, turnover and sickness problems which have led to heavy use of agency staff in social care, though there has been encouraging recent improvement in teacher vacancies.

Collaboration with schools has improved and the challenge from the education service has become more robust. Management capacity and stability have led to more effective monitoring arrangements although these would be further improved with more proactive monitoring of schools budget and the greater use of pupil level data in school self-evaluation.

Thames Gateway development offers the town new investment and opportunities for cross-authority working. Following discussions with DfES, the Council has secured a timely business support package that should give new momentum to tackling the deep-seated challenges in children's social services.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Healthy life-styles are promoted for children and young people:

- impact of programmes on health outcomes in high deprivation wards.

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

- CAMHS progress.

Staying safe

Looked after children live in safe environments and are protected from abuse and exploitation:

- the high and increasing rate of looked after children
- commissioning of placements and preventive services and value for money
- fostering and adoption capacity
- impact of Behaviour Strategy on safety of children in schools.

Enjoying and achieving

Children and young people are enabled and encouraged to attend and enjoy school and to achieve highly:

- impact of strategies to raise standards and support underperforming groups including achievement and attendance of looked after children
- strategy to support behaviour and attendance.

Making a positive contribution

Children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision making and in supporting the community:

- use of children and young people's views to influence provision and strategic direction.

Achieving economic well-being

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:

- impact of the 14-19 strategy.

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

- quality of pathway plans.

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: Southend-on-Sea 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	2
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	2
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 capacity to improve its services for children and young people	2

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