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26 November 2007

Ms L Christensen  
Director of Children's Services  
Norfolk County Council  
County Hall  
Martineau Lane  
Norwich  
Norfolk  
NR1 2DL

Dear Ms Christensen

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NORFOLK 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) 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**

Norfolk County Council delivers services for children and young people at an adequate level. A period of considerable change over the past year has been managed effectively to improve children's services and develop integrated working arrangements within the council and with a range of partners who are committed to improving the lives of children and young people. It has made satisfactory progress in building upon some of the improvements identified in the 2006 annual performance assessment but it has not managed to maintain improvements in some *Every child matters* outcomes, particularly in enjoying and achieving. Enabling children and young people to make a positive contribution, being healthy and ensuring their safety are strengths of the service. Contributions to enjoying and achieving and achieving economic well-being are judged to be adequate. Although joint working in children's services is improving, the council's own evaluation of its CYPP acknowledges that some outcomes are not as good as they could be. A number of strategies have been initiated but they are relatively new and require more time to fully impact on improving outcomes for children and young people.

## Being healthy

Grade 3

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good.

Provision for children's health in the majority of early years settings is satisfactory or good. The authority has made satisfactory progress in encouraging children in schools to lead healthy lifestyles by introducing healthy lunches, providing sport and exercise programmes, encouraging children to walk to school and promoting their emotional well-being. These measures are all contributing towards reducing childhood obesity rates which are currently similar to the national average. While the council has exceeded its own target for schools achieving Healthy Schools Status this is below statistical neighbour and national averages and fewer schools are currently participating in this initiative compared with schools in statistical neighbours and nationally. Increasing numbers of children and young people are participating in sport for two hours per week and a recent survey indicates that 76% spend three or more days doing at least 30 minutes physical activity.

Satisfactory progress has been made overall in developing a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Access to the service is improving and an implementation plan is in place to fill the gaps in services for children with complex, persistent and severe behavioural and mental health needs. A 24-hour service is now in place and timescales for assessment and treatment are good. In particular, timescales for young people involved in offending behaviour are now very good. New commissioning arrangements and a joint development officer post have been established to make further improvements to this service. The authority is performing very well on the provision of health checks to looked after children and young people; for example, over 83% had medical and dental checks last year which is a higher proportion than the previous year and similar to the national average.

The most recent information (2005) shows an increase in the number of teenage conceptions. This proportion is higher than the statistical neighbour average but below the national average. The local authority has reviewed its strategy for the delivery of sex and relationship education, personal, social and health education, and contraceptive and sexual health services, in order to target intervention with high risk groups to reduce the rate of teenage conceptions. The authority has had some success in reducing the proportion of expectant mothers smoking during pregnancy and in encouraging a significantly higher than average number of mothers to initiate breast-feeding. The percentage of babies born with low birth weight is below the national average.

### Area(s) for development

- Fully implement the CAMHS strategy for children and young people with complex, persistent and severe behavioural and mental health needs.

- Reduce the number of teenage conceptions.
- Increase the number of schools achieving Healthy Schools Status.

## **Staying safe**

## **Grade 3**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board has wide representation from a variety of voluntary and statutory agencies and has made good progress in providing new child protection procedures and training to a significant number of council and community organisations. The authority has achieved a significant reduction in the number of children on the Child Protection Register, an area for development that was identified last year. The number of referrals and repeat referrals has reduced to below statistical neighbour and national averages, due to better partnership working and a change of emphasis towards preventative work with families. Performance on the timeliness of initial assessments is strong whilst performance on the timeliness of core assessments has reduced from last year and is now only at an acceptable level. Following its introduction in one area of the county in 2006, good progress has been made in staff training and the use of the Common Assessment Framework. All children on the Child Protection Register or who are subject to a Child Protection Plan were reviewed last year and the number of first-time registrations and re-registrations is above the national average.

Reducing the proportion of looked after children and young people is a high priority for the authority. Despite having a looked after children strategy delivered through single area panels and a strong council commitment to corporate parenting, there has been a slight increase in the number of looked after children and a slight decrease in the number of those who have been adopted. The stability of placements has continued to improve and is better than statistical neighbour and national averages. However, there has been a significant improvement in the timeliness of reviews of looked after children and a sustained pattern in the reduction in the numbers of those in residential accommodation, which is now below the national average. An increased number of looked after children were placed in foster care and a higher proportion than average were allocated a named social worker. The proportion of children in foster care who are placed with relatives and friends is lower than statistical neighbour and national averages and a greater number of looked after children are now being placed nearer to their homes within Norfolk.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Improve the timeliness of core assessments.
- Reduce the numbers of looked after children and young people.

## 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.

Children get a good start in early years and the Foundation Stage and attain better than statistical neighbour and national averages. In Key Stage 1 results fell slightly in 2006 but remained above the national average. In Key Stage 2 standards were at the national average but below the statistical neighbour average; results in mathematics were similar to the previous year but they declined in science and English. Results at higher levels in English and mathematics have improved and are closer to the national average. Thirty eight schools, which received intensive support from the authority in 2006, increased their overall number of pupils achieving Level 4 by the end of Year 6 by 3% in English and 2% in mathematics. The overall progress of pupils between Key Stages 1 and 2 fell slightly in 2006 and was below the national average.

Improvements were more noticeable in secondary schools, where pupils in Key Stage 3 generally made good progress. Mathematics results improved and were above statistical neighbour and national averages in 2006. Similar improvements were seen in science where results were above the national average. Recent year-on-year improvements in English were not maintained and results fell slightly to below average. Pupil performance continued to improve in Key Stage 4. Standards were slightly below the national average but in 2006 the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE increased to 55.9%. There was a similar increase of 2% in the proportion of students achieving 5 or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics; this was twice the national increase and took the county figure to 44.9%. Pupils' average points scores and capped average points scores also improved. The number of looked after children and young people achieving five or more A\* to C GCSEs improved significantly. Most pupils behave well and enjoy school; the additional sporting, musical and cultural activities provided by youth services are helping to enrich opportunities and add to the enjoyment and engagement of young people.

Attendance rates are similar to the national average. Authorised pupil absence in primary schools has increased slightly, whereas in secondary schools it has decreased slightly. The number of exclusions from primary and special schools was above the national average. However, for special schools this represents a significant improvement on the previous year. The number of fixed and permanent exclusions from secondary schools fell and was well below statistical neighbour and national averages. Fewer looked after children and young people were excluded last year and their attendance improved due to effective preventative action by the authority. However, less progress has been made in improving the quality and duration of education for those excluded from school. The proportion of children with a statement of educational need in mainstream schools was higher than the national average and inspections show that the progress of pupils with learning difficulties

and/or disabilities is similar to the statistical neighbour average. The authority's strategy to support these and other young people with special educational needs has been agreed and implementation of the first phase of a ten-year strategy is now ready to commence.

The number of primary schools in a category of concern increased in 2006 and the proportion is now above statistical neighbour and national averages. Eight primary schools were placed in special measures and five primary schools were given a notice to improve. The authority provided good support for six schools that were removed from special measures this year but was less effective in anticipating and preventing other schools entering a category of concern. The situation is quite different in secondary schools where one school was removed from a category of concern during the year and only one other secondary school was judged to require special measures. All secondary schools have exceeded their Key Stage 4 floor targets, an area for development that was identified last year.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Raise standards in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.
- Reduce authorised absences and the number of exclusions in primary and special schools.
- Provide further challenge and support for governing bodies and school leaders to prevent the number of schools entering a category of concern.

## **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 authority continues to build upon its beacon status for youth engagement by fostering effective partnership working to maintain and improve the ways in which children and young people can make a positive contribution. An increasing number of schools gained 'hear by right' accreditation, giving young people a greater stake in decision-making and engagement in school and community life. Representation in the UK Youth Parliament and The Norfolk Children and Young People's Partnership Trust allowed young people to share their views and to be consulted on how council services are delivered.

Youth services are good. The number of youth workers has increased to the national average and the number of young people reached by youth services has increased following a sharp decline in the previous year. However, it is still below the national average and the national target. The number of Youth Inclusion and Support Panels has doubled from three to six and in 2006 over 90% of vulnerable young people referred to them did not go on to re-offend. Effective corporate parenting provides very good support for looked after children and young people. In 2006, nearly 86%

of looked after children attended and participated in their reviews. However, the number receiving final warnings or convictions has increased and is above the national average.

The Youth Offending Team is having an impact on reducing anti-social behaviour but the number of young people entering the youth justice system for the first time has risen. The local authority feels this is mainly due to the success of Norfolk Police in meeting their own targets for raising the number of offenders brought to justice. Young offenders have improved access to mental health and substance misuse support, and the Connexions service provides a wider range of sports, creative arts and volunteering activities to help young people re-engage. Local libraries and district councils are working effectively with those young people who are hard to reach, such as Travellers and families with a parent in prison, by providing additional educational and cultural opportunities. Families with disabled or vulnerable young people now have their own parent forum to share issues and concerns and seek the help they need.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Reduce the number of looked after children and young people receiving final warnings or convictions and reduce the number of young people entering the youth justice system for the first time.

## **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.

The number of young people continuing in learning after Year 11 has increased but remains below statistical neighbour and national averages. A higher proportion of 16 to 18 year olds gained Level 2 and 3 qualifications last year. Unemployment rates have fallen but the proportion of young people not engaged in education, employment or training rose slightly to above statistical neighbour and national averages. Plans for 14-19 provision are in place and three diploma submissions were successful. A partnership prospectus is available online. Access to courses is too variable in parts of the county. The authority acts as a regional hub to help to integrate a growing number of children and young people from economic migrant families who have English as an additional language. In 2006, children from 13 refugee families were successfully placed in mainstream Norwich schools.

Standards at post-16 are improving but are below statistical neighbour and national averages. Almost all secondary schools have increased flexibility programmes to provide young people with work-based learning opportunities and the number completing apprenticeships has increased to above that of other local authorities. The proportion of looked after children and young people leaving care with at least one GCSE qualification improved to above the national average and a higher number



of looked after children and young people continue with their education and training after the age of 16. In 2006, over half of young people leaving care entered employment or training, which was higher than the national average, and a higher number remained in contact with their carers after the age of 18. The percentage of care leavers living in suitable accommodation has improved and is better than statistical neighbour and national averages.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Raise standards in post-16 education and training.
- Improve equal access and opportunity in all areas of the county.

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

**Grade 2**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The capacity to improve, including the management of children's services, in Norfolk County Council is adequate. It has made satisfactory progress in integrating its service provision through a Children and Young People's Partnership Trust and by building workforce capacity in five area-based teams with devolved budgets. The good progress in financial management identified in the previous year has been maintained. Joint commissioning strategies are at an early stage of development. The lack of a children's commissioner with responsibility for CAMHS appointed by the strategic partnership has limited the progress the Council has been able to make in meeting service priorities. The CYPP has been reviewed and refreshed after consultation with children, young people and partner agencies to identify the key priorities of the authority grouped under the five *Every child matters* outcomes.

Senior managers have articulated a clear vision and communicated it to all staff and partner agencies. A wide range of training opportunities and procedures for managing staff performance are in place and the authority has had its Investors In People award renewed this year. However, performance in some outcomes does not yet fully reflect the progress made in improving joint working arrangements and the strategic management of integrated children's services. Managers at all levels are engaged in monitoring performance, setting targets and scrutinising the impact of their own and others' work. However, this lacks the rigour required to make the planned progress in each of the priorities and improvement targets contained in the CYPP, and performance in two of the five outcomes is not as effective or consistent as it should be. The new strategic leadership of the council is aware of this and is focusing its monitoring on the areas where most improvement is needed.

The authority's planned re-organisation of schools to address the dip in Key Stage 2 performance in middle schools and avoid pupil transfer in Year 8 is proceeding to schedule. The corresponding capital investment in schools is enhancing the environment for learning. The authority has recognised the need to make appropriate plans in the light of demographic changes due to the migration into the

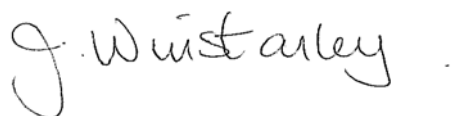
county of families from overseas, and to tackle the particular needs of rural communities.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Improve the evaluation of progress made towards meeting *Every child matters* outcomes, including the priorities identified in the CYPP.
- Improve the effectiveness of performance monitoring and management to secure consistent improvements across the council's services for children and young people.

The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment to be published by the Audit Commission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager  
Local Services Inspection