

26 November 2007

Ms Elaine McHale
Corporate Director for Children's Services
City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
8 St John's North
Wakefield
West Yorkshire
WF1 3QA

Dear Ms McHale

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CITY OF WAKEFIELD METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment for your local authority. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan, your action plan arising from the joint area review (JAR) and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. The letter comments on progress since the joint area review and last year's annual performance assessment. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the assessment.

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

Wakefield delivers above minimum requirements in many outcome areas. Following recommendations made in the JAR, the council has acted resolutely on a number of key issues and has made good progress in tackling them. The council has been awarded Beacon status for Positive Youth Engagement. The contribution the council makes towards improving outcomes for being healthy, enjoying and achieving and achieving economic well-being are good; the council's contribution to improving outcomes with regard to staying safe are adequate. Overall, the council has taken appropriate steps to improve further integrated working in the new children's services arrangements and there is a strong commitment to improve services further. The capacity to improve is good.

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. Partnership arrangements to deliver better

health outcomes have been simplified and are much improved since October 2006 when the two former Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) were merged into one PCT co-terminus with the council's area. The following recommendations were highlighted in the JAR.

For immediate action

In order to improve the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provision the partnership should:

- finalise the commissioning of appropriate in-patient provision for 16 and 17 year olds and specialist provision at the highest level of need (tier 4)
- improve provision for out-of-hours access for specialist CAMHS
- ensure that all partners agree to a protocol that clarifies which conditions presented by young people attending the local accident and emergency department are appropriate for referral to Social Care Direct.

There has been good work to commission appropriate in-patient provision for 16 and 17 year olds and specialist provision at tier 4. No young people with mental health needs are cared for on adult wards; emergency inpatient care is provided in single rooms on paediatric wards at local hospitals with specialist support for staff and longer term care by a private provider. Wakefield is working with other West Yorkshire councils to develop local provision. A protocol is now in place to clarify appropriate liaison arrangements between Social Care Direct and the CAMHS team in dealing with emergencies that happen outside the normal working day, including those present at accident and emergency departments of local hospitals. The appointment of a further CAMHS psychiatrist has enabled the service to meet the 24-hour access criterion for providing psychiatric assessment of mental health emergencies.

Improved partnership arrangements have given a clearer focus to the council's contribution to improving health outcomes for children. The council's target for 100 schools to meet the new Healthy School standards by July 2007 was achieved and progress is being made with the remaining schools. Children's centres and schools, including extended schools, make a major contribution to improving key health targets such as teenage conception, smoking, obesity and oral health.

Wakefield has a high rate of emergency admissions to hospital and a high rate of non-road traffic accidents involving children under 15. Health visitors and children's centre staff are working with parents to support them in dealing appropriately with minor childhood illnesses and safety in the home. The council is a key player in Wakefield's Accident Prevention Group which coordinates a wide range of activities for children across the district to highlight the dangers associated with, for example, fire setting, motor bikes, fireworks and alcohol abuse. These activities are well designed to engage the interest and attention of children and feedback from young people and carers show that this has been achieved, although this is not yet obvious in all outcome measures.

Area for development

- Reduce the number of non-road traffic accidents for children under 15 years of age.

Staying safe

Grade 2

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 adequate. The following recommendations for action were highlighted in the JAR.

For immediate action

The council should:

- implement its draft placement strategy as a matter of urgency and continue to ensure that close and consistent service management is provided to placement services for looked after children.

For action in the next six months

In order to improve safeguarding of children and young people the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) should:

- ensure representation is secured from the voluntary and community sector in Wakefield
- ensure that information sharing protocols are in place and understood by all agencies providing care or coming into contact with children in need or at risk.

The placement strategy for looked after children has been implemented and monitored by the Government Office. The LSCB has reviewed its membership in line with the JAR recommendation and the voluntary and community sector is now appropriately represented. LSCB membership is reviewed annually, as per its constitution. The council has established good safeguarding procedures for Madressahs and implemented a Child Death Protocol well in advance of the required date to aid identification and earlier intervention.

The council's performance in relation to referrals, initial and core assessments undertaken within timescales are lower than those found in similar areas with the number of core assessments just over half that of similar councils. The rate of initial child protection conferences is also lower than similar councils but this position is improving. The rate of re-referrals at 18.3% is better than the national average of 24.8%; however, child protection re-registrations have risen in the last year. The council recognise there is still some lack of clarity about the point at which Family

Services become involved with families and are implementing wide-ranging training programmes on the use of the Child Well Being Model and the implementation of the Common Assessment Framework to address this.

The rate of looked after children per 10,000 is 48.5 compared to 55.9 for similar councils and has been showing improvement for the last four years. This is a result of improved family support services and better management oversight of entry to the looked after system. Rates of children in family placements are good and both short and long-term placement stability are very good, as is the rate of health assessments for looked after children. Although high numbers of children contributed to their statutory reviews, the timeliness of these reviews at 62% in 2006/07 is poor. The rate of reviews of foster carers was good at 93%.

Independent inquiries into some serious failings in the fostering service and residential care were commissioned by the council. The Independent Inquiry into events surrounding a fostering couple in 2004 was commissioned by the council and published recently. The failings relating to residential care were subject to a number of detailed investigations. These investigations are now complete and the council has accepted all recommendations from both inquiries specifically for their attention and have already developed, shared and implemented action plans led by the Director of Family Services.

Wakefield has exceeded the government target of 50% reduction in road traffic accidents by 2010 involving children and young people. Wakefield schools have made a significant contribution in achieving this reduction. Outcomes in school inspections for helping children keep safe is good and compares well against statistical neighbours.

Areas for development

- Increase the number of initial and core assessments undertaken and within timescales.
- Review thresholds for entry to the looked after system and ensure inter-agency agreement and implementation.
- Drive forward the recommendations of the recent fostering inquiry and regulation inspection.
- Improve the timeliness of reviews for looked after children.

Enjoying and achieving

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. The JAR report highlighted one action to be taken in the next six months.

For action in the next six months

- Take action to ensure that the progress of all children and young people with learning difficulties can be monitored at council level.

The positive work identified at the time of the JAR has been maintained. The council is to be commended for their work in ensuring schools good rates of progress in removal from Ofsted categories of concern. In particular, their innovative cross branch meetings provide a regular forum for all the council services required to assist schools in removal from the category. Intervention in these schools has led to only one being placed in an Ofsted category of concern and this has been judged to be making good progress at a recent monitoring visit. Recent Ofsted reports also indicate that the council's support, and intervention, is having a positive impact. National Strategy intervention in schools and leadership and management of the School Improvement Partner programme are both rated as good following external monitoring

The council has developed an exemplary colour by numbers tracking system for schools to monitor all pupils progress. The inclusion of 'P' levels in this data allows for ease in monitoring the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A further development is the inclusion of School Improvement Partners in the process who conduct school visits with a focus on the progress of young people encountering difficulties in learning, vulnerable pupils and those identified with English as an additional language. Through this system, the council are able to present informed challenges to schools when they are setting targets as well as giving a tool for brokering support. The council provides good advice for vulnerable young people to help them make effective choices from the range of post-16 education options.

In 2006, attainment at Key Stage 4 was in line with the national average, and was better than in comparator councils. The unvalidated data from 2007 indicates continuing, and marked, improvement. The number of pupils attaining five A*-C at GCSE increased by 7% and the percentage, including English and mathematics, rose by 3%. The profile of attainment in core subjects at Key Stage 2 was sustained with little fluctuation: it is slightly below the national average but the rate of improvement is above the national trend. Pupils, and students, make good progress from their starting points. The proportion of young people leaving care aged 16 with at least one GCSE equivalent qualification is better than statistical neighbours. However, the council recognises there is a need to tackle some emerging issues around attainment at Key Stage 1, particularly in pupils writing skills. The authority plans to utilise its tracking systems to target pupils in early years and lower Key Stage 1 with a view to improving communication, language and literacy skills. Overall, the data for attainment indicate an improving trend in Wakefield with no schools in the authority below the floor targets for GCSE attainment in the last two years. Value added analysis shows improving trends for the vast majority of vulnerable groups, with contextual value added scores for Key Stages 2 to 4 for pupils with special educational needs, for example, well above the average for the district.

Attendance in Wakefield schools is in line with national figures, and is slightly better than comparator councils. Unauthorised absence in secondary schools is now better than the national average and those of similar councils, the attendance of looked after children remains lower. The number of exclusions from Wakefield schools is decreasing but remains higher than those in similar authorities. In order to reduce this further the authority has forged a strong partnership between Wakefield District Community School and the authority's secondary schools, establishing seven student support centres across the district. Each centre supports a small number of local high schools. In addition, for provision for 6th day exclusion these centres also offer step out programmes for young people at risk of exclusion. Preventative work is done with the young person and capacity building work is done with the staff from the mainstream school. Agencies work closely with foster carers to reduce the previous high rates of unauthorised absence caused by foster families taking holidays in term time. The local authority shows commitment to further improve by retaining a consultant for behaviour and attendance.

A robust outcome focus is being applied to Early Years and Children's Centres. A service level agreement, and service specification, is being applied across both stand alone and school-based centres. Wakefield is one of few councils to achieve designation of four, phase 2 centres by the end of September.

Areas for development

- Raise attainment at Key stage 1, particularly in writing.
- Improve the attendance of looked after children.

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. The following recommendations for action were highlighted in the JAR.

For action in the longer term

The council should:

- take action to increase the access of young people to supported independent living schemes and social housing
- improve communication to ensure that future developments about children's centres are clear to all early providers
- work closely with schools to reduce the extent of racist behaviour that causes concern to children and young people

- along with its partners, develop its participation strategy to ensure that regular and systematic opportunities are available for young people in the planning and management of local services
- thoroughly review the opportunities available for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to express their views on mainstream services and to identify how well their needs are being met.

Participation and consultation with all ages of children and young people are embedded in council activity and there are many examples of innovative work. Wakefield has recently been awarded Beacon status for youth engagement. As recommended by the JAR, the council has produced an overall consultation framework, Engaging our Futures, which cuts across both the local area agreement and the Children and Young People's Plan. This very good framework covers wide-ranging consultation such as the Youth Parliament and School Councils, as well as work with specific disadvantaged groups including disabled children, looked after children and young families. There is good evidence to show that children's views are listened to and have made a difference to services.

A recent survey of young people's views indicated that low numbers of children feel they are involved in decision making in schools, however, there are many good school councils across the district. Rigorous action is taken to deal with bullying and the development of the anti-bullying action plan has been led by young people. Ninety-two percent of looked after children contributed to their annual reviews. This figure is higher than similar areas and significantly better than the national average.

A joint protocol between local police and children's social care has been produced setting out the circumstances in which there will be police involvement in incidents in residential children's homes. Training has been provided on restorative justice, designed to minimise the use of formal criminal justice procedures. There are early signs that these two initiatives are impacting on the offending behaviour of looked after young people. The performance measure for looked after children who offend has reduced in the last three years, and is better than statistical neighbours. Youth Offending Teams are effective with re-offending rates falling and the Youth Justice Board approval of the Youth Justice Plan comments on the strength of existing youth justice services.

The Youth Offending Team Board agreed an action plan to tackle the low numbers of young people who offend who are involved in education or training. Early indications show a marked improvement in these figures. The Youth Inclusion and Support Team are successfully assessing need and risk to target crime diversionary activity. Only 3.9% of the youth population were sentenced by the courts in Wakefield and sent to secure accommodation compared to a Youth Justice Board target of 6% or less. This reflects confidence in community based provision.

Area for development

- Continue to address the JAR action points.

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. This represents improvement since the JAR.

The following recommendations for action were highlighted in the JAR.

For action in the next six months

- Along with its partners, develop appropriate post-16 programmes of training and support for vulnerable young people and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Take action to increase the access of young people to supported independent living schemes and social housing.
- Work closely with schools to reduce the extent of racist behaviour that causes concern to children and young people.

For action in the longer term

- The council and its partners should take action to improve participation and achievement on apprenticeship and entry to employment programmes.

Of particular note in improving this aspect of the council's contribution has been the introduction of Jobcentre Plus data to identify where childcare is a barrier to employment. Children's centres are now closely linked to Jobcentre Plus with relevant information and advice readily available for parents/carers.

Access to, and uptake, of apprenticeships is now good. A recent apprenticeship evening attracted 12 providers. This event was attended by 244 young people, representing a 25% increase in numbers from the previous year, together with 277 parents/carers. Collaborative provision has recently enabled 50 young people to follow a Young Apprenticeship Pathway. The number of young people entering apprenticeships has increased and 32 work-based learning providers are now represented in the district-wide 14-19 prospectus.

The strategic commissioning process for apprenticeships is complete with plans well advanced to revise the education to employment programme. The aim is to increase the volume of provision available to young people as well as fill gaps in key occupational areas. Collaborative work with the Learning and Skills Council has

supported the delivery, and resourcing, of a number of initiatives. For example, a range of good practice workshops has focussed well on employer engagement, retention and achievement strategies. The impact has been to increase retention and achievement rates and numbers of learners staying in learning.

There has been an improvement in the number of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET). The figure fell from 13.6% to 12.2% during the last year and is now lower than in similar areas. The district multi-agency partnership continues to monitor and manage the NEET strategy for the district, reporting to the Children and Young People Management Group. The council also monitor the targets for reduction of NEET figures set for each school. Progression rates in to post-16 education and training are steadily increasing from 81.6% in 2005 to 82.5% for 2006.

As part of the Gateway Planning employers are involved in the consortia proposals. The district will launch a Construction and Built Environment diploma in 2008. Involving employers in the teaching of the new diploma is recognised as a priority and work is planned this year to raise awareness of the 14-19 agenda and to enlist employers' support. There are already examples of joint delivery of programmes in hairdressing, IT and social care.

The council has been particularly proactive in working with young adults and people with learning difficulties. The training and enterprise group has improved guidance on transition for these young people providing better information about pathways in to work.

Young people have been encouraged to ensure they do not tolerate any form of racial harassment or bullying. The council has implemented good training and support through the Equality and Diversity Group. The council has been proactive in ensuring that any incidents arising from the arrival of families to Wakefield from countries new to the European Union are managed in a supportive manner.

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

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is good, and its management of these services is good.

For action over the next six months

- Improve communication to ensure that future developments about children's centres are clear to all early providers.

The council has secured some significant improvements in education outcomes during the last year. The work of the school improvement team is particularly noteworthy. The reductions in the number of looked after children who offend and the overall reduction in re-offending rates indicate that Wakefield is making important contributions to improve outcomes for all children and young people including some of the most vulnerable. The Beacon status award for youth engagement reflects positively on the way the council has tried to involve young people in decision making. There are, however, some weaknesses in the way the council responds to referrals to social care but there are signs of improvement in this important area of work.

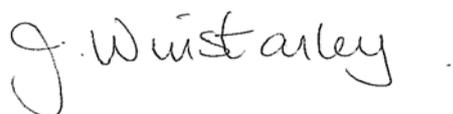
The improvements gained this year have been supported by significant improvements in the performance management arrangements together with clearer strategic planning linked to targets and outcomes. The performance management framework has allowed progress and improvement to be monitored more closely. The management of services is now embedded with clear action planning linked to quantifiable success criteria.

The Audit Commission schools survey reflects some concern about the speed of change in the local area. The council has responded positively to these concerns by seconding two headteachers into the Commissioning, Performance and Partnerships Service. These posts will focus on consultation and change management in order to support some key strategic developments, such as the impact of reduced pupil numbers in primary schools.

The council has been particularly effective in working with schools in Ofsted categories of concern and where school improvement is too slow. Practical solutions have been implemented to overcome barriers to help young people access work.

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 score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment to be published by 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 large initial 'J' and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection