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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Mr Harris

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY 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 awarded ¹
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.	2

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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

Hertfordshire social care services provides the minimum requirements for maintaining and improving the outcomes for children and young people but has a good capacity to improve. The council's services make a good contribution in helping children and young people to be healthy. Services ensure children and young people's achievement and well-being is good. The Children and Young Persons Plan (CYPP) takes good account of the views of children and young people and demonstrates good levels of partnership working, which continue to be a strength. Children's social care services are only adequate, in particular around the performance on both initial and core assessments. However, the immediate action taken by the council to secure improvement must be sustained. Children and young people are enabled and encouraged to attend and enjoy school although the absence rate for looked after children is high. This performance judgement means that your authority is regarded as coasting for children's social care services.

Being healthy

The authority makes a good contribution towards improving the health of children and young people in the area. The partnership between key services continues to be effective in promoting healthy lifestyles. Coordination has improved between services since the authority review in autumn 2005.

National health targets are met in most areas and exceeded in some. Overall progress in reducing teenage pregnancy continues to be impressive particularly in Stevenage; an area of relatively high deprivation. However, there is a need to refocus on the districts where teenage conception rates are increasing. An increase in the reported incidents of sexually transmitted diseases is being addressed with increased training and guidance provided for pupils in secondary schools. The proportion of schools participating in the national healthy schools programme continues to be high. Ofsted section 5 inspections noted 90% of schools were good at enabling learners to be healthy. A ratio of 1 in 5 children are overweight when they start school; although this is better than the national average further progress is sought through the multi-agency healthy lifestyles strategy and the CYPP.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) progress continues in line with the national targets. Waiting times in CAMHS have reduced from six months to two months. Referrals within youth offending to CAMHS are all met within target timescales. Progress towards a comprehensive CAMHS is reasonable; however, progress in providing services for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been slow and will not be delivered within the next year until commissioning arrangements move from the adult's trust to the children's trusts. The council face an NHS budget reduction of £260k, with a loss of six posts. However, tier 3 services will be protected but tier 2 services waiting lists are likely to increase. The dedicated counselling service for care leavers, funded by CAMHS, achieved good results.

Substance misuse services for young people under 18 have been less well developed than comparators; however, a new tier 3 service will shortly begin operation. The timescale targets for assessment and early intervention of treatment are met successfully.

Performance on the health needs of looked after children, which was a concern in the APA 2005, has now improved to a good level. The service has three dedicated nurses who work effectively but there is no designated doctor.

Staying safe

The authority adequately promotes and serves the safety of children and young people but there are some significant areas for improvement. Numbers on the Child Protection Register are in line with comparators, although there are issues around registrations and the numbers being conferenced which require further analysis. All child protection cases continue to be allocated to a qualified social worker. Adoptions have improved to a good level from last year although the three year average is slightly lower than comparators. The overall balance of placements remains good but more local specialist teenage placements are needed. Placement stability is very good and long-term stability is acceptable.

The results of section 5 inspection continue to be positive in terms of pupil's care, welfare and guidance; all were satisfactory and 60% reported to be good or better.

Measures to address bullying continue to have a high profile in the authority, although there has been a significant increase in reported cases. During section 5 inspections pupils consistently express confidence with the way in which schools deal with bullying. Primary support bases are having a positive impact on exclusions; primary and secondary exclusion rates are close to, and in some instances, below the national average.

Social services referral rates and trend growth are higher than comparators (52% higher, 25% higher respectively) although repeat referrals are lower than comparators. It is acknowledged that the referral volume is massive and the reasons for this have not been fully understood by the authority; it is likely to be a range of factors in the operation of the client services team. There were no published eligibility criteria until September 2005. The decision made to boost the professionally qualified component of the client services is sensible and offers a prospect of substantially reducing the demand for assessment by more effective screening and diversion to appropriate services. The analysis and evaluation of the trends in agency referrals needs to be sharper to identify where problems can be more effectively dealt with at source. However, the completion of assessments within timescales remains poor and represents an area of serious underperformance. The reasons for this have been thoroughly analysed and the decisions made to restructure children's fieldwork arrangements offer some prospect of improved performance next year. Reviews of child protection cases are at 100% and duration on the Child Protection Register has fallen from 8.3 to 6.3 months. Review, registrations and de-registrations are all good.

This has been a difficult year for children's social care performance and measurable progress has been limited. However the department has realistically reviewed and addressed shortcomings and there is confidence that the source of the problems has been identified. The action taken to involve elected members has been impressive in relation to

the scrutiny of fundamental shortcomings. The authority is keen to have external assistance in monitoring children's service performance.

Enjoying and achieving

The authority makes a good contribution towards ensuring children and young people achieve at school and enjoy their education and leisure activities, with some notable strengths. The overall quality of early years provision is good; results are above the national average and calculation is consistently strong.

Results at the end of Key Stage 1 continue to be above the national average and those of statistical neighbours. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics has improved. A similar situation exists at the end of Key Stage 2 with pupil performance above what would be expected in English, mathematics and science for the second year in succession. Well targeted support via the Primary Leadership and Intensive Support programmes and these have been particularly effective in lower achieving schools. The authority makes good use of advanced skills and leading teachers and school improvement advisers deploy national strategy consultants very effectively. There is clear evidence of support helping to improve standards.

At the end of Key Stage 3 performance in all core subjects is above national averages and the performance of similar authorities although there remains some variation between schools. At the end of Key Stage 4 more pupils achieve five good GCSE passes than in similar authorities and nationally. Similarly, the proportion who achieves at least one GCSE pass remains above such comparators. Only one authority school remains below the 30% GCSE floor target. The value added by the weakest secondary schools shows some improvement, although more is required. The most successful schools clearly demonstrate good, and sometimes, outstanding achievement.

Post-16 achievement is lower than at GCSE but is satisfactory overall. The value added by those schools that are able to support large sixth forms is good. The increased effectiveness of the post-16 consortium is addressing the difficulties experienced by smaller schools; section 5 inspections confirm the higher standards achieved where collaborative arrangements are well established. These arrangements form the basis of the authority's 14-19 strategy and have improved vocational and alternative curriculum provision, a concern noted in the 2005 performance assessment.

The attainment of the relatively small proportion of minority ethnic groups is generally satisfactory. The authority is seeking to improve performance of some groups, particularly the children of travellers, Black African and Caribbean communities where the achievement of boys falls behind that of girls. The percentage of looked after children entered for GCSE examinations continues to rise and the proportion who gained one GCSE A*-G grade and five higher grade GCSE was above the national average for the third year. Eighteen looked after children secured a place at university in 2005; the authority support for accommodation and tuition costs has been important to securing this equality of opportunity.

Most children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have their learning needs met in mainstream schools. Schools speak well of the support they receive from the authority's specialist support teams. Pupils in special schools make good progress. The authority has opened three Key Stage 4 learning centres and plans for three more are well advanced. These will provide multi-agency support for vulnerable pupils.

Attendance in primary and secondary schools has improved and generally compares favourably with national figures and those for similar authorities. The attendance rate of looked after children has declined and needs to be addressed. The proportion of excluded pupils who are provided with alternative provision is below the median level for England; the authority plans to address this issue through the multi-agency work of the recently commissioned Key Stage 4 Learning Centres. The growth in extended schools, crèches, out of school care, breakfast clubs and holiday play schemes has been maintained. There are good recreational and voluntary learning opportunities for children and young people.

Support for schools placed in formal categories of concern by Ofsted is good. Schools are being removed from these categories more quickly than in the past. Under the new section 5 inspection procedures, fewer schools than nationally have been placed in a category of concern.

Making a positive contribution

The authority makes a good contribution towards ensuring children and young people contribute positively. The youth justice service has been judged as one of the best performers nationally and the work is closely aligned with CSF in the development of the Children's Trust.

Offending by looked after children has increased but a planned reduction is sought by the establishment of stronger police protocols around intervention in residential care situations and through the existing restorative justice procedures. Some 90% of young people who offend are in full-time education.

Good support and information is provided for young carers, this includes: specialist and integrated play schemes; respite care for disabled children and their families at one of the residential units; and an outreach service. Children in care have good opportunities for cultural and leisure activities; for example, free instrumental lessons are provided by the authority music service. GO East considers that Hertfordshire has a very effective children's fund programme delivering a range of preventative services. The authority engages well with the children's fund and the latter is a key player in the development of children's trust arrangements.

The participation of looked after children in reviews has improved substantially but is still low in comparison with similar councils. The problems are concentrated particularly within the 4-8 year old group and it is proposed to address these deficiencies through a stronger role for IRO's and training, leading to increased involvement by foster carers. All young people are encouraged to participate through the youth forum as well as local and regional events. School councils operate in almost all schools. All secondary schools have sixth

forms and there are good collaborative arrangements with further education institutions and employers. Participation rates are high and the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training is low.

Achieving economic well-being

The authority makes a good contribution to children and young people's economic well-being. There has been excellent progress in developing the second phase of children's centres and the first inspection of a first phase centre has been very positive. Primary support bases are now in place in nine schools, covering all areas in the authority; they are having a positive impact on reducing exclusions.

The local authority's opening of Key Stage 4 learning centres to address the noted weakness in the attendance of looked after children and provision for pupils educated in non standard settings is a positive move. These budget holding centres are managed by the communities they serve enhancing the cooperation and care for vulnerable pupils. Although supported accommodation for care leavers has been in short supply, new arrangements with a housing association will provide more effective community arrangements.

Coverage of pathway plans and personal advisors for care leavers has been relatively low. Problems have been identified in the effectiveness of current contract arrangements. These have been reviewed and changes are expected by April 2007. The ratio of care leavers to general young people and the achievement of employment, education and training have improved further and remains at a very good level. NEETS: at 5.5% between 2002/2006; are notably below the national average of 8.3% but slightly up on same period last year.

The projected rate of children with disabilities moving from children to adult's services is expected to increase by a factor of three over the next two years. Resource allocation to meet this evolution will require serious consideration. All transition plans are completed on time.

Overall, the provision of 14-19 education and training is at least satisfactory with examples of good practice. The 14-19 strategic action plan has seven strategic area planning groups (SAPGs) established to deliver an agreed and ambitious countywide 14-19 learner entitlement based on the effective work of the sixth form consortia. Guidance and materials have been created to produce appropriate three year plans. Secure arrangements devolve £3.3m per year to the SAPGs to support their full implementation. The development of an integrated 14-19 prospectus for learners is already underway and will be available to all young people in the autumn term 2006.

Access to, and participation, in vocational work-based and alternative curriculum offers has improved and is now good. The proportion of young people progressing to higher education or training continues to be above the national average. The work of Connexions, health and adult care services to identify and meet individual need is at least satisfactory;

careers guidance tutors, Connexions personal advisers and other staff routinely review young people's progress.

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

The council and its partners provide effective leadership for children's services. The Hertfordshire's Children's Trust partnership was established in 2002 and the Children's and Young People Plan provides a clear set of priorities with appropriate actions.

Children's Trust status is developing locally around the 10 district councils. Hertfordshire have a strong commitment to integrated services, and there is strong evidence that progress on the Every Child Matters agenda is being sustained. However, there have been serious structural problems identified in the arrangements for the management of social care fieldwork services and in the deployment of social work staff. This has resulted in an unsupportable level of demand for assessment and a seriously deficient level of performance in undertaking timely assessments. A full review was commissioned and substantial investment in additional social work resources for the client service team is scheduled for September 2006.

The council now has a workforce strategy which consists of investing in more professionally qualified posts in the assessment teams, whilst at the same time changing the skill mix towards professional assistants (unqualified social workers) in the locality teams. Staff turnover overall, has improved markedly and is now in line with comparators; overall vacancy levels have decreased slightly but are higher than other councils. However, good progress is reported in social worker recruitment and vacancy levels are now at manageable levels. Sickness rates have improved and are in line with comparator councils. Practice learning is at a very good level and is planned to improve still further. Levels of staff qualifications are in line with comparator councils and the proportion of budget spent on training is growing. A deputy director, with specific accountability for social care functions, has been appointed.

Good service management decisions have been taken to enhance the work of Key Stage 4 learning centres and primary support centres which have had a positive impact on attendance and exclusions. The introduction of secondary school improvement partners (SIPS) has been well managed. The authority has brokered effective agreements with all sixth form consortia to extend their work to the whole 14-19 agenda, thereby providing good access to vocational and alternative curriculum for all secondary pupils.

Unit costs of looked after children are acceptable and lower than comparator councils, although they have increased over the last five years. Social care spending in Hertfordshire compares well to similar councils and a further investment is under way. Financial control is good and there was a 0.6% underspend in budget last year. However, efficiency savings in the non-schools budget for 2006/2007 are very challenging and will require further restrictions in provision of discretionary services, enhanced value for money from contracts as well as further staffing reductions. Good progress has been made in achieving savings from the looked after children strategy and £3.2m will have been saved by April 2007 in

each of the last three years. The balance of family support services spend is still good but is reducing whereas in comparator councils it is increasing.

Use of PFI credits to refurbish council children's homes is a positive initiative
 The council is striving hard to improve its management information systems and inculcate a performance management ethos in all parts of the social care department. The key objective must be to engage frontline workers in setting clear objectives and targets and in providing good quality baseline data to inform decision making.

Members have launched their first scrutiny review on the staying safe areas of Every Child Matters outcomes with assistance from the IDeA. This review has been timely and effective in addressing some fundamental performance issues. There is still work to be done in assessing the outcomes of race equality impact assessments.

key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • healthy lifestyles/healthy schools • low and falling teenage pregnancy rate • improved CAMHS • health of looked after children. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • targeting areas of health inequalities • overall investment in CAMHS, particularly in relation to services for children with learning disabilities.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • safety on the roads • fostering services standards • standards in children's homes • adoptions. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initial and core assessments • continue to respond to bullying concerns • adoption – care planning and matching • timeliness of statutory reviews of looked after children • social work performance culture in relation to front line services • realistic thresholds for all referrals.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children and young people are enabled and encouraged to attend and enjoy school and achieve highly in all age groups • all children and young people can access a range of recreational and voluntary provision • children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to achieve. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the value added by the smaller secondary schools • the attendance rate of looked after children • the educational provision for pupils educated in other settings.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision making • action is taken to reduce re-offending • high performing youth justice service. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support for looked after children in respect of the personal advisor and pathway plans • offending of looked after children • timeliness of and involvement in statutory reviews of looked after children.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high post -16 participation rates and improving achievement • proportion of young people in EET • 14-19 strategy effectively managed across consortia • EET for care leavers. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suitable accommodation for care leavers • resources for children with disabilities moving into adult services.
<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sustained effective partnership working • clear CYPP • sensible restructuring plan and clear accountability for social care performance • value for Money for looked after children • evolving workforce strategy • member commitment. 	<p><i>Management of children's services;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continued drive for value for money • recruitment and retention of social care staff • embedding performance management • performance data.

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

- Timeliness of initial and core assessments.
- Attendance of looked after children.
- Educational provision for pupils educated otherwise.
- CAMHS services for children and young people with learning disabilities.
- Substance misuse treatment services for under 18 years.
- Referral processes.
- Childcare reviews.
- Performance management.
- Transition for children with disabilities.
- Services for care leavers.
- Performance plans of social work teams.
- The accuracy of authority performance data.
- Progress with workforce strategy.

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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