

26 November 2007

Miss Cynthia Welbourn  
Corporate Director of Children's Services  
North Yorkshire County Council  
County Hall  
Northallerton  
North Yorkshire  
DL7 8AE

Dear Miss Welbourn

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NORTH YORKSHIRE 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 (CYPP), 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**

North Yorkshire County Council delivers good services for children and young people. Services are making an impact on narrowing the gap between the outcomes for most children and young people and those who are most vulnerable. Performance in respect of all the key indicators relating to the five outcomes is nearly always better than similar authorities and national benchmarks and this is reflected over time. The council has responded very well to recommendations made in the recent joint area review and as a consequence improved outcomes are already evident in many, but not all areas. A clear strategy is in place designed to improve and maintain preventative services that promote high standards across a broad front. The exemplary management of children and young people's services combined with rigorous quality assurance procedures and a proven record for securing change are the reasons why the capacity to improve is outstanding.

### **Being healthy**

**Grade 3**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. Health outcomes for children and young people compare well with similar areas and are a priority in multi-agency work and the development of

integrated health services. Jointly commissioned and integrated services and support for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are developing well.

In 2006, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) received comprehensive CAMHS status. Access to CAMHS for young people is generally good and is well established for looked after children and improving for young offenders. High percentages of cases wait for under four weeks or under 26 weeks in most parts of the county, though there has been a deterioration in the area served by one of the five provider services. All five CAMHS areas within the county have prioritised children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities within their area strategies. There is good identification of young people with issues of substance misuse.

There is very good performance by schools in enabling learners to be healthy with nearly all judged to be good or outstanding. Children's involvement in sport and physical activities is good. Good progress has been made in schools achieving National Healthy Schools Status and participation levels are very good, both being above comparator councils and the national average.

Multi-agency health promotion work is a strength and targeted. There is good coverage of GP practices offering child health surveillance services. The performance in the rate of conceptions amongst under-18s is lower than in similar councils and significantly lower than the national average. The incidence of low birth rate has risen slightly but remains below the national average. The percentage of mothers initiating breast-feeding in the county has increased overall.

The health of looked after children and young people is generally good. Since the joint area review, the Primary Care Trust has put in place a designated doctor for all looked after children. However, the number of looked after children receiving an annual health assessment has fallen.

### **Areas for development**

- Improve the number of looked after children who receive an annual health assessment.
- Reduce the length of wait for CAMHS new cases.

### **Staying safe**

### **Grade 3**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. Information made available to parents and carers through the well-used website on safeguarding children, and a widely distributed safe parenting handbook about safeguarding children, is good. There is a well-developed Local Safeguarding Children Board with multi-agency senior level representation. Good arrangements are in place to share information and multi-agency public protection arrangements work well. The authority has developed strong partnerships with health and other agencies and joint working is effective.

There has been a slight decrease in the percentage of initial assessments undertaken following a referral carried out within seven days and the council's performance is below that of statistical neighbours and the national average. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of core assessments undertaken, although this remains at a lower level than statistical neighbours. There has been an improvement in timeliness of core assessments within 35 days but again this is lower than statistical neighbours and the national average. The council has introduced new performance management monitoring systems and created an independent reviewing officer service, which is heavily involved in monitoring and quality assuring children's social care work. These actions were part of the council's response to some weaknesses identified in the 2006 joint area review. The introduction of a new system for the management of child protection case conferences has led to more effective planning and decision-making at meetings. There has been a fall in the number of children subject of a child protection plan, or on the Child Protection Register. There has also been a reduction in the number of re-registrations of children on the Child Protection Register. Both these indicators are in line with statistical neighbours. All children on the Child Protection Register or subject of a protection plan were allocated a named qualified social worker.

The number of children and young people killed or seriously injured in road accidents has reduced from 55 in 2004 to 51 in 2005. Good arrangements are in place within schools to counter bullying. Children and young people report that their schools deal with bullying more effectively than found nationally.

A high number of workers within North Yorkshire's residential services have achieved NVQ level 3 caring for children and young people, a far higher proportion than similar councils. Social workers and residential managers achieving PQ1 is also higher than statistical neighbours and national performance.

The council has performed well in maintaining relatively low numbers of looked after children. Placement stability is good and a lower number of children are accommodated in residential placements than both statistical neighbours and the national average. The welfare of looked after children is safeguarded. The fostering service and all the council's children's homes received an inspection judgement of good in regard to staying safe.

### **Area for development**

- Improve the performance of referral and assessment processes.

## Enjoying and achieving

## Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. There is a clear strategy in place that supports an integrated approach to development in the early years. Its impact on the quality of provision is strong. The expansion of children's centres and Sure Start programmes together with the development of strong multi-agency links ensure that parents and carers receive good levels of support, information and advice.

The standard of early years education and childcare is high and is underpinned by a comprehensive training programme for all practitioners. The overall effectiveness of all schools including the pupil referral units is good. Educational attainment in nearly all subjects at Key Stages 1 to 4 is consistently above the national average and similar councils. The percentage of young people leaving care aged 16 or over with at least one general certificate of education (GCSE) graded A\* to G is good and has been rising steadily for the past three years. The proportion of Black and minority ethnic pupils attaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is well above the national average and exceeds the performance of similar authorities.

The percentage of looked after children with a completed personal education plan has improved significantly since the joint area review and is now good overall. However, plans for early years children are not completed as efficiently.

Attendance levels at school are consistently well above local and national averages and exclusions are well below average. Children and young people indicate that life is enjoyable and they are very happy at school.

Support for schools is outstanding resulting in a low proportion of schools causing concern. There is a clear and agreed strategy for school improvement, based on consultation which has been shared and agreed with key partners, such as headteachers and governors. Collaborative work between schools is actively promoted and support is effective in realising positive outcomes. Accurate, high quality data and analyses are provided to all schools, including special schools, which are used effectively to help raise standards, identify underachievement, and inform priorities and the allocation of resources.

Children are able to access a broad range of recreational activities and provision is good. The targeted use of Youth Opportunities and Capital Fund to provide positive activities is effectively meeting the needs of children in areas of deprivation. Young people centres and additional mobile resources for young people in rural communities are helping to overcome problems associated with accessibility.

### Area for development

- The council should improve the number of completed personal education plans for looked after children in respect of early years.

## Making a positive contribution

## Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. Good improvements have been made in reducing anti-social behaviour and reducing offending. Re-offending has slightly increased in North Yorkshire but remains below comparator and national averages. Concern remains about the rates of re-offending amongst a small but significant number of young people. There are creative projects and effective partnership working with young people at risk of offending in some areas. The number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system, although declining, is higher than comparators. The intensive supervision and surveillance programme in North Yorkshire as reported in Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons report is considered 'good and held in high regard with strong links to other agencies'. The rates of final warnings, reprimands and convictions of looked after children and young people are reducing. The introduction of a service level agreement between the youth offending team and the Primary Care Trust has increased the access to CAMHS services for young offenders.

Children report that their views are listened to more than their national peers. There are good examples of participation and consultation contributing towards planning services, which leads to improvement. The council has consulted extensively with children and young people during the development of the CYPP. Children and young people are actively engaged in sports activities and community projects. Lower than average numbers of children and young people are being reached by the youth service. However, the geographical size and rural nature of the county can inhibit access. The activities provided are generally well received and productive. The council has taken action to improve the extent of activities available to children and young people. However, opportunities for them to gain an accreditation are not as well developed. The youth service has increased work at weekends and during school holidays to engage young people purposefully. A good example of this was the development of a successful youth arts festival. The extended youth services work well with some of the harder to reach young people, such as those with substance misuse.

Generally, there is good performance in early years provision meeting standards for positive contribution following inspection. This is consistent across nearly all settings. Schools actively promote children's behaviour and prepare children well in making a positive contribution.

The performance in respect of the percentage of looked after children and young people who contributed towards their annual review has increased from 53% in 2005-06 to 88% in 2006-07. This area was identified as a weakness in the joint area review report and reflects well on the positive way the council has addressed this issue. Good arrangements are in place to seek the views of children in residential special schools and with statements of special educational needs.

## Areas for development

- Reduce the rates of re-offending amongst a small but significant number of offenders.
- Improve the numbers of children and young people engaging in out-of-school and community-based activities with increased opportunities for accreditation.

## Achieving economic well-being

## Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Clear strategic planning has resulted in an increase in the number of childcare places. The continuing development of children's centres, particularly in disadvantaged and rural areas is effectively meeting the diverse needs of various groups of parents and carers. Links between childcare provision and agencies including Job Centre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council are having a positive effect in supporting parents to return to employment.

A very high proportion of schools inspected during the academic year 2005/06 were rated good or better in respect to 'how well learners develop workplace skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being'. The percentage of young people not in education, employment or training is the second lowest nationally. The provision for 14–19 year olds is good overall and has improved significantly since the joint area review. Clearly defined strategic aims relate well to local and regional priorities. Good systems are in place to monitor the progress of the strategy against qualitative and quantitative criteria. Well-constructed partnership groups work well over a large geographical area and every effort has been made to secure the representation of all stakeholders. The majority of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities makes good progress into post-16 education but not many progress beyond Level 2. Most pupils at Key Stage 4 gain work related experience through education and business partnerships. Relationships between providers and schools are developing well. Schools are much more aware of what workplace learning providers can offer. The range of choices for learners within education, training and employment, while improving, need to be extended further. The percentage of young people achieving Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications by the age of 19 is above that of statistical neighbours and significantly greater than the national average. The average point scores of students entered for GCSE/VCE/A/AS Level are well above statistical neighbours and the national average. The value added in terms of performance from Key Stage 2 to 4 and from Key Stage 3 to 4, is above the national average and indicates a rising trend. The performance of further education institutions is better in most and equal in every respect to similar councils. This is particularly the case in respect of tertiary colleges and sixth form colleges.

Good strategies exist regarding the support of transition of looked after children and young people into adult life and for them to achieve economic independence through education and/or employment. The authority and its partners have developed and implemented a very good homelessness prevention strategy.



## Areas for development

- Extend the range of choices for learners within education, training and employment.
- Improve the achievement of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in post-16 education and training.

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

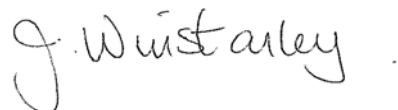
**Grade 4**

The capacity to improve, including the management of children's services is outstanding. Consistent improvements relating to the five outcomes are rooted in improved services. The council is ambitious for all of the children and young people in North Yorkshire. The CYPP contains clearly defined, realistic and challenging objectives based on a rigorous needs analysis and extensive consultation with children and young people, parents and carers. Very good systems are in place to monitor and evaluate progress against key milestones and targets related to the five outcomes. Prioritisation is very good and a strength of the council's approach to improving the outcomes for children and young people. The CYPP takes into full account the resources required to implement initiatives and is effective in securing good value for money. Priority is given to the provision of high quality mainstream, targeted, and high needs services. There is a strong focus on preventative services, particularly for the most vulnerable children and young people, aimed at improving and maintaining high standards through early and effective intervention. The council is committed to working in partnership with a number of organisations that work with children and young people. This is undertaken extremely well and, as a consequence, the authority is successfully building capacity in locally based services and in the workforce. Performance management is effective. There are systems and processes in place both within and across council services. In terms of school performance it is strong and makes good use of data analysis, target setting and robust levels of challenge. Children's social care arrangements have been transformed through comprehensive and regular in-year monitoring of performance data, intelligent target setting at team level, and management training. Quality assurance has also been strengthened through Service Manager moderation of case file audits, and thematic audits and reviews of service standards.

Major factors that underpin the excellent capacity to improve are exemplary leadership and management that are both visionary and capable of realising change and the empowering of key frontline staff to secure targeted improvements. A good example of this can be seen in the rapid response to recommendations made in the recent joint area review report.

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