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Making Social Care  
Better for People



Ms Sue Fiennes  
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**01 November 2006**

Dear Ms Fiennes

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

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 Annual Performance Assessment of 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 <sup>1</sup>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	2
The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people.	2
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	2

<sup>1</sup>

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

Herefordshire County Council delivers an adequate contribution to maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people within the area.

The council is aware of its areas for development, and is starting to collaborate closely with relevant partners to analyse needs and set appropriate, challenging targets for improvement. Capacity for further improvement is adequate.

## **Being healthy**

The contribution Herefordshire Council's services make to improving outcomes in this area are good, particularly in the way that healthy lifestyles are promoted through partnerships between key services. The health needs of looked after children are met effectively and most indicators are better than national averages. The range and effectiveness of actions taken to promote the mental health of children and young people have increased and services are available promptly. Access to therapy has improved. All children's health needs are met in age appropriate services, although a minority of looked after children do not have a comprehensive written health record. The proportion of schools achieving the National Healthy Schools Standard has improved and is set to exceed the interim national target. Looked after children and their families benefit from free access to leisure facilities. The Primary Care Trust's high level of commitment is driving a range of initiatives to deliver better outcomes.

Although most outcomes are good there are a number of areas that should be improved. Dental health is very poor. There is a lack of co-ordination between agencies for the assessment, planning and individual involvement of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The incidence of teenage pregnancy amongst 16 and 17 year olds has fallen for three years but has increased compared with the national trend. The capacity of the substance misuse service is inadequate as are its identification and referral systems. While opportunities for young people to engage in sport through their schools are good, additional leisure and sports activities are limited by lack of transport in rural areas.

## **Staying safe**

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area are good overall; some important weaknesses in social care have been addressed following the Joint Area Review (JAR) in September 2005. The authority's policies now recognise what constitutes a safe environment and the implementation of these policies in social care is regularly monitored, though it is too early to see measurable improvements in outcomes. Previously some children who were at risk were not able to access social care support as thresholds were so high but these have been revised following the JAR.

Social care and its partners do not yet provide an effective range of preventative services to meet children's needs before they become intractable. Provision for children experiencing domestic violence is unsatisfactory. However a recent Service Level Agreement with a local Women's Aid provider shows some signs of resolving this. Young people leaving care do not always have a comprehensive pathway or transition plan in readiness for adult life.

All looked after children and children on the Child Protection Register have an assigned qualified social worker and all child protection reviews are completed within time. Children benefit from very good consistency of placements. The completion of initial assessments in a timely manner has been adversely affected by capacity and targets have not been met. Significantly fewer children received a core assessment in Herefordshire than in similar authorities though most of the assessments were completed in timely manner. There were no serious case reviews.

The authority has embarked on a process which, when fully implemented, will clarify referral systems and protocols between education, health, social care and others in supporting children in need, looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Protocols with the health service are secure and joint assessment processes are being improved.

### **Enjoy and achieve**

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area are adequate, with several good features. Overall attainment figures for school age children in 2005 were slightly higher than national averages and progress in all phases of education is broadly average. A good feature has been the marked improvement in the proportion of pupils gaining GCSE or equivalent qualifications. Sixth formers at the college do well, and all post-16 students make at least adequate progress either at the other colleges or in school sixth forms. The vast majority of learners enjoy school and are making good progress in their personal development and well being.

However, there are some signs that academic progress has slowed and for example, some value added measures are now just below average. There has been a marked reduction in the proportion of schools where inspectors judged achievement to be good or better to less than half of the most recently inspected schools. Improvements common in schools inspected are: better monitoring and evaluation of performance at all levels, including governance; and better use of assessment to help learners to improve. The local authority recognises it needs to improve support for schools in their monitoring and self-evaluation, and for governors to monitor schools. There is good evidence to confirm effective support by the local authority for example, by spreading good practice in order to improve results at Key Stage 3.

The range of curriculum opportunities is adequate for students aged 14 to 19. Many schools provide vocational courses in business studies and information and communications technology for those aged 14 to 16, but there are only a few examples of more imaginative curriculum opportunities. Work-based training is limited because of a shortage of suitable employment places.

Looked after children attain higher standards than children in care nationally and about half continue in education, employment or training at 16 which, again, is better than the national average. Other groups achieve as well as most other learners across the country. Tuition hours for permanently excluded pupils are much lower than average and have declined, despite full time provision being available at pupil referral units. The time taken to assess children for statements of special educational needs has improved markedly. The achievement of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is

broadly satisfactory. However, there are still some weaknesses in review procedures, particularly for children at age 14.

The youth service is rapidly increasing the number of accredited learning outcomes but has not yet reached its targets. Furthermore, the number of young people reached by the service remains below their own targets despite a strongly rising trend.

### **Making a positive contribution**

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area are adequate. Overall, the rate of youth crime is below average but has increased recently while those in other authorities have been falling.

Re-offending rates have also risen but the impact of projects to combat re-offending has not been analysed by the local authority.

The majority of children and young people are given adequate support to manage changes in their lives. The local authority and its partners are establishing better strategies to help children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities manage the transition between specific phases in their lives. Arrangements for the significant number who are placed outside the authority are not robust enough.

Increasing the opportunity for young people to express their views is a priority for improvement although the authority has established a number of youth councils and boards to elicit the views of children and young people.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area are adequate overall. The majority of schools inspected are good at enabling learners to achieve economic well-being. Almost all young people are involved in education, employment or training after they reach the age of 16, including about half of those in care. The number of Year 11 students continuing in full time education, training or employment is rising, but the proportion that are not is well above the November 2006 target of 4.9%. A significant minority are in employment without training, and so their long-term economic prosperity prospects are at risk. Too many young people leave education or training at age 17 and there is growing pressure on suitable training places, which remain limited in number despite funding for more apprenticeships being available.

The JAR found that many families and young people in vulnerable groups were affected by the scarceness of suitable housing though the Council has taken some steps that are starting to benefit young people. Almost all young people who leave care at age 19 are living in suitable accommodation, with a plan for 2006-07 that will include them all.

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

The capacity to improve is adequate.

The authority is starting to collaborate closely with relevant partners to analyse needs and set appropriate, challenging targets for improvement. The local authority is starting to take better account of the views of parents, carers, children and young people when identifying priorities for development. There is limited capacity for analysis in order to manage activity levels and trends. A single children and young people's plan has been produced, although current plans tend to focus on processes rather than outcomes, making it difficult to assess impact and establish the extent to which strategies and policies provide value for money.

The education service knows its strengths and weaknesses, and uses evidence from inspections and the analysis of school performance data to direct support for schools well. It also has a good vision to raise standards by systematically developing the ethos of schools. The staffing structure has changed significantly since the JAR and most vacancies have been filled.

After the first three months of 2006/07 it is predicted that the budget for children's social care will be overspent and all budgets are being reviewed even though further growth in capacity is needed. There is a strong commitment from health to children's services but pressures on health budgets may limit ability to deliver.

Performance management remains under-developed; there is a lack of measurable targets or of evidence that services actually improve outcomes for children. The local authority has engaged external support to introduce benchmarked performance measures.

The establishment of a Public Services Trust will drive governance arrangements and contribute to setting up a Children's Trust. However, the Children and Young People Partnership Board has been slow to become established and limited resources were available.

The economic climate and local employment conditions present significant threats to education, employment and training opportunities. The local authority should do more to identify specific measures and intended outcomes to prevent this situation from worsening significantly.

The JAR improvement plan and external support proposals being implemented in 2006/07 enhance the service's capacity to improve. The existing information technology system is limited and data cannot be analysed easily. The urgent need for the replacement of the system has been agreed but no specific solution yet commissioned.

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 formation only.

Yours sincerely



**FLO HADLEY**

Divisional Manager  
Office for Standards in Education



**JONATHAN PHILLIPS**

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