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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Ms Jefferson

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN LANCASHIRE 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 awarded¹
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 <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people	3
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	3

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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

Lancashire County Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements for children and young people. The majority of services can demonstrate that they are improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people. Partnership arrangements are well developed and there are good indications of effective consultation with children and young people. The council has made good progress in addressing the areas identified in last year's APA, although it is acknowledged that progress in some of the identified areas, for example, rates of teenage pregnancy, form longer term strategies. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) has been drawn up together with partners and identifies clear priorities for improvement, with appropriate links to stretch targets within the Local Area Agreement. It has good capacity to improve its services further.

Being healthy

The authority makes a good contribution towards improving the health of children and young people. There has been good progress with improvements across children's services and in continuing to establish effective partnerships. An instance of this is children's centres, which are promoting the health of young people and their parents, for example, with support for at risk mothers, speech development and in giving up smoking. The healthy schools programme is underway in almost all schools and half have achieved Healthy Schools Status.

Despite a recent rise in teenage conception rates, the reduction over the last few years remains in line with that in similar authorities, though higher than the national average. There has been a reduction in most districts, but there are difficulties in reducing rates in a few hotspots. The council, in liaison with its partners, is targeting these localities. This is a priority in the CYPP and part of a Local Area Agreement stretch target. The Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) continues to develop comprehensively across the county; a coordinator was appointed recently. This too is a CYPP priority.

Provision for looked after children is improving; performance measures are very good and exceed those for similar councils. Inspection of registered children's homes raised concerns regarding administration of medication, with only a third meeting national standards. Stringent procedures have now been established and must be closely monitored. The council is also regularising the sharing of medical information relating to looked after children.

Referrals of young offenders requiring substance misuse assessment are increasingly prompt. Greater collaboration between the Lancashire Youth Offending Team and CAMHS has facilitated universal assessment of children and young people with acute and non acute mental health difficulties. The percentage of young offenders with substance misuse problems who need assessment and are attended to within five days has improved since last year but is still significantly lower than other similar councils, but almost all needing intervention are dealt with in 10 days.

Staying safe

The authority's work in promoting and securing the safety of children and young people is now good. There has been very good progress with improvement on points for development set out in the 2005 APA letter.

Good performance in aspects of child protection has been maintained or enhanced. All children on the register have a social worker and 98% of cases are reviewed within the scheduled timescale. There is low re-referral on to the register and indications are that few remain on the register for more than two years: these are indicators of effective practice. Although referrals have increased, there has been excellent improvement in the speed of initial and core assessment. Some 70% of initial assessments meet a seven-day target, an improvement of 20% since last year. Core assessment within 35 days has improved from 55% to 69% despite increased numbers passing through the service.

Most reviews of looked after children are prompt, although they are lower than in other councils; the council is seeking to ensure more effective operation of protocols in relation to looked after children from outside the county, but is confident that equal protection is afforded. The authority has convincing evidence to support its view that there are robust arrangements for Lancashire children placed elsewhere.

Prompted by the 2005 APA letter, the council has reviewed the accessibility of the service to black and minority ethnic communities. Progress has been made. For example, there has been a change in the ratio of black and minority ethnic children on the register from 0.80 to 1.17. However, the council needs to assess the impact of policies on promoting race equality for children to ensure that there is full access to services.

Placement stability is in line with other councils, and work is being undertaken to improve this, for example, by accessing consultancy through the Department for Education and Skills. There are slightly more family placements in both fostering and adoption and fewer in residential homes than last year. There has been expansion of in-house fostering places, including those for children whom it is hard to place, through a fostering focus scheme.

There has been minor slippage in allocation of personal advisers and provision of pathway plans for those leaving care, though the needs of these young people are generally attended to well, often through collaboration between the council and welfare services in colleges. Most of the shortfall was due to staffing shortages which have now been resolved following integration of services. There has been appropriate remedial action and the position will be closely monitored.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution the authority makes to ensuring children and young people achieve at school and enjoy their education and leisure activities is good. The overall quality of Foundation Stage education is good, with nearly three quarters judged good or better in school inspections. About 300 childcare settings have been inspected on the current framework; nearly all are judged to be good or better.

Results at the end of Key Stage 1 rose this year; they are all above national averages and are rising rapidly; last year they were below those of statistical neighbours, but now they are above. This reflects improved effectiveness in some schools. At Key Stage 2, results have improved and all remain higher than national averages and those of statistical neighbours. Pupils make good progress between Key Stages 1 and 2 and this has improved steadily over the last three years. The authority is seeking to improve the performance of pupils of Pakistani family origin at Key Stage 2. At Key Stage 3, all results are better than national averages and those of statistical neighbours. However, the progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 is weaker than that found nationally. This is due to some instances of weak achievement by boys in English in schools in challenging circumstances; the problem has been identified and is being addressed. The percentage of pupils gaining five A* to C grades at GCSE has improved and is about two percentage points above the national average and results for statistical neighbours. Overall, progress to GCSE is at least as good as that found across the country. Of the schools, 26% are in the top quartile and only 19% in the bottom quartile for contextual value added during the 5 years to GCSE. Most pupils make the progress expected of them based on their prior attainment; value added from age 11 to age 16 is similar to that found nationally. The differences in performance between girls and boys are generally less marked at each key stage than comparative national performance.

Ofsted finds the effectiveness of the majority of schools to be good, and that in the great majority of schools pupils enjoy their education. Nonetheless, a significant number of schools are only satisfactory in the key functions of teaching and management. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is found by Ofsted to be mostly good or better. The proportion of looked after children gaining success at GCSE has increased slightly. It is low, but comparable to that found nationally and the council is aware of the need to pursue strategies to further improve achievement for these pupils. Success measures for such children are stronger than those found nationally at earlier stages.

Authorised and unauthorised absence rates in primary schools are lower than nationally or amongst statistical neighbours. Levels of absence in secondary schools are similar to national averages; authorised absence is decreasing but not as rapidly as nationally. Unauthorised absence is increasing, but more slowly than nationally. The attendance of looked after children has improved and is now good; the absence rate is less than half that recorded nationally.

The rate of exclusions at primary level is below both national averages and statistical neighbours. At secondary level it is higher, partly as a consequence of the use of fixed term exclusions to reduce the risk of permanent exclusions and partly as an aspect of local policies linking secondary schools with pupil referral units. Exclusions are closely monitored. The recent increase in secondary exclusions reflects a suitably firm stance with regard to oppressive behaviour and ensures that the majority of pupils in schools are largely free from risk to their safety and well-being. Circumstances leading to permanent exclusions are well documented and have often involved drugs, violence or the carrying of weapons; schools have rightly taken strong action to remove the risk of such incidents and to make clear the seriousness of such offences. There is substantial provision for those who are not educated in school. The authority is active in exploring an alternative

curriculum, behaviour management and other early intervention strategies with schools where the incidence of exclusion is high.

When schools are identified as weak or causing concern, school improvement services generally provide very effective support. The number of schools placed in a category of concern following inspection is lower than nationally. The rationalisation of surplus school places is efficient. There is an increase in outdoor education and the number of before and after school clubs is growing. The council's provision of youth services is good. Young people have high levels of achievement and receive good advice and guidance

Making a positive contribution

The contribution of services to outcomes in this area is good. School inspections have found generally highly effective opportunities for pupils to make a positive contribution by, for example, serving on school councils, acting as reading buddies to younger pupils, and engaging in community service. Pupil questionnaires are well established in schools and are effective in informing self-evaluation by school managers. Youth councils are strong and the authority and other agencies pay heed to their views in planning development. There have been good instances of such consultation, for example, with plans for educational and community renewal in Burnley. There is good support for all aspects of personal, social, health and careers education, and Ofsted inspections find this to be of good quality. Education in citizenship is not always as strong as it might be, and the council is giving attention to this.

Vulnerable children receive good support from a range of agencies and mentors and others in schools in managing change in their lives. There is an effective network of support for young carers and advocacy arrangements are satisfactory. There has been further reduction in the rate of offending. There is effective liaison between the council and other agencies, such as the police, in establishing sensible local strategies. For instance, in the cautious use of antisocial behaviour and dispersion orders. There have been over a thousand reparation interventions. In promoting opportunities for young people to make a contribution, the authority has productive links with the voluntary sector, faith and community groups.

There is clear evidence of a commitment by the council and its partners to embed consultation with young people in all areas of service delivery. There are good examples of consultation together with evidence of young people's input influencing provision. Examples of this include looked after children's feedback on service provision bringing about improvement in social work practice; representative groups of young people influencing the design of the leaving care service, and the involvement of young people in staff interviews and in staff training. Whilst the percentage of looked after children participating in their reviews dropped from 76% to 74% against the new performance indicator definition there was a rise from 76% to 80% on a like for like comparison.

Achieving economic well-being

The contribution of the council and its partners towards outcomes in this area is good overall. There is a small improvement in the proportion of the post-16 cohorts in education, employment or training, though this subsumes a slight fall in the proportion engaged in work-based learning. The colleges generally offer good provision for learners in the 16 to 19 age range and have had a positive impact on the curriculum in Key Stage 4 through the increased flexibility programme.

Just over a dozen sixth forms account for a large proportion of the A level provision. In general, average point scores are high because students take more subjects than normal, but outcomes in subjects, on average, compare less favourably with students' attainment at GCSE. The authority is aware that schools need to tackle underperforming subjects, review the unreasonably high GCSE grades sometimes stipulated for admission to courses, and collaborate to improve access to vocational courses, less popular A levels and the advanced extension award.

Effective initiatives are underway to improve access for learners in the 14 to 19 age range to vocational courses and life skills support; there are commendable new ventures in deprived areas sometimes involving collaboration between schools, colleges and other agencies. Young people leaving care have ample support with progress into education, training or employment. The successful progression of leavers from special schools into employment or continuing education is impressive. Almost all pupils have the opportunity for work experience and many schools in all phases have other effective links with business and industry.

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

Overall, the council shows good management of its services and good capacity to improve. There is sustained good performance and improvement in key areas. There is effective leadership and direction, and promising strategies for improvement are in place. Priorities for the council and its partners are based on thorough evaluation of practice and analysis of needs. Good account is taken of the views of stakeholders at all levels, particularly those of vulnerable groups. There is a clear commitment to develop this further.

The council is confident that Children's Trust arrangements will be in place by 2008 and work is progressing well in this regard. Joint commissioning arrangements are evident through the Children's Safeguarding Board and the Drug and Alcohol Team. Further development together with partner agencies is needed in order to fully optimise joint commissioning arrangements. The Common Assessment Framework is progressing, building on a successful pilot in the Rossendale area, with plans to pilot further amongst schools in the South Ribble area, before full roll-out across the county.

Performance management arrangements are effective across council services, and multi-agency processes are being developed. Performance Improvement Boards are established, relating to the five Every Child Matters outcomes and associated priorities within the CYPP,

to monitor performance across all agencies. The council is aware that further development of performance management is required before this is fully effective.

The council has improved performance in relation to both staff retention and reduction of sickness levels. The percentage of appropriately qualified staff in residential child care, although in line with similar councils, has declined and the percentage of social workers and residential managers with a PQ1 award is lower than in similar councils. The council is aware of the need to continue to develop strategies to impact positively in this area.

Generally good achievement is maintained in schools. There have been distinct areas of improvement. Pockets of underachievement are clearly identified and are properly attended to. Schools with notices to improve or in special measures are well supported. Vulnerable learners are well cared for. Post-16 provision is generally effective and the council is aware of the need for quality control in sixth forms. There is ample opportunity for children and young people of all abilities and dispositions to make a positive contribution and establish skills to develop their economic well-being. The authority has a number of ambitious and well conceived development initiatives underway, in particular, the reorganisation of secondary education in Burnley, which will be in place by September 2006. In its development of education, the council takes every opportunity to work in concert with other agencies and in consultation with all interested parties, including children, young people and their families.

The budget for children and families is lower than that of similar councils and significantly lower than national figures. The council has acknowledged that the allocation should be reviewed in order for it to be able to meet the demands of the service in the coming year.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • multi-agency working in children's centres • healthy schools initiatives • health of looked after children • promptness of referral and assessment to CAMHS. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rates of teenage pregnancy • further development of CAMHS • arrangements for the administration of medication in children's homes.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effective child protection work • much improved assessment timescales • improved access to family placements • reduction in use of residential care. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access for minority ethnic children and families • improvement of monitoring arrangements for children placed by other authorities • allocation of personal advisers and pathway plans.

<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mostly good provision from early years to age 11 • attention to pockets of underachievement by identified sub-groups • strong support for schools identified as causing concern • effective management of attendance and exclusions • a good youth service. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the improvement of schools that are coasting but with potential to be good • the success of older looked after children.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cordial encouragement and appreciation of the pupil, student, and youth voice and contribution • successful strategies for reduction in offending • good support for vulnerable children and young people in coping with changes they have to face • personal, social, health and careers education • coordination with the voluntary sector and community groups in forwarding development. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the contribution of the authority to the quality of citizenship in the curriculum.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generally good provision and success for most 14 to 19 year old learners • effective support for vulnerable learners into continuing education and employment. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • achievement and access in some sixth forms.
<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effective partnership working • consultation with children and young people • performance management within council services • recruitment and retention • reduction of sickness levels. 	<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • further development of performance management across agencies • review of budget allocation for children and families.

Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA

- Performance management arrangements across agencies.
- Planning and provision for young people leaving care.
- Accessibility of services to black and minority ethnic communities.
- Monitoring arrangements for children placed by other local authorities.
- Improvement of schools that are coasting but with potential to be good.
- The success of older looked after children.
- The contribution of the authority to the quality of citizenship in the curriculum.
- Achievement and access in some sixth forms.

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 (CPA) and will be published to the Audit Commission. The social care judgement is for CSCI information only.

Yours sincerely



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