

26 November 2007

Mr David Hawker
Director of Children's Services
City of Westminster
Westminster City Hall
64 Victoria Street
London
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Dear Mr Hawker

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CITY OF WESTMINSTER

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

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

Westminster City Council consistently delivers services above minimum requirements for its children and young people. The JAR found that the council had made very good progress in addressing the areas for improvement raised in the APA in 2006, and all services are continuing to make good or excellent contributions towards improving outcomes. Safeguarding arrangements were found to have many strengths, with more work to be done on thresholds for access to services, housing arrangements and ensuring safer recruitment. The council and its partners are making good progress in tackling school improvement in secondary schools.

The council works effectively with its partners and there are many opportunities for children and young people and their families to have an influence on service development. Priorities are clear and are based on good analysis of information, and

performance information is being used well to drive improvement. The council has recently restructured its children's services and, combined with effective leadership and very good financial capacity, this means that there is excellent capacity to improve further.

Being healthy

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

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

The council has addressed the three areas for improvement that were identified in last year's APA. The substance misuse plan has been implemented and partnership work is strong, with some outstanding work being carried out by the Hungerford drug project. Treatment is prompt and there are good performance management arrangements. Young people have been involved in a number of innovative events to promote the services available, to good effect. The Healthy Schools programme is on target. The JAR found that the quality of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) was excellent. CAMHS works very effectively with other agencies to provide information and early intervention. There is early diagnosis for children with complex needs and accessible services have been established for hard-to-reach families and Black and ethnic minority communities.

The council works very closely with its partners to provide services that are innovative and inclusive. Priorities have been based on the health needs of the area, and a wide range of initiatives have been established in the last year to target specific issues such as obesity and immunisation. There is a continued focus on reducing teenage pregnancies, with a 47% reduction since 1998, and promoting sexual health. Health assessments for children who are looked after remain in the top band of performance. Services for children with disabilities are being increasingly integrated and some waiting times such as for physiotherapy have been much reduced. Health outcomes for children and young people are similar or better than in other comparable authorities.

Staying safe

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. This judgement is in line with the wider safeguarding judgement in the recent JAR. Improvements in performance have been consolidated and monitoring has become much more focused on ensuring good outcomes for children.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has been in place since early 2006 and reflects good working relationships with partners and a commitment to learn from practice. The LSCB has clear priorities which have been well-publicised. It has

focused particularly on ensuring that learning from the recent serious case review is embedded across agencies, to good effect. Child protection thresholds have been reviewed and training has taken place regarding long-term domestic violence and chronic neglect cases. A treatment programme has been set up specifically for children who experience domestic violence. Child protection planning is now more closely scrutinised and performance has improved as a result. Procedures for children returning home from care are now more rigorous. The JAR questioned the capacity of the LSCB to ensure effective training, development and compliance across all agencies; this is an area that needs to be addressed.

The proportion of looked after children has been falling over the last three years and is now below that of similar councils; the proportion of looked after children placed in residential care is also decreasing and a higher percentage are now fostered by relatives or friends. A relatively high number of children are placed more than 20 miles from home, although these tend to be the children with more complex needs. The council is working with two neighbouring authorities to commission a more local three-bedded unit for children with high needs. Looked after children all have allocated social workers and reviews are carried out on time. Medium-term placement stability is very good, but longer-term stability is not as good as for similar authorities. Adoptions of looked after children are at a very good level, although improvement is needed in the percentage of looked after children who were placed for adoption within 12 months of a decision for adoption being made.

Referral rates for children in need are generally lower than for similar authorities. The number of referrals leading to an initial assessment has dropped but it is still above that of similar councils. The number of core assessments has also reduced but it is still almost double that of similar councils; the council should keep this process under review, to ensure that resources are being used to best effect.

The council is committed to providing a safer environment for children and has launched a number of initiatives to address this, including a Safer Recruitment/Safer Environment Strategy and the introduction of multi agency Family Support Panels to provide early intervention to families with complex needs. Inspection findings show good provision of safe environments in schools and Early Years settings. The number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents is gradually reducing. The prevention of bullying is a local priority and young people have been involved in the production of an anti-bullying toolkit that was launched in 2006.

Children and young people with learning disabilities are supported to remain with their families as much as possible. Reviews of children with disabilities who are looked after are carried out on time, and consultation arrangements about the quality and safety of respite care have been enhanced. Of young people with learning disabilities aged 14-18, over 90% have transition plans for managing their move to adult services, which reflects good performance.

Areas for development

- Increase the number of children looked after who are placed within 20 miles of their family home.
- Improve speed of adoption of looked after children once a decision for adoption has been made.
- Review the need for the high volume of core assessments.
- Improve long-term stability of placements.
- The LSCB should review its capacity to co-ordinate and develop safer recruitment across all partner agencies.

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 area is good.

Children are getting a good start to their education. An above average proportion of Early Years settings are judged to be good. However, there were no outstanding or inadequate providers, indicating a good spread of support, targeted to ensure that no provision fails to meet minimum standards.

Attainment at Key Stage 1 in 2006 shows a decline at all levels for reading and writing with significant drops in boys' attainment. Mathematics, whilst significantly declining at Level 2+, indicates a slight increase at Level 3+. Boys' attainment is lower than girls' in mathematics and has declined since 2005.

Intensive challenge and support by the authority has led to attainment rising at the end of Key Stage 2. English results are well above the national average and in line with the authority's target for 2007 of 84%. In mathematics, results remained at 76%, just below national average. The authority has set a target of 84%; the gap from 76% to 84% is wide. The value added measure from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 is above the national average.

At Key Stage 3, attainment remains in line with statistical neighbours for all three core subjects. The value added measure from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 is slightly below the national average. However at 21%, the gap between boys' and girls' attainment in English is wide with a 26% gap in one school. At Level 6+ the gap is greater, with boys achieving a low 18% and girls 45%. There have been good improvements in mathematics. Pupils have made less progress in science over the last few years.

Key Stage 4 results rose in 2006, with the proportion achieving 5+ A*-C up to 49.35% and the proportion achieving 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics up three percentage points to 41.13%. Variation in performance between secondary schools still exists. The LA target for 5+A*-C in 2007 is ambitious at 55%.

The authority has made considerable progress in supporting and challenging secondary schools since its 2006 APA. Strategies and systems are in place to further accelerate the pace of change through the Building Schools for the Future programme, the closure of a weak school and collaboration with the colleges and the Academies. The LA continues to provide significant financial investment to poorer performing schools, with some success in improving behaviour and addressing the under-achievement of specific groups of pupils. The authority has created a number of new posts and is developing a learning and achievement strategy to help drive improvement. One secondary school was judged by Ofsted to require special measures following its inspection in November 2006. The first monitoring visit to this school in April 2007 identified that the LA, through its subject specialists, provided some good support for teaching and learning. However, the overall support from the authority was judged to be inadequate because the impact of its strategies were limited at the time.

A detailed target-setting strategy is well used to provide schools with demanding challenges. The authority uses data effectively to set targets, monitor progress and reduce the gaps between high- and low-performing schools. Schools share a wide range of data, enabling them to identify their own areas of challenge and how to rectify them. Young people from Black and minority ethnic groups make good progress, with achievement rates above the national average.

The education of children who are looked after is a high priority. The percentage of children who are looked after leaving care with at least 1 GCSE pass remained static in 2005-06, although the authority continues to perform in line with the national rate. Daily monitoring of the attendance of high risk children has reduced the number of children who are looked after who miss 25 days or more.

Both unauthorised and authorised absences in primary schools are high compared to national averages. There is a significant difference between primary and secondary schools in the national ranking of authorised absence, with the authority being 119th for primary compared to 2nd for secondary. A range of measures have been put into place to rectify this including a detailed guide assisting the transition of young people from primary to secondary schools and a series of information guides.

The high exclusion rates, identified as an issue in the 2006 APA, have reduced. Permanent exclusions have reduced by 46% over the last three years. Fixed-term exclusions are in line with statistical neighbours. The authority is working well with its partners in health and social care to investigate the relationship between exclusions and external factors such as homelessness, mental health and financial issues.

Areas for development

- Improve attainment at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 particularly in mathematics.

- Improve pupils' overall rates of progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.
- Address the wide gender gaps in achievement.
- Improve attendance in primary schools.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is very good. The council has a strong commitment to consultation with children and young people. Children and young people's involvement is given a strong focus and as a result services, activities and programmes are shaped to meet children and young people's needs.

All schools have a School Council and their members contribute to the life of the community in a number of ways; for example, in involvement in the appointment of headteachers. In addition, pupil referral units now consult service users to inform improvements to provision. Children are consulted on the play curriculum and will be involved in the Big Lottery consultation to develop new play opportunities. It is encouraging to note the authority is continuing to develop its response to children and young people's voices further and that this is a key area for development. The views of schools overall regarding council services are above the average for all councils surveyed.

The authority has achieved the target of 15% of schools making the full core extended service offer available to parents and children by September 2006. It is on target to exceed the 30% required by September 2007.

A second City survey was conducted in 2006-07 involving 1,500 young people. A very high number reported they feel safe within their families, schools and local communities. Despite a good anti-bullying strategy for schools, some young people remain concerned about racism in particular. Although young people say their situation improves when they report bullying.

There has been a reduction in the percentage of children who are looked after receiving final warnings, reprimands or convictions in 2005-06. The authority is seeking to improve the educational achievement of young offenders through joint work with 16+ and Further Education services. The authority is building on the close working between the Youth Offending Team, social inclusion and vulnerable children teams to explore the benefits of the lead professional role. A local delivery model has been developed through an incremental approach. The action taken to reduce anti-social behaviour and offending is good. The youth inclusion and support panels (YISP) are effective in identifying early those young people at risk of offending. A mentoring scheme and family intervention project, multi agency working and information sharing are well established. The incidence of anti-social behaviour orders is low and the high use of anti-social behaviour contracts, along with an

effective Civil Watch scheme, are reducing further the low levels of youth offending and anti-social behaviour.

Designated staff in schools and colleges support young people well in making good use of the advice and support they get from a highly effective Education of Children in Care team who co-ordinate support to all those educated out-of-borough.

In 2005 to 2006 100% of children who were looked after participated in their own reviews compared to 86% in 2004-2005. Opportunities for some children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to take part in out of school activities are limited, in particular for those with moderate learning difficulties.

Area for development

- Increase the opportunities for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to take part in activities outside of the school day.

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 area is good. The authority is making good progress in the delivery of designated Children's Centres. Parents are active members of the Children's Centre Cluster Board, building on the excellent practice established in Sure Start.

The percentage of young people in employment, education and training (EET) post-16 is very encouraging, including an improvement for young offenders. The provision for looked after young people continues to be very good. The Connexions service has exceeded its 2005 not in employment, education or training (NEET) target of 9.9% and, in March 2006, only 7.6% of 16–18 year olds were NEET, against 13.5% a year ago. All young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in school receive impartial information and guidance from Connexions at Key Stage 4.

Young people who are looked after are prepared well for transition to adulthood. In December 2005, 84% of care leavers were in EET, compared to 53% in 2004. This reflects a wide range of pathways. All care leavers have pathway plans and a high level of support for those in education.

The authority continues to make steady improvement in Level 2 attainment. It is ahead of its own targets, in line with Central London averages, and just below national averages. This demonstrates a 3% improvement from 2004-05 to 2005-06. To further ensure progress in this area with a stronger focus on quality, headteachers and principals have agreed to combine sixth forms with the 14–19 Forum to create a single strategic framework for 14–19 collaboration. The council's links with schools have been strengthened to have more involvement in supporting 14–19 developments. Off-site vocational opportunities in 13 areas have been made

available. School-based vocational programmes are available in most schools. A comprehensive post-16 education offer is provided by the seven school sixth forms and two colleges, with a consortium approach to the AS/A2 offer and a wide variety of other options at all levels. The 14–19 partnership recognises the need to strengthen vocational provision and establish new stronger links with employers.

The authority recognises improvements at A-Level are not yet secure. Vocational learning features prominently in the Building Schools for the Future plans and the city-wide curriculum audit has been revised as a basis for agreeing diploma pathways linked to the London-wide e-prospectus. A new 14–19 Action Plan will be published in September 2008. There is a growing commitment to collaboration between schools, colleges and employers to deliver the new diplomas.

Areas for development

- Secure the recent improvements in outcomes at post–16.
- Develop a more strategic view of the 14–19 agenda and ensure its implementation.

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

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council has excellent capacity to improve its services for children and young people and its management of these services is excellent. There is effective senior leadership and very good corporate support for improving children's services provision. There has been very good progress in addressing issues identified for improvement. Challenging ambitions are shared by partners and staff. The council's One City programme aims to make Westminster the 'best governed city in the world'.

The council and its partners share common objectives for safeguarding the welfare and improving the well-being of children and young people in the area and priorities are set out clearly in the Children and Young People's Plan. The plan itself has been informed by a comprehensive needs analysis. Many new initiatives have been established that demonstrate a commitment to partnership and to hearing the voice of young people. Much attention is given to inclusion, equality and diversity with a clear focus on meeting the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable children.

A cross-agency Children's Workforce Strategy was published in May 2006. The percentage of staff leaving has reduced for the second year running, and vacancy levels have also gone down substantially. The JAR identified some weaknesses in the recording of compliance with the safer recruitment policy, and the council is now developing more robust procedures. The JAR found that value for money was good, with excellent budget monitoring and financial management. Additional resources have been secured to support school improvement. The council is at an early stage in implementing its plans to develop joint commissioning arrangements. Performance

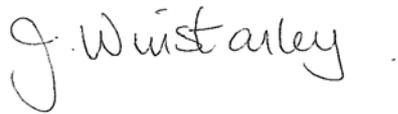
is tightly managed and there are effective mechanisms for sharing performance information with partners at a strategic level.

Area for development

- Ensure that recruitment systems are robust.

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