

26 November 2007

Ms Carol Chambers
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Dear Ms Chambers

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN RUTLAND COUNTY 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

The council continues to provide a good service which contributes well to the improving outcomes for children and young people in Rutland. The substantial improvements made in the service since the last joint area review (JAR) are starting to become established and the newly structured teams are well placed to maintain and improve standards of performance across the five outcome areas. Leaders tackle complacency and set challenging targets. Progress against these is monitored with increasing rigour. Recommendations from inspections are followed up and appropriate action taken. The council's use of external challenge through consultants and other professionals is contributing to its increasing capacity to improve. The council capitalises on the advantages of the small size of the authority and seeks creative solutions to the difficulties this presents. Children and young people are increasingly engaged in strategic planning, and vulnerable groups, though small in number, are protected well.

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 JAR found that these services were good and there is evidence of further improvement since the previous report.

There is an appropriate emphasis on promoting healthy lifestyles and meeting the health needs of all children and young people in schools and early years settings. The rate of immunisations is consistently good and above national averages. Some 20 out of 21 schools are at Level 3 or have achieved Healthy Schools status and several hold *Activemark* awards for sporting activities. Teenage pregnancy rates are well below regional and national averages. Mental health services for children and young people in school are good and work is in process to ensure that services for young people aged over 16 meet national standards. Young offenders with mental health and/or substance misuse problems have speedy access to services and the attention to health needs by the youth offending team is rated excellent in comparison with other teams in the country.

Recent responses from young people suggested that more work was needed to reduce the use of alcohol and drugs. The Rutland Youth Service is now specifically working on personal health related issues, including targeted work with young people at risk from alcohol related problems. The service has reorganised some unattached youth worker time to enable them to be more readily available at appropriate times.

Some partnership working with the Primary Care Trust has been adversely affected by reorganisations in the health service with consequent change of personnel, although this is now showing signs of stability. The council is developing integrated services, with its partners, to further improve support for families, including provision of health advice. This strategy centres on plans for children's centres and extended schools which are being implemented. Further work is needed to provide support for vulnerable groups such as teenage parents and towards reducing smoking among pregnant women, both of which were issues in the JAR, as part of an overall family support strategy. Staffing problems have also hampered progress on the provision of school nurses although this is planned to be addressed as part of the provision within the three extended schools.

All looked after children and young people are offered regular health checks and the Primary Care Trust has formal arrangements to ensure that these are undertaken on time, which was a recommendation of the JAR. The health needs of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and work is in hand to improve the speed of response of the Occupational Therapy Service.

Areas for development

- Ensure the provision at the extended schools includes school nurses.
- Link the availability of health advice to vulnerable groups within the context of a more coherent strategy for the support of vulnerable children, young people and families.

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. The JAR found that the council's integrated approach to safeguarding was good and this has been further strengthened by the recent structural reorganisation of these services.

The responses of young people in the Tellus2 survey show that Rutland is a safe place for most young people. All inspections of schools and early years settings report a good or better performance in this aspect. Rutland benefits from membership of an effective Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) which is jointly funded with Leicestershire and Leicester. Procedures are regularly updated and accessible on a good website alongside a wide range of good practice guidance and information for parents. The independent chairperson has clear lines of accountability and there are robust planning and financial arrangements. The LSCB has recently appointed a quality assurance officer to monitor performance. There have been no serious case reviews in Rutland and the multi-agency public protection arrangements were judged to be secure by the JAR. There is a standing safeguarding liaison meeting for partner agencies in the county.

The authority has begun to address the need to improve strategic approaches to family support services. A comprehensive needs assessment is informing service improvement. A range of good services are provided to support parents and prevent parenting crises, with plans to develop these based in the three extended schools. One example is the child behaviour intervention initiative which takes referrals from schools and health visitors. The service has been expanded with the appointment of a new half-time worker.

The recently appointed Participation Officer is also developing ways to involve children and young people more and to create a listening culture which can respond effectively to requests for support and advocacy. These include a Children's Rights Service to support in particular those children and young people who are looked after or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities although it is recognised that this requires further development.

Thresholds for social care intervention are agreed with partner agencies and kept under review through case monitoring. Deployment of social workers is good. There are no unallocated social care cases and all children and young people on the Child Protection Register are allocated to a social worker. Rutland has used its 'Trailblazer' status to good effect in preparing for the phased implementation of the common assessment framework. The strategy is supported by Bridges, an imaginative jointly funded arrangement with the LSCB partners.

Child protection services are robust. The number of initial child protection referrals is consistent with the average of similar councils. There was a small increase in the number of child protection referrals in 2006/07 which affected the response time for

completion of initial assessments and the possible longer-term implications are being kept under review. However the percentage of core assessments completed within 35 working days is good. Access to the Child Protection Register, managed by Leicestershire, is now available outside office hours, implementing a recommendation of the JAR.

The number of looked after children young people is low in comparison with similar councils and a high percentage are fostered or placed for adoption. The quality of foster care services for looked after children and young people has been rated excellent in recent inspections. All the children and young people have access to a qualified social worker and also a personal adviser where appropriate. Placements are very stable and, with only one exception, all statutory reviews in 2006/07 took place on time. Over 90% of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have a transition plan, which compares favourably with similar authorities.

The Bichard implementation group reports to the LSCB. This has given a strong lead on implementation of safe recruitment processes. The group includes both adult and children's services providers, including external providers of human resource management services to schools. The action plan includes training for staff interviewers/appointers in all agencies. The council has reviewed all relevant staff records to ensure police checks have been undertaken, including staff in the school.

Area for development

- Embed the Children's Rights Service in order to improve further the support for children and young people, especially those who are looked after or have a learning difficulty and/or disability.

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. Attainment at all key stages is generally higher than in similar authorities and nationally and is continuing to rise. Parents and carers receive good support from a range of initiatives in helping their children to enjoy and achieve. These include easily accessible sources of information and family literacy programmes.

In Rutland, early years provision promotes children's development and well-being well and helps them meet the early learning goals. At inspection, all settings were judged at least satisfactory or better in promoting children's enjoyment and achievement although gaps in achievement at the Foundation Stage between boys and girls were an area for concern in 2005. A local strategy to target the issue has reduced the gap so it is at least in line with that seen nationally. Key Stage 1 attainment is above or well above national averages and those in similar authorities in reading, writing and maths. There was weaker performance by boys and in mathematics at Key Stages 1 and 2.

At Key Stage 3, girls' performance at higher levels declined but there were significant improvements by boys. Overall there is a picture of high and improving attainment in core subjects. This is greater than the improvement found in similar authorities and nationally. However, there is a considerable gap in English between the attainment of boys and that of girls, which is greater than that found nationally.

GCSE results were the best ever for the authority and some of the highest achieved nationally. The progress children and young people make during the different phases of their education is improving and was generally good at all key stages, although there were marked differences between the achievement and progress measures of the three secondary schools, with a significant gap between the highest and lowest figures. The progress made by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is generally in line with expectations. The number of looked after children and young people is too small to make statistical comparisons, although the authority accepts that improvements are needed in the standards they achieve.

The new Children and Young People's directorate has strengthened the process for monitoring and challenging schools. Better support for school leaders and tiered intervention and support packages for schools designated as causing concern is having a positive impact on performance. No schools in the authority were found to require special measures and the one school with a notice to improve was judged to be making good progress at the previous monitoring visit. Inspection outcomes are generally good or better, although the authority acknowledges that there is a need to increase the percentage of schools which are judged to be outstanding.

Inspection evidence indicates that behaviour in all schools is good or better. Exclusions are also very low. There have been no permanent exclusions in 2006/07 and significantly less fixed term exclusions compared to national averages and those of similar authorities. Attendance is well above average in both primary and secondary schools and still improving. Evidence from young people's responses confirms that they enjoy school.

Rutland is the only authority where 100% of schools have already achieved the full core offer of extended services three years before the target date. Work is now in progress to build on this success in the next phase of development. All stakeholders are consulted and involved in the process. This is a key strength of the authority. Access to leisure facilities has been an issue raised by the JAR and by children and young people themselves. The inadequate grade awarded to the Youth Service in 2006 reflected this. As a result of initiatives such as the Play Strategy this is improving and a recently commissioned independent review of the Youth Service confirms that there have been substantial improvements. The Youth Service is now considered to be well placed to develop further.

Areas for development

- Further reduce the gap in performance between boys and girls.

- Reduce variations in secondary school performance and increase the amount of outstanding provision overall.
- Consolidate the recent improvements to the Youth Service.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 2

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate and improving. Many improvements have been made to the service since the last JAR, but there has not been sufficient time for the authority to demonstrate improved and sustained impact.

Schools are contributing well to the personal and social development and well-being of children and young people. Of the eight schools inspected last year, seven were judged as good or better for this aspect of their provision. No early years settings were required to take action to meet the National Standards contributing to this outcome prior to registration.

Much work has been done to address the need to involve children and young people more in decision making and in providing more opportunities to have their views heard. Almost all the schools in the authority encourage pupils to have a voice through a school council. The JAR report recommended that a broader diversity of children and young people should be involved in decision-making. As a result, the authority is making imaginative use of a range of approaches for example, the use of an artist workshop to canvas the views of young children, graffiti walls, videos and working with a software company to develop electronic means of canvassing those with disabilities.

Previously, too few looked after children and young people were contributing to the periodic reviews of their plans or being involved in helping to design services that affect them. The authority is now actively pursuing how these young people can contribute meaningfully to their reviews and this is improving.

Rutland Youth Service is promoting volunteering through initiatives such as the Millennium volunteer scheme, the Positive Activities group and the Youth Opportunity Board. Some young people took part in the election for the United Kingdom Youth Parliament. Recent positive feedback from children and young people in the Tellus2 survey suggests improvements on previous years and participation on most measures is now above national averages.

As part of the shared youth justice board for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, the authority accounts for about 5% of the youth offending team work load. Across the work of this group there have been significant achievements in reducing first time offenders and re-offending. The service is high achieving nationally on most measures.

Increased support and advice for children and young people has been achieved through an improved ratio of full-time equivalent youth workers to young people and there is a high percentage of contact with youth services. Young people in need of specialist support, for example on issues of drug use, are helped through a joint approach by links to the Community Safety Partnership. Young children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given well coordinated help. This is also improving in remote areas, where access was previously inadequate.

Plans are well advanced for the creation of a children's centre. Further access to the recreation facilities is being addressed through using a wide range of resources including parent volunteers, external agencies and extended schools. This is beginning to improve opportunities for all but this aspect still remains a concern. A Youth Mobile Unit is operating in rural areas to address the continuing lack of easily accessible facilities for some young people.

Areas for development

- Further improve the involvement of children and young people in evaluating and contributing to the development of the services which affect them.
- Extend the range of leisure and informal learning activities to ensure all children and young people can benefit.

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. There is sufficient well-regulated childcare to meet the needs of parents seeking to enter employment or study and good dissemination of information through the Council Information Service. Plans are in place to include Surestart in the development of the new children's centre.

Partnership working is a real strength and ensures there is a wide range of opportunities for young people. There is very good progression to education or training and to employment by 16-year-olds, including young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and care leavers. The numbers not in employment, education or training have fallen and are low, with very few 'unknowns'. The numbers in employment with no training are also gradually falling. Despite this, the authority is not complacent and has set targets to reduce the number further.

A range of enterprise activities and opportunities for 11- to 16-year-olds and some post-16 students has been successfully introduced. Work-related learning has been mapped across the curriculum at Key Stage 4 and all students have a minimum of two weeks work experience. All secondary schools and the Further Education college libraries were awarded certificates of excellence by Connexions for careers resources.

Vocational qualifications are well established and show high success rates; for example last year 95% of Young Apprenticeships were successfully completed.

The 14–19 Strategic Partnership has been recognised as an example of good practice. The successful bid to provide Creative and Media Diplomas at three levels across a consortium of schools, colleges and businesses was based on evidence of need from business partners in the locality and the area has been recognised by the Creative and Media sector skills council as a national example of good practice.

Young people at age 16 achieve increasingly high pass rates in GCSE examinations. The numbers gaining five or more passes at grades A* to C were above similar authorities and well above the national average. This was also the case in the figures which include English and mathematics. By 19 years of age, 82% of young people achieve Level 2 and 3 qualifications, well above the national average of 67.5% and above the average for similar authorities. In order to reduce the relatively high drop-out rates at age 17 or over, more entry Level and Level 1 qualifications are also being introduced.

High rents and a lack of crisis accommodation in Rutland are recognised by the authority as an issue for vulnerable young people and those leaving home. Children's Services have worked with the council housing department on this and are now tracking individuals and vulnerable families carefully to minimise risk.

Areas for development

- Further reduce the number of young people in employment with no training.
- Improve social housing opportunities, especially for single young people.

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

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The management of services and the capacity to improve outcomes for children and young people are good.

The 2006 corporate performance assessment noted that Rutland provided good value for money in children's services overall but that ambition and performance management were weaker. One year on there is substantial evidence that the council has clarified its ambition, made good progress to improve performance management and has further developed children's services.

Rutland has the second highest council tax level in the country, whilst spending per head of population is the fifth lowest of all unitary authorities. It has both low unit costs and good quality for children's services. For example, whilst unit costs for looked after children and young people have gone down further, as a greater proportion have been fostered within the county, inspection results confirm that the

quality remains excellent. Education and social services are generally high performing and 42% of national performance indicators were in the top 25%.

The council's ambition for children's services is seen in continued political support, structural reorganisation, progress in implementing the national agenda and targeted financial growth. A major reorganisation to create a fully integrated service has been effectively implemented in the year since the JAR. This is enabling the authority to take a more holistic approach to delivery of service and work with partners. Although more remains to be done, there is also evidence of greater involvement of the community and young people in consultations about service developments, supported by a new Participation Officer. The council has recruited 12 young people to form a Youth Opportunities Board and has allocated £100,000 from the Youth Opportunities Fund to support 10 projects. This has been endorsed by the government regional office as an example of good practice.

The council has prioritised new developments and allocated funding appropriately, for example to increase support for the child behaviour intervention initiative, the fostering service and the safer recruitment strategy.

Rutland has to work creatively to ensure that it has the managerial and staffing capacity to respond to national agendas and local priorities. It does this through effective partnership working and joint service provision with neighbouring councils, the health service and other statutory, voluntary and private sector partners. There are many examples of good partnership working, as noted in the JAR, co-ordinated by the Children and Young People Strategic Partnership. This group has the strategic lead for the Children and Young People's Plan and oversees other partnerships, such as the Youth Offending Service and Connexions. The recently established Workforce Development Partnership is developing an overview of activity needed to ensure there are appropriate staff in all children's services agencies. Evidence of capacity to improve is seen in these successful initiatives as well as in the improvements in the Youth Service after a very poor inspection report, the council's implementation of the common assessment framework and the developments in extended schools and children's centres.

The council appointed a new Chief Executive in this period who has led implementation of a new planning and corporate performance management framework, responding to one of the criticisms of the corporate performance assessment and JAR. The Youth Service has implemented a robust and consistent quality assurance process for direct work with young people. Whilst these developments are already providing managers, staff and councillors with monthly reliable data on performance and trends, the arrangements are not fully established and have not been tested over a full planning cycle.

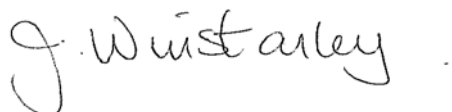
The council, with its partners, has completed a thorough needs analysis, as recommended in the JAR, and therefore has a realistic view of the current state of children's services and is well placed to aspire to excellent services overall.

Areas for development

- Embed the use of performance data, financial reports and forward planning in an integrated way.
- Consolidate consultation with young people and the community about service developments.

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