

26 November 2007

Ms Jill Baker
Strategic Director of Children's Services
Salford City Council
Minerva House
Pendlebury Road
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Dear Ms Baker

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SALFORD CITY 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 (CYPP) 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 2

Salford City Council delivers services for children and young people that produce adequate outcomes overall. In all but one key area, children's services are making significant contributions to improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people within a city that is considerably disadvantaged. The quality of strategic planning is generally good and provides clear direction for improvement in most areas. There have been dramatic, and sustained, improvements in educational outcomes for children and young people, particularly at age 16 and beyond, and young people have more opportunities to shape the decisions that affect them. There has been limited progress made on the recommendations of the joint area review of 2006, in respect of looked after children and safeguarding issues. As a result, the council's services for supporting children and young people to stay safe are inadequate.

Being healthy

Grade 2

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 adequate. There is strong partnership working, most notably with the Primary Care Trust (PCT), with several senior posts jointly funded

by the council and the PCT. There are well-formulated, integrated plans to tackle the health challenges in an area of high deprivation, including joint commissioning strategies for teenage pregnancy, substance misuse, and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. There is evidence that preventative measures are having some impact, for example in reduced rates of smoking in pregnancy and low birth weight.

The CYPP includes delivery of physical health and social education in schools as a priority for development. All schools are engaged in the national Healthy Schools Programme and the proportion that has achieved the standard is ahead of target and higher than the national average. Initiatives include gardening clubs run in schools with children and young people encouraged to 'grow your own', an approach that is shown to have a range of benefits for participating children.

The proportion of children and young people who are obese is increasing, which is a national trend, and is higher than the regional average. The joint area review report described strategies for promotion of healthy eating and tackling obesity as adequate. The city-wide Food and Physical Activity Partnership has acted to improve the strategy, which is now comprehensive with ambitious but realistic targets to halt and reverse trends. Rates of dental decay are high in Salford with no improvement in recent years. A new oral health strategy has been devised and practical initiatives include providing a toothbrush for each primary pupil to use at school.

The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy is having a limited impact on reducing teenage conception rates. The latest data (2005) show the rate of conceptions is high and increasing. There is a similar picture in neighbouring councils. Reducing teenage conception rates is a key element of the local area agreement and the situation is well researched and kept under close scrutiny. The strategy has recently been revised to focus more on preventative measures.

The Substance Misuse Advice and Referral Team (SMART) offer a comprehensive range of services. Training on screening for drug misuse provided by the School Health Advisor has helped increase identification and support. However, admissions to hospital related to substance misuse remain significantly higher than the benchmark average.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service provide good outcomes for children and young people, with short waiting times and comprehensive service provision. Progress towards a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service is very good and remains ahead of the national average. The only area still to be completed is a fully comprehensive service for 16 and 17 year olds.

The proportion of looked after children and young people that received a health assessment during the year is high and in line with similar councils. Targeted services for looked after children and training programmes for staff and carers are leading to demonstrable improvements in their health.

Areas for development

- Reduce obesity rates for children and young people.
- Reduce teenage conception rates.
- Reduce dental decay.
- Reduce admissions to hospital relating to substance misuse.

Staying safe

Grade 1

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 inadequate. Since the joint area review there have been improvements in the strategic framework, but there is little evidence of impact on outcomes for children and the council has not made sufficient progress on some of the key recommendations in the joint area review report. The reduction in numbers of children on the Child Protection Register is an additional concern together with arrangements for allocation of qualified social workers to this group.

The council provides a safe environment for children in schools and nurseries in the city. Information from regulatory inspections show early years provision is generally of a good standard, providing an environment which is safe, or safer, than the national average, and school inspections note that primary schools in particular provide safe environments. A variety of anti-bullying strategies are in place, but work to measure effectiveness is at an early stage. There is work in progress to establish baselines and produce a city-wide strategy to tackle bullying.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board, established in early 2006, is taking a more proactive approach to safeguarding issues in line with the joint area review recommendations. There is a strong commitment to inter-agency working at strategic level with excellent attendance at the Local Safeguarding Children Board and in the work of the sub-groups. The council and partners are implementing the strategy to refocus services on early intervention to support more children in the community. During the year, services have been restructured into four local area teams across the city; a new family support service is being developed through children's centres in localities; and revised thresholds for intervention have been introduced.

Those changes have contributed to the following outcomes. Referral rates of children in need have reduced and are now in line with the average for similar councils. Response times for assessments have improved. However, the numbers of both initial and core assessments completed during the year have significantly declined and rates are less than half those in similar councils. The council explains that work referred directly to the local teams is recorded on a separate system and is not included in the data return, while the outcome of some referrals taken by the central duty and investigation team has not been recorded correctly. Thresholds applied in

the duty and investigation team drifted up during the year, reducing assessments and deterring other agencies from referring. The council has identified this trend and has taken action to correct it with work to improve understanding of thresholds by staff in the duty team and other agencies. Since July 2007, weekly printouts of assessment activity have been provided to first line managers. Assessment activity is now increasing.

The number of children on the Child Protection Register has reduced significantly during the year and the rate is less than half the average in similar councils. The council is concerned that this may be due to the reduction in referrals to the service and is working with schools and the PCT to ensure appropriate referrals are made. The council acknowledges that, during the year, children at risk who would previously have been supported by a child protection plan were not. The number on the Child Protection Register has begun to recover during 2007–08. At times in the year 2006–07, not all Child Protection Register cases were allocated to a qualified social worker, and on 31 March 2007 nearly 12% of children and young people on the Child Protection Register were not allocated to qualified social workers. This reflects poor management of resources for those most in need of protection and is inadequate. The council attributes this to recruitment difficulties and reports that, where Child Protection Register cases are unallocated, an inter-agency protocol has ensured that a robust protection plan is in place and all cases have been reviewed within timescales.

The joint area review recommended the council should ensure the numbers of looked after children were reduced, especially in placements outside Salford. Although some progress has been made on reducing the number placed outside the authority, the rate of looked after children increased slightly in 2006–07 and is now above the rate in similar councils. Neglect remains the predominant reason for children becoming looked after in Salford and services to support children in the community are as yet insufficiently developed to have an impact on admissions to the care system. There is some evidence of targeted action to enable children and young people to leave care. Although the number of children adopted or made subject of a special guardianship order reduced in 2006–07 and performance is in Band 2, the council has identified those for whom adoption or guardianship is appropriate and expects the rate to increase next year.

The joint area review recommended the council should ensure all looked after children were allocated to a social worker. In January 2007, there were still 20 looked after children without a social worker. The position improved by 31 March 2007 when almost all were allocated. However, the proportion of reviews of looked after children completed within timescales reduced in 2006–07 and is in the acceptable banding.

Inspections show most of the council's children's homes are rated good overall, and there was a positive fostering inspection during the year. The proportion of looked after children living in a family placement improved slightly in 2006–07 but remains significantly lower than in similar councils. The council has recruited new foster carers during 2006–07 but has not been able to increase its pool of carers. A new

recruitment officer has recently been appointed to develop a more effective recruitment strategy. There is growing competition from independent fostering agencies and the number of looked after children in an independent fostering agency placement is increasing. Almost all young people who should have a pathway plan do have one and almost all care leavers were living in suitable accommodation at the age of 19.

The joint area review found that guidance and records for adults who work with children and young people were out-of-date. The council reports that the guidance has been revised recently, complies with national guidelines, and that a priority is to ensure that adults working with children receive Criminal Records Bureau checks.

Areas for development

- Ensure that children on the Child Protection Register are allocated to a person qualified as a social worker and that there are sufficient qualified and experienced staff to run a safe child protection service.
- Ensure thresholds are set at a level that enables children in need and their families to access appropriate services; ensure thresholds are clearly understood by staff in all agencies.
- Develop, and adequately resource, effective early intervention services that reduce the need for children to be looked after.

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. Guidance and support for parents of children under five is targeted through the Sure Start children's centres. The council is developing a play strategy for children aged 0-16, information about which is provided for parents via Salford Children's Information Project. Parents and carers of children under five with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive guidance through the Early Support Programme. In response to feedback, the programme is being funded beyond its original short-term period.

Salford's early years provision promotes children's development and well-being extremely effectively and helps them to meet the Early Learning Goals. Given the levels of disadvantage experienced by large numbers of children in the city, the outcomes they achieve by the age of five are very good. In recent years, the trend has been for children at the end of Foundation Stage to attain results that are at the national level. Additionally, figures show that the council is reducing the inequality gap for young children. In line with the national picture, the council's area of priority is communication, language and literacy and this is clearly noted in the review of the CYPP.

The quality of Salford's schools is improving. The number of schools in Ofsted categories has declined sharply since the joint area review. There is now one secondary school, one primary school and one pupil referral unit with a notice to improve and one primary school in special measures. The findings of Ofsted inspections are extremely encouraging with a greater percentage of secondary schools than that of similar councils receiving outstanding and good overall judgements. The impact of the work undertaken by the authority in schools it considers to be at risk is good and is evident in the schools' improving annual test results.

Children and young people in Salford are achieving more. The upward trend in Key Stage 4 national test results reported in the joint area review report has been sustained and improved upon. The most recent, unvalidated, 2007 figure of 60% of students gaining five or more grade A*-C at GCSE or equivalent brings the council's results close to the national figure of 63% and represents a very impressive improvement over a relatively short period of time. The percentage of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and mathematics, although improving, remains low at 38%. The trend in the rate of improvement in Key Stage 3 results is above average, although results remain too low.

Salford's primary schools continue to perform well. The most recent unvalidated test results for Key Stage 2 reverse the slight drop recorded in 2006 and are at the national averages in each subject. The combined results in mathematics and English are amongst the most improved nationally this year. Salford's primary schools are maintaining the benefit that the early years provision is giving its children and building on it as they move through their primary education.

Attendance has been a major issue for some of Salford's secondary schools, especially unauthorised absence rates, which remain high, compared to the national figure. The council and its partners have worked with individual schools to combat the culture of non attendance amongst specific groups and this combined effort is bringing results at those schools.

The council currently has 40 children or young people who do not attend school and are educated otherwise; some from the same families. According to assessed need, some students attend the Royal Manchester Children's Hospital School, others attend pupil referral units and others are educated at home. The council visits this latter group termly. The number of children and young people educated otherwise is stable and relatively small and the council knows where they are.

The council is part way through its programme to roll out its fully extended school provision across the city. Part of the core offering of extended schools is that they will provide sports and arts recreation activities outside of the normal day. By March 2008, 50% of Salford primary schools and one third of secondaries will have these services on, or near to them, via the extended schools core offer. Currently, 39 of its schools are fully extended, including seven secondaries.

Salford has a strong and successful tradition in promoting children's enjoyment through music and performing arts. The council is a lead partner in the North West Music Manifesto Pathfinder, one of only three nationally. Salford also has proportionately more modern foreign language assistants than anywhere else in the country and has been highlighted for best practice by the British Council. There is also a strong focus in the council on helping children and young people to enjoy sport through its sports partnerships.

During 2006/07, three quarters of the looked after children in Salford eligible for GCSE (or equivalent) examinations sat at least one of them. This is an increase on the corresponding percentage in the previous year (just over half) and is higher than the corresponding figures in similar councils and nationally. The percentage of young people leaving care aged 16 or over with at least one GCSE grade A*-G or GNVQ equivalent is in line with that in similar councils and better than the national figure. Salford is getting much better at enabling looked after children and young people to sit at least one exam. This is an improving trend. However, during the same year, 19.2% of school age looked after children that were looked after for 12 months or more by Salford missed 25 or more days schooling. This is higher than the corresponding percentages in similar councils, and higher than nationally during the same period, and equates to 67 of the 349 eligible looked after children missing five or more weeks schooling.

The vast majority of care leavers are in suitable accommodation and the council knows where more of its young people are after leaving education.

Salford's provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is improving as a result of the council's decision to make this area of its work a new priority. Two of the special school settings have shown good improvement in examination outcomes in 2006. A third have developed expertise in enabling young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to live more independently, for example through a travelling independently programme.

Areas for development

- Educational outcomes at age 16: increase the percentage of five A*-C GCSE or equivalent including English and mathematics.
- Reduce the percentage of children and young people in care missing 25 days or more schooling.

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. There are many examples of support to enable children and young people to develop socially and emotionally, such as the social and emotional aspects of the learning schools programme, the benefits of which are seen when children transfer to high school. There is a wide range of support for parents

and carers who have difficulties in maintaining positive relationships with their children, including young parents groups, and there are plans to promote services further through the website. The joint area review recommended the council should develop more effective links between the youth service and other agencies to extend educational, leisure and recreation opportunities for children and young people. The youth service has significantly extended its involvement with young people and has improved links, for example the secondment of a youth worker to the community safety unit. Work has begun on the development of an integrated and targeted youth support service.

There is good support for vulnerable groups in managing changes and responding to challenges in their lives. Transition planning for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well coordinated and there are comprehensive arrangements to support young carers, including good strategic management, activities, dedicated support workers and links to other services.

There is a strong commitment to include children and young people in decisions. Young people involved in the Children and Young People Partnership Board have been closely involved in consultation events on building schools for the future and on extended schools. One innovation is to include consultation in the curriculum, such as geography and citizenship. School pupils have been actively involved in the recruitment of headteachers. Young people have contributed to an online directory, for young people, of things to do and places to go. The council intends to set up a database to collate all such activity and develop robust procedures for seeking the views of children and young people on an annual basis.

Salford's strategy to reduce anti-social behaviour includes support for diversionary activities, drug and alcohol awareness, youth inclusion projects and work with parents. There is targeted work on hotspots and those most at risk. The council has evidence that, although reporting of juvenile nuisance incidents has increased over the last year, juvenile nuisance is actually reducing.

The Youth Offending Service exceeded its target to reach young people at risk of entering the youth justice system. However, the number of first time entrants has increased. This may, in part, be due to conflicting targets set by the police. There has been a decrease in re-offending rates and the Youth Offending Service has collaborated with the school improvement service and looked after children team to introduce restorative justice methods.

Participation of looked after children in reviews improved significantly in 2006–07 from the previous year, and is now in the top banding. Looked after children and young people receive regular newsletters from the Listening to Children Officer and have the opportunity to attend the Voice Group, where they can meet senior officers and contribute to developments that affect them. The disability youth group has been involved in a number of consultations which affect their peers and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are on the Children and Young People Partnership Board.

Areas for development

- Develop systems to routinely seek the views of children and young people and to determine the range of activities they have used.
- Reduce the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 2

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is adequate. Actions taken by the authority to prepare young people for working life are beginning to bear fruit. From a very low baseline, there is a steady improvement in the numbers and proportions of young people choosing to stay on in education or training after the age of 16. Just over two thirds of young people now enter full-time education, and four out of five are in some form of education or training. The numbers applying to higher education have also risen; an increase of 87% between 2001 and 2006. Although the baseline numbers in each case are very low, the upward trend clearly reveals the rise in aspirations of young people and their families. The proportion of young people not in education, employment, or training continues to decline and the authority is on track to meet its target in this aspect. The trend in attainment post-16 continues upward, with Salford recording the highest value added at age 19 in the Greater Manchester area in 2006. This reflects the authority's commitment to ensure that all young people up to age 19 have the support to achieve qualifications to the best of their ability and that a significant number achieve at least five or more grade A*-C passes at GCSE or equivalent.

The authority's current review of provision for 13–19 year olds includes a wide ranging evaluation of its sixth form provision and the progression pathways to colleges, training and work. There is an increasing breadth of vocational courses on offer in Salford secondary schools, with more young people responding positively to this choice by opting for a wider range of vocational GCSEs and other vocational courses. Ofsted inspection data show that further education college provision is generally good and responsive to local circumstances.

Good partnership working between Connexions and other agencies, the involvement of families and young people and regeneration programmes, which target the city's most deprived communities, are paying dividends. The regeneration of Salford is at the core of the city's Community Plan. In addition, the city's Local Area Agreement identifies children and young people as the priority group for action. Salford Council has pledged to focus services, activities and opportunities to support children and young people to achieve their full potential. The authority has overseen a steady growth in child care, and parents and carers continue to be informed about the range of child care provision and the financial support available to them through the authority's Matrix Children's Information Service. This service is to be extended to children's centres as they roll out across the city.

The council's investment plans to improve the quality of housing stock in the public sector, in order to meet its decent homes target, are now at implementation stage. Economic prosperity is improving and employment rates continue to rise. However, the proportion of children and young people living in households where no one is working remains above the national figure and is not reducing. The council knows that tackling the culture of worklessness in some communities is a priority in order to change the aspirations of the most hard-to-reach young people and their families.

The Next Step Project continues to work closely with looked after children and care leavers in the areas of education, training and employment. In 2006/07, 65.85% of 19 year old care leavers were in education, training or employment, compared with 80% in 2005/6. The council is reviewing reasons for this apparent reduction. Nevertheless, this is still very good compared to the figures for similar councils and nationally. Some 97% of the 2006/7 cohort were in regular contact with the authority and deemed to be living in suitable accommodation.

Young care leavers have continued in full-time degree courses this year with one young person having graduated in August 2007. A bespoke pre-university course was established in January 2006 at Salford University for 17–20 year old care leavers. The 26 week course, designed to give nine young people insight into university life, has been highly successful. The course assesses their basic literacy skills and produces a portfolio of work for them to enable them to move on within the education system. Consequently, the council is in discussion with the university about developing a pathway for care leavers. This initiative is regarded as breaking new ground.

A recommendation of the joint area review was that the council and partners should review the quality of careers advice and guidance provided for young people, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The council has reviewed its targets for the Connexions Service and has agreed more stretching targets in respect of key vulnerable groups, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In 2006-07, Connexions interventions with young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities aged 13–16 increased, from 313 in the previous year to 472. In addition, the percentage of 16–19 year olds with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in further education, training or employment increased from 65.6% in 2005 to 72.8% in 2006. The 13–19 Strategic Partnership has recently commissioned the development of a careers education and guidance entitlement statement for young people, which all partners will be asked to sign up to.

Areas for development

- Continue to increase the proportions of young people in education, employment or training post-16.
- Continue to improve educational outcomes post-16, including in English and mathematics.

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

Grade 2

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is adequate, and, with the exception of staying safe where the management of resources is poor, its management of these services is also adequate.

There is stable and adequate leadership of children's services in the city. Salford has a clear vision of what it wants to achieve and this is set out in the review of its CYPP. The council communicates decisions about these ambitions to councillors, officers and staff, to children and young people, and to local stakeholders. The council is aware of the problems it faces and how to address them.

Priorities have been set by the council for improving outcomes for children and young people and these have led to success in developing the Youth Service and in improving educational outcomes. In contrast, the council has been less successful in improving staying safe outcomes for children and young people. This aspect of its work is inadequate. The council has not sufficiently taken forward some of the weaknesses highlighted in the joint area review. More and urgent consideration needs to be given to developing the range of preventative services so that needs are addressed before problems become intractable.

Consultation with children and young people is effective; a range of approaches is used to consult with them. Engagement with minority ethnic groups is carried out through the voluntary sector. There is a shared vision for fully integrated and seamless services, for example to deliver health through children's services. The majority of decision making processes are transparent, timely, and have resulted in some notable improvements. A review of the risks in implementation has led to the establishment of a resilience response group. The responsibilities placed on the lead Strategic Director of Children's Services are understood and the majority are adequately discharged. The voluntary and community sectors are involved in decision-making. Relationships with partners are effective and there is evidence of integrated planning. The arrangements are set out in the strategic partnership framework.

The council has taken steps to build financial and other capacity through the Children and Young People's Partnership Board. An assistant director in children's services is a joint director of the PCT for children and young people's health commissioning. The council and its partners have developed some joint commissioning and are considering extending this; there is some alignment of budgets.

The council has increased its expenditure on social care and spends more per capita than similar councils. There has been a small reduction in the overall budget for looked after children. Expenditure on family support services is significantly lower than in other councils and this is reflected in the low proportion of the children's services budget spent on children in need. The council recognises the need to redirect expenditure to preventative services and has taken some steps to reduce costs in the independent sector.

Most teaching posts in the city are filled. There has been a shortage of social care workers and lack of qualified staff has impacted adversely on care services. The council reports recent success in recruitment and internal training to fill posts and is now close to full capacity.

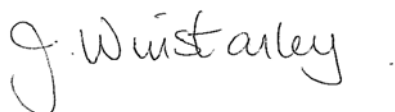
The council has revised its performance management to a results-based accountability system. The impact is variable across services and is least effective in monitoring staying safe outcomes, especially duty and assessment and children protection performance.

Areas for development

- Ensure performance management systems monitor, quality assure, and collate accurate information on all referral, assessment and service activity.
- Ensure the deployment of staff is effective in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people.

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



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