



Making Social Care  
Better for People



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**1 November 2006**

Dear Mr Bartley

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

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

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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

In relation to all the outcomes, the council has made a good contribution. The strengths noted in last year's APA have been sustained and most of the areas for improvement have been fully or partially dealt with. In particular, the weaknesses concerning the referral and assessment teams have now been addressed. The re-alignment of council services into the children's services department has led to greater efficiency in service delivery. Partnerships with other agencies have remained effective.

## **Being healthy**

The council makes a good contribution to outcomes in this area. Overall, children have a good start in life but there is considerable variation in health outcomes for children between different wards in Oxfordshire. The council, with its partners, is targeting resources appropriately at these areas.

A range of multi-agency support services is available to parents and carers in Oxfordshire. These include health promotion, parenting courses and training courses for foster carers. The council also works with children with disabilities and their families to prevent their needs escalating. In addition there are a number of examples where joint working directly with young people is leading to improved outcomes. An example of this is the Bodyzone initiative, which was set up via consultation with young people as a confidential drop-in centre.

Schools play an active part in promoting healthy lifestyles. Children and young people have good and appropriate access to sport activities in schools and there are targets to increase participation. The number of schools that have achieved the Healthy Schools standard has more than doubled in the last year and the council is on target to achieve 142 validated Healthy Schools by December 2006.

Weaknesses that were identified in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), in particular the coordination of services at tier 1 and their availability at tier 3, have been rectified and this has led to improved outcomes for children and their families.

The majority of children who are being looked after reported that they were aware of how to best look after their well-being through healthy eating and exercise. However, the percentage receiving health and dental checks has deteriorated this year due to staff turnover. An action plan is now in place and internal monthly monitoring has shown that performance is improving.

Although teenage conception rates are below national averages and declining, insufficient progress is being made in areas of high need. Similarly, drug and alcohol misuse remains a concern, although the council has put into place many initiatives including a Young People's Substance Misuse Steering Group, an alcohol strategy, education and preventative services and the Evolve drug treatment programme, all of which are having a positive impact.

## Staying safe

The council makes a good contribution to outcomes in this area. Oxfordshire is generally a safe county in which to live. However, through consultation with young people and their families, a number of issues were raised such as bullying, providing more fun things to do in safe environments and lessening the impact of domestic violence. These have all been incorporated into the Oxfordshire Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) for priority action and work on them is under way. For example, there is now a strong multi-agency action plan to tackle bullying, based on solution-focused work undertaken by a group of young people and a range of professionals.

In the last year, Oxfordshire has built on and developed its network of family support services to ensure that the needs of children at risk of harm and family breakdown are met. These improvements have been achieved through an increase in the amount of family support available in localities and by engaging partners across sectors, agencies and services. This is beginning to lead to positive outcomes. All of the first wave of 29 children's centres have clearly stated plans for outreach and family support that target the most vulnerable.

A comprehensive tracking system is in place to establish the identity and whereabouts of children aged 0–16 who move off school rolls. This has been developed by education, health and social care. Guidance packs have been distributed to all schools. The information gathered is used effectively and the council is looking at ways of increasing its use.

Oxfordshire has a good understanding of its child protection data and the data is used effectively in performance management. All of the related performance indicators are good.

Actions taken following concerns about capacity in the assessment teams raised in the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) have had positive results and there is now a more consistent approach to managing the work across the county. All the performance indicators show that work is effectively and efficiently processed. More initial and core assessments are completed in the expected timescale than in similar councils. The referral rate is low but the number leading to initial and core assessments is high. The re-referral rate is low which indicates that work is being referred appropriately and is being dealt with effectively. This was also found by an independent evaluation of the pilot projects for integrated support services in high need areas.

Oxfordshire has established a safeguarding children's board (OSCB). All statutory agencies have identified their representatives and a budget has been agreed. These steps are creating the capacity for the OSCB to have its own policy and development support. Overall, the number of children who are looked after has been reducing since 2003. A wide range of strategies to support placements is in place. There have been improvements in placement stability and adoptions, increases in use of foster care and in those placed for adoption, and a high rate of kinship care. Some progress has also

been made on the placement needs of children with profound disabilities. However, there are still some matters requiring attention: too many children are placed too far from home; reviews for children that are looked after need to be done on time; and the lack of placement choice on occasions puts children and young people in less appropriate placements. Good work has been undertaken around private fostering but again there is still more to do.

Services for children with disabilities are of good quality. Children who require support for complex needs receive respite care in the two Barnardo's centres. Through the introduction of a 'flexible response worker' scheme, all home care packages are covered. This service received a Chartermark in February 2006 and was congratulated for its effective communication with parents.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

The council makes a good contribution to outcomes in this area, although pupils' academic achievements overall are no more than satisfactory. There are long established partnerships with the voluntary sector in the provision of early years education and care. The number of childcare places is above national and regional figures. The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage is good and continues to rise: since 2004 the proportion of pupils reaching the early learning goals has increased in all areas of learning. The council has identified the need to give further support to voluntary groups providing out of school care. The responsibility for monitoring and supporting these groups, previously contracted out, has been taken back in-house and good strategies are in place to bring about improvement. Four year-olds are only funded for part-time schooling though some schools have used funding from other sources to provide full-time places. This results in too much inconsistency. The review that is currently taking place of the admission policy should consider ways of resolving some of the anomalies.

In 2005, test results at Key Stage 1 were in line with national averages, though below those in similar authorities. From Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 pupils made a little more than the expected progress and achieved results that were in line with those in similar authorities as well as with national averages. From Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 pupils also made a little more than the expected progress. Results at the age of 14 improved again last year and were above the national average and in line with those in similar authorities. At Key Stage 4 there were also improvements and the proportion of pupils gaining five good grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, was above the national figure. However, on other measures, GCSE results in 2005 were below those in similar authorities. In more than a third of secondary schools progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 in 2005 was too slow. The council, working closely with these schools, has identified particular subject departments which have been given targeted support and this is helping to raise standards.

Attendance at school continues to be very good and unauthorised absence in secondary schools decreased by 12% from 2004 to 2005: the largest improvements

were made in schools in areas of high need that had received targeted support. Fixed-term exclusions are in line with national figures. Permanent exclusions are low: they decreased last year by 50% from a figure which was already below the national average. The proportion of permanently excluded pupils receiving full-time education has increased considerably from just over 30% in 2003 to around 95% this year.

The educational achievements of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities have improved. The completion rate for statements is excellent: during the last financial year all statements were completed within 18 weeks. The number of tribunals has continued to fall. The council's identification of schools in which provision for these pupils' needs to be improved is particularly thorough and schools are given well targeted support.

The educational achievements of children who are looked after have improved considerably over the last two years, and the proportion leaving care with five good GCSE grades or a GNVQ is above the national figure. The improvements are the result of: the establishment of a virtual school; a dedicated education support team; learning mentors; and targeted support for underachieving pupils. Their attendance has also improved and is now in line with the national figure.

The attainment of pupils of Bangladeshi heritage has improved as a result of a careful analysis of their progress and a good working relationship with their community. There have been initiatives to raise aspirations among other groups, but there remains a need to raise attainment, particularly of pupils of Black Caribbean and Pakistani heritage. The Traveller Education Service works very effectively with different groups of travellers and also helps them to keep in contact with health professionals and other agencies.

### **Making a positive contribution**

The council makes a good contribution to outcomes in this area. A multi-agency Children's Rights Group coordinates a strategy for participation and there is extensive consultation. The youth service has five divisional youth forums that make decisions about the Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital. Over 90% of schools have school councils and Ofsted reports are positive about pupils' participation in decision making.

Levels of youth offending have fallen by 17.5% over the last five years, although there are still some geographical areas where youth offending remains relatively high. There has been a considerable reduction in the number of looked after children who have offended: as a result of the success of an imaginative scheme, the number reduced by half between 2004 and 2005, and the proportion offending is now a quarter of the figure in 2001. The Youth Offending Team (YOT) has a well developed commitment to prevention and works successfully with partners on a number of schemes that are mainly targeted on the three areas where crime is highest. Through its emphasis on restorative justice, the YOT has worked to reduce re-offending, but has only met with partial success so far.

Children who are looked after nearly always participate in their reviews. In other ways, children and young people who are in or leaving care are given very good opportunities to make a positive contribution. Some of them are known as “source workers” and act as advocates for their peers. The source workers have been involved in the recruitment and training of staff, in carrying out consultations and in helping to run cultural and leisure activities.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities also have good opportunities to make a positive contribution. They are being helped to participate in decision making in a range of different ways. For example, young people attending disability centres are working with architects to design new buildings.

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

The council makes a good contribution to outcomes in this area. The proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training is below the regional and national figures and is continuing to decline. The proportion of young offenders who are in full-time education, employment or training has risen from 36% in 2005 to 56% this year, mainly in education.

There is one inadequate sixth form which will be discontinuing its Level 3 courses: its students are being helped to find alternative placements through the Oxford City 16-19 consortium arrangements. The proportion of young people attaining Level 2 and the proportion attaining Level 3 by the age of 19 rose in all parts of the county between 2004 and 2005.

The curriculum offered to young people in the 14 to 19 age range has widened considerably and there is increased flexibility. The number of vocational and applied programmes increased fourfold between 2003 and 2005. Entries to applied GCSEs nearly doubled from 2004 to 2005 and the proportion of good grades in vocational GCSEs is now higher than the national figure. The broadening of the curriculum is having a positive impact on the standards achieved and on the engagement of young people from vulnerable groups.

In 2004/05 a very good proportion (84%) of young people leaving care were in education, employment or training. The proportion fell to 62% in 2005-06 (primarily as a result of supported unaccompanied asylum seeking young people being eligible care leavers but not allowed to enter education, training or employment because of their immigration status) but this is still good compared to the national figure. There are specific initiatives to give further help to unaccompanied asylum seeking children including a project to support them at college after leaving care. Housing is a problem for care leavers in this expensive part of the country. Two district councils (Oxford City and Cherwell) have now agreed to give priority nomination rights for housing to care leavers and other vulnerable young people and this is helping to improve the situation.

Connexions personal advisers are closely involved in helping young people with learning difficulties and disabilities to find the right pathway. A good proportion (85%)

of these young people are in education, employment or training and 90% of their parents and carers responded to a recent survey expressing satisfaction with the work in aiding transition. However, there is no post-16 provision in special schools in Oxfordshire and this is a cause of concern to parents and young people who have learning difficulties. A considerable amount of work has been undertaken recently to find a solution to this long-standing problem. A working party, including parents, was due to make a report to Cabinet in July 2006.

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

Oxfordshire Council has realigned its services to create a new directorate for children, young people and families in a way that enables it to take forward its vision through strong leadership and clear lines of decision making and accountability. There is strong political leadership from the Lead Member for Children and Young People & Families and the Lead Member for School Improvement. It has a stable, well trained workforce with sickness, vacancy and turnover rates all lower than comparator authorities.

The council led the development of Oxfordshire's CYPP with the active engagement of over 300 children and young people, over 200 parents and carers and significant involvement of a wide range of staff across council services and partners in the statutory and voluntary sectors. The CYPP and its underpinning action plans with their clear targeted actions, while ambitious, are a good basis for taking forward the work of children's services in a way that can be realistically achieved and that has the potential to make real improvements in the lives of children and young people in the county.

There is a history of good partnership working. In the last year a number of partnership developments have strengthened further the capacity of local services to improve and to facilitate positive responses to current and emerging needs. These include, in particular, the integration of service delivery, the commissioning of new services, such as the establishment of a new Children's Trust for Oxfordshire, the development of a new Joint Commissioning Team, and the implementation of local, multi-disciplinary teams in areas of high need. These positive developments in joint commissioning and de-commissioning will need to be embedded across all service areas in the next year.

There is a strategic focus on securing value for money. Partnership arrangements are effectively improving value for money in services for children and young people. Budgets are aligned or pooled where this provides improved impact. The impact of resource shifts on particular groups of children and young people is taken into account as resources are moved from non-priority areas to those with higher needs.

Priority is being given to providing a wide range of high quality preventive services for all children and young people and there is evidence that needs are beginning to be addressed before problems become intractable. However further work is still needed to fully engage the black and minority ethnic communities.

The partnership has limited financial capacity. Oxfordshire is historically a low-spending authority and there is a projected £82 million deficit in health. However, there appears to be the financial capacity needed to deliver agreed priorities.

The current key risks to sustained improvement have been identified. Budget growth and key strategies are targeted at these risks. The council has proved effective in obtaining funding from other sources.

The council has a good track record in managing projects positively. It has preserved a focus on performance whilst implementing its realignment. Virtually every performance indicator has improved again this year. Additionally, it has responded effectively to recommendations from previous inspections and assessments including last year's APA.

Oxfordshire has introduced some innovative ways of consulting with families and young people and this is seen to make a difference both at a strategic and at a more individual level.

Locally, there is a significant commitment to work jointly to develop integrated information and communication technology (ICT) solutions and there is good sharing of information. This is set to improve further now the Children's Integration and Information Programme Board, which includes representatives from partner agencies, has been established to oversee the development of integrated ICT and information management systems.

### 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>• support to parents and carers</li> <li>• examples of good joint working across statutory and voluntary agencies, which are leading to improved outcomes for young people</li> <li>• good targeting of resources to areas of greatest need.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase in the percentage of children looked after receiving health and dental checks</li> <li>• greater decrease in the overall teenage conception rates in the areas with high incidents of this</li> <li>• further work on timely assessments and treatment for all groups of substance misusers.</li> </ul>



<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the number and range of agencies that prevent the needs of children and families in reaching crisis level</li> <li>• good collaboration between agencies in safeguarding children at all levels of risk</li> <li>• improving outcomes for looked after children</li> <li>• the comprehensive tracking system establishing the identity and whereabouts of children aged 0–16.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• timeliness of reviews of looked after children</li> <li>• greater placement choice for children who are looked after</li> <li>• increased knowledge about the number and quality of placements of children who are being privately fostered.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attainment at Key Stage 3</li> <li>• very good school attendance</li> <li>• improved attainment of pupils of Bangladeshi heritage</li> <li>• improved educational achievements of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities</li> <li>• considerable improvement in the educational achievements of looked after children.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• further improvement in attainment at Key Stage 4</li> <li>• progress between Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 in a significant number of schools</li> <li>• attainment of pupils of Black Caribbean and Pakistani heritage.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a coordinated strategy for participation and extensive consultation with children and young people in shaping services</li> <li>• reduced offending by children &amp; young people</li> <li>• good participation by looked after children and by children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• further reductions in re-offending rates.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• higher than average participation in education, employment or training</li> <li>• good progress towards a wider curriculum offer and increased flexibility for young people aged 14 to 19.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• post-16 provision for young people with special educational needs.</li> </ul>

*Management of children's services*

- majority of performance indicators have improved during a period of re-organisation
- responded positively to all action areas outlined in children's services inspection which has led to improved outcomes
- CYPP devised with children, parents and a wide range of partner agencies
- CYPP is a robust document with ambitious but realistic targets that should lead to better outcomes
- good analysis of need and current resource have led to priority areas being appropriately targeted.

*Management of children's services*

- further work is needed on ICT solutions for information sharing
- further work is needed to fully engage the Black and minority ethnic communities to ensure good outcomes for all young people
- new joint commissioning and de-commissioning need to be embedded across all service areas.

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

- Teenage conception rate in areas of deprivation.
- The timeliness of assessment and treatment for all groups of substance misusers.
- The effectiveness of strategies to improve the range of placements for children who are looked after.
- Progress and attainment at Key Stage 4.
- Progress of pupils of minority ethnic heritage.
- Post-16 provision for young people with SEN.
- ICT solutions for information sharing.

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



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