

26 November 2007

Mr Mohammed Mehmet
Director of Children's Services
Peterborough City Council
Bayard Place
Broadway
Peterborough
PE1 1FB

Dear Mr Mehmet

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN PETERBOROUGH CITY COUNCIL

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 2

Overall, the local authority delivers services for children and young people at an adequate level. The local authority's management of its services for children and young people, including its capacity to improve, is also adequate. The local authority has responded to the issues raised in the joint area review with significant additional investment to improve outcomes for children and young people in staying safe. Although it has improved, progress in this aspect has been slow; services are having a limited impact and staying safe remains inadequate. Within a city that faces considerable social challenges, the local authority has high aspirations and a realistic vision for every child and young person in Peterborough to lead successful lives and to make a positive contribution to the future. The authority's robust children and young people's plan is a good vehicle to achieve this, and action plans are comprehensive and thorough. The council has made significant progress in laying firm foundations to tackle weaknesses but it is too soon to see demonstrable improvements.

Being healthy

Grade 2

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate with some good features. One recommendation emerged from the 2006 joint area review.

For action in the next six months

- The Cambridge and Peterborough Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust and its partners should improve in-patient services to ensure appropriate mental health care for young people, and should reduce waiting times for treatment provided by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Good progress has been made on reducing waiting times for CAMHS services and most young people who are referred are now seen within target timescales. Access to CAMHS for looked after children and young people has also improved. Funding has been secured for proposals to ensure sufficient in-patient facilities for young people with mental health difficulties but this is not yet developed. The capacity of the CAMHS team to meet the needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been strengthened by a dedicated specialist team and the appointment of a half-time consultant. Access to CAMHS for young people involved in offending is good. Programmes to develop emotional awareness and learning through the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning project have been rolled out in schools.

Joint working across agencies to promote the health of children and young people is good but improvements in a number of areas have yet to be seen. A range of new initiatives is in place. This includes a network of local volunteer health champions, who work with individuals in disadvantaged areas and with groups of young people at risk, to encourage healthier lifestyles. Healthcare staff and children's centres provide mothers with effective support to maintain healthy lifestyles. The proportion of new mothers breast-feeding is improving though it is still below similar authorities and the national average. Community midwives help mothers to understand the health issues associated with smoking and the percentage of mothers smoking in pregnancy has reduced from 18% to the national average of 16.6%. A good multi-agency approach promotes sexual health and safe sex. A comprehensive teenage pregnancy intervention plan has been developed but has yet to have an impact. The number of conceptions among 15 to 17 year olds has increased and remains higher than similar areas. A new community-based Chlamydia screening programme has been developed and rolled out and increasing numbers of young people are accessing this service.

Engagement with the healthy schools initiative is excellent with 96% of schools participating and 72% having achieved healthy school status, significantly above the national average of 47%. The appointment of a sports coach to the Youth Offending

Service has led to an extended range of health promotion activities for young people involved in offending and encouraged their take-up of assessment and treatment for substance misuse problems.

The proportion of looked after children and young people who have annual health assessments and dental checks remains within the average range although it has dipped to below similar authorities and the national average. The mental health needs of young people placed in the local secure unit are met satisfactorily through a service level agreement with a specialist hospital.

Areas for development

- Implement proposals to ensure sufficient in-patient facilities for young people with mental health difficulties.
- Reduce teenage pregnancy rates.

Staying Safe

Grade 1

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is inadequate. Four recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

For immediate action

- The council and its partners should agree and implement appropriate and clear thresholds to improve access to universal, targeted and specialist services.
- The council and its partners should ensure timely and appropriate responses to child welfare concerns and support effective assessment and care planning for all children and young people in need.
- The council and its partners should strengthen auditing, monitoring, and scrutiny of referral, assessment, and care management services to improve the quality of practice and identify emerging trends at an early stage.

For action over the next six months

- The council and its partners should improve support services for children and young people with moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities in order to increase choice, access and support to families.

The joint area review in 2006 judged Peterborough 'inadequate' for staying safe. A change programme supported by a detailed improvement plan is being implemented.

There has been significant additional investment in children's specialist services to strengthen capacity at all levels. However, the benefits of these on the delivery of frontline services and on improving outcomes for children have largely yet to be realised. Whilst performance in some areas has improved, overall progress is slow. The intake and assessment system has been effectively re-organised and the backlog of outstanding work dealt with. However, systems are not operating effectively to ensure children and young people receive appropriate and timely services. Compared with similar councils there are high numbers of looked after children and those with a child protection plan. Thresholds for universal, targeted and specialist services have been agreed and preventative activity increased but this has yet to have an impact on children and young people. The number of initial assessments has improved but timescales for completing these are poor and have deteriorated further since 2006. Performance in completing core assessments within timescales has improved but still remains well below similar authorities and the national average. The number of core assessments of children in need dropped significantly and is well below comparators. The number of children who have a child protection plan is comparatively high and not all these children are allocated to a qualified social worker. Re-registrations of child protection plans have reduced and performance in this respect is now good, indicating child protection plans are becoming more effective in reducing risk. All child protection cases are reviewed within timescales. A programme of regular audits is identifying areas of poor practice and ensures steps are taken to address these.

A number of effective road safety campaigns and initiatives have contributed to the very good performance in reducing the number of children and young people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents by half. An anti-bullying strategy (Becoming Brave) has been developed but is not yet implemented. The majority of young people responding to the Tellus2 said that they do not suffer from bullying but only half feel that their schools deal with it effectively when it occurs.

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) is independently chaired and well established. It is supported by a good range of operational groups and has taken a strong lead in addressing wider safeguarding issues. Reports on serious case reviews and management reviews are properly considered by the Board. Quality assurance has been strengthened with the appointment of a dedicated quality assurance team manager and an audit framework has been developed but this has yet to be implemented.

The number of looked after children and young people remains high and well above similar authorities, indicating that actions to prevent children becoming looked after are not effective. Those responding to the schools survey rated the effectiveness of the council's preventative strategy to reduce the number of children and young people who go into care as unsatisfactory. Timescales for reviewing cases of looked after children and young people have improved and are good. The stability of long term placements is adequate, but the number of looked after children with three or more placements during the year is too high. Most children live in family placements and are well cared for by their foster carers but increasing numbers are not allocated to a qualified social worker. Adoption performance is adequate. Inspections of the

secure unit show that safeguarding issues are identified and child protection referrals made appropriately. Insufficient progress has been made to improve support services for children and young people with moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities in order to increase choice, access and support to families.

Area for development

- The areas for action which formed the recommendations in the joint area review report remain the priority areas for further development.

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 aspect is adequate. The joint area review report acknowledges that the council, its partners and schools are determined to improve education outcomes for children and young people. This was realised in 2006 with considerable improvements in examination results of 16 year olds. Nevertheless, the attainment of those aged 6-14 years, including vulnerable groups, remains below national averages and progress on closing the gap is too slow. One recommendation emerged from the joint area review.

For action over the next six months

- The council should ensure that all children and young people permanently excluded from school receive the minimum recommended education.

The local authority has effectively tackled this issue. Temporary arrangements to place some pupils in the local authority's pupil referral unit have raised the number of permanently excluded pupils receiving the minimum recommended education to 96%. Secure plans are in place to maintain this level of provision with the opening of a new school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties in January 2008. Inspection evidence shows that most children and young people attend school regularly, show good attitudes and enjoy their education.

Compared with statistical neighbours and national averages Peterborough's performance in improving outcomes for children and young people is low. Nevertheless, the trend over time is one of gradual improvement. Standards of achievement in the Foundation Stage are improving in all areas of learning and the gap between Peterborough and national averages is narrowing. The local authority has used extensive data analysis of the six areas of learning to identify strengths and weaknesses in practice. As a direct result, targeted training and support has been provided for early years practitioners and this is leading to steadily improving outcomes for five year olds.

The decline in standards at Key Stage 1 has been halted, although outcomes remain very low compared to similar authorities and national averages. The local authority is addressing this as a matter of urgency and is extending the Intensive Support Programme into selected schools at Key Stage 1. The considerable improvement in the 2005 national test results in all subjects in Key Stage 2 was successfully repeated in 2006. However, the proportion of children achieving Level 4 remains below national averages especially in English. A similar picture emerges in Key Stage 3 with an improvement of one percentage point in mathematics and sustained improvement in science. However, the 2006 results in English dropped by 5%, cancelling out the improvement in 2005. The local authority has strengthened its capacity to support school improvement, with strategic appointments of some new middle managers and additional consultants. There is a distinct improving trend in the achievements at Key Stage 4. GCSE results are better than those of similar authorities and match national averages. In 2006, the proportion of young people leaving care aged 16 with five A*-C GCSEs more than doubled and exceeded the national average by 7%.

A lower than average proportion of children and young people are excluded from schools as a result of effective identification, assessment and preventative strategies. School absence is broadly in line with national averages and similar authorities. Following the launch of a new Attendance Service, the authority has successfully raised attendance to broadly national averages in primary and secondary schools.

The authority has introduced a robust strategy to raise the achievement of the rapidly growing numbers of Black and minority ethnic groups newly arrived in the city but this has had insufficient time to have an impact on the outcomes for learners. The authority has responded positively, targeting these groups for strategic development in the CYPP but as yet there is no consistent improvement in outcomes.

Children are getting a satisfactory start to their education. Inspection findings show that the majority of pre-school settings are effective, with most judged as satisfactory or good. Around half of the schools inspected in 2006/07 were judged as good or better. A small number of schools causing concern have been placed in a category. Interventions in these schools are mostly effective. The local authority has strengthened its capacity to identify, challenge and support schools causing concern with robust procedures and the recruitment of additional expert staff to support school improvement.

The council is on course to meet its targets for extended schools in 2007/08. A play strategy has been published and children and young people in eight centres of deprivation have free access to venues, equipment and leisure activities. The first phase of the secondary school review has been well managed by the local authority, closing five schools to open two state-of-the-art secondary schools. So far, standards in Key Stage 4 have been successfully maintained during this period of re-organisation and turbulence. Money saved through the reduction of surplus places has been reinvested in education. Buildings and facilities in some existing secondary schools have been refurbished providing students with access to improved facilities. A similar primary review is planned over the next three years.

Area for development

- Demonstrate improved outcomes for children and young people in Key Stages 1 and 3.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Three recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

For immediate action

- The council should ensure that all looked after children and young people have access to complaints and advocacy services.
- The council should ensure that all councillors and officers are aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities and represent those interests effectively.

For action in the next six months

- The council and its partners should increase opportunities for participation for all children and young people in planning and management of services.

Good progress has been made in meeting the recommendations of the 2006 joint area review. An independent advocacy service for children and young people in care is now in place and every child or young person coming into care receives an information pack, including information on advocacy, the complaints process and their rights. Most looked after children and young people participate in their reviews, though the proportion has dropped slightly. The advocacy service gives good support to individual young people to ensure their views are taken account of at their reviews. Effective work has been done with councillors to improve their understanding of issues regarding looked after children and young people. Councillors scrutinise progress on this matter through the newly established corporate parenting group but this group does not engage formally with looked after children and young people to exchange views. A corporate parenting strategy has been developed to support this work.

Opportunities for all children and young people to participate in the planning and development of services have been extended through the engagement initiative. Sound structures have been developed to enable and support participation through the city Youth Council and three locality youth forums. Increasing numbers of schools have school councils, including all special schools. A young people's cabinet is in place, mirroring the Council Cabinet, with representatives drawn from school and youth councils. There are a number of good examples where the views of children and young people have made a difference to the delivery or design of

services. Specific support is being targeted at children and young people from travelling families to increase their engagement in the planning of services. Their views have influenced the provision of positive activities on site during the holidays. The Youth Offending Service consults and involves young people using their services well. Young people are engaged routinely in recruitment interviews across a number of services.

A wide range of programmes provides good support to parents and carers, many commissioned from a number of voluntary agencies. Targeted support is given to families from Black and minority ethnic communities. Increasingly, parents whose children are involved in offending behaviour participate in parenting courses. A support strategy has been developed to ensure parenting initiatives are well coordinated and properly targeted to avoid duplication.

Growing numbers of children and young people are involved in volunteering. The Unity Programme promotes community cohesion very well through a good range of innovative projects, bringing together young people from different backgrounds. A number of projects support children and young people well through transitions in their lives. A working group has been established to develop a transition strategy to improve the co-ordination of these projects.

Youth services support a comparatively high number of young people. Good multi-agency working is successfully reducing anti-social behaviour and improving crime prevention. There has been an 8% reduction in the number of young people involved in repeat offending and the number of first time offenders has dropped below that of statistical neighbours. Access to CAMHS for young people involved in offending is good. Focus groups and questionnaires were used effectively to engage children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their parents and carers in the review of the CYPP.

Area for development

- Establish a system for councillors to hear the views of looked after children and young people directly.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 2

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. Two recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

For action over the next six months

- The council and its partners should increase and sustain the engagement of vulnerable young people in education, employment and training.

For action in the longer term

- The council and its partners should increase provision for young people to live independently and safely.

There are very high numbers of looked after young people living in Peterborough and this presents the local authority with significant challenges in supporting them. Nevertheless, the proportion of looked after young people in education, employment or training is steadily rising. This has been achieved by prioritising care leavers for dedicated support and by increasing the proportion of care leavers with pathway plans. The proportion placed in appropriate housing has improved significantly and is better than similar authorities and the national average. The authority has identified the need to extend the current team to meet the demands of the high number of children and young people who are looked after.

Child care provision has been extended and there are good plans to develop provision and access further, especially for those children and families from disadvantaged communities and backgrounds. Although still too wide, this is helping to narrow the gap between the outcomes for most children and young people in Peterborough and those who are most vulnerable. Parents and carers are encouraged to take up their benefit entitlement and the good take-up of nursery places increases the opportunities for parents and carers to get into and remain in employment.

A new integrated Young People's Service (formerly Connexions, youth workers, post 16 team and teenage pregnancy staff) provides targeted support for the 13 to 19 age group in locality teams. The authority has refined its analysis of data relating to the categories of young people not in employment, education or training enabling resources to be targeted more effectively. The rates of young people not in employment, education or training are falling as a direct result but continue to be higher than statistical neighbours and national rates. A comprehensive strategy successfully ensures the accurate assessment of needs, school places and delivery of relevant curriculum packages for new arrivals from minority ethnic groups. There is insufficient analysis of the progression and participation rates for young people with moderate learning difficulties, young Travellers and those who are looked after.

The strong collaborative approach of the Team Peterborough gives young people access to a wide range of vocational pathways and progression routes as well as good universal information, guidance and advice. Apprenticeship success rates have risen steeply since 2003. In contrast, the percentage of post-16 students achieving Level 2 and Level 3 is slowly improving but at half the rate of statistical neighbours. Percentages of young people achieving Level 2 and Level 3 are below the national average. The authority has a good, clear understanding of what needs to be done to implement the 14-19 reforms and progress towards provision of a limited range of diplomas is underway.

Areas for development

- Improve the participation rates of vulnerable young people.
- Improve achievement rates post-16 at Level 2 and Level 3.

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

Grade 2

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council's capacity to improve and manage its services for children and young people is adequate. Three recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

For action over the next six months

- The council and its partners should implement joint commissioning arrangements to enhance service provision and value for money and, in particular, to reduce the numbers of agency placements.
- The council should strengthen recruitment and retention processes to reduce high numbers of vacancies of qualified social workers.

For action in the longer term

- The council and its partners should improve information about the needs and whereabouts of children and young people to support service planning, and to evaluate the effectiveness of joint initiatives and their impact on outcomes.

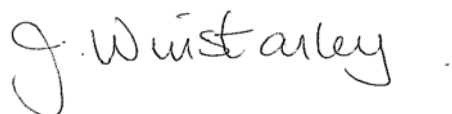
The local authority has satisfactory plans for improvement with clear, challenging yet realistic long-term ambitions that are shared by key partners. The CYPP is comprehensive and well informed by the views of children and young people. It is underpinned by detailed and appropriate action plans. Senior and middle managers have a good grasp of performance and a clear awareness of their roles in contributing to improved outcomes for young people. Through detailed needs analysis, they have a good understanding of the local context and their priorities reflect this. Overall, the council has demonstrated adequate progress in meeting the joint area review recommendations. Satisfactory progress is being made on most fronts. However, despite increased investment to improve capacity and a strong improvement plan, children's social care specialist services remain inadequate. Progress in raising the educational achievements of children and young people is adequate overall although inconsistent across the age range. A joint commissioner has been appointed and a joint commissioning strategy developed, but implementation is at a very early stage. Work to develop an integrated database to track the whereabouts of children and young people, share this information and promote the well-being of children is progressing as planned. The commitment and engagement of lead officers is strong and contributes to the authority's adequate capacity to improve.

Areas for development

- Ensure that the work of local services keeps children, young people and vulnerable children safe.
- Ensure that the clear strategic objectives, targets, actions and resources set out in the CYPP lead to significant improvements in achievement.

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