

26 November 2007

Mr A Webb  
Corporate Director, Children and Young People  
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council  
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Stockport  
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Dear Mr Webb

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN STOCKPORT METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council's contribution to outcomes for children and young people is good in most service functions across the five outcome areas. Services are appropriately focussed on vulnerable children and families and effectively delivered through strong partnerships. Outcomes are often better than for children and young people in similar authorities, and can be securely identified as arising from the council's actions. The engagement of children and young people in consultation, decision making, resource allocation and other activities is a strength. Most children and young people have a positive view of local services. The leadership and capacity of the council to improve outcomes further is outstanding.

### **Being healthy**

**Grade 3**

#### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. In some aspects the contribution is outstanding. There are effective mechanisms for partnership working and the delivery of services

is very well aligned across agencies to agreed strategies. Most hospitals are compliant with national standards. Programmes to promote healthy lifestyles are proving very successful in encouraging breastfeeding, immunisations, and the cessation of smoking during pregnancy. Work in reducing teenage pregnancies is outstanding; Stockport has achieved the 21st highest reduction of all local authorities in this area. Effective work has been carried out in ethnic minority communities to encourage improving access to sexual health services.

The authority has appropriately identified long waiting times for some specialist services in occupational, physiotherapy, and speech and language therapies. Waiting times for these specialist therapies are longer than is acceptable, although the authority has ensured that some progress has been made in reducing waiting times, and where there are long waiting times children are seen by other staff. However, further improvement is necessary on waiting times for formal assessments. The provision of 24 hour cover for urgent mental health needs has been fully implemented. Most of the other Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services are improving, and all are good. The assessment of young people with acute and non-acute mental health needs within timescales is excellent. Admissions to hospital related to substance misuse have increased. The council and partners have identified substance misuse as a priority.

Health services supporting looked after children are successful in ensuring that appropriate and timely checks are carried out with 92% of children and young people. This area has shown sustained progress over time to this very good level as a result of consistent management focus through, for instance, ensuring that all school age looked after children are screened by a school nurse to ensure that their emotional and mental health needs are being met. Early years provision is good or satisfactory in almost all cases. However, Ofsted finds that in encouraging children to be healthy there are no outstanding providers in some types of provision such as full, sessional, crèche and multiple day care. School inspections show that children in school are strongly encouraged to be healthy; no secondary schools have been graded outstanding on this aspect, 91% are graded as satisfactory or good, and 9% are inadequate. However, 50% of primary schools were graded as outstanding and 96% as outstanding or good. There were no inadequate judgements in primary school inspections on this aspect. All of Stockport's schools are now taking part in the National Healthy Schools Programme, which is above the national target, and the authority is on track to achieve the national milestone of 55% of schools achieving National Healthy School Status by December 2007.

### **Areas for development**

- Encourage and enable the provision of high quality childcare providers.
- Improve waiting times for formal assessments in occupational, physiotherapy and speech and language therapies.

## 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 area is good. There has been a 29% reduction in the average number of children aged 0–15 killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents between 1994–98 compared with 2005. There has been an effective campaign to raise awareness regarding domestic violence which has increased referrals by 8%. While almost all childcare providers are good or satisfactory in ensuring that children stay safe, there is no outstanding provision regarding children staying safe, other than amongst childminders. However, 46% of primary schools were judged to be outstanding in ensuring learners stay safe and a further 50% were judged to be good. All secondary schools were judged to be satisfactory or good in ensuring that learners stay safe. None were judged as outstanding. The council has carried out surveys and used feedback from young people to improve safety in local areas.

The council and its partners have a clear vision and localised, integrated services to support vulnerable children and families. Organisational structures effectively reflect this vision. Stockport has a lower rate of referrals for child protection procedures than similar authorities. The council has a responsibility to make enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. The council is successful in meeting the timescales from commencing these enquiries to holding a conference. The percentage of initial assessments carried out within 7 working days is in line with their statistical neighbours but has decreased over the past two years. The council carries out a significantly lower number of core assessments than similar authorities but the timeliness of these assessments is significantly below that of these authorities. This is not acceptable. Reviews of children on the Child Protection Register (CPR) have been consistently carried out in 100% of cases for the past four years, representing a very good performance. There is a strategy to ensure that following de-registration, families continue to be well supported and the rate of re-referrals back onto the CPR is very good, indicating that these services are effective. The child protection data regarding ethnicity is defective; the council's data states that all non-white children are of mixed ethnic origins. The council accepts that this is an error. This weakness may well inhibit effective planning. All children on the CPR have an allocated social worker.

Although there is a significant five year downward trend of the numbers of children looked after, the rate increased slightly in 2006-07, and is above the rate in similar authorities. It is a key priority for the council to continue to reduce safely the number of looked after children and strategies such as reducing the number of children at home on care orders are having some effect. The council has been successful in recruiting foster carers during 2006-07 which has contributed to improved placement choice. The fostering service is rated as excellent by the Commission for Social Care Inspection. Reviews take place within timescales in 99% of cases, a very good performance and well above the performance of similar authorities. The number of

looked after children allocated to a qualified social worker is at 100% and has been at this level for four years, indicating sustained and effective management attention. The training levels of residential workers are good, and the numbers of social workers with a qualifying award is improving rapidly

### **Areas for development**

- Improve the timeliness of child protection assessments where necessary.
- Ensure that child protection data in respect of ethnicity recording are sound

## **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 area is good. Data for 2006 show that standards and rates of progress continued to improve overall in all key stages. The strongest performance continues to be across core subjects in Key Stage 2, although there was an impressive rise by 4.3 percentage points in the percentage of students achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE. Standards in the Foundation Stage are good overall, and provision in Early Years education continues to be strong. Nevertheless, the authority has rightly identified the need to improve boys' performance in the area of communication, language and literacy. At Key Stage 1 standards in reading and writing are above national averages and are in line in the case of mathematics. However, the rates of progress over the previous four years have been slower than those nationally. Key Stage 2 rates of progress in English and mathematics are in line with national rates, and above the national rate in science. The percentage of pupils achieving Level 4+ in all core subjects is above the national average. Standards at Key Stage 3 in all core subjects are in line with those nationally; rates of progress in each subject were slower in 2006. Standards at GCSE improved at a faster rate than nationally last year, and the percentage of students achieving at least five A\* to C grades including English and mathematics is above national averages. At 78%, the percentage of young people leaving care with one or more A\* to G at GCSE or a GNVQ is very good and well above national averages. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory or better progress in over 90% of schools inspected.

In primary and secondary schools the rates of attendance are in line with national averages. The percentage of permanent and fixed term exclusions in primary schools is much lower than those nationally. However, the picture is reversed in secondary schools with percentages above national in both aspects. The percentage of fixed term exclusions for pupils with statements of special educational need is below the national average in both primary and secondary schools.

Attainment of young people from minority ethnic groups is varied across the borough. Those from White Other and Chinese heritage perform well with above average attainment in Key Stages 3 and 4. However, the authority has rightly identified weaker progress among some smaller groups including Asian heritage and Pakistani heritage girls. The authority has already started to look at ways to improve the situation. This includes a greater use of data analysis and target setting at school level, and programmes to increase attitudes and aspirations among pupils and parents. Overall, rates of progress are steadily improving, and the progress made by pupils between Key Stage 2 to GCSE is in line with the national average.

The authority continues to provide a good level of support to all its schools in supporting them to raise standards and achievement. All schools, except one, buy back into the School Improvement Team's Service Level Support. During the previous year only one school was given a notice to improve and no schools were given special measures. The majority of schools achieved overall effectiveness judgements of good or better in schools inspections. Stockport has a high level of outstanding schools compared to statistical neighbours. Responses from young people through the Tellus2 survey showed that on the whole they enjoy school and feel happy and safe there.

### **Areas for development**

- Raise the attainment and rates of progress amongst minority ethnic groups.
- Reduce fixed-term and permanent exclusion rates in secondary schools.

## **Making a positive contribution**

**Grade 3**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. It has been a core part of the council's strategy to ensure that young people participate in structures of their own, such as the Youth Parliament, or contribute to formal structures, such as the recruitment of senior staff. The 'Diverse Not Different' group, made up of 15 disabled young people, has had success in seeking to influence the inequalities and under representation of disabled young people. The council has been effective in meeting the recommendation from last year's joint area review regarding feedback after consultation and performance in this area is outstanding. The council has created effective internal structures, for instance in integrating the Connexions service into its local service delivery structures. The total number of children and young people involved in volunteering is up from 531 to 605. The number of Duke of Edinburgh Awards rose from 179 to 196.

The council has a positive rating for all restorative youth justice processes and the numbers of first time entrants to the youth justice system is comparable to similar authorities in validated data. Liaison by case supervisors is 100%, but taking breach/recall action within timescales occurs in 75% of cases. Recidivism remains a target for the Youth Offending Team. Dedicated workers are working with looked after children regarding offending. In childcare there is a lack of higher quality providers (except among childminders, all day care and sessional daycare providers) in encouraging children to make a positive contribution.

Participation of looked after children in reviews increased in 2006-07 from the previous year, but is not banded as acceptable and is slightly below the rate achieved by most similar councils. The JAR identified that improvements were required regarding the percentage of young people with transition plans moving from children's to adults' social care. These have improved and the percentage of young people with transition plans has increased from 74% in 2005-06 to 81% in 2006-07. This recommendation has been met. However, some children and young people in Stockport still do not have a transition plan and many local authorities now ensure that over 90% of children and young people with disabilities aged 14 or above have a transition plan.

In response to funding difficulties, the council made reductions in the management of youth services. As a result, the numbers of young people reached by youth workers has reduced and is currently below the national target. However, the council has carefully focussed its remaining resources on priority areas. It also has an online service which is well used.

### **Areas for development**

- Increase the numbers of looked after children participating in their reviews.
- Increase the percentage of young people with transition plans.

## **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. The authority and key partners have worked effectively to address the issues raised in the JAR relating to this aspect of work and in particular the 14–19 strategy. There is a well established and very good quality 14–19 strategy supported by an equally good implementation plan. Since the previous annual performance assessment there has been a firming up of commitment from all partners and a re-structuring of the way the 14–19 partnership operates. Better working structures have been introduced which include much clearer lines of management and accountability. There is now a further improvement in the partnership and working procedures between the authority and the Learning and

Skills Council. Collaboration between all the colleges and secondary schools is developing and has improved over the last year. There are now five working groups and an implementation group established with strong representation from the 14–19 providers. These have improved greatly the operational aspects of the 14–19 strategy. The authority was not successful in the first round of bidding for the Diploma lines, although one has been accepted pending amendments for 2009. This has meant a delay in the introduction of Diplomas for young people in Stockport.

The number of young people aged 16–18 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) has increased over the last two years, and is slightly higher than national rates. The number of young people aged 19 in the same category is in line with national rates. The authority has established a NEET strategy group to focus on the issues and look at ways of improving the participation rates. This group has already brought about a greater cohesion to the 14–19 strategy and identified some of the barriers faced by different groups of young people. The number of young people looked after who are engaged in education, training or employment at the age of 19 is acceptable. There has been increased attainment in level 2 and level 3 qualifications at age 19. The percentage of young people achieving level 2 and 3 by age 19 is above national averages and that of statistical neighbours.

There is a wide range of work related learning and work based learning available to pre- and post-16 students. Employers are actively engaged and involved in the programmes in schools, colleges and training providers, and through the local authority pre-16 work based learning service and the Education Business Partnership. This employer engagement provides students with very good access to apprenticeships and other 'jobs with training'. For students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities there is a comprehensive programme of entitlements to work experience placements with accredited training provided in further education settings and where appropriate work shadowing programmes are provided in the school environment. This whole aspect of preparing young people for working life is managed very effectively across the authority through the established local training provider network.

There is a wide range of childcare provision across the borough which has grown by 6.6% since 2005, which is nearly double the national rate. There has also been a growth in the supply of childminders which at 4% is, again, double the national growth rate. The Sure Start programme includes a social inclusion project. This engages with local parents and carers to enable them to contribute to the planning, implementation and evaluation of the Sure Start programme. There is a 'Continuing Education Service' which offers childcare arrangements 'on site' for their Skills for Life courses in literacy and numeracy. These courses are also run specifically for teenage mothers with crèche facilities on site. The service provides good quality courses in the community to prepare learners for work by providing help with job applications, CV writing and interview techniques. Some 350 learners achieved nationally recognised tests in literacy and numeracy during the previous academic year.

## Area for development

- Reduce the proportion of young people not engaged in education, training and employment.

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

Grade 4

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council has outstanding capacity to improve its services for children and young people. Its management of core services is very good, effected through a strong and very effective senior leadership team. Since the previous annual performance assessment the authority has made some excellent progress in addressing issues and in establishing new strategies and working procedures. In many cases these have contributed to the improved outcomes and performance. The review of the high quality children and young people's plan shows that good progress is being made in most aspects of the authority's work and that the council knows its strengths and weaknesses well. The authority has very good systems in place for self evaluating its work. It has updated its system for analysing data which maps performance across services and targets areas for improvement quickly. This is supported by a newly formed data and performance team.

During the previous year the authority has successfully managed a £1 million cut in budget which saw outcomes in most areas either sustained or improved. At times the council has had to made hard decisions while also ensuring that savings are made and ways of working are more efficient. For example, the re-organisation of the social care and youth services has been carried out to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of both services. There are greater elements of joint working across the authority. There has been an assimilation of Connexions, the Youth Service and Education Welfare into one integrated service for young people. Stockport has developed an 'Inclusive Supportive Communities' approach to delivering services to meet local needs. After piloting the model in one geographical area, this model has been smoothly rolled out to the remaining five cluster partnerships across the borough. This is a highly effective strategy which delivers services through multi-agency work and supports the whole agenda of inclusion, integration and decision making at a local level to meet local needs.

In 2006 standards for five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE rose by 4.3% and the percentage of young people leaving care with 1 or more GCSE or GNVQ rose by 27%. Early indications for schools' performance in 2007, although unvalidated, show a further small increase in standards in most areas.

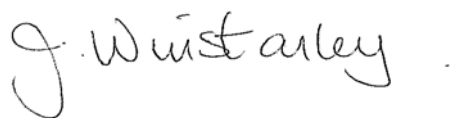
The council's restructuring of services and a sharper focus on service management has not only enhanced capacity but also improved the service delivery. Given the overall budget restraints across the borough, the council has delivered excellent value for money alongside some stiff cost reductions.



There are no additional areas for development to those outlined under the *Every child matters* aspects. However, the council should continue to address any areas from the previous annual performance assessment and joint area review which have not been fully met. This assessment also agrees with the areas for development identified by the council through its review of the Children and Young People's Plan.

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