



Making Social Care Better for People



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Mr John Nash  
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**1 November 2006**

Dear Mr Nash

**2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN POOLE**

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 <sup>1</sup>
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	4
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	3

<sup>1</sup>

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

The Borough of Poole delivers a service that is consistently above minimum requirements for children and young people. All of the services can demonstrate how they are improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people. There is very effective working with all partners, including health organisations and neighbouring councils. The council is to be commended for its unity of purpose with children and young people as a priority throughout all of its services. A particular strength is the very good consultation and engagement with children, young people and their families. Almost all of the areas identified for improvement in last year's APA have been subject to carefully targeted action and this has led to improved performance. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) is very good and it demonstrates that the council has a very clear view of its own strengths and areas for development. The council has excellent capacity to continue improving its services.

## **Being healthy**

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make in this area is excellent. Schools are promoting healthy lifestyles through physical education, personal social and health education programmes and participation in national schemes. Poole has met their Local Public Service Agreement target for the required number of schools providing at least two hours of physical education per week. The conception rate for under 18's has continued to fall. There is evidence of good partnership working between the council's key services and local health organisations; for example, there is a joint appointment between the council and the Primary Care Trust (PCT) to lead on commissioning services for children. A health worker has been seconded to lead on a health and early years project and a part time physical activities coordinator from leisure services is working with early years settings. There are a number of innovative programmes working with families where children have disabilities or challenging behaviour.

Waiting times for access to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) have continued to fall. In addition, there is now 24 hour cover to meet urgent mental health needs. Young offenders referred by the youth offending team (YOT) to CAMHS are assessed within the agreed timescale.

An integrated team, combining education and social services staff is in the process of being set up for children with disabilities. A sub-group of CAMHS is focusing on the need for particular specialist services for children with Asperger's and autistic spectrum disorders. The multi-agency East Dorset Commissioning Group has responded to the challenge that the threshold for intervention by the social work team was too high. It is developing alternative models for respite care, including more shared care, holiday play schemes and intensive home support so that more children with disabilities are receiving services.

Looked after children's health needs are met well. The proportion of looked after children having the appropriate health checks remains very high and there has been a good improvement in the number of children receiving dental checks. The recent inspection of fostering services confirmed that there was support from a specialist psychologist and nurse.

## **Staying safe**

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is good. Children and young people are provided with the safe environment to which they are entitled. All children on the Child Protection Register (CPR) and all looked after children continue to be allocated to a social worker. The number of registrations of children on the CPR is at an appropriate level. The proportion of CPR reviews undertaken within the appropriate timescale was 96%, which is adequate. All of the schools inspected by Ofsted in 2004/05 take all reasonable steps to comply with child protection procedures.

The proportion of referrals of children in need has continued to fall and is considerably below the average of similar councils. A higher proportion of referrals than average lead to the completion of an initial assessment. Repeat referrals are rising; the council has not established if this is because initial referrals are not being dealt with appropriately.

The proportion of core assessments undertaken has fallen dramatically from last year and is well below the national figure and that of similar councils. The council recognises that this remains an area which they need to investigate. Last year there was evidence that the quality of assessments varied and action needed to be taken to ensure that they were of a uniformly high standard. A quality assurance system has been put in place and a non case-holding senior practitioner is now in post to assist inexperienced colleagues. The council is yet to evaluate these improvements.

Pre-registration support to childminders has improved and is satisfactory, but the council accepts that it needs to be more proactive in ensuring childminders attend child protection training as at present it is optional.

Looked after children have stable placements. However, long term stability as measured by the new Public Service Agreement target is below that of similar councils and the national average. The number of adoptions of looked after children has fallen this year after two years of good performance. The numbers of children involved are very small. Last year, it was identified that there needed to be improvement in the speed with which children were placed for adoption once the 'best interest' decision was taken. However, performance has deteriorated and fewer adoptions have occurred within the timescale. The council is taking steps to review administrative practice in this area. All care leavers have an allocated personal adviser but only three

quarters of those eligible have a pathway plan, which is below that of similar councils and the national average.

The council is to be commended for its implementation of the recommendations of the Bichard Enquiry which arose from the Soham murders. The council has implemented and is monitoring the recommendations across all of its services, not just those in social care.

Last year it was noted that elected members needed to become more effective in their role as corporate parents. Appropriate actions have been taken involving a volunteer group of looked after children who are helping to increase the understanding and involvement of councillors.

Ofsted inspection evidence confirms that the extent to which schools ensure that learners stay safe is broadly good.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

The contribution that the council makes to ensuring that children and young people achieve at schools and enjoy their education and leisure activities is good, with many strengths.

The overall quality of early years provision and outcomes are good and compares well with national figures. Children are supported well and achieve good progress in meeting their early learning goals. There is some mismatch between parental demand and provision of day care places which the council recognises needs further investigation.

Standards achieved at the end of all key stages and post-16 is good; pupils and students make good educational progress. At the end of Key Stage 1, although the results in reading in 2004/05 fell compared to those in 2003/04, they remained in line with the national average. In writing and mathematics the results were above the national average.

At Key Stage 2, results in English and mathematics were in line with the national average. In science the improved results placed the council above the national average. Overall, children make good progress between Key Stages 1 and 2.

At Key Stage 3 results improved in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. In English they improved significantly and were above the national average. Results in mathematics have improved and are above the national average. In science, results are well above the national average. Progress made between Key Stages 2 and 3 is good.

Results at GCSE have been consistently above those of statistical neighbours and the national averages for a number of years. In 2004/05 they improved again and Poole obtained its best ever results. These were well above the national figures for the proportion of pupils achieving five or more higher grade GCSE passes. Although there was a fall in the in the proportion of pupils achieving one or more GCSE passes, these figures were above the national average. Pupils make good progress from Key Stage 2 to 4. All of the secondary schools have met the DfES floor targets of 25% of pupils achieving five or more higher level passes at GCSE.

Almost all of the small number of looked after children who leave care aged 16+ take GCSEs. The proportion of pupils achieving one or more A\*-G grades has fallen but remains satisfactory. However the proportion of pupils who achieve five or more higher grade passes has doubled since last year and this figure is well above that recorded nationally

Fixed term exclusions are high and in primary schools have risen to more than double that of their statistical neighbours and are much higher than the national figure. However these figures have to be treated with caution. In Poole, middle schools deemed primary include Year 7 pupils who would be counted in secondary school figures in other councils. The numbers of fixed term exclusions in secondary schools were also higher than their statistical neighbours and much higher than the national figures. This partly reflects the schools' commitment to rigorously tackling pupils' unacceptable behaviour and attitudes. Attendance is slightly lower than last year with fewer absences being authorised. All of the schools, with the council's support, are taking a very strict line on attendance and absence is only being authorised if it meets agreed criteria.

None of the council's schools required special measures and one school was given a notice to improve following the Ofsted inspection. The council works very closely and effectively with those schools that are less successful, providing intensive support and challenge. Care, guidance and support in the schools inspected have been a strength.

### **Making a positive contribution**

Performance in this outcome area is excellent. The council continues to provide the majority of young people with good support to manage change in their lives. The council has put in place many opportunities for young people to contribute to discussions about their future, including a Shadow Board to advise the Children's Services Board.

More looked after children communicated their opinions in their statutory review this year than last, which places the council in the top band of performance. The rate of convictions and final warnings for looked after children who offend has fallen from

last year's comparatively high figure and Poole has now moved into the top performance band. This is to be commended.

Over 90% of children aged over 14 with disabilities have a transition plan which is monitored and updated regularly. The youth service has made good provision for young people with disabilities in response to a request from the young people themselves. A good range of support is provided for young carers.

An innovative outreach partnership service with the police is helping the youth service to achieve above the national target for the high proportion of young people it reaches.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

The council makes a good contribution to outcomes in this area. The quality of education provided for 14 to 19 year olds continues to be generally good. Poole has continued to work well with partners to increase curriculum options to extend choice for all young people.

In schools with sixth forms, the average points score in public examinations achieved by students is above their statistical neighbours and well above the national figure. Bournemouth and Poole College has been graded as good by Ofsted, with no causes for concern. There continue to be lower levels of young people not in education, employment or training than for similar councils. The proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training is very high and remains in the top performance band. All care leavers are living in suitable accommodation and have a personal adviser and the support of the leaving care team. This figure is above the national average.

The council is intelligently implementing its plans to focus its attention (with other agencies) on those areas of the borough which are most deprived as detailed in their Local Area Agreement 'Closing the Gap'. This involves multi-agency teams working closely with the community to promote the life chances of young people through proactive, rather than re-active, interventions. This work is being concentrated in two particular areas of the town.

Whilst there has been a big improvement in the numbers of families of children with disabilities in receipt of direct payments, there is still scope to increase this figure to enable more families to take control of the services they receive. Person-centred planning is being further developed for young people to improve their transition to adult services.

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

The council is very well led, with a clear vision and good strategic direction. Senior officers spoke confidently about both strategy and its implementation at all levels. They demonstrated coherence as a team which linked councillors to the everyday life of children, young people and their families. The council has a strong planning and performance management culture. It demonstrates a strong commitment to partnership working, both within the council and externally. There has been a joint appointment of a Commissioner for Children's Services between the council and the Poole PCT. A joint Local Safeguarding Children Board has been established with Bournemouth Borough Council. The preventative work being undertaken with vulnerable children and young people in the two targeted localities involves all the statutory agencies and the voluntary sector.

Supporting young people remains a strategic priority for the whole council and features as a strong element of the local area agreement. The CYPP is clear, readable and it was written in part by young people themselves. This demonstrates Poole's commitment to consultation with, and involvement of, children, young people and their parents. This is a very good plan with an effective needs analysis and agreed priorities and objectives. This strategic plan is sensibly underpinned by more detailed action plans. The council's self assessment document was thorough but is focussed too much on provision rather than outcomes.

Workforce development remains a significant challenge to the council. Poole is collaborating with the Poole PCT to develop a workforce strategy. Poole continues to report difficulties in recruiting staff at all levels in social care, but vacancy levels remain comparatively low. A larger percentage of the budget has been spent on staff training this year, leading to an increase in the percentage of staff with the PQ1 Qualification which is awarded to qualified social workers after a period of practice and further training. It remains the case, however, that fewer social workers have attained the award than the national average.

The council is satisfactorily addressing the challenge that they were insufficiently aware of the needs of the black and minority ethnic children in Poole.

The council is continuing the process of rationalising the age of school transfer through a major restructuring school organisation. Effective plans are in place but are contingent on sufficient capital funding being made available both from the DfES and the council. This very complex change is being well managed.

The council's capacity to improve outcomes for children and young people is excellent.

## Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• partnership working, with healthy lifestyles promoted</li> <li>• reduction in the teenage pregnancy rate</li> <li>• access for looked after children to health checks, including dental checks</li> <li>• access to CAMHS services</li> <li>• participation by almost all schools in the Healthy Schools scheme.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all children looked after, or on the CPR, allocated to a qualified social worker</li> <li>• partnership working between agencies</li> <li>• support for children looked after,</li> <li>• care leavers access to an allocated personal adviser</li> <li>• Implementation and monitoring of the Richard Enquiry council wide.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensuring that the referral system is identifying all children in need</li> <li>• improving the quality of and reversing the fall in the number of core assessments</li> <li>• all child protection registration reviews undertaken within the time scale.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attainment and achievement at all key stages</li> <li>• 2005 examination results</li> <li>• proportion of care leavers gaining 5 or more higher passes at GCSE.</li> <li>• all secondary schools met DfES floor target (of 25% of pupils achieving 5 or more higher GCSE passes.)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the match of early years places to need</li> <li>• attainment in reading at KS1</li> <li>• attainment in English at KS2</li> <li>• the proportion of pupils given a fixed term exclusion.</li> </ul>



<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• involvement of young people, including children looked after</li> <li>• support for care leavers</li> <li>• the low offending rate of looked after children</li> <li>• high proportion of young people reached by the Youth Service, including those with disabilities.</li> <li>• proportion of young people with a disability over the age of 14 who have a transition plan.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14–19 education and training provision</li> <li>• low levels of young people, including care leavers, not in education, employment or training</li> <li>• care leavers accommodation.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• number of families of children with a disability in receipt of direct payments.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CYPP</li> <li>• partnership working</li> <li>• vision and strategic planning.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• performance management in social care</li> </ul>

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

- The extent to which black and minority ethnic communities are being served by the council.
- The extent to which the referral system is potentially screening out children in need.
- The quality and fall in number of core assessments needs to be investigated.
- Attainment in reading at Key Stage 1 and attainment in English at Key Stage 2.

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 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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