

26 November 2007

Ms Anji Phillips
Director of Education and Children's Services
London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames
Regal House
London Road
Twickenham
TW1 3QB

Dear Ms Phillips

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) for your local authority, some aspects of which were conducted at the same time as the analysis stage of the joint area review. The 2006 annual performance assessment informed the scoping of the joint area review at the planning stage and the initial findings of the 2007 APA were taken into account by the review team at the end of the analysis stage. The outcomes of the joint area review were then considered alongside a review of recent data in arriving at the final APA judgements for 2007. As a result, many of the areas for development highlighted in this letter align with the recommendations in the joint area review report and should be similarly aligned in any future action plan produced by the council and its partners. The judgements in the letter also draw on your assessment of progress or review of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted and other inspectorates. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this and for the time given by you and your colleagues to the assessment process.

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 4

Richmond upon Thames delivers services for children and young people at an outstanding level. This is an improvement on the good level of services reported at the last APA and is a result of continued strong leadership and effective working through partnerships. The recent joint area review report highlights the outstanding local services for looked after children and for those with a learning difficulty and/or disability. The areas of being healthy and enjoying and achieving continue to be good and further improvements have been made over the past year. For example, although the progress made by children and young people in relation to their starting points remains in line with national averages, strategies to support secondary schools

have made a positive difference to the standards of work achieved at the end of Key Stage 3. In relation to health, improvements have been made in reducing levels of obesity and teenage pregnancies but the council acknowledges that actions taken to improve Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have not yet made a sufficient difference to services.

Being healthy

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 aspect is good. Continued progress is demonstrated, although improvement is slower in some aspects where plans are not yet fully implemented or where the results of actions taken are not yet evident. However, children and young people in the borough continue to be generally healthy. Although they have good access to a range of useful information, the young people have highlighted that they would value even more advice about alcohol misuse, smoking, sex and relationships. Schools continue to play their part well in the promotion of healthy lifestyles through the Healthy Schools Programme. Almost all schools are involved and almost two thirds have been accredited through the new, more rigorous, scheme. Secondary aged pupils have regular access to professional health workers in school as well as within the local community.

Since the last APA, the council has improved its strategy to tackle obesity. A range of coordinated initiatives and activities are available to give good support to schools and families. As a result, rates of obesity remain low and health professionals have a clear picture of where to target their resources. This includes responding to concerns raised by the recent audit regarding children and young people who are underweight.

There continues to be a low incidence of drug and alcohol misuse. The small numbers of children and young people transferring to adult services shows that timely action and support are effective. A new coordinator has been appointed and the drug and alcohol team now provide an integrated service. The number of young people who smoke is in line with the national average but there has been a significant reduction in the number of expectant mothers who smoke.

The council continues its planned work to ensure that children and young people maintain good sexual health. Some 90% of schools have sex and relationship education policies and many good opportunities are available throughout the borough for information and advice. The take-up of these services is good, particularly by groups that have been identified as vulnerable. There has been a further reduction of teenage pregnancies and the council continues to have one of the lowest rates in the country.

There has been some progress in developing CAMHS and it provides a satisfactory quality of service. The council is mindful that there is still more to be done to ensure that the service is well coordinated. Detailed fieldwork carried out in the joint area

review reveals that whereas there is good support for the most vulnerable groups of children and young people, there are weaknesses within the services to others. These include transition to adult services, prioritisation and commissioning, and waiting times for some services. An assessment of the mental health needs of children and young people has been completed and is informing a reorganisation of services.

The council has a good record for ensuring that children and young people who are looked after by the local authority receive all health checks and that they have access to opportunities for recreation and exercise. Those involved with the Youth Offending Team benefit from excellent joint working with CAMHS.

Families with children and young people with a learning difficulty and/or disability are well supported and services have been further developed this year. This includes the work of specialist nurses to support those with complex ventilation needs so that they can live at home. One of the biggest challenges highlighted by the recent audit is the need to coordinate more effectively the support for families of those whose learning difficulty has associated problems with managing their behaviour. Therapy services have recently been brought back into the Integrated Service for Children with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties and this has had a positive impact on reducing waiting lists, improving access to services and an increase in demand for services.

Areas for development

- Continued development of a single commissioning strategy for CAMHS and consolidation of key posts of responsibility.
- Improve support for those whose learning difficulty has associated issues for managing their behaviour.

Staying safe

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding and this judgement is in line with the wider findings for safeguarding children at the recent joint area review. Ensuring that children and young people stay safe is of highest priority for the council and the children and young people report they feel safe in school and around their local area. Policies and procedures are well understood by services and partners. There are very good partnership and inter-agency collaboration, which provide families with a range of preventative measures to ensure safe homes and environments for those who are vulnerable. As a result of the effective, and improving, preventative strategies, such as raising awareness of domestic violence, the number of referrals for children's social care services is very low compared to the national average and there are low and reducing numbers of those who are looked after by the council. The number of children and young people who are on the child protection register is half the

national average and although there has been a rise in the proportion of those re-registered over the past year, the overall trend over the past three years has been consistently below the national average. Services are quick to respond, identify and address the needs of children and young people. As a result, the number of initial assessment and core assessments completed on time is consistently well above national averages.

The looked after children within the borough have access to highly experienced and qualified staff including qualified social workers. A successful campaign to recruit more foster carers has led to more stable placements over the past 12 months for some children. This has also reduced the number of looked after children and young people living outside the borough but some still have too far to travel to maintain good links with friends and family.

Arrangements to track, and support, vulnerable groups continue to develop. The Common Assessment Framework has been in place for some time, although its potential is still being realised. Effective work, such as the pilot project for those who have been excluded from school for more than three days, is having a positive impact because it entails an assessment being undertaken for each pupil through the Common Assessment Framework and referrals made to the Connexions Service and Social Inclusion Team.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is now well established and rigorous in the fulfilment of its functions. An independent Chair has recently been appointed with a view to developing the board's effectiveness further. The recent joint area review report noted the good multi-agency representation of the LSCB and its sub-groups and how this ensures a strong sense of shared responsibility across the range of safeguarding issues.

Area for development

- Strengthen the use of the Common Assessment Framework to track children and young people.

Enjoying and achieving

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 aspect is good and clear progress has been made in addressing issues highlighted at the last APA. An improving trend of attainment at Key Stages 1 and 2 has been maintained and there are strong signs of improvement for older pupils, looked after children and young people, boys, and those from Black and minority ethnic groups. There is still more work to do to ensure this is maintained so that children and young people of all ages across the borough achieve as much as they can in relation to their starting points.

The overall picture is that children gain a good start to their education through early years and childcare services. In primary schools, pupils attain consistently high

standards when compared to national averages and the local authority is ranked as one of the highest in the country in this respect. However, the progress that children make in primary schools is generally in line with what might be expected in relation to their individual starting points. In secondary schools, the picture is less positive. Here, standards are broadly average at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. Nonetheless, over the past year, there has been some good progress in raising standards at the end of Key Stage 3 so that the majority of young people are now achieving in line with national averages. The proportion of those gaining five or more A*-G at GCSE has been in line with that expected nationally for the past three years and often below average when compared with councils in similar circumstances. However, in 2006 the proportion was above national averages for the first time when English and mathematics were included. Improved standards are also evident for Black and minority ethnic groups, so that their attainment is now slightly above the national average. Pupils with a learning difficulty and/or disability often make good progress. In the recent Tellus2 survey, the proportion of children and young people who reported they enjoyed school most of the time was higher than the national average.

Although there are few children and young people who are looked after by the council, their educational needs have a high profile within the services. There are high aspirations for them to achieve well and an increasing proportion of these young people go on to continue their studies at university.

The council's support to schools was a focus for the recent joint area review and the review shows that the council has a good impact on raising achievement. Over the past year, particular support has been given to boost the achievement for learners during Year 9. This was successful and plans are well advanced to consolidate this and to build upon the focus on Years 7 and 8 over the last two years, so that all pupils throughout Key Stage 3 make better progress. The school improvement service, in partnership with headteachers and School Improvement Partners, has also worked diligently with secondary schools to track and identify more effectively those individuals and groups that are underachieving. One school has recently been given a notice to improve following an inspection. This is against the trend of the past three years when no schools were identified as causing concern through inspection. The council has been proactive in addressing weaknesses in the provision for young people with behavioural and emotional difficulties and inspection shows improving results for those attending the Pupil Referral Service. Fieldwork conducted for the joint area review revealed weaknesses in the curriculum and operational management of the youth service, acknowledging that the council has identified both the issues and support needed for improvement.

There has been a further reduction in permanent and fixed-term exclusions in secondary schools. This is as a result of well-monitored programmes to support those at risk and good support for those excluded for more than three days. Absence rates have improved and continue to be in line with national averages, with the exception of unauthorised absences in secondary schools which remain too high.

Areas for development

- Improve rates of progress for pupils of all ages so that more pupils make good, or better, progress from their starting points.
- Reduce levels of unauthorised absence in secondary schools.
- Improve the curriculum and operational management in the youth service.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. This judgement is supported by the findings of the recent joint area review which identifies an outstanding range of opportunities for children and young people to participate in activities within the borough. The review also shows that services are very active in ensuring that they involve those who are particularly vulnerable or hard to engage. Similarly, there are many opportunities for groups of young people to share views and influence services including a direct involvement with the council. For example, the council gave particular attention to involving children and young people in the new CYPP.

Young people report they feel they can make a positive difference. Children and young people who are looked after by the council are able to influence services through their contribution to issues such as accommodation for care leavers, and by delivering training to staff in schools. The vast majority actively participate in their reviews and, for those unable to attend, their views are represented in other ways. Similarly, the council actively seeks the views and participation of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and this has a high profile within the CYPP.

The proportion of children and young people in the borough who offend is low in comparison with the national average and very few of those who are looked after enter the criminal justice system. There is a continuing reduction of numbers of those who commit crimes for the first time and strategies to prevent re-offending are developing well. There is now a dedicated worker to support those at high risk of re-offending and there are early signs that the prevention work offered to this group is having a positive effect. The community safety team has undertaken an evaluation of the impact of summer programmes with young people on crime reduction in high risk areas. As a result of their findings, additional prevention work is to continue in two particular areas in the borough.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. The number of children and young people in education, training or employment continues to be above the national average.

This includes the proportion of care leavers, which is significantly higher than the national average. The council is particularly successful in helping those who need additional support to gain employment and training including those involved with the Youth Offending Team, young mothers and those who are looked after by the local authority. The reasons for this are that they know their young people very well, support services work collaboratively to meet their needs and interests, and schools, colleges and local employers are working in partnership very effectively to increase the range of flexible routes to employment. They are targeting their resources well, not only in terms of what they can reasonably achieve at this time, but also by prioritising particular areas and groups. Young people feel that they would like more information and advice to help them plan for their future; however, they speak very positively about the quality of public transport in the borough.

There is a strong and successful strategic approach to preventative work with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of young people so that they remain within the education system and are inspired by excellent role models to achieve greater things for themselves. Two good examples of this are the Self-Esteem Through Sport programme and the newly established Skills Centre. These training courses ensure that young people maintain very positive attitudes to education. There is also very good attention paid to improving basic literacy and numeracy skills within these courses. The direct impact of these courses is that the young people gain confidence and skills which make a positive difference to their options when they leave school at the age of 16.

Very good support is also given to those who are leaving care as they reach adulthood so that they can make their contribution as responsible citizens. This includes access to high quality accommodation as well as a range of employment or training opportunities. This reflects the high aspirations that the council has of looked after children and enables young people to play a full and active part in the community.

Since the last APA, good progress has been made in increasing the range of courses available for 14 to 19 year olds. The council has recently set these out in a prospectus and has ambitious plans to work with other London boroughs to increase the offer further. The council has good plans in place to ensure that education and training for 14 to 19 year olds is sufficiently flexible and wide-ranging to meet the demand, particularly for those who are looking for vocational rather than traditional options. Consequently, the council is in a strong position to give greater options to young people.

Area for development

- Develop vocational 14-19 pathways.

Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council has an excellent capacity to improve its services for children and young people. This is demonstrated by the improvements made in all areas of the council's services over the past year. These improvements have been possible not only because of increasingly effective integration of the council's services but also as a result of further consolidation of partnerships between those offering additional services. This is exemplified further in the joint area review report.

Leadership of the council is very good and has been strengthened during the last year through consolidation of key roles and responsibilities. The Director of Education and Children's Services demonstrates excellent leadership and leads by example. All managers are clearly focused on working in partnership both within the council and with those providing services externally. At its best this provides tailor-made support to individual children and young people and their families because they are well known to a range of professionals who provide timely and well-coordinated support. Some areas of service work are able to do this more effectively than others and this is where partnerships and multi-agency systems are better established and have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities than others. For example, over the past year the co-location of services for those with a learning difficulty and/or disability has strengthened further the coordinated approach to meeting their needs. But a lack of coordinated approaches to the improvement of CAMHS has resulted in less development than expected.

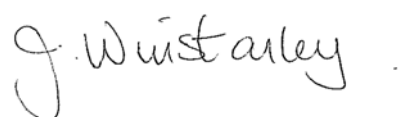
The council is ambitious in its plans and aspirations for children and young people in the borough. It is on target to improve services as detailed in the CYPP and as evidenced in its review of the first year of the plan. The council is proactive in seeking to identify and address weaknesses, and the monitoring of progress and outcomes, particularly for vulnerable children and young people, continues to be good. This ensures that the council is in a strong position to develop services further.

Area for development

- Further develop commissioning priorities and attention to strategic development with health.

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 blue ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection