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Ms Carol Tiddy
Corporate Director - Children and Young People's Services
Shropshire County Council
Children & Young People's Services
Shirehall
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury
Shropshire
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Dear Ms Tiddy

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) for your local authority. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan 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 4

The contribution of the local authority towards children and young people is outstanding in all areas.

Children and young people's services provide a number of significant contributions to improving the life chances of young people across a large rural county. Audit commission data show that schools are consistently happy with services, rating them all as above satisfactory. The local authority has responded well to recommendations made in last year's APA and has made very good progress in improving the work of its services and raising the aspirations and life chances of children and young people. The council works well with a wide variety of partners and agencies, including the voluntary sector and has a very good and realistic understanding of its strengths and areas for further improvement.

Being healthy

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The local authority makes an outstanding contribution to improving the health of children and young people. The council, the Primary Care Trust (PCT), and the wider partnership have ensured that shared priorities are based on good analysis; there is a strategic focus on key priorities; and services are co-ordinated effectively. Health inequalities are identified and targeted well. Most health outcomes are in line with or above similar authorities and most child specific targets were met in the last annual health check. A very high number of children and young people report that they are very or quite healthy.

Parents are very well supported to keep children healthy. The numbers of expectant mothers smoking, low birth-weight babies and infant mortality are all reducing well and are below the national average. Immunisation and breast-feeding rates are good and above the national average. Partners take effective action to promote physical health and healthy lifestyles. Most school inspection judgements are outstanding or good, with 95% of primary and 83% of secondary schools in those categories, indicating that schools work well to enable learners to be healthy. Childminders and Early Years settings promote health well. Oral health is good among younger children, with values below national figures. A well-coordinated approach by partners is tackling poor dental health among teenagers, where values are above national figures, through promotion of healthy eating programmes.

Smoking among young people is reducing as a result of good partnership approaches and effective work in schools. Obesity among children starting school is slightly higher than in similar authorities but partners provide a range of focused and effective services, and a comprehensive obesity strategy is being developed. The authority has already met its 2009 target for the number of schools participating in the healthy schools initiative with all schools participating and the number achieving the required standards well above similar authorities. Good advice and education ensures a low number of teenage pregnancies which is reducing at a faster rate than in similar authorities.

Young people access timely support from substance misuse services and organisations work together well to address alcohol consumption among young people in a focused and timely way.

Partners work effectively to develop and deliver a comprehensive service for children and young people with mental health needs, and good progress has been made. Good local multi-agency collaboration has resulted in more children being supported at earlier stages, and waiting times for those with more complex needs has reduced significantly. Good arrangements support older teenagers well. Young people who offend access assessment and treatment services promptly. Extensive consultation

with parents, children and young people has improved the effectiveness of the service to meet local needs.

Most looked after children and young people receive regular health assessments and have prompt access to specialist services when needed. An established strategy and agreed eligibility criteria enable partners to work effectively in delivering services to children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families. Plans to co-locate services are in place.

Area for development

- Improve the oral health of older children.

Staying safe

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people staying safe is outstanding.

There has been a significant reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured on the roads. Schools are good at promoting the welfare and safety of children and some primary schools are outstanding in this aspect. Partners deliver a wide range of universal and targeted programmes in schools and other settings to reduce bullying. There is good support for parents. Action by the council to meet quality standards in care settings has improved outcomes for looked after children.

Information sharing arrangements and the common assessment framework are well-established. High numbers of staff have been trained across the partnership and large numbers of children and families are benefiting from prompt multi-agency support delivered locally. The council achieved Beacon status for Early Intervention (Children at Risk) in 2006-07. Agencies have a good understanding of their safeguarding roles and responsibilities, and appropriate referrals are made to social care.

Referrals to social care are managed well. The number of initial assessments completed on time is very good and well above the national average, and performance in completing core assessments is good. Re-referrals are in line with similar authorities. Addressing domestic violence is a shared priority and a detailed action plan has resulted in strong progress over the past year.

All children on the Child Protection Register are allocated to a social worker, cases are reviewed on time, and the number of children being re-registered is low. Good action has been taken over the past two years to remove longer-term children appropriately from the Child Protection Register and the number is now in line with national averages.

The local safeguarding children board (LSCB) is well supported by partners. A performance framework and agreed dataset are in place and assist the LSCB to drive safeguarding improvements effectively. Statutory partners have robust recruitment checks in place and the LSCB takes appropriate action to ensure that secure recruitment practices are in place across the voluntary sector.

A well established culture of family support ensures that a consistently low number of children and young people need to become looked after. Family group conferences are widely used to support families and maintain children at home. All looked after children and young people have a qualified social worker. Most reviews are on time and a high number of young people contribute to their reviews.

The council has developed a placement commissioning strategy. Action to contract with external providers and establish a third children's home will extend the range and number of places available and address placement stability which has slightly reduced. Focused and effective practice ensures that good numbers of children are adopted within timescales.

Care leavers are well supported. All have a pathway plan and are allocated a personal advisor. All are living in suitable accommodation and a very high number are in employment, education or training.

Area for development

- Improve placement stability.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding.

Early Years provision is very good in the towns and the local authority has worked well to increase the number of places available, particularly in the rural areas where provision is sparser. It has introduced a child minding network to help improve the provision in these areas. Children enter the Foundation Stage with levels of communication and social skills below average. This is more noticeable when children have had limited opportunities to socialise and play with other children. Standards at the end of the Foundation Stage are slightly below average. The local authority has worked hard to ensure greater accuracy with assessments at the end of the Foundation Stage.

Key Stage 1 results remain good, above national averages and in line with statistical neighbours, with reading and writing being better than mathematics. Performance at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2006 improved on the previous year and maintained well

above average standards. In the 2006 tests, 84% of pupils gained a Level 4 or higher for English, 80% for mathematics and 91% for science. For both key stages the difference between standards in reading and writing has reduced with writing improving in response to the local authority focus in schools. Results also showed good progress from Key Stage 1. Results in Key Stage 3 showed an improvement in mathematics and science, with 82% of pupils gaining a Level 5 or higher in mathematics and 81% for science, but a slight drop in English from 2005 although standards are above national figures. Progress from Key Stage 2 was above average and standards remain above national comparisons.

At the end of Key Stage 4, results continue to improve. The average number of points gained by pupils in GCSE examinations rose to 389 and is better than national and statistical neighbours. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more higher level GCSE passes fell slightly from the previous year but the proportion which included mathematics and English rose to 51% and was above the national figure. Progress for pupils in secondary schools is good with only 1.3% leaving with no GCSE qualifications. Many of those who do not gain a GCSE qualification achieve suitable accreditation in recognition of their efforts, reflecting the authority's strong commitment to inclusion. No schools are below floor targets for any key stage.

School inspections show an above average proportion of schools being judged good or better across all areas. The local authority has worked well with schools causing concern. Two schools in special measures came out of the category quickly and those given a 'notice to improve' have also been successfully removed from that category. The local authority has no schools in an Ofsted category at present and they know their schools well and intervene when they feel a school has problems. They have been particularly successful in working with effective senior leaders to support other schools which are encountering problems.

Attendance has remained high although in both primary and secondary schools it fell by a greater value than national figures. The local authority are able to track this carefully and analysis shows that in one term its schools were substantially affected by a flu outbreak and poor weather. Exclusions from mainstream schools are low with no pupils permanently excluded from primary schools and very few from secondary schools. Fixed-term exclusions are also very low and well below national figures.

The proportion of looked after children and young people who are entered for GCSE examinations and the proportion who gain at least 1 pass are well above national averages. The LA always considers the needs of individuals and works well with schools to match their needs to provision. As a result, children sometimes repeat a year to make sure they are able to make up missed work and they do not add to the published figures for gaining five or more higher level GCSE passes as they are in effect a year older than their peers when they complete them. Attendance of looked after children and young has improved because the local authority supported children effectively and has been successful in ensuring all children in care homes attend school well, many of whom had poor attendance previously. However,

attendance is low for a number who are not in care homes and who have more than 25 days absence from school in a year.

Areas for development

- Raise standards in communication and social skills of children prior to entry to school.
- Improve the attendance of looked after children and young people.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The local authority's contribution to this aspect of children's services is outstanding. Partners provide very good support for children's social and emotional development. The number of youth workers is above the national average, and higher numbers of young people access services from statutory and voluntary youth services. A very high number of school inspections are judged good or better for children making a positive contribution.

Good and increasing numbers of young carers are identified and provided with support. The council works effectively with schools and groups, and with the local media to raise awareness of young carers and their needs. Partners jointly fund a long-term contract with the British Red Cross which offers a range of support services for this group of young people. The views of young carers are regularly sought about the services offered to them.

Partners place a high priority on ensuring that exceptionally high numbers of young people are enabled to participate effectively in strategic and operational decision-making processes. Young people report that they feel they are influential. Councillors and young people's champions in the District Councils offer a strong lead, and partners on the Children's Trust have agreed to achieve 'Hear By Right' standards with many already reaching the required levels. A participation team of young people, selected by their peers, works effectively to ensure that consultation is well-embedded. Active support by partners enabled approximately 3,000 young people to vote in elections for the youth parliament. Families and children with profound disabilities have been well supported to identify and plan the services they want.

Effective multi-agency action has reduced anti-social behaviour. Timely intervention and a tiered approach by partners have led to a reduction in first-time offenders. A pilot system to reduce re-offending rates targeted young people at higher risk, with only two receiving a custodial remand over the last year. The system has been adopted as good practice by the Youth Justice Board for national dissemination. Higher than average numbers of young people, 80%, who offend are in education, training and employment and supported to ensure good access to support services.

Councillors provide a strong corporate parenting lead to drive improvements for looked after children and young people who have access to an independent advocacy service. A good number are involved in decisions about their care arrangements and a robust action plan is in place to minimise offending by looked after young people.

Area for development

- Continue to reduce offending by looked after children and young people.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding.

The local authority works well to gain the views of parents and pupils to ensure its services better match the needs of the community in order to effectively support improved economic well-being. A significant number of parents and young people responded to a questionnaire. Their responses inform nine local steering groups on further planning for children centres. The good partnerships between children centres, extended schools, the adult and community learning team and Jobcentre plus are supporting parents well and have improved the lot of children in areas of greater deprivation within the authority. The proportion of children living in households where no one is working is well below the national average.

Improved cooperation between the local authority and its partners has ensured that provision for children and young people aged 14-19 has improved and is seen as an example of best practice by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The proportion of 16 year olds who stay in education is higher than the national average and statistical neighbours. The local authority now has responsibility for running Connexions and this has helped secure a more coherent approach to development. The number of young adults not in education, employment or training (NEET) is significantly below the national average and statistical neighbours. The proportion of teenage mothers in education, employment or training is above the national average as is the proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Good relationships between providers ensure cooperation for courses and the proportion of young people who complete NVQs is above the national average, as is the proportion completing apprenticeships. However, the largest local employers are all from the public sector and there are limited opportunities for young people to undertake work placements in local businesses. Vocational courses are available in appropriate subjects, for example equine and game keeping studies which meet local needs well. Inspection judgements show that school support for economic well-being is very much better than national figures in secondary schools and the quality of sixth forms has improved during the year.

The proportion of young people gaining Level 2 qualifications is above average as is the proportion gaining level 3. The average points score per subject gained by students in sixth forms in schools is above that found nationally. Inspection judgements show that secondary schools prepare pupils very well for their future economic development. Clear plans are in place to introduce diplomas and to extend the vocational courses available. Good work has been done to inform parents of the nature of diplomas and to prepare pupils so that they can make informed choices.

The proportion of looked after children and young people who continue into education, employment or training is similar to other young people and all who left the care of the authority aged 19 were living in suitable accommodation. Transition plans are very well developed so that all care leavers are well supported. All have appropriate accommodation and a safe and secure base, from which they may progress.

Area for development

- Increase the opportunities for work placements in local businesses.

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

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The capacity to improve, including the management of children's services is outstanding.

A strong strategic leadership ensures the authority is well able to discharge its corporate parenting responsibility. Members are effectively involved through working closely with areas and services. They are focused on how the work of the council improves the lives of children and young adults across the county. They work closely to support looked after children, including shadowing a young person, so they can understand the issues and obstacles they meet. They also audit reports across all services to ensure they have a very good understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different agencies and also to hold them to account. Very good work is done with voluntary agencies so that they feel fully involved in the development of services.

A very comprehensive Children and Young People's plan outlines the key areas. The plan was noted as an example of good practice by the DCSF. It is well focused on raising standards and improving the life chances of young people within the authority and includes ambitious targets based on a thorough analysis of need. A perceptive review of the plan has identified areas for further improvement. Priorities are identified from both the local and national agenda and are linked to key indicators, which the council feel are in need of improvement. A strong emphasis is given to supporting vulnerable groups. Good use is made of parents and young people to identify issues of concern, including two young people and a parent on the Children's

Trust, as well as school and college representation. Revised priorities for 2010 have been agreed.

Good progress has been made in most of the issues identified last year. The number of schools achieving the healthy schools standard has increased. There are no schools in an Ofsted category. There has been a reduction in the level of offending and the quality of schools' sixth forms has improved. Less progress has been made in increasing the capacity for the variety of placements for looked after children and young people. Clear structures and procedures have been put in place to address this, including a placement commissioning strategy, which will improve this area. These demonstrate the very good capacity of the council to improve.

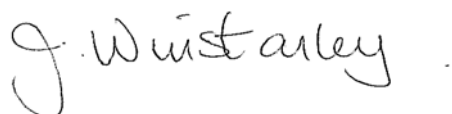
Good and improving cooperation between agencies ensures a more coherent approach to services. A pilot to consider the best way of working in a multi-agency approach, including social workers, is being used to inform future plans. The council has had problems recruiting suitably qualified social care personnel to work with children but good cooperation with a higher education provider and a vigorous recruiting campaign has helped reduce the problem. A common performance management system is in place across all areas and this has improved the accountability of teams and ensured value for money. Good use is made of data to hold managers to account by linking outcomes to national benchmarks. But, at times, data are not correctly collated. Generally costs are low compared to national figures. However, the cost per looked after child is above comparable authorities. The council has well developed systems and practice for the joint commissioning of services.

Area for development

- Improve procedures for the accurate collation of data.

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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection