

26 November 2007

Ms Debbie Jones  
Corporate Director Children and Learning  
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Dear Ms Jones

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN LUTON 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**

Luton consistently delivers services for children and young people at a good level, and a good contribution is made by services towards improving outcomes. Together, children's services have played a very significant part in enabling children and young people to make a positive contribution. In terms of the overall judgement the effectiveness of children's services is good.

### **Being healthy Grade 3**

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

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this aspect is good. The key priorities of the Primary Care Trust are closely aligned with those of the Children and Young People's Plan. Infant mortality has declined since 2001 but there is still a high incidence of low birth weight babies and comparatively low rates of initiation of breast-feeding.

Rates of immunisation are higher and this has been partly due to collaborative work with health partners in children's centres. Health clinics have been re-located to

many of these. The oral health of children needs improvement, although there is now fluoride in milk in seven schools. Almost 50% of schools had achieved the Healthy Schools standard by July 2007, in line with the national target. There were many more outstanding judgements in school inspections, for standards relating to health, than in most other areas of personal development and one school-based health centre has been established. Every child in Year 7 participates in a smoking education programme. In the children's centres, staff are trained appropriately to act as advisors. For young people under 20 years of age, emergency hospital admissions for substance misuse have fallen by almost a half since 2001. The teenage pregnancy strategy is strong and rates fell in 2005.

Progress towards a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Health Service (CAMHS) is good. Waiting times for the service are lower than in comparable areas. An efficient service is provided to young offenders and young people with substance misuse problems. There has been 24-hour cover since March 2006. Young people admitted to adult wards are accommodated in single bed units and receive individual nursing cover. Almost all looked after children and young people have annual health assessments and dental checks. A doctor and nurse are available to discuss healthy lifestyles with them and a specialist worker offers sexual health advice. A care coordinator service is offered by health, social care and education professionals for children aged 0 to 3 with complex and severe needs. Fifty-two children benefit from this service. Transition arrangements to adult social care are insufficiently universal. A multi-agency panel has been set up to review all those aged 14 and above to ensure that assessments have been completed. Specialist health services for disabled children and young people have improved. The council has a comprehensive special educational needs and inclusion strategy, which includes a multi-agency focus on those with physical disabilities. Work is in progress to develop a multi-agency strategy with a focus on those with learning disabilities.

### **Areas for development**

- Develop strategies to reduce low birth weights and increase rates of breast-feeding.
- Ensure improvements in the oral health of children.
- Ensure transitions arrangements to adult social care are comprehensive.
- Ensure that the multi-agency strategy for all disabled children and young people, including those with physical disabilities, is clear within the existing overarching strategic framework.

### **Staying safe**

**Grade 3**

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

The contribution the council's service make to improving outcomes in this aspect is good. Over the last seven years, there has been a large decrease in the number of 0-

to 15-year-olds killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents. The personal, health, social and educational programme in schools includes information on the dangers some adults pose to children and young people. The council provides guidance on the safe use of the internet to parents. For children and young people who attend accident and emergency more than three times in any year, there is a system of notification to the general practitioner, health visitor and the safeguarding unit in the Primary Care Trust.

The council is reducing the number of actions for new childminders at registration by releasing part of the grant, prior to registration, to install safety equipment. The child protection system is run efficiently. All cases on the Child Protection Register are allocated to a qualified social worker and reviewed at appropriate intervals. Rates of re-registration are comparable to those of similar councils. The proportion of cases leading to an initial assessment is in line with statistical neighbours. Work with families is active and instances of de-registration are few. Records of strategy discussions and enquiries made in child protection cases are now quality assured by managers. The percentage of section 47 enquiries leading to an initial case conference within 15 days has increased to 42% which is above the national average for similar councils.

Family support services are strong. Three multi-agency family support panels operate fortnightly to plan support for vulnerable children and young people and their families, and termly school liaison meetings focus on the most vulnerable children and young people. Two family resource centres work intensively with families to prevent children and young people from becoming looked after. The proportion of initial assessments completed on time has increased to 65% which is better than the average for statistical neighbours. Almost all reviews for looked after children and young people take place on time and this is outstanding. Some 94% of looked after children and young people had an allocated social worker which is an improvement on last year and well above that of statistical neighbours. The number of core assessments completed is low compared to similar areas. Overall, performance in adoption work is good but the average time from the panel deciding that it is in child's best interest to be adopted and the child entering placement has increased to around 16 months.

The council has a low proportion of looked after children and young people in residential care. A large residential unit is being closed to be replaced by two smaller home-like units in the next year. Children enjoy stability of placement in their first year but, over the longer term, performance in maintaining stability declines. This is due to a small number of children and young people with very challenging behaviour. The percentage of looked after children and young people in receipt of annual health assessments and dental checks has been consistently above the national average in recent years. Performance in creating pathway plans for care leavers is below that of similar councils.

## Areas for development

- Ensure all looked after children and young people are allocated to qualified social workers.
- Increase the number of core assessments.
- Ensure there is stability of placements is maintained, particularly for children and young people with challenging behaviour.

## Enjoying and achieving

## Grade 3

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this aspect is good. Outcomes are improving. The overall quality of early years provision is good. Although results remain low, the gap below the national average has narrowed, particularly in literacy which has been a priority for the authority. The family workers in schools programme has been extended successfully to all schools at Key Stages 1 and 2. Over 200 new childcare places have been created in the last three years. Over 90% of 3-year-olds now have a place in an early years setting. Schools and settings receive good support and advice from the local authority.

Results at all Key Stages remain below national expectations but the difference between the local authority performance and the national average has been reduced. At Key Stage 1, Luton compares favourably with its statistical neighbours in reading, writing and mathematics. Results overall are broadly average. There was a more significant improvement in results at Key Stage 2 in 2006 than regionally or nationally, particularly in English and writing where the gap between the local authority and the national performance has narrowed considerably. The performance of boys at Key Stages 1 and 2 has improved faster than the national rate for boys, although the gap between the performance of boys and girls remains wide. Continuing improvement in performance reflects the success of the local authority in tackling underachievement through a rigorous process of self-evaluation and the use of data to set targets for improvement.

Performance in core subjects is mixed by the end of Key Stage 3. Results significantly improved in mathematics and science but fell back in English. These results reflect the local authority concentrating its efforts on successfully raising attainment in mathematics which was identified as a key improvement issue last year. Standards in mathematics are now in line with national averages. The percentage of pupils achieving five grades A\* to C at GCSE improved over the previous year and progress in improvement over the last three years compared to national rates is good. The percentage of those achieving five good grades including English and mathematics is lower than the national average but it improved last year. The rate of improvement is consistent with national expectations. The percentage of pupils who gained at least one GCSE grade A\* to G is line with national averages. The gap between the performance of children and young people

eligible for free school meals and those who are not is the smallest in the region. The local authority is well on track to ensure all schools meet floor targets at GCSE by 2008.

Whilst the attainment of most minority ethnic groups has improved, there has been no improvement in the performance of pupils of Kashmiri, Black Caribbean, or Black other background, at Key Stage 1. At Key Stage 2, the performance of White British pupils has remained static whilst results for White Other pupils have fallen at Key Stages 2 and 3. At GCSE, there have been improvements in the performance of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean pupils whose underachievement was identified by the local authority as a priority to address. Nonetheless, standards for Black Caribbean pupils remain below the authority average. The attainment of looked after children and young people is very good. The percentage achieving at least one GCSE is well above the national rate for this group. Percentages for looked after children and young people achieving at least one grade at GCSE A\* to G and obtaining five good grades at GCSE are well above the national average. The percentage of looked after children and young people entered for GCSE examinations has fallen but it remains in line with the national average and above its statistical neighbours. The attendance rate of looked after children and young people has continued to fall and the proportion who have missed 25 or more days of school is too high. This academic year has been designated the year of the looked after child.

Outcomes from school inspections are better than nationally and no new schools have been placed in a formal category of concern by Ofsted. Support for one secondary school in special measures has been good. From September 2007 this school became one of two new academies in the authority. Attendance in both primary and secondary schools is in line with the national average. Unauthorised absence in secondary schools continues to remain low and is below the rate for its statistical neighbours and nationally. The rate of permanently excluded pupils, which is already low, is falling sharply. Nearly all permanently excluded pupils receive at least 20 hours tuition a week, which is well above the national average. These outcomes are the result of close collaboration with schools and successful multi-agency partnerships.

### **Areas for development**

- Ensure consistency by raising attainment in all core subjects at Key Stage 3.
- Raise the attainment of those groups of pupils in each Key Stage whose improvement has not kept pace with that of the authority's overall performance.
- Increase levels of attendance for looked after children and young people and ensure that the percentage entered for at least one GCSE is increased.

## Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this aspect is good and has played a significant part in enabling children and young people to make a positive contribution. Over 3,000 young people were involved in elections for 25 elected members of a youth parliament. The authority has listened to members' concerns over bullying as well as responding to the 'Being Young in Luton' survey which highlighted young people's need to feel safe. This has informed the five priority areas for the Luton Local Safeguarding Board where bullying is a main focus. Pupils have written a leaflet for all schools which challenges bullying. Young people have contributed to making a film on fighting street crime. A multi-agency strategic group has been established and guidance on bullying for schools concerning its policies has been produced. The already low number of permanent exclusions has fallen significantly in the last year.

Five high schools have programmes of active citizenship. Each youth club has a youth forum. There are specialist focus groups for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The youth service is working on a three-area basis with young people voted into each area to be representative decision makers, for example, in deciding how money is spent. Some 30 young people are involved in this initiative and work closely with three elected members.

Consultation with young people has led to changes in local authority policies, for example a more flexible strategy for youth work has been introduced. Under the building schools for the future proposals, a centre based on each school site will support disengaged young people rather than an area hub model originally proposed by the local authority. In response to a request from Muslim girls, the council is providing breakfast clubs during Ramadan. However, in the recent Tellus2 survey young people in Luton said they felt less listened to in running their school, than other young people nationally. The local authority was aware of this issue and has put in place three area participation workers to focus specifically on this area.

A significantly higher than average percentage of excluded pupils has been successfully returned to mainstream education. There has been an 11% reduction in the number of first time entrants to the criminal justice system and a fall in the re-offending rates, although the figure for the small number of looked after children and young people has increased. Recent figures from the local government satisfaction survey indicate that the public perception of anti-social behaviour has significantly dropped from 66% to 31% in the last three years.

By the end of this year, nearly all looked after children and young people will have been involved in their statutory reviews. A small, but growing, number have chaired their own reviews. Looked after children and young people are included in recruitment processes for senior officers. The interview panel for the newly appointed Director of Children's Services included a looked after child, a disabled pupil and a member of the youth parliament. Twenty young people, including five

looked after children and young people, have been trained to be part of interview panels.

### **Areas for development**

- Strengthen links with youth offending services further to reduce offending rates of looked after children and young people.
- Ensure children and young people in schools have a greater say in decisions on running their school.

## **Achieving economic well-being**

**Grade 3**

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

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this aspect is good. The local authority has continued to extend its provision for children's centres and a further eight will open by 2008. There has been a substantial increase in the number of full day care places available in the authority.

Performance has continued to improve for 14- to 19-year-olds, although results for GCE AS/A-levels remain low when compared to national figures. The authority is above the national average for young people achieving the equivalent of five good GCSE grades by the age of 19. A minimum level performance has been introduced to provide a baseline for all providers. There is a rising trend of improvement in work-based learning. The number of 16- to 18-year-olds engaged in learning has increased. There are now extended curriculum choices via the prospectus of Campus Luton which was launched in July. The authority was successful in its gateway proposal for delivering an Information and Communication Technology diploma in 2008. Provision for education in the 14 to 19 sector has been recognised, through inspection and government briefings, for the success of its collaborative approach. The further education providers inspected have been judged as having outstanding leadership and management, although there is still some variability in the quality of provision in secondary schools which ranges from outstanding to inadequate.

The figure for young people not engaged in education, employment or training, or not known, is too high and through a multi-agency not in education, employment or training strategy group, including voluntary agencies, the council is urgently seeking to address this. An extensive school engagement programme targeting the most vulnerable pupils in each school has been developed. Provisional figures indicate the strategy is beginning to impact. All young people have been offered a place this year through its September guarantee. The council has identified the need to produce a young people's housing strategy for care leavers and, in particular, to increase the availability of supported lodgings. One in five young people leaving care is living in unsuitable or unknown accommodation.

Inspection outcomes for achieving economic well being in schools compare favourably to national figures. However, a minority of schools do not achieve a

higher grade because of low standards in literacy, numeracy, and Information and Communication Technology. The number of care leavers engaged in education, employment and training has increased. Nearly all have an allocated personal adviser and there has been an increase in the number with pathway plans. Nevertheless, the number of those who are unemployed is too high. The percentage of young people under supervision who are in suitable education, employment or training is higher than statistical neighbours and the national average.

### **Areas for development**

- Reduce the percentage of young people not engaged in education, employment or training.
- Ensure there is consistency in good quality provision for 14 to 19 in secondary schools.
- Raise standards of literacy and numeracy further in schools.
- Develop a young people's housing strategy which increases the proportion of care leavers in supported accommodation.

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

**Grade 3**

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

The contribution of the council to the management of its services for children and young people and its capacity to improve them further is good. The council's self-assessment is an honest and critical evaluation of strengths and areas where it can improve further. The seven priorities are clearly set out and focus on better outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. A realistic approach to working across boundaries with other agencies does not rely on structural solutions. Although priorities are clearly set out in the review of the Children and Young People's Plan, the plan focuses too much on listing outputs around the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes. It is over lengthy and does not indicate the timescales for improvement in key indicators, the links through to the local area agreements, where appropriate, or which agency, and officer, has lead responsibility for delivery. Capacity has been increased in the last year through continued investment in family support and through better leadership and self-evaluation. The authority has successfully intervened in schools to raise performance.

A workforce strategy was completed across children's services in 2006. This has led to fewer teacher vacancies and, for the first time, a full complement of qualified field social workers. There was, until recently, a high level of vacancies for other practitioners in social care. Data is collected systematically on a cross-agency basis and this dataset then uses a 'red, amber, green' rating across children's services to illustrate where improvements are most needed. Performance information is used effectively throughout the management structure. The council has made progress in



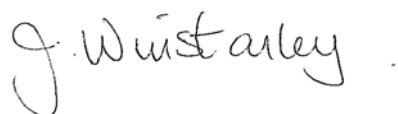
many of the areas identified for improvement in the annual performance assessment of 2006. The annual performance assessment has identified a number of areas where the council can make further improvements. Areas identified where progress has been made include: increases in immunisation and vaccination rates and pursuing perfection for children and young people with disabilities; narrowing the achievement gap for children and young people in education; timely initial assessments and statutory reviews for looked after children and young people; a reduction in re-offending; the production of an anti-bullying strategy; better value for money in the provision for 14- to 19-year-olds; improved recruitment and retention of key staff; the setting up of a joint commissioning unit and also a multi-agency performance management framework.

### **Area for development**

- Improve the Children and Young People's Plan to ensure there is greater accountability against performance indicators within the context of the Local Area Agreement.

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