

26 November 2007

Mr Maurice Bates
Director of Children's Services
Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council
Council Offices
Kirkleatham Street
Redcar
TS10 1YA

Dear Mr Bates

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN REDCAR AND CLEVELAND 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

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council's contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people is good. Outcomes are generally better than those achieved in similar areas and continue to improve. The council's services are making an increasingly discernible difference, especially for the most vulnerable children and young people. There is a clear focus on narrowing the gap between the outcomes for these children and those for most children, while continuing to improve provision and outcomes for all. The views of children and young people are sought and used to influence decisions. The council's commitment to further improvement is set out clearly in its plans and reflected in the ambitions and determination of its elected members and officers.

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. The council has developed a range of strategies in partnership with other agencies to improve the health of children and young people across the borough. This includes initiatives such as free access to swimming baths for all

children during the summer holidays. Health promotion is targeted effectively to meet the needs of groups of vulnerable children. The number of looked after children that attend their health assessments has increased significantly from last year and is now in line with national averages and that of comparable councils.

All of the authority's schools are now participating in the Healthy Schools Programme, which is a marked improvement on last year. The proportion of schools which has achieved the national Healthy Schools Standard is above the national average. Opportunities to participate in physical activity have improved for all children and the extent to which pupils develop healthy lifestyles was judged good or better in 90% of schools inspected since September 2006. Sports coaches from Middlesbrough football club provide coaching in schools and after-school clubs, particularly in more deprived areas. Schemes to tackle obesity and promote healthy eating have been established for parents and children.

There has been a marked reduction in conception rates among 15–17 year olds. This brings the council's rates down to below the average of similar councils, although it remains above the national average. Challenging targets have been set for next year to reduce the figure further; this remains a high priority for the council. The proportion of children and young people with decayed, missing and filled teeth also remains higher than average.

Good progress has been made in increasing the provision for young people receiving treatment for substance misuse, including a new treatment facility based in the borough. This is a well-targeted use of resources, given that the number of young people that are admitted to hospital following substance misuse is above the national average and that of similar councils.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service has improved. Increased funding has resulted in easier access and no waiting times. The service has also improved its support for vulnerable children and young people. This includes a dedicated service for looked after children with immediate access, as well as support and advice for foster carers and residential workers. A consultant has designated responsibility for the service for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Area for development

- Improve preventative work to reduce the rate of substance misuse in the longer term.

Staying safe

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. Safeguarding arrangements have continued to improve in the last year. Inspection reports show that schools have sound systems in place to ensure the safety of children and young people. Effective road safety measures have

resulted in a reduction in the number of children and young people killed or seriously injured on the roads.

The council works effectively with its partners to promote early intervention and support to children and families. This, together with robust monitoring of safeguarding arrangements, has resulted in fewer children becoming the subject of a child protection plan than the averages found both nationally and in similar areas. It has also resulted in comparatively low numbers of looked after children. All children on the child protection register have an allocated social worker and have their cases reviewed within the appropriate timescales. Very good improvements have been made in the timeliness of both initial and core assessments, and performance is now considerably better than is the case nationally and in similar authorities.

Looked after children and young people continue to have secure and stable placements in the short and long term. Placement stability has improved from last year and is now better than in similar areas. Most looked after children aged 10–16 live in foster care or adoptive placements and a high proportion of care leavers live in suitable accommodation. The council's performance on the number of children adopted is very good.

All young people leaving care are allocated a personal adviser. They all have pathway plans and are well supported by the leaving care team to enable them to manage their finances, live independently and access appropriate housing.

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. Most outcomes for children and young people have improved, although not all challenging targets have been met. Significantly, the dip in standards in secondary schools in 2005 has been reversed. The outcomes of national assessments and examinations at all key stages in 2006 represented the best ever results for the local authority; this ranks the authority in the top 10% of authorities nationally for rate of progress. Primary school children make better progress than expected given their starting points; standards reached at the end of Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics are above those achieved in similar authorities and in line with national averages. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4, including the proportion of young people gaining five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics, are now in line with similar authorities. The authority is unambiguous about the need to secure further improvements in standards in secondary schools and its plans reflect this priority. In the drive to raise standards further, the authority and its schools are making increasingly effective use of high quality data provided by the authority. The number of schools in Ofsted categories of concern remains very low. Two schools were removed from categories and one special school became subject to a category.

The majority of inspections judge schools' overall effectiveness to be good, albeit with a stronger profile for primary schools. Provision and outcomes for the youngest children remain good overall. Although children's outcomes in the Foundation Stage are slightly lower than the previous year, they compare well with similar authorities. Robust action has been taken to tackle the weaknesses identified in the inspections of some settings, mainly out-of-school care settings, with the result that inadequacies have been eliminated. The restructuring of support for early years, bringing together education and care, together with better information about settings, is ensuring that support is targeted carefully to need.

The authority's clear focus on vulnerable children and young people is continuing to improve the provision made for them. The authority has increased significantly the proportion of funding for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities which goes directly into schools. This early intervention has enabled the authority to make significant reductions in the number of statements of special educational needs. The production of all statements continues to meet the 18 week target, thereby demonstrating good partnership work with the health service as well as with parents and schools. Outcomes of school inspections show that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally make good progress. Children and young people in the care of the local authority achieve well in gaining at least one GCSE pass, in comparison to those in similar authorities. The aspirations of these children and young people are increasingly high as the authority provides good support for them to access further and higher education.

The authority's support for improving behaviour and attendance is helping to ensure that almost all measures are at least comparable to those in similar authorities and national averages, including overall attendance in both primary and secondary schools. Unauthorised absences are now relatively lower, especially in primary schools, but authorised absences remain slightly above average and hard to improve. Fixed-term exclusions from both primary and secondary schools are below national averages.

The local authority's strategy for improving recreational, leisure and cultural facilities is increasingly well established and enhanced by successful bids for additional funding. As a result, children and young people benefit from a wide range of opportunities, including those which result from the extended and specialist schools in the borough. Children and young people have opportunities to take part in events outside the borough, including some in which they have been successful in regional and national competitions. The authority continues to provide good support to enable vulnerable groups to access recreational facilities, including help with transport and leisure access cards for looked after children.

Area for development

- Continue to raise standards in secondary schools, especially at Key Stage 4.

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. There is a strong culture of participation and inclusion within the council. A multi-agency network for youth participation coordinates the involvement of children and young people. Young people are involved in youth forums and a group of them have recently received training in decision making and are now involved in allocating funds from the youth opportunities fund. There is an annual youth voice event that young people plan and organise, including managing part of the budget. Young people are also involved in the recruitment of staff. Support is given to encourage children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and children from different ethnic groups to take part in these activities.

Vulnerable children receive good support from a range of agencies. Individualised learning packages and behaviour support are offered to children and young people with behavioural difficulties. Learning mentors work with children at risk of exclusion. There is an effective network of support for young carers and an independent advocacy service established to support them to have their say. Looked after children also have access to an independent advocacy service. A very high number of young people communicated their views at their statutory reviews, higher than the averages nationally and in similar areas.

The fostering inspection judged that children in foster care made an excellent contribution. They are listened to well and can influence the care they receive and the running of the service.

Since 2005, the council has increased significantly the number of young people reached by youth services from 24.6% to 32.6% in 2006. This is above the national target of 25% and represents 4,424 young people. There is a pick-up and drop-off service to support children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities access youth provision.

The number of first time entrants to the youth justice system has been reduced by 6.9%, but remains high. This figure has been difficult to reduce as the police targets are to increase the number of offenders brought to justice. Strategic level discussions are trying to resolve this. Rates of re-offending are in line with similar areas and targeted work is continuing to improve these figures.

Area for development

- Resolve with the police the approach to first time entrants to the youth justice system.

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. Strengths have been maintained, including aspects of the work with vulnerable groups. One such example is the high quality of support which helps young people in care to achieve independence, including the steps taken to improve the quality of their personal plans and the support to meet housing needs. The number of homeless young people has reduced through effective multi-agency work and the council's housing services' focus on preventative measures. The council is on target to achieve the Decent Homes Standard in the timescale set. Additional support for families with children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been provided in the last year through Neighbourhood Renewal funding. As a result, a significant number of families have been helped to access the benefits available to them.

Significant progress has been made in implementing the 14–19 strategy. A major factor in this progress has been the strength of collaboration with partners, notably the Learning and Skills Council, which has been commended by external evaluators. Additional funding is being employed effectively to strengthen links with employers, demonstrating astute recognition of the challenges of local employment patterns. Students are well informed about the range of choices available to them and collaborative work between schools and colleges is improving the range of vocational courses. Appropriate plans are in place for the introduction of the new diplomas.

The authority continues to be challenged by the high number of young people not in education, employment or training, which remains above the national average. However, the strategies which are being used to reduce this number are increasingly effective and are leading to a declining trend. Effective partnership work is seen in the development, sharing and use of more accurate data, as well as targeted support and intervention. The findings of specific local research into the needs of this group of young people are used well to inform this intervention.

Opportunities for young people to develop skills for life and employment are well promoted through a range of youth service projects. These include more opportunities for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and planning a successful project to celebrate diversity and tackle racism. Young people have contributed to regeneration plans, which have included the provision of a youth centre.

Area for development

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

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

Grade 3

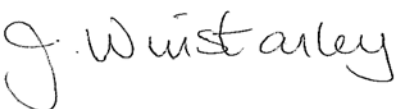
Summary of strengths and areas for development

The commitment of elected members and officers to improving the lives and life chances of children and young people is good. There have been significant changes in the local authority, including restructuring to create a directorate of children and adult services, following the earlier merger between education and children's social care. It is to the credit of the local authority that it has demonstrated improvement in provision and outcomes for children and young people, including progress on almost all of the areas identified in the previous annual performance assessment, during this period of change. There is a clear view of the way forward and funding is aligned with priorities. Senior officers and elected members can demonstrate early benefits of the new directorate, for example better understanding and information sharing, including housing and leisure services, as well as efficiencies in working practice. Re-alignment of services, such as those for early years, is making support for children and young people increasingly coherent and cost-effective.

Partnership work remains a strength of the authority. Senior officers and elected members have worked hard to restore the confidence of schools in the aftermath of the rapid restructuring. Work with partners beyond the authority is contributing to improved outcomes for children and young people as demonstrated in the authority's detailed review of its Children and Young People's Plan. Clear and appropriate emphasis is placed on developing the workforce to meet the priorities of the revised plan. Service management is strong and performance management is well established. Determined leadership, clarity of purpose and priorities, together with the progress already made, contribute to good capacity for further improvement.

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'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection