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Making Social Care  
Better for People



Stuart Smith  
Executive Director of Children's Services  
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**1 November 2006**

Dear Mr Smith

## **2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN LIVERPOOL CITY 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**

<b>Areas for judgement</b>	<b>Grade awarded<sup>1</sup></b>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	<b>3</b>
The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people	<b>3</b>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	<b>3</b>

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<b>Grade</b>	<b>Service descriptors</b>	<b>Capacity to improve descriptors</b>
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

Liverpool Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements for children and young people. The contribution of all services to delivering outcomes for children and young people is good in all but one aspect and adequate in staying safe. Together they are making a major contribution to improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people within a city with very significant social and economic challenges.

## **Being healthy**

The contribution of services to outcomes is good. The council has continued to improve its performance in the promotion of healthy lifestyles and good health for children and young people. Innovative work is developing around new priorities to tackle childhood obesity. Interventions are appropriately targeted to vulnerable groups and to the most disadvantaged areas of the city. Specialist services dedicated to the health needs of black and minority ethnic groups, travellers, asylum seekers and refugees have been established. Coherent partnership arrangements with statutory and voluntary services are having a good impact on outcomes for children and young people. National and local targets are met. Healthy living, recreational activity and health assessments for looked after children remain in the top band of performance. Effective work continues on tackling key priorities of teenage pregnancy and smoking cessation. In addition, focused workshops for tackling substance abuse and promoting sexual health have been provided in a variety of settings. The council has further work to do to fully establish formal protocols with children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) for 16 to 19 year olds. Overall the council is proactive, innovative and inclusive in providing its health related services.

## **Staying safe**

The contribution of services to outcomes in this area is adequate. Child protection procedures and effective initiatives to prevent harassment and bullying help to promote good outcomes in schools. Looked after children have a good level of stability in their placements. The percentage of looked after children fostered by relatives and friends is considerably above the average for similar authorities and out of city placements have continued to reduce.

However, a number of aspects of child protection activity that were identified in the APA in 2005 remain as areas of concern. The number of referrals, although increased, remains lower than in similar authorities. The proportion of completed core assessments at 17% is very low. Similarly, the number of child protection conferences, while also increased, remains far lower than in similar authorities. The council's data is not sufficiently robust to support the assertion that the Families First preventative strategy and the wide range of early support services are effective in reducing the need for further intervention to protect children and young people. The interim Executive Director of Children's Services acknowledges the requirement to improve both performance and information management in this respect. Consequently, a more rigorous approach to monitoring practice has developed in this area since February 2006.

The number of adoptions has declined. This is due to exceptional performance in the previous year when the numbers of adoptive parents increased as part of additional action

to reach a local partnership service agreement (LPSA) target. The council states that it has been very difficult to recruit and replicate such high numbers of adoptive parents since. The council reports that the number of adoptions is likely to remain within the average for similar authorities. Initiatives to recruit continue. A high proportion of children are fostered by family and friends as a result of the council's flexible and supportive approach to foster carers. In relation to transition planning for young people with learning disabilities, the council reports that 69% have transition plans. Efforts are required to ensure that all young people are appropriately prepared for transition to services for adults.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

The contribution of services to outcomes is good. An improving trend in attainment at all key stages has been sustained and Liverpool's performance is mostly above that of similar authorities. At Key Stage 4, performance is in line with similar authorities. Standards at Key Stage 1 are broadly in line with national averages, although writing remains a concern. Standards are also rising steadily at Key Stage 2 and rapidly at Key Stage 3 where improved English results in 2005 brought attainment in line with the national average. In addition, GCSE results continue to improve at a faster pace than nationally: 50% achieved five or more A\* to C grades in 2005. The authority is determined to raise standards further and a wide range of strategies to improve the low attainment of some black and minority ethnic groups and looked after children is being planned and implemented. Most children and young people, including learners with difficulties and/or disabilities, vulnerable and other groups make satisfactory progress, and some make even better progress, given their starting points and circumstances. Overall, rates of progress are improving although value added measures between Key Stage 2 to GCSE remain some way below the average nationally.

Children are getting a good start to their education. An above average proportion of early years settings receive good and outstanding grades in Ofsted inspections. Most schools are providing effective education, care and services to meet the needs of learners. The care, guidance and support for learners' personal development are areas of strength in most schools. School inspections show that almost all children and young people enjoy school. This generally very positive picture and forward momentum was less strong in some key areas during 2005/06. The proportion of schools causing concern has increased: seven schools, including one secondary, have required a notice to improve since September 2005, a slightly higher proportion compared to similar authorities and the average nationally. One school remains in special measures. The authority has strengthened its procedures to identify and challenge schools, and plans to support them are comprehensive. Performance in one school fell unexpectedly in 2005 and it failed to meet the 20% floor target. Subsequent monitoring by the authority shows significant improvement.

Children and young people's attitudes and behaviour in schools are mostly good or better. Fewer children and young people are excluded from schools as a result of well targeted preventative work and good implementation of the authority's behaviour strategy. Permanent exclusion in secondary schools has declined over three years: reducing from 101 pupils to 36. Nonetheless, the very challenging behaviour of a small proportion of young people is proving difficult to tackle and exclusion rates are slightly higher than the

average nationally. The impact of this is also reflected in the high figures for unauthorised absence in secondary schools. Further modification in the approach to improving and managing behaviour in schools is being actively considered to tackle the problem.

School attendance is broadly in line with national averages and similar authorities, although absence is not reducing as quickly as the authority hoped because of holidays taken in term time. The authority is beginning to audit schools' practice in monitoring absence in an effort to improve attendance and raise standards further, and particularly for looked after children. The council acknowledges a decline in performance in relation to the absence of looked after children and an improvement plan has been in place since February 2006.

An extensive and well planned range of study support is provided through playing for success centres throughout the city and through the many cultural and youth arts programmes. This reflects the council's well coordinated strategic drive to raise standards, and take-up of this support is high. The authority has managed the reduction of surplus places in primary schools very well in the last two years and rates are below those of similar authorities. Similar action is underway in secondary schools: one school will close in September as part of a planned reduction of 4,100 places across all sectors over the next six years.

### **Making a positive contribution**

The contribution of services to outcomes in this area is good. Children and young people's involvement in making decisions about service delivery is a strength. Services, activities and programmes are shaped to meet children and young people's needs and wishes. Feedback from service users about the range and quality of services is positive. School councils and youth parliaments are established and make a key contribution to informing the design of services. Information and advice for young people is very good. Extensive children's centres play a strategic and coordinating role across the city in enabling children, particularly the vulnerable, to access available services. In addition, work targeted to meet the needs of young people with disabilities and black and minority ethnic groups demonstrate the council's inclusive approach. Strategies such as free access for children and young people to leisure and recreational services have been instrumental in the council's unified approach to tackling anti-social and pre-offending behaviours. Council data demonstrate a significant uptake of leisure activity and a corresponding reduction in nuisance behaviours in neighbourhoods. There has been a further reduction in the number of looked after children subject to a reprimand, final warning or conviction. Developing links with the youth offending services are beginning to have a positive effect on offending rates. The council acknowledges that there is still work to do in this area. Key planning priorities are to further develop and expand links between the corporate parent role for looked after children and the youth offending service. Looked after children are well supported with discrete services and through mainstream provision in schools. In 2005 to 2006, 63% of looked after children attended and participated in their reviews and more young people contributed by submitting a written response. However, the council acknowledges that this requires further improvement.

## **Achieving economic well-being**

The contribution of services to outcomes is good. Strong corporate parenting promotes the economic well-being of looked after children. As they grow older, looked after children have opportunities to access jobs with the council, and financial support to undertake modern apprenticeships ensures that they stay in education and training until age 19. The number of young people who do, is well above average for similar authorities. Similarly, high numbers of care leavers settle successfully into suitable accommodation. Partnership working with Connexions helps ensure continuity of targeted and personalised support for care leavers.

Opportunities for vocational education are well promoted through a city-wide system of collaborative networks involving all secondary schools and the college. Children and young people receive good advice and guidance about career development. More young people continue to stay on in education, employment and training. This improvement, coupled with an improving trend in attainment post-16, has been maintained although both remain below national rates. However, the proportion of young people not engaged in education, training and employment overall continues to be well above regional and national rates. A coordinated approach through Children's Information Services and Job Centre Plus helps to promote job opportunities and young people's recruitment. Childcare provision is well planned and flexible and enables parents to return to work. Free short-term childcare has had a high take up by parents and the initiative is being extended to enable more parents to return to employment.

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

The management of services is strong. There is effective senior leadership and good corporate support for improving children's service provision. The priorities and ambitions of the council have been formalised into a comprehensive and detailed children and young people's plan. The plan has been developed through extensive and on going consultation with parents/carers, children and young people. Hard to reach groups and vulnerable children have been successfully engaged in developing services. Good service integration is demonstrated clearly in the joint appointment and secondment of personnel from health to key leadership roles within the directorate. Joint commissioning strategies ensure that children's services are flexible and responsive to need.

The council has sought to invest significant funding in the education and care of young people and this reflects the key role it plays in regenerating the city. Financial resources are well managed. However, the cost of some services is much higher than for similar authorities and national averages. Work to identify cost savings, without detracting from service quality while maintaining high levels of activity, has begun. In addition, the authority has realigned the social care budgets. This has given the opportunity to recruit into key social care posts and strengthen capacity for delivering the service. Support for effective corporate parenting is a strong feature of the social care service.

The self-evaluation did not demonstrate the authority's strengths or areas for improvement as fully as it could have. In particular, the evaluation of the services and indicators relating to child protection were undermined by weaknesses in the use of management data for monitoring social care performance.

The council has a high number of vacancies within social care that are filled by agency staff. While this ensures that provision for children and young people is maintained, senior management are continuing to recruit social care workers and are in the early stages of exploring strategies successfully applied in schools to remodel the social care workforce.

### 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>• promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and young people</li> <li>• maintained reductions in teenage pregnancy</li> <li>• health of looked after children.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establish protocols for CAMHS.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strong performance in schools</li> <li>• improved governance of care brokerage system.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• child protection management and intervention</li> <li>• performance and information management</li> <li>• completion of transition plans for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improving proportion of looked after children in education, employment or training</li> <li>• sustained improvement in standards</li> <li>• children's performance in early years and Key Stage 1</li> <li>• good behaviour in schools and improving exclusion rates</li> <li>• involvement and consultation with parents and young people.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increasing number of schools in Ofsted's notice to improve category</li> <li>• unauthorised absence rates in secondary phase</li> <li>• attendance of looked after children</li> <li>• authorised absence</li> <li>• value added rates in secondary schools.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bespoke services to meet the needs and wishes of young people</li> <li>• the inclusion of hard to reach groups.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participation of looked after children in completing reviews</li> <li>• preventing offending and re-offending behaviour.</li> </ul>

<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good corporate parenting to promote the employment and care of older looked after children.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high numbers not in education, employment or training.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good service integration</li> <li>• strong leadership</li> <li>• improved financial planning</li> </ul>	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• performance and information management within social care</li> </ul>

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

- Management information that demonstrates children and young people are provided with a safe environment.
- Reducing unauthorised absences at secondary and absence of looked after children.
- Audit of authorised absences and preventative measures.
- Action to prevent offending and re-offending behaviours.
- Work force development, recruitment and retention.

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



**FLO HADLEY**

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**JONATHAN PHILLIPS**

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