

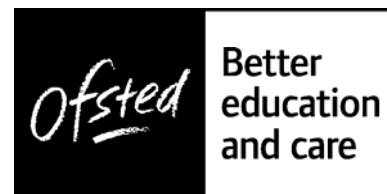
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045

email: edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr Colin Hilton
Executive Director of Children's Services
Liverpool City Council
Millennium House
Victoria Street
Liverpool L1 6JQ

1 December 2005

Dear Mr Hilton

**ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF LIVERPOOL CITY 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 Liverpool local authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself, your colleagues and elected members to discuss relevant issues.

Being healthy

Outcomes in this area are very good. Inter-agency activity effectively promotes children's and young people's health. Virtually all schools meet the National Healthy Schools standard; there is progress on reducing teenage pregnancies, which are now almost down to the national average; action, including prosecution with attendant publicity, is being taken to tackle suppliers of alcohol to children and young people, and all schools meet national expectations in respect of sex and relationships education.

There is integrated action on mental health, and the timeliness of the responses to referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) teams demonstrates effective partnership work in this area. The health of looked after children is catered for more effectively than national averages (although there has been a slight drop compared to earlier years). Some 88% of looked after children were seen by a general practitioner and dentist in the last year, and this is better performance than national and comparator groups. Finally, whilst the picture on smoking and children and young people is less encouraging, it is noted that all schools will be 'smoke-free' from January 2006, and that the council is sponsoring a pilot bill in parliament to introduce smoke-free public areas.

Staying safe

Overall, outcomes in this area are good. However, the submitted evidence and analysis provides a mixed picture with a number of effective practices and outcomes but also issues for further improvement.

There are appropriate child protection procedures in all schools, coupled with effective anti-bullying work; 100% of child protection cases were reviewed in the last reporting year; and the number of initial assessments completed within seven days has increased (and is well above comparators). Some 100% of looked after children have qualified social workers allocated to them.

Effective practice is also noted in the stability of placements for looked after children, which remains in an area of very good performance. Good performance is noted in both fostering and adoption across a range of performance indicators. There has also been a stepped increase in the number of young looked after children being placed in fostered or adoptive care. The out-turn figure has moved the council into the highest band of performance. The percentage of looked after children fostered by relatives and/or friends is above the national average and demonstrates a high number of looked after children living in their local communities. In addition, the percentage of looked after children in residential accommodation has reduced.

There are also processes in place to track pupils and locate children and young people lost to the system. The looked after children team is able to track attendance of pupils at relevant centres; through the use of the Virtual School it is possible to establish whether or not a child has 'attended' events and there are a range of activities undertaken by education welfare officers to try and locate pupils if they fail to attend school. However, there were variations in the extent of reporting by schools and this inconsistency needs to be addressed.

A number of areas of particular concern were identified:

- There has been a reduction in the number of referrals of children in need aged under 18 years. The council has reported that there are 287.6 referrals for every 10,000 children. Comparator authorities are reporting 626.3 for every 10,000 with a national average of 531.6. Furthermore, the number of core assessments of children for every 10,000 under 18 has fallen from 43.8 to an out-turn of 12.2, again this being significantly lower than comparator averages of 82.7. This picture cannot be adequately explained by the impact of Liverpool's Families First preventative strategy and there are concerns that this may be the result of the introduction of higher thresholds for intervention.

- There has been a fall in the number of initial child protection conferences, from 44 for every 10,000 children and young people to an out-turn of 21.2. This is much lower than the comparator group averages of 45.2.
- The number of registrations on the child protection register has fallen from 34.6 to 20.8 for every 10,000 children and young people. The comparator average is 37.8.
- There are concerns regarding the management of the council's care brokerage system and its impact on both 'gate keeping' and data collection.

The council has offered a number of explanations for these figures:

- the impact of the industrial action involving 100 social workers leading to a risk management strategy which focused attention on the most vulnerable children and young people
- successful application of the Families First prevention strategy in reducing the numbers of looked after children and referrals
- issues connected with data collection and collation.

It is acknowledged that the 2004/05 performance figures were distorted by the industrial action and that the reported Children's Service referrals for the first quarter of 2005/06 are as might be expected, and are in line with expectations (and comparator authority figures).

In terms of child protection conferences, the council acknowledges the need to review its practice. There is a trend within the child protection team to call 'Children in Need' conferences, as opposed to child protection conferences. These Children in Need conferences are not recorded as Child Protection conferences. This is being addressed and, based on current projections, figures are expected to be in line with national and comparator groups by December 2005.

The council has also explored thresholds and believes criteria to be tight but not unreasonable. The council is satisfied that child protection is robust. However, the council and partner agencies are currently reviewing threshold criteria following the resolution of the industrial action.

In terms of managing the identified shortfalls in the care brokerage/ integrated children systems, the council reports a staffing review which has identified skill gaps. Active recruiting has commenced and there is a new key appointment to lead a customer care quality assurance initiative. Under-resourcing has been identified in some key practice areas — hence the low level of core assessments completed in 35 days. Again, this performance area is now being actively managed and an increase in both resources

and performance is envisaged. An additional £600,000 has been allocated to address the shortfalls within the skill provision.

Inspections of early years provision identified high numbers requiring follow-up actions. The council commented that this was a consequence of inadequate preparation, and that it may well be the case that some providers, given their socio-economic circumstances, may not know where to access information about preparation. The council has taken steps to improve support for providers: that activity is now bearing fruit and is sufficient to redress this concern.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good. On educational attainment, two contextual factors need to be borne in mind. Firstly, Liverpool is the most deprived area in the country (ODPM's Index of Multiple Deprivation), and the council has worked assiduously with partners over recent years to provide a strong educational base to promote pupils' attainment.

While standards are below national averages, Liverpool pupils perform slightly better than those in statistical neighbours. An illustration of this is that performance at five A* to C at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) has risen from 36.3% in 1999/2000 to 45.6% in 2003/04, compared to 47.7% and 52.9%, respectively, for national averages. What is notable on this performance indicator is that Liverpool has opened a four percentage point gap between itself and statistical neighbours. However, set alongside that is the fact that the progress between Key Stage 1 through to Key Stage 4 is below the average. While progress between Key Stage 1 and 2 is just below the national average, it has slipped back between Key Stage 2 and 3. Progress between Key Stage 3 and 4 has improved marginally, and between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 it remains below the national average. The council commented that the lower than average progress between key stages was a consequence of historical factors and the council and schools are working to close those gaps (for example, there are improved Key Stage 3 results in English and mathematics, improved Key Stage 4 results, and no secondary schools below floor targets).

A key achievement of the council has been the lack of schools in the categories of concern used in Ofsted's inspections: currently only one is in special measures, with none in serious weaknesses. The council and school managers work hard both to prevent schools slipping into categories of concern and to remove schools from those categories. Both of the primary schools indicated in the relevant set of performance indicators were successfully removed from categories within a year.

The percentages of looked after children with either five A* to C or one GCSE are higher than the national averages but the council, rightly, acknowledges that these

outcomes are still disappointing, and has demonstrated its commitment to press harder and further to raise standards in this area. The number of care leavers in education, employment or training (75%) is, nonetheless, encouraging and compares very well to national figures.

In terms of areas for improvement, unauthorised and authorised absences in secondaries are worse than statistical neighbours and would impact adversely on other performance indicators, such as those for anti-social behaviour. This is an area where there have been historical difficulties and in the circumstances represents an area for further work by the council.

There has been a decrease in looked after children's absenteeism, but that figure is still above statistical neighbours and national averages. The council considered that one of the issues was that when looked after children are living with family or friends, absences may be condoned rather more readily than if the looked after children were in residential care. The council acknowledges the need to address this issue with some urgency.

Another area for development is the higher proportion of secondary schools with surplus places compared to statistical neighbours. The council has observed that this issue may partly be dealt with by the development of the two academies, and that the large voluntary aided sector has a significant impact on the maintenance of surplus places in the secondary phase.

Another area for improvement initially appeared to be the education of pupils excluded from school, in respect of the apparent poor level of reintegration indicated by the relevant Annual Performance Assessment data set (E&A 34). This is a small number of pupils statistically. The council commented that this figure represented those pupils whose behaviour had been so poor that permanent exclusion had been the only, and final, solution. This meant that the excluded figure was lower than those of statistical neighbours, and the level of successful reintegration was likely to be statistically smaller. Data provided by the council shows that only seven of the 78 pupils permanently excluded in 2004/05 were without some alternative provision. This signals improvement, and demonstrates that the council has taken appropriate steps to redress this area of concern.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. Effective advice, guidance and support is provided to all special educational needs coordinators; and target setting and monitoring of the progress of individual pupils is conducted and reported to the council. Of the seven special schools inspected since 2003, all were judged to be at least effective schools, with one graded as outstanding. Set against those gains is the higher percentage of pupils with statements being permanently excluded from school. Effective inclusion is evidenced by the special schools operating at various levels in the mainstream – that inclusion activity has contributed to reductions in the numbers of

pupils placed in special schools. Finally, the work on dyslexia has resulted in 36 schools achieving Dyslexia Friendly School status.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. In terms of strengths, reports on childcare inspections show personal, social and emotional development to be strong: school inspection reports show that pupils are free from harassment, bullying and racism, and there are also satisfactory or better opportunities for pupils' spiritual and moral growth in all but one school inspected. There are arrangements to involve pupil participation in decision-making – although it is not clear how children and young people receive effective feedback on their contribution, and how the rationale for decisions might be explored with them.

It is clear that the views of looked after children are being heard through provider panels and taking account of their views on staff recruitment, and there are extra-curricular events targeted supportively at them, including access to leisure facilities. Pupil advocacy and parent partnerships assist children and young people with disabilities in getting their point of view across. On final warnings and convictions of looked after children, there was a fall, compared with a rising trend from 2001 onwards.

The following areas for improvement were identified. The percentage of children and young people communicating their perspectives in a statutory review was 74.9% with a target of only 75% — in statistical neighbours, the number is 80%. Efforts should continue to improve this percentage in line with comparator authorities.

On youth offending, there has been a rise in the quarter July 2004 to September 2004, despite the national trend reducing. A higher rate of re-offending is also reported, from a higher baseline than national averages. As the council has developed effective strategies to deal with the most significant risk factors associated with youth crime (low academic achievement; history of both family and friends being involved in problem behaviour; poor parental supervision) the rise in numbers was seen to be a result of the culture within the city to report activity to the police immediately rather than explore local options, and not necessarily a result of increasing anti-social behaviour. The evidence collected in the registered children's services would support this view.

Achieving economic well-being

Overall, outcomes in this area are very good. Pass rates at Key Stage 5 have improved and Liverpool's average point score at Key Stage 5 is higher than statistical neighbours. This is set against a background of improved participation and retention rates. Broadly speaking, sixth forms are effective with the one sixth form previously judged to be inadequate now out of that category.

In terms of general achievement by children and young people, a 14 to 19 year area survey found a sharp focus on a joint approach to meeting the needs of children and young people, and the emphasis on Student Apprentice Initiatives and work-based learning is noted. The key to improvement has been the strong linkages between relevant partners to support learners to achieve desired outcomes. That extends, as far as specific groups are concerned, to the vocational college to support looked after children to keep them out of the 'not in education, employment or training' category, with the success reported above. Effective partnership work to support children and young people with disabilities is also meticulous, through the increased flexibility programme; information and guidance to children and young people with disabilities; and the Aimhigher initiative.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and young people • reductions in teenage pregnancy • the health of looked after children. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing children and young people with a safe school environment • support for looked after children • stability of placement • family placements. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initial assessments • referrals • registrations on child protection register • governance of care brokerage system.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low numbers of schools causing concern • performance at key stages higher than statistical neighbours • higher attainment by looked after children at Key Stage 4 compared to statistical neighbours • lower number of looked after children in not in education, employment or training compared to statistical neighbours. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • surplus places in secondary phase • attendance rates (including looked after children).
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social and emotional development in early years settings and in schools • voices heard of looked after children and children and young people with disabilities. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing re-offending rates • increasing numbers of first time offenders.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong learning partnerships • opportunities for children and young people with disabilities to access further education and higher education. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p>

Service management

This is an area of strength. Work on race equality policies and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 are embedded into operational practices. The stimulus of the Children Act 2004 has served to drive a coherent organisational restructuring. Importantly, the new social work career grade scheme seems calibrated to secure the best social work talent across the region, although there are persistent gaps in numbers of field social workers. Supporting all those activities is the alignment of performance management objectives to targets emanating from national and local performance indicators. This is a sound structure to maintain the momentum of service delivery, with the vital component that elected members continue to hold officers to account for progress on strategic objectives and continue to demonstrate an ability to drill down on operational matters when appropriate.

The partnership work conducted by the council is best exemplified by the achieving economic well-being outcome, but is also illustrated by such work as on school meals and supporting children and young people's mental health.

In terms of budgeting, effective work to reduce out-borough placements of looked after children has enabled investment to be channelled elsewhere. We note that spending on personal social services is forecast to fall, but in some areas that reduction will still mean that spend remains above that of statistical neighbours. In all, given the evidence, financial management appears to be robust, with appropriate targeting of funding.

A number of concerns have been identified:

- The council's expenditure on staff training is extremely low, as is the number of staff achieving National Vocational Qualification Level 3 in Residential Childcare and staff achieving the Post-qualifying 1 award. This is important, as the competency of staff working with children and young people will impact on the council's capacity to improve. However, the council asserts that there has been no reduction in training and that alternative funding streams have been sought and utilised. The council also argues that the impact of the industrial dispute meant staff could not be released to training as part of the management strategy to ensure front line services. The recent restructure within children's services has required a review of the training strategy, which is now in line with the authority's vision for children and young people and in line with performance expectations.
- On capacity to improve, the strong track record of the education directorate and its senior management team in moving Liverpool forward; the effectiveness of the partnership work, evidenced through discussion at the meeting on 20 July 2005; the

recovery from the social workers' industrial action and the performance management system aligned to targets, signal that the capacity to improve is good.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Staying safe

Children and young people are provided with a safe environment:

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

- child protection
- initial assessments
- referrals
- registrations on child protection register
- governance of care brokerage system.

Enjoying and achieving

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

Children and young people who are looked after are helped to enjoy and achieve:

- reducing absences at secondary level, including of looked after children
- removing surplus places at secondary level.

Making a positive contribution

Action is taken to prevent offending and to reduce re-offending by children and young people:

- action taken to prevent offending
- action taken to prevent re-offending.

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: Liverpool 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	3
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	4
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people	3

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