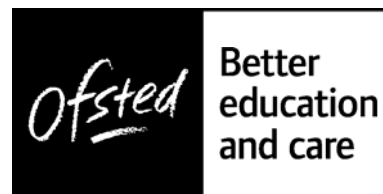


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Making Social Care
Better for People



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01 November 2006

Dear Mr Beynon

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THURROCK 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.	2
The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people	2
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	2

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

Thurrock Borough Council provides an adequate service to children and young people.

The council is aware of its areas for development and is working well with partners to achieve its vision of providing a safe environment in which children are protected from harm and enabled to fulfil their potential. Good progress has been made in engaging young people through a Youth Cabinet and participation in a range of outcome related Boards. Good progress has also been made in establishing a Children's Trust. A number of pilot projects and new initiatives have been developed and implemented. The impact of these still need to be evaluated. The authority's capacity to improve its services further is adequate.

Being healthy

The local authority's contribution to outcomes in this area is adequate with some good elements.

Good progress is being made in schools achieving the Healthy Schools Standard, and the number anticipated to achieve this quality mark is expected to exceed the target. All eligible schools are part of the scheme to ensure children eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. A physical activity strategy is also being piloted. The impact of this on outcomes for young people is being evaluated.

It is evident the council is making positive links between the physical and mental wellbeing of children and their ability to achieve. A recent example is that of one group of children who attended the breakfast club at their school every day during the week of the National Curriculum tests and consequently their results improved. Teachers are also making the connection between children's behaviour and their mental health needs. A Primary Mental Health Team has been established to improve the level of support to schools and young people. An evaluation has shown the positive impact this service has on the young people using it.

The health of looked after children is very good. There is a dedicated service to promote the mental health of looked after children. This service is available to both individual children as well as their carers.

A joint Children and Family Consultation Service and Paediatric Clinic was established in February 2006. This will be evaluated in the coming months and may be extended to other parts of the borough. To further enhance the link between behaviour and learning there are plans to establish a psychologist within the clinic.

The services provided by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are inadequate. Waiting times for an initial assessment have been up to 13 weeks, and for treatment have been as long as 18 months. This has reportedly been due to staff vacancies that have now been filled. Those waiting for an assessment are contacted in the interim in order to monitor any changes. Access to treatment is also prioritised according to need.

Mental health assessments of young juveniles are timely. There are currently 40 young people waiting to be seen by the CAMHS. The youth offending team report there is no problem in accessing services when CAMHS staff are based within the team, and recruitment to the existing vacancy is underway.

A community mothers' programme established to support mothers through practical and emotional support for example is operating successfully within the borough. Areas of focus also include helping parents to stop smoking, through either onward referral or information, and healthy living. A Healthy Living Centres Programme, offering a range of physical activities, was accessed in 2005 by over 8000 young people.

Staying safe

The local authority's contribution to outcomes in this area is adequate.

A Safer Thurrock Partnership has been established that has young people as a key area of focus. A young person's delivery group, with young people representation, has been established to focus on anti social behaviour, for example re-offending. A Safer Schools Partnership that involves health, the police and a school has been piloted but its impact has yet to be evaluated through the Children and Young People's Plan. Although initial feedback from young people is positive.

Although schools have anti-bullying policies, young people report that they do not always feel safe in schools. As a result work is planned to strengthen these procedures, which is also priority within the Children and Young People's Plan.

The numbers of children in need referred to the council has reduced as has the number of looked after children. There has been an improvement in the percentage of initial assessments completed within seven days however further improvement is required. Fewer core assessments are being undertaken, and there has been a reduction in the actual number undertaken on time. In response to the annual performance assessment in 2005, the council audited cases identified as requiring a core assessment and found that this was not always the right decision. This has resulted in more focussed initial assessment work and a restructuring of those teams undertaking this work into one initial response team. A multi-agency Assessment and Response to Children System (ARCS) has been developed which will further support early intervention. This is in the process of being implemented.

Although the percentage of children on the Child Protection Register for more than two years is now acceptable, there has been a twofold increase in the percentage of re-registrations. This is principally a result of children and families moving in and out of Thurrock. All looked after children children, and those on the Child Protection Register, are allocated a social worker. All reviews of children on the Child Protection Register are held on time. The time taken to review the needs of looked after children is inadequate.

The stability of placements for looked after children is now very good. Performance in the long term placement stability for looked after children is acceptable but not as good as in the previous year.

The percentage of children in residential care has reduced. There has been an increase in the number of foster carers which is now more representative of the local population. The percentage of children living in foster placements has increased on last year as has the percentage of those fostered by family and friends.

Enjoying and achieving

The local authority's contribution to outcomes in this area is adequate.

Although outcomes in this area are adequate overall, there are some important weaknesses to be addressed. Most children's results are below the national average although they are satisfactory in relation to those in similar authorities. Most children make satisfactory progress over their time in schools. Looked after children and those with learning difficulties and disabilities make good overall progress. Access to child-care for under-fives has improved.

There has been some progress made in the areas identified in last year's annual performance assessment. While many of the issues impacting on children and young people's achievements are long standing, over the last two to three years the strategies to address these problems have been fundamentally reviewed and continue to be re-appraised.

Significant improvements have been made in the way the council is working with its schools; for example more rigorous and effectively targeted intervention has resulted in positive and active response from two schools where results rose by 6% in English and 8% in maths. Trends in secondary are better than in the primary schools. The quality of early year's provision is not yet enabling children to meet national expectations on entry and the relatively low standards reached at the end of the Key Stage 1 mean that most children have a significant amount of ground to make up in later years. In Key Stage 3, the trends are for smaller increases than achieved nationally but in line with similar authorities in English but below both in mathematics and science. At Key Stage 4, there has been a slight increase in children gaining five A*-C since the dip in 2004. The trend for one GCSE A*-G rose to 98% in 2005. Most vulnerable groups achieve well including looked after children who achieved very well. This progress is attributable to good support from the School Improvement service to reduce the number of low attaining schools through their strategic planning. Although boys continue to underachieve in comparison to girls by the end of Key Stage 4 the local authority recognises that girls' self-esteem and access to further and higher education remains a concern.

Attendance remains an issue particularly in the primary schools where levels are still below the national average. Support for schools with an above average number of unauthorised absences continues to be effective. These schools frequently show rapid but not always sustained rates of improvements.

Thurrock children and young people continue to have access to a suitable range of good educational provision and the number of surplus places is relatively low. The number of schools with special measures or notice to improve is low. There are, however, a

significant number of schools whose performance is satisfactory. The authority, through its recently developed assessment and response procedures, is working with schools to ensure that all teachers have a better understanding of how to use data to track, monitor and support children and young people to improve achievement and raise standards overall.

Thurrock has continued to develop good partnership working arrangements with its schools and most of its other key partners to deal with common issues. This good practice has now been effectively developed with schools, colleges and the Learning Skills Council. A consultant has now been appointed and the 14-19 Strategy developed.

Making a positive contribution

The local authority's contribution to outcomes in this area is adequate.

A Youth Cabinet, with an agreed constitution, has been established and representatives sit on the five outcome boards. Representation of young people is flexible, being dependent both on the young people concerned and the board itself. Young people have received training from the council to assist in their participation. The degree of representation of young people on the youth cabinet exceeds the initial target of 25. The council is working to ensure that the Youth Cabinet is representative of the local population. There are strong links between the Youth Cabinet and school councils. The key aspirations of young people are contained within the Children and Young People's Plan.

Generally the work of the Youth Offending Team (YOT) is having a positive impact and the rate of re-offending has declined. A successful project run jointly with partners in one part of the borough has led to a 50% reduction in reported levels of nuisance. The percentage of children looked after receiving a final warning, reprimand or conviction has increased but remains acceptable. A worker within the YOT is allocated to support looked after children.

Work in supporting young carers is an area of concern. This service was contracted out to the voluntary sector until recently when the council brought the service back in-house. Information from the last census indicates there are about 400 young carers in the borough. Of the 30 to 40 who have been identified only 10 are engaged in the one carers group that is running.

A good percentage of children communicate their views at their reviews. Looked after children have access to advocacy services that they use to challenge and change decisions made.

Good progress has been made on the number of children with disabilities who have a transition plan. A transition service is available and staff are trained to support young people through person centred planning. Although the impact is yet to be fully evaluated, young people are reporting that they feel more able to ask questions and are less anxious.

Achieving economic well-being

The local authority's contribution to outcomes in this area is adequate with an overall improving trend.

The established children's centre is a good example of the positive multi-agency work which Thurrock is now beginning to establish more widely. It is opening three other children's centres by September 2006. Early years' day care and childminding provision is expanding at a faster rate than nationally. Support to prospective childminders prior to registration is poor in some aspects; specifically safety, health and equalities.

The number of young people who are not in education, employment or training has improved but still remains an issue for the borough. The council has done work on identifying those young people at risk of not being in education or employment and is putting systems in place, for example a job coach, to provide support. There are now good links with the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions. The strategic plan for 14-19 education is now in place and beginning to challenge secondary schools to develop alternative curriculum provision and further development of the work-related curriculum. However, it is too early to evaluate any impact. Links between the authority and the local Further Education College are yet to be developed fully.

The proportion of young people who progress to higher education and training remains low. The concern of the low participation in post-16 education and training by girls remains an issue. However young people, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities continue to benefit from the good guidance and support from Connexions, the Youth Service and a number of other initiatives, for example Open Door Information and Mediation Services.

Increasingly, provision is planned to address particular local needs within certain areas of the borough. This has improved the access for young people and adults in these areas and made a good contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people in areas of deprivation. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do well with the services provided for them. All looked after children have pathway and transition plans. There is partnership working to offer a general programme of support for vulnerable children. There has been effective action for looked after children to have access to housing. This includes joint tenancies and other solutions for vulnerable young people.

The quality and range of advice to children and young people is evaluated and a range of opportunities extended accordingly to ensure that services reflect the diversity of need. There is effective coordination between health, education and social services to meet educational, personal and welfare needs of children and young people, especially those who are vulnerable or looked after. The transition to adult services is improving and is now satisfactory.

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

The council has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for further development. The authority consulted widely on its Children and Young People's Plan, which sets out a strategic vision for Children's Services and a challenging agenda for change. The Youth Cabinet played an active role in consulting with the children and young people of the borough. The plan is based on an analysis of need and identifies gaps in provision and sets out clear and ambitious targets for all phases. It seeks to secure future performance improvement, create efficient and seamless services and value for money. The Council and partners have a set of shared goals to secure a judgement of good or better for the quality and impact of service provision in the 2007/8 Joint Area Review. The council has rationalised its planning and has increased the capacity of the management team through the establishment of the Children, Education and Families directorate. As part of this process developments are underway in key areas of provision, such as CAMHS and the school improvement service, to improve the services on offer. Its arrangement to keep a percentage of the budget centrally for developing innovative projects has been well received by all parties concerned. Thurrock has finally achieved success in the recruitment and retention of the consultant for 14-19 and is now able to move forward to improve the provision for young people in the borough. There are now joint priorities with the police, health and social care services. Effective partnerships have been formed with the local college and the local Learning and Skills Council. However, action to measure the impact of the initiatives taken and to judge their cost effectiveness are yet to be developed.

The self-assessment undertaken for the APA demonstrates well that the authority has a full understanding of its strengths, areas for further development and the strategies required to implement further developments.

Forward planning and performance management systems are much better developed and used to inform practice. The development of the workforce will be underpinned by implementation of the Common Induction Standards for Children's Services from September 2006.

Most of the issues identified in last year's APA are being addressed and the authority is working effectively towards ensuring the others are met. This includes, for example, CAMHS and assessments. There have been pressures on budgets across the council, nevertheless, the council budget came in on line in 2005-2006 and for the second year was able to add to the reserves so that it is able to increase provision for out of borough placements.

The authority has adequate capacity to make further improvements to the services it provides for young children and young people.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • looked after children • healthy schools • healthy living centres. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAMHS.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment and Response to Children System (ARCS) • Initial Response Team. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • timeliness of reviews • core assessments.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overall care and attainment of looked after children • early intervention for pupils with special educational needs • work with pre-school children • good partnership with schools. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gender issues – boys' overall achievement, • girls' self-esteem and access to further and higher education • attendance – particularly in primary schools • continuity and progression of pre-school work into Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 • continue to raise standards overall but particularly at Key Stage S1 and Key Stage 2.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Cabinet • Primary Mental Health Team. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • further improve representation on the Youth Cabinet • support to Young Carers.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partnership work • person centered planning • children's centres. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14-19 development • data analysis and its use across the LA and schools • pre-registration support to prospective childminders.
<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partnership working • improvement in Social Care Staffing • leadership at senior management level • joined up approach to social care and education. 	<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evidence of impact on outcomes; impact analysis • workforce strategy and teacher recruitment • performance management.

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

- CAMHS.
- Overall achievement, particularly of boys.
- Attendance, particularly primary.
- Young carers.
- Use of data and assessing impact on outcomes.
- 14-19 provision.

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

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JONATHAN PHILLIPS

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Commission for Social Care Inspection