

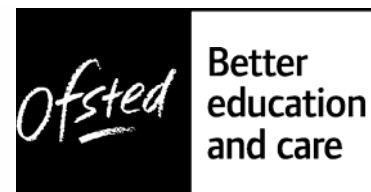
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Making Social Care  
Better for People



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**1 December 2005**

Dear Ms Terris

## **ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF HALTON BOROUGH COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005**

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 27 June 2005 to assess 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 yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

### **Being healthy**

Outcomes in this area overall are good. There is a coordinated approach to promoting the health and well-being of children and young people. This assessment is based on evidence provided from five out of 66 schools. There is evidence of full compliance with the statutory requirements governing sex and relationships education in schools. A high proportion of schools, 92%, participate in the Healthy School Initiative with 78% of schools having achieved Phase 1. The health needs of looked after children is met effectively and performance has been consistently strong exceeding national averages. The council works with partners to promote the mental health of young people and there is an increase in the number of social workers now engaged in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Although a key priority for the council is to reduce the high level of teenage conceptions the latest data available for 2003 is that there has been an increase in the under 18 conception rate of 12% taking the rate in Halton to 48.3%. A detailed action plan is in place to address the issues. The council is aware that some older children are looking to decline conventional health assessments and is developing a flexible health service to address this identified gap in provision. Guidance and support for schools and governors in sex and relationship education is a recognised strength.

## **Staying safe**

Children and young people in Halton are provided with the safe environment to which they are entitled. The outcomes in this area are good. The number of children who are assessed for social care services is small relative to similar councils.

There is an increase in the percentage of referrals leading to an assessment that is higher than the national average. However a high percentage is being carried out within seven days and although core assessments have almost doubled during the year 2004/05, 83% are being completed within the required 35 days.

Child protection processes are robust. All looked after children have an assigned social worker. The council performs well in placing children with relatives and friends and the findings of a fostering inspection during 2004/05 were positive. The council is consistently effective in achieving long-term stability. Performance on the percentage of children who were adopted and within the required timescale is very good.

The council has identified year-on-year fluctuating trends in performance information since 2002 but is clear in relation to the rationale behind this data and performance. The council recognises the need for robust arrangements to meet the social care needs of vulnerable young people. It has undertaken a comprehensive review of policies and performance and has put in place improved performance management arrangements. Better controls are designed to ensure that the social care needs of children and young people are met more appropriately than in the past either by the council or other providers and this is supported by consistent and rigorous monitoring arrangements. The council now rightly believes that it is in a strong position to demonstrate that services continue to be effectively targeted to meet assessed needs and that evidenced good performance this year will continue. The council also recognises the need to ensure robust contractual arrangements with providers. This will provide clear evidence that the needs of vulnerable children and young people who do not access the council's social care provision are being met appropriately and quality outcomes secured for individuals.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. The overall quality of early years' provision is very good and supports children well in enabling them to meet the early learning goals. Results and rates of improvement at the end of Key Stage 1 are good and better than statistical neighbours and the national average. Progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is improving, although, for science, there has been a decline in performance.

Standards in Key Stages 3 and 4 are in line with statistical neighbours but remain below the national average. Performance of sixth form schools remains below statistical neighbours and the national average. Value added data indicates that insufficient

progress is being made across these key stages. The children's service directorate has recognised raising attainment as a key priority and there is a detailed and prioritised action plan in place to address performance across all key stages.

The proportion of looked after children gaining one or more General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSE) is in line with statistical neighbours and the national average, although no looked after children gained five or more GCSE's for the year 2004/05. In the same period the number of looked after children absent from school has increased. Improving outcomes for looked after children is an identified priority for the council.

School attendance is good, with the exception of unauthorised absences in secondary schools, which is showing an increase. Halton has identified this as a key priority and appropriate action is in place to address the issue.

There are a higher number of surplus school places for both primary and secondary schools in comparison with statistical neighbours and the national average. Halton is fully aware of this matter and is using both political and officer resolve to reduce the number of surplus places. They intend to utilise the Child Care Strategy and Children's Centre's agenda to further this aim.

The support provided for schools in a formal category is effective. Halton currently has two schools in a formal category and has been sufficiently proactive in identifying and tackling the emerging weaknesses in these schools.

Ofsted inspected Halton Local Authority in December 2004, a recommendation was made regarding the implementation of the Special Educational Needs Strategy. Halton made this one of their key priorities. There is a detailed action plan in place and there has been progress particularly with regard to the percentages of statements completed within 18 weeks.

### **Making a positive contribution**

Outcomes in this area are good. The majority of young people are supported in managing change in their lives. Transition plans are in place to support young people and their parents through key transition points. A high percentage of looked after children contributed to their reviews, although at this stage, it is not evident what impact their contribution is making to the planning and management of the services they receive.

Young carers are supported through a commissioned voluntary provider. This enables them to remain out of the children in need system and free from stigmatisation, whilst still being able to access services.

When looked after children and young people were consulted 37.9% said that they were satisfied with the services they received, and 29.1% confirmed that they were offered choices when decisions were made about their future. This performance is in line with the national average. The council needs to use these outcome indicators to demonstrate how it can more effectively listen to young people and ensure that their views are taken into account.

Halton has introduced a number of projects to facilitate children and young people participating in decision making and supporting the community. There is a shadow Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership — young people's board 'look who's talking' — that advise and influence developments in children and young people's services. In addition, looked after children are encouraged to give their views through the 'rant and rave' groups that are available. Halton Speak Out initiative is a valuable resource in enabling young people with learning difficulties and disabilities to participate in various forums. However, the council does need to show more clearly how the views of children and young people are making an impact on re-shaping policy and services.

Outcomes with regards the reduction of youth offending is satisfactory with very good performance for timely referral of juveniles to CAMHS. Nonetheless, there has been an increase in the number of looked after children who have received final warnings and convictions.

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

The outcomes in this area are good. There are strong collaborative strategic partnerships in place to ensure that 14 to 19 education and training is planned and delivered in a coordinated way. Effective work is taking place with the local Learning and Skills Council and Connexions service who have made good progress against the achievement of the national key performance indicators, particularly by reducing the number of those young people not in education, training or employment. In addition, good progress has been made in supporting care leavers into education, training and employment.

There are two schools with sixth forms in Halton and the standard of education provided is below both their statistical neighbours and the national average. The authority recognises this area of concern and is making efforts to address the issues. The council believes rightly that they have made considerable progress with their not in education, training or employment targets and that this more accurately reflects the work they are doing with young people who are at risk of underachieving.

Appropriate resources are available to support young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities through the transition phases from Year 9 upwards.

## SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>coordinated approach to CAMHS</li> <li>92% of schools engaged in the healthy schools initiative</li> <li>health of children looked after met effectively</li> <li>full compliance with statutory requirements governing sex and relationships education in schools.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>under 18 conception rates</li> <li>health assessments for older young people who are looked after.</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 time scales</li> <li>placements with relatives and friends</li> <li>good child protection processes</li> <li>consistently effective in achieving long term stability for children and young people</li> <li>the percentage of children who were adopted and within the time scale is very good.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>29.1% confirmed that they were offered choices when decisions were made about their future</li> <li>contractual arrangements with providers of services on behalf of the council.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>good quality early years provision</li> <li>good Key Stage 1 results</li> <li>value added from Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 good.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>attainment across Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4</li> <li>unauthorised absence of secondary pupils</li> <li>attendance and attainment of looked after children.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>transition plans for young people</li> <li>reviews for looked after children</li> <li>participation of children and young people.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increase in number of looked after children receiving a final warning</li> <li>37.9% of children and young people said they were satisfied with services they received.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14 to 19 years education and learning delivered in a coordinated way</li> <li>education, training and employment for young people leaving care is good.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>post-16 performance in schools with sixth forms.</li> </ul>

## **Service management**

The council has a strong track record of working strategically and operationally with relevant partners and there is a shared commitment to prioritise the delivery of clear and ambitious targets. Migration to a Children's Trust/Alliance is documented in a project plan for 2005/06. There is evidence that children, young people and their families are beginning to have a real voice in influencing developments. The council acknowledges the need to continue to work on the engagement of young people.

The district auditors letter dated 2004 confirms that the council has continued to improve the way it manages its performance. There is corporate and political engagement in a challenging children's agenda, together with strong budgetary control to meet financial targets. Performance management was judged to be good and the council has successfully recruited to key posts to support service delivery. However sickness absence is above average.

A director of children's services is now in post and significant progress has been made in moving towards the production of a single children and young people's plan from 2006. The council knows itself well and there is positive work between education and social care services. Analysis of local need underpins developments. The council provided very comprehensive information for this annual assessment but has recognised that the overall focus was on processes rather than outcomes. Therefore it proved difficult to identify what impact proposed improvements will have on the lives of children and young people. The directorate recognises the need to develop local outcome focused indicators to assist this area of work.

The council capacity to deliver on this agenda is good.

## **Areas for exploration in the joint area review**

### **Being healthy**

*Looked after children's health needs are addressed:*

- impact of the strategy to address the health needs of older looked after children.

### **Staying safe**

*Children and young people are provided with a safe environment:*

- evidence to support robust monitoring arrangements of contracts with providers who furnish services on behalf of the council.

## **Making a positive contribution**

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

- final warnings/reprimands and convictions of looked after children where performance has declined.

## **Achieving economic well-being**

*Action taken to ensure that 14-19 education and training is planned and delivered in a coordinated way, and to ensure that education and training (16-19) is of good quality:*

- progress on the implementation of the 14 to 19 years post-inspection action plan.

## **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: Halton Borough Council

Areas for judgement	Final judgements <sup>1</sup>
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.	2
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	3

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1

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