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Making Social Care
Better for People



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1 November 2006

Dear Ms Gwynn

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MILTON KEYNES

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment (APA) process for your local authority. The judgements reflect the findings of the 2006 joint area review (JAR) report and the updated self-assessment from the council. We are grateful for the information that you provided to support this process and for the time made available by you and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Summary

Areas for judgement	Grade awarded¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	2
The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people	2
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	2

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

Milton Keynes Council delivers only minimum requirements for children and young people and, on current performance, demonstrates adequate capacity to improve. The majority of services can show how they are promoting the achievement and well-being of children and young people. However, as was evident in the JAR, the council needs to do more for some important groups of children. Although plans are in place to reduce the number of pupils excluded from secondary schools, this rate is too high. The council is making changes to the structure of provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but has not provided a clear vision for the future of special schools and their links with mainstream schools. The provision of post-16 courses is not yet meeting the needs of all learners and particularly those whose academic achievements are limited.

In its updated self-assessment the council has demonstrated some signs of improvement. The recent Children's and Young People's Plan (CYPP) for 2006/09 is a commendably accessible read and includes a clear analysis of needs. In addition, the recent data about social care in 2005/06 demonstrate improvement in the council's performance for those children and families who rely on the council's social services.

Being healthy

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is good. Two recommendations for action emerged from the JAR:

For action over the next six months:

- partners should ensure that arrangements for access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for children and young people are well understood and working effectively
- partners should review and improve arrangements for partnership working with the acute trust.

The council states that although the final published copy of the JAR report had only been received in June 2006, work was already in hand with partners to address these recommendations. In particular the council is in dialogue with the local acute NHS trust about making sure the national agenda for children is fully reflected within the partnership with the council.

Staying safe

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is adequate. Five recommendations for action emerged from the JAR.

For immediate action:

- the council should review and improve the understanding and application of arrangements for delegated decision making under the *Placement of Children with Parents etc Regulations 1991*
- the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) should develop further policy and procedures, and improve practice, to check the quality, consistency and effectiveness of the safeguarding and family support arrangements
- the council should strengthen compliance with the arrangements to quality assure the safeguarding and family support arrangements in social care.

For action over the next six months:

- the LSCB should ensure that thresholds, responsibilities and referral procedures are understood and consistently operated by all agencies, particularly schools
- the LSCB should improve policy and procedure for the referral, assessment and support of children and young people who move in and out of Milton Keynes.

To respond to these recommendations the council states that it has action underway. These include a work plan to improve the scrutiny and monitoring arrangements of the LCSB in leading on the auditing of safeguarding across services; work to improve collaboration with schools; plans to commission a review of the inter agency procedures for safeguarding children and internal communication about the scheme of delegated decision making and placing looked after children at home.

The council has also done much to consolidate and improve its successful approach to focusing on family friendly preventative services and to reduce effectively the numbers of children looked after and on the Child Protection Register. The recent data show improvements in the timelines of assessments, the allocation of work with looked after children to qualified, named social workers, and the rate of re-registration to the Child Protection Register.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is adequate. Two recommendations for action emerged from the JAR:

For immediate action:

- the council should ensure that pupils permanently excluded from school receive full-time educational provision.

The council has made an immediate response and improvement has been made in this area with all permanently excluded pupils now in receipt of a full-time education.

For longer term action:

- in collaboration with schools, and other partners, the council should develop a clearer vision for the future role of special schools and their links with mainstream schools.

The council is continuing to plan the development of the role of special schools and several collaborative groups have been set up to review arrangements in this respect.

The recent data also show the council's performance, with respect to looked after children being absent from school, has improved in 2005/06 to be better than the average performance of comparable councils.

Making a positive contribution

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is good. Two recommendations for action emerged from the JAR:

For longer term action:

- the council and its partners should develop a strategy for the participation of children and young people in making decisions which impact upon their lives
- the council should monitor and evaluate the outcomes of improvement projects for children and young people.

The council has a number of initiatives in place for consulting with children, in line with the Hear-by-Right national standards on young people's participation. A newly appointed group director will look at establishing frameworks for the evaluation of projects.

The data for 2005/06 also demonstrate good improvement in the work to reduce final warnings, reprimands and convictions of looked after children. The council's performance in getting looked after children to participate in their own reviews has improved but remains below an acceptable standard. The council is insufficiently ambitious in its plans to address this deficit in its service for looked after children.

Achieving economic well-being

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is adequate. One recommendation for action emerged from the JAR:

For action over the next six months, partners should:

- incorporate into the 14-19 education and training strategy, appropriate plans and actions relating to provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or

disabilities, and skills for life for 16-19 learners; improve access to post-16 vocational provision in some schools, particularly at lower levels and enhance teaching and learning methods to improve GCE/VCE attainment.

To respond to these recommendations the council states that headteachers have made a commitment to work together collaboratively and that momentum for the development of 14-19 provision is gathering. Several small steps, such as additional provision of entry level and level 1 courses related to retail at the college of further education, have been taken and a review of the education business partnership is underway.

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

The council's management of services for children and young people is good. The council's capacity to improve further is adequate.

The council has demonstrated good progress in the short time available to it as it responds to the JAR recommendations.

There are a number of improving trends. For example, costs of services for looked after children have reduced to a level below the average for similar councils. Also, the council's performance in delivering practice days for social services staff working with children has improved to achieve a good standard. However, there is a 22% vacancy rate for permanently employed social services staff working with children. Plans are in hand to tackle this but have taken some time to develop.

We confirm that the APA 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



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