

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 Terry Piggott
Executive Director, Children & Young People's Services
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
PO Box 70
Municipal Offices
Smith Street
Rochdale
OL16 1YD

1 November 2006

Dear Mr Piggott

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN ROCHDALE 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 awarded ¹
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	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

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council delivers good overall provision for children and young people. It has built on the strengths noted in last year's joint area review (JAR) and is tackling the areas for improvement vigorously and with some notable successes. The Children, Schools and Families partnership has been strengthened to form a Children's Trust which includes the local Primary Care Trusts (PCTs). The Trust's single plan for children and young people sets a clear and ambitious agenda designed to realise the council's aim of 'Excellence for Everyone'. It is well founded on priorities arising from self-assessment and wide consultation. The council has good capacity to improve its services further.

Being healthy

The contribution of the council's services to improving the health of children and young people is good and has improved since the JAR in 2005. The council recognises the importance of a long term preventative approach to tackling health issues. Health outcomes for children, young people and adults in the authority are generally below the national averages. Recognising that health outcomes for children and young people are different across the four townships, the council has identified specific issues for the black and minority ethnic community.

As part of a commitment to tackling health inequalities the council has exceeded their target for schools with Healthy School status and nominated their programme for Beacon status. Evidence has been gathered on lifestyle issues such as smoking, alcohol and substance misuse through a thorough survey in schools. The data collated indicate an improving picture with a reduction in the number of children and young people smoking, drinking and misusing drugs.

Levels of obesity have been identified as a challenge within the borough requiring a multi-agency approach. The council has agreed to develop a joint commissioning strategy with partners to improve outcomes in this area for children and young people. This approach gives the opportunity to develop a further understanding of commissioning in partnership.

The PCTs have improved their performance in the last reporting year and are both now judged to perform at three star level. Although the PCTs are undergoing a period of change, they have nominated a named lead for children and young people and are contributing to service developments as part of the change for children team.

The council has maintained a strong focus on improving health outcomes for the most vulnerable children. Strong partnerships are developing, for example within the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) which now supports young people who are vulnerable, young offenders and looked after children. The authority has addressed the issue identified by the JAR and developed a CAMHS service for 16 to 19 year olds.

Although above the performance of comparators on reducing teenage pregnancy, numbers increased slightly last year. A range of services promoting positive sexual health has been established.

Staying safe

The council promotes and secures the safety of children and young people adequately. There are some good outcomes for looked after children. Schools ensure a comprehensive range of advice and support regarding safety issues is available to children and young people. Procedures are now in place to ensure that children missing from education are identified and action is taken, as recommended by the JAR. Positive feedback from children and young people indicates that the authority's anti-bullying strategy is proving effective.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) formed in January 2006 recognises the full breadth of the safeguarding agenda. It has established a structure of six sub-groups to cover the full range of safeguarding activity. Five of these are now operating with the final one due to commence shortly. The LSCB has been involved in recent work to establish a clearer understanding of thresholds across all the agencies, a draft framework for which has been produced. An inter-agency compact has been developed setting out how each agency will ensure that safeguarding responsibilities are undertaken effectively. It also sets out the performance management structure with clear lines of accountability. Agencies are gathering information on their current performance. The authority has a draft implementation plan setting out how it intends to implement the common assessment framework and the role of the lead professional.

During the last year, the council has changed the computer system used to capture social care data. They have also reorganised their assessment teams into one centralised unit. The number of referrals per 10,000 population recorded has fallen and is below comparator authorities. Discussions with the authority highlighted a disparity between activity and the figure recorded. The amended figure of 470 is closer to, but remains below, that for comparator authorities of 543.9 per 10,000 population. The number of initial assessments carried out has increased to 26.6% but remains at approximately half that of comparator authorities. The authority identified that some referrals bypass the initial assessments stage, particularly those of a more complex nature. Had the authority recorded all cases where an initial assessment would be appropriate, they estimate that this would have increased their figure by approximately 24%. Of those initial assessments recorded by the authority, 85% were undertaken within seven days. This performance was better than the average comparator performance of 69%. The number of core assessments completed per 10,000 population (63.9) has reduced since last year and remains below that of comparator authorities (92.6). The authority identified that although core assessments are being undertaken within the duty and assessment processes, this is not the case for their long term teams who are using a range of documents. The timescales for completion of core assessments remained the same as last year and is slightly above the comparator authorities. The authority recognises that their assessment, referral and recording systems and processes require urgent review and is initiating this immediately.

The number of children subject to an initial case conference is 19 per 10,000 population, well below the comparator authority average of 29.6 per 10,000

population. As a consequence of issues raised regarding historical practice and the data set, the authority is currently reviewing thresholds regarding when initial case conferences should be convened. Re-registration rates have fallen and are now slightly below the comparator authority average.

The JAR recommendation that all looked after children and on the Child Protection Register (CPR) should have an allocated social worker, has been met, and 100% of reviews of children on the CPR are completed within timescales. Outcomes for looked after children have improved across a range of performance assessment framework indicators. The stability of placements for looked after children is adequate. Services provided for looked after children, adoption, fostering and residential children's homes, have all performed well against standards in recent inspections. The authority has sound plans in place to reduce the number of children in external placements placed outside Rochdale.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area has improved since the 2005 JAR and is now good.

The quality of early years provision is generally good. The effective work of Sure Start is being built on in the development of children's centres. In the majority of schools inspected this year, the quality and standards in the Foundation Stage are at least good. Inspections of other settings indicate that provision is at least satisfactory and often good. The authority is taking suitable steps to ensure that early years providers understand requirements and so reduce the number of actions imposed at registration.

There has been an improvement in standards at Key Stage 1, 2, 3 and 4 so that although mainly below national averages, they are in line with those of similar councils. The 2005 results in reading at Key Stage 1 and mathematics at Key Stage 2 are in line with the national performance. Rochdale is ranked the most improved local authority in terms of the 2005 Key Stage 2 results. Nonetheless, a number of primary schools failed to reach the floor targets. Standards at Key Stage 3 and 4 are below the national average. However, Key Stage 3 results in English and mathematics are exceeding the national rate of improvement. They are keeping pace with the national rate in science. The authority achieved its best ever performance at five or more A* to C and one A* to G grades at GCSE level. All secondary schools are performing above the floor targets. Pupils make satisfactory progress in the primary phase. Progress at secondary level improved markedly in 2005 but remains below the national rate. Inspection judgements indicate that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally make good progress.

The attainment and attendance of looked after children have improved since the JAR. The proportion of Year 11 pupils sitting at least one GCSE or equivalent examination is above average. Both the percentage of care leavers achieving at least one pass and those gaining five or more A* to C grade passes are broadly average. Rochdale has a higher percentage of supervised juveniles in education, employment and training when compared with both similar councils and the national picture.

Attendance at primary schools has been maintained at the national level. There has been some improvement in attendance in the secondary phase with a reduction in unauthorised absences. However, the figure remains below the national average. There has been a greater increase in the rate of attendance in schools in the behaviour improvement programme with some success in using innovative strategies such as text and voice messaging to combat absence. The rate of exclusions from primary schools remains broadly in line with that found across the country. However, despite some reduction at secondary level, exclusions are higher than found nationally. The proportion of permanently excluded pupils receiving at least 20 hours tuition is average.

The number of schools in formal categories of concern is low. Support for the one secondary school subject to special measures is effective and is making good progress. The authority has taken strenuous and successful steps to secure provision at a special school which recently received a Notice to Improve.

The work of Rochdale's music service contributes well to pupils' enjoyment in education. The annual festival of music, speech and drama attracted 4,500 children and young people this year. Local partnerships between secondary and primary schools are extending opportunities for sports and performing arts across the borough.

Making a positive contribution

The council's performance against this outcome is good with some areas of excellence. Young people are actively encouraged to take part in the democratic process. For instance, as well as a youth parliament, they have a junior mayors' programme with one mayor representing each of the four townships. There is a range of regular youth forums and the authority's 'big listen' programme has included vulnerable groups such as looked after children and children with disabilities. Through such opportunities, children and young people have influenced strategic thinking and contributed to the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and consultation on the housing renewal strategy. In addition, there is a wide range of opportunities to contribute positively through volunteering.

The youth service has met its targets for the proportion of young people gaining both recorded and accredited outcomes despite low funding. The authority is considering improving funding levels in the future. The authority's young carer project has Beacon status and has successfully identified and engaged young carers in a wide range of support activities.

The youth offending team and the youth offending services are working closely together to deliver a range of strategies that are effectively reducing antisocial behaviour and the need for antisocial behaviour orders. The authority has significantly exceeded its own 2% target for reducing first-time offenders and achieved an overall reduction of 29%. Looked after children's involvement with their reviews has increased and an advocacy service is now available to all children. Re-offending rates still present a challenge, although the council has shown improvement compared to comparators.

Achieving economic well-being

The council's contribution to the economic well-being of children and young people is adequate. Performance at A/AS level fell markedly in 2005 in contrast to a rise in results both nationally and for similar councils. Working jointly with the local Learning and Skills Council, the authority has increased the support and challenge to sixth forms to address this.

Working with a wide range of partners in responding to the strategic area review, some developments have occurred since the JAR to extend and improve provision for 14 to 19 year olds. These have been more rapid for 14 to 16 year olds than for 16 to 19 year olds. A staged approach to implementation is underway. This reflects the strengths and needs of the particular institutions and townships as well as the skill requirements of the borough as a whole. The curriculum offer at secondary schools includes work-related options in all cases. To drive this agenda with greater urgency, partners have formed a consortium and appointed a coordinator to lead a cohesive and coherent approach across the borough.

Participation rates for all young people are now higher than those in the region and remain good for 19 year olds leaving care. Although below the national target, participation rates for young offenders are good. The percentage of young parents in education, employment or training has risen. There has been an above average increase in the number of childcare providers and in the number of available places.

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

The council's comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) rating is two stars and the Audit Commission's 'Direction of Travel' statement assessed the council as improving well. 'Aiming High', the council's strategic plan, makes children and young people a high priority. The recent development of a Children's Trust reflects its continued commitment to improving life and chances for its children and young people against a background of considerable deprivation. The leadership of the children's services agenda is resolute and determined in pursuing this.

The CYPP sets out the Trust's ambitious targets and distributes responsibility for achieving these across the partners. Performance management processes have been strengthened with regular reviews at all levels of service delivery, following a common format of appropriate questions. However, there is some evidence that the strong focus on reporting on key indicators and targets results in too narrow an analysis of performance. Broader patterns underlying key indicators are not always identified and this could affect the basis for strategic decisions adversely. For example, the failure to identify changes in referral patterns would not enable the council to identify changing patterns of need. The recent creation of a performance development service across all elements of services for children is a positive step in unifying the authority's approach to performance management.

There is a growing common understanding of the Trust's role in commissioning. The CYPP sets out an agreed ten step process. From across the partners, a team is being established to develop this. There are helpful plans to put the process to the test shortly on the challenging issue of obesity. The authority has sought to improve value for money in the reduction of primary school surplus places by 1,400 and the reallocation of released funds to other areas of education. The criteria for determining school closures reflect the authority's determination to improve the standards and quality of provision. Low levels of spending on the youth service have been recognised and there are plans to address this in the coming year.

The authority's capacity for improvement is strengthened by well considered workforce planning. The social care workforce has been successfully re-engineered to address significant difficulties in recruitment and retention. Additionally, there has been a marked decrease in sickness absence. A training programme to develop future school leaders has been put in place following an analysis of the current position. Existing successful practice is being extended so that the in-house agency for school supply staff will also provide a similar service to cover the childcare workforce. In addition, the Rochdale Education and Learning Trust is expanding its remit for continuing professional development in education to address the needs staff in social care and health. An innovative mapping of career and qualifications routes for all those working in schools is broadening to cover other sectors of the children's workforce. Helpfully, a common induction programme for all staff working with children in the borough is being established.

Overall, the council has good capacity to make further improvements in its services for children and young people. Effective leadership, the formation of a Children's Trust, a unified CYPP with challenging targets, and extensive consultation with children and young people are contributing to notable improvements in outcomes.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong multi-agency partnerships • clear focus on vulnerable groups of children and young people. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continue to monitor teenage pregnancy rates.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partnership arrangements across the whole range of safeguarding activity. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve effectiveness of referral, assessment and recording processes • review thresholds for convening case conferences.

<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> improved attendance and attainment of looked after children support for schools causing concern. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure all primary schools reach the floor targets raise attendance at secondary schools improve achievement at Key Stage 3 and 4.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> involvement of children and young people in democratic processes young carers project work on reducing antisocial behaviour. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reducing re-offending rates.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> participation rates. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve A/AS level results further develop the range of provision available for young people aged 14 to 19.
<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> strong leadership of children's services the formation of the Children's Trust the single CYPP workforce planning. 	<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that performance management has sufficient breadth to inform strategic planning and decisions accurately.

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

- Assessment and recording processes for children in need and children in need of protection.
- Thresholds for convening case conferences.
- Achievement at Key Stage 3 and 4.
- Provision for 14 to 19 year olds.

We confirm that the children's services grade will provide the score for the children and young people service block in the 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