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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Ms Turner

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SUFFOLK COUNTY 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 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	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

Suffolk County Council continues to provide a good service for children and young people. This is in spite of making significant changes in the last year, which have included establishing a new service for young people by amalgamating education, social care, Connexions, and the youth service. A new Director of Children and Young People has been in post since May 2005. All senior managers have recently taken up their posts.

As with many local authorities, Suffolk has had to manage significant budget issues both within the council and externally from Primary Care Trusts (PCT).

Suffolk has demonstrated that it has excellent strategies and policy documents, for example; the Suffolk Children's and Young People's Plan (CYPP), the policy for teenage pregnancy reduction and the Local Area Agreement (LAA). There are services which have good strategies but which are not yet providing good quality outcomes for young people; these include the reduction of teenage pregnancies, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), the youth offending team (YOT), the substance abuse reduction service and the youth service. Suffolk has demonstrated that it is well aware of the need to improve these areas and has put in place the management, staffing and resources to do so. There are good prospects that these will improve outcomes for young people over the next year.

The authority has made good progress with tackling most of the areas of concern identified last year with the exception of CAMHS and improving attainment at Key Stage 2.

Being healthy

The contribution of the authority to being healthy is good overall; however performance in some aspects has yet to match the good strategies in place.

School inspection judgements show that health awareness is promoted positively by encouraging healthy eating and by ensuring regular access to sport and exercise. Although the number of schools achieving healthy school status is currently low, many more have joined the scheme, with 205 now on the programme. Good progress has been made towards achieving the authority's 'fit for life' target. The number of specialist teachers of personal, social and health education has doubled, strengthening the authority's resource for reducing the numbers of teenage pregnancies and incidents of substance misuse. As in previous years the health of looked after children shows continued good performance.

Teenage pregnancy reduction had disappointing outcomes in 2004; although the authority's latest and more up-to-date data show some improvement. The council has concentrated on improving outcomes in high risk areas by introducing more user-friendly contraception services and improving sex education in schools. Outreach workers have been working closely with young people and partner organisations and more support has been provided for teenage parents.

The performance indicator for CAMHS shows that Suffolk is doing better than its comparator group but further improvements are required, for example establishing a 24

hour out-of-hours service and reducing waiting times consistently across the county. Aspects that have improved include establishing four emergency beds and achieving full integration with the health service. There are also increased financial resources allocated for the coming year.

The substance abuse reduction service has shown poor performance with low take up, lapses in assessment times and poor data collection. Long-standing difficulties with recruitment have now been resolved. The authority expects to see a significant improvement in outcomes for young people in the coming year.

Staying safe

The contribution of the authority to staying safe has been good. Although performance is slightly down on last year, Suffolk consistently performs better than its comparator group. The particular strengths are the overall case management and timely referrals and assessments for looked after children. The stability of placements has continued to improve and the quality in four out of five of Suffolk's in-house residential provision is good. The inspection of the fostering service showed it to be excellent.

Suffolk continues to invest in, develop and improve its preventative services. These have been reviewed in detail as limited progress has been made in reducing the number of looked after children and the number of children on the Child Protection Register; both are still higher than the authority's comparator group. The number of referrals for children in need is acceptable, but the number of young people then receiving a service is lower than its comparator group and re-referrals are higher. This suggests that thresholds may be too high. The authority demonstrated that it regularly reviews thresholds and believes they are acceptable. In the coming year, more consistency is required between referrals, re-referrals and those receiving a service.

Looked after children reviews are timely and the data show continued good performance, however the last two fostering inspections have highlighted that the reviews do not always include key people in the discussions. Reviewers are conscious of achieving targets but this must not be at the expense of including all the relevant parties.

The CYPP clearly states the authority's priorities for improving the safety of the environment for children, young people and their families. The scheme to reduce traffic speeds outside of schools is extended each year and 10 and 11 year olds have the chance to learn about environmental hazards and how to manage risk. The authority has been recognised for its good practice in countering racism in schools. Inspection outcomes confirm that schools take appropriate action to enable learners to stay safe and the authority is active in helping to tackle bullying and improve safeguarding.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution the authority makes to ensuring children and young people achieve at school and enjoy their education and leisure activities is good, but there remain some aspects of performance where outcomes are not positive enough.

A rapidly expanding programme to establish 34 children's centres is well underway. The overall quality of early years provision is good; the quality of care and nursery education compares favourably with that found nationally but the proportion of outstanding settings remains low. Inspection outcomes indicate that the quality and standards in the Foundation Stage in primary schools are predominantly good or better. An increase in child care places has satisfied previously unmet demand, although some childminders have not been well prepared prior to registration. The authority is tackling this through the appointment of a childcare coordinator in each of the three areas.

Results at the end of Key Stage 1 continue to be above the national average. Outcomes at the end of Key Stage 2 remain too low, particularly in middle schools and in mathematics. This is similar to the position reported in last year's APA letter. Some of the support programmes of the Primary National Strategy resulted in limited success last year. The authority is expecting improvements in the results in 2006. A well organised programme funded over three years for improving transition between Years 4 and 5 is expected to have a positive impact on the outcomes for children in Year 6.

Standards at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 are above averages nationally and in line with statistical neighbours. Although results at GCSE have improved only marginally in the last three years, the proportion of schools not meeting the national floor targets is very low. There is a significant difference between the value added between Key Stages 1 and 2 and that achieved between later key stages (between Key Stages 2 and 4, and 3 and 4). The rates of progress for children from Year 2 to Year 6 are too slow, particularly in middle schools. This has prompted the authority to undertake a substantial review of the school organisation structure and examine the marked underachievement in the three-tier system.

Inspection evidence indicates that children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in schools. There are good educational outcomes for looked after children and good improvements for ensuring they attend school. Considerable effort has been made to improve outcomes for looked after children; this includes establishing close links with the education welfare service and children's homes, clearly identifying the young people concerned, undertaking weekly monitoring and taking early intervention. At Key Stage 2, 21 of the 26 children involved have shown good improvement in their educational outcomes in reading.

There is some improvement in attendance, particularly in the schools targeted by the authority. However, an annual rise in unauthorised absence in both primary and secondary schools is a developing trend and attendance was judged inadequate in five schools inspected. A self-evaluation toolkit has been produced to help schools review and improve attendance. The authority has made very good progress with reducing permanent exclusions. The number of permanent exclusions has dropped dramatically this year and suitable emphasis is now placed on reducing the number of fixed term exclusions. The authority has made very good progress in providing appropriate tuition for those educated outside of school.

The number of primary schools placed in a category of concern continues to be very low. There is, however, an increasing number of secondary schools receiving a notice to improve and this is cause for concern. The authority expects the support from the reorganised school improvement service and the deployment of its team of school improvement partners to tackle this.

Making a positive contribution

The authority makes a good contribution to this outcome. School councils are promoted positively and the 'having my say' involvement strategy gives young people the opportunity to help contribute to service development. There is a well developed programme of activities which support the engagement of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspection outcomes confirm schools' positive commitment to inclusion.

Although there has been a slight increase in final warnings, reprimands and convictions for looked after children, performance continues to be good. Police liaison officers are suitably linked to each aspect of the children's service.

The youth services reach only a small number of young people. The authority has identified this as an area for development. The Connexions service has been integrated with the authority's youth services, management arrangements are now in place and clear targets have been set.

Achieving economic well-being

The contribution the authority makes to the achievement of economic well-being is good overall. Inspection evidence shows that most schools are good at enabling learners to build the skills needed to achieve economic well-being. The authority's 14–19 strategy is well established and previous gaps in provision for Level 1 and Level 2 learners are being filled. Improving outcomes for young people remains a priority. Participation rates for 16–18 year olds are rising but remain too low. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) is still too high. This is recognised by the authority and there is a suitable target and strategy for the reduction in the NEET population. Good improvements were secured in 2005 in the achievements of 16–18 year olds. Results improved well, at a faster rate than those of statistical neighbours and nationally. Inspection outcomes indicate achievement in sixth forms to be at least satisfactory, with half of schools inspected being rated as good. The achievement in one special school was inadequate.

Performance remains strong on finding suitable accommodation for looked after young people, although it is not as good as last year. The fostering inspection found that a number of looked after children were accommodated in bed and breakfast rather than permanent, suitable accommodation. This needs to be tackled as a matter of urgency. The levels of employment, education and training for looked after children over 16 are good but, in this area as well, the performance is also marginally down on last year.

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

The authority has demonstrated that good partnership arrangements are in place and is moving to greater integration by developing a Children’s Trust. Connexions and the youth service are now fully integrated with the authority’s children’s services. This arrangement has the potential to increase the council’s capacity to improve these services.

Suffolk continues to invest significantly in preventative services and spends considerably more than its comparator group. This strategy of long term investment is expected to have a positive impact on reducing the number of looked after children.

The authority’s staff are well trained, well qualified and a high number have been appropriately trained in residential services. The number of staff so trained is significantly higher than Suffolk’s comparator group and is a particular strength.

The Audit Commission identified weaknesses in financial reporting and this affected the authority’s comprehensive performance assessment (CPA). Suffolk has accepted the criticism and has conducted a comprehensive review which has resulted in standardised budget reporting, clear lines of accountability, stronger management support systems and training on budget management.

The authority spends less on children’s services than its comparator group but it has improved performance over the last three years. Although performance is good, there are still improvements to be made. In the coming year there will be a further reduction in the budget but the authority is confident that there will be improved outcomes for young people. It has increased or maintained targeted resources in those areas where outcomes need to be improved the most, such as with CAMHS, the youth service, the reduction of teenage pregnancies and the substance misuse service.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting health lifestyles through a range of initiatives offered in schools. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improving timeliness of assessments for substance misuse • fully implementing the strategies identified for CAMHS.

<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prioritising improvements in the safety of the environment for children, young people and their families • countering racism in schools • managing cases, referrals and assessment of looked after children • a commitment to developing and improving preventative services • improving the stability of placements for looked after children • the quality of Suffolk's in-house residential and fostering provision. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reducing the high number of looked after children • reducing the number of young people on the Child Protection Register, which remains high • including key people in the looked after children review discussions
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overall achievement • educational outcomes and attendance for looked after children • the progress made by pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities • above average standards at Key Stage 3 and 4. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improving attainment at Key Stage 2 • reducing rates of unauthorised absence in schools • preparing and training child minders prior to registration.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive outcomes for looked after children • the programme of activities for young people with learning difficulties • opportunities for children and young people to express their views. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing the proportion of young people reached by youth services.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • securing accommodation, employment, education and training for looked after children over 16 • improvements in outcomes for 16–18 year olds. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reducing the proportion of young people who are NEET • reducing the number of looked after children accommodated in bed and breakfast • increasing participation rates for 16–18 year olds
<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partnership arrangements and improved service integration • high investment in preventative services • well trained and qualified staff. 	<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allocating more resources for youth services.

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

- How well the outcomes for groups of children and young people are improved by the actions of the services in the following areas: CAMHS, teenage pregnancy reduction, substance abuse reduction, the YOT.
- The impact of the authority's actions to raise standards at Key Stage 2 and to improve participation rates and outcomes for young people.
- The support for schools causing concern, particularly secondary schools.
- The outcomes achieved in supporting looked after children, and the quality and involvement of all appropriate parties at reviews for looked after children.
- Improvements in the youth service.

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



FLO HADLEY

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