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Mrs Lynda Fisher
Strategic Director for Children, Families and Learning
Portsmouth City Council
Civic Offices
Guildhall Square
Portsmouth
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Dear Mrs Fisher

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN PORTSMOUTH 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 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 provides a service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users. Its overall effectiveness continues to be good. This is the case for most areas of the council's work. For example, the council has engaged effectively with local communities across the authority to further develop its multi-agency work. These Community Improvement Partnerships (CIPs) are ensuring the council's strategic aims as outlined in its Children and Young People's Plan are translated into effective practice and that its services are relevant to the needs of the children and young people in the city. Within the *Every child matters* outcome 'Enjoying and Achieving', judged to be adequate, there are many areas of strength: for instance, although results for 11- and 16-year-olds were below national and statistical neighbours' average in 2006, the unvalidated 2007 data suggests that there has been significant improvement and this has been formally recognised by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

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 area is good. All children and young people with chronic health needs have specific health care plans and protocols in place which are drawn up by specialist nursing teams. There are good systems in place to reach vulnerable children and young people through the use of specialist posts and effective interagency working across the CIPs.

There are particularly well coordinated approaches to the health needs of looked after children and young people using identified professionals across the authority. The authority has a robust approach to meeting the needs of looked after children and young people. All Portsmouth schools have a 'looked after' link teacher. There is a 'looked after' link nurse to monitor health standards and offer health care advice and support for young people with a particular focus on substance misuse and teenage pregnancy. There has been a substance misuse training programme developed for residential staff and foster carers and a looked after children substance misuse policy, jointly developed with the Safer Portsmouth Partnership, is in place. All those identified as having a substance misuse problem receive an intervention from the young people's substance misuse team. All of the pre-school development assessments for looked after children aged 5 years or younger are up to date. There is also a Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) nurse whose role is to prioritise referrals of looked after children and young people. The Adolescent Health Project has resulted in an increase in the time allocated to the looked after children link nurse to further improve take up of health assessments. The authority has remained in the good performance range for health assessments for looked after children and young people for the fourth consecutive year.

The council has made good progress towards a comprehensive CAMHS service with effective protocols and plans in place to meet the needs of 16- to 17-year-olds, and children and young people with learning difficulties and complex needs. They have also fully implemented plans for a 24 hour urgent response. The authority has taken appropriate steps to ensure that the most vulnerable children and young people can access appropriate CAMHS services that meet their needs. As a result, there has been a reduction in waiting times to under four weeks and all families are now seen within appropriate time frames.

There has been good progress in schools achieving Healthy Schools Status with the authority exceeding its target. The authority has also focussed on ensuring school-aged children and young people can access two hours of physical education a day. The Tellus2 survey suggests that children and young people would like more information about healthy food, smoking and drugs, and the local authority is already planning to address this.

The proportion of breast-feeding mothers and the percentage of babies with low birth weight are in line with national averages. The rates of immunisation at both second and fifth birthdays are both above national averages.

The authority continues to focus on teenage pregnancy as a key priority and this remains an area for improvement. Although the rate has reduced slightly, the current rate of decline will not be sufficient to reach the 2010 target. However the authority has implemented a good range of interventions to ensure progress is made. It has restructured the service, which effectively ensures user involvement in its development and style of service delivery; it has focused on preventative action by identifying trends and working with fathers and young mothers.

Area for development

- Improve the performance of the teenage pregnancy strategy to meet the planned reduction required by the government's 2010 target.

Staying safe

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people is good. There has been significant improvement in the timeliness of initial assessments with good performance clearly above that of statistical neighbours and the national average. Continued good performance on timescales for core assessments is also very good and above average. Re-referrals have shown continued improvement and this is a better performance than the authority's statistical neighbours and national averages. The data indicate that referral rates to initial assessment are below the authority's statistical neighbours and the national average. The authority information suggests that this is because of how initial contacts are made: low level initial assessments and signposting are recorded as referrals not as initial assessments. If this is the case, this misrepresents the work the authority is undertaking. Parents are routinely involved in assessments and the authority is ensuring that assessments are signed by parents to reflect this.

All child protection cases have been reviewed within timescales. There is also very good performance around re-registrations. Performance on meeting timescales for initial child protection conferences is poor. Although the authority maintains that safeguarding measures are in place prior to the conference, it also needs to ensure that child protection conferences are held in a timely manner in line with national timescales.

All children and young people on the Child Protection Register and almost all looked after children and young people have an allocated social worker. The council has made significant improvement in timescales for looked after children reviews and performs well in this area. The number of looked after children and young people

continues to decrease and is below the average for similar authorities and the country as a whole.

The number of adoptions remains low in relation to both the authority's statistical neighbours and national averages. The authority maintains that this is related to a particular cohort of children and young people where adoption is not a viable option; however, this is still an area for improvement. The authority is aware of this and prioritising appropriately. The stability of short term placements is good with the percentage of children and young people with three or more placements being less than both the authority's statistical neighbours and national averages. The stability of long term placements is also very good, again better than both sets of comparators.

There has been improved signposting to, and development of, preventative services to support early intervention through the Child and Family Enquiries system. This is a referral system that is staffed by a multi agency team to ensure timely and appropriate responses to initial contacts. There continues to be an appropriate focus on the development of preventative services, particularly around domestic violence, leading to an increased referral rate and early intervention programmes are in place. There are good strategic links to CIPs, extended schools and children's centres to safeguard children and young people across the city.

An ongoing serious case review raised issues around capacity, practice and performance. The capacity within the Local Safeguarding Children Board has been improved to ensure that future serious case reviews will be taken forward in an appropriate and timely manner. The authority has identified how it can improve its practice following the case review and has implemented robust audit systems to ensure the quality of safeguarding work via monthly file audits by senior managers and multi-agency audits of a sample of cases. The Local Safeguarding Children Board has demonstrated its ability to impact on outcomes in the authority through a review of all young people on the Child Protection Register.

Areas for development

- Take positive steps to ensure that initial child protection conferences are held in a timely manner within national timescales.
- Ensure accurate recording of initial assessments.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 2

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this outcome is adequate, with many good features.

Early years provision continues to be a strength with strongly co-ordinated children's centres across the city and family learning effectively supporting children and young

people. Standards at the end of the Foundation Stage in 2006 exceeded national expectations across most areas of learning. A significant proportion of the outcomes of Ofsted inspections of early years settings were good or outstanding.

The validated results for the 2006 Key Stage 1 tests indicate that the pupils in the authority's schools are attaining standards which are broadly in line with national expectations and its statistical neighbours. The proportion of pupils attaining below national expectations has reduced as the authority has effectively concentrated on tackling these groups as a way of reducing the tail of underachievement.

At Key Stage 2 in 2006, although the overall point scores for the authority continued to improve, the proportion of pupils attaining expected standards remained stubbornly below the national average for English, mathematics and science. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science was also below national averages and the authority's statistical neighbours, although the proportion of pupils attaining Level 5 increased in mathematics and science. The proportion of pupils attaining national expectations at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2006 continued to increase from a very low base but was still below statistical and national comparators.

The unvalidated data for 2007 at Key Stage 2 and the GCSE results suggests that the continuous improvement seen in previous years has continued to be built on. The percentage of pupils attaining national expectations at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4 has risen significantly. The Key Stage 2 results are in line with the national average and the GCSE results meet the authority's statutory GCSE targets.

The outcomes of the council's provision for looked after children and young people are good and is an area of strength. On all significant indicators, their average performance is better than national and statistical comparators. Similarly, the attainment of pupils from black and multi-ethnic groups across the key stages is at least in line with the authority's statistical neighbours and national averages.

Provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. There is a wide and varied range of support across the city; this is well co-ordinated and linked to the work of other agencies. As a result, the overall proportion of the pupils with statements of special need is in line with national levels. In 2006, statements were completed well within the statutory time lines. Placements in mainstream schools are higher than those in the authority's statistical neighbours and the national average. No schools have an inadequate inspection grading for provision for learning difficulties and/or disabilities and 78% have a rating of good or better against this criterion.

The proportion of pupils permanently excluded in both primary and secondary schools is below that of the authority's statistical neighbours and national averages but fixed term exclusions are higher. However, the amount of time provided for permanently excluded pupils' education is in the top quartile nationally.

The authority's intervention work with schools that are causing concern is robust and effective. Relationships between the authority and its schools are good but there is no complacency. As a result, the small number of schools in Ofsted's categories of concern has decreased since 2005/06. There are no schools in special measures. The number of schools with good or better inspection outcomes is increasing.

School attendance is below national averages overall. However, the rate of pupils' attendance at primary schools is broadly in line with the authority's statistical neighbours and national average, as is the rate of authorised absence. The level of unauthorised absence has decreased since 2006 and is slightly higher than that of the authority's statistical neighbours and national average. Secondary pupils' attendance is still below national average although there has been a slight improvement since 2005/06. The figures for secondary school pupils' authorised absence is significantly higher than the national average and the authority's statistical neighbours and have increased since 2005. The level of unauthorised absence for secondary school pupils is significantly higher than national average and the authority's statistical neighbours and has significantly increased since 2005/06.

The Tellus2 survey and other longstanding survey work, in which the council has been involved with Keele University, suggests that children and young people are generally positive about their education and their schools with the proportion of positive returns being at least in line with the national trends.

Areas for development

- Increase the proportion of pupils attaining national expectations in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4.
- Increase the number of pupils attending schools by tackling unauthorised absence rates.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people is good. There is a diverse range of opportunities for children and young people to contribute and be consulted across a variety of settings, including annual student voice days and 'Represents' events to inform the Children and Young People's Plan. Some 85% of schools have a school council or equivalent and 10 schools have processes for involving young people as school governors. The multi-agency inclusion support panel ensures young peoples' views are taken into consideration. The Tellus2 survey showed responses roughly in line with national averages, with many of the respondents being involved in youth parliaments.

There is ongoing work to engage children and young people in investing in their community, for example the development of young wardens to work alongside community wardens, responding to local need.

Youth Workers, the 'Preventing Youth Offending Project', and Motiv8 as all work directly with young people who are often victims of crime as much as perpetrators. The restorative justice programmes which operate in children's residential homes have been effective and well received by magistrates and police. The number of looked after children and young people cautioned and convicted remains higher than the statistical neighbours and the national average. Although this relates to a particular cohort of young people, this remains an area for improvement. The rate of re-offending is in line with national averages. The Wessex Youth Offending Team's 2003 annual report suggests that in Portsmouth there has been a steady reduction in the number of young people who have committed at least one offence that resulted in reprimand, final warning or prosecution.

The involvement of looked after children and young people in their review process is improving. Performance is now acceptable and there is continuing work to engage young people with the review system. However, this is still below the position in the authority's statistical neighbours and the national average and remains an area for improvement.

There are good systems in place to ensure that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are able to take an active part in decision making. Transition protocols have been produced to ensure clarity about the role of all agencies to ensure a smooth transition to adult life. This has included user-friendly guidance on transition produced specifically for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The views of children and young people with special needs and/or disabilities are sought and recorded both during assessment of their needs and at all reviews of their progress. There is some innovative and inclusive practice in place, for example, the special schools take an active part in the Council of Portsmouth Students organisation. Minutes from these meetings are created on both paper and DVD.

Areas for development

- Reduce the numbers of looked after children and young people cautioned and convicted.
- Increase the numbers of looked after children and young people participating in their reviews.

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 area is good with many areas of strength. There is a very strong, cross-directorate emphasis on corporate parenting. This can be seen in the highly effective work on housing and placements for young people within the city. This work is

having a direct impact on the economic well-being of vulnerable children and young people as it enables them to live locally and to access learning and work opportunities. For instance, the proportion of care leavers living in suitable accommodation is above the authority's statistical neighbours and national averages.

The authority has made an effective start in implementing the 14–19 strategy; it has established a strong working group and appointed a new coordinator. Although it is now well placed to have a positive impact on the achievement of young people, the proportion of learners attaining Levels 2 and 3 by the age of 19 is in line with its statistical neighbours but below national expectations.

The council's provision for looked after children and young people in this area is very strong. Outcomes for care leavers about to make the transition into further education, employment and training are good and all care leavers have pathway plans. The proportion of looked after children and young people obtaining five GCSEs at grades A* to C is better than the national average and the authority's statistical neighbours.

The council's provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Children and young people are well supported by the authority through its effective partnership working with the Connexions service and good transition arrangements, especially in secondary schools, for those with statements of special educational need. 96% of school leavers with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the 16 to 19 age group are engaged in education, employment or training.

There are significant opportunities for children and young people to access jobs and training. The effective partnership work with Connexions has enabled an increased proportion of young people to access further education. This has led to a further reduction in the number of young people not in education, employment or training so that the number of young people is in line with the authority's statistical neighbours and national averages.

Different agencies are well co-ordinated through local children's centres which are closely linked to the CIPs. This has resulted in the work on family learning strategies being effectively embedded in the various communities. As a result, day-care provision is judged to be above the national average and Foundation Stage profile outcomes exceed national inspection outcomes.

Area for development

- Increase the proportion of young people attaining Levels 2 and 3 in further education through the work of the 14–19 strategy.

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

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council has strong, effective and well established senior leadership in place with a good track record of continuous improvement. This can be seen by the progress made since the last annual performance assessment. A practical example of this is the steady, improvement in pupils' attainment at the end of the key stages which clearly indicates the year-on-year impact of the local authority's work with schools. This incremental approach was also noted in the Fostering Services inspection report (January 2007) which reported a considerable improvement since the last inspection in 2005. The report concluded that the service has the potential to meet or exceed national averages. A clear Children and Young People's Plan has been implemented effectively with a range of strategic partners. Children and young people have been well involved in the development of the Children and Young People's Plan in identifying key strategies. A wide range of information and data has been analysed to effectively support the priorities which the council is working on.

There is a strong political will to ensure that children and young people's lives in the city are improved. This can be seen through the effective cross directorate working and well managed multi-agency strategies at a senior level within the council. These are also strongly aligned with locality-based work in the CIPs and partnership work with a wide range of agencies. For example, closer working with the housing directorate has resulted in a significant improvement in the availability and quality of accessible housing for young people.

The council, through its Medium Term Resource Strategy, has identified Children's Services as a priority and is effectively developing and supporting the care and well-being of children and young people; this is well targeted and based upon an effective analysis of need. This is achieved through a well-established joint commissioning approach to services which match the outcomes of the *Every child matters* agenda.

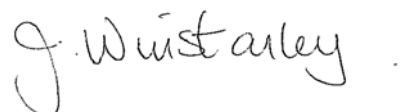
The council has good levels of recruitment and retention. It has one of the lowest service staff leavers' percentages of the statistical neighbours group. This places the authority in a strong position to continue to improve local services. The effective, cross-cutting partnership working involving services and agencies means that the authority is now well placed to achieve some challenging targets, for instance reducing the number of teenage pregnancies. Some initiatives have not been in place long enough to have had a sufficient impact on areas identified by the council for further development.

Area for development

- Ensure that the strategies and initiatives that have recently been put in place result in effective action to improve the authority's performance.

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