



Making Social Care Better for People



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Dear Mr Hill

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON

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	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

The London Borough of Merton continues to deliver a good service. Children's services have been maintained and social care services have improved outcomes for children and young people. Appropriate action has been taken to address all of the areas identified in the previous APA. The Children, Schools and Families Directorate demonstrates strong operational and political leadership. It has worked well with key partner agencies to analyse need and set appropriate priorities and challenging targets which are clearly focused on performance and outcomes. The process of change is rapid and effective. Actions have strengthened management and the council has good capacity to improve its services for children and young people. The council has a well managed strategy to complete the transition to a Children's Trust. A clear plan encourages innovation and partnership working.

Being healthy

The council's contribution to improving outcomes in this area is good. Merton is committed to promoting and maintaining good health for children and young people and the result of this is seen in a number of convincing ways. Achievements are the result of effective collaborative work between key partners. A very high proportion, 92% of schools are engaged in the healthy school programme and involve children, staff and families to review provision and set and meet targets for improved health. School nurses deliver expert training and workshops on healthy eating, medicine, hygiene, and sex and relationships to pupils in all schools. Recently head teachers engaged in a school meals' contract development day and school meals are set to improve. All eligible schools take part in the fruit and vegetable scheme which helps to ensure children learn about and eat these foods. The Safehome Scheme supports home safety and accident prevention by providing information and reduced-price safety equipment targeted at low-income families. Children and young people are encouraged to use walkways and cycle-ways. The Walk on Wednesday initiative involved over 6,500 children a month. There is agreement with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) for health visiting services to be based in the new children's centres in order to better target hard to reach groups.

Provision for young people who misuse drugs is good. Almost one quarter of those receiving services are under eighteen, which is double the region's average. Moreover, a very high number, 96.3% are receiving their treatment within specialist services for young people. Substance misuse workshops are held routinely in all secondary schools and young people have access to a wide range of activities such as Health Fairs commissioned by the drug and alcohol action team and there is a drug counsellor in the youth awareness programme. Consequently, young people are enabled to seek help and this is demonstrated by the comparatively high proportion of under-18 year olds receiving drug treatments. The council has correctly identified the need to address alcohol misuse amongst teenagers and is working towards this aim.

There is a steady fall in teenage conceptions and the Teenage Pregnancy Unit rates the council as green for its good progress. There have been several improvements in this area; for example, accessible written information on sex and relationship education is made available and there are local drop-ins for contraceptive advice. Teenage parents, including young fathers are offered the Aiming High course. There is good joint work

with the housing department to ensure that young parents' needs are well planned for and met. The PCT provides wide-ranging support to pregnant women and young fathers through the pregnancy period and into parenthood.

There has been a good focus on the early identification of health risks to vulnerable groups. Multi-disciplinary services work well together through the child concern model and the common assessment framework. The current good practice at the Lavender Children's Centre will provide a strong model for the eight new children's centres due to open over the next two years. Dedicated health workers support all looked after children by making best use of health care screening and assessment. Health packs are provided and one to one support also takes place at placements. However, the percentage of looked after children receiving regular medical and dental checks fell slightly in the past year and performance is below that of similar councils. The council has robust plans to improve performance.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) was identified as an area for development in last year's APA. Since then the authority has reviewed its services and has quickly improved several aspects of provision including: tier three services, clinical interventions, family support and joint commissioning arrangements. Additionally, CAMHS grant funding has been effectively used to locate specialist workers in social work teams to offer services direct to looked after children and children in need.

Staying safe

The council's contribution to this area is good overall. It has placed strong and effective emphasis on ensuring that key partner agencies have a coordinated approach to child protection, including protecting vulnerable children and young people. The local safeguarding board is well established and well focused on raising awareness on safety and safeguarding. Staff and young people are better informed. For example, there is a good range of literature (also available in community languages) and advice and well targeted intervention work with children and their families around the issues of safety, staying safe and parenting. Specific multi-agency training is regularly provided to staff, school governors, foster carers and voluntary and community organisations. The safeguarding board ensures that criminal records bureau checks are carried out according to statutory guidance. Clear and agreed procedures are in place to respond to allegations of abuse by professional staff. Whistle blowing procedures are also fully established. The safeguarding board has a sound business plan and pooled budget arrangements to carry out its statutory functions.

Children and young people have quick access to social care services and a high proportion, 80% of initial assessments takes place within seven days of referral. However, comparatively the proportion of core assessments that takes place within 35 working days is only acceptable at 65%. All children on the Child Protection Register and those in the council's care have an allocated, qualified social worker with good knowledge and understanding of individual case histories. This has contributed to numbers on the Child Protection Register stabilising over the past two years. All child protection reviews take place on time but only 93% of reviews for looked after children

take place on time. The council uses evidence based practice approaches, including the child concern model and the common assessment framework and it is notable this practice is increasingly used for multi-agency assessments.

The percentage of children and young people spending two or more years on the Child Protection Register has fallen steadily over the past few years. This is now good and on par to other similar authorities. The percentage of those re-registered has also fallen, but to a level which could be deemed too low. However, the council is confident that sufficient work is undertaken with children and families within two years that sound decisions are taken about de-registration. Any cases that are re-registered are subject to a management review.

A steady reduction in the number of looked after children has been achieved as a result of re-investing in family support and prevention services. Placements for looked after children are stable. Fostering and adoption placements are made with appropriate families/carers to ensure that an individual child's needs are met. There has been a significant increase in the number of children who have been adopted. Families which are hard to reach including some from black and minority ethnic backgrounds have been successfully engaged in, for example, the Common Thread project. A psychologist with the CAMHS looked after children's team specifically supports foster carers in managing complex and challenging behaviour. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also have access to a CAMHS support worker. These are good arrangements to support children with very complex needs. There are effective multi-agency protocols and systems in place to identify and track the whereabouts of missing children. Looked after children who go missing persistently are given a mobile phone so they can be contacted by social workers.

School inspection outcomes indicate that children and young people are encouraged to adopt safe practices. All schools receive guidance on bullying and all report racist incidents which are centrally monitored. Children and young people are involved in peer-led anti-bullying projects in three secondary schools and pupil representatives contribute to racist incident panels. All children and young people involved with the youth offending team (YOT) receive mental health screening and appropriate, timely follow-up assessments and intervention. Supported advocacy is available for all children and young people to make a complaint either through the listening complaints officer or the advocate and independent visitor.

Enjoying and achieving

The council's contribution to improving children's enjoyment and education is good. Those responsible for school improvement, including some recently appointed staff, demonstrate a determined and urgent drive to build capacity and raise achievement in all schools. This is underpinned by very good local knowledge, analysis of data and a good understanding of how services can be integrated to benefit children. Interventions are appropriately focused on areas where performance is weakest and the impact is beginning to show, for example, in achievement at Key Stages 2 and 3. The authority has supported school leaders in self-evaluation and recruitment and provided training in

assessment and middle management. Two secondary schools in the east of the borough are on target to open as academies and the council's good partnership with the London Challenge is improving provision in a third secondary school.

Nevertheless, overall standards and achievement are only adequate. While the majority of schools are successful, achievement is low in a large minority of primary and secondary schools. The council's improved internal monitoring procedures have identified schools causing concern and well placed intervention has followed. The rationale for categorisation and subsequent entitlements are clearly communicated to schools. Positively, as a result of this work there is only one school in an Ofsted category of concern; this is the council's Pupil Referral Unit which was placed in special measures following a major reorganisation.

Early years' provision is good in nursery education and satisfactory in childcare settings. The council is active and resourceful in supporting carers and parents including those who are vulnerable, hard to reach and some from black and minority ethnic groups through activities such as the Polka Theatre drop-in project. As a result children leave the Foundation Stage with standards which are above national expectations in most areas. One exception is communication, language and literacy, where only 65% reach national expectations and training is planned for September 2006. Standards in Key Stage 1 are below average and are slow to improve. Writing is a particular concern and there are timely plans to focus on the development of early phonic skills.

Standards in Key Stage 2 have improved and are average overall, largely as a result of good gains in mathematics, which has been a focus of consultant support. Progress between Key Stage 1 and 2 is good, and the performance of boys, which was previously identified as a weakness, has improved. All professionals involved in schools in the intensive support programme have started to use the same useful assessment tracking system. This is helping to target support accurately and measure the impact of intervention. At Key Stage 3 standards show good improvement and are in line with the council's statistical neighbours and national average. English is the strongest subject. Progress between Key Stage 2 and 3 is above the national average overall but low in three out of eight secondary schools. At Key Stage 4 standards have improved. The number of young people who achieve one GCSE has increased and results are close to the national average in English and mathematics. However, although the number achieving five (capped) GCSE A* to C has improved, it remains lower than comparators because of low attainment in some non-core subjects. Consequently, there is slow progress between Key Stages 2 to 4 and 3 to 4.

Asian pupils make good progress but compared to their peers girls underachieve and the performance of some black and minority ethnic groups is lower than the borough average. The council believes this reflects low attainment in particular schools and two projects specifically aimed at raising achievement amongst black pupils are showing an increase in motivation and enjoyment. Looked after children achieve well and the percentage gaining at least one GCSE is much higher than average. There are currently five care leavers at university and eighteen at further education establishments. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The vast majority

receive their education in mainstream schools and recent school inspections have found inclusion to be good overall and very good in some primary schools. Comparatively high proportions of children have a statement and are educated in non-maintained and independent special schools and the authority is sensibly changing its organisation to meet individual needs earlier through good quality provision in local schools. Statements are all completed within the statutory timescale but there is a relative weakness in completing statements requiring complex inter-agency provision. The council's plans for this area are good and include demanding targets to benefit children and young people.

Attendance has improved and is satisfactory overall. The authority expects to meet its targets in this area. Targeted truancy patrols, prosecution and behaviour contracts are used effectively. The attendance of looked after children has declined. This is attributed to improved monitoring systems but requires improvement. The number of pupils receiving a fixed-term exclusion is recognised as being too high but there are few permanent exclusions. Pupils who are excluded get support quickly and are helped to reintegrate. The recently formed PRU has a good track record of reintegrating 36% of its roll. There are no permanent exclusions of looked after children.

Opportunities for enrichment in schools are good. Other local provision is much improved as a result of the speedy and effective reorganisation of the youth service. Better staffing and a planned curriculum have led to an increase in the number of accredited outcomes. 75% of pupils aged 5–16 now engage in two hours of sport per week. Provision for vulnerable young people who have a personal education plan is enhanced because all plans must include a target for activity out of school.

The provision of school places is satisfactory. There are plans to address surplus places in primary and secondary schools. The schools' admissions policy provides good support for looked after children who get top priority in the allocation of places to oversubscribed schools and most newly placed children are located within 20 miles of their home.

Making a positive contribution

The council's contribution to this area is good. An extensive range of initiatives helps to engage children and young people in consultation and decision making. In 2005 the council conducted a young person survey, which contributed valuable information to the planning process. Views were taken seriously and the improvements that children and young people said they wanted clearly drive the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). Moreover, there have been demonstrable changes in services to meet needs. For example, children said that they needed more and better youth clubs and since then significant investment in the youth service has resulted in increased attendance and accreditation, for example, recorded outcomes increased from 89 to 188. Looked after children are routinely involved in their reviews. This is often in innovative ways, for example, through the use of video. Children with disabilities are also supported in exemplary ways, such as through the use of pictorial materials and augmented communication systems, so that their views can be expressed effectively.

Council members also undertook a scrutiny review of children and young people's participation. A Listening to Children officer conducts regular listening forums where children and young people have good opportunities to contribute. They are encouraged to plan events and activities, for example, theatre outings and the annual celebrating success event. The council's commitment to increased participation is demonstrated in the CYPP; which shows that the views of children and young people gathered in the scrutiny review are used to determine future plans. For example, the plan to improve recreational opportunities results from young people's dissatisfaction. The council is committed to more involvement and has developed, with young people, a good consultative document – Have Your Say, which encourages use of the Way Ahead website. One of the UK youth parliamentary representatives is a member of the council's scrutiny panel for life chances; all of the schools' representatives have been involved in national consultations and will be involved in developing policy for the youth opportunities fund. All schools have a school council and 25% of children who were interviewed for the residents' survey said that they have been a member of a school council. Young peoples' interview panels are becoming a routine aspect of the staff recruitment process in schools and social care settings. This is a high level of engagement and the use of children and young people's views about their education added insight to the authority's self-assessment. However, the views and needs of young people do not sufficiently drive the strategy for 14–19 provision.

Approximately half of all primary schools have introduced a curriculum designed to help children understand emotions and communicate effectively. The CYPP intends to extend this strategy in more schools and other settings which bodes well for supporting increased participation. During the last year there has been a significant increase in the number of vulnerable young people receiving mentoring support to manage changes in their lives. Particularly good attention is given to the needs of looked after children. Task focused mentoring work with young people has developed significantly and resulted in some good outcomes, including courses on strengthening families, strengthening communities, a council wide fathers' forum and an increase in vocational courses. Improvements in the work of the YOT have increased its capacity to provide mentoring, support for victims of crime, implement restorative justice strategies and contribute to courses for young people and their families. The rate of youth offending has remained 5% below the national figure for several years. The number of looked after children receiving final warnings, reprimands or convictions remains relatively low.

Achieving economic well-being

The council's contribution to this area is good. There are some real strengths in ensuring the future economic well-being of young people. In particular, social care services work very effectively to support vulnerable groups and looked after children and special schools have good education to employment training partnerships. The authority also coordinates its services well to support the needs of those young people for whom it has a responsibility and all young people up to the age of 21 have an active pathway plan.

The council's determination to improve education provision and choice for all 14–19 year olds and its preparedness to take direct action to address underperformance is

demonstrated by its sound education strategy which has resulted in recent swift progress towards opening two academies with sixth forms and a specialist college. At present, overall GCSE results are significantly lowered by performances in three schools and sixth form provision is only available at two high performing Catholic schools, one effective special school and Merton College where outcomes are in line with the national picture.

Partnership working has helped to successfully reduce the population not in education, employment or training (NEET) to 6.94% which is better than the council's target. All young people are informed of the range of educational options at 16. Pupils from a range of vulnerable groups were targeted with individual support and summer learning programmes in order to ensure that they transferred into education, employment or training, 85.8% did so successfully and this was considerably higher than originally predicted. In particular, the percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training increased and remains high. There has been a recent dramatic improvement in the number of offenders in education, employment or training. Nevertheless, 72% is below the council's target of 90%.

The 14–19 strategic partnership is beginning to have a good impact on widening vocational opportunities. All secondary schools offer vocational courses and funding for additional flexibility has been used to develop a range of vocational options at Merton College. New partnerships with well known training providers are set to significantly enhance vocational opportunities. Other developments are not yet sufficiently linked to the underachievement of specific groups, the views and needs of young people or the planned community regeneration initiatives in the east of the borough.

Housing provision for teenagers who are homeless and looked after children is comparatively good. The recent additional investment in the youth service and the new action plan indicates further good outcomes for young people.

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

The council's capacity to improve further is good. It has the strategic capacity to drive improvement that will make a difference. The council has worked well with key partners to analyse needs, set appropriate priorities and agree challenging targets. Extensive consultation with children and young people has led to a strong understanding of needs, aspirations and gaps in service delivery. As a result, good arrangements are in place to improve the lives of children and young people. The CYPP has clear success criteria and effective monitoring arrangements, which demonstrates the council's determination to significantly improve the delivery of services. The council is highly focused on improving outcomes for children.

The council benefits from strong leadership and political commitment. There is a determination to improve performance through the appropriate allocation of resources in relation to priorities. Service management responds directly to the needs of children and young people. Leadership is fully committed to integrated children's services and has good structures to facilities interagency working. Good partnership arrangements are in

place, with clear strategic aims, which show a shift in focus to prevention and early intervention. The council's equality impact assessment is becoming firmly embedded into the planning process.

The council has effectively addressed difficulties in the recruitment and retention of social care staff through a variety of incentives. For example, it recently recruited social workers from the United States of America. All schools have submitted new staffing structures based on teaching and learning needs and work force remodelling is well underway. There remains a shortage of science teachers and officers militate against weaknesses in science teaching via recruitment campaigns and leadership training.

The council has effective financial management control. The good use of funding has enabled it to invest in imaginative and creative service development. Firm arrangements are in place for the establishment of eight children's centres, five extended schools and two academies. Financial planning is sound and where appropriate, pooled budgets ensure greater efficiency and better provision.

The council remains committed to closely monitoring and improving performance. It has a well established performance management framework with clear links between strategic plans, service delivery. The council's track record of successful partnership with other key partners is a clear strength.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pre-natal work into parenthood, which supports young parents, including fathers is in place • joint work with the housing department to ensure that young parents needs are planned for and met • 92% of schools are engaged in the healthy school programme • health packs are provided for all looked after children • steady fall on teenage conceptions. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plan to address alcohol/drug misuse amongst teenagers • complete the remodelling of CAMHS • dental and medical health screening for looked after children.

<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local safeguarding board is well established • whistle blowing procedures • numbers on the Child Protection Register have stabilised • pooled budget arrangements • whereabouts of missing children. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase the proportion of core assessments carried out within 35 working days • improve the timeliness of reviews for looked after children.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improvement at Key Stage 2 and 3 • proximity of placements for looked after children • educational attainment of looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities • improvements to youth service provision • progress towards academies. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raise standards and achievement, in particular at Key Stage 1 and 4 • reduce the high number of pupils with fixed term exclusion.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • looked after children are routinely involved in their reviews, often in innovative ways • listening to children officer conducts regular young people listening forums • Way Ahead website • looked after children receiving final warnings /reprimands/convictions has remained relatively low • curriculum development on social and emotional aspects of learning. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use children and young people's views to drive and plan improvements in 14–19 years old provision.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • care leavers in employment, education and training remains high • NEET figure decreasing • swift action to improve 14–19 provision • increase in education, employment or training figure for youth service clients. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve 14–19 provision • improve outcomes at Key Stage 5.

<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong leadership and political commitment • equality impact assessment is becoming firmly embedded into the planning process • performance management framework • effective financial management control • track record of successful partnership. 	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continue to develop good commissioning arrangements for an integrated service.
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Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA

- Progress on improving outcomes at Key Stage 1 and 4
- Progress on improving provision for 14 to 19 year olds
- Progress on plans to address alcohol/drug misuse amongst teenagers
- Progress on the implementation of plans for the reorganisation of provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

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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