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Mr Richard Hubbard
Director of Children's Services
Worcestershire County Council
County Hall
Spetchley Road
Worcester
WR5 2NP

Dear Mr Hubbard

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WORCESTERSHIRE 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 (CYPP) where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. Information and comments drawn from the Tellus2 survey of the views of children and young people and Worcestershire's own school survey have also been taken into account. 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 overall effectiveness of the council remains outstanding. It consistently delivers services for children and young people which are very well coordinated and managed. The council knows its strengths and has a clear understanding of what it needs to do to further improve. There is a focus on and a commitment to improving the lives of children and young people across Worcestershire. The council has recently undergone considerable re-organisation and restructuring of the children and young people's service which is now complete. This has led to more localised services focusing on prevention through strong partnership working. Senior officers are very clear about their roles and responsibilities, and the strong and visionary corporate leadership, including effective discharge of corporate parenting responsibilities, is further strengthened by integrated working with the new single Primary Care Trust (PCT). The significant challenge of moving from a three tier to a two tier education system is being well managed. The council continues to make a significant contribution to improving the achievement and well-being of its children and young people.

Being healthy

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. Health and well-being are consistently promoted in the different settings. The partnerships between the county council, health services and other providers are well established and make a significant difference to the lives of children and young people in Worcestershire. Services are moving from partnership to integration.

The re-organisation of Primary Care Trusts from three into one was temporarily disruptive but has not detracted from improving outcomes and there are now coterminous structures which facilitate joint working. One of the first joint decisions of the council and the new PCT was the joint appointment of a commissioning manager, now in post. He contributes to the local needs analysis and leads on development of integrated health services for both organisations.

There is excellent support for parents and some young people to engage in healthy lifestyles and deal with health problems. Some 97% of schools are engaged in the healthy schools programme and 63% have achieved the standard, some ahead of target. A similar local standard for other providers, such as colleges and early years, homelessness and youth services, is about to be launched. There are high levels of participation in sports. Specialist teams integrate their initiatives with each other, using needs and data analysis, to ensure greater impact. Teams co-ordinate activity to counter a range of risky behaviours in hot-spot schools and areas. Teenage pregnancy is continuing to decline from a low base. Substance misuse services are effective and support for young people to complete treatment in the community and overcome dependency is among the strongest in the country.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) now provides a consistent, multi-agency, easily accessible service across all parts of the county at all tiers. It provides good support to schools, the Youth Offending Service and looked after children and young people. The integrated team for children looked after is well established and ensures a holistic approach to all their needs. The PCT co-ordinates administration of regular health checks for looked after children and young people and the council's record of ensuring these happen is very good.

Services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very good. The council has evidence that parents move to the area to benefit from the quality services. Co-ordination between the different providers is effective and some are fully integrated. A strategy for the delivery of integrated services for children and young people with disabilities and complex health needs is about to be launched. There are well-established arrangements for consultation with parents and young people and new methods of consultation with young people without speech have been used in the recent review. Transitions between services are well handled, with good partnerships with adult health and social care. Short break options are good. The funding of specialist and out-of-county services is managed smoothly using joint funding.

Staying safe

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. There are excellent arrangements for children and young people to voice concerns and the majority report feeling safe. The youth service won a BT award in 2005 for its anti-bullying work. Information about staying safe is available for parents and the wider community. Three quarters of all early years settings inspected were judged good or outstanding in relation to this outcome. All but one school were judged to meet standards for safeguarding learners. Strategies and protocols are well established for sharing information between professionals. There is a range of preventative and early intervention services, including extended schools, children's centres, and respite care for those on the edge of going into care, new family support worker posts linked to implementation of the Common Assessment Framework and the Individual Positive Parenting Programme (IPPP).

The council has implemented its new electronic social care case recording system, integrating the new electronic Integrated Children's System (ICS), one of the first in the country. Designed to link with the Common Assessment Framework, it provides a seamless electronic framework for prevention and intervention. The short-term impact of these changes is seen especially in the initial response to referrals, the number of which increased slightly during the year but remains low in comparison with similar councils. Accessible preventative services, good screening of initial calls and effective signposting to appropriate sources of help all contribute to a pattern of comparatively low formal referrals, almost all of which, therefore, have an initial assessment.

The implementation of the major reorganisation, new on-line recording systems and ICS resulted in reduction in the timely completion of initial assessments. However, managers intervened immediately and effectively to deal with problems and sustain the quality of service. Performance returned to the former good level by the end of the year, although not reflected in the yearly average. Despite these upheavals, the council more than doubled the number of completed core assessments to a very good level, above similar councils.

The Local Safeguarding Board is highly effective. The Executive tracks and audits performance and agencies respond quickly to issues. The procedure established for reviewing disagreements about the outcome of case conferences has been used during the year and probably contributed to the slight increase in registrations. There is an established protocol on missing children. The number of Serious Case Reviews is very low, with one active at the time of the visit.

Services help to improve the life chances of looked after children and young people leaving care. The outcome of the inspection of fostering services was good and new marketing strategies are being deployed to develop the range of foster carers, in

response to the 2006 APA recommendation. Residential homes have been judged good or satisfactory following unannounced inspections. The council has negotiated advantageous contracts with independent fostering agencies to ensure value for money. All looked after children and young people have an allocated social worker and reviews take place on time. All children, including those who are looked after having a series of short breaks, have statutory reviews.

The council has developed strong early intervention services integrating early years, health and social care services. There are good links between these services and disability teams. A carers' development officer has improved links between the council and parents of children with special needs, including a 100% increase in parents on the register of carers. The recently formed Parent Carers Council is already having an impact on service development. The take-up of direct payments by families of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well promoted. Joint work with Barnardo's is encouraging take-up of short breaks and other preventative services for children with disabilities from minority ethnic groups.

The council provides a strong lead through the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB), to ensure safe recruitment practices in all agencies including effective auditing of all agency personnel procedures. The policy group setting minimum standards for partner agencies works well. The council co-ordinates investigation of allegations against staff and provides valued advice for all agencies. The first annual report to the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board is comprehensive and future reports will be quarterly to improve awareness.

Area(s) for development

- Sustain and improve the timely completion of initial assessments and convening of child protection conferences.

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. Early years provision and nursery education continue to form a strong basis for children's development. Outcomes at the end of the Foundation Stage continue to be above the national average. By the end of Key Stage 1, standards also continue to be at least above the national average and well above for reading and mathematics. Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are above average in English and science. In mathematics, standards have declined and are just below the national average. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 declined slightly in English, although mathematics and science did better and have remained at the same level as 2005. Overall, the progress made by pupils from Key Stage 1 to 2 and Key Stage 2 to 3 is satisfactory. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are generally good. In 2006, the proportion of pupils attaining 5+ GCSE A*-C increased by two points from 56.69% in 2005 to 58.75% in 2006. However, this did not meet the local authority's

own target of 60%. Early indicators for 2007 suggest standards have risen slightly although it is too early to make comparisons nationally or with statistical neighbours.

The integrated support services for looked after children and young people are excellent, resulting in good overall educational performance. There has been an increase in those with five or more GCSEs at A*-C from 4.3% in 2005 to 14.6% in 2006, whilst 50% attained five GCSEs or equivalent at grade A*-G, which is better than the national average of 41.4%. This is in the context of 35% of the looked after children having learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which is above the national average. A new system for supporting looked after children's attendance and tracking absence rates has had an impact. Attendance rates have now improved. The percentage of looked after children with attendance concerns has increased from 8.9% in 2005 to 10.7% in 2006. This is still better than its statistical neighbours (17.6%) and England (13.3%).

Of the primary schools inspected, 60% were graded good or better, with most graded as good which is better than statistical neighbours (56%). A third of the schools were graded satisfactory and 3% were graded outstanding. Pupils' personal development and well-being and the curriculum are the strongest areas. Of the secondary schools inspected 57% were graded good or better, with most graded as good. Three schools were judged to be outstanding. Five schools were placed in a category of notice to improve. Of the special schools, out of five inspected, three were graded as good or outstanding and two were graded as satisfactory. Overall, the proportion of schools going into a category is above that of statistical neighbours.

The local authority has undertaken a major review and re-organisation of school provision in the Wyre Forest. Subsequently, 29 first schools (4-9), 11 middle (9-13) and five high schools (13-18) were closed on 31 August 2007. On 1 September 2007, 25 primary schools (4-11) and five secondary schools with sixth form provision (11-18) were opened. There are now 22 schools across the county with sixth forms. An extensive and well-planned range of extended school provision is made throughout the county and through the many cultural and youth arts programmes, the take-up of which is high. This reflects the council's well-coordinated strategic drive to raise standards. However, it is too early to have any impact on overall standards and achievement.

Whilst attendance is generally good it is yet to reach the levels of 2004/05 in secondary schools. Attendance rates have fallen in secondary schools but remain satisfactory in primary schools. The numbers of fixed-term and permanent exclusions continue to fall and compare favourably with national figures and those of statistical neighbours.

Area(s) for development

- Improve further the overall achievement for all young people by reducing variations in secondary school performance and increase the amount of outstanding provision overall.

- Improve standards in mathematics at Key Stage 2.
- Improve further the attendance rate of all children and young people and particularly those at Key Stage 4.

Making a positive contribution

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. Children are very well supported in their social and emotional development and services work well together to support identified vulnerable groups. Children and young people's involvement in making decisions about the services provided by the council, particularly from vulnerable groups, is given a very strong focus. The mechanisms for involving looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are embedded in practice. These are integrated with wider systems for consulting children and young people to ensure that their voice is heard. As a consequence, activities and programmes are shaped to meet children and young people's needs and wishes. Children and young people have provided the council with positive feedback from a range of locally designed surveys in consultation with the young people. School councils and the Youth Cabinet are firmly established and inform the future practice of the service and review of the CYPP.

Opportunities for children and young people who are looked after to express their views on services are strong. This has resulted in a greater number who now participate in further and higher education. The work targeted to meet the specific social and educational needs of young people with disabilities demonstrates the council's inclusive approach, although this is not yet paying enough dividends in terms of improving further the educational attainment particularly by the end of Key Stage 4. There has been extensive work in developing strategies such as free access for children and young people to leisure and recreational services and free bus passes for the most vulnerable. This has been instrumental in the council's unified approach to tackling anti-social behaviour. The outcome of the various surveys and the data available demonstrate a significant uptake of leisure activities by young people and the wider community largely helped by the engagement with the Youth Service.

The very good links with the youth offending services have had a positive effect on reducing offending rates. There continue to be very effective well-targeted initiatives and intervention strategies when young people first offend. This has been particularly effective for those children and young people who are looked after.

Black and minority ethnic children and young people represent 4.4% of the population age 18 and under, with the highest grouping being Pakistani children and those from mixed White/African Caribbean backgrounds. Worcestershire County Council has worked well to meet the needs of these pupils. The relative success is demonstrated by the needs assessment which indicated that the educational

performance of Black and minority ethnic groups across the 5-16 age range was generally in line with the whole cohort.

A new behaviour and anti-bullying strategy has been developed across all children's services based on consultation with young people and all stakeholders. All schools are involved in an effective personal development programme noted positively by Ofsted through school inspections. The strategy ensures that all young people have an opportunity to voice their views and have these views heard at the highest level possible.

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. Looked after children, and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported very effectively in making the transition to adult life and economic independence. However, the council recognises that further work with housing needs to be developed.

The standards of attainment for 16 to 18 year olds overall are good although a small percentage of students in some sixth forms do not do as well as those in some colleges, where attainment at Levels 2 and 3 is high. Considerable effort is being directed at the development of the curriculum, particularly in special schools, to support those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and looked after children and young people. The 14-19 strategy and related action plans continue to make a very positive impact on students' achievements and their life chances. Six geographical consortia of schools, colleges and work-based learning providers are in place and have developed a learning entitlement statement and a strategy which is now fully in place. The first round of 14-19 diploma bids has been successful (three unconditionally and seven subject to development), spread across consortia that represent 90% of young people. A Young Apprenticeship scheme will operate in all consortia from September 2007 and a Foundation Learning Tier will operate in four out of five consortia. The local authority also works well with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Connexions to ensure that services are connected and serve the needs of its young people. Although there are good links with the local business communities, who are fully engaged through the Education Business Partnership, the local authority recognises that there is further work to be undertaken.

The proportion of young people in full-time education, training and employment is well above the national average, as is the proportion of young people leaving care. The local authority knows the destinations of almost all of these young people. All young people leaving care are placed in suitable accommodation by the age of 19. Provision is very good for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, a high proportion of whom are fully engaged in education, training and employment. Specialist Connexions personnel work closely with special schools to ensure all pupils with statements of special educational needs have moved into further post-16 learning.

Inspections indicate that schools are generally good at helping learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being.

Area(s) for development

- Improve attainment at Levels 2 and 3 for students in post-16 settings.
- Develop a housing strategy for looked after children and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Develop further the links with the business communities.

Capacity to improve, including the management of

Children's services

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

Children's services are very well managed and have outstanding capacity to improve further. The *Every child matters* agenda is firmly embedded in the council's drive for improvement and the structure of the new directorate has been successfully aligned to *Every child matters* outcomes and delivery of CYPP priorities. The latest Audit Commission judgement for Worcestershire County Council is that it is 'a four star council which is improving well. Overall council services show a trend of improvement and Worcestershire is doing well in relation to other four star counties in terms of relative improvement, being the second best improver in this category.' This is seen in the ambition of the council and reflected in the performance of children's services.

There is an outstanding range of consultative frameworks involving children, young people, parents and the wider community and good joint working with partners, seen in the strength of the new Safeguarding Children Board. Political and managerial leadership is confident and has sustained both the commitment of staff and the quality of services during a year of major upheaval in the council and the merger of three former PCTs into one. The new management structure ensures integration of service delivery involving both operational and developmental managers. This includes the joint appointment, with the PCT, of a senior manager to lead on commissioning and quality who will further strengthen integrated working. The re-organisation of special schools in part of the county has engaged successfully with parents in exploring highly sensitive options for change. The highly successful introduction of new information systems and initial assessment procedures has engaged the support of staff and demonstrated managerial capacity to respond quickly to new challenges during the implementation phase. There are many other examples of innovative solutions to varied challenges and clear evidence of sustainable improvements in outcomes for children and young people.

The implementation of the new integrated social care recording system described above and the speedy response to problems which arose exemplify the council's

outstanding capacity in respect of managing performance and change, and using data. Council staff at all levels are skilled in interpreting quantitative and qualitative information and using this to shape services. The council has prioritised and phased major school re-organisations taking account of available managerial capacity, and is effectively involving parents in reshaping special education.

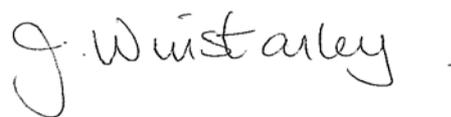
The council has no major workforce pressures and takes action to deal with short-term pressures, such as occurred during the departmental re-organisation. Staff development arrangements are very good; there is a well-established framework for supporting newly qualified social workers and commitment to post-qualifying awards. There are effective arrangements to support staff in integrated teams.

Area(s) for development

- Ensure that effective/swift action is taken to redress any gaps in provision and outcomes as identified by the recent refresh evaluation.
- Ensure consistency between the Business Plan of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board and the CYPP.

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