

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr Damian Allen
Director of Children's Services
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Education and Lifelong Learning Department
Huyton Hey Road
Huyton, Liverpool
L36 5YH

1 November 2006

Dear Mr Allen

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN KNOWSLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH 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	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

1

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

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council delivers well above minimum requirements for children and young people. The council was awarded Beacon Status last year for Integrated Children's Service, and has continued to benefit from exceptionally high levels of integration across this area of its work. The council has demonstrated continuous and sustained improvement across a range of services and performance measures that show it is continuing to achieve improved outcomes for children and young people.

Being healthy

The contribution made by the council to outcomes in this area is excellent. Healthy lifestyles are promoted through strong partnerships between key services, which are underpinned by the high level of integration that exists in the borough. Services are well coordinated and targeted to those most at risk.

Access to a full range of assessment and treatment services for all children and young people is prompt. Vulnerable children, including those with physical and learning disabilities and traveller children, have their health needs met. In particular, the actions taken to promote the mental health of children and young people are effective; the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is very well developed, placing the council in the top quartile of performance. The health needs of looked after children are met effectively and performance indicators exceed national averages. Ninety four per cent of looked after children had a health and dental assessment during the year, which is much higher than similar councils. One hundred and twenty five looked after children aged ten and above have a personal health plan in place, and 31 have reduced or given up smoking. There has been a slight increase in the rate of teenage pregnancies during 2004 resulting in performance that is worse than in similar authorities but better than the national figure, although the overall rate has decreased since 1988. Moreover, the council has in place suitable strategies, implementation plans and monitoring arrangements to support further reduction.

Finally, the percentage of schools that have achieved level 3 of the National Healthy Schools Standard has exceeded its target; there has been a significant decrease in the percentage of obese children aged four and five years; and a large number of children and young people achieved recorded outcomes in a large scale programme of health education run by the Youth and Play Service.

Staying safe

The council's contribution to outcomes in this area is excellent. The council has achieved Beacon Status this year for its Road Safety Education Programme, and is now one of the highest performing councils in the country. Policies and procedures to reduce bullying are in place in all service settings, and there has been a reduction in the percentage of young people in secondary schools who reported they were afraid to go to school sometimes because of bullying. The council was one of the first in the country to use the Information and Sharing Assessment Programme (ISAP) as a pilot programme. The council is now at the

forefront nationally in terms of implementing ISAP across the whole of the area. Some 5,000 children and young people are indexed on the ISAP system. 133 children in need of support at level 2 of the Children in Need model have a lead professional who coordinates services and promotes early and integrated intervention. The council has been cited by the Department for Education and Skills as an example of good practice in this area. The quality of preventative support is good; multi-disciplinary teams routinely use a wide range of high quality preventative support services. The full range of services is provided to children and their families at any point in the assessment process. Therefore, services are provided before a situation becomes critical.

There has been a slight increase this year in the rate of referrals but it remains much lower than in similar councils. Families and children at risk are identified early because robust children in need procedures are in place. The council has developed practice in terms of the completion of initial assessments, as these are now multi-disciplinary in nature if this is required. There has been a significant reduction in the number of core assessments, and both initial and core assessments are completed quickly when compared with similar councils.

The council has continued to provide training in safeguarding to all social care professionals, including foster carers. There are effective safeguarding arrangements for looked after children. Child protection procedures have been reviewed to ensure full compliance with the new Working Together requirements. Overall, there have been significant reductions in levels of child protection activity across a range of indicators. Re-registrations on the Child Protection Register were high last year and identified as an area for improvement; these have reduced considerably this year to a very low level. The changes are positive as they are due to earlier identification, better use of preventative services and the extended use of ISAP. The proportion of black and minority ethnic children on the Child Protection Register is lower than in similar councils.

Adoption and fostering services have continued to perform well and this is shown by positive regulatory inspections. One hundred children and young people at risk of becoming looked after were supported by the flexible support team and have remained in their family homes. All looked after children have been supported by a named social worker since 2001/02. Fourteen children and young people remain in suitable placements outside of the borough. The council has increased the local provision of foster carers and this was identified as an area for improvement last year.

There is a strong and effective process within the council for collating, monitoring and reviewing information from the Criminal Records Bureau checks, and the council reports that all teaching staff have now had retrospective checks made. The social care service's responses to reviews of serious cases are monitored by senior managers and elected members.

Enjoying and achieving

The council's contribution to outcomes in this area is good. The quality and standards in Foundation Stage provision were found to be good or better in over three quarters of schools inspected since September 2005, and there have been some improvements to levels of pupils' attainment at all key stages.

In 2005, Key Stage 1 results dipped in reading and writing, although they improved in mathematics. The council is taking reasonable steps to improve performance at this key stage, particularly in the area of boys' writing.

Key Stage 2 results were good. English results at Level 4 or above, the expected level for 11 year olds, improved and were above those of similar councils and close to the national average. Mathematics results at Level 4 or above were also above those for similar councils and broadly in line with the national figure. The trend of improvement for English and mathematics is also good when compared with similar councils. Results in science declined slightly but remain above those of similar councils and are in line with national figures. Evidence from school inspections supports the view that primary schools are both well challenged and supported.

Raising standards at Key Stage 3 continues to be the chief educational priority for the council. The progress pupils make from Key Stages 2 to 3 remains below the national average but there has been a steady improvement in English and mathematics and results are now in line with similar councils. Moreover, the trend of improvement in these subjects is well above that found nationally. Science results have also risen and there are suitable strategies in place to improve these further, for example through identifying leading science departments to share good practice.

The percentage of pupils gaining five A* to C grades at GCSE rose sharply in 2005 and gave the council its best ever set of results. Although they remain well below the national average, they are in line with those achieved in similar councils and year-on-year improvement has been consistently above the national trend. The percentage of pupils gaining one A* to C grade at GCSE level has risen, but remains well below average.

The progress of pupils from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4, identified as an area for improvement in 2005, has improved too but is still below average. Similarly, the progress made by pupils from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 has improved but is also below average.

The council is fully committed to raising achievement further. Ambitious targets for improvement are set out in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). School improvement services are strong; only one school is in a category of concern and it is well supported by the council and is making satisfactory progress. Attendance was identified as an area for improvement in the 2005 APA and in primary schools it has improved overall while remaining below average. In secondary schools, it has also improved while remaining

well below average. Unauthorised absence at secondary level has risen slightly but strategies to tackle absence are robust.

The attainment of the small number of looked after children was identified as an area for improvement in 2005. There is a mixed picture here. The percentage of looked after children who sat at least one GCSE exam has increased significantly but the percentage gaining an award fell, and an earlier improvement in attendance levels of looked after children has not been sustained. However, the percentage of children leaving care with five or more GCSE A* to C grades met the planned target. There is now a specific officer to support looked after children in respect of attendance and attainment. Few looked after children are placed outside the borough, and this continues to be a positive feature of the council's performance.

Provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities remains good. Effective systems monitor their progress. The percentage of statements of educational need prepared within 18 weeks has increased greatly. Fixed-term and permanent exclusions at Primary Level are well below average. Fixed-term exclusions at Secondary Level are below those of similar councils and the national average. However, permanent exclusions are above average because of the firm line taken with any incidents of violent behaviour. The proportion of permanently excluded pupils who receive 20 or more hours a week of tuition is very high.

The number of secondary school surplus places remains above average although appropriate action to reduce this has started.

Making a positive contribution

The council's contribution to outcomes in this area is excellent. There is ample evidence of coherent, innovative and effective partnership working, including with the voluntary and private sectors. Consultation in Knowsley draws widely on the views of all children and young people, including vulnerable and hard to reach groups. The outcomes of this consultation, often involving local and national initiatives, clearly influenced the council's strategic direction and helped to shape the CYPP and the innovative plans for the Building Schools for the Future initiative. There are a number of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are actively engaged in play and youth clubs, and supported to achieve awards alongside their peers.

There are significant reductions in anti-social behaviour in the borough. The Youth Offending Team (YOT) was reorganised last year and this appears to have been effective. Over the past year, there has been a significant reduction in the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system. Increasing rates of re-offending were identified as an area needing improvement in 2005 and this has reduced by 5%. The YOT has supported more than three quarters of young juveniles into employment, training or education successfully. Although it has not yet quite met the national target set by the Youth Justice Board, it compares well nationally. There has been a small increase in the percentage of

final warnings, reprimands and convictions of looked after children and this remains very slightly above the levels achieved by similar councils.

Achieving economic well-being

The council's contribution to outcomes in this area is good. The high quality partnership that exists between the council, the local Learning and Skills Council and Connexions is constructive and ensures that there is a wide range of suitable courses for children and young people. It leads to effective advice and guidance to all groups of young people, including vulnerable groups and those with complex needs. Provision in special schools for 16 to 18 year olds with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. The assessment of learning needs, future planning and the quality of provision is monitored well by the 14 to 19 Quality Group and other multi-agency quality assurance groups.

The local college offers good provision for learners in the 16 to 19 age range, and the area's innovative approach to 14 to 19 education has had a very positive impact on the curriculum at Key Stage 4. Achievement at GCSE and school sixth form provision were identified as issues requiring improvement in 2005, and outcomes at GCSE and at post-16 have improved. Attainment of Level 2 qualifications by age 19 has risen from 40% to 50%. Success rates at Level 3 at the local college were significantly above the national average in 2005. Average point scores at the two sixth forms have risen but were still well below those achieved in similar councils. Concerns remain about these weak results. The council has yet to resolve all the issues relating to post-16 provision in Knowsley.

Nevertheless, the percentage of young people in education, training or employment has increased. Retention rates for young people in education declined sharply between the age of 16 and 18. The ratio of care leavers aged 19 in education, training and employment has remained above that achieved by similar councils. Additional funds are used effectively to improve rates of employment for care leavers not in education, training and employment, and these young people often do better in this respect than young people who are not looked after.

All looked after children have pathway plans in place. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have transition plans that are drawn up through a multi-agency approach. In addition, the council has initiated a pilot scheme to enable all young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to develop their own person centred plan. The percentage of care leavers aged 19 in suitable accommodation has increased slightly and again is higher than that achieved by similar councils. The council has a number of housing programmes that have improved housing opportunities for the homeless, vulnerable adults and for children in need. There has been a slight increase in the take up of direct payments that help young people remain in education after the age of 16. This was an area for improvement identified last year.

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

The management of services by the council is strong, and its capacity to improve is excellent. The council and its partners champion the needs of children and young people in the area by providing innovative and creative community leadership to address local and national challenges. The council has demonstrated a significant contribution to the improvement of outcomes in education, social care and health for children and young people in the area. This is a relatively small council, which is successfully running a complex Change for Children programme alongside being in Wave 1 of the Building Schools for the Future initiative. In addition, the council takes on the additional responsibility for sharing best practice, as it is an exemplar of good practice in a number of areas, for example Beacon Award for Integrated Children's Services and early adopter of ISAP. The council has made excellent use of health act flexibilities and was one of the first to participate in the revised local area agreements. This has resulted in the council being able to use its resources more creatively, and be more focused on local priorities than would have otherwise been possible.

The CYPP sets out clear and challenging ambitions for improving the well-being of children and young people, clearly demonstrating that partners share common understanding of local needs. Objectives and targets are based on a comprehensive needs analysis, and gaps in service provision have been identified in a coordinated way, taking into account the high levels of deprivation in the area. Priorities are identified across the area, and are planned across services, in a clear and coherent manner, reflecting analysis of need but also with a very strong focus on prevention. The CYPP is based upon the council's very well developed consultation procedures with stakeholders and is now into its second revision, and has been cited previously by the Department for Education and Skills as an example of good practice.

The council benefits from a strong performance management culture, which is bringing about improvements in services and leads to improved outcomes for children and young people. The Audit Commission, within the context of Corporate Performance Assessment, has judged the council to be 'improving well' and recognises Knowsley as a 4 star authority. The Audit Commission also found the council to be providing value for money to taxpayers, and determined that there are robust procedures in place for challenging and monitoring value for money at a local level.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • healthy lifestyles (including vulnerable groups) • Youth and Play Service • CAMHS • Child Development Centre. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beacon status for road safety education programme • early adoption of ISAP • strong safeguarding practices • work of the flexible support team. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low level of child protection registrations for black and minority ethnic children.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attainment at Key Stage 2 • improvement at Key Stage 4 • provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities • good plans in place to reduce surplus places • strong support for schools causing concern. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attainment at Key Stages 1,3 and 4 • attendance.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • looked after children contributing to reviews • positive impact of YOT • strong and wide ranging consultation processes in place (including vulnerable and hard to reach groups). 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p>

<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong collaborative partnerships with providers • good monitoring of provision • high proportion of looked after children in employment, training or education • care leavers in suitable accommodation • good provision of the 14 to 19 collegiate. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • achievement at GCSE • school sixth form provision • retention rates at aged 18 in employment, training or education.
<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beacon Status for Integrated Children's Services • highly developed CYPP • successful at accessing funding streams • strong performance management culture focused on improvement • achievement of value for money • strong focus on improving outcomes for children and young people. 	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p>

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

- Reducing usage of the Child Protection Register and the impact of the high use of preventative services.
- Outcomes achieved for looked after children.
- The impact and effectiveness of the ISAP.
- Continued improvements at Key Stages 1, 3 and 4.
- Continued and sustainable improvement to rates of attendance.

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



FLO HADLEY

Divisional Manager
Office for Standards in Education



JONATHAN PHILLIPS

Director – Quality, Performance and Methods
Commission for Social Care Inspection