

The Cabinet – 14 December 2005

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Annual Performance Assessment of Children's Services

Purpose of Report

1. To inform the Cabinet on the process for the Annual Performance Assessment of Children's Services.
2. To inform the Cabinet of the feedback received following the Annual Performance Assessment.

Background

3. The Children Act 2004 placed a requirement on all children's services authorities to submit an annual self-assessment of their work on delivering the five outcomes in Every Child Matters:
 - **be healthy**
 - **be safe**
 - **enjoy and achieve**
 - **make a positive contribution**
 - **achieve economic well-being**

From 2005, an Annual Performance Assessment (APA) Statement is to be submitted by every children's services authority by the end of May.

4. Dudley's 2005 APA Statement was submitted on 27 May 2005 following joint input from the then Directorates of Education and Lifelong Learning and Social Services, together with support from our statutory partners in the police service, the health service, Connexions, the Youth Offending Service, and the Black Country Learning and Skills Council. The APA Statement was endorsed by the Executive Group of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership.

5. The two principal inspectorates, CSCI and OFSTED, called a meeting in Dudley on 21 June to discuss the APA Statement, to explore several issues in more detail, and to give initial feedback. The feedback was then confirmed in a draft APA Letter which, after a process including local checking for factual accuracy and national moderation, was communicated to the authority in final draft form on 27 October. At that stage the Council had the formal opportunity to appeal against any of the judgements or scores; the Council did not need to take up this opportunity. The final APA Letter (attached as Appendix 1) was published by OFSTED and CSCI on 1 December 2005 alongside the APA Letters for all children's services authorities.
6. The APA Letter identifies areas where the inspectorates judge that we are performing well and also areas for possible improvement. The Letter also provides grades for four areas on a four-point scale.
7. The grades were as follows:

The contribution of the local authority's social care services in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people

Grade 3 – a service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users.

The contribution of the local authority's education services in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people

Grade 3 – a service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users.

The contribution of the local authority's children's services in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people

Grade 3 – a service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users.

The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people

Grade 3 – good

8. These grades were the same as those included in the APA self-assessment. Across the country, a large minority of local authorities were judged as having wrongly self-assessed their performance. A small minority of local authorities appealed against their grading.
9. These grades will feed into the overall Comprehensive Performance Assessment for the Council.
10. In summary, the key areas of good performance were:

Being healthy –

- a clear, co-ordinated approach;
- “overall a positive picture of health in Dudley”.

Staying safe –

- good collaborative working;
- child protection has improved further in the last 12 months;
- positive picture evidenced by the launch of the Dudley Safeguarding Children Board;
- “very positive safe environments in schools”.

Enjoy and achieve –

- very positive picture of childcare provision;
- sufficient and suitable school places;
- Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 improving in line with national averages;
- good support from the Council for schools causing concern.

Making a positive contribution –

- a range of strengths: the Youth Offending Team, joint working, engagement of children and young people;
- multi-agency working to address needs;
- wide consultation with children and young people.

Achieve economic well-being –

- post-16 and sixth form at the national average;
- “rapid progress” on 14-19;
- family learning programmes “strong”;
- care leavers in education, employment or training - performance has improved.

Service management –

- clear demonstration of partnership working and positive outcomes with strong inclusion of the voluntary sector;
- strong corporate commitment to children and young people;
- clear ambitions linked to a “very comprehensive” needs analysis;
- effective financial management;
- an awareness of ‘Every Child Matters’ at all levels;
- strong performance management systems;
- stable and well trained workforce;
- areas for improvement: workforce re-structuring and development of governance mechanisms.

11. The areas for improvement were:

- the range of support and service provided for children with disabilities including those with special educational needs;
- the service improvement plan arising from the recent review of CAMHS, ensuring the most efficient use of resources;
- primary school attendance and standards of attainment;
- progress of improvements to provision for SEN including looked-after children and children with disabilities;
- establishing the principles of Every Child Matters into the work of all schools;
- progress in engaging care leavers with education, training or employment.

12. The areas for improvement are indicators of the likely focus of the Joint Area Review, an inspection of all services for children and young people across Dudley which will take place in March 2006 and which is linked to the Corporate Assessment which takes place at the same time.

13. On 18 November 2005 representatives from the Council and partner organisations met with officials from the DfES, CSCI and the Government Office to update them on progress against the areas for improvement identified in the APA. This meeting, the ‘Priorities Meeting’, is another standard feature of the new accountability arrangements. At the meeting the it was recognised that further improvements had been made in these key areas.

14. The APA Letter concluded that as an authority we are aware of our strengths and weaknesses, indicated by the fact that our final gradings were in line with our own assessment. Our contribution to each 'Every Child Matters' outcome was rated as 'good' and 'the Council has good capacity to improve further'.

Finance

15. There are no direct financial implications of this report.

Law

16. The central legislation is the 2004 Children Act and associated Regulations and statutory guidance.

Equalities Impact

17. The APA Letter sets out a number of areas in which the work of Council has a positive impact on equalities, notably outcomes for looked-after children and for children with disabilities.

Proposal

18. That the Cabinet notes the information on the APA process.
19. That the Cabinet welcomes the APA Letter.



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Background Papers

The under mentioned papers were used in the compilation of this report:
APA – self assessment document
APA letter
APA handbook