

26 November 2007

Mr John Nash
Director of Children's Services
Borough of Poole
Civic Centre
Poole
Dorset
BH15 2RU

Dear Mr Nash

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE BOROUGH OF POOLE

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) 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

Borough of Poole delivers services for children and young people at a good level. A good contribution is made by services towards improving outcomes. There have been clear improvements in the extent to which children and young people are enjoying and achieving and keeping healthy. There is good integration of education and social care services in targeting resources at the most vulnerable children and young people. The authority has taken positive steps to engage with, and consult, children and young people through the Children and Young People's Shadow Board. This is being used to shape strategy and develop services in improving the lives of children and young people in Poole. A key area for development is the implementation of the authority's 14–19 strategy.

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. In the past 12 months, the council has continued to develop services with its partners and has established a strong network of multi-agency groups. There is effective joint planning, good attention to early intervention and a clear focus on targeting areas where there is greatest need. This has led, for example, to increased attendance at parenting support programmes. The continued

development of children's centres within the locality is supporting promotion of health and healthy lifestyles. The council has exceeded its target for the National Healthy Schools Programme and school inspection findings are positive in relation to being healthy.

The percentage of teenage conceptions has increased but remains below the national figures. The council is actively targeting identified areas in the borough and has deployed additional resources in the secondary school with the highest rate of teenage conceptions.

There have been high hospital admissions due to substance misuse by young people. The council has identified that these relate mainly to alcohol misuse. Young people have been engaged in looking for solutions. The authority has developed a multi-agency strategy that includes education, environmental health and police working in partnership.

The council has made good progress in establishing a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), including protocols and services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A range of staff have been trained to deliver services at tier 1 to young people in community settings. The council is being proactive in seeking ways to develop the service further through community provision. The proportion of cases seen within specified timescales compare well to the national figures.

There is good health provision for looked after children. Advice and support about health services is part of the health review process and training and information is also given to carers. The rates of dental and health assessments for looked after children are very good in comparison with similar authorities and the national average.

Areas for development

- Work to reduce teenage conceptions further.
- Reduce instances of admission to hospital as a result of substance/alcohol misuse.

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 council continues to ensure that children and young people live in an environment where they are protected from harm. Children and young people from Year 6 report, through the Tellus2 survey, that they have confidence in the way incidents of bullying are dealt with in their schools. All children on the Child Protection Register and all looked after children continue to be allocated to a designated social worker, which exceeds the national comparators for both groups.

Borough of Poole has continued to develop services in localities, working in close partnership with other agencies, for the early identification and response to need. Use of the common assessment framework is well established with substantial year-on-year increase in its use. More is spent on family support services than in similar councils. However, successful early and local intervention has resulted in a lower referral rate, a reduction in the number of looked after children and lower numbers of children on the Child Protection Register. These improvements justify the financial investment made by the local authority.

The 2006 APA letter highlighted the need for the referral system to identify children in need and to reverse the fall in the number of core assessments. The authority has responded positively to this and has developed assessment and referral teams to bring about greater consistency. There has been staff training in this area and quality assurance systems have been put in place to ensure threshold levels are correct. These have contributed to a substantial increase in core assessments over the last year although the number remains low compared to the national average and similar authorities. The percentage of referrals leading to an initial assessment has greatly reduced to below the national average. This reflects the impact of the successful locality strategy, which enables managers to redirect referrals to localities. However, the authority also identified some weaknesses in its recording procedures as a contributory factor and these have since been addressed.

A local Safeguarding Children Board is established jointly with Bournemouth Borough Council. It is well represented and has a comprehensive work programme. The joint arrangements give the opportunity for challenge between authorities. Action has been taken in respect of issues identified from a serious case review. The numbers on the Child Protection Register have reduced steadily over the last three years and are in line with the national average. The level of re-registrations has reduced and the gap is steadily narrowing between Poole's figures and the proportion of re-registrations nationally. The authority has taken positive steps to identify those children who are privately fostered in the community resulting in an increase in the number of children being identified.

The authority has a below average proportion of children who are looked after and it has no residential provision. Therefore, a high percentage are in foster care. Of these, the proportion of looked after children fostered by family or friends is lower than comparator authorities. Emphasis has been given to developing family and friends placements, which has led to a small increase. There has been a marked deterioration in placement stability, from a previously very good position. As the number of looked after children has decreased, the profile and nature of young people's individual needs has changed. The proportion with complex needs has increased and it has not always been possible to match placements from existing resources. The authority has identified this as a key focus and is currently commissioning placements from independent fostering providers. The council is committed to placing children within reach of their local community and, currently, 95% of children and young people are in placements within 20 miles of their home address.

There has been an increase in the percentage of looked after children adopted in the last year. Although this is below average, the numbers of children and young people involved are very small so any comparison with the national average must be treated with caution. The speed at which adoptions take place has improved. All care leavers are allocated a personal advisor. However, only just over 60% of these had pathway plans last year. This dip in performance was affected by staff vacancies and sickness and the situation is now being rectified.

Areas for development

- Continue to monitor threshold levels for assessments to ensure that children in need are correctly identified.
- Ensure there is a good choice of placements available for looked after children and young people and increase placement stability.
- Ensure all care leavers have pathway plans.

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. The authority performs well at most key stages in comparison with national averages and other similar authorities. Good support is provided for parents and carers to help their children get off to a good start from early childhood. The authority is developing its work further to engage with more 'hard-to-reach' parents and carers through, for example, the Peers Early Education Partnership initiative. This contributes to good outcomes for children in the Foundation Stage. A greater proportion of children reach or exceed the national expectation by the end of their reception year than is the case nationally. Most school inspections judge the quality and standards in the Foundation Stage to be at least good. The quality of provision in day care settings, however, is weaker with a below average proportion judged good or better.

An improving trend in attainment at Key Stage 1 has been sustained and standards are above the national average. Reading has improved since last year's APA when it was identified as an area for improvement. Attainment at Key Stage 2 has risen to above average in English and remains in line with the national average in mathematics. In science, results dipped to average in 2006 having been above average for the previous three years. Children and young people in Key Stage 2 do not do as consistently well as other key stages. The authority has identified this and has instigated support programmes in several schools. Based on the sample of schools inspected during the year, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as those in similar authorities. The proportion of statements of special educational need prepared within the required 18-week timescale is low and places the authority within the lowest 25% nationally. This has been largely due to vacancies and a period of staff turnover. Appointment of staff and the creation of an

additional post have increased the authority's capacity to improve the timeliness of statements.

Standards in English at Key Stage 3 are above average. Continued improvement in mathematics led to standards rising to well above the national average in 2006. In science, standards are consistently well above average.

GCSE results continue to be above average. Around 64% achieved five or more A*–C grades in 2006. Whilst this did not quite match last year's results it was nevertheless above the national average. Some 60% of pupils from Black and minority ethnic groups attained five grades A*–C, including English and mathematics. The standards of children and young people who are looked after were above average at Key Stages 2 and 4 in 2006. The children and young people who have been in care over a longer period generally achieve better. However, Poole has a small number of children and young people in this group and any comparison with national figures should be treated with caution.

Inspection findings show that children and young people in Poole enjoy school. One secondary school is currently in a category for concern, having been issued with a notice to improve. Inspection monitoring shows there has been good progress in addressing the school's key weaknesses and that intervention and support from the authority has been well targeted and a contributory factor in the school's improvement.

School attendance at both primary and secondary levels is broadly in line with national averages. The authority issues clear guidance to its schools to encourage good attendance. The percentage of schools with 25% or more surplus places is below average for both primary and secondary schools. Fixed-term exclusions are increasing in secondary schools at a faster rate than those nationally. The authority has identified the reasons for this increase, which is attributed to one particular school, and is being proactive in providing support and guidance to the school concerned in a bid to reduce its fixed-term exclusions.

Areas for development

- Improve the quality of provision in day care settings.
- Prepare all statements of special educational need within the required timescale.
- Reduce secondary fixed-term exclusions.

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 in this aspect is good. Children and young people are engaged in decision-making through the Children and Young People's Shadow Board and all groups are well

represented. Their views are welcomed and there are some good examples of young people taking a lead through, for instance, talking to representatives from the police service or meeting senior citizens to discuss standards of behaviour on public transport. The Corporate Parenting Group has established a good partnership with looked after children, who also contribute ideas to help elected members and senior officers review and develop services. A participation strategy has recently been developed with local agencies and agreed by all partners.

Inspections of early years settings and school inspections report a generally positive picture in relation to making a positive contribution. The ratio of youth workers to young people has increased and now exceeds national figures. This helps the youth service to reach a high proportion of young people aged 13–19 and the authority has exceeded the national target.

The authority has focused on promoting youth activities and leisure opportunities in areas of greater deprivation, in partnership with the police. This has had a positive impact, with increased take-up of activities. Children and young people have been trained to act as mentors both in schools and the youth service. The council reports reducing numbers of anti-social behaviour orders, with none issued so far in 2007. There has also been a reduction in re-offending by children and young people, which is better than the national average and that of similar authorities. There has been a general increase, however, in the number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system which is generally higher than national figures.

Advocates support vulnerable children to express their views. A higher proportion of looked after children communicated their views at the time of their statutory review than occurred nationally. Over 90% of young people with disabilities have transition plans to support the move to adult care. A range of day and short break care is available for children and young people with disabilities. The local authority is addressing the impact of the closure of a local residential respite unit, which has resulted in a resource shortfall, and has identified the need to expand its shared care provision which is currently insufficient to meet needs.

Areas for development

- Embed the Participation Strategy for children and young people aged 0-19 and identify standards for success.
- Develop capacity for respite care facilities, including shared care.

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. The authority works with other partners to disseminate information to parents and carers. Most children have free entitlement to nursery places, which enables parents to return to work should they wish. The authority is on target to meet the requirements for all but one of its children's centres. Children's

Information Services has extended the range of information and support on offer. The council is actively seeking further ways that it can widen access to information and present this in a more integrated way to support young people and families.

There has been a substantial increase in the take-up of Access to Leisure and Learning scheme over the last three years. This enables children and young people to take part in leisure and sporting activities by reducing costs. There has been a marked rise in the number of families with children with a disability who are in receipt of direct payments.

Attainment post 16 is above the national average and that of similar authorities. The percentage of young people achieving Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications by 19 is above average against national figures and those of similar authorities. Performance in the General and Vocational Certificate of Education (GCE, VCE), A and AS qualifications is also consistently above average against both comparators.

The authority has taken positive steps to target information, advice and guidance and to support young people, particularly those who are in the most vulnerable groups. This has been a contributory factor in reducing the proportion of young people aged 16–18 who are not in education, employment or training. Performance against this indicator remains below the national figures and is showing an improving trend. The authority provides good support and advice to the small number of children and young people in care through its Connexions service. All young people from this group had interventions from a Connexions personal adviser in 2005 and 2006.

The authority has made limited progress in implementing its 14–19 strategy. There is adequate collaboration between schools and providers and the authority is actively engaging in a process to develop its prospectus and to bring about coordinated diploma bids for the next round of submissions from September 2009. The authority has analysed need in relation to the skills profile for the area, in conjunction with the Business Partnership in Poole. However, it has been insufficiently proactive in developing a clear and coherent 14–19 entitlement for all young people across the borough. Much provision currently rests with individual schools and there are limited pathways for young people to follow a variety of courses across different providers. Poole did not submit a bid for the first round of specialised diplomas which means learners in Poole will not be able to access one of the five diploma lines starting in September 2008. The authority is developing its collaborative arrangements with schools and employers and is intending to bid for seven diplomas for implementation in September 2009 at Levels 1 and 2. Progress in developing a comprehensive area-wide prospectus has been slow. This is on track to go live by the end of September 2007 but the authority recognises it needs further development to help young people in Poole make informed choices about their future learning.

The council is proactive in ensuring that young people have appropriate housing and is on track to meet its target to provide decent housing for all young people by 2010. There is a comprehensive range of support services for young people leaving care to

help them make appropriate choices for their training and future lives. All care leavers live in suitable accommodation.

Areas for development

- Develop coherent and collaborative partnerships to broaden the choice of pathways for 14–19 learners.
- Provide a comprehensive area-wide prospectus to help young people make informed choices from a range of courses and providers.

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

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council has good capacity to improve its services for children and young people. It has addressed most of the areas from the last APA successfully. The council is well led. There is a clear vision and sense of direction.

The local authority has set a clear direction for establishing a common age of transfer in the borough through school reorganisation. The Borough of Poole has a comprehensive system of performance management.

The spending on services generally compares well to national figures and other similar councils. The local authority structure is well integrated across education and social care. The recent appointment of a Disability Manager means the council has no vacancies in key officer positions. The authority has a coherent strategy aimed at narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged children and young people. Services work together closely to improve the lives of children and young people. This is evident in the three most disadvantaged wards, through the locality strategy, where outcomes for young people are showing improvement. There is close working with partners, such as health, police and the Connexions service, to provide an integrated and cohesive approach to supporting the well-being of children and young people in Poole.

The authority has carried out a detailed and comprehensive review of its Children and Young People's Plan. This identifies needs and priorities for most aspects and there are clear action plans and identified lines of responsibility to underpin further improvement. Some sections lack focus on the impact of the authority's work on the outcomes for children and young people.

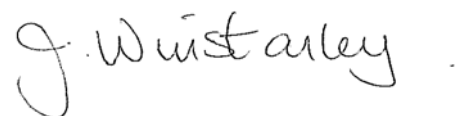
Area for development

- Give greater prominence to the impact of services on the outcomes for 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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley" followed by a period.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection