

26 November 2007

Mrs Rose Collinson
Director of Children's Services
Medway Council
Civic Centre
Strood
Rochester
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Dear Mrs Collinson

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MEDWAY 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, your action plan arising from the joint area review and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. The letter comments on progress since the recent joint area review. 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 services provided for children and young people by Medway Council are adequate overall and are having a positive impact on improving outcomes for children and young people. The council has responded positively to the recommendations raised in the joint area review report and has made progress. In particular, the outcomes for staying safe have improved and the council's contribution to this aspect is now adequate and improving. There is clear evidence that the council has introduced radical changes to the management of social care services for children and young people and that these are beginning to have a beneficial effect on outcomes. The contribution the council makes towards improving outcomes for enjoying and achieving and economic well-being remains good. The judgement relating to making a positive contribution remains adequate as is the contribution towards being healthy. The leadership of children's services is determined and is increasingly more effective and the council, together with its partners, have laid secure foundations to increase integrated working and have appropriate plans to ensure further service 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. One recommendation emerged from the joint area review.

For action over the next six months

In order to improve outcomes for looked after children:

- local providers should ensure that there is coordinated action to assess and provide for their health needs.

The council recognised that their systems for recording data were not efficient and not capturing the numbers accurately. This has now been reviewed and a more robust system is in place.

The number of teenage pregnancies has reduced from the 1998 baseline although progress in diminishing numbers has been at a slower rate than statistical neighbours and the conception rate is above the national average. The council are aware that systems previously in place were not robust enough and as a result the Teenage Pregnancy Board has been reconstituted and a new Sex and Relationship education programme has been introduced. It is too early to measure the impact of these initiatives.

The proportion of mothers who smoke during pregnancy remains higher than the national average but shows a continued downward trend. Rates of breast-feeding are higher than the national average and show an upward trend. A higher percentage than the national average of 12–15 year olds reported in the Tellus2 survey that they had never taken drugs. Interventions in relation to substance misuse are well focused, with the proportion of those in substance misuse treatment who are under 18 being significantly above the regional average.

Some progress has been made towards developing the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Waiting times have reduced with 100% of young people assessed within the expected timescales for acute services in the last two quarters. The Tier 2 service has only seen six re-referrals in two years. However there is a lengthy waiting time for non urgent cases. A fundamental review of CAMHS involving both Children's Services and the Primary Care Trust (PCT) is planned which aims to build a stronger level of service and to look at prevention.

The vast majority of the authority's schools are successfully involved in the School Sport Partnership Programme. Healthy School accreditation has increased to 33%. The appointment of a school nutrition adviser has supported 90% of schools in meeting the 'food in schools' standard. A multi-disciplinary community programme to

promote physical and emotional well-being in children aged 7–13 has successfully been introduced.

The support for vulnerable groups such as looked after children and young people is improving. There is now a strong corporate parenting group to ensure that children receive the service they deserve. The dedicated looked after children team includes a designated health worker although it has been recognised that additional help is needed in this area and extra funding has been secured to meet that need. Free passes to all the council leisure facilities in the area have been given to children who are looked after in response to a request made by this group during consultation exercises. The immunisations of the majority of children who are looked after are up to date and this is well above the national average and the World Health Organisation target. In spite of this, the number of looked after children and young people who have an annual health and dental assessment fell last year to below the national figure and that of statistical neighbours.

Parents and carers continue to receive good advice and support. There is clear evidence of effective partnership working within preventative services that has a positive impact for children and young people. Assessment services for children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are accessible and well coordinated. Clinical provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.

Areas for development

- Ensure all children and young people who are looked after receive annual health and dental checks.
- Improve the efficiency of the CAMHS service.

Staying safe

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 now adequate. Some significant improvements are evident as a result of action implemented since the joint area review. Many recommendations for action were highlighted in the joint area review report.

For immediate action

In order to improve the delivery of social care services to children and young people generally, the local authority should:

- establish a clear and effective system for referrals to its social care service which is well understood by all concerned
- ensure that the threshold for intervention by its social care service is clear, well understood, and consistently applied

- ensure that the cases of all children and young people at risk of abuse and neglect are allocated promptly to suitably qualified social care staff
- ensure that there is effective management monitoring within its social care service
- ensure that accurate and reliable data informs performance management within its social care service
- ensure that performance management findings are systematically collated and used to inform improvements in social work practice, policies and procedures, and the use of resources.

In order to improve the safeguarding of children and young people more specifically:

- local providers should respond promptly and in full to the findings and recommendations of serious case reviews
- the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) should ensure the effective implementation of the associated action plans.

For action over the next six months

In order to improve the delivery of social care services to children and young people generally:

- local providers should develop a clear multi-agency strategy to ensure early identification of and intervention in developing family problems, with the specific aim of preventing the need for children and young people to be looked after and/or placed on the child protection register
- the local authority should ensure that teams and managers within the social care service are supported by effective administrative and information technology support.

In order to improve the safeguarding of children and young people more specifically:

- local providers should establish a clear and agreed understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each service involved.

In order to improve outcomes for looked after children:

- the local authority should improve the training for those taking a lead role in fulfilling the corporate parenting function
- the local authority should ensure that monitoring undertaken in its role as corporate parent includes some detailed study of the individual experiences of children and young people, including seeking their views

- the local authority should strengthen its structures and processes for consulting with looked after children as a group.

Since the joint area review the leadership team has implemented the recommendations from the joint area review report. A clear system for referrals has been introduced with a one point entry. The percentage of referrals is higher than those of the council's statistical neighbours but lower than the national average. The percentage of re-referrals is double that of statistical neighbours. However, the figures are beginning to show an improvement. The percentage of referrals which led to initial assessments is higher than national averages, although the number of initial assessments completed on time has increased from 15% to 62%. This figure remains below the national average. The timeliness of core assessments has increased dramatically to 50.6%. Although this figure is below the target set, a closer look at these figures reveals that in the latter half of the year, over 80% has consistently been achieved. De-registrations have increased by 43%. Improved systems and mandatory training have ensured that all social workers are up to speed on the relevant methods and technology. All statutory childcare work is now allocated to registered and experienced social workers. The work now done by the integrated teams is providing better support. The LSCB receives regular social care performance reports and very detailed monitoring processes are in place. Data processes have improved with the introduction of a new tracking system.

Children and young people report feeling safe around the local area, on public transport, going to and from school and in their homes. A larger percentage of children and young people than nationally report never having been bullied at school and anti-bullying strategies in schools are effective. This is an improvement since the joint area review.

The percentage of children and young people who are looked after is slightly higher than nationally or for similar councils. Stability of placements remains an area of good performance with only 6% being moved more than three times, which is lower than comparative councils and nationally. The vast majority are placed in foster care with very few placed in residential care beyond the council's boundaries. A recent inspection (2006) of the local authority fostering service highlighted that 'the outcome in this area is excellent' with children and young people positively benefiting from the support to maintain contact with those important to them. Reviews of children who are looked after is an area of underperformance but with the introduction of clearer systems and improved records there is already some evidence of improvement. The council acknowledges, however, that there is further work to do in this area.

There is a strong leadership team in place who have obviously worked hard at improving this service. There is an honest awareness of where there is slippage and underperformance, and clear and effective processes have been introduced to address these issues.

Areas for development

- Continue the work started to ensure core assessment practices are reviewed and those completions of assessments are within 35 working days.
- Continue the work started to ensure reviews of looked after children and young people are carried out within statutory timescales.

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. The positive work identified at the time of the joint area review has been maintained. A number of recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

For immediate action

- In order to improve provision for pupils who need to be educated otherwise than at school the local authority should ensure that all those who can benefit from full-time educational provision receive it.

For action in the next six months

- In order to improve outcomes for looked after children the local authority should develop a coherent strategy encompassing both the monitoring of educational progress and the provision of targeted support.

For action in the longer term

In order to improve leisure and recreation provision for children and young people:

- the local authority should take steps to expand out-of-school provision, particularly drop-in provision for all age groups and organised activities for older teenagers.
- the local authority should ensure that looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have no worse access to provision than other children and young people.

The council has responded well to these issues. It is improving the provision for pupils who need to be educated otherwise than at school by extending the provision at the Silverbank Pupil Referral Unit so that pupils have access to full-time education where this is possible. It has improved the outcomes for children who are looked after by gathering data more effectively and regularly, by providing School Improvement Partners and others with more information and by establishing links with designated teachers. It has also ensured that there is a much stronger sense of the council's role as a corporate parent. The council has successfully improved

leisure and recreation provision for children and young people by expanding out-of-school provision and by providing children who are looked after with free access to all the council's leisure centres. Half-price bus fares are available to all children under the age of 16. There have been improvements in the availability of information about the facilities on offer.

The council has successfully addressed the shortcomings identified in some child care and nursery settings. Children's performance in the Foundation Stage in schools has improved with above average outcomes in some aspects of their development. Standards in primary schools and in Years 7-9 in secondary schools are broadly in line with national trends. GCSE results continue to improve year on year. In 2006 an average number of pupils (55.1%) gained five or more A*-C grades with 44% gaining five or more A*-C grades including English and mathematics; this latter figure is in line with national averages. The gap between boys and girls is reducing. All secondary schools achieve above the Department of Children, Schools and Families floor targets for GCSE. The percentage of children who are looked after who gained least one GCSE at grade A*- G in 2006/07 was well above the national figure and that of statistical neighbours. Overall the rates of progress made by pupils between Key Stage 2 to GCSE are good and are above the national average. Pupils enjoy school and appreciate the opportunities available to them. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well. There is not, however, a sufficiently secure enough grasp on the progress of pupils with complex needs who are educated out of the area. Young people who are looked after achieve well at 16 years compared to national figures. The appointment of a new senior adviser for diversity and inclusion is set to secure further improvements for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The council has no schools in special measures and the number with a Notice to Improve has dropped to one.

Attendance has been good in primary schools and is improving over time. Work on attendance in secondary schools has been effective in reducing absences, so that it is now good and above statistical neighbours and national figures. The attendance of children who are looked after is consistently good and absence rates from school are well below the national average. There have been no permanent exclusions in primary schools in the last two years and in secondary schools the number is reducing and is below that of statistical neighbours and the national average. For those who are excluded, alternative provision is provided and the most recent figures (2005) indicate a marked improvement on the previous year for those who receive 20 or more hours of education per week.

Area for development

- Ensure the close monitoring of those children and young people who are educated out of the area including looked after children.

Making a positive contribution

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. The joint area review highlighted three areas for action in the longer term which have been dealt with promptly and efficiently.

For action in the next six months

In order to improve provision for young people who offend, the local authority should ensure that:

- there is effective performance management within the youth offending team
- there is effective liaison between the youth offending team and its social care service for children and young people
- effective support is provided to children and young people who are at risk themselves or may pose a risk of harm to others.

Most children and young people in Medway contribute very well to their schools and communities. Of those who responded to the Tellus2 survey only 16% stated that they had not done anything to help or assist anyone else. This is in line with the national response. There is active engagement in school councils and the Youth Parliament which is well represented on the Children and Young People Strategic Partnership Executive Board. A strong emphasis is placed upon listening to children and responding to their needs and as a result of the consultation work carried out with young people a 'Things to do, places to go' strategy has been introduced.

The youth service is now under new leadership and management and good progress has been made in implementing improvements by developing a new vision, enhancing capacity and developing better management processes. This has laid sound foundations for future work. The youth service has made good progress in ensuring the views of all young people are heard; the Youth Panel reflects the diversity of the area well. Young people in care were engaged in establishing a children's pledge, which has given the corporate parenting group a baseline to work from for producing the services young people feel they need. However, during 2006 the council identified a fall in the number of children who are looked after who have contributed to their reviews during the peer review process. Although performance this year is below national figures and those of statistical neighbours, changes made to the recording process mean that the performance since April 2007 is meeting that of the statistical neighbours, but remains slightly below the national average.

Behaviour in schools is mostly good. During 2006 there has been an increase, to above average figures in the number of children who are looked after who committed offences and were cautioned and convicted. Revised and appropriate performance management systems for the Youth Offending Team are now in place. There has been a suitable emphasis put on preventative work which has included the appointment of a prevention worker within the team. The number of young offenders in education and training has increased. Youth Improvement Support Panel projects have recently been expanded to operate area-wide, new key workers have been appointed and the links between the Youth Offending Team and social care are improving. This and other systems put into place in the last 12–18 months are now beginning to have an impact. The authority acknowledges that there is further work to do in this area.

Areas for development

- Ensure effective support and systems are in place to address the issue of looked after children and young people who offend.
- Continue to examine ways in which children and young people who are looked after are able to contribute to their review.

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. One recommendation emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the longer term

- In order to help families with low incomes achieve economic well-being, local providers should develop and implement a clear overall strategy which draws together the various kinds of support provided.

Plans to create four children's centre programmes to support low income families are well advanced with further centres planned. The council has promoted the availability of free school meals. It has increased child care provision for working parents although the take up by low income families is slightly lower than the national average. Changes in the care provisions with increased full day care and out-of-school care and fewer childminders, crèches and sessional care, match the national picture.

There are good signs of progress in the development of the full range of the 14-19 curriculum. The council has made very good progress in implementing the new requirements. Successful applications for four diplomas at all levels from 2008 and plans for a further diploma in construction in 2009 are progressing well. It has developed an effective online prospectus for post 16 courses. Good progress, as a result of careful monitoring, has been made in reducing the number of young people

between the ages of 16 and 18 who are not in education, employment or training. The figure for this age group is lower than for statistical neighbours and the national figures, although the figure for 19 year olds is above. The percentage of 19 year olds achieving Levels 2 and 3 is broadly in line with statistical neighbours and the national figure. There has been a significant increase in the number of young people completing an apprenticeship. The overall NVQ success rate for work-based learners is above the national average. Overall results for GCE/VCE in 2006 were slightly below national figures and those for statistical neighbours.

There has been a reduction in the number of young people living in bed and breakfast accommodation and plans are in place to provide more suitable accommodation. More young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities over 16 years of age are staying in learning and they are better informed about their options and courses in the local area. The council is responsive to the new needs of families from Eastern Europe and has appointed an adviser for minority ethnic achievement. The council is working to improve the educational opportunities of pupils with complex needs but accepts that more needs to be done.

Area for development

- Improve the educational opportunities for pupils with complex needs.

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 to improve its services for children and young people is good. Its management of services is becoming stronger. There is a track record of improvements in services and performance data in a number of areas. Two recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the longer term

- The local authority should build leadership and management expertise at elected member, senior officer and middle manager level.
- Local providers should ensure there are clear policies, procedures and protocols in all key service areas which can guide delivery and ensure at least the delivery of necessary minimum standards.

There is effective senior leadership and good corporate support for improving children's services provision. Clearer and stronger performance management strategies underpin this progress. Partnership working is strengthening. Medway has refashioned its management structures, improved working relationships with its partners and established integrated area teams. Self-assessment is more rigorous but needs to be cautious about referencing emerging strengths which have yet to have an impact. The council has developed its capacity but this has yet to translate into improvements in all areas. It is deliberately fashioning an open and transparent

culture where there are clear roles and responsibilities, increased accountability at all levels and sharply focused priorities. The council has the quality of staff to enable it to realise its ambitions.

The review of the 2006 children and young people's plan shows that progress is being made across all five outcome areas. The council has tackled with vigour and determination the shortcomings, especially in social care, identified in the joint area review and ensured that they now meet the minimum standards. This has involved a focused and rigorous scrutiny of performance.

The awareness, accountability and capacity of the politicians have increased with the appointment of an additional portfolio holder with a particular brief for children's social care. Working with the government office, the council has agreed ambitious targets to achieve better outcomes for children and young people. It has strengthened its role as a corporate parent. There have been considerable efforts to ascertain the views of children and young people and to ensure that their views and concerns are taken seriously in the decision-making process. The council is rightly moving its priorities for action from remedial work in the direction of prevention and is aligning its resources to match those priorities to ensure improved value for money.

Performance in education is improving and is particularly strong for GCSE, although is less strong for A/AS and other Level 3 qualifications. There is no school in a category of special measures and a reduction in the number of those with a Notice to Improve.

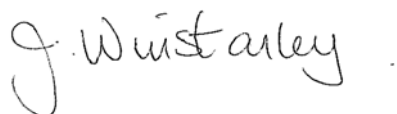
Area for development

- Ensure a continued focus on rigorous monitoring of provision and outcomes through honest and robust self-evaluation.

Overall the council has demonstrated good progress in meeting the joint area review recommendations. It has shown a good capacity to maintain and improve further its 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 black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection