



Making Social Care Better for People



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Dear Ms Wright

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN READING 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.	2
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

Reading Borough Council is a small unitary council serving the town of Reading. Since the 2005 APA, the council has maintained, and improved some services, particularly those which support outcomes for children and young people relating to their being healthy, staying safe and making a positive contribution. Outcomes for children and young people in relation to enjoying and achieving in their education have improved in places but standards have not risen significantly for 16 year olds. Whilst A level results are good, too many young people are not in education, employment or training and the range of qualifications available for them is generally too limited. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) is comprehensive. It includes a very thorough and accurate analysis of where outcomes need to be improved and robust plans to affect change. Management of services is good and the council has the capacity to improve further although the strategy for improving secondary school performance has still to be fully determined.

Being healthy

The council makes a good contribution towards improving the health of children and young people in the area. Overall, the council, with its partners, is targeting resources appropriately and in line with the assessed needs of the area to improve the health and well-being of children and young people.

Many schools are making a good contribution to this area. Roughly three quarters of schools have the Healthy Schools status and this is well ahead of the council's target. Of the schools inspected in the two years to July 2005, all provided good or better sex and relationship education. In addition, child protection procedures in these schools were found to be good overall. Participation in sport, however, was not as good as nationally by a significant amount. The proportion of full-day care providers and childminders that provide outstanding outcomes for children's health is higher than the national average.

The number of teenage conceptions continues to be high and, despite the work of the council, and partners, it is not reducing. The council has an ambitious and comprehensive plan to reduce the rate of teenage conception by 2010 and there is emerging evidence that the interventions are having an impact. The plan seeks to address this issue in more wide ranging ways in response to research findings that suggest some young people are actively choosing to become pregnant.

There are dedicated workers to support the health care needs of looked after children who have good access to clinical psychology and priority access to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). There has been continued improvement in the number of looked after children who receive dental and annual health checks with the majority of children in this group now included.

The council has resolved many of the capacity issues within the CAMHS and has been accepting routine referrals for the past year. The service has improved over the year but further improvement is required to ensure 24-hour access for urgent referrals and to ensure that services are age appropriate.

Staying safe

The contribution of the council to outcomes in this area is good. The council knows the community it serves and has clearly identified a number of potential problem areas including those with high levels of conflict within families. As a result, the council has invested in multi professional support to parents and carers across a full range of needs. This approach includes a parenting coordinator whose role is to ensure a consistent pathway for all referrals. A good outcome from this approach of working with, and being accessible to, parents has been the steady reduction in the number of children becoming looked after. Coupled with the use of family group conferences, this approach has increased the proportion of looked after children and young people being fostered with family and friends. The number of children placed for adoption, and adoptions taking place, have increased since last year and this represents a positive response from the council. The stability of placements for looked after children is improving.

The council, with its partners, has successfully implemented the new Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). It has been able to secure funds to appoint a development manager to ensure that the safeguarding agenda is broad and focuses on children being safe in all areas.

Children and young people have made a significant contribution to the CYPP and, through this, key areas in which they would like improvement have been identified. One area is around bullying, and the Reading Anti-Bullying Alliance has vetted all primary and special schools' anti-bullying policies. The council has established robust, and effective, procedures for dealing with racial abuse and has a dedicated helpline for schools, parents, children and young people, and Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. Seminars, and other events, to support schools and parents have taken place. The extent to which pupils in schools are free from harassment is better than found on average nationally.

The performance indicators for staying safe are largely good but some additional work is required by the council to ensure its performance in some areas is in line with other similar councils and average performance across England. For example, of the above average figure for referrals of children in need, a lower than average proportion is leading to initial assessments. There has been some slippage in performance of undertaking initial assessments within the required timeframe and this could lead to a delay in allocating resources to those children and young people. The council's performance data for referrals and initial assessment have been subject to change due to the data collection tools being used. This information is key for the council and

action should be taken to ensure that the new systems are providing up to date, accurate and usable information. There has also been some deterioration since last year in the number of looked after children who are allocated a qualified social worker. The current performance is below comparators and national performance.

There has been an increase in the number of re-registrations to the Child Protection Register; this increase comprises re-registration of a large number of siblings from two families. The increase therefore has a valid explanation and the data does not accurately reflect the performance of the council in this area.

The council is committed to placing children in community settings, wherever possible, and avoids residential accommodation. This stance has resulted in fewer children being placed in residential accommodation compared to other councils. This outcome has been achieved in part by the use of the new Family and Friends Panel which assesses all planned placements to ensure that they are appropriate and safe. However, work is still required to ensure placements outside the borough meet the holistic needs of children, with educational opportunities being available to at least the same level as that of children placed within Reading.

There is positive involvement and participation by children and young people with learning disabilities. Children and young people are encouraged to participate in their reviews. Their transition to adult services, including employment opportunities, is managed via 14 years + transition plans. The appointment of a Children's Rights Officer, Parent Partnership Officer, Independent Visitor Scheme and Advocacy Scheme ensures that the views of children and young people, including those with disabilities, are heard.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution of the council to outcomes in this area is adequate overall. The council has played a part in improving attendance and in raising standards at Key Stages 2 and 3, and to a lesser extent in Key Stage 1. The gap between GCSE results in Reading secondary schools, however, and those nationally is not narrowing quickly enough. The council is aware that there is still work to be done to raise educational standards further. Pupils' achievement is broadly average over Key Stages 2 and 3 but not as good over Key Stage 4.

The quality of nursery education is better than the national average. Most childminders provide good, or better, outcomes for children's enjoyment and achievement. The close relationships across teams working with Foundation Stage settings enable staff to provide well coordinated support. The Foundation Stage Profile data for Reading show that children's attainment is just below the national average for every area of learning.

In Key Stage 1, standards have risen in mathematics at a much faster rate than nationally and in similar councils. In 2005, they were in line with similar councils but below national averages. Standards in reading and writing have not improved significantly and are below average; standards in writing have been hovering at well below the national average for several years. Standards in Key Stage 2 have improved faster than nationally in all three core subjects and are broadly average overall. The primary strategy is well managed and is having a demonstrable impact on raising standards in the targeted schools.

In Key Stage 3, standards fluctuate and progress towards targets since 2001 has been variable across all subjects. Nevertheless, there have been improvements since 2004, most significantly in English, where the percentage of pupils reaching Level 5 or above is back to average, after a dip in 2004. For mathematics and science, these percentages are below the national average. Based on average point scores (APS), however, standards are above the national average for English and mathematics and in line for science. The 2005 results in all three subjects were better than in similar councils and, in mathematics, they were considerably better.

In Key Stage 4, standards are rising but not fast enough. Using the APS measure, standards are higher than in similar councils but below the national average. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE is below average. The percentage of pupils not gaining any level 2 qualification at age 16 is much higher than both the national average and in similar councils. The extent to which looked after children gain educational qualifications varies greatly from year to year. It was below average in 2005. The council is currently exploring various models of support for secondary schools. It is also seeking to broaden the curriculum offered in schools to engage better young people's interest and levels of enjoyment.

The council holds data about standards of looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but does not examine their progress in as routine or systematic a way as it does for other groups of pupils.

Attendance has improved because of effective action by the council and it is now average. In particular, the attendance of looked after children has improved markedly in recent years. The council has robust plans to improve educational outcomes for looked after children. Their improved attendance coupled with the Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for all looked after children indicate that the future prospects are promising. A slight improvement is anticipated for next year and significant improvement by 2010. The PEPs ensure young people have easy access to support and agreed personal targets with clear goals.

The performance of the council in placing looked after children close to home when measured against the new indicator is not as good as that in other comparator groups. The council ensures that placements far from home are made only in exceptional and

necessary circumstances and that, if made, they do not compromise the education, support and encouragement these children deserve.

The proportion of schools with surplus places is higher than in similar councils and nationally. In September 2006, the council will launch a project to review the configuration of schools across the borough, with a view to producing a plan for the next 20 years.

Making a positive contribution

The contribution of the council to outcomes in this area is good, with evidence of improvement to areas of concern raised during the previous annual performance assessment. In particular, the council has addressed underperformance in the Youth Service and made good progress against the post Ofsted Action Plan. The majority of young people responding to a survey expressed overall satisfaction with the service provided. The council has improved on the number of young people reached by youth services which is now above the national target.

The council recognises that the image, and perception, of young people in Reading are issues to be addressed. It is ensuring that children and young people play an active part in shaping media coverage and community issues. The CYPP contains a participation strategy which includes a self-assessment tool to ensure active participation of children and young people in decision making. Early indicators show that this strategy is being used and is encouraging the contribution of young people.

There are examples of positive engagement with children and young people such as the conference for 100 children around the emerging CYPP. This initiative is to be further developed to ensure that children from hard to reach groups are included. Other examples would include the strong school council network, youth forum and a positive interest by children and young people voting in the recent youth parliament. The number of looked after children participating in their reviews has improved on last year and is now good as measured by the relevant indicators. Robust plans are in place to further improve this during the coming year. The council has engaged external consultants to establish an independent advocacy scheme for children and young people with disabilities. The project is still in its infancy but already two young people have accessed independent advocates and the consultants will also take on the role whilst they are recruiting and training volunteers.

There has been some reduction in the number of looked after children receiving final warnings, reprimands and convictions but further work is required as performance remains below that of similar authorities and national performance. The reduction does, however, demonstrate positive partnership working between social care, youth service and the Youth Offending Team (YOT)

Looked after children are supported to access the independent visitors' scheme, which ensures they have access to a safe adult. In addition there is good access to an advocacy scheme and the Children's Rights Service. These mainstream services are also accessed by children and young people with disabilities and learning difficulties and/or disabilities and are tailored according to specific needs. One example of this is the complaints procedure which has been amended to give access to children with communication difficulties.

Transition planning for young people with disabilities is well established in Reading and all eligible young people have a plan which details the support needed through the transition phases to adulthood.

Achieving economic well-being

The contribution of the local council to outcomes in this area is adequate. Over the last four years, A-level results have been above national averages and much better than in similar councils. Roughly half of pupils leaving Year 11 stay on into the school sixth forms to take A-level courses. The range of vocational qualifications offered post-16 is still rather limited and the council is seeking to remedy this for September 2006 as part of its 14-19 strategic plan.

Encouraging young people to engage in education or training post-16 is a key priority for the borough. Although there is considerable concern about continuing high levels of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), the 14-19 area inspection report acknowledged that the Connexions service works effectively with young people in the NEET group to identify opportunities, offer advice, information, guidance and support as required. There are also effective initiatives to engage and raise the aspirations of young people at risk of becoming disengaged from education and training. In schools inspected over the last few years, the work on preparing young people for their later stages of education and employment has not been as good as occurs typically nationally.

The number of 19 year old care leavers in employment, training or education is judged to be good when measured against the relevant indicators, although the council falls marginally below the performance of similar councils and significantly behind national performance. The council recognises the need for improvement and there are good plans in place to improve further outcomes for care leavers in this area in the coming year.

A comprehensive service is provided to children, their parents and carers and to other stakeholders via the Children's Information Centre. The centre provides information across a wide range, including advice and guidance to employers, voluntary agencies and groups, which can make a difference to the lives of young people. There are established groups to support children with disabilities, children from Black and minority

ethnic groups and young carers. In addition, an outreach service and children's centres ensure services are accessible to hard to reach groups.

Homeless teenage parents are classed as a high priority and children leaving care are offered accommodation in the supported lodging scheme. In addition, young care leavers are offered permanent tenancies within the council's own housing stock. Over the past two years only three care leavers have presented as homeless. The majority of care leavers have Pathway Plans in place and detail the support each young person requires to achieve their full potential and realise personal aspirations for education, employment and training. There are robust processes in place to ensure the Pathway Plans work for the young people and are reviewed and updated as required.

Progress with take up of direct payments by families and carers of children with disabilities is limited. The council is aware of the need to improve in this area and has plans to review current arrangements to remove potential barriers to progress.

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

Management of services is largely good. The publication of the CYPP followed a comprehensive needs analysis and extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including children and young people. The council has secured the agreement of a wide range of partner agencies that will be essential in delivering the plan in full. Its capacity to improve services further is good.

The council has reorganised the directorate to provide for the full integration of children's services in line with the Every Child Matters agenda. Further reorganisation is being considered in relation to support for secondary schools. The percentage of unfilled teaching vacancies is considerably higher than average and this is a barrier to school improvement. Opportunities to consolidate the new structures are in place. The directorate was without a permanent Director of Education and Children's Services for a few months but, with the temporary arrangements, none of the momentum for improvement and in setting up the directorate has been lost. The council responded quickly and appropriately to the resignation of the director to ensure senior cover. A new director took up post in June 2006.

The robust performance management culture within social care has assisted in setting challenging targets, monitoring progress and assessing achievement. This is coupled with sound financial management and budgetary control. There has been significant progress on achieving pooled budgets with local health partners for children with specific needs and this approach has already yielded some efficiency savings. The CYPP sets out the framework for workforce development and this includes a reform of the workforce. The reform of the teacher workforce has already been successfully implemented.

Reading has made considerable progress on both the information sharing assessment and a common assessment framework. These are essential developments to support the move towards a multi agency integrated workforce.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> health assessment of looked after children good partnership with health and the voluntary sector resulting in early intervention to prevent/minimise health difficulties such as obesity. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> teenage conception rates 24 hour access to CAMHS for urgent cases access to substance misuse treatment in young people services.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> keeping children free from bullying, harassment and racism successful implementation of LSCB with range of partners increased use of family group conferences and reduction of children becoming looked after increased fostering and adoption of looked after children. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> timeliness of initial assessments evaluation and impact of the CAMHS the number of looked after children allocated a qualified social worker.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> foundation stage improvement in standards at KS2 and KS3 improved attendance, particularly for looked after children. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> standards at KS4 evaluation of progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and looked after children, particularly those placed outside the borough number of looked after children placed within 20 miles of their home. educational qualifications of looked after children broaden 14-19 curriculum.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of young people reached by Youth Services • positive involvement of children with special educational needs/disability at key transition points. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number of final warnings, reprimands and convictions of looked after children.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A level results • strong partnerships with key partners eg Connexions • number of care leavers in employment, education and training • good provision of housing and supported accommodation for vulnerable groups including teenage parents. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preparation for later stages of education and employment • direct payments for children with disabilities • the number of young people not in education, employment or training.
<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • robust CYPP demonstrating good analysis of strengths and areas for development • impact of the primary strategy on raising standards in targeted schools • positive management of social care staff • numbers of suitably qualified social care staff at NVQ and post qualifying levels • progress with information sharing assessments and common assessment framework. 	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • secondary school improvement strategy • teacher vacancy and turn over • use of data to evaluate educational achievement of specific groups of pupils.

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

- Impact of secondary school improvement strategy.
- Reduction in teenage conception rates.
- Improved direct payments.
- Assess impact of implementation of independent advocacy for children with disabilities.

- Data management processes and use of data to evaluate extent of improvements in outcomes.

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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