



Making Social Care Better for People



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Dear Mr Badman

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment process for your local authority. We are grateful for the information provided by you 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	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

Kent County Council delivers more than the minimum requirements for children and young people. Almost all of the services can demonstrate clearly how they are improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people. Weaknesses identified by last year's APA have been addressed by well thought out actions which have led to improvement against a number of key indicators. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) is well constructed and demonstrates that the council has a clear and accurate view of its own strengths and weaknesses. The council has excellent capacity to improve its services further.

Being healthy

The council makes a good contribution towards improving the health of children and young people. The council has achieved most relevant health related national targets for children and young people and a range of good multi-agency support services are available and accessible to most parents and carers. Where pockets of less good performance affect the overall performance of the council, these are identified and tackled rigorously. There are robust and collaborative planning arrangements, which routinely involve children and young people. The allocation of resources and service development are based on extensive needs analysis and research, and include reviews of actions to ensure that best practice is promoted. Services are well targeted to promote the health of vulnerable groups such as looked after children and towards those geographical areas that require particular support to tackle health inequalities.

The CYPP includes a range of clear, accurately identified priorities to promote healthy lifestyles. Children in school are increasingly aware of the need to eat healthily and take regular exercise and the council is on track to achieve its targets for the number of schools achieving the Healthy Schools Award.

The previously commendable declining trend in teenage pregnancies has halted. Levels are now slightly higher than similar councils, although still below the national average.

Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have continued to develop its accessibility and range of services well. However, the rate of young offenders with mental health needs who are referred to the service appears lower than that for comparative councils and the England average. The council has identified that this is due in part to these people accessing the service through alternative routes. Further action is required to ensure that all these young people receive the support they need.

Looked after children's health needs are reviewed regularly and they receive the necessary health assessments, checks and care. There has been an apparent deterioration in the council's performance in relation to national levels, but this is due to the reducing number of looked after children and the subsequent relatively high proportion of those that have challenging needs. The council's performance remains good.

A joint agreement with the Strategic Health Authority has created a post of Director of Children's Health, and the council and its partners have placed a high priority on their preventative strategy. As a result, there is an increasing and extensive range of

preventative services underpinned by well targeted support. For example effective transition arrangements are in place for children with disabilities transferring to adult services, and designated nurses are available in schools and children's centres.

Staying safe

The council makes a good contribution to promoting the safety of children and young people. Performance, as measured by national performance indicators, is mostly very good and better than other councils. There is a sustained trend of significant improvements and high standards are maintained.

Most children report feeling safe and feel that their concerns are listened to and responded to promptly. There are well established domestic violence forums, and anti-bullying good practice is being disseminated through schools. There are clear initiatives in place to tackle homophobic bullying and to support lesbian and gay young people.

Children who are at risk of abuse are suitably protected with effective use made of child protection procedures. The new Safeguarding Children Board is further strengthening inter-agency collaboration to protect children. All children on the child protection register have reviews completed within required timescales, which is better than the averages at national level and for the comparator group of councils. The council also performs very well on the rate of re-registrations and the duration on the child protection register.

The council and its partners have very well established and agreed strategies, policies, procedures and standards which comply fully with the requirements of the Government's *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006)* guidance. Protocols for sharing information are good. As a result of the well thought out systems for joint working there is an effective range of services provided by the council, other statutory, private and voluntary agencies to ensure that children are safe.

The council has established a 'Child In Need' matrix, which provides clear guidance to staff to promote effective decision-making regarding the care needs and service provision for children and young people. There has been a good increase in the rate of core assessments carried out, and a significant improvement in the timeliness of assessments. Performance in this area is now good.

The rate of looked after children continues to be in line with similar councils and below the national average. Through its well established preventative strategy, Kent has successfully reduced the numbers of looked after children. This means that many of those that are looked after have particularly challenging needs, and a relatively high proportion of these children are unaccompanied asylum seekers. Wherever possible, placements are made in the child's family home or with family members. A very small number of children are placed outside Kent and the council has proportionately fewer children in residential care than similar councils. The percentage of looked after children who have to make three or more moves in a 12 month period continues to be better than the averages for councils at national level and for the comparator group.

Most looked after children have easy access to secure and stable education and health provision and this is contributing to improved outcomes. The timeliness of reviews of looked after children is very good, and the percentage of looked after children who have a named qualified social worker is higher than the national figure and that of similar councils. The numbers of looked after children that are in foster placements or placed for adoption remain good and are in line with other councils. The percentage of looked after children that are adopted remains very good, and is better than the national average and average for similar councils. Most adoptions are concluded within 12 months of the decision.

Children, including those with disabilities have access to high quality, independent advocates.

Almost all children and their carers actively participate in planning and reviewing the effectiveness of the services they receive. As a result, there are discernable improvements. Information about the experience of children and their carers is routinely collected, collated and used in the design, decommissioning and re-commissioning of services.

Enjoying and achieving

The council makes a good contribution towards improving the outcomes for achievement and enjoyment of children and young people, including vulnerable, minority ethnic and other groups such as looked after children. The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage are at least satisfactory and over half of those services inspected received a good or outstanding inspection grade. Overall achievement at Key Stages 1 and 2 has improved but is lower than that of similar councils, and the gap between the attainment of boys and girls is widening at Key Stage 2. This has been identified by the council as a priority for improvement. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with averages nationally and for statistical neighbours, but GCSE results have risen and are now above the national average. The progress made by vulnerable, minority ethnic and other groups throughout all phases is similar to that of other children. Looked after children achieve the same percentage of educational qualifications as comparable groups elsewhere, but the proportion of 16 year olds in this group who do not sit any examinations is higher than the national average.

The proportion of schools that are causing concern has fallen significantly as a result of the highly successful Kent School Improvement Partner programme, which has enabled the council to have a better knowledge of its schools and provide a robust challenge to underachievement and inadequate leadership. The positive outcome of this programme is that a significant number of children are now experiencing better education.

Primary school attendance has improved at a faster rate than the national trend over the last two years as a result of well targeted intervention strategies. Secondary school attendance has improved slowly over the same period, but school attendance overall is below that of similar councils and the national average and the proportion of unauthorised absence is higher than comparators. The number of looked after children who missed significant amounts of schooling during the year has risen slightly and is above average.

This was identified as an area for improvement last year and in taking steps to address this issue the council created two new Education Welfare Officer posts in 2005/06. Analysis has been undertaken to identify reasons for non-attendance, and new attendance reporting rules have been introduced to schools to enable them to take more targeted action to improve attendance. There has been a clear focus on addressing casual absence, identifying vulnerable pupils and providing family support. This is beginning to have a positive impact on attendance. Behaviour is judged as good in a majority of schools.

Data are used effectively to determine future trends and predicted needs in relation to school places and suitable action is taken as a result of these analyses. The number of pupils unable to attend school as a result of exclusion has fallen, but the number of permanent exclusions is higher than for similar councils and above the national average. There are appropriate procedures to identify and support children who are at risk of exclusion.

Provision in the early years is of high quality and overall outcomes are mostly good and in line with the national picture. Support has been targeted at maintained nurseries and reception classes in the most deprived areas of the county and this has had a positive impact on improving provision. There is increasing choice and flexibility for most parents in balancing their children's needs, their work commitments and family life. As a result, almost all three and four year olds are now receiving early years provision. A parental survey has been used to identify the needs for childcare in different types of areas in Kent. This is being used to plan future provision, and in particular to ensure vulnerable groups have good access to services.

Making a positive contribution

The council makes a good contribution towards improving outcomes in this area. All groups of children and young people are encouraged to participate in decisions that affect them. There is regular and innovative consultation with those groups of children who are traditionally harder to reach and harder to engage. This very successful consultation is impacting positively on service design.

Inspection evidence shows that spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and pupils make a positive contribution in most of the schools inspected.

The council has continued to prioritise the provision of activities for children and young people beyond the normal school day, and there are a number of initiatives to promote positive contributions largely through partnership work with Kent Children's Fund. Family learning programmes and other early intervention strategies are enabling parents to support their children's learning and develop positive relationships. Effective support is offered to children who are susceptible to anti-social behaviour and young carers have good opportunities to seek support through a local 'Young Carers Project'.

The proportion of young people aged 13 to 19 reached by the publicly funded youth service has increased and there is a good rate of participation in youth activities.

The rate of final warnings, reprimands and convictions of the relatively small number of looked after children has decreased and is now in line with the national rate and that of similar councils.

The proportion of looked after children who participated in statutory reviews is below the national average and is lower than the proportion of similar councils. It is noted that a change in the definition of the relevant performance indicator makes comparisons complex. This was identified as a weakness last year and continues to be a priority for improvement, which the council is tackling through its independent review arrangements.

Achieving economic well-being

The council makes a good contribution towards improving the outcomes for children and young people in this area. The proportion of children and young people in education, training and employment is slightly better than the national average and in line with similar councils, although there are some parts of the county where the figure is particularly low and additional support has been successfully targeted at these areas.

The council has used an innovative approach to inspire and motivate young people at Key Stage 4 and has made considerable progress in the development of its pioneering vocational programme, which is part of its implementation of the national 14–19 Strategy. Partnership working is very effective and includes voluntary and private providers. The council ensures that the costs of key services are known.

The development of the 14–19 Strategy is based on a clear analysis of needs. Success rates for those achieving Level 1 and Level 2 part or full vocationally related courses have risen and the proportion of 16 year olds who entered full time education is higher than in other parts of the South East. The council's successful work with the Learning and Skills Council, Connexions and local service providers ensures that most children and young people, including children in care and care leavers, have sound advice and guidance at all key transition points. A majority of children and young people are positive about service provision and delivery.

Most vulnerable and other groups of young people have Pathway and transition plans, which are reviewed regularly. Almost all young people contribute to their reviews and the council has identified this as a continuing priority in its CYPP.

The council has successfully increased the number of direct payments to children and young people or their carers from 25 to 65 to increase their choice and autonomy. Very good performance is sustained on the rate of care leavers in education, training and employment and the proportion of care leavers who are living in suitable accommodation has improved but is lower than similar councils and lower than the national figure. An audit of placements has been completed and as a result accommodation has been withdrawn from the council's lists because children and young people felt unsafe when placed there.

The overall quality of education is good but variable with continued improving performance at secondary level. This good improvement is further supported by the development of vocational centres and the strengthening of business links through the 'Kent Works' initiative.

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

Kent County Council and its partners champion the needs of its children and young people very well and it has an excellent capacity to achieve further improvement. There is a very strong commitment to promote better outcomes for all children, and its strategic and planning documents include aspirations and clearly thought out priorities to address the needs of children, young people and their families. The council and its partners have a local area agreement (The Kent Agreement) in place, which includes challenging targets. The local area agreement process is used successfully to drive performance improvement. Children and young people and their carers are involved fully in the development of services and these have shaped the CYPP which provides a clear picture of plans for service development.

The council reorganised its children's services into a single Children Families and Education Directorate from April 2006, further enhancing opportunities for collaborative working and service development. The transition was implemented smoothly and progress towards Children's Trust status is now underway.

Kent County Council's management of financial and human resources is excellent. Resources are targeted at areas of greatest need. Through the very effective collaborative arrangements with partner agencies, good use is made of shared budgets and external funding sources. Regular cost and quality comparisons are made and good use is made of joint commissioning and partnership working to improve the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of local services. The council's good policies and procedures ensure that staff at all levels are aware of their responsibilities and accountabilities.

The council's capacity to improve is enhanced by the way in which it continues to give priority to preventative services. Resulting from this, two examples are: the rate of children looked after by the council has continued to decrease and casework decision-making is effective, ensuring that individuals receive services that are appropriate to their needs.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion of healthy lifestyles • accessibility to the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • referrals of young offenders to the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a well established range of prevention strategies • reduction in the number of looked after children and an increase in family placements and placements near to home • very good performance on timeliness of child protection reviews • very good performance on the proportion of young children placed in foster placements or placed for adoption, and the rate of children adopted from local authority care. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • early years provision • opportunities for secondary pupils to follow vocational pathways • out of school activities. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards at key stages 1 and 2 • widening gap between the performance of boys and girls at Key Stage 2 • school attendance including the attendance of looked after children.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a comprehensive range of initiatives promoting a positive contribution. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rate of looked after children who contribute to the statutory reviews of their care.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing the number of direct payments or alternatives to direct payments to children and young people or their carers • innovative partnership arrangement for developing 14-19 provision. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accommodation of care leavers.

<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong financial management and control • very strong commitment to promote better outcomes for all children in Kent • coherent strategy, planning and operational arrangements that promote improved outcomes through consultation, review, research and service development • efficient management of resources. 	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p>
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Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA

- The contribution of health services to the children and young people's agenda.
- Provision for looked after children.
- The engagement of children and young people in safeguarding and diversity.
- The impact of initiatives on raising the attainment of pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Development of the Youth Service and extended provision.

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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