

4 December 2007
Mr Richard Stiff
Executive Director for Children's Services
North Lincolnshire Council
Pittwood House
Ashby Road
Scunthorpe
DN16 1AB

Dear Mr Stiff

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment for your local authority, some aspects of which were conducted at the same time as the analysis stage of the joint area review. The 2006 annual performance assessment informed the scoping of the joint area review at the planning stage and the initial findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment were taken into account by the review team at the end of the analysis stage. The outcomes of the joint area review were then considered alongside a review of recent data in arriving at the final annual performance assessment judgements for 2007. As a result, many of the areas for development highlighted in this letter align with the recommendations in the joint area review report and should be similarly aligned in any future action plan produced by the council and its partners. The judgements in the letter also draw on your assessment of progress or review of the Children and Young People's Plan where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted and other inspectorates. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this and for the time given by you and your colleagues to the assessment process.

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

North Lincolnshire Council's contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people is good. The quality of provision makes a notable difference to their lives, especially for the most vulnerable children and young people. There is a strong commitment to narrowing the gap between the outcomes for these children and for most children, while continuing to improve provision and outcomes for all. Many outcomes in the five *Every child matters* areas are better than those in similar local authorities and those that are not are improving well year on year. The views of children and young people, including those that are looked after, are regularly sought and contribute widely to planning and decision making. The council's

commitment to further improvement is set out clearly in its plans and is reflected in the positive working relationships that exist between its partners and other agencies.

Being healthy

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. The council continues to work collaboratively with its partners to promote the healthy life styles of all children and young people. The provision of preventative and early intervention services in response to low levels of physical activity, smoking and alcohol misuse and high levels of obesity has led to an improvement in all of these areas. For example, the 'Active Strategy' and the 'Obesity Project' have succeeded in increasing the numbers of young people taking part in sport and physical activities. The Healthy Schools programme is working well with partners in reducing levels of smoking through a number of initiatives including the development of 'stop smoking' and peer mentoring schemes.

Health promotion is targeted effectively to vulnerable groups of children and young people. The number of looked after children that attend their health assessments has increased since last year and, at 88%, is now above the national average and that of similar councils.

Participation in sport is good within school settings and the majority of pupils receive a minimum of two hours of sport and physical activity each week. All of the authority's schools participate in the Healthy Schools programme. This is better than the national picture. The proportion of schools who have achieved full status is rising and is above the national average at 48%. The extent to which pupils develop healthy lifestyles was judged good or better in over 90% of primary schools and 70% of secondary schools.

There has been a slight fall in the conception rates among 15- to 17-year-olds from 51 per 1,000 of the population in 2004 to 48 in 2005. The latest figure is above the average for similar councils and national comparisons. The rate of progress in reducing teenage pregnancies needs greater impetus and remains a high priority for the council. The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy has identified a ten point action plan for improvement and challenging targets have been set to reduce the figure further.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) had been redesigned and improved with significant input from young people. As a result, there have been some good improvements in the speed of access to services and in the provision for looked after children and young offenders. For example, all looked after children and young people receive a mental health assessment and all juvenile offenders with acute mental health needs are now assessed within five working days. In addition, the proportion of young people who are receiving substance misuse treatment is significantly below the regional average.

However, whilst graded as acceptable, the council's progress towards achieving a comprehensive Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service is below the national average and that of similar areas.

Areas for development

- Reduce the rates of teenage pregnancies.
- Strengthen the work of the CAMHS strategy.

Staying safe

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Safeguarding arrangements for children and young people have been maintained and improved across a number of key indicators. Schools provide a safe environment for learners and effective road safety measures have seen an overall reduction in the number of children and young people killed or seriously injured on the roads from 16 in 2005 to 7 in 2006. This represents an impressive fall of 56%.

The council works effectively with its partners to promote early intervention and support for all children and their families. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is well established and gives high priority to child protection issues. Monitoring systems are secure; action is decisive and well coordinated across the range of services.

Whilst the number of children and young people becoming the subject of a child protection plan has been consistently below the averages found nationally and in similar areas from 2002 to 2006, the length of time children and young people spend on the Child Protection Register is above the national average and that of similar authorities. However, the numbers of repeat referrals have significantly reduced over the last two years from 22% to 13%. In addition, the percentage of children's assessments completed in good time is increasing. The figure for completion within seven days is currently 86%, which is higher than average for both national and similar councils. The completion of core assessments within the period of 35 days is very good with over 84% completed within the agreed timescale.

Support for vulnerable children and young people is strong. The numbers of looked after children per 10,000 of the population aged under 18 are reducing well, and has fallen from 55 per 10,000 to 47 per 10,000 during the last two years. 99% of case reviews were completed in good time and all young people are allocated to a qualified social worker.

All care leavers are allocated a personal adviser, have pathway plans and are very well supported by the leaving care team in managing their finances, gaining independence and in developing life skills.

Area for development

- Reduce the amount of time that children and young people spend on the Child Protection Register.

Enjoying and achieving

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. Children are getting a good start to their education and make good progress in the Foundation Stage. Most early years and nursery settings receive good inspection outcomes and the annual Audit Commission survey indicates that schools are highly satisfied with the early years support they receive.

At Key Stage 1, the progress of pupils is slower; standards in 2006 are below average at Level 2 + in reading at 83%, in writing at 77% and in mathematics at 88%. Intensive challenge and support by the authority over the last two years has led to standards rising, as reflected in the unvalidated results for 2007. Despite a narrowing of the gap in achievement with similar councils and the national picture, the pace of improvement requires further commitment. At Key Stage 2, although standards are broadly in line with national averages and similar areas, the overall rate in performance is up and from 2002 to 2006 has shown a year-on-year improvement. The unvalidated results for 2007 mirror this upward trend and show further increases of approximately 2% in the proportion of pupils at Level 4 and above in English and maths. Standards at Key Stage 3, whilst in line with national averages, have risen steadily over the last four years. As a consequence, the gap between North Lincolnshire and similar authorities continues to reduce.

Good progress has been made in raising achievement at Key Stage 4 with a clear focus on strengthening teaching and learning and improving curriculum experiences. As a result, the percentage of pupils achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE continues to improve. It is currently 54%. The unvalidated data for 2007 indicates a further rise of 6%. The council acknowledges that there is further work to do. Although rising, the proportion of 16-year-olds achieving five good GCSEs including English and Maths is below the national average.

Looked after children and young people make good progress. In 2006 the percentage of these pupils, leaving care achieving at least one A* to G at GCSE or GNVQ stood at 57%, which is higher than the national average and in similar authorities. In addition, recent data points to an increase of 6% in the percentage of looked after young people leaving care with five A* to C grades at age 16 to 12%. This reflects the council's strong commitment to supporting the needs of all individuals and the effective way in which their progress is targeted and reviewed.

Inspection judgements indicate good support and progress for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Increased support to these pupils in mainstream

classes has led to a significant reduction in the number of new statements issued. The council has continued to be effective in reducing permanent exclusions to nil, through well targeted preventative work and good implementation of the authority's behaviour strategy. However, fixed term exclusions remain above the national average and similar authorities in both primary and secondary schools.

The majority of children who responded to the 'Tellus2' survey said they enjoyed or mostly enjoyed school. They attend school at a broadly similar rate to pupils nationally and early 2007 data shows an improvement in both primary and secondary pupils' attendance and for those pupils in care. Strategies to improve attendance are robust, well co-ordinated and targeted at individual schools and children at risk.

The council knows its schools very well and makes an excellent contribution to school improvement. Schools value this support and speak highly of its effect on challenging them to get better. Early intervention and targeted support has led to a significant reduction in the number of schools performing below their floor targets at Key Stage 4. Only one school is currently in an Ofsted category of concern. In addition, more recent Ofsted inspections indicate that 100% of both primary and secondary schools are judged to be satisfactory or better. In the primary sector, the percentage of schools graded good or better now stands at 63%.

Services across the council, such as the arts development, sports and leisure services are working well together to increase the participation of children and young people in recreational, arts, cultural and out of school activities. For example, 'bid to play' and 'street sport' initiatives are proving successful in reducing the numbers of young people who are at risk of becoming bored and having little to do.

Areas for development

- Raise standards and accelerate progress at Key Stage 1.
- Reduce the number of fixed term exclusions.
- Raise the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A* to C GCSEs including English and mathematics.

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. The council has significantly increased the number of children and young people reached by youth services to above the national target.

There is a strong culture of the involvement of young people in decisions, through the partnership 'Hear by Right' strategy and as a result, activities and programmes are shaped well to meet their needs. Children and young people have provided the council with positive feedback about the range and quality of services they receive.

Schools councils and youth parliaments are firmly established in the vast majority of schools and play a significant role in informing decisions and making a contribution. Inspection evidence shows that making a positive contribution has been judged to be consistently good and better in 87% of primary schools and in 85% of secondary schools.

Vulnerable children and young people receive good support from a range of agencies. All looked after children and young people make a contribution to their statutory reviews which is higher than the national average and the average for similar councils. Individualised learning packages and behaviour support are offered to children and young people with behavioural difficulties. Learning mentors work well with children at risk of exclusion.

The number of looked after children and young people who were given a final warning or who were convicted of an offence has increased over the last year to 3.6%. Unvalidated and locally provided data suggests that this trend has been reversed. The council acknowledges that it has been difficult to reduce the number of first time entrants into the youth justice system as police targets are to increase the number of offenders brought to justice. Strategic level discussions between the youth offending team and the Police are resolving this issue with alternative approaches to sanctioning and in the reporting of offences. The number of first time entrants into the Youth Justice system has fluctuated over the last few years but overall has shown an increase. Whilst some of this increase can be attributed to the change of Police policy, the council has correctly identified that there is more work to do in linking the preventative agenda between the Youth Service team and the youth offending team more effectively.

Areas for development

- Improve youth offending services to reduce the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system.

Achieving economic well-being

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. Improvements are evident year on year. Strengths have been maintained, including aspects of the work with vulnerable groups. As a result, services, activities and programmes are shaped well to meet children and young people's needs and are succeeding in raising their aspirations, developing their potential and in increasing their employment opportunities. Participation in full time education is increasing at post-16, from 61% in 2004 to 63% in 2005. Care leavers participating in education, employment or training is very good and has been consistently above the national average and for similar authorities from 2004 to 2007.

The number of young people not in education, employment or training at age 16 to 19 is above the national average at 9.9 %. However, the strategies which are being used to reduce this number are increasingly effective and are leading to a declining trend. The percentage of children and young people at risk of not participating in employment, education or training is falling due to early intervention and the effective work of the Connexions team in providing targeted and personalised support. For example, the current rate is 8%, which is the lowest figure for some time and broadly in line with similar areas. However, the council recognises that despite these improvements there is further work to do. The overall number of young people at age 16 to 18 leaving education, employment and training who re-engage in further education opportunities is still below the national average and for similar authorities at 74%.

Opportunities for vocational education are well promoted through strong partnerships and collaborative networks at 14–19. Children and young people have provided the council and 'Tellus2' survey with positive feedback about the advice they receive and the range and quality of the services on offer. For example 'The Fast Tomato' project and the 'E Prospectus' are enabling more young people to gain suitable careers advice and choose appropriate options. As a consequence, although below similar authorities, good progress is being made on increasing the numbers of young people in Year 11 who continue in learning. Recent data points to an improving picture with an increase of 4% reported across the authority over the last year. This improvement, coupled with a rising trend in attainment post-16 and an increase in the percentage of 19-year-olds achieving Level 3 from 37.7% in 2005 to 39.6 % in 2006, has been maintained through strong partnership work and highly effective support for individual needs.

Areas for development

- Reduce the proportion of young people not engaged in education, training or employment.
- Increase the proportion of young people re-engaging in employment, education and training.

Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council's capacity for improvement is good. The leadership team is highly effective and provides a clear steer in its commitment to make a difference to the lives of all children and young people in the authority. This commitment is reflected at the highest level. It can be seen for example, in the higher than national investment levels for supporting children and their families and for children in need.

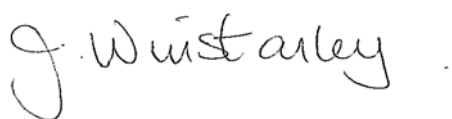
Partnership working is very strong. Roles and responsibilities within the council are clear and officers are held to account for their actions. Procedures for recruitment,

staff training and performance management are robust. As a result, improvements to the educational outcomes for children and young people, including vulnerable groups, are consistent and improving year on year. The unvalidated results for 2007 mirror this upward trend and show further improvement.

There is a good awareness of what is currently happening across the local area and of what is needed to improve. The Children and Young People's Plan is clearly focused on improving the outcomes for all children and young people against each *Ever child matters* area and benefits from wide consultation and a thorough analysis of needs. Priorities are clear, targets are challenging and action is well thought out. The annual school survey indicates that schools value highly the many services the council and its partners provide. In particular they recognise the high quality support they receive in extending school provision and the effective way in which the council consults and communicates information.

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