



Making Social Care  
Better for People



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**1 November 2006**

Dear Ms Nicholson

**2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment (APA) process for your local authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

**Summary**

Areas for judgement	Grade awarded <sup>1</sup>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	4
The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people	4
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	4

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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 overall effectiveness of the authority's children's services is excellent. Outcomes for children in four areas: Being Healthy, Enjoying and Achieving, Making a Positive Contribution and Economic Well-being were judged to be excellent whilst outcomes for Staying Safe were considered good. All service areas are at least good. The authority has taken a lead role in driving improvement in children's services, and has made substantial progress on the Change for Children agenda in the fifteen months since the Children and Young People's Directorate was established. The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people is outstanding.

## **Being healthy**

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to this area is excellent. The LA is confident that at least 50% of schools will achieve the Healthy Schools standard by December 2006. Other work is being undertaken to support improvements in general health. A survey to gather baseline data on body mass index has been undertaken and results are being analysed. It is intended that this will inform plans to reduce obesity. The availability of sport in schools is excellent, and the network of trained coaches available to schools has recently been enhanced.

There has been a continuing reduction in the rate of teenage conceptions, and rates are lower than in similar councils. The authority is aware of local problem areas and is targeting resources there. Self-assessment of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is good, and the integration of mental health workers in multi-agency teams has raised the profile of mental health problems among the young and ensured that specialist resources are appropriately prioritised. All young people with non-acute mental health problems referred to CAMHS by the youth offending team were assessed within five days.

A higher than expected proportion of those receiving treatment for substance misuse was aged under 18 years, which shows that the reach of substance misuse services to young people is good. Those young people who receive treatment for substance misuse are almost always treated in a child friendly setting. This is better than elsewhere in the region. Alcohol misuse by young people has been given a high priority for action by the Children's Trust, and a reduction in teenage drinking has been included as a priority in the Local Area Agreement (LAA).

Action to reduce the take up of smoking by young people has been effective, and numbers of young people who report never having smoked are increasing year on year.

A multi-agency approach is being taken to develop services for disabled children and their families. Building the Child Development Centre on the Severndale School site will further enhance proposals for integration of services for children with disabilities.

The authority and its partners are taking action to reduce waiting times for access to some therapy services, and to improve access to Genito-Urinary Medicine clinics.

Support for parents and carers is developing through multi-agency teams that are located within each of the five District council areas.

Health checks for looked after children are excellent, and proposals for integrating medical checks for individual children are good. The council is intending all looked after children to have a health improvement plan by April 2007.

## **Staying safe**

The council's contribution to children and young people staying safe is good. Nearly all schools were rated as good or better in the extent to which schools ensure that learners stay safe. Fewer children in Shropshire reported concerns about bullying than the national average. Bullying remains a priority for the Children's Trust and the authority is working to reduce the impact of bullying further. Instances of racial abuse and discriminatory behaviour are monitored by regular reports to scrutiny panel.

The authority has implemented the common assessment framework and is about to introduce software-based information sharing arrangements with partner agencies. Multi-agency teams have been established in all five district council areas, and the authority has been awarded Beacon Status for early intervention to protect children at risk. The authority's view is that it is too early to say that there is clear statistical evidence of better outcomes, though anecdotally families have welcomed the support offered.

Referral rates and repeat referrals of children in need and the percentage of referrals that led to initial assessment have remained similar to the previous year and with comparable councils. Performance in assessing referrals within timescales has improved overall, though there was a slight fall in assessing initial referrals within seven days.

Numbers of children who are the subject of a formal child protection plan and who are on the Child Protection Register (CPR) are falling. All children on the CPR are allocated to a qualified social worker, and all cases of children on the CPR were reviewed within timescales. The low number of re-registrations of children on the CPR is excellent. The proportion of children that were removed from the CPR having been registered for more than two years increased, but remained low, demonstrating that protection plans were effective.

A multi-agency plan to reduce the impact of domestic violence on children and families is being jointly implemented by the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Children's Trust.

A high proportion of children with disabilities have a transition plan to support their move into adulthood.

Numbers of looked after children remain stable and are low compared with similar councils. All looked after children have a named and appropriately qualified social worker, and nearly all reviews were completed within timescales.

However, there are some signs of pressure within the service for looked after children. All three indicators around placement stability show signs of decline in the year, though overall the council's performance remains good. Despite increases in the pool of foster carers, a higher proportion of Shropshire's looked after children are placed in residential care than a year ago. Conversely, lower proportions are in foster care, placed for adoption, or are placed with family and friends. The quality of the council's children's homes is unsatisfactory as they fail to consistently meet national minimum standards. The council is working up a jointly commissioned project with two other councils, to deliver a number of specialist residential placements combined with appropriate education. The council is also proposing to replace its existing two children's homes, which accommodate nine or ten children, with three homes each accommodating four children.

The council recognises that further work is necessary to ensure that there is adequate capacity in the system and that placements can be made of children with complex needs.

Appropriate action is being taken to safeguard children who are privately fostered.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

The contribution the authority makes to ensure children and young people achieve at schools and enjoy their education and leisure activities is excellent. The separation of advisory services from a joint arrangement with Telford has been managed effectively and is already benefiting Shropshire children and schools.

Levels of attainment at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 are consistently above the national average in all core subjects and broadly in line with similar local authorities. The percentage of pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades at A\* to C has increased and is above the national average and that of statistical neighbours. Very few pupils leave school without a qualification. The overall progress of pupils from Key Stage 1 to 4 is very good and the achievement of pupils was at least good in half the schools that have been inspected recently. Looked after children are supported very effectively. The proportion of young people leaving care who are entered for and achieve at least one GCSE grade is well above the national average

The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage is good in most schools. More nursery education providers are judged very good compared to the national average. The percentage of pupils reaching the early learning goals of Level 6 is lower than nationally although figures improved last year and are now closer to the national average. The council is working positively with the maintained and non-maintained sector to improve the quality and capacity of Early Years provision.

Since September 2005 two primary schools have been placed in special measures and two schools have been given a notice to improve (one primary, one secondary). The proportion of schools in special measures remains low and for schools given a notice to

improve is broadly in line with the national average. Support for schools placed in a category is good and most are on target to come out quickly.

Rates of unauthorised and authorised absences have remained consistently below the national average. The overall attendance rate has improved at secondary and primary schools, as has the attendance of looked after children which is now satisfactory.

Numbers of permanent exclusions are low in all schools but fixed-term exclusions remain high in secondary schools.

The proportion of young offenders in full time education, employment or training is above the national average. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. This is supported by inspection evidence where it is judged to be at least good in the majority of schools. Participation in youth and community activities is high and has exceeded national targets. Young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, enjoy a wide programme of sporting and musical activities.

### **Making a positive contribution**

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to this area is excellent.

The authority reports that the Youth Service has improved its reach to a higher proportion of 13–16 year olds in 2004/05, and figures are now better than comparable councils and the national average.

There is considerable evidence of the involvement of children and young people in decision-making by the Children's Trust, including representation on the board, the adoption of Hear by Right Standards across the authority, and the establishment of a specific participation team of young people. This team has quarterly targets and has commenced its work on consultation with children with disabilities. Looked after children make a contribution to nearly all reviews.

The performance of the youth offending team has improved against Youth Justice Board performance indicators. Recidivism has reduced for three years running in the cohort followed by the youth offending team, though this cohort is drawn from both Shropshire and Telford. Convictions, final warnings and reprimands for looked after children are down. There is concern that rates of final warnings, convictions and reprimands are rising as a result of national policy initiatives on crime, however, a further reduction in offending by young people has been included as a Local Area Agreement target, and the authority is engaged with partners including the police in working to achieve this.

## **Achieving economic well being**

The authority makes an outstanding contribution to children and young people's economic well-being. In particular, looked after children and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported very effectively in making the transition to adult life and economic independence.

Standards of attainment for 16 to 18 year olds overall are good although the small percentage of students in school sixth forms does not do as well as those in colleges where attainment at Levels 2 and 3 is high.

Only three schools with sixth form provision have been inspected recently. However, in none of these was the provision judged better than satisfactory and one was inadequate. Previous inspections in the remaining schools judged provision to be good. In recent inspections achieving economic well being was judged good in the majority of schools.

The proportion of young people in full time education, training and employment is well above the national average, as is the proportion of young people leaving care. The authority knows the destinations of almost all of these pupils. All young people leaving care are placed in suitable accommodation by the age of 19. The Department for Education and Skills (Dfes) has recommended that other local authorities visit the good practice in Shropshire's provision at 14 to 19.

Provision is very good for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, a high proportion of whom are fully engaged in education, training and employment. Specialist Connexions personnel have worked closely with special schools to ensure all statemented pupils have moved into further post-16 learning.

The impact of Sure Start has contributed to levels of child poverty reducing at a faster rate in Shropshire than nationally.

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

The authority's success derives from competent and committed senior staff as well as engaged political leadership. Arrangements for children to contribute to the agenda are excellent and include representation on the Children's Trust Board as well as a wide range of other initiatives to support engagement, including from vulnerable and hard to reach groups. The Children's Trust has put considerable effort into developing a thorough assessment of need and then to refining key priorities, which have been reviewed and re-prioritised during the year. The authority has maintained its engagement with the Primary Care Trust and there is evidence of a best value approach to commissioning services. The authority is working up a shared performance management framework with partners; the timetable for which is set out in the LAA.

The authority was an early mover in setting up an integrated Children and Young Person's Directorate and has been active in developing the Change for Children agenda nationally. The authority is also an early implementer of the common assessment framework. The implementation of multi-agency family support teams, located in the five district authority areas, has been acknowledged as innovative practice by DfES with the recent award of Beacon Status. The LAA has widely based support, including from all district councils, and the agreement confers single pot financial flexibilities and commits partners to challenge improvements in children's services under a shared performance management framework.

### Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduction in the rate of teenage conceptions</li> <li>• CAMHS services are good</li> <li>• substance misuse services are effective in reaching young people and in providing appropriate treatment</li> <li>• action to reduce numbers of young people who take up smoking has been effective</li> <li>• health checks for looked after children and the work to ensure that these translate into effective health improvement plans</li> <li>• integration of services for children with disabilities is proceeding.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• achieving the Health Schools Target.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• implementation of the common assessment framework and information sharing arrangements</li> <li>• assessments of children in need are carried out within timescales</li> <li>• the development of multi-agency teams to provide support to children and families that avoids intervention by specialist services</li> <li>• numbers of looked after children remain stable overall</li> <li>• allocation of children on the CPR and looked after children to qualified social workers.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increasing capacity so there is genuine placement choice for all children that need to be looked after</li> <li>• ensuring that the council's own children's homes operate consistently at a level above the national minimum standards.</li> </ul>

<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attainment at schools for pupils aged 5–16 is good</li> <li>• half of schools inspected were judged good or better in terms of achievement</li> <li>• the proportion of young offenders in full time education, training or employment is high</li> <li>• absences are below the national average</li> <li>• the proportion of looked after children gaining one GCSE at grades A* - G was good</li> <li>• positive work is taking place to improve the quality and availability of Early Years provision</li> <li>• the authority is improving the performance of early learners which is currently below the national average.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensuring that schools currently in categories make progress, and that monitoring is effective in ensuring that schools' performance does not deteriorate.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improved performance of the youth offending team</li> <li>• reduction in final warnings, convictions and reprimands given to looked after children</li> <li>• engagement with young people at many levels in the authority including representation on the Children's Trust, the youth parliament, and the establishment of the participation team.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reducing further the level of offending by young people.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• overall attainment of young people at post-16 is good</li> <li>• high proportion of pupils with learning disabilities engaged in education, training and employment</li> <li>• all young people leaving care are placed in suitable accommodation</li> <li>• good Connexions service working closely with schools</li> <li>• impact of Sure Start in reducing levels of child poverty.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improvement in the quality and standards of post-16 education in school sixth forms.</li> </ul>



<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strong leadership</li> <li>• strong partnership arrangements through the Children's Trust</li> <li>• good Children and Young People's Plan based on comprehensive analysis of need</li> <li>• engagement with policy initiatives</li> <li>• workforce strategy.</li> </ul>	
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**Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA**

- Evaluation of the effectiveness of multi-agency teams in improving outcomes for children.
- The resources and support available for looked after children in Shropshire.

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 and will be published to the Audit Commission. The social care judgement is for CSCI's information only.

Yours sincerely



**FLO HADLEY**

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**JONATHAN PHILLIPS**

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