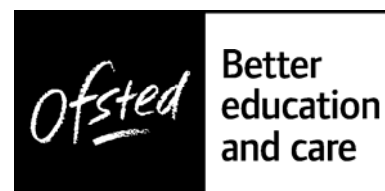


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Making Social Care  
Better for People



Ms Diana Terris  
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**1 November 2006**

Dear Ms Terris

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

<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>4</b>

1

<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

Halton Borough Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements for children and young people. The contribution of services to outcomes is excellent in the area of staying safe and good in the remaining areas.

## **Being healthy**

The contribution of the council's services to outcomes in this area is good. There is a coordinated approach to promoting the health of children and young people.

Almost all schools participate in the healthy schools initiative. Health awareness is good in schools. Healthy eating and ensuring regular access to sport and exercise are promoted. The health needs of looked after children are met effectively and performance remains consistently strong. The health needs of children with disabilities are identified early.

Teenage pregnancies have reduced by 7% since the baseline was set in 1998 and whilst it is recognised that the rate of reduction needs to improve it is lower than that of similar councils. Whilst the number has decreased, the council recognises that in certain wards improvements need to be made at a faster rate. The development of a preventative children's trust in 2006 has effectively combined services that tackle teenage pregnancy and substance misuse to deliver better outcomes in this area.

Access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is improving but at a rate slower than similar councils and the national average. This remains a priority for improvement. The children's trust is providing timely access to services. The target is to ensure a fully operational comprehensive CAMHS services by December 2006. Good, integrated working with the youth offending team (YOT) has delivered better outcomes for children and young people.

## **Staying safe**

The council makes an excellent contribution to promoting and securing the safety of children and young people, and is able to demonstrate that services continue to be effectively and efficiently targeted. There is a sustained level of continuous improvement leading to better outcomes for the most vulnerable children. All services continue to be provided in partnership, and this includes the voluntary and private sectors. There is a significant drive towards preventative services to enable children to be well cared for outside the looked after system. Good progress has been made on implementing the common assessment framework (CAF).

A borough wide specialist team has been established to provide a response and duty service. Strong management and tracking systems are in place and this ensures that all of the good practice requirements of the Victoria Climbié inquiry have been met. The referral, assessment and review systems ensure that children at risk are identified early. Their needs are subsequently met in a timely way. Excellent performance has been maintained this year.

The council provides children and young people with a safe environment, and support for learners' safety in schools is mostly good or better. Child protection procedures are

robust. All children on the Child Protection Register together with all looked after children have an assigned qualified social worker. The council is consistently effective in achieving long term stability. The percentage of children who were placed for adoption within 12 months is very good. A high number of looked after children (18.7%) are placed with family and friends. This percentage is higher than that of similar councils (15.5%) and above the national average (13%).

The council has been effective in improving performance information. This was identified as an area for improvement in the last APA letter. They can now demonstrate rigorous performance management arrangements that continue to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people.

Contractual arrangement with providers was identified as an area for improvement during the APA process 2004/05. The council has provided clear evidence that the needs of the vulnerable children and young people who do not access the council's social care provision are being met appropriately.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

The council makes a good contribution to ensuring that children and young people achieve at school and enjoy their education and leisure activities. The quality of early years provision is good. Training and support remain strong and most children achieve the early learning goals by the end of the Foundation Stage. Parents have ready access to advice and guidance through the borough's schools, children's centres and services, and this helps them support their children's learning and transition from one school phase to another.

Performance overall remains in line with similar councils, and at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 standards are in line with national averages. Moreover, test and examination results improved in some key areas in 2005. The proportion of children achieving at least Level 4, the expected level for 11 year olds, rose at Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics. At Key Stage 3, an increase in the proportion of children achieving at least Level 5, the expected level for 13 year olds, in all core subjects brought attainment in line with the national average. In addition, GCSE results improved; 50% of pupils, including one looked after child, achieved five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE; and almost all young people (96.32%), including half of the looked after children, left school with qualifications.

Results fell significantly at Key Stage 1, however, and intensive activity is underway to improve teachers' skills and introduce different approaches to learning in an effort to raise attainment so that results will rise to the national average. The council is aware that attainment at the higher levels, in Key Stages 2 and 3, is not improving as fast as the council want and action to tackle this is a focus for 2005/06.

Children's progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is in line with other councils nationally. Rates of progress are improving, although value added measures between Key Stage 2 to GCSE remain well below the average nationally. The local authority is responding purposefully to this challenge through tailored support and intervention that are expected to address variations between school and subject performance. The effective arrangements for monitoring, challenging and intervening in schools where performance is a concern, noted in the 2005 APA letter, continue to be successful.

Indeed, the proportion of schools causing concern has reduced: there are no schools subject to special measures, although there is one secondary school that received a notice to improve in its spring 2006 inspection.

Differentiated provision and support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is strong and most pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good or better progress. The attainment and progress of looked after children, some of whom also have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is satisfactory or better given their starting points. A broad range of general and discrete enrichment and study support activity is provided through summer schools and multi-skill centres for the disabled. Take-up of this support is high.

Most schools are providing effective education, care and support for learners' personal development. Almost all children and young people enjoy school. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are mostly good or better in schools. However, the levels of permanent exclusion in secondary schools remain relatively high overall compared to national averages. While exclusions have continued to reduce throughout 2005, managing the challenging and poor behaviour of a small number of pupils remains a particular concern for the council and is the focus of multi-agency work. Provision for children and young people who have been permanently excluded from a school is good.

Attendance is broadly in line with national averages at primary and secondary schools. The levels of unauthorised absence in secondary schools have continued to increase and remain a concern.

A determined start has been made on addressing the issue of surplus places in primary and secondary schools and some reductions have been made already.

## **Making a positive contribution**

The contribution of services to outcomes in this area is good. As was identified last year, consultation with children and young people is strong. In the last year, their contributions have informed decision making in many areas of the council's work and their needs and wishes are beginning to shape service delivery, activities and programmes. Consultation with looked after children, vulnerable and hard to reach groups is also good. Most (95%) looked after children participated in their reviews. Outcomes have improved as a result of their influence on this process and there is ongoing dialogue with them through Rant and Rave groups. Speak Out and advocacy provides good support and enables children and young people with learning disabilities to contribute their views.

Young people in Halton have a low level of involvement in crime and few young people are involved with criminal justice agencies. Action to tackle reoffending behaviour is strong. Strategies such as summer holiday programmes for vulnerable pupils and youth engagement projects have helped to bring about a reduction in anti-social behaviours. However, proportionally more looked after children are engaging in offending behaviour than in similar councils. Rigorous action is being taken to address this issue. A social worker is being appointed and a protocol developed with Cheshire police to manage behaviour in residential units.

## **Achieving economic well-being**

The council's contribution to outcomes in this area is good. Partnership working is effective and families are well supported. Access to information, such as childcare and financial entitlement, is promoted well through the Children's Information Service. The take up of direct payments has increased.

Young people are prepared very well for their working life. Staying on rates are good: over 90% of young people chose to continue in education, training and employment in 2005/06. Actions to tackle the problem of high numbers of young people in Runcorn who choose not to engage in education, training or employment have been initiated.

Good progress has been made this year in improving the coordination and planning of 14 to 19 education in 2005/06. As a result, Halton is in a stronger position to establish a cohesive and balanced 14 to 19 curriculum. Standards and the quality of 14 to 19 education are improving, although performance is below the national average.

Rigorous systems for cooperation between agencies ensure that young people with complex needs receive timely advice and support. Pathway and transition plans for vulnerable children and young people are effective. In addition, all care leavers have a personal advisor and are helped into suitable accommodation. Consequently, a high proportion of care leavers and all young people with disabilities are involved in employment, education and training.

## **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. The council and its partners champion the needs of children and young people in the area. There is sustained corporate and political support with the children's agenda being the top priority. There is a commitment to resource future development.

The Chief Executive leads the implementation of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). Strategic planning is based upon a thorough needs analysis and targets are well integrated into a diverse range of plans throughout all service areas. Progress towards reaching ambitious targets is monitored rigorously to bring about change and improvement in services and to ensure that children get the best possible start in life. The collection and analysis of data and overall performance management remains a major strength. Local indicators have been developed and influenced by children and young people. The thorough self-assessment undertaken for the APA is outcome focused and accurately identifies the major areas of strengths and those for improvement.

Good progress is being made towards the implementation of a children's trust/alliance in 2007. Mini trusts are already established.

The organisation of children's service is well embedded but there is more work to do to improve educational outcomes in relation to the number of permanent exclusions, the level of unauthorised absence, and standards and progress (particularly of pupils aged 14 to 19). The council has made outstanding progress in delivering social care services

to the most vulnerable children and young people. Excellent performance has been achieved this year.

There is a comprehensive approach to help staff develop and achieve their potential. Recruitment to and retention of people in key posts within children's services has been sustained and the monitoring of sickness absence is very good.

Consultation with children, young people and families is influencing the council's decision making with regard to planning, commissioning and implementation of services. This remains an area for continued development. The local safeguarding board is developing robust processes that will audit the effectiveness of their contribution to improving the outcomes for all young people in the borough. Work has progressed on the CAF and this is integral to the priority the council gives to supporting children and families in order to minimise the numbers who progress to being looked after children. The capacity for improvement is good.

### 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>95% of schools engaged in the healthy schools initiative</li> <li>health of children looked after met effectively.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>implementation of comprehensive CAMHS service.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>overall children and young people are provided with a safe environment</li> <li>good assessment timescales</li> <li>placements with relatives and friends</li> <li>good child protection procedures</li> <li>consistently effective in achieving long term stability for children and young people</li> <li>percentage of children who are placed for adoption.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>support for schools causing concern</li> <li>progress of looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities from their starting points</li> <li>early years provision.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>high permanent exclusions in secondary schools</li> <li>unauthorised absence of secondary school pupils</li> <li>achievement at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 4.</li> </ul>

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contribution of looked after children to reviews</li> <li>• consultation with children and young people</li> <li>• tackling reoffending behaviour.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high offending rates of looked after children.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transition plans for young people</li> <li>• education, training and employment for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and young people leaving care</li> <li>• care leavers access to suitable accommodation.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• post-16 attainment and progress</li> <li>• young people not in employment, education or training in Runcorn.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• corporate, political and service leadership</li> <li>• partnership working</li> <li>• strategic planning and allocation of resources</li> <li>• data analysis and progress monitoring</li> <li>• delivering social care outcomes.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improving educational outcomes in relation to permanent exclusions and unauthorised absence</li> <li>• embedding outcome focused commissioning/contracting</li> <li>• progress good working on the local safeguarding children board (LSCB)</li> <li>• progress of preventative strategy work.</li> </ul>

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

- To test out the impact of a comprehensive CAMHS.
- The effectiveness of measures to reduce the rate of reprimands, final warnings and convictions amongst looked after children in Halton's care.
- Young people's attainment of qualifications at Key Stage 4 and post-16 and unauthorised absence and exclusion rates in secondary schools.

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's information only.

Yours sincerely



**FLO HADLEY**

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**JONATHAN PHILLIPS**

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Commission for Social Care Inspection