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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Mr Ayre

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

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 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

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

Bath and North East Somerset Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements for children and young people. The majority of services demonstrate that they are improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people. Partnerships with health and other agencies are good and make a significant contribution to improving services. Progress since last year's APA has been good, although some areas for improvement persist. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) was devised with a good level of consultation with stakeholders and sets out the authority's priorities clearly, showing that it has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Good strategic planning is ensuring that improvements, when achieved, are sustainable and based on clear policy and robust procedures. The authority's capacity to improve its services further is good.

Being healthy

The council makes a good contribution towards improving the health of children and young people in the area.

There are strong partnerships and close working relationships with health which are evident in a range of new and developing initiatives. A specialist mental health service for children with disabilities has been established and an emotional support service has been extended. The Child and Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is developing systems for evaluating effectiveness and new projects have built-in evaluation processes. Although CAMHS' waiting lists have not been further reduced this year, improved access to the rapid assessment and interventions service has been maintained. It is a council priority to develop further preventative and early intervention initiatives to reduce waiting times. Teenage conception rates are low and continue to decrease. However, the council has not met government targets in this respect.

The number of schools achieving Healthy Schools status is high, exceeding the council's targets. The programme of early interventions, which is being extended through the children's centres, produces a good range of opportunities for children and families to access information and support.

The health needs of vulnerable groups of children are addressed. Looked after children's health needs are addressed primarily through the dedicated support of a nurse and doctor. However, this year there was a decrease in the numbers of looked after children having timely health and dental checks. The health needs of children with disabilities are addressed through holistic assessment and health action plans for older young people. Black and minority ethnic (BME) children's specific needs are now starting to be addressed, which is an improvement since last year's annual performance assessment. There are two new initiatives to analyse the needs of BME children relating to palliative care and for children with learning disabilities and mental health needs.

Staying safe

Outcomes for children in this area are good. The council has established its Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) with a detailed work plan for the year. There is good

inter-agency collaboration for child protection training. Child protection practice continues to be sound and the authority has maintained its standard for completing all reviews of children on the register within timescales and allocating them social workers. There are comprehensive auditing systems both within teams and via the safeguarding board subgroup to ensure that thresholds are maintained and to assure the quality of child protection practice. The maintenance of the register is robust with a good decrease in re-registrations this year.

The council has recognised that there is a high proportion of BME children on the Child Protection Register and a high proportion of children in need are from BME communities. However, the numbers are small and the council is clear about the children's specific needs.

The council is targeting schools where bullying has been identified as an issue. It is monitoring the impact of its policies through surveying children's opinions.

Both the percentage of initial assessments started within seven days of referral and the proportion of core assessments undertaken this year have increased well. However, the timely completion of core assessments has been less effective, partly due to staffing shortages.

The council is clear about its corporate parenting responsibilities and has a corporate members parenting group. Stable placements are maintained for looked after children, particularly for those accommodated for over two years. However, targets for further improvement in this area are not sufficiently challenging. There is a strong focus on fostering with an increased use of residence orders reducing the numbers of kinship fostering. Adoption rates are very low and the council's own target was not met this year. This is expected to improve in the next year and the council has worked hard to change attitudes to enable more children to have adoptive families.

The range of placements is being developed. There is an increase in therapeutic foster placements. A new post, funded jointly with the Primary Care Trust (PCT), to explore good commissioning and brokerage of new services has been developed. Reviews for looked after children are not always conducted in a timely manner and performance is lower than the national average. Good support services have been developed in partnership with the voluntary sector to address the identified priority of support to families and children who live with domestic abuse.

The council knows the whereabouts of children and young people in the area through its effective tracking systems. Any potential gaps are being explored through the LSCB.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good. Standards and achievement are on an upward trend at all key stages. Support for schools through the Primary and Secondary Strategies is good. Children are supported well in schools in the early years, enabling them to meet the early learning goals. However, the contribution of some early years settings to the quality of

provision in enjoying and achieving is satisfactory rather than good. The council is taking appropriate action to improve the quality in this area. Standards and achievement at Key Stage 1 have improved since last year when they were noted as an area for improvement. In reading and writing, they are now well above the national average and above the average for similar authorities. In mathematics, they are above the national average. At Key Stages 2 and 3, attainment is above that nationally and in similar authorities. At Key Stage 4, the proportion attaining five or more GCSEs at A*-C is well above that nationally and above similar authorities. The proportion of looked after children achieving satisfactorily at GCSE is low in comparison with this group nationally, but satisfactory given their circumstances and starting points. The council has identified that the performance of the pupils from BME backgrounds is unsatisfactory and it is developing more systematic methods of providing them with support.

The number of exclusions from school remains relatively high both at primary and secondary schools. However, the number has reduced significantly this year and the proportion of exclusions from vulnerable, minority and ethnic groups has decreased markedly. Good systems, procedures and protocols have been agreed with schools for dealing with challenging behaviour and this is beginning to reduce the levels of fixed-term and permanent exclusions. The capacity to improve in this area is good. Attendance has improved and is now better than the national average in primary schools and in line with national averages in secondary schools.

There are low numbers of schools in categories of concern and the council provides these with a sound level of support. The council has a good knowledge of the quality of its schools and provides them with appropriate and targeted challenge and support.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. The council has made good progress in involving young people in the devising and implementation of the CYPP. A large proportion of young people, including looked after and children with disabilities, were involved in the consultation process and in prioritising actions. It is presently devising ways of ensuring that these stakeholders contribute effectively to the plan's evaluation. The council is increasingly seeking the views of young people when monitoring the impact of its provision and this is having a beneficial impact on services.

A number of projects support vulnerable young people effectively, including special support services for young carers. The council has worked well to ensure that the views and needs of minority groups are considered. Advocacy services are being used well to help young people, including young people with disabilities, to express their views clearly and make a positive contribution to their welfare.

The rate of first-time offending has increased this year, but there has been a good reduction in rates of reoffending. The proportion of looked after children who received a final warning, reprimand or conviction has increased.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are adequate, with some good features. Family support services are performing well. The number of care leavers in education, training and employment has increased significantly and the accommodation capacity for care leavers has also improved. The number of direct payments for carers of children with disabilities and young people with disabilities has doubled since last year.

A full-time strategy manager to develop the 14 to 19 provision is in post, jointly funded by the council and the Local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC). The authority has worked well with the LLSC, the youth service, Connexions and other stakeholders to improve provision in this area. The number of young people remaining in education, employment and training is high. The collaboration between the LLSC and the council in the strategic planning for 14 to 19 education is beginning to have a positive impact. There is now a broader range of courses available at Key Stage 4. Although these are still predominantly targeted at those with relatively low prior attainment, there has been progress in ensuring that more vocational courses are provided for the more able and there is a significant improvement in this respect since last year. However, the vocational options do not yet cater for the full range of young people and are not accessible to them all.

The quality of education provided for 16 to 19 year olds remains adequate. There has been no improvement in the satisfactory achievement and standards reported in the last APA. However, the council is making sound progress in formulating the plans for the pattern of future provision in the area, involving key stakeholders in the process. The plans for a future 14 to 19 vocational centre are now well advanced, and schools and other institutions are involved in devising the necessary area-wide planning for 14 to 19 provision. Although the plans are well conceived and procedures are sound, it is as yet too early for them to have had a significant impact on standards.

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

The council demonstrates good capacity to improve. It has clear plans and priorities for the future. These are developed through wide consultation and good involvement of young people and partners in an effective Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership. The council and the PCT have decided to integrate children's, adults and public health services through an Integration Project Board.

The CYPP prioritises the work of the council and the delivery plans form an effective basis for the work of the children's service. The focus this year has been on developing collaboration, which has been successfully achieved.

The council is able to demonstrate good partnership working and the close working relationship with the PCT has had positive benefits in the provision of a flexible service and good outcomes for children. Pooled resources are being used imaginatively to improve the range of services and commissioning practice.

The council has demonstrated progress in all key stages in education and in some areas of social care in which performance was weaker last year. There are some remaining areas where performance is not good. However, the council shows an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and is approaching problems in both strategic and systematic ways. There is financial pressure on the council but budgets are realistic and well managed. Unit costs are low and there is a proactive approach to ensuring value for money. The authority is approaching the improvement agenda with a focus on sustainable and systematic change.

Performance management is well established with clear monitoring and accountability, although target setting needs to be sharper. The authority has demonstrated good use of quality auditing.

There has been a high turnover of staff and periods when there were high numbers of vacancies in social care. The council has identified actions to reduce the problem and the workforce strategy has been revised effectively. Vacancies have now been filled and there will be a full review of the impact of the new childcare team structure.

The council is approaching the improvement agenda with a concentration on sustainable and systematic change and is making good progress on ensuring there are solid foundations for this.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • joint working between agencies • development of new projects and initiatives • proportion of schools achieving Healthy Schools status. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduction in CAMHS service waiting lists • increase numbers of looked after children having timely health and dental checks.

<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improved rate and timeliness of initial assessments • sound child protection practice, well audited • good stability of placements and increasing range. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase the number of children adopted • improve the timeliness of core assessments • improve the timeliness of reviews for looked after children.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good and improving standards at Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • further reduction of the levels of fixed-term and permanent exclusions from school • the quality of some early years provision • the attainment of looked after children and those from BME backgrounds.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involvement of young people in developing the work of the authority • the use of advocacy services. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rates of first-time offending • proportion of looked after children receiving final warnings, reprimands and convictions.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family support services and provision for care leavers • increased proportion of care leavers in education, employment and training. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • breadth of vocational options has improved but does not cater for all young people aged 14 to 19 • standards and achievement at 16 to 19.
<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partnerships with other agencies • clear identification of priorities • involvement of stakeholders in planning and evaluation. 	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting of targets in social care • recruitment and retention of social care staff.

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

- Breadth of vocational options for young people aged 14 to 19.
- The level of exclusions from school.
- Offending rates of looked after young people.
- CAMHS development and outcomes.
- Quality of early years provision.

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 information only.

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY

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JONATHAN PHILLIPS

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