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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr Tony Dessent
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Dear Mr Dessent,

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

¹

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

Luton Borough Council delivers services above minimum requirements for children and young people. The council is securing improvements across a wide service area. Considerable headway has been made in the integration of education and social care services and good progress has been made in the majority of areas for improvement as set out in last year's performance assessment. Joint commissioning requires further development and multi-agency performance management is at an early stage. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) is evidence-based and demonstrates joined up strategic working, recognising and addressing the key priorities for the town. The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people is good.

Being healthy

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area is good. There is an increasing emphasis on providing a holistic overview of the Every Child Matters agenda across services and teams. A number of key outcomes are improving. There are good examples of inter-agency collaboration to improve health outcomes through children's centres and appropriate targeting of hard to reach vulnerable families. However, teenage pregnancy rates have risen after a significant fall in 2003 and the incidence of sexually transmitted infections have increased in the 15 to 25 age group.

There is a strong focus on promoting health in the authority's schools. Some 73 schools are working towards the Healthy Schools Standard. There is good provision in schools for substance misuse prevention and early screening for all young people referred to the youth offending team. All schools inspected under Section 5 were judged satisfactory or better in respect of being healthy.

Agencies are working well to promote mental health. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) manages resources well and provides an effective service. Waiting times for treatment have reduced and only a small percentage of young people are waiting longer than 12 weeks. CAMHS input to foster carers has had a positive impact on the reduction of placement breakdowns.

There is an appropriate focus on improving health outcomes for looked after children. Levels of health and dental assessments are very good. The authority is aware of the percentage of children and young people who do not receive health care assessments. This is mainly confined to older children and young people and is covered within reviews.

Luton has a higher rate than the national figure for stillbirths, early neo-natal deaths and low birth weight babies. The authority is making appropriate plans to meet the future demand of an increase in the number of children with complex medical needs.

Specialist health services are developing for children with disabilities and there is a pooled budget for respite services for this group. Around half of the schools offer students junior leadership training and a children's fund project provides weekly out of hours sporting and learning opportunities for young people with disabilities.

Staying safe

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area is good. There are sound policies in place to safeguard them. Joint training and good networking arrangements, particularly with health professionals and the police, have led to improvements in child protection and inter-agency working.

The authority has appropriately examined the causes of a significant increase in the number of referrals and has put in place increased capacity to deal with this. The number of children on the Child Protection Register has risen and is now just above the national average. All children on the register have qualified social workers allocated. All child protection reviews are completed within the required timescales. Fewer children remain on the register for more than two years and the levels of re-registrations have reduced. All child protection concerns referred to the initial assessment team trigger core assessments. The timescales for completing these assessments have improved significantly. Levels of initial assessments completed within the timescales set have improved but remain low.

The authority has established its local safeguarding children board (LSCB) with appropriate multi-agency representation. A high proportion of children with disabilities have a transition plan to support their move into adulthood.

The numbers of looked after children remains high. This is one of the main challenges the authority faces. Around 93% of looked after children have a qualified social worker. There are a wide range of strategies to support the placement of children who are looked after. There is increased use of foster care, particularly for teenage young people, and an increased rate of kinship care. Placement changes have been reduced. Long-term stability is now at an acceptable level but needs further improvement. Levels of adoption have increased significantly and the Local Public Service Agreement target has been achieved.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area is good. Outcomes are improving. The overall quality of Early Years' provision is good. Results, although below the national average, show that progress is good as children often enter the foundation stage with low levels of language and literacy skills. Very good use is made of funding to support families through the deployment of school based family workers. Following the success of the first school based family worker initiative the model is being extended to all primary schools

Results at the end of Key Stage 1 continue to improve and are broadly in line with the national average and above those of statistical neighbours. Results at the end of Key Stage 2 are poor. Standards in writing are particularly low and declined in 2005. Very effective and targeted support, from national strategy consultants, has secured significant improvements this year. Results in mathematics and science improved after a steady decline over the previous three years. However, they remain below statistical neighbours and well below national averages.

At the end of Key Stage 3 performance in all core subjects is improving. Standards in mathematics and science remain in line with statistical neighbours but below national averages. Results in English improved greatly and are now above statistical neighbours although still below the national figure.

At the end of Key Stage 4 the number of pupils who achieved five good GCSE passes improved significantly. However, the number of these which include mathematics and English is lower than expected. The number of pupils who gained no passes at GCSE is below statistical neighbours and in line with the national average. The gap between the most and the least successful schools has become less pronounced with only one school remaining below the 30% GCSE floor target. Plans for the introduction of two academies are well developed.

The attainment of ethnic groups is generally satisfactory. However, the local authority is seeking to improve performance of some groups, particularly the children of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black African and Caribbean communities. The percentage of looked after children entered for GCSE examinations continues to rise and is very high and the proportion of these who gained five higher grade GCSE rose significantly to above the national average and those who gained at least one GCSE pass remained above the national average for the third consecutive year.

Attendance in both primary and secondary schools has improved. The local authority has developed a multi-agency attendance strategy to reduce non-attendance due to extended leave through targeted work with schools and families and uses penalty notice legislation to pursue unauthorised holidays. This has led to a slight increase of unauthorised absence. The attendance rate of looked after children has declined and the local authority has an appropriate plan to address this issue.

Support for schools placed in formal categories of concern by Ofsted is good. Two schools have been removed from these categories more quickly than in the past. Under the new section 5 inspection one school has been identified as requiring special measures. School improvement advisers have helped many schools to produce realistic self-evaluation documents. The local authority has clear plans in conjunction with secondary head teachers for the introduction of School Improvement Partners (SIP) and preparation for primary SIP was seen as outstanding. There is increasing alignment between support for school improvement and the 14 to 19 Strategy development.

The growth in extended schools, crèches, out of school care, breakfast clubs and holiday play schemes has been maintained. The Luton sports partnership is active and there are good recreational and voluntary learning opportunities for children and young people.

The vast majority of permanently excluded pupils receive at least 20 hours tuition a week, well above the national average.

Making a positive contribution

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area is good and it has played a significant part in enabling children and young people to make a positive contribution. The Being Young in Luton survey is instrumental in informing and changing policy in a variety of areas. The survey ensured all young people, including hard to reach groups, had a say. Their views have been acknowledged and a group invited to join a young citizen's panel. Bullying was identified as a major concern in the survey. While all schools have policies and procedures to reduce incidents of bullying, there is not a suitable authority policy on how to reduce incidents of bullying which includes the use of text messages or the internet, both in and out of school.

The number of looked after children who received a final warning, reprimand or conviction rose slightly last year but is in line with comparators and the re-offending rate of all young people has increased.

The participation of looked after children in reviews is poor in comparison with similar councils. The problems are concentrated particularly within the over 14 year old group. However, a significant number of looked after children chair their own reviews and children have designed a 'child friendly' booklet to help them to take part in reviews. All young people are encouraged to participate through the youth forum as well as through local and regional events. School councils operate in almost all schools.

Achieving economic well-being

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area is good. There has been very good progress in developing the second phase of children's centres with 11 centres placed in the neediest areas of the borough. Family learning courses have been well attended. Retention rates are very high and almost half of learners come from minority ethnic groups.

There has been a further reduction in young people not engaged in education, employment or training figures. The number of 16 to 18 year olds in learning is above statistical neighbours and in line with national figures. The Connexions service has increased the number of personal advisers. The data warehouse ensures greater and more effective use of information to plan and support young people.

The GCE A-level results across Luton are improving but still below the national average. Achievements in work-based learning have improved. A high proportion of young people enter higher education. In 2005, some 34% of 18 and 19 year olds successfully applied to enter higher education compared to 29% nationally.

Provision for education in the 14 to 19 sector now better meets the needs of learners, employers and the community. Campus Luton provides a clear and imaginative vision for 14 to 19 education and training, which is well understood and supported. Strategies are leading to improvements in achievements, the quality of provision and have begun to have an impact on the breadth of the curriculum on offer. There are good collaborative

arrangements between the colleges and the schools. A much improved vocational offer is available across the first consortium of schools. Leadership and management of 14 to 19 education and training are good and good progress has been made in implementing the post-inspection action plan. Campus Luton will be extended to all schools from September 2006. Plans are well established to enhance the support for gifted and talented children across the Borough.

All care leavers with whom the council have been able to make contact are in suitable accommodation and there are 12 priority housing places available for care leavers aged 18 or older.

Transition is enhanced by the authority working with Connexions, health and adult care services to identify and meet needs. Careers guidance tutors, Connexions personal advisers and other staff routinely review young people's progress.

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

The contribution of the council to the management of its services for children and young people, including its capacity to improve them further is good. Good progress has been made in integrating children's services. The leadership and management of the council's services for children and young people are good. The authority's self-assessment demonstrates a clear understanding of strengths and areas for improvement.

A detailed and exemplar CYPP has been produced based on a robust analysis of need and good consultation through the Being Young in Luton survey. The plan details clear priorities and targets with a focus on performance indicators and outcomes for young people. However, several initiatives are in their early stages of implementation and have yet to impact upon outcomes.

Governance structures are well established within the children and young person's safeguarding board and there is member commitment to corporate parenting evidenced through the children's panel. Where possible, partner agencies have moved service provision into three geographically coherent areas. There has been an increased investment in family support services and a commitment to the further development of preventive and early intervention services. Effective use is made of mechanisms for community engagement. The local voluntary and community sector is involved at a strategic and operational level.

The authority has made progress in many of the areas for improvement identified in the APA in 2005. Fewer staff left posts in social care last year and sickness levels were reduced.

Efficient financial management arrangements are in place and there is a focus on securing value for money whilst ensuring that appropriate efficiency savings are achieved. There are a range of partnership arrangements including pooled budgets and lead commissioning. Joint commissioning is at a very early stage of development.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inter-agency collaboration to improve health • healthy lifestyles/healthy schools • health input into children's centres. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teenage pregnancy rate • identification of hard to reach families • financial pressures within health.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family workers based in schools • improved timescales for core assessments • safeguarding post in education welfare • all child protection cases allocated • all child protection cases reviewed on time • levels of children adopted improved significantly. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • long-term stability of children looked after needs to continue to improve • increase in rate of referrals • initial assessments need to be undertaken more promptly • timeliness of reviews.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no permanent exclusions of looked after children • the number of looked after children who gain one GCSE and five or more higher grade GCSEs • percentage of young people leaving care with five or more good GCSEs • preparation for primary SIP was seen as outstanding • the vast majority of permanently excluded pupils receive at least 20 hours tuition a week, well above the national average. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce the numbers of looked after children absent from school • below national average standards in all key stages • improve standards in mathematics in Key Stages 2 to 4.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improved opportunities for children and young people to participate in the planning and provision of services • consultation booklet for reviews of looked after children • Being young in Luton Survey. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce the re-offending rate • lack of appropriate anti-bullying strategy.

<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of care leavers in employment, education and training has improved • increased number of children's centres • reduction in the number of young people not in employment and education • Some 90% of children with disabilities have a transition plan • increase in the number of direct payments for children with disabilities • funding of voluntary organisations to signpost families towards financial aid • extended curriculum choices via consortiums and Campus Luton. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure value for money for 14-19 provision • raise standards on level 3 courses.
<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sustained effective partnership working • clear CYPP with contributions from all stakeholders • member commitment • equality impact assessments • targets linked to performance management at a service level • performance is aligned with cost • improvement in practice learning and qualification levels • school advisory team. 	<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recruitment and retention of social work and teaching staff. • joint commissioning strategy • multi-agency performance management frameworks.

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

- Timeliness of initial assessments.
- Attendance of looked after children.
- Progress with workforce strategy.
- Progress with commissioning strategy.
- Multi-agency performance management.
- Education standards at all levels.
- Impact of Campus Luton on raising attainment.

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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Commission for Social Care Inspection