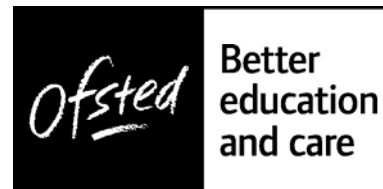


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Making Social Care
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Dear Colleagues

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF KENT COUNTY COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter follows the meeting held on 27 June 2005 concerning the performance of the education and social care services within your authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourselves and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Being healthy

Outcomes for the health of children and young people are good. Teenage pregnancy rates have been reduced for the under 18 and under 16 age groups. Although there are specific geographical areas of increase, the careful analysis of need and targeted use of resources such as youth workers is working well at addressing this priority. The health of looked after children is good and the county council has sustained this over time. Indicators for speed of referral from Youth Offending Teams to Children and Mental Health Service Teams (CAMHS) are poor. However, this does not accurately reflect service delivery since many referrals are through the Primary Care Trust and referrals also take place through the well resourced social worker support to CAMHS. Targeted action in tackling drug and alcohol misuse has led to a decrease in school exclusions associated with these causes and there has been a significant increase in the number of referrals to the drug misuse support service.

Strategic planning and multi-agency working is a strong aspect of the county council, with a positive commitment to locating solutions to problems at local level. This strategy is driven centrally by the Public Services Board, by the second local public service agreement and the local area agreement, and at district level by the Children's Consortia. However, it is too early to assess how these strategies directly impact on the health outcomes for children and young people.

Staying safe

There are some good outcomes for the care and safety of children and young people, although there are some weaknesses in performance indicators.

Strengths include the robustness and corporate leadership of the multi-agency Area Child Protection Committee and child protection arrangements, including inter-agency referral and assessment. There is evidence of good systems being in place to protect children in the early years and in schools. The council has taken effective action to reduce bullying and a comprehensive Safe Schools Programme is in place. Where children and young people are at particular risk, such as those on the child protection register and those vulnerable to drug or alcohol misuse, then the county council provides targeted support.

The completion of initial assessments and core assessments within expected timescales deteriorated in 2004/05. For core assessments, the rate is significantly below the average of similar councils and in the bottom quartile of all councils in England. The county council has said that this was thought to be due to: initial assessment officers who were running initial assessments into core assessments without closing the initial assessment (practice has now changed); and shortcomings in the existing information system which constrains accurate recording. A further factor might be the relatively high proportion of referrals that lead to initial assessments. This continues to run at over 95%, whereas the average rate for similar councils is consistently below 70%, suggesting that initial screening prior to assessment is not occurring appropriately. The rates of re-referrals and of core assessments per 10,000 of the population are consistent with similar councils, suggesting that the practice of more initial assessments is not significantly impacting on these measures. The county council has introduced a "Children In Need Matrix" to help teams prioritise incoming work, as well as an Assessment Framework Recovery Plan.

The council has a robust preventative strategy that is supported by effective partnership work with the voluntary sector, district councils and the NHS. Children are supported in their own homes wherever possible, and when it is necessary to accommodate them, they are looked after in family settings close to their homes.

There has been a rise in 2004/05 in the numbers of children on the child protection register and of new registrations, and the rates for 2004/05 are respectively in the top and near the top quartile of similar councils. The council expected this, and state that it is a consequence of: a lowering of thresholds to respond proactively to neglect; increased identification of need arising from preventative activity in the community; and the shift to maintaining vulnerable children in from their families. There is continued good and very good performance on the percentage of child protection re-registrations during the year, the percentage of child protection cases reviewed, and

the percentage of de-registrations of children who have been on the register for two or more years.

Looked after children are in appropriate placements as indicated by: the percentage that have three or more placements during the year; the proportion of children under 10 that are in foster placements or placed for adoption; and the rate of children adopted from local authority care.

Enjoying and achieving

There are generally good outcomes for the enjoyment and achievement of children and young people. There have been significant improvements in the quality of teaching in the Foundation Stage between 2001 and 2004. However, achievement at Key Stages 1 and 2 is lower than that of similar councils. There has been some reduction in the gap for mathematics at Key Stage 1, but this has widened for subjects at Key Stage 2. For Key Stage 3, those pupils gaining Level 5 or higher is in line with the national average. At Key Stage 4 the proportion of pupils attaining 1+ A*-G grades is above the national average and those getting 5+ A*-C is in line. The rate of improvement for GCSE grades 1+ A*-G results is faster than that found nationally, but for 5+ A*-C it is slower. Whilst looked after children are achieving at rates comparable to other councils for GCSE, the figures for A*-C and A*-G grades are very poor when compared to achievement for Kent pupils overall. Only the most vulnerable children, whose potential for academic achievement may be compromised, are looked after in Kent. In order to maximise the potential of these children, the council has agreed a Local Area Agreement (and Local Public Service Agreement) target to improve performance. There is disproportionate underachievement within some minority ethnic groups and targeted support, including educational assessment for unaccompanied asylum seeking children, is in place to address this.

The high number of primary schools in special measures is unsatisfactory and the rate of improvement for this is no better than for similar councils. There are significantly more primary schools both going into a category and removed from a category compared to similar councils or nationally. No sixth forms were found to be unsatisfactory in recent inspections and a high proportion of these are good or very good.

Targeted work for school attendance has led to improvements and it is in line with similar councils and nationally for authorised absence. Unauthorised absence at secondary level is below national levels, although remains above similar councils. There has been a rise of 36% in absence rates of looked after children, and the expected rate for 2005/06 is higher than in 2003/04. This is a reversal of the previous improving trend and in contrast to the trend for similar councils. The council states that this may be due to improved data quality, and to the fact that only the most vulnerable children, who may have challenging behaviours or special needs that effect

school attendance, are looked after. The council should review the policy and practice that has previously led to improvement in this area, and put actions in place to reduce the rate. Exclusions at primary and secondary level are higher than national figures.

The development of school clusters is a strategic initiative that intends to provide more local solutions with better outcomes for children. However, to date there is no evidence of improved outcomes in the local authority which result from this initiative.

Making a positive contribution

There are many ways in which children and young people make a positive contribution and this outcome is satisfactory overall.

The percentage of looked after children who communicate their views to a statutory review is in the bottom quartile for the comparator group of councils, with a risk of Kent looked after children not being sufficiently included in the plans for their own future.

The voting of 48 members onto Kent Youth, the use of learning mentor schemes in school clusters, the involvement of young carers in the setting up of a dedicated website and the use of youth panels for the Kent safe schools programme are clear examples of initiatives, amongst many others. There is strong engagement of young offenders in post-16 activities, with 85% in education, employment or training. Also, there is a good rate of participation in youth service activities and prioritised work by the council to celebrate achievement through awards. The council ensures as well that activities for young people beyond the normal school day are given importance.

Less positive is the fact that recidivism rates have deteriorated and whilst overall performance is better than national, the gap has narrowed. The rate of looked after children who receive final warnings or convictions has increased by 29%, which is significantly greater than the previous upward trend, and in contrast to the reducing trend of 50% of similar councils. The council states that this is a consequence of the policy to accommodate only the most vulnerable children, who may have more challenging behaviour.

Achieving economic well-being

Overall outcomes are satisfactory. The percentage of direct payments for carers of disabled children and disabled children is significantly below the average percentage for the comparator group of councils. While Kent's plan for 2005/06 is to more than double its percentage, we project that that will still leave the county council significantly below the average for the comparator group.

Very good performance is sustained on the rate of care leavers in education, training and employment. There are 150 placements for young people aged 14-19 in employment placement supported by Kent, including those with special needs and there are plans to increase the number significantly.

Overall the quality of education is good but variable, with performance improving at secondary school level. Key Stage 4 performance has improved to slightly above average, giving a firm foundation for future employment. This is further supported by the development of the pre vocational centres and the Business Start Up Units.

There are, however, some areas that are less good. Some youth offending team targets are not being met. Whilst the target on reducing reconviction rates by 7% was achieved, this has been followed by an 11.7% increase. There has been targeted work with young people and ongoing support at the end of statutory interventions, which is standard practice across the teams.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continued good and very good performance on a number of indicators, including teenage pregnancy reduction and the health of looked after children • appropriate targeting of resources in response to auditing of need • good levels of staffing for social workers in the Children and Mental Health Service teams • well established strategic planning and joint working between social services and education, and with district councils and independent sector • direct involvement of children and young people in the development at local level of the healthy schools programme. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • variation in the response to the teenage pregnancy strategy, with rises in some areas • response rate in performance indicators for Youth Offending Team (YOT) referrals for mental health assessments and insufficient prioritisation of action reflected in plans.

<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • well established multi-agency working and strong long lasting partnerships • early years care well-placed to secure the safety of children, and very good performance on the rate of re-registrations after child protection initial registration • very good performance on the rate of participation of children in 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 • targeted action for children on the child protection register who were at risk of drug/alcohol misuse • priority given to placing children at risk within the local area. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the rate of initial and core assessments completed within expected timescales • the rates of children on the child protection register and of new registrations.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improvements in quality of teaching in Foundation Stage • good performance on the percentage of care leavers with 5+ GCSE grade A*-G • significant improvement over recent years in grades for teaching at foundation stage • Key Stage 4 results good and sixth form inspection results good. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educational attainment at Key Stages 1 and 2 • significant number of primary schools in special measures • a 36% increase in the rate of looked after children absent from school.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high percentage of young offenders in full time education, training or employment • priority given to developing range of activities outside school for children and young people • council's encouragement to young people to achieve awards 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deterioration of recidivism rates (at the time of an improvements overall nationally) • the rate of looked after children who communicated their views to a statutory review • the rate of final warnings convictions of looked after children.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduction in the rate of re-offending by introducing a challenging PSA target • the voting of 48 members onto Kent Youth, the use of learning mentor schemes in school clusters, the involvement of young carers in the setting up of a dedicated web-site and the use of youth panels for the Kent Safe Schools programme, amongst many other initiatives. 	
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individual assessment of the economic needs of every looked after children aged 16+, and a reviewed action plan as part of the pathway learning service • very good percentage of care leavers in employment, education, or training at age 19 over the past three years. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • non-achievement of some YOT targets • direct payments for carers of disabled children and disabled children.

Service management

Service management and capacity to improve is impressive across much of children's services, although for social care the trajectory of performance indicators is not always one of improvement. Members and officers have a strong shared vision of the need to improve outcomes for children. Kent uses the mechanisms of Local Public Service Agreements and the Local Area Agreement to drive partnership work and improvement across the council area. Work is already underway to have a children and young people plan in place. The strategies are communicated in a coherent way and they reflect the particular context of Kent by using a devolved model for service delivery. The vision for Kent provides the needs analysis to assist planning, and the priorities that have been identified are well reflected in the capital and revenue funding and in the plans for structures and accountability.

The council faces some particular challenges. These include: the rate of asylum seekers and refugees and the financial constraints arising from current government grant arrangements; and the high rate of looked after children placed by other councils into Kent, for whom Kent provides relevant services.

Capacity is assisted by well-developed performance management systems at strategic and operational level. There is an effective recruitment and retention strategy and staff care package that ensures that adequate staff are available, and financial management is robust.

Areas for exploration in the Joint Area Review:

Being healthy

Healthy life-styles are promoted for children and young people:

- the extent to which the strategic links are associated with better health outcomes for children and young people.

Staying safe

Children and young people are provided with a safe environment:

- focus on safeguarding and diversity – assess impact via views of children and young people.

Enjoying and achieving

Children and young people who are looked after are helped to enjoy and achieve:

- explore how the initiatives at KS1 and KS2 have had impact on all pupils and looked after children achievement.

Making a positive contribution

Action is taken to prevent offending and to reduce re-offending by children and young people:

- focus on YOT activity and impact.

Final judgements

Please see your final annual performance assessment judgements attached at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY
Divisional Manager
Office for Standards in Education



JONATHAN PHILLIPS
Director – Quality, Performance and Methods
Commission for Social Care Inspection

APA final judgements 2005: Kent County Council

Areas for judgement	Final judgements ¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	3
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
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 capacity to improve its services for children and young people	4

1

Grade	Service descriptors	Capacity to improve descriptors
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Very good
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good/promising
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate