

26 November 2007

Mrs Norma Cadwallader
Strategic Director of Children's Services
Warrington Borough Council
New Town House
Buttermarket Street
Warrington
WA1 2NJ

Dear Mrs Cadwallader

2007 APA OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WARRINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL IN WARRINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) for your local authority, some aspects of which were conducted at the same time as the analysis stage of the joint area review (JAR). The 2006 APA informed the scoping of the JAR at the planning stage and the initial findings of the 2007 APA were taken into account by the review team at the end of the analysis stage. The outcomes of the JAR were then considered alongside a review of recent data in arriving at the final APA judgements for 2007. As a result, many of the areas for development highlighted in this letter align with the recommendations in the JAR report and should be similarly aligned in any future action plan produced by the council and its partners. The judgements in the letter also draw on your assessment of progress or review of the Children and Young People's Plan where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted and other inspectorates. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this and for the time given by you and your colleagues to the assessment process.

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

Warrington Borough Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements in many outcome areas. The council has responded positively to the recommendations raised in the 2006 APA and good progress has been made since that time. Outcomes for staying safe have shown good improvement; the upward trend in enjoyment and achievement has been further enhanced by improved results and progress at Key Stages 3 and 4 so that this area is now judged outstanding overall; significant steps have been taken to fully integrate education and social care services and the council has significantly strengthened its capacity to improve its services for children and young people, with a high level of commitment and enthusiasm. As a result, the overall APA judgement on capacity to improve, including the management of services, is now outstanding.

Being healthy

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good.

There is a good and developing coordinated approach to promoting the health and well-being of children and young people. The council is meeting its targets for the roll out of the Healthy Schools accreditation. There is an expanding programme of children's centres improving access to a widening range of services, including health visitor services being piloted in two areas alongside the centres. Good partnership working between the local authority and health services include effective work to reduce alcohol abuse and self-harm. This ensures that all young people have access to specialist assessment, early intervention and treatment. The quality of the work to tackle substance misuse is of a good standard with access to specialist assessments and treatment within national timescales.

Some of the partner services are targeted at improving outcomes for children and young people. For instance, positive outcomes can be seen in the declining teenage pregnancy rates and improvements in the sexual health of children and young people. However, in general the gaps between the health outcomes for children and young people living in inner and outer Warrington are not being narrowed sufficiently.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is adequate and improving. The service has significantly improved since 2006 with a new strategy, increased funding and commissioning and budgets in place. There is good performance in relation to waiting times. There is a new Tier 2 service for 6–14 year olds; however this service is limited for older children. There is also good access to services for children involved in substance misuse and for those who offend, although there are some staffing constraints for this latter group.

The local authority and Health Service are excellent in addressing the physical health needs of children and young people who are looked after and 99% of these have annual assessments. A therapeutic panel for looked after children has been set up to identify pathways and to feed into the strategic commissioning process, although there remains a gap in the availability of responsive and flexible services.

There has been a significant improvement in the CAMHS provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Improved resources at Tier 2, involving a multi-agency team, has been developed. There are signs of improved openness and access to the service. Tier 3 services have been developed with the establishment of a specialist psychiatrist post for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Areas for development

- Narrow the gap in outcomes for children and young people between inner and outer Warrington.
- Improve CAMHS for looked after children.

Staying safe

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. There is clear evidence of good improvements being made since the 2006 APA.

Safeguarding work is appropriately seen in Warrington as the responsibility of all agencies and there is much good partnership work in the borough to improve children's safety. However, there is a lack of consistency in carrying out assessments in children's social care.

All schools have good approaches to child protection with designated teachers and child protection policies in place. Police checks are carried out for all staff and adults working within the school environment. Schools deliver good local programmes which help to raise children's awareness and enable them to better protect themselves in a variety of settings, including on the roads and in abusive and harmful environments. The local Health Service has a good model of support, the *child in need pathway*, which ensures the most vulnerable children are provided with coordinated support that meets their medical and social needs. There are approximately 400 children supported in this way at any one time.

The response to referrals by Warrington's children's social care services is adequate, delivering in the main prompt responses to members of the public and other agencies' requests for services to meet the needs of children and their families. Good tracking arrangements are in place to ensure that these follow-up services meet the children's needs. However, there are high thresholds in place for children and families who have more complex needs. Assessments are of variable quality and are not always undertaken following national guidance.

There is an established Local Safeguarding Children's Board delivering to the national standards. It focuses on child protection well and is in the early days of broadening its remit to include the wider safeguarding agenda. There have been no recent serious case reviews, which occur following the death of a child.

Family support services in Warrington are outstanding. These are provided through a network of high quality children's centres and extended schools provision. There are good multi-agency services to tackle domestic abuse and bullying. The local authority has identified that more resources are needed for those families with complex needs who don't meet the threshold for social work involvement.

The numbers of looked after children and young people are low and have fallen over the past three years. There is a range of support offered to prevent children and young people becoming looked after and thresholds for entry to the care system are appropriate. All looked after children and young people have an allocated social worker and are all reviewed within timescale. In 2006-07, 96% of these reviews were contributed to by the relevant children and young people and this is excellent. Good arrangements are in place to safeguard looked after children in placement and there is good multi-agency work to support them in their placements.

There are 68 families in receipt of direct payments which is a 60% increase from the previous year. This allows families to purchase their own care for their children. Respite care provision has improved using the fostering and adoption team for family based respite care and Ross Close for planned programmes of overnight respite care. Facilities for respite care for complex needs are met outside the local authority with plans to replace and extend Ross Close to improve the internal provision. This facility is greatly valued by parents. There is good transition planning with the disabled children's team using person centred planning which has led to greater involvement of young people in their care planning.

Areas for development

- Review current thresholds for child protection.
- Ensure that all social care assessments consistently meet national standards.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. The consistent and positive trend in attainment at all key stages has been sustained over several years and has been further enhanced this year.

Children are getting a very good start to their education. Nearly all children attend nursery education and 70% of early years settings were judged by Ofsted to be good or better in helping them learn. Quality and standards in the Foundation Stage were good or better in over 85% of Section 5 school inspections. These figures compare very favourably with national figures.

Key Stage 2 attainment in English remains well above the national average, and in mathematics it is significantly above. Provisional 2007 results indicate that these impressive results have been maintained. Overall, Warrington's performance remains well above the national average and above that of similar councils at each key stage, including in English at Key Stage 3, which had been identified in the 2006 APA as an area for improvement. Although the gap in attainment between boys and girls in writing at Key Stage 2 remains, overall attainment in writing improved in 2006 and

the gender gap is similar to the national picture. The gap, however, between boys and girls at GCSE narrowed by 3% in 2006 in relation to the achievement of five A* to C grades.

Pupils' rates of progress are good between each key stage, although some levelling off between Key Stages 1 and 2 reflects the national 'plateau' in English results for 11 year olds. Progress overall between Key Stages 2 and 3 exceeded that of similar councils and the national average. GCSE results in 2006 showed a further increase in the proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more A* to C grades. At 66%, this is significantly above the national average and similar councils. The proportion of students achieving this with English and mathematics (48.4%) is 2% above the national average. Provisional 2007 results indicate that this will rise further together with an increase in students' overall achievement of five or more A* to C grades.

Children and young people who are looked after achieve well, although data fluctuates with the relatively small cohorts involved, and should therefore be treated with caution. Nevertheless, their attainment at Key Stage 2 is close to the national average. A well above average proportion of young people in Year 11 who are looked after sit at least one GCSE examination and a good number achieve 5 or more at grades A*-G or equivalent. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress, with this aspect being judged good or better in the majority of school inspections.

Warrington schools are usually judged good or better in Ofsted inspections. There are no schools in an Ofsted category of concern. This is a significant achievement. Warrington knows its schools well and provides effective challenge and support to promote their continuous improvement, with no room for complacency. This view is shared by school leaders.

Ofsted inspections have found that pupils enjoy school, behave well and attend regularly. School attendance remains just above national average and that of similar authorities. An increase since 2006 in absences from school by looked after children and young people was closely examined by the council and a system of regular monitoring set up. As a result of the improved support systems now in place a good reduction in absences by looked after children and young people has been achieved.

Permanent exclusion figures in secondary schools have declined over three years, reducing from 42 pupils to 16, as a result of a range of effective actions taken. This includes a 'Hard to Place' protocol, collaborative practice and partnership working with schools. The number of days lost to fixed-term exclusions also continues to fall, although it remains just above the national average. No looked after child or young person has been permanently excluded from school in the last four years.

The council is committed to providing and promoting a wide range of opportunities for children and young people to enjoy play and leisure activities. It is estimated that over 25,000 took part in the integrated summer programme of events, and/or free swimming sessions. Extended schools activities have been further developed over and above their core offers to complement the council's promotion of sporting and

creative activities. A good proportion of Warrington schools have achieved Arts Mark awards, seven of these at the gold level. All primary schools are delivering a modern foreign language to pupils in Key Stage 2.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good.

Consultation with children and young people continues to improve. Some 3,700 young people voted in the youth parliament elections and the Youth Service has supported young people well to engage in consultations about a substantial local regeneration project. A recent school survey found a high level of satisfaction from schools about opportunities provided through the council for children and young people to make their voices heard on decisions which affect them. The number of young people aged 13–19 being reached by publicly funded youth services has increased, despite a slight reduction in the staffing ratio of youth workers to young people.

The council has identified variations between groups of children and young people who may have barriers to their participation in consultation and decision making on matters which affect them. There is a commitment to improve this and ensure that the views of children and young people are central to the council's work.

School inspection reports indicate that learners make a positive contribution to their school and community with 90% of Warrington schools judged to be good or better in this area of their work. The council's performance on ensuring that looked after children are able to contribute to their reviews has improved significantly, with 96% now doing so. This figure is higher than the national average.

The Youth Service makes a valuable contribution to initiatives such as youth involvement, sexual health, substance misuse and reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. The service is well regarded by parents and young people, and good partnership working enhances the range of provision available.

The numbers of young people re-offending has reduced by 7.4%, which exceeds the council's target of 5%. Although in 2006 there had been an increase in the number of looked after children aged over 10 years who were subject to reprimands, final warnings or convictions, this is now declining and is in line with regional and national averages.

Opportunities for young people to take part in activities with accredited outcomes, offered through the Youth Service, Connexions, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Youth Federation, have increased, and a number of volunteers working across the voluntary sector have been trained in Youth Achievement Awards.

Area for development

- Fully embed the Active Involvement Strategy to further improve the involvement of children and young people, particularly those who are looked after or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, in the development of services.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good.

There is good partnership working to support and develop the 14–19 strategy, with a number of working groups established to implement this. The 14–19 online prospectus, *Way Ahead Cheshire and Warrington*, was successfully launched in March 2007, and gives learners good access to information about post-16 opportunities.

In 2006, nearly 80% of Year 11 students chose to continue in full-time learning. This figure is above the national average and continued the upward trend that began in 2003. The percentage of young people achieving Level 2 qualifications by age 19 increased in 2006 and is above the national average and close to similar councils. The achievement of Level 3 qualifications remains in line with the national average but almost 3% below similar councils. The council acknowledges that the progress of post-16 students has been variable and is taking action to remedy this. Provisional 2007 A-Level results indicate that improvements are being made. There has also been a good improvement in the number of young people completing apprenticeships, and in provision for vocational qualifications.

The proportion of young people aged 16–18 years not engaged in employment, education or training remains significantly below the national average at 7%. A good proportion of young people leaving care at age 19 are engaged in education, employment or training. Good support is provided for care leavers, who are placed on a special guardianship programme. A good proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities moved into employment, education and training in 2006/07.

School inspection judgements on how well learners develop in the workplace and other skills that will contribute to their economic well-being indicate that this aspect of provision is very good. More than a quarter of the schools inspected in Warrington were judged outstanding in this respect, compared with 17% nationally, and around 75% in total were judged good or better. This is higher than similar councils and the national average.

Good support and provision is helping to remove barriers facing young people, for example through the multi-agency 'one-stop shop' and Connexions at the Gateway. The children and young people who contributed to the Tellus2 survey indicated that a higher than average proportion consider their area to be a good place to live and that they get good information to help plan their future.

Area for development:

- Improve young peoples' achievements in post-16 learning, particularly in Level 3 qualifications.

Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council has outstanding capacity to improve its services for children and young people. It is in a much stronger position than at the time of the 2006 APA, having demonstrated improvement by establishing a clearer focus on evaluating the impact of its service delivery on improving outcomes for children and young people.

The council's 2006 comprehensive performance assessment category of four stars reflects the council's good rate of improvement in its services and in providing good value for money.

The council's comprehensive 2006-2007 annual review of the children and young people's plan indicates that good progress is being made in many areas identified for development. The work of the Performance and Business Unit is now well established in its monitoring role.

A key factor in the rapid pace of improvement since the 2006 APA has been the clear 'culture shift' that has taken place: education and social care are now fully integrated, working well together and developing strong multi-agency partnerships under strong and effective leadership. All share the clear and challenging vision for children's services, and there are well defined strategic plans to deliver the priorities outlined in the Children and Young People's Plan. Common induction training is in place for all staff in children's services and these meetings are also open to, and often taken up by, partners from Connexions, the Youth Offending Team, the voluntary sector and health visitors.

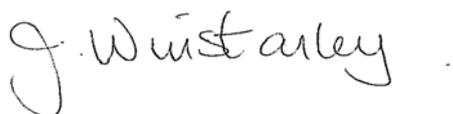
Capacity has been strengthened by the restructuring which has taken place at senior level including additional appointments to head of service posts. This is enabling the council to adopt an innovative strategy to help address the needs of children and young people across all wards in the borough, whilst also developing the expertise of senior leaders and their capacity to manage across services.

The council has sustained its performance in delivering good quality services to vulnerable children and young people who access the social care system. The high turnover of staff in key posts during 2005-06 has been reduced, and there are fewer vacant posts. Action continues to be taken on reducing levels of sickness absence with some success, although this is still higher than average. There has been a large increase in the number of residential child care workers achieving appropriate NVQ Level 3 qualifications. The council provides good corporate parenting.

The council makes an excellent contribution to the enjoyment and achievement of its children and young people through its high-performing schools. Schools value the advice and support they are given, and are effectively challenged to improve further. Monitoring and intervention is robust and effective when schools are identified as underperforming. The council responded well to the issue of surplus school places, acting upon its major review of secondary education which began in 2006. Provision in central and eastern Warrington was not fully resolved and as a result, four key options were presented for detailed consultation across the area in June and July. Two of these options involve proposals to close one of the secondary schools in the area and a decision on the council's chosen option is imminent. In a recent survey, Warrington schools gave a very positive response when asked to rate *'the effectiveness of your council's children's services in working in partnership with other council departments and with external agencies to deliver the five outcomes for children outlined in Every Child Matters.'*

The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment and will be published to the Audit Commission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection