

26 November 2007

Dr Robert Garnett
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Nottinghamshire County Council
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Dear Dr Garnett

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

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment for your local authority. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the assessment.

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 2

The overall effectiveness of children's services is adequate with some good aspects, though with variation between outcome areas. The contributions with regard to making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being are good. The contributions made to being healthy, staying safe and enjoying and achieving are adequate. Although the direction of travel is positive, when compared to similar councils, the pace of change has not been rapid enough to overcome weaknesses in most outcome areas and those weaknesses are sufficient to make the overall effectiveness no more than adequate.

Being healthy

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 with some good aspects. In terms of health, there are inequalities for children and young people and families living in areas of deprivation compared to those growing up in the county's affluent areas. This is reflected in differential rates between the north and the south of the county in the take up of breast feeding and smoking cessation in pregnancy programmes, infant mortality

and emergency admissions to hospital of 0–19 year olds. However, resources from all agencies are targeted at areas of highest deprivation and focused on improving outcomes, for example; advice and guidance to parents from SureStart, Home Start and family support programmes.

Ofsted Early Years inspections judged that almost all settings were satisfactory or better in enabling children and young people to be healthy. The council has achieved the national target for the number of schools with Healthy School Status. Exercise and participation in sport is actively encouraged. The Tellus2 survey shows a good rate of participation with 88% of young people taking part in a physical activity at least once a week, with 37% participating daily.

During 2006/07 good progress has been made in improving early access to mental health services for children and young people. Until 2007 there was inadequate co-ordination of the provision to support the emotional health and well-being of vulnerable children and young people. Although it is too soon for impact to show, three new multi-agency teams are being piloted to provide improved support and therapeutic interventions. Waiting times for both specialist and non-specialist assessment have reduced and are now in line with the national average. There has been good performance by the Youth Offending Service and all young people who were referred for a specialist assessment for substance misuse were assessed within five working days and once assessed very few young people experienced delays in receiving treatment.

Teenage conception rates have fallen by 22.5% against the authority's 1999 baseline and remain well below those of similar councils. The council and its partners are aware of the continued challenge and targeted work continues to address hot spot areas. In the Tellus2 survey, more young people (71%) (national average 63%) commented that they felt they had good enough information on sex and relationships.

Support for vulnerable groups, such as children who are looked after is good. There has been a year on year improvement in performance with 85% of looked after children and young people receiving their annual health and dental assessments. Where it is required, there is a fast track system in place to refer these young people to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and substance misuse services.

There is joint commissioning of services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities although transition planning for young people 14–19 is underdeveloped. Less than 75% of young people have a transition plan to help them move towards adulthood and this position has remained unchanged since 2004. The authority has started work to address this issue and new protocols between children's and adult services are being worked out.

Areas for development

- Continue work to reduce teenage pregnancies.
- Development of preventative work to reduce health inequalities between the north and south of the county.
- Ensure improvement in transition planning arrangements for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Staying safe

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 with some good aspects.

There is a wide range of programmes delivered across agencies to promote and support children, young people and families to stay safe. The Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board has established itself and made a good start in identifying priorities for its wider safeguarding role. However, it is early days and has yet to make an impact in delivering improved outcomes for children and young people.

The effectiveness of strategies to combat bullying, discrimination and racism have been slow to take effect and the authority's target to reduce the number of racial incidents in schools was not met. A lead officer has been appointed to address issues of bullying and work is continuing in schools and youth services to accelerate progress. It is too soon to judge how effective the new arrangements are.

The Tellus2 survey shows that a majority of children and young people feel safe on public transport, going to and from school and within their homes. Compared to the national average of 25% more children and young people (32%) feel less safe within their local areas. Death from road traffic accidents continues to fall and is now 38% less than it was in 1998. However the rate of improvement is much slower than that of the England average (48%). Ofsted inspections of early years settings, schools, the authority's residential and fostering provision, judged children and young people to be provided with safe environments.

During 2006/07 performance indicators in relation to staying safe continued to show good performance with most indicators being in line with or better than similar councils. Whilst the rate of referrals of children in need decreased by 25% and are now significantly less than those of similar councils, the proportion of re-referrals remains high at 27.9% and are higher than similar councils (24.7%). Similarly, a significantly higher proportion of referrals lead to initial and core assessments. The completion of these within timescales is very good compared with similar authorities. There has also been much better performance than similar authorities in holding

initial child protection conferences within 15 working days. However the increase in child protection conferences resulted in a higher number of children, relative to the population, becoming registered, and an increase both in de-registrations and re-registrations. The authority has reviewed its performance and is satisfied that thresholds for accessing child protection services are not too low and that registration is appropriate for all those registered. All children on the child protection register are allocated to a qualified social worker.

Activities to promote and publicise private fostering have been slow to develop. An earlier campaign has not proved successful with very low impact in terms of referrals to social care services. A further public awareness exercise is planned for later in 2007. There is however a well established multi-agency group in place to identify, track and monitor the whereabouts of all children 0–16 who are missing or move off school rolls. The group are currently reviewing processes and developing new guidance. To further strengthen this work a Missing Children's Officer has been newly appointed.

Strategies to reduce the need for children and young people to enter public care are having a consistent and sustained effect with a year on year reduction resulting in the numbers of looked after children, relative to the population, being much lower than that of similar councils. Performance indicators in relation to children looked after are good with nearly all indicators in line with or better than similar councils. Placement stability is good with 82% of looked after children living in foster care. The proportion of looked after children who were adopted is very good. However placement for adoption within 12 months of that decision being made dropped from 75% to 52% during 06/07 and was at its lowest point since 2004. Delays both within Children's Services and the court processes contributed to this. Concerted effort by the authority to address this issue has been successful and there is early indication that the impact of its action has had a positive effect. The timeliness of reviews for children who are looked after is good with 90% of all looked after children receiving their reviews on time. During 2006/07, the number of eligible care leavers with a Pathway Plan (48%) and/or an allocated personal adviser (88.3%) is significantly lower than that of similar councils. In recognition of poor performance the council has initiated a review of both number and quality of planning and expects this will impact on improved performance for 07/08. The council reports that while all looked after children are allocated to an appropriate worker not all of these are qualified social workers.

Transition arrangements between children's and adult services for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are poor with less than 75% having a transition plan. Performance has not improved since 2004 and places the council's performance well below that of similar councils. The council has recognised this issue and has planned work in place to improve practice during 07/08.

Areas for development

- Reduce further bullying, discrimination and racial incidents within schools and local areas.
- Increase public awareness of private fostering.
- Improve timeliness of children and young people placed for adoption.
- Ensure all looked after children have a qualified social worker.
- Ensure all care leavers have a Pathway Plan and are allocated to a personal adviser.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate overall but with some indication of recent improvement. Standards in both early years settings and in Key Stage 1 are a little above national averages and broadly in line with statistical neighbours. Inadequate nursery inspection outcomes are being addressed through training and through bringing provision into the Achievement and Learning division, although it is too early to see evidence of improvement. At Key Stage 2, standards are a little above national figures and in line with similar authorities, but are static.

At Key Stage 3 outcomes continue to be close with national averages and with statistical neighbours. It is at Key Stage 4 where the direction of travel is strongest. From a position well below average and that of statistical neighbours, results made a steep improvement in 2006 closing the gap with national averages and the performance of similar authorities. This improvement appears to have been matched in the unvalidated 2007 results. The council has allocated additional resources of £500,000 to Key Stage 4 school improvement for each of the last two years.

Outcomes for vulnerable groups are mostly good. The achievement of looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities compares well with similar authorities and the gap is closing with the performance of their peers. Ethnic minority groups also make sound progress.

Targeted strategies are showing mixed signs of success. Known weaknesses in writing across age groups are being addressed, particularly in areas of disadvantage within the county. There has been considerable success in reducing the number of schools below floor targets. Work with families of schools has produced significantly improved results, with some of the secondary schools in the families enjoying considerable increases in GCSE results. Strategies to support identified weaknesses in behaviour and attendance show more variable evidence of improvement. Permanent exclusions are in line with national averages and similar authorities, but fixed term exclusions are below those of statistical neighbours.

The authority now faces the challenge of changing the culture of schools and their relationship with Children's Services. There is an acknowledged need to offer a more robust challenge through target setting and the work of school improvement partners (SIPs). More challenging, differentiated benchmarks are being provided to raise aspirations appropriate to the individual school or area. At present some schools are slow to grasp the challenge of setting more challenging targets.

Response in supporting schools in Ofsted categories has not always been sufficiently swift to ensure good progress at the first monitoring visit. Officers are aware of this issue and are taking steps to ensure that services are prioritised to schools most in need of curricular support. In general there is a good track record of taking action to remove schools from categories in a timely manner.

Areas for development

- Work effectively with schools to meet more challenging targets in order to raise standards where static and to maintain the present rates of improvement in those closing on national averages and statistical neighbours.
- Improve attendance and behaviour in all targeted schools to a satisfactory level.
- Ensure that support is targeted effectively and in a timely manner at schools most in need.

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. The direction of travel is good and the Participation Strategy launched in November 2006 is beginning to impact with an increasing number of participation activities planned for 2007.

Nearly all schools have school councils, there is Youth Parliament involvement and there are a range of countywide participation networks that link to local communities. Despite the opportunities for young people to have a voice, and in line with the national average, the Tellus2 survey shows that 61% of 12–15 year olds felt their views were not listened to at all/very much. Slightly better than the national average results were obtained for the proportion of young people who, in the last 12 months, had given their views about the running of the local area or school and felt that they had been listened to. However, the authority's own data based on the National Youth Agency performance indicators shows a more positive picture with a third of all 13-19 year olds involved in some form of participation. The council intends to analyse this conflicting data to see how inclusion can be further improved.

Preventative work with Black and minority ethnic young people and their families is increasing and starting to have a positive impact within communities. For example:

The Parent Partnership Service has a dedicated Asian Support Worker who has supported 193 Asian families who have children and young people with special educational needs. A new voluntary sector organisation 'Shadings' was formed in November 2006 to provide activities and support for Black and mixed heritage families. The Kool Kids support group for Black and minority ethnic families and children in the Mansfield and Ashfield area has been effective. By raising the profile of Kool Kids through training events the group has been able to increase the number of front line workers which has enabled them to provide services in more communities.

There are effective intervention programmes for those at risk of offending and levels of youth offending continue to fall; the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system decreased by 15% in 2006, compared with the previous year. Good and effective Youth Offending Service parenting programmes contribute to the reduction in offending. Robust community intervention programmes are in place and are effective in supporting young people at high risk of offending/re-offending. For example, the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme and the Resettlement and Aftercare Project have had a positive impact on helping to reduce the numbers of young people re-offending. Re-offending rates are now in line with the national average and continue to show a year on year decline with a 2% reduction overall. The Youth Offending Service has been successfully integrated into the Children, Young People and Families Directorate, enabling its strengths to be sustained, while developing closer links with other teams.

Less well developed are support services to young carers and this is an area of work acknowledged by the council as requiring further development. Plans are in place to address this issue.

Children who are looked after nearly always participate in their reviews. However, as a group they are less involved in contributing to service planning. Across the council as a whole, wider corporate parenting activities in relation to looked after children are slow to show evidence of impact. Currently there are no opportunities for looked after children to meet regularly, as a group, with elected members to discuss issues of importance. The offending rate among children who are looked after has continued to reduce; it is now below that of the population as a whole.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have good opportunities to make a positive contribution. They are involved in all the consultation and decision making forums and are given any support they may need to ensure that they can make an effective contribution.

Areas for development

- Improve support for young carers.
- Improve participation of children and young people at service planning level.
- Improve corporate parenting activities in respect of looked after children.

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 new Director of Children's Services has worked effectively to renew and refresh relationships between the local authority and key partners in delivery at 14–19 in order to improve communication and confidence. There have been some tensions between the local authority, the Learning and Skills Council and colleges in the recent past, with differences of view concerning the approach to 14–19 coordination across the county. Part of the new relationship has been to successfully redefine a county-wide partnership with representation from the Area Strategy Groups (ASGs).

Most of the key educational outcomes for economic well-being are broadly in line with those of similar authorities. The proportion attaining Level 2 and 3 qualifications at 19 is a little below statistical neighbours but is improving at a faster rate than nationally to close on the average. Average point score at Advanced level has improved to a position in line with statistical neighbours. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training has reduced and is low compared to the national average, but there are some weaker rates of participation in the north of the county. NVQ success rates are a little above the national average. Participation rates overall are improving and at the national average, but are low in some parts of the county. However, the proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities not in education or training is low and improving. The number of care leavers with a pathways plan and with access to employment and training is good and the proportion living in suitable accommodation is in line with national figures.

The increase in the growth of childcare providers has been faster than that seen nationally. There has also been a sharp rise in apprenticeship provision. Successes in gaining approval for Diploma applications from four of the seven ASGs continues to move forward and it is intended that all ASGs will be engaged in Diploma delivery by 2008. Headteachers are playing an increasingly active role within ASGs in monitoring and target setting. There is some evidence that the number of college places being taken up by schools has fallen since the ring-fencing of funding has been removed.

A 14–19 local plan is under construction and will form the basis for the future commissioning of provision. The on-line prospectus has only been available from the start of September 2007. The Tellus survey indicates that the level of satisfaction with services by young people is similar to that seen nationally. The school survey is less positive about 14–19 provision, but only one secondary school responded this year. Although these surveys are limited in scope and coverage and are somewhat at odds with the local authority's own feedback, they do offer some reflections that are being given serious consideration.

Areas for development

- Address differences in partner views of provision in order to improve confidence across the partnership.
- Improve participation and progress, particularly in more challenging areas of the authority.
- Improve young peoples' confidence and perception of their economic well-being in Nottinghamshire.

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

Grade 2

The present Director of Children's Services has been in the post for just over a year following a period of reorganisation and considerable turnover in senior leadership. In this time he has strengthened the strategic arrangements by redefining and clarifying roles within the partnership. He has been well supported in this by a lead elected member with a strong commitment to Children's Services. Children's Trust arrangements are now established through one to one meetings with key partners. There is also a wider partnership forum to involve wider stakeholders. The key body is the executive group who are responsible for the Children and Young People's Plan and the commissioning of services. There are also networks established for young people and parents and carers. Many of these arrangements are recently established and yet to be proven in delivery, so capacity to improve overall is adequate.

Financial planning to priorities is now complete and there is some evidence of joint funding and joint commissioning from the executive.

Officers at a senior level are committed to new ways of working and have a strong understanding of their new roles. More work remains to be done at middle manager level to ensure a similar level of operation. Similarly, schools have yet to fully embrace the new culture with the local authority in the context of the New Relationship with Schools. At present there is limited evidence of cross agency working although there has been some promising joint work in children's centres and the Nottingham Learning Centre (former PRU). There is limited progress in terms of young peoples' understanding of health, bullying and personal safety issues, particularly in schools, as is reflected in the Tellus survey.

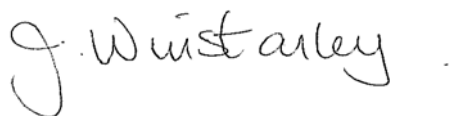
Areas for development

- Develop the role of middle managers within Children's Services in order to improve the effectiveness of joint working.
- Embed the new relationship with schools in order to improve their performance and increase their confidence in local authority services.

- Build upon the largely positive current direction of travel in order to improve outcomes.

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 "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection