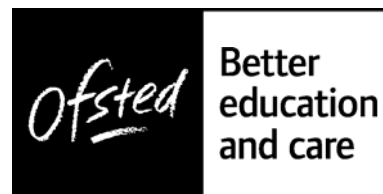


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Making Social Care  
Better for People



Mrs Margaret Blenkinsop  
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**1 November 2006**

Dear Mrs Blenkinsop

**2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BOLTON METROPOLITAN 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**

| 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. | 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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1

| 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                      |

Bolton Metropolitan Borough County was awarded a four-star rating by the Audit Commission in its 2005 comprehensive performance assessment (CPA), and the council was assessed as improving well. The council's social care services have a track record of strong performance, and the Children's Services Department established in September 2005 has put in place comprehensive plans to deliver improved services to all children and young people. The council has continued to build on the strengths noted in last year's APA, and has addressed or is working to address all the identified areas for improvement. Good outcomes for children and young people are already evident in most services areas, and the council predicts improved education results this summer. The children and young people's plan (CYPP) is based on a thorough needs analysis and wide consultation, and sets out a comprehensive work plan which includes integrated working in many areas. Overall capacity for improvement is good.

## **Being healthy**

The council makes a good contribution towards improving the health of children and young people in the area. It is engaged with other partners such as the Primary Care Trust (PCT) in promoting healthy lifestyles. Some initiatives form part of the local area agreement, for example the project to tackle childhood obesity. Ninety one per cent of schools already participate in the Healthy Schools programme which provides a coordinated approach to health and well-being, and there are plans to extend this to all schools.

The Children's Services Department's substance misuse service, Project 360, works with a range of partners including health services and police to tackle substance misuse. The council has been successful in identifying those who need treatment and retaining them on programmes. Challenges faced are referrals increasing year on year and young people moving into drug misuse at a younger age. The council is taking action to respond to these trends, and this is identified as a priority in the CYPP. Training is being rolled out to staff across children's services to support early intervention. The council anticipates that this will initially generate more referrals but, through appropriate intervention, lead to a reduction in the number of young people involved in substance misuse.

Teenage pregnancy action plans have been commended by the regional teenage pregnancy coordinator for Government Office North West as appropriate for reducing teenage conceptions and supporting young parents. Conception rates for under 16 year olds are reported to be better than the national average. However, under-18 conception rates remain an area for improvement. The latest data available (2004) show there is no sustained reduction: in fact rates are above the 1998 baseline in contrast to data for similar councils and the England average where rates have decreased by 10%. Since 2004 a full time teenage pregnancy worker has been appointed.

Sex and relationships education (SRE) forms part of a strong programme of personal, health and social education (PHSE) in primary schools. Delivery of SRE and PHSE is less well developed in secondary schools. A consultation exercise with young people revealed that SRE was not well received. Young people have helped to redesign the way SRE is taught and the new programme will commence in secondary schools from September

2006. Targeted work with vulnerable groups including training for foster carers and residential social workers is being delivered in partnership between social care, the looked after children's nurse and the teenage pregnancy team. The team provides SRE in a range of work settings and works with the youth offending team and the youth intervention support programme.

A review of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) conducted by National Children's Homes found high levels of satisfaction among service users. The council is on target to achieve a comprehensive CAMHS by January 2007. This is ahead of most councils. A range of provision is being developed to extend support for young people, ranging from basic to higher levels of intervention. This includes support through the Bolton Lads and Girls club and the Extended Schools initiative, where schools provide a range of activities and services beyond the school day to the wider community.

A dedicated senior nurse for looked after children coordinates the involvement of health care professionals and plays a vital role in maintaining the health of this group of children. The council's performance in arranging annual health and dental checks for looked after children continues to be very good, and exceeds that of similar councils. The 'LAC and CAMHS' team; a multi-disciplinary team for looked after children, includes dedicated posts for a half time clinical psychologist, a half time educational psychologist, and a senior social worker for emotional health. This structure provides for a holistic assessment of the needs of looked after children.

## **Staying safe**

The council makes a good contribution to promoting and securing the safety of children and young people. There have been improvements in some aspects from an already high level, and many examples of better performance than in similar councils. The main areas for development at this stage are further exploration of the impact on children and young people from the black and minority ethnic community, and tackling the high number of children with care orders who are placed with parents.

Excellent partnership working arrangements ensure agencies work together to safeguard children at all levels of vulnerability. There is a focus on early preventative work in joint working plans. There are good systems and procedures for the protection of children and young people, and thresholds for intervention are well understood and implemented. This is reflected in the consistent levels of performance reported. The number of children on the Child Protection Register has remained relatively stable for the past four years, and is in line with the rate for similar councils. Rigorous monitoring has ensured that all child protection cases have been reviewed on time. The number of children who have been on the Child Protection Register for more than two years is small which is good, and timescales for completion of initial and core assessments are excellent. All children on the Child Protection Register have a social worker.

The number of looked after children has been stable in recent years and is in line with similar councils, and placement stability is good. 99% of looked after children have a named and qualified social worker and over 90% of children with disability aged 14 or

older have a transition plan. Both of these measures are better than the average for similar councils.

During the year the family placement team was split into separate specialist fostering and adoption teams. There has been substantial investment in the fostering service to increase fostering fees, develop recruitment and improve placement choice. This is part of the overall strategy to reduce out-of-borough placements. There has been investment in additional support for kinship carers and the council has continued to increase the proportion of looked after children in kinship care, which is now well above the average for similar councils.

Information from inspection reports of the council's children's homes, its adoption service and fostering service gives a positive picture. For example, the fostering inspection noted arrangements that are in place to promote educational attainment and work that has taken place to make sure the regulations and standards are met, resulting in good outcomes for children and young people. There is some evidence that staff records do not comply with all the requirements of the relevant regulations for fostering and children's homes.

The high rates of referrals and re-referrals and the comparatively low rates of initial assessments and core assessments completed were identified as areas for improvement in the 2005 APA. The council undertook a review including regional comparisons and found differences in recording practice. Work has been taking place during the year to ensure activity is recorded consistently, and managers now routinely monitor the quality of assessments. This is having a positive effect on performance, with improvement reflected in fourth quarter reporting, and to a lesser extent in the figures for the whole year. The council reasonably expects that, as the full impact of the review is felt in the coming year, rates of referrals, re-referrals, initial assessments, and core assessments will come into line with other councils. Bolton is piloting the common assessment framework (CAF), and contact, referral, and assessment records will link to this process.

The 2005 APA identified the uptake of services by the black and minority ethnic population as an area for development. The number of black and minority ethnic children on the Child Protection Register is very low compared with figures for similar councils and the national figure, and is lower than in the previous year. The council is taking steps to investigate this issue and has commissioned an independent researcher to conduct a comprehensive review to be completed by September 2006.

The number of looked after children placed with parents has increased over the last three years with approximately 19% of all looked after children now placed in this setting, which is twice the national rate. The council is developing a strategy to tackle these high numbers.

## Enjoying and achieving

The contribution the council's services make to ensuring children and young people achieve at school and enjoy their education and leisure activities is adequate overall. However, there are strengths in a number of key areas including good support for early years education. On inspection, early years settings were found to be good in the main with regard to both care and education. Training is responsive and targeted at areas of relative weaknesses. Early years provision is suitably distributed across the borough enabling access for young children and carers. Almost all three year olds receive their grant entitlement.

The management of provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities remains a strength. The review of pupil referral unit provision is leading to a well considered restructure which places management responsibility within a new and fast developing cluster framework for secondary schools. In almost all the schools inspected this year pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were found to be making at least good progress. There are a small number of schools in Ofsted's categories of concern. These receive timely and rigorous support from the authority, and monitoring indicates satisfactory progress.

The council provides strong support for arts and cultural development; for instance, through its music service, collaborative projects with professional artists and its links with the Octagon Theatre. The development of a broad range of opportunities for physical education is effectively supported by two School Sports Partnerships.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in the primary phase but the council recognises that improvements are required in the rate of progress made by pupils at secondary level. Results at Key Stages 1 and 2 are in line with national averages and the performance of similar councils. The slight fall in standards at Key Stage 1 noted last year has been arrested and there has been a small improvement in results in mathematics. At Key Stage 2 there has also been a reversal of the previous dip in results in mathematics and science. The year-on-year rise in English scores has been sustained. While standards at both Key Stages 3 and 4 are in line with those of similar councils, they remain below the national average. There has been a small rise in results at Key Stage 3 in English and science but a slight decline in those for mathematics. The rate of improvement is broadly in line with that found both nationally and for similar councils. Following a period of static performance, there has been a rise in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE level although the proportion gaining at least one GCSE level pass remained steady. Results for looked after children are mixed. The proportion of Year 11 pupils who have been looked after for a year or more sitting at least one GCSE or equivalent examination is broadly in line with the national figure and that for similar councils. However, the proportion of care leavers gaining at least one GCSE level pass has fallen from the previously acceptable level. The proportion gaining five or more A\* to C grades remains at half the national average. There are sound plans to establish a dedicated team to support the education of looked after children.

Attendance is satisfactory overall. There has been a modest improvement in the attendance of looked after children which is now at an acceptable level. In primary schools the rate of exclusion is below the national average; it is broadly average in secondary schools. No pupils were excluded from special schools.

### **Making a positive contribution**

The council's contribution to outcomes in this area is good. There is a well embedded culture of consultation and collaboration across the borough, from school level decision making by pupils to strategic planning at council level. This takes account of the views of a wide range of stakeholders, including young people, which are reflected in the comprehensive needs analysis and activities in the CYPP. Realising that their views are taken seriously has spurred young people in two secondary schools to build on their experience of Bolton's Future Search visioning event and take it into their own communities in order to bring about improvements. Confidence in being heard has been reinforced by the authority's support for the Bin the Binge campaign. This was instigated and developed by a small group of Asian young people as a consequence of their concerns about the misuse of alcohol.

The Youth Service has built well on the progress reported last year. There has been an increase in the number of young people reached and the service exceeded its target. A robust system for carefully targeting work in response to the needs of each locality has been established. A rigorous approach to recording and accrediting outcomes for young people has been introduced. As a consequence of a more effective system for recording and evaluating performance, the service is able to demonstrate success clearly, for instance in its work with Asian young people.

There has been a marked decrease in recidivism rates overall and a reduction in the number of looked after young people committing offences to a level that is lower than that of similar councils. The percentage of supervised juveniles in education, employment or training has been maintained at well above both the national average and that for similar councils. All young people leaving care have an allocated worker and a pathway plan.

The percentage of looked after children who participated in their case review is excellent. At 96%, performance is substantially better than the national average and the figures for similar councils.

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

The council's contribution to the economic well-being of children and young people is adequate. Performance at A/AS level and equivalents has continued to improve but remains below both the national average and that of similar councils overall. The performance of schools with sixth forms, above average on both measures, has also continued to rise. In addition, the recent inspection of Bolton Community College noted an increase in success rates broadly in line with the national position for learners aged 16 to 18. A higher proportion of young people are not in education, training or employment than found nationally. However, the provision for young mothers is particularly successful

in helping them to continue learning formally and in raising their aspirations. Special school provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities aged 16 and over is a strength. The authority is piloting the activity agreement to evaluate the impact of financial incentives on post-16 participation.

Working collaboratively with a wide range of partners, the authority has developed an innovative strategy for improving the quality, range and accessibility of provision for 14 to 19 year olds. Rapid progress has been made in putting in place the structures required to deliver this. New geographical clusters of providers have begun to extend the options available to young people aged 14 to 16. The potential to expand the remit of the clusters and to distribute responsibility to stakeholders in the local areas has been built on immediately, with the recent reorganisation of the pupil referral units.

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

The CYPP sets out a vision for children's services within the council's ambition for Shaping Future Services. This is clearly articulated by the leadership, and partners are signed up to the objectives and targets. The plan incorporates a thorough analysis of need and proposes a more responsive approach to service delivery, focusing on the particular needs of localities, with locality working seen as a key means of securing targeted and seamless services. All partners engaged with the community in wide ranging consultation, including a successful event entitled Future Search at the beginning of the planning process, and consultation is included in the planning cycle. A participation strategy is now being drawn up, intended to extend the participation of children and young people in the design of new services.

The council demonstrates ambition in its management of children's services. There is a history of innovative working and involvement in cutting edge projects and pilots, for instance as a pathfinder trust for children with disabilities. The council is currently piloting initiatives such as the youth card, information sharing and assessment, and the common assessment framework. The council's trailblazer status supports the Department for Education and Skills with its National Index Project.

The council is developing a commissioning strategy in conjunction with its children's trust arrangements. This forms part of its local area agreement. Partners have aligned budgets that support interventions to meet priority targets, and integrated commissioning has already had some impact on services, with benefits for the provider as well as the commissioners and service users. However, there is further work to do before this commissioning strategy becomes firmly embedded in practice.

A Children's Workforce Development strategy has been agreed which takes account of the needs of all services. In order that staff can meet these needs and the new wider roles, children's services is organising training sessions for managers. Partnerships are in place to develop national qualifications and vocational pathways into qualifications linked to children's services. Common induction standards in children's social care will be introduced by September 2006. The council has significantly increased its spending on social care

training and above average numbers of social work and residential staff have relevant qualifications. It is a priority to recruit and retain front line staff and first line managers in children's social care. The council has been successful this year in improving staff retention, reducing vacancy rates and sickness absence, and is performing better than similar councils on these measures.

The council has robust performance management systems in place. Children's services have an integrated planning cycle that external partners have signed up to. In social care, performance management is well established and in education the systems and culture have improved markedly. Investment in information technology systems is taking place with plans to integrate systems to facilitate information sharing with partners.

Political scrutiny arrangements are evident. The executive member, although recently appointed, has considerable relevant experience. Members have demonstrated commitment to children's services authorising substantial additional funding for the fostering service.

Overall, the council has good capacity to make further improvements to its services for children and young people.

### 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>• CAMHS</li> <li>• health assessments and dental checks of looked after children</li> <li>• the work of Project 360.</li> </ul>   | <p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teenage conception rates.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• timescales for initial and core assessments</li> <li>• management of the child protection system</li> <li>• placement stability and placement choice for looked after children</li> <li>• support to care leavers and children with disabilities.</li> </ul> | <p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• take up of services by the black and minority ethnic community</li> <li>• high level of children on care orders placed with parents.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good early years provision</li> <li>• rigorous and timely support for schools in Ofsted categories</li> <li>• support for arts, culture and sport.</li> </ul>  | <p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• results at Key Stage 3 and the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE</li> <li>• the progress pupils make at Key Stages 3 and 4</li> </ul> <p>the educational attainment of looked after children.</p> |



|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• wide ranging consultation with children and young people</li> <li>• youth service provision of activities so that young people can achieve recorded and accredited outcomes</li> <li>• the improved match of youth service work to the needs of localities</li> <li>• a marked decrease in recidivism</li> <li>• participation of looked after children in reviews.</li> </ul> | <p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• further develop and embed the youth service's system for managing information.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support for young mothers (Care to Learn)</li> <li>• special school provision for young people post-16</li> <li>• development of 14 to 19 cluster partnerships.</li> </ul>  | <p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• performance at A/AS level and equivalent</li> <li>• rates of post-16 participation in education, training or employment.</li> </ul> |
| <p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• partnership working</li> <li>• good plans based on thorough assessment of needs</li> <li>• track record of innovative working</li> <li>• workforce planning</li> <li>• performance management.</li> </ul>   | <p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• further development of commissioning strategy.</li> </ul>   |

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

- Records of referrals and assessments in children's social care.
- Progress made by pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Participation rates post-16 in education, employment and training.
- Attainment at A/AS level and equivalents.
- Educational achievement of looked after children.

We confirm that the children's services grade will provide the score for the children and young people service block in the CPA and will be published to the Audit Commission. The social care judgement is for CSCI information only.

Yours sincerely



**FLO HADLEY**

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**JONATHAN PHILLIPS**

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