

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 945 6293
Direct F 0117 945 6554
South_apa@ofsted.gov.uk



26 November 2007

Mr Clive Webster
Director of Children's Services
Southampton City Council
1st Floor, Civic Centre
Southampton
SO14 7LY

Dear Mr Webster

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) for your council, some aspects of which were conducted at the same time as the analysis stage of the joint area review (JAR). The 2006 APA informed the scoping of the JAR at the planning stage and the initial findings of the 2007 APA were taken into account by the review team at the end of the analysis stage. The outcomes of the JAR were then considered alongside a review of recent data in arriving at the final APA judgements for 2007. As a result, many of the areas for development highlighted in this letter align with the recommendations in the JAR report and should be similarly aligned in any future action plan produced by the council and its partners. The judgements in the letter also draw on your assessment of progress or review of the Children and Young People's Plan where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted and other inspectorates. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this and for the time given by you and your colleagues to the assessment process.

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

Southampton City Council provides a service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users. The council's contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people is good in most service functions across the five outcome areas. A number of important initiatives are narrowing the gap between the outcomes for most children and young people and those who are most vulnerable. The recent JAR found that the council and its partners are addressing well the long-standing weaknesses in educational attainment and services for vulnerable young people. The council has adopted a long-term strategy of improving preventative services and promoting sustainable improvements across a broad front.

Being healthy

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council has improved its promotion of healthy lifestyles and good health for children and young people in a range of ways, for example, by providing free use of council run swimming pools to under sevens. Immunisation levels are higher than national averages. Targeted work on reducing obesity, a key area for improvement in the 2006 APA, and improving dental health in priority areas has had a positive impact; however, the level of tooth decay in Southampton, particularly for younger children, is increasing in areas which have not been specifically targeted and is above the national average. Breastfeeding rates have declined slightly although they are still better than the national average. Smoking in pregnancy has also declined but is still relatively high and the Tellus2 survey indicated that a higher than average number of young people have smoked cigarettes. Effective targeting of priority areas has resulted in higher birth weights and fewer Caesarean sections, narrowing the gap between priority areas and the rest of the city. Infant mortality continues to be significantly low. The rate of teenage conceptions is below the 1998 baseline but progress needs to be sustained. There is a wide range of initiatives in place which target high risk groups as well as improving sex and relationships education and access to services.

Most early years provision contributes well to the health of the young children attending. When inspected, 9.1% of settings attained an outcome judgement of outstanding, significantly higher than the national average. Most schools are doing well in encouraging pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles and some excellent work has taken place on improving the quality of food in schools. In the Tellus2 survey, 87% of children and young people described themselves as quite or very healthy, which is similar to the national average. The council is making satisfactory progress towards meeting its Healthy Schools target by the end of 2007.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are comprehensive, although some schools report delays in access. The JAR found that the CAMHS for children with learning disabilities was comprehensive with good partnership working between agencies to meet all levels of need, although waiting times for specialised services were sometimes too long. All secondary schools have workers who have received mental health awareness training. All parents and carers of young people with, or at risk of having, an Anti-Social Behaviour Order now have access to parenting support and increased support is available to parents of younger children whose behaviour is causing concern. Timely intervention for young people with substance misuse needs is similar to the national average, but there are delays in assessment times that need to be addressed. There is a dedicated health team for looked after children and health assessment levels remain very good. All looked after children have mental health assessments. A multi-agency therapeutic needs panel has been set up to act as a single point of referral for looked after children who have mental health problems or learning difficulties and this is enabling more consistent and faster access to services.

Areas for development

- Focus multi-agency health promotion work to reduce the rate of teenage pregnancies to meet national targets; continue to reduce the levels of smoking during pregnancy and encourage more mothers to initiate breast-feeding.
- Improve access time to specialist CAMHS, especially for schools.
- Improve access to assessment for young people identified with substance misuse needs and build upon the effective local interventions that have taken place in targeted areas to improve dental health, particularly for younger children.

Staying safe

Grade 2

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this outcome is adequate. There is continued good support from local services for road safety. There has been a good reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured in road accidents and the council is in line to meet its targets for 2010. The number of children on the child protection register is relatively stable and re-registrations have dropped, indicating that de-registrations are timely. Hardly any children are now on the register for more than two years. Schools have effective child protection policies in place. In the Tellus2 survey, 70% of children and young people reported that they feel very safe or quite safe in the local area, and more so at school. However, just over a quarter of children and young people reported that they had been bullied in the last four weeks and a similar number said that bullying was not dealt with very well. These figures are in line with national averages, but are clearly of concern. An anti-bullying strategy has been completed and distributed to relevant agencies. All schools now have an anti-bullying policy and a co-ordinator, who investigates incidents and monitors the effectiveness of the policy.

The number of social care referrals is well below that of most councils. Referrals have continued to reduce in number, partly due to the council ensuring that contact referrals are recorded separately. The recent JAR found that although thresholds for referral were clear, they were not fully understood by all referring agencies. A greater proportion of referrals lead to initial assessments, although there has been a drop in the timeliness of initial and core assessments which needs to be addressed. The re-referral rate is lower than other councils and indicates that cases are being closed appropriately.

The numbers of looked after children are low as the council's strategy is to prevent children having to be looked after. Family group conferences have been particularly effective in deflecting children from entering care. Short-term stability of placement is good but there is less stability in the longer term. The JAR found that permanence

planning for children in long term care needed to be improved. Performance on the timeliness of statutory reviews, a key area for improvement in the APA for 2006, has increased significantly to 80%, although there is more progress to be made. The JAR found that there was a lack of rigour in the auditing of case files, and in the systematic recording and tracking of decision making, within case files. Most looked after children are placed less than twenty miles from their home which is helping to support family relationships. Safeguarding arrangements in the council's own residential and fostering services are good. The percentage of adoptions of looked after children is at a very good level, as are adoption timescales. Over 90% of young people with disabilities aged 14+, have a transition plan in place, which is good practice.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is in its second year of operation. There is good representation from partner agencies and the voluntary sector and there is also emphasis on learning from practice. Priorities have been identified but the actions taken have still to impact on outcomes for children and young people. Thresholds for serious case reviews have been agreed and new inter-agency safeguarding procedures are being developed in conjunction with three local authorities. Delays in agreeing these procedures have been addressed, and interim guidance has been provided to staff. Private fostering arrangements are being monitored and the Board is kept informed of developments. The number of private fostering arrangements is very small; nevertheless timeliness of monitoring visits requires improvement.

Areas for development

- Continue to address the incidence of bullying.
- Improve the quality assurance of case files.
- Ensure that referral systems are clear and fully understood by all referring agencies.
- Improve the timeliness of initial and core assessments, statutory reviews for looked after children and monitoring of private fostering arrangements.
- Improve permanence planning and the stability of longer term placements for looked after children.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. Most children and young people make better progress than expected given their low starting point and achieve well in relation to their capability.

Inspection findings confirm that the quality of provision in the early years is good and there is a wide and flexible choice for most parents in balancing their children's needs, their work commitments and family life. The council has exceeded its target

for the number of designated children centres. Children develop a good range of skills in the Foundation Stage and continue to progress well at Key Stage 1. As a result, by the end of Year 2 they achieve standards that are in line with national averages. The 2007 unvalidated data for Key Stage 2, show that the upward trend in standards has been maintained and at a faster pace than in previous years. The data show improved standards compared to those in 2006. Standards in this phase are in line with other similar local authorities and the gap between national averages is narrowing significantly. Although standards are lower than national averages by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, they are continuing to rise and are in line with similar authorities.

The council continues to improve its outstanding and inclusive music service, and to provide an excellent range of opportunities for sport and the arts. For six consecutive years the music service has been identified as one of the best six performing music services in England and this year the council has received the top award. The music service has initiated several projects designed to increase access for all. Most pupils enjoy their education, this is partly due to the quality of education provided by schools and the work the council and schools are doing with carers and parents to help them support their children to enjoy and achieve.

The overall progress of children and young people from Black and minority ethnic groups is at least satisfactory; however, the council is aware that some groups do not progress as well as their peers at certain points in their education. Although schools track fluency levels, this is not done equally well in all schools. There is currently limited guidance for schools about how best to meet the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

The percentage of looked after children in Year 11 who sat at least one GCSE or equivalent exam is higher than average. Furthermore the percentage of young people leaving care aged 16 or over with at least 1 GCSE at grade A*-G or with five or more GCSEs at grade A*-C is good. The needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well met and the council is increasingly effective in reaching those with learning needs and supporting their progress. Exclusion rates for these children and young people are very low. This is partly due to effective behaviour management strategies in schools.

The council provides most schools with good levels of challenge and support and this has had a noticeable impact on standards, particularly in primary schools where there has been a significant reduction this year in the number of schools attaining below floor targets. The use of school improvement partners for secondary schools has been less effective and has not led to the same rigour of challenge. Nevertheless, fewer schools are a cause for concern. There are currently no schools in special measures; no secondary schools and only one primary school has a notice to improve.

There is a significant difference between the Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 contextual value added measures for boys and girls, with the local figure for girls being above the national figure and the figure for boys being below. The council is making

satisfactory progress in helping to reduce this gap. There is good focused work taking place, aimed at improving outcomes for the majority of looked after children, as well as improving partnerships between schools and colleges in providing 14–19 education. Although schools are effective at supporting the most vulnerable children and young people at key transition points, this is less well managed for the more able and higher attaining pupils. The education plans and transition arrangements for children and young people receiving or leaving custodial sentences are at times disjointed and not fully informed by educational information and assessment.

The council has worked hard to put systems in place to help improve rates of attendance. Although attendance levels are now broadly in line with the national average, this remains an area for improvement due to the overly high levels of authorised and unauthorised absence. Nevertheless, there is good evidence that some children and young people, whose attendance was previously poor, are now attending regularly as a result of council and school initiatives and many of these are achieving better as a result. There continues to be low levels of permanent exclusions, but the number of fixed term exclusions both in primary and secondary schools has recently increased notably for looked after children. Some schools also report difficulties in accessing the designated social worker for looked after children in their school.

More children and young people have access to a wide range of recreational activities both in and out of school and during the school holidays. These include a wide range of free holiday activities, an extensive program in leisure centres, a junior archaeology club and art gallery workshops. Pupils can also receive help with homework through the library network.

Areas for development

- Improve standards particularly in Key Stages 2 and 4, and improve transition arrangements between all Key Stages.
- Work more closely with schools to continue to reduce rates of authorised and unauthorised absence as well as exclusion rates of looked after children.
- Ensure that arrangements for children and young people receiving or leaving custodial sentences are joined up and well informed by educational information and assessment.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good with some outstanding features. Young people have helped to shape the Southampton City Strategy and have been involved in a number of funding allocations. The recent JAR found that consultation and engagement were good but that opportunities to participate in service planning and to meet with

elected members and senior managers should be increased for children and young people from the more deprived communities. Participation in volunteering is growing across all age groups, a small-scale Junior Neighbourhood Warden Scheme, which offers a range of activities and encourages 8-12 year olds to take pride in their community, has been highly successful and has now been rolled out across the city. Increasing numbers of young people are taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and a pilot scheme for 8– 12-year-olds has been very successful in encouraging children to become more involved in their communities.

Almost all looked after children now contribute to their reviews, with participation methods being tailored to their needs. The percentage of looked after children who have received reprimands, final warnings or convictions has reduced significantly and is now below that of most councils. The number of first time entrants to the youth justice system is dropping, although it is still relatively high. Re-offending rates are similar to national averages. Services are working together effectively and focusing on particular neighbourhoods to reduce anti-social behaviour.

Inspections of early years provision found that services were better than those in most councils, and 86% of schools inspected were found to be good, 64%, or outstanding, 22%. The development of support for emotional literacy is particularly strong in Southampton schools. The JAR found that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities did not always find it easy to participate in service planning. A participation worker from a voluntary organisation has been contracted to work with children in need, with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and more opportunities have been made available for consultation. The Youth Parliament has strong representation from young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, looked after children and those from minority ethnic groups.

Older pupils in all phases of education receive good opportunities to act as mentors.

This provides additional support to vulnerable groups and helps children and young people to develop a shared sense of community spirit.

Areas for development

- Increase the level of engagement of young people in community activities and decision-making.
- Reduce the numbers of first time entrants to the youth justice system.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. There is a wide range of childcare provision, based on a comprehensive analysis of need, predicting future demand and meeting the needs of diverse groups. The council has increased the number of childcare and early years places and exceeded targets in areas of deprivation. Sure Start programmes are

working hard to encourage parents to raise their aspirations and family income by taking up training, building their skills for employment, using registered child care, claiming tax credits and finding jobs. In 2006/07 the training places taken up by Sure Start parents increased significantly from the previous year. The satisfaction rates of parents using childcare are very high.

Parents and young people can readily access helpful, reliable and up-to-date information about council services. The council's Children's Information Service (CIS) has won national awards and continues to provide a high quality comprehensive information service for parents and families. Since the introduction of the web site in 2005 and the increase in the range of information held by the service, use has increased, from 2005 when 7,835 enquiries were made, to 10,126 enquiries in 2006/07. The parents' survey in 2006 indicated that half of all parents are aware of the CIS and 17% of parents spontaneously mentioned CIS as where they would go to find information on childcare. This compares favourably with 7% of parents nationally.

The council has made good progress in supporting families and developing sustainable communities. Vulnerable young people are well supported and the majority of care leavers aged 16 -18 are living in foster care or supported lodgings. Effective referral systems between agencies ensure that young people with complex needs also receive good advice. Children and young people who are looked after are helped to achieve economic well-being and the employment rate of care leavers is good. The Council uses its position as the largest employer in the city to promote employment and training opportunities for young people. Various sections of the city council offer work experience and apprenticeships.

There is a wide range of projects to support economic well-being. Young people are well supported in developing enterprising behaviour and pupils at school are helped to prepare for the world of work and are improving their ability to use information and communication technology. The curriculum includes a good range of vocational pathways and progression routes relevant to the needs of learners. Vocational courses are well used in schools and in joint programmes between schools and colleges and these are having a positive impact on results. Work experience participation and completion rates are good.

The percentage of young people at 19 who have achieved an NVQ Level 2 or above continues to be low and there has been an increase in the percentage of young people whose destination is "Not Known" from 5.7% in November 2005 to 8.6% in 2006. There has been significant improvement in staying-on rates at post 16, but retention rates remain insufficient. Curriculum opportunities for 14 to 19 year olds have improved and this has been enhanced by the growing and developing partnership between schools and colleges. However, there is insufficient coordination to ensure that young people have a clear view of the full range of opportunities available to them particularly in the realms of work based learning.

The council is developing good links with employers by, for example, sharing a definition of employability drawn up through the Skills and Employability Board. However, there is still a long way to go to involve employers more fully, including promoting links between schools and local businesses for children and young people in Key Stages 2 and 3.

Different projects and initiatives, including action groups and multi-agency working, are helping to reduce the proportion of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). Although there is an improving picture, the council recognise the need to further reduce the number of NEETS.

Areas for development

- Help schools to strengthen links with local businesses for learners at Key Stages 2 and 3.
- Encourage young people to increase their level of qualification and ensure all secondary schools have a relevant 14-19 curriculum with clear progression pathways, and develop strategies to improve retention rates at post 16.
- Reduce the number of young people whose destination is not known and continue to reduce the number of NEETS.

Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The management of services for children and young people is good. Services are making a discernable difference and are of clear benefit to most children and young people. They are narrowing the gap between outcomes for most children and young people and for those who are most vulnerable. This is particularly significant when set against the wide and challenging agenda for change and improvement during a time of considerable budget cuts. The council has focused on developing a Children's Trust, the restructuring of children's services and has embarked on reorganising secondary education and implementing the Change for Children programme. Furthermore, the lead councillor for children's services changed in May 2007 following local elections.

Senior officers provide a strong sense of direction and have a realistic understanding of the significant challenges facing children's services. Consequently, long-standing weaknesses in educational attainment and services for vulnerable groups of children and young people are improving. The ambitions of the council are realistic and challenging and good partnership working across health, social care and education is helping to bring about good levels of improvement within services.

The Children's and Young People's Plan (CYPP) takes account of the views of parents, carers, children and young people and has been strengthened through the inclusion of specific, measurable actions. The impact of some of these actions will take time to be realised, although a number of services targeted at priority areas are already showing improved outcomes. The CYPP is clearly linked to other council plans, such as the corporate plan and community strategy. The full range of equality and diversity issues is included within the priorities. The CYPP sets out clearly focused activities across the five outcomes and the updated version includes detailed evaluations on the progress made since last year's APA. Services for children and young people are well managed, and there is good capacity to improve.

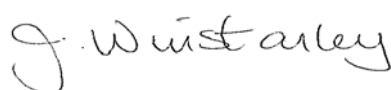
The JAR found that performance management is adequate. The council's corporate performance management framework is being implemented across children's services but it is not yet fully embedded. The council has recognised that the former education and social care services need to work more closely together and is taking steps to build on existing good practice. Nevertheless, a stronger and more focused approach to performance management in learning services has led to service improvements in priority areas of educational achievement. The council recognises that there is a need to review systems for consulting and communicating with schools and remains appropriately focused on key priorities for improvement. There is increasingly good partnership working across the city and within council services. Good examples include the work between schools and colleges, the development of skills centres to further resource vocational opportunities as well as partnership working between agencies to meet the mental health needs of children and young people at all levels.

Areas for development

- Ensure that performance management is fully embedded and rigorous.
- Ensure that processes are fully integrated across the former education and social care services.
- Review systems for consulting and communicating with schools.

The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment to be published by the Audit Commission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection