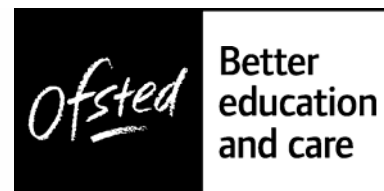


Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
Email edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



Making Social Care
Better for People



Barry Keel
Chief Executive
Plymouth City Council
Civic Centre
Plymouth PL1 2AA

1 December 2005

Dear Mr Keel

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF PLYMOUTH COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 20 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 adequate. While slipping a little this year, the performance indicators for the health assessment of Looked After Children (LAC) remain at good levels. However, a statutory requirement is made in the Fostering inspection report (March 2005), to devise and monitor more formalised systems. Poor management of and provision for drug addict parents has been a common theme over a number of years in Serious Case Reviews.

Throughout 2004-5 the social care children with disabilities team had large numbers of unallocated cases and children with disabilities had not been systematically consulted. The 2004 Children's Social Care inspection reported concerns about services for children with disabilities. Particular concerns remain about short break services for children with disabilities, and the use and commissioning of family centres. The 2005 follow-up inspection also found services had not significantly improved and the threshold for Intervention had been raised. One recommendation was made to improve consultation, and another to review the high access thresholds that are in operation for these children.

The council, with its partners, recognises both strengths and shortcomings with its Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provision, particularly in relation to the response to referrals and the coverage for some groups. A comprehensive needs analysis has been completed, a multi-agency CAMHS Development and Delivery group

is in place and a new multi-agency community CAMHS manager post has been established to lead the implementation of work for the identified priorities.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted for children and young people in schools, with just over half the schools achieving the Healthy Schools standard. Participation in sports activities has increased and the council has met already its Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) target for participation in sport.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are unsatisfactory.

Social services have faced a substantial agenda for change in 2004-05. Overall performance indicators suggest an improving picture. The 2004 service inspection identified a range of areas where changes had yet to work through as improved outcomes for children, young people and their families. The 2005 service inspection recognised that a lot of work had been done but that much remained to be achieved, and that in some areas key priorities had been missed.

Of 18 recommendations in the 2004 social services inspection, adequate or good progress had been made against only 3. Minimal, slight or no progress had been made against the remaining 15 recommendations. This is a very unsatisfactory position. Some of the continuing shortcomings are picked up within sections of this letter, while a more detailed analysis of the problems facing the council can be found in the 2005 service inspection report. The council must put to together an Inspection Action Plan to detail what it intends to do in response to the 2004 and 2005 inspection recommendations.

All Child Protection (CP) cases are allocated to appropriate staff and reviewed on time. Year on year, the numbers of children on the CP register has fallen and re-registrations have not increased, indicating that appropriate decisions are being made. Particular safeguarding concerns were identified in relation to Serious Case Review & Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) processes. The council acknowledges that this issue dates back some considerable time and that there have been delays and lack of focus on reports, with, until recently, little learning, training or leadership within the processes. The findings of the 2004 Service Inspection identified the need for social services to take a lead in partnership working and in the development of an effective properly resourced safeguarding board. For example, a clear business plan for the ACPC has yet to be produced, which in practice undermines the development of the new Safeguarding Board.

Education partners are applying CP policies and most schools were judged to be responding appropriately to bullying, racism and other harassment. Social services have now achieved near 100% recording of ethnicity. The Black and minority ethnic

population in the city is small but growing. The council is only now making provision for anti-racism awareness and practice. There is good individual work, but better management and organisation is required to ensure that policy is coherent and practice targeted and rigorous.

Over 2004-05 there have been performance issues within the social care 'flagship' Advice and Assessment service (A&A) in-take service. These have included several significant peaks in unallocated cases, and fluctuations in the time it has taken to complete both initial and core assessments. The council believe changes in management arrangements will deliver sustained improvement in the future. More positively, since the creation of A&A, referrals resulting in an initial assessment have noticeably increased while re-referrals have halved. Cases are allocated and systematically reviewed. Education, health and independent sector partners have expressed some concerns about service thresholds and access. The council must ensure that the consolidation of A&A, the Child Concern Model and the very recent reorganisation of longer-term teams will improve responsiveness, quality and outcomes. It is critical that the services are appropriately staffed, managed and monitored to deliver a safe service for vulnerable children.

The council's re-designed placement strategy for looked after children is driven by a desire to localise services, improve outcomes for children and through 'invest to save' strategies reduce council spending. Substantial saving has yet to be achieved. The Performance Indicators (PIs) on the stability of foster placements is positive, the numbers of looked after children in foster placements are good and the level of adoptions has improved from an acceptable to very good banding. In the last year the fostering service has undergone a major and much needed redevelopment programme with a big drive to recruit new carers. Changes were in their early stages at the time of the fostering inspection (March 05), which reported some improvement on a previously very weak service. Nonetheless, the 2005 inspection reported 10 standards met, 9 almost met and 11 not met with major short falls, leading to 14 statutory requirements and 11 good practice recommendations. For example, the Fostering Report suggests the matching process has potential to be a paper exercise due to extremely limited placement options and that there were weaknesses in the Fostering Panel process. This raises additional questions about the quality of the fostering placements and processes, and the current reliance on independent sector placements. The council acknowledges the need to expand the number and improve the quality of foster placements.

The Service Inspection 2004 noted severe pressures on the children with disabilities team, and limitations and inequities in access to respite and short breaks. The 2005 Service Inspection reports that this user group continues to experience 'an unsatisfactory service'. Proposals to resolve this need to be built into the Inspection Action Plan, and addressed as a matter of priority.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good. The quality of provision for early years education is good overall, with more places available to parents. Since the last inspection of the local education authority in 2002, schools and the education service have successfully focused attention on areas of underachievement. As a result, there has been an improvement in standards, particularly in primary schools, and the gap has narrowed between tests and examination results in Plymouth schools and the national averages. Children and young people achieve standards broadly in line with the national average and make progress at a rate similar to that seen in schools nationally. The best rate of progress is between the ages of 7 and 11 years where children do better in relation to their prior attainment. Additional work is needed to ensure improved outcomes for children and young people from black and ethnic minority groups.

At Key Stage 1, there has been good improvement in children's writing skills, in contrast to the less positive trend in similar authorities. At Key Stage 2, standards in English have improved but test results in science have fallen, mirroring the fall in standards nationally and in statistical neighbours. In tests and examinations in secondary schools young people do substantially better than their peers in statistical neighbours. English results at Key Stage 3 have improved to 2% above national averages; improvement in mathematics is in line with national averages but performance in science has fallen. Plymouth has consistently maintained higher performance in GCSE results than its statistical neighbours. In 2003/04, the number of pupils gaining one or more A*-G grades increased. However, against a previously improving trend, there was a fall of just over 1% in the number of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades.

Children and young people looked after by the local authority do much better than their peers nationally and in comparator councils with the result that the council has already met its 2006 targets. While it was evident from the fostering inspection that a high priority was placed on educational needs of looked after children, a statutory requirement was made 'to devise a system to monitor and promote' their educational needs. With the support of the Plymouth Looked After Children in Education team, these young people have attendance levels well above the national average and leave care with more qualifications than their peers nationally. The education service reports good levels of achievement by children and young people with a learning difficulty or disability, although it is rightly concerned that lower attaining pupils, some with statements of special educational need, do not make sufficient progress. Plymouth's primary schools have a higher number of statemented children than the national average. The criteria for assessment of special educational need have been revised and further guidance issued to schools. The education service reports a reduction in numbers, reflecting changes in practice in schools and decision-making processes. The council identifies as a priority improvement in the outcomes for children and young people from black and minority ethnic groups.

Attendance is in line with the national average. The Education Welfare Service regularly reviews with schools their progress against targets and rigorously challenges the reporting of authorised absence. Fewer pupils are absent without permission than nationally but the above average level of authorised absence in primary schools is of concern.

The education service has successfully reduced the number of pupils excluded permanently from primary schools to below the national average; the number of permanent exclusions is in line for secondary schools. However, too high a proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs are permanently excluded. The education service identifies this as a concern and has strengthened procedures to ensure that schools review more rigorously a pupil's statement prior to the decision to exclude. Plymouth makes good alternative provision for excluded pupils. Outcomes for these pupils appear good; of some 48 pupils entered for GCSE in 2003/04, 98% gained at least one A*-C grade and just over a quarter gained five or more A*-G grades.

The education service has been successful in its monitoring and challenge of schools that give cause for concern. No sixth form, secondary or Pupil Referral Unit is in an Ofsted category of concern. The number of schools requiring special measures has been maintained below the national average over time, with only one school currently requiring special measures.

Making a positive contribution

Overall, outcomes in this area are satisfactory. The need for increased user involvement in strategic planning in social care was identified in the 2004 Performance Review Report. With the exception of care leavers, the 2005 children services social care inspection reaffirms that involvement of service users and carers is patchy and cites, for example, the need for better involvement of children and young people with disabilities and those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. The council's self-assessment offers numerous examples of consultation and involvement of looked after children and young people in general, some of which has resulted in service changes. These local initiatives have been brought together within a strategy, and aligned with the Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership (CYPSP).

Regulation inspections report that National Minimum Standards relevant to "making a positive contribution" were met. There are transition plans for Early Years transfers for vulnerable pupils and clear links between adult and children's social services.

Data shows 96% of care leavers stay in contact with social services and the council is better than many at ensuring that looked after children have meaningful employment at 19, but acknowledge that there is more to do. The March 2005 Fostering inspection

was critical of the level of training offered to carers to help them make plans with users of services about their future. Communications with looked after children within the statutory review processes has deteriorated noticeably in the last year and is now lower than most comparator councils.

There has been some improvement in the level of final warnings and convictions received by looked after children but work still to be achieved to bring levels down to those of better performing comparator councils.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are adequate. The strategies for 14-19 education and training in Plymouth are good. The council collaborates successfully with the local Learning and Skills Council and the Connexions service on a range of 14-19 issues. All schools are now members of the post-16 consortia and a common approach to recording and monitoring recruitment and retention has been agreed. However, support for young people with disabilities and their families is not yet sufficiently effective to ensure that these young people are able to make a smooth transition to economic and personal independence.

By the end of the sixth form, young people achieve examination results in line with national averages and standards in statistical neighbours, showing improvement since the 14-19 area inspection in 2004. In secondary schools, the progress made by young people from 14 to 18 years, although overall in line with national averages, varies from school to school and there is evidence that schools and pupils do not have sufficiently high expectations of what they can achieve.

Young people receive good guidance and support for the choices they need to make, supported by a city-wide post-16 options website, with the result that above average numbers continue in education and training or find employment. Joint planning between the Youth Offending Team and the education service has resulted in a rising trend to above the national average in the number of young offenders who are in education, training or employment. Similarly, young people leaving care continue on to positive destinations at a level higher than national averages.

Within this positive picture of high progression and participation rates, there are, nevertheless, some areas of concern. The council is aware of the increasing number of young people going into employment without training. Significantly, the needs of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities are not adequately met. There is too little entry level and level 1 provision. The range, level and thresholds of social care services for children with disabilities and their families are of concern. The level of children in need with disabilities who receive some form of services from social services has fallen below last year's position and is a little below comparator councils. Direct payments for carers of children with disabilities have improved from zero last year to

be on par with the comparator councils. Direct payments in both Plymouth and its comparator councils, however, remain at half the levels of those of the South West and England council averages.

Summary

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> health schools standards promoted good participation in sport in primary schools good Looked After Children health needs assessment performance indicator. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> learning from serious case reviews about drug using parents improving CAMHS services for some user groups social care access thresholds for children with disabilities formal arrangements between link worker and carer for health planning in foster service.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> commitment to improving social care services most schools taking effective action on bullying, racism and other harassment reduction in Child Protection cases and re-registrations good CP provision in schools stability of foster placements and major drive to recruit new carers. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> social care priorities and user outcomes serious case reviews and ACPC/Safeguarding Board processes consistently acceptable service delivery levels with A&A service overall quality and volume of foster care service options services for children with disabilities.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> good provision for early years improving standards in English in primary schools and higher attainment at key stages 3 and 4 than statistical neighbours good alternative provision for permanently excluded pupils educational outcomes for looked after children effective monitoring and challenge for schools causing concern. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> attainment in science in primary schools progress made by lower attaining pupils outcomes for children and young people from black and minority ethnic groups level of authorised absence in primary schools high percentage of pupils with a statement permanently excluded.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> transitional arrangements for Early years and vulnerable pupils most care leavers in contact with the council and above average levels in employment. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communications with LAC in reviews level of final warnings and convictions for LAC better involvement of children and young people with disabilities and from BEM backgrounds.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> effective partnership and collaboration in 14-19 education and training good strategy for 14-19 education and training high progression and participation rates in further education low number of young people not in education, training or employment. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> rising number of young people in employment without training too little entry and level 1 provision range, level and thresholds of services for young people with disabilities and their families

Service management

The council faces a challenging and uncertain year: In social services the director is leaving, the assistant director is temporary following an unsuccessful recruitment round, and several other key lower tier posts are either vacant or have caretaker cover. A structural reorganisation of children services has only recently taken place and the 2005 children services inspection reports only limited change in service user outcomes with a considerable agenda still ahead.

Education offers a more positive and solid platform. There has been clear direction and leadership for the education agenda with a focus on raising standards, school evaluation and a review of mainstream school structures in light of the falling rolls in the primary sector.

At the APA meeting the council confirmed that it wishes now to accelerate the transition to a new joint Children’s Department, headed by the current Director of Education. Timelines for the new department have not yet been set and detailed plans have not yet been presented to members. Across the new department, management will be very stretched to deliver on all the change and service development agendas they face.

The council’s member and officer commitment to improving social care services over the last couple of years is commendable. Similarly, the experience of recent years has led to a solid basis for partnership working. There is buy-in from partners to the *Every Child Matters* (ECM) agenda, but all recognise the need to review membership, clarify

links and ensure coherence in the Children and Young Persons Strategic Plan. The development towards the children's directorate has been, by design, behind the pace. It now needs clear project management and management capacity to deliver against ECM timescales. Priorities, rightly, have been focused on improving social care services for children, with the continuing clear direction for school improvement maintained. An explicit and revised plan for the integrated future of children's services is required.

The stability and capacity issues in social services raise risks for the future development of services and similarly for the development of the new Children's Department. Social services faces workforce challenges to achieve the right level and mix of skills, effective management recruitment and development, and the appropriate culture for a modern and integrated service.

There is a mixed picture in the effectiveness of performance management arrangements. Performance management information is routinely and effectively used in education to secure improvement and to track improvements in social care. However this has not sufficiently informed the prioritisation of safeguarding in social care. Investment in information technology and systems in social services has been substantial.

The council's budget for education is at the level of the Formula Spending Share and spending in most areas is below national averages except for that on special educational needs. A large majority of the schools inspected were judged over the last year to be delivering at least satisfactory or better value for money. Gross expenditure on children's social care in recent years has fallen below comparator councils, but expenditure per head has increased year on year. Expenditure on family support fell sharply in 2003-04, but has risen substantially in 2004-05, while remaining below comparator councils. During 2004-05 the cost of placements for looked after children rose to three times that of comparator councils. This links to the council's high dependency on independent sector placements and in part to the transition costs of phasing out in-house residential care.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

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

- the extent to which the CAMHS service meets all areas of identified need.

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

- the social care access thresholds for assessment and services for children with disabilities.

Staying safe

Children and young people are provided with a safe environment:

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

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

- processes to safeguard children
- learning embedded from effective Serious Case Review and ACPC systems
- delivery against all the recommendations from the 2004 and 2005 CSCI Children's Service inspections.

Enjoying and achieving

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

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to enjoy and achieve:

- achievements and progress of children and young people with lower attainment and those with special educational needs
- attainment and progress of children and young people from Black and minority ethnic groups.

Making a positive contribution

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

- action taken to ensure a full range of children & young people are consistently involved in consultation in strategic planning.

Achieving economic well-being

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to achieve economic well-being:

- the quality and level of support and access for young people with disabilities and their families
- educational provision and outcomes post-16 for young people with disabilities.

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

cc: Bronwen Lacey, Director of Children's Services

APA final judgements 2005: Plymouth City 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	1
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.	2
The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people	1

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