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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Mr Eccleston

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BRACKNELL FOREST BOROUGH COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment 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

Areas for judgement	Grade awarded¹
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	3
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

Bracknell Forest Unitary Authority provides good services for children and young people and it has demonstrated that it has responded well, during the course of the last 12 months, to the recommendations made in last year's annual performance assessment. It has continued to create positive and effective working partnerships across a range of services. Children and young people have made a significant input to the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). The plan clearly and appropriately sets out the agenda for the future taking careful account of local needs. Progress in promoting good health through the Healthy Schools scheme, early initiatives relating to childhood obesity and joint working with the Primary Care Trust (PTC) is good. Support for schools, in proportion to need, is well targeted with standards in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 being good; however, standards at Key Stage 4 and post-16, although rising, still require improvement. Attendance in school is good, except for children in the authority's care where absence is high. Exclusions in a minority of secondary schools are also too high. Progress has been made in seeking to secure a better provision of courses post-16 but further development work in this area remains, particularly in conjunction with the Local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC). The well established youth forum continues to make a valuable contribution in engaging with hard to reach groups ensuring that a diverse section of Bracknell Forest's young people are represented and the 'Tell Us' conferences are providing valuable feedback to the authority. The authority has effectively remodelled its workforce, in a phased manner, responding to emerging needs. It has good capacity to improve even further.

Being healthy

The contribution of the authority to outcomes in this area is excellent.

The authority is continuing to build on its sound record of working collaboratively with key partners and other agencies to promote healthy lifestyles, and has good strategies for bringing about further improvement. Teenage conceptions are continuing to decline and the authority overall is significantly ahead of national performance. There has been a steady and sustained improvement in the number of pharmacies offering the Emergency Hormonal Contraceptive Pharmacy Scheme. The authority recognises that teenage conception initiatives are an on-going priority.

The delivery of the Healthy Schools Programme is commendable with all schools achieving the Bronze Award and with the majority having the Gold Award. All schools are now working towards the new standards. Participation in sport is good within school settings. The majority of pupils receive a minimum of two hours of high quality physical education and school sports each week. A local realistic improvement target has been set for this year together with an inspirational target to bring Bracknell Forest in line with national performance by 2007.

Health needs of looked after children are met effectively by a range of professionals. The proportion of children looked after by the authority, who have regular health assessments and dental treatment is very good and continues to improve in line with that of comparator authorities. There is positive action across a range of health issues for looked after children ensuring timely access to a range of support services, including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) and

physiotherapy service when they require help or advice. The provision of both preventative and reactive services in response to substance misuse, smoking cessation and obesity are now well established and are offered in collaboration with health partners, school nurses and schools. One example of this is the work with health partners in identifying baseline data for obesity. This is established in one school and will be extended to other settings. The overall aim at this stage is to identify any specific intervention required within the local authority area.

The CAMHS has benefited from additional investment in both staff allocated to the service and the type of services provided, for example, integrated care pathways for primary age children presenting with behavioural problems, and joint investment in specialist family therapy facilities. There are good links with the youth offending team especially the provision of a health-based worker carrying out health assessments of young offenders. The authority is aware that a formal service level agreement between the authority, the PCT and Berkshire Health Care Trust is required and discussions at the most senior level in all organisations is taking place.

Staying safe

The authority makes a good contribution to outcomes in this area. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has been successfully established with full endorsement from all partner agencies. A sub-group to the main board covers the issues across the whole of Berkshire to ensure maximum efficiency with neighbouring councils. A range of good quality and easily accessible multi-agency training is available and specific and targeted training for school governors is in place.

The Child Protection Register has been reviewed and a new electronic system is in place. This has increased the accuracy of the record and enables access 24 hours a day. Professionals are now able to undertake appropriate checks immediately where child protection issues are of concern.

The authority has taken action with regard to an identified weakness raised in the 2005 APA and has introduced an appropriate protocol to respond to children missing from home. This policy complements the existing one for children missing from care.

There has been significant involvement of children and young people in the development of the CYPP with over 5,000 young people responding to a survey on feeling safe. The authority has responded to this and is targeting resources to anti bullying initiatives both in and out of school. Young people themselves have identified a need to be safe from crime and anti social behaviour and again the authority has been able to secure investment from multi agency partners to take this forward. There is heightened awareness of the potential harm to children and young people in information and communication technology (ICT) environments and the LSCB is addressing this.

Active participation of looked after children is a priority and is evidenced by the number of young people encouraged to take part in their own reviews. However, the number remains lower than that of comparator councils. Good progress has been made in increasing the number of looked after children who chair their own reviews. In response to the request of

one young person, the essential paperwork has been redesigned to make it more user friendly. In addition, the authority has taken steps to ensure that looked after children from black and minority ethnic groups are proactively monitored. This extends to black and minority ethnic children on the Child Protection Register. Every looked after child has a named and qualified social worker. This is an improvement on the performance identified in 2005 and is better than the national performance. There is planned improvement on the timeliness of reviews of looked after children and some improvement has already been noted with the appointment of a permanent independent reviewing officer. There has also been a good improvement in the stability of placements over the last year.

There have been sustained improvements regarding initial assessments. These are now significantly better than that of comparator councils and the number and timeliness of core assessments has been brought into line with national averages. The increased improvement in core assessments within the required timeframe is evidence of sustained working partnerships across key partners.

There has been a significant drop in the rate of referrals of children in need to a figure significantly lower than comparator groups as a result of improved data collection. Following intervention by the authority the level of repeat referral is low and in line with other groups.

The authority is committed to preventing children becoming looked after and has had some success in this by the use of family group conferences. This is particularly evidenced by the number of children and young people continuing to live with their families under residence orders. There has been improvement in the numbers of looked after children in foster placements or placed for adoption but the number of children fostered by relatives or friends is low. While the number of number looked after children in residential accommodation appears high, placements are in line with the best interests of the children and this is acceptable. The recruitment of foster carers remains a priority for the authority with a reported increase in the numbers of carers recruited. The very recently appointed marketing officer is working positively to secure additional local foster placements.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution that the authority makes to ensuring that children and young people achieve at school and enjoy their education is good.

The authority analyses data well and has a clear view of the performance of its schools across all phases. The effective use of data by schools has improved and they receive good support from the authority in understanding the new Ofsted performance data.

The use of the Foundation Stage profile in schools and private and voluntary settings is effectively supported by officers. Teacher moderators are working with schools and a significant number of private and voluntary sector settings. The level of consistency across schools is good but other settings still need further support to ensure reliability in the use of the profile. There is good access by parents to an early years guidance document produced by the authority. Training and support for staff in the private and voluntary

sector is good and an increasing number of these staff are achieving Level 3 qualifications. The overall quality of funded nursery provision is good.

The authority has good strategies for improvement and for supporting vulnerable groups. At the pre-school age, education, health and social care work together in partnership with a voluntary organisation to provide a multi disciplinary assessment of children with a development delay. The registration scheme for children with disabilities has been revised and now gives parents and carers better access to information.

Standards in Key Stage 1 for writing, reading and mathematics have shown a further slight rise and are above the national average. The performance of boys reaching expected levels in reading and writing has increased significantly, whilst the number of girls reaching higher levels in mathematics has fallen but is still around the national average. At Key Stage 2 standards in English and mathematics are above the national average and in line with statistical neighbours. Science results have been particularly strong and are well above the national average. The progress between Key Stage 1 and 2 is satisfactory.

There are good processes in place to support children and young people at key transition points, including better exchange of information about vulnerable children between primary and secondary schools. Support assistants are effectively allocated to some children with severe or complex needs in the transition phase between primary and secondary school.

At Key Stage 3, standards are above the national average for English, mathematics and science, the latter having improved by 7% in the last year, placing Bracknell Forest in the top quartile for local authorities. Since 2001, the trend in Key Stage 3 results is positive and 2006 targets are in line to be met. In Key Stage 4 standards are in line with the national average but below statistical neighbours for pupils achieving 5+ A* - C GCSEs. Pupils achieving 5+ A* - G grades continues to be well above the national average. GCSE results in 2005 were the highest recorded and have improved sharply over the last two years, at a rate faster than the national average. The rise over the last four years has been steady. Pupils' progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 is just below the national average in only two schools. No schools are below the floor targets.

Educational achievements of looked after children have improved this year as a result of targeted intervention by the council. The performance of this group of children during their school life is also improving with all looked after children attaining their target grades at all key stages.

Behaviour in two schools at Key Stage 4 has resulted in permanent exclusions being higher than the national average. However, the number of permanent exclusions has been reducing over a three-year period and now remains high in only one secondary school. The team of secondary strategy consultants are appropriately focussing their work on assessment for learning and behaviour management in Key Stage 4. Pupils' attendance during the last year shows a further slight rise and continues to be in line with statistical neighbours and the national average. Unauthorised absence across schools is well below the national average. The attendance of looked after children has improved over the last year but is still lower than the national average.

No schools are in a category of concern following their section 5 inspections. However, one secondary school's sixth form has been judged to be inadequate. Appropriate and swift action has been taken by the new headteacher to ensure improvement.

The authority is working towards the Youth Justice Board target for young offenders being in full time education, training or employment with performance overall being within the target range

Making a positive contribution

Performance in this outcome area is good. There is effective multi-agency work in relation to youth offending. Examples of this include early intervention plans following a risk assessment of children known to offend. Looked after children are included in this initiative, with an assessment taking place as soon as the child becomes looked after, so that early intervention plans, if required, can be established. Final warnings, reprimands and convictions of looked after children remain high despite the significant input by the authority and partners. There are clear strategies for reducing crime and anti-social behaviour with targeted action by the council, social care staff and youth offending team.

The authority encourages children and young people to make a valuable contribution and it has established a number of groups to support this. The youth forum is also used as a consultation group to seek the views of children and young people in response to developments across authority departments. The forum has an active role in engaging with hard to reach groups to ensure representation reflects the diversity within Bracknell Forest.

The level of contact between young people and the youth service currently exceeds the national targets and plans are in place to improve further on this. Bracknell Forest has had a good record of involving young people aged 16 plus in volunteering. This has increased further this year with the introduction of the Millennium Volunteering Scheme and extending the service to those aged 14 plus.

Listening to children is achieved in part by a series of "Tell Us" conferences and targeted conferences for children with disabilities using the same format are in place.

Although the proportion of looked after children who contribute to their reviews remains at a satisfactory level and the number of reviews completed within the timescales has increased, the evidence from the performance data indicates that some young people are not sufficiently involved in the process.

Achieving economic well-being

The authority makes a good contribution to outcomes in this area.

Initial decisions about the future of post-16 provision in the authority have been effectively repositioned over the last year. Good progress has now been made in gaining the agreement of the majority of secondary schools in developing joint Level 2 courses. This

has significantly improved and rationalised the sixth form provision and, in particular, has resolved the issue of very small classes in the inadequate sixth form. A common prospectus across the schools has been appropriately developed. However, standards overall for 16-19 year olds are below the national average. A closer working relationship is needed with the Local Learning and Skills Council to ensure effective and broad vocational opportunities.

A high proportion of young people, including those from black and minority ethnic groups, remain in education and this is consistent with the emerging pattern of recent years. Greater emphasis has been placed on supporting young people not in education, training or employment which includes home visits, taster days in employment and training, and increasing the number of suitable vacancies. The outcome of this investment by the authority has been an overall improvement in the number of young people in employment and training when measured against national performance. This trend is also reflected for looked after children with performance for this group being very good; a significant improvement on last year's performance. There is an effective strategy to support teenage mothers aged 16-19 years in education, training or employment and appropriate aspirations to improve on the current 21% this year to 60% by 2010.

Support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. There continues to be a strong commitment to ensure that transition at key points in their schooling is smooth. Procedures for writing and reviewing personal education plans are now embedded within the culture and these plans are supported, as required, with transition plans.

Joint initiatives with the housing directorate have enabled the authority to address housing needs of a number of young people who may otherwise be at risk of homelessness. Following assessment, young people have access to supported lodging or housing and during the year significant numbers of young people have been helped. All care leavers at age 19 are assessed by the authority as living in suitable accommodation.

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

Service management and capacity to improve is good across much of children's services, with the trend of social care performance indicators largely showing improvement. Members, officers and the workforce have a strong, shared vision of the need to improve further the outcomes for children. Despite challenges, there are robust partnerships with both statutory and voluntary sector agencies and these are used to drive improvement across the authority area. The work of partners in producing a coherent CYPP is good; it will be further strengthened when additional measurable success criteria are in place against all actions. The authority is confident that standards in schools will continue to rise and that the partnership with the LLSC and local colleges will significantly improve the post-16 provision and outcomes for young people. This confidence is realistic given that the authority has already demonstrated its capacity to improve in a number of areas, for example in raising standards at Key Stage 4.

The authority has identified some barriers, which potentially could hinder progress. These include issues which are specific to the authority, such as attitudes to learning within the

borough and the high costs of some social care placements for children, as well as perceived external pressures concerning funding. Along with a number of authorities, the impact of the new health authority and PCT is not yet known.

Capacity is assisted by well developed performance management systems at strategic and operational level. The senior team is well established with a number of key staff being in post for some time and this stability is reflected throughout the organisation. There is an effective recruitment and retention strategy and staff care packages ensure that adequate staff are available, and financial management is robust. The authority has good performance in recruiting and retaining staff within education and will be using the success of this to inform its recruitment and retention of social care staff, which at present is still of some concern.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continued reduction in teenage conception rates • improvement in health screening of looked after children • good early initiatives relating to childhood obesity • joint working arrangements with the PCT. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engage all partners in dialogue to resolve the CAMHS service level agreement as soon as is practicable.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>robust child protection procedures and extensive training for all staff and multi-agency training</i> • <i>safeguarding children and young people in the use of ICT in schools</i> • <i>impact of marketing officer for securing additional fostering placements</i> • <i>improvement in stability of placements for 2005/06.</i> 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>engaging partners and key stakeholders in approaches to avoid the need for children to become looked after.</i>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>educational achievement of looked after children</i> • <i>above national average standards in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.</i> 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>further improve standards at Key Stage 4 and the progress made by children from Key Stage 2 to 4.</i> • <i>further improvements in school attendance of looked after children.</i>

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • well established youth forum • positive dialogue and engagement for children with disabilities and their parents and carers • 'Tell-us' conferences providing consultation opportunities for children and young people with disabilities • increasing numbers of 14+ young people volunteering. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce final warnings, reprimands and convictions of looked after children • further increase numbers of looked after children participating in reviews.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • young care leavers in employment, training or education • high number of young people post-16 who remain in education including black and ethnic minority groups • common sixth form prospectus between secondary schools • agreement between most secondary schools to rationalise sixth form provision. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improvement in post-16 standards in schools • further improve the flexibility of the curriculum 14-19.
<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • performance management embedded in culture of organisation • willingness on the part of staff to engage with workforce restructuring in a phased manner and to meet emerging needs • good support, management of absenteeism and response to housing needs for staff • good partnership working with external agencies and voluntary sector. 	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce costs of social care placements • recruitment and retention of social care staff.

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

- Standards in Key Stage 4 and post-16.
- Appropriateness and measurability of performance indicators in the CYPP.
- Increase the number of available foster placements.

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



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