

26 November 2007

Mr Chris Pratt
Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services
Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
Trafford Town Hall
Talbot Road
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Dear Mr Pratt

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN TRAFFORD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment for your local council. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. 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

Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements. The council has made good progress in addressing recommendations raised in the joint area review (JAR) of 2006. The most significant improvements have taken place in relation to outcomes for safeguarding and making a positive contribution; both of these aspects are now good. The council's contribution to improving outcomes for being healthy, enjoying and achieving, and for economic well-being remains good. The council is making good progress in implementing its framework of multi-agency teams and there are already signs of positive impact on outcomes, for example in early years provision. There is clear evidence that the gap between outcomes for the majority of children and young people, and the outcomes for the most vulnerable, is narrowing.

Being healthy

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. Overall health outcomes for children and young people in Trafford are good. Strong partnerships are in place between the council and local health

services, at both a strategic level and at the point of service delivery. This will be further enhanced next year by the development of area based multi-agency teams.

A detailed local needs analysis is in place which supports the commissioning and targeting of services which, in turn, are effectively reducing health inequalities. Targeted intervention has reduced the number of women who smoke during pregnancy in the north of Trafford from 33.9% to 17.9%. North and South Trafford now have rates of smoking in pregnancy below that of similar areas. The Oral Health Strategy is beginning to achieve a reduction in tooth decay. In the north of the borough dental cavities have reduced by 0.19 per child with a 0.23 per child reduction in the south. Overall, there has been a small increase in the numbers of women who choose to breast-feed.

Although preventative services are in place there has been an increase in the number of low birth weight babies born in the Trafford area. The council and health services have used their detailed data analysis to identify that the underlying issues relate to one geographical area in Trafford. As a result, consideration will be given to additional support to families from one area of Trafford where there are a number of factors, including low income and a high number of vulnerable families, which are resulting in poor health outcomes.

There are excellent rates of immunisation across all ages and all geographical areas in Trafford compared to statistical neighbours. The council provides good support to early years providers to assist them in achieving good standards when inspected.

Support is available for young people who offend who have their mental health and substance misuse needs assessed; all mental health assessments are undertaken on time. The number of young people accessing treatment for substance misuse has increased. Looked after children have their health needs and their mental health needs met. Reducing the number of teenage pregnancies still remains challenging, as this year there has been a 10.2% increase from the 1998 baseline. The council views this issue now as a priority area.

Following the JAR of 2006, the council introduced a range of strategies to improve the mental health of children and young people. Assessment times have improved with all children and young people being seen within 26 weeks and the majority of specialist cases being seen within four weeks. However, some of the services that were previously planned to be in place by December 2006 (services for 16 to 17 year olds and 24-hour crisis services) are operating at a reduced service. Due to difficulties these services are now to be re-commissioned from a different provider.

Areas for development

- Reduce the rate of teenage pregnancies.
- Ensure that the full range of child and adolescent mental health services are available for all groups.

Staying safe

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. A framework of preventative services is now in place across Trafford. In the west of Trafford children and young people receive support through their needs being identified early, using the Common Assessment Framework. Their plans are then coordinated by one lead professional. Families accessing support earlier in the west of Trafford has reduced the number of children and young people, from this area, who require referring for support to the council social care services. This service model has been developed by applying good practice principles learnt previously from child protection work. There are systems in place to audit, monitor and review services coordinated in this way. This ensures that assessments and support are of good quality. The council now plans to roll out this model for service delivery across all Trafford from next April.

Services are collaborating to reduce bullying and to identify children and young people who are affected by domestic violence. There is work being undertaken to tackle gun and gang concerns reported by young people and schools. This is being undertaken in partnership with other local authorities as this issue remains of concern across the Greater Manchester area. Schools and early years services provide safe places and environments for children and young people. Across health services all staff who may come into contact with children and young people receive child protection training to identify concerns early.

Of those children and young people referred to the council's social care services, there has been an increase in the number who receive an initial assessment, from 29.3% to 41.5%. Social care services have been developing a culture of improving performance through programmes of auditing and monitoring information and files to ensure compliance with standards. This has led to improvements in assessment quality and the quality of the services provided. Lessons learnt from serious case reviews are also influencing front line practice. Timescales for undertaking initial assessments (71.1% on time) and core assessments (83% on time) remain good. The total number of core assessments recorded as undertaken remains low; the council recognise the need to improve this. One of the reasons for the low numbers of recorded core assessments is the refusal by the local courts to accept assessments (requested as part of care proceedings) in the 'core assessment' format. Social workers have therefore produced assessments in a format suitable for court purposes covering all the requirements of a core assessment but have not recorded this as a core assessment completed. Local courts have recently commended Trafford on a number of occasions for the quality and depth of assessment work undertaken.

The overall number of children and young people referred for support has decreased since the introduction of the Common Assessment Framework. However, the numbers of children and young people referred appropriately with identified child protection concerns has increased, leading to increased numbers of children being

placed on the Child Protection Register (CPR). The council has successfully ensured that no child receiving services is subject to drift or delays. All children and young people on the CPR and all looked after children have an allocated social worker. All children and young people on the Child Protection Register are reviewed on time with 90% of the reviews of looked after children taking place on time. As a result, the number of children who have been on the register for over two years at deregistration has reduced. Due to this focus, the overall numbers on the register (although higher than statistical neighbours) have not increased. Continued success in identifying needs earlier and responding quickly should be matched with a reduction in the number of children on the CPR.

Looked after children live in stable placements with high numbers placed with friends and family carers who receive good support from Trafford. Over the last twelve months the number of children adopted was very low (1.6%). Of the children for whom adoption was considered during the year, almost half have now successfully returned to the care of their parents. The high numbers of children living with friends and family has meant that adoption is not the only solution for children and young people to have permanent alternative homes. This has been achieved by the use of other legal orders (residence orders and special guardianship orders).

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. Over 90% have a transition plan in place at the age of 14. There are high numbers of care leavers who have pathway plans in place.

Areas for development

- Increase the number of core assessments undertaken.
- Increase the number of children adopted.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The already high levels of attainment at each key stage continue to show year on year improvement. Overall rates of progress are improving, and the majority of children and young people make better than average progress by the time they leave school. More recently there has been a marked improvement in GCSE results for schools located in some of the more deprived areas of the borough. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the number of young people leaving school with five or more good grades at GCSE. Government targets for Key Stage 4 attainment by 2008 have already been exceeded; in 2007, 75% of secondary school pupils attained five or more A* to C grades and no secondary school attained less than 50%.

Provision in early years and primary schools is very strong. This is underpinned by the council's combined strategic approach to children's centres and extended school developments. Access to key services and support has increased since the JAR and is now more focussed on those areas and communities where vulnerable children and adults who care for them can benefit the most. Support for childcare providers is very good. As a result, a high proportion of childminding and day care applicants complete their registrations successfully. The council has successfully increased the number of registered child-minders from black and ethnic minority groups within the Old Trafford community. Inspection outcomes for child care providers are mainly good or better. Children develop positive attitudes to learning from the very outset and acquire a sound foundation in reading, writing and mathematics. Levels of attainment at the end of the Foundation Stage are significantly higher than national averages. Similarly, levels of attainment are significantly higher than average at Key Stage 2.

The highly supportive but rigorous school improvement service has a strong track record in raising standards. The support and training provided for school governors is held in very high regard by local schools. With the exception of three primary schools currently in a category of concern, all primary schools inspected have been judged good or outstanding. There are no secondary schools in a category of concern. Provision within the pupil referral units has been reorganised and stronger links have been established between local schools and the pupil referral units' services. The Key Stage 4 pupil referral unit is currently in a category of concern, and was judged to have made inadequate progress at its first monitoring visit. Arrangements for management, governance and administration of the Key Stage 4 pupil referral unit have been strengthened recently. Most children and young people attend school regularly; instances of unauthorised absence are low, when compared to national averages. The proportion of children and young people who are permanently excluded from school is low compared to other councils. Fixed period exclusions are slightly lower than the national figure and the average length of time spent out of school during exclusion has gradually reduced. The amount of time spent out of school by looked after children has been reduced considerably and is now at an acceptable level.

The council is acutely aware that although there is reason to celebrate some outstanding levels of educational attainment, a small minority of children and young people in Trafford do not have the same opportunities to progress or succeed as well as their peers. As a result of focused and targeted activity there are positive signs that the gap between outcomes for the most and least able is starting to narrow. Qualifications of care leavers aged 16 or over declined in 2007 and this is unacceptably low compared to both similar councils and national averages. However, unvalidated data indicate that GCSE results significantly improved in 2007 for those young people in care who sat the examination.

Inspection outcomes indicate that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least satisfactory progress in the majority of schools. The council has a poor track record in completing statements of special educational need within an acceptable timescale. There has been significant improvement in the

timeliness of statements completed within the education service itself. However, where there are exceptions that require input from health services, timescales for completion remain unacceptably low.

The lack of appropriate alternative provision to meet the needs and aspirations of vulnerable young people has been an ongoing concern since the JAR. The school improvement service has collaborated with schools and other service providers to address this problem. A directory of alternative provision, linked to the local area 14–19 prospectus, is now available and significant additional funding has been allocated by the council to support the high costs of providing tailor-made education packages for pupils at risk of exclusion. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this provision on the outcomes for young people.

Areas for development

- Increase the number of children and young people in care who complete and achieve qualifications.
- Ensure that all statements of special educational need are completed within acceptable timescales.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. There are some excellent examples of young people influencing local democracy through challenges raised by the youth cabinet to the cabinet and local elected members. The council has an engagement model (the loop) which ensures that children and young people's consultation and participation influence service design, evaluation and delivery. To encourage engagement, the council has improved the information available to parents and young people. The Tellus2 survey (although completed by a limited number of primary school children) suggested a good level of support for children in Trafford. Outcomes of school inspections reinforce this; in the majority of cases, inspectors judged this aspect as outstanding.

Trafford have developed a project which directly involves groups of young people in assessing services as part of the commissioning process. This influenced the specific service provider being chosen to deliver contracts. Children and young people are supported well through transitions; for example, work undertaken by Year 7 pupils to ensure that all children who were changing from primary school to secondary school had all the information they would need. Mentoring and peer mentoring is in place in school and across a range of services.

The youth service last year focused on delivering intensive programs of support to those young people who are vulnerable. This resulted in an overall decrease in the number of young people recorded as in contact with the youth service.

The appointment of a care leaver to work alongside the children's rights officer, and the appointment of a parent coordinator, enables groups who have participated less in the past to make a contribution to this area of Trafford's work. Looked after children regularly contribute to their reviews, and the numbers participating have increased from 61% to 90%. Young carers' needs in Trafford are recognised and well supported. The young carers' card scheme ensures that their status is recognised and that additional support is provided, for example if a prescription needs to be collected from a chemist.

The development of a multi-agency Trafford juvenile contact scheme to focus work for those at risk of offending has led to a reduction in the number of first time offenders. Youth offending services are working to reduce re-offending and to boost young offenders' self-esteem and engagement. The reported numbers of young people who re-offended over a two year period remain high at 67.1%, compared to statistical neighbours and the national average.

Children with disabilities contribute at all levels; for example, by being members of the youth cabinet, and one disabled young person is Trafford's national youth parliament representative. Another example is that children with disabilities have been involved recently in revising service delivery, resulting in several changes as a consequence of their suggestions.

Areas for development

- Reduce the number of young people who re-offend.
- Increase partnerships with a wider range of agencies and the voluntary sector as part of the development of the multi-agency family support service. This will increase capacity to deliver both specialist programs through targeted youth support and increase contact with young people.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Significant investment in child care provision has resulted in a 29% increase in out of school day care to enable more parents to return to work. This level of support for parents and carers reflects the strength of this council's commitment to family cohesion and stability.

The council has made good progress in developing and implementing a local 14–19 strategy. Partnership arrangements are strong and transparent. Links with employers are developing through both the further education (FE) college and the local school with specialist status. The council is aware of the need to promote the benefits of the new 14–19 diplomas more widely to parents who are reticent to change. There are insufficient opportunities locally for young people to engage in work based learning.

Young people are prepared well for adult and working life. The proportion of 19 year olds who achieve a level 2 or level 3 qualification is higher than in similar councils and increases year on year. Standards in local school sixth forms are impressive. Success rates for 16–19 year olds on level 1 vocational courses in FE are outstanding. Retention rates on GCE AS and A level courses provided by the FE college have been low. Unvalidated data for 2007 indicate and improvement in retention rates.

The proportion of 16 year olds who continue their learning and who remain in full-time education or training is high. Strategies to support teenage mothers and help them remain in education, employment or training have been particularly successful. Similarly, the number of young people in care who stay in education and training until age 19 has increased; this is now close to the national average as well as the average for similar councils. The council has improved its arrangements to secure suitable accommodation for young people leaving care aged 19. Further work remains to be done to secure the availability of tenancies.

At around 7%, the proportion of young people not engaged in education, employment or training has increased slightly. This reflects the national figure, but is higher than in similar councils. The 14–19 partnership has adopted a collaborative and strategic approach to tackle this issue; local schools and providers have already integrated targets from the council's strategy for young people not in education, employment or training into their own institutional development plans. The proportion of 19 year olds whose activity is unknown varies between years and is higher than in similar councils.

Areas for development

- Reduce the proportion of young people not engaged in education, employment or training.
- Improve success rates on advanced academic qualifications delivered in the further education college.

Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council demonstrates good capacity to improve its services for all children and young people. Strong corporate leadership and good management promote high levels of trust between the council, its partners and key stakeholders. The council is committed to developing a robust model of multi-agency working. It is managing the transition of services in such a way that staff are fully engaged in the process and are clear about how they can contribute their skills and ideas. A coherent and clearly articulated plan celebrates the council's successes and recognises where further progress needs to be made. Targets are sufficiently ambitious and focus on reducing inequalities. Robust performance management systems are underpinned by

meticulous analysis of data. Progress against planned milestones within the CYPP is monitored regularly. Not all partnership issues are tackled with the same degree of vigour; for example, in the case of timeliness of SEN statements with exceptions and the accessibility of child and adolescent mental health services. Successful delivery in both these areas would have required performance management systems to better identify multi-agency performance issues and actions.

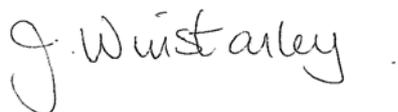
A thorough review and evaluation of the CYPP shows this council knows and understands the communities of children and young people it serves. The successful multi-agency approach to building capacity within early years and primary provision provides a clear blueprint for other services to follow. The council's school improvement has been highly successful in raising standards and has been particularly successful in strengthening the capacity for leadership and governance within its schools. Arrangements for safeguarding and children's welfare have improved significantly since the JAR; this has been achieved through highly effective joint working and a focus on the quality of social care work undertaken. Service development and monitoring now routinely includes children and young people. With lower levels of funding than similar councils, good outcomes and improving trends across all its services to children and young people, the council provides good value for money.

Area for development

- Align performance management systems in the multi-agency services so that managers at all levels are able to identify and act on any variance in service performance.

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".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection