

26 November 2007

Mr Ian Sandbrook
Interim Strategic Director of Education and Children's Services
Slough Borough Council
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Dear Mr Sandbrook

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SLOUGH 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, 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

Slough Council consistently delivers services for children and young people at a level that is above minimum requirements in all respects. Services are clearly matched to local need and are having a discernible impact on the lives of children and young people. The authority's management of its services for children and young people and its capacity for further improvement are also good. The authority knows its strengths and has a clear understanding of what it needs to do to improve further.

Effective and sometimes innovative provision is in place to promote healthy lifestyles and to help parents and carers to keep their children healthy. A high proportion of Slough schools have achieved the national healthy schools standard. Teenage conception rates are low. However, despite some improvement, there are weaknesses in the authority's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

The authority's services help to ensure that children and young people stay safe. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is well established and effective, and the council works effectively with its partners to continually reduce risks. Assessment and referral of children is appropriate, all children on the child protection register are allocated to a social worker and reviews are held on time. However, the

percentage of s47 enquiries leading to initial child protection conferences held within 15 working days is low. Looked after children and young people are well supported and their individual needs are met well.

Services make a good contribution to children and young people's achievement and enjoyment. The quality of schools and early years provision is good. Attainment at the end of the Foundation Stage is below the national average but improving. Standards at Key Stages 1, 3 and 4 are above, and sometimes well above, national averages. Key Stage 2 standards are broadly average, although they have not risen as rapidly as those of similar authorities. Children and young people have very good attitudes to school and their attendance and behaviour are good. The authority provides highly effective provision for children and young people educated out of school.

Council services help children and young people to make good, positive contributions. Their views are listened to, although opportunities for them to influence the work of the council are limited. Children and young people in care, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are given good opportunities to make decisions about their lives and to review the services that they receive. Children and young people have access to a good range of activities. The authority's actions are contributing to a fall in the numbers of first time entrants to the youth justice system and in the re-offending rate.

Services provide good support to enable children and young people to achieve economic well-being. The proportion of young people in education, employment and training is above average and rising, as is the attainment of 16 and 19 year olds. Almost all schools now have sixth forms and partnership work between schools is good. However, the authority's strategic plans for 14-19 education are out of date.

Being healthy

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

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

Slough has a well developed framework for promoting healthy lifestyles and actively supporting parents and carers in keeping their children healthy. It is inclusive and benefits from some well focused support from the voluntary sector. The Children and Young People's Plan identifies the following as agreed priority areas: promoting exercise, healthy eating and healthy lifestyles; encouraging children and young people to 'choose health'; and improving children and young people's mental health. These are based on a sound analysis of health needs, including health inequalities. A range of innovative projects and effective joint working have led to positive outcomes, for instance an increase during the year from 20% to 59.7% of all eligible babies engaged in Kool Kids Use Cups programme (free cups and dental advice). Well targeted initiatives have also helped to improve the proportion of mothers who initiate breast-feeding. Local health service data show that the percentage of

mothers who are breast-feeding at 10 days increased by 13.5%, and at 6 weeks by 9.1% during 2006-07. Data also show that the proportion of mothers who initiate breast-feeding is higher than the average for England.

Overall provision contributes well to the health of young children. No provision had actions imposed at the point of registration, which is considerably better than the average for England. Inspections report that all sectors, except sessional work, have outcomes that are higher than the national average for health. One hundred percent of Slough's schools are participating in the healthy schools scheme, and a high percentage (59%) have already achieved the national healthy schools standard. This is above the national target (50%) and the average for England (47%). In addition, 85% of schools in Slough are engaged in two hours or more of physical exercise per week. Forty percent of young people reported through the Tellus2 survey that they had spent at least 30 minutes doing sports or other active things on six or more days in the last week.

Young people have easy access to appropriate contraceptive and sexual health services through a range of settings. However, according to the Tellus2 survey, fewer children and young people in Slough (52%) than the national average (63%) think that the information and advice they get on sex and relationships is good enough. Nevertheless, compared to national figures, teenage conception rates are low, although there has been considerable fluctuation from year to year.

Some progress has been made in tackling the shortfalls in CAMHS identified in the 2005 joint area review. For example, a policy is now in place for transition arrangements which is operating successfully. However, over the past 18 months there has been increasing frustration around the CAMHS service level agreement and its delivery. This has resulted in notice being served on the current provider and a move to the re-commission of CAMHS. In the meantime, the health provider has brought in a consultant to assist with CAMHS developments. Despite the difficulties, developments have been taking place locally at Tiers 1 and 2 which have taken some of the pressure off Tiers 3 and 4, and this has had positive benefits for children, young people and their families. For example, the CAMHS grant was used for primary mental health workers within the psychology service to assist with prevention, early intervention, training, direct support, signposting and referrals. Two grant-funded therapists have also been appointed to support looked after children and young people. The proportion of new cases to CAMHS waiting under 26 weeks is generally in line with the average for England, but the proportion having a wait of under four weeks is still too low. The majority of young people referred to CAMHS by the Youth Offending Team receive an assessment within five working days.

The needs of vulnerable children and young people, including those who are looked after, are very well met. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from excellent multi-agency team support. The percentage of these young people who have had an annual health assessment and dental check has increased again this year from 87% to 90%, which is better than the average for England.

Area for development

- Work proactively with partners to develop a comprehensive CAMHS strategy.

Staying safe

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is well established. It provides an effective lead in taking forward the safeguarding agenda for the council and its partners. It has a sound work plan, based on identified areas that need further work or improvement, and takes decisive, effective action.

The council works effectively with partners to continually reduce risks. Making safeguarding everybody's business and improving street safety for children and young people are two specific actions in the Children and Young People's Plan. Information, support and guidance are targeted well to meet needs. For example, the community safety pages on Slough Borough Council's website have been improved and now provide key information on community safety issues of relevance to young people, such as mini-motorbikes. According to the Tellus2 survey, most children and young people in Slough feel safe; this is in line with the national average.

Safeguarding vulnerable children through increased focus on prevention is at the centre of the partnership agenda. As part of the overall strategy to integrate locality working, multi-agency discussion meetings are being held regularly in schools and children's centres. These look at issues and put targeted, early intervention services into place with good outcomes. Once fully introduced, the common assessment framework will be used in many of these cases to streamline the process and ensure that families are fully engaged. The range of high quality supportive early intervention and safeguarding provision, such as family group conferencing, is used successfully.

Performance in 2006-07 shows that referral and assessment workers promptly and accurately identify children in need of services and those at risk of serious significant harm. However, the timeliness of initial assessments fluctuates from year to year. The percentage completed within timescales increased in 2006-07 to 70.3%, which is above the average for England (68.4%). There has been an appropriate increase in the number of core assessments and a high proportion (82%) is now completed to timescales. Performance remains at a very good level and is better than the average for England (78%). Both the low number of repeat referrals (8.8) and of re-registrations on the child protection register suggest that workers gather relevant information, secure well-focused support or intervention and ensure that most cases are not closed inappropriately.

All children on the Child Protection Register are suitably allocated to a social worker and all child protection reviews are held on time. However, Slough's performance for the percentage of s47 enquiries which led to initial child protection conferences held

within 15 working days (6.3%) is well below the national average (34.6%). Slough has acted appropriately and promptly by putting some actions into place to improve this whilst further work is being undertaken to gain a fuller understanding of the underlying reasons.

The percentage of looked after children and young people who are allocated a suitably qualified worker is low at 77.3%. This is due to two factors: data entry, which includes cases held temporarily by students; and Slough's policy of allocating the worker most able to meet the needs of each individual young person in their care. The information technology problems related to counting students as allocated workers have now been rectified. The young people who have a non social work qualified caseworker are those aged over 16 years old who wish to remain in care whilst moving on to independence. Each individual's worker is allocated on the basis that he/she is the member of the team who has the most appropriate skills to meet the young person's transition needs, for example language skills or a good knowledge of education settings. This policy demonstrates good use of resources and an emphasis on meeting each young person's needs appropriately. The percentage of reviews held on time is at a good level (94%), which is better than the average for England (85%). The stability of placements for children who are looked after is good. A high percentage of looked after children were adopted during 2006-07 and their adoption plans were put in place speedily.

Areas for development

- Embed and monitor the actions required to ensure that initial child protection conferences are held within 15 working days of the start of s.47 enquiries.
- Explore further whether the thresholds for undertaking s.47 enquiries and for holding initial child protection conferences are both appropriate and applied effectively. If necessary put appropriate actions into place.

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.

Children receive a very good start to their education. An above average proportion of early years settings are judged to be good and outstanding in Ofsted inspections. Furthermore, children's attainment at the end of the Foundation Stage is improving, although still below the national average.

The quality of the local authority's schools is generally good. The proportion judged to be good or outstanding in recent inspections compares favourably with similar authorities. Officers monitor schools closely and provide highly effective support and challenge, acting robustly where schools are at risk of failing. As a result, very few

schools have been judged by Ofsted to be inadequate in recent years. Children and young people, including those who are looked after or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, progress well in their learning. Standards in English at Key Stage 1 are in line with the national average and consistently above those seen in similar authorities. Similarly, standards in mathematics are above the national average and well above those in similar authorities. In Key Stage 2 standards are broadly average, however, and despite significant actions by the authority, they have not risen as rapidly as the results of similar authorities. In contrast, average Key Stage 3 and GCSE standards are consistently above, and sometimes well above average. They are also increasing at a more rapid rate. The proportion of pupils attaining five or more higher grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, was around 10% above the national average in 2006, placing Slough in the 10 best performing authorities.

Children and young people generally have very good attitudes to school. Notably, the results of the Tellus2 survey showed that the proportion that enjoys school is significantly above average. Attendance, including that of looked after children and young people, is good. Recent inspection reports demonstrate that behaviour is good or outstanding in most schools. Very good support to prevent children and young people from being excluded from school has resulted in very low rates of permanent and fixed-term exclusions. Furthermore, exclusion rates for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are also much lower than the national average. The authority provides highly effective and often innovative provision for children and young people who need to be educated out of school.

The 2005 joint area review recognised that, while support was generally good, improvements were needed in the support provided for parents and carers from hard-to-reach groups. The authority has worked hard to engage these parents and carers more effectively, and has successfully increased the opportunities that exist to meet with them, to respond to their concerns and ideas, and to provide them with individual support.

Areas for development

- Raise levels of attainment at age 11.
- Improve outcomes for children at the end of the Foundation Stage.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

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

Slough Borough Council has a robust Children and Young People's Participation Strategy, 'Getting Involved', and an active and effective participation group that is a sub-group of the Children's Trust. More children and young people in Slough consider

that their views are listened to in decisions about both the local area and school matters than the national average, according to the Tellus2 survey. A good example of children and young people getting involved in local decisions and actions are the bike ramps that were requested by young people in Langley and then installed by the community safety team; similarly, football posts were installed in Pippins Park to encourage young people to use and look after the park. There has been a delay in establishing a Children and Young People's Cabinet through a local election process, but this is now imminent.

A higher percentage of Slough's looked after children and young people were involved in making decisions about their own lives by participating in reviews this year (84%) than last year (78%). Performance is in line with the average for England (87%). There are good examples of looked after children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities being involved in reviewing the services that they receive. Looked after children also have an opportunity to participate in a bi-monthly meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

A wide range of multi-agency services provide mentoring and other support for individuals and groups of children to enable them to develop socially and emotionally. For example, in a number of the schools inspected the Slough Creative Partnerships programme was seen to be making a positive contribution to pupils' personal and creative development. Other Ofsted inspections of provision such as nurseries, schools and foster care show that high levels of care and attention are given to all aspects of enabling children and young people to make a positive contribution, with good results. Over 70% of all judgements were good or better, which is higher than the national average (63%). Services are used effectively by children and their families, including those needing support at challenging times. There are effective strategies to support community cohesion and anti-racist and anti-bullying strategies and initiatives are well established in schools. According to the Tellus2 survey a higher percentage of children in Slough report that they are not bullied in school (75%) than the average for England (70%).

The increasing range of activities that all children and young people, including looked after children and those with learning disabilities and/or difficulties, can access are good. During 2006-07 there was an overall increase in the number of young people accessing youth services and a higher percentage of them have taken up programmes and achieved accredited outcomes. In 2006-07, a 5.6% reduction in crime was achieved. This was accomplished by partners working together in an effective and timely manner to tackle anti-social behaviour and offending within the community, and by the Youth Offending Team delivering focused programmes and working directly with the parents of offenders. For instance, proactive anti-social work is carried out with schools by the Police and Community Safety/Drug Action team to warn young people about the consequences of anti-social behaviour, crime and drug misuse. Good progress has also been made on running well targeted crime reduction activities. The number of first time entrants to the youth justice system is falling year on year, with an 8.7% reduction in 2006-07. Re-offending rates are also dropping and performance is better than the average for England.

Area for development

- Improve the opportunities for children and young people to influence the work of the council.

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.

Opportunities for 14-19 education are enhanced by good partnership work between schools in the area. School sixth form provision has increased considerably and almost all schools now have sixth forms. Strategic plans for 14-19 development are in place, but, given the rapid pace of national and local change, are out of date and therefore do not fully meet current needs. The local context is also complex, as learners can easily access provision across a wide geographical area and in a number of different authorities. Further strategic planning is now being carried out to reflect these issues, with plans for increased collaboration with neighbouring authorities. The authority is also engaging more closely with local employers to ensure that 14-19 planning links more closely to the skills needs of the local area.

The levels of attainment of 19 year olds, both at Level 2 and Level 3, are above the national average and have improved in recent years. Over the last two years the authority has also successfully increased the proportion of young people in education, employment or training to a level which is significantly above that seen nationally or in similar authorities. The proportion of 16-18 year olds not in employment, education or training fell from 9.3% to 5.4% last year and the proportion of 19 year olds fell from 10.2% to 5.9%; with national averages at 7.7% and 8.2% respectively. Similarly, the proportion of 17 year olds continuing in education or training has increased from 73% to 81%, while the national proportion has increased from 74% to 76%. Young people's access to information, advice and guidance about their future options has improved, with good targeting of guidance at young people from vulnerable groups. Services have also been reconfigured to provide better support to young people when they leave care. These changes have contributed to a greater proportion of vulnerable young people in education, employment and training.

The authority has recently increased the level of support that it provides for parents and carers with basic skills needs. Advice and guidance sessions have been provided, linked to 12 new training courses. These opportunities have been carefully targeted and take-up in the first year has been good.

Area for development

- Improve strategic planning for 14-19 developments to ensure that provision in Slough is coherent and well matched to local needs.

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

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The management of services for children and young people, and capacity for further improvement, are good.

This is a period of some change in the leadership of the council and the children's services directorate. The authority currently has an interim Director of Children's Services, although a new substantive director should be in post by January. The council's Chief Executive was also appointed recently. Despite this period of change, leadership has remained effective and the authority has maintained its drive for improvement. Notably, officers at all levels have a powerful commitment to meeting the complex and sometimes challenging needs of service users. The development of an integrated approach to children's services is progressing well. However, time is now needed for changes in the leadership and management of the directorate's work to become embedded and to develop further. The council's work with other partner organisations is good. The Children's Trust and Local Children's Safeguarding Board are well established and include good representation from a variety of agencies. Performance management is good and the authority uses its resources effectively and efficiently.

The authority's vision and ambition is set out clearly in a comprehensive and well-focused Children and Young People's Plan. Their recent review of the plan demonstrates that good progress is being made in the majority of areas; in some areas progress is excellent. Good progress has also been made in implementing most of the recommendations identified in the last annual performance assessment and in the 2005 joint area review. In many areas, the authority has taken decisive and sharply focused actions which have resulted in timely and at times substantial improvement. This is demonstrated, for example, by the authority's work to reduce exclusions to very low levels and by the way in which it monitors and supports the work of its schools, particularly those at risk of failing. In a few areas, for example in the youth service and the involvement of children and young people in the council's work, improvements have been made, although progress has been slow.

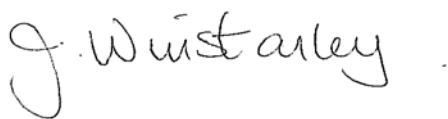
Many aspects of the authority's workforce planning and development are strong. However, the number of unfilled social care posts is above levels seen nationally and in similar authorities; retention has also fallen slightly in recent years. The proportion of residential care workers qualified to NVQ Level 3 and the proportion of social workers and residential managers with the Post Qualifying Award are also below average.

Area for development

- Review and redevelop the authority's strategy for social care workforce planning and development.

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