

26 November 2007

Ms Sheila Lock
Director of Children and Young People's Services
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Dear Ms Lock

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN LEICESTER CITY 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 (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 3

Leicester City Council continues to deliver services for children and young people at a good level. Leadership of the service is strong and forward thinking. It provides a clear strategic approach with a sense of clarity and purpose. A good contribution is made by services to improving outcomes and they show sustained improvement in most areas over time. Many solutions are becoming increasingly innovative. Leicester receives a high number of residents from a number of countries around the world. The number of new arrivals and the associated language and cultural barriers, bring many challenges. Some parts of the city face significant economic and social obstacles and the council shows increasing ambition to challenge these. It has a good understanding of the inequality in outcomes for young people and their families and a clear view of the necessary action to improve services and make a discernible difference. The council is aware of the need to improve health and educational attainment in all phases and thus the life chances of children and young people. To this end, there is an increasing emphasis on prevention and early intervention. The commitment to collaborative working and the quality of forward planning to achieve this is a significant strength.

Being healthy

Grade 2

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area is adequate. This is lower than the position in 2006. Although there are a number of strategies to improve the delivery of services, some are not currently being fully implemented.

The council has taken steps recently to integrate and improve partnership working with the health sector. In May 2007, the current performance year, a jointly funded lead for strategic joint commissioning was appointed and she chairs the local strategic partnership's 'Be Healthy' theme group. This group drives the delivery of the city's 'Be Healthy' targets and includes representation from a wide range of health partners. The lead has also been instrumental in driving forward the Teenage Pregnancy Partnership and the Leicester Integrated Services Trial in New Parks. As a result, health partners are now actively engaged in the children's agenda and new relationships are being forged with key stakeholders, including general practitioners (GPs). There is also growing integration between the council's approach to participation and delivery of the public patient involvement (PPI) initiative.

The health visiting service has been re-structured to work in the children's centres and in the areas of highest need in the city. There is a draft strategy on the midwifery service and integration into the growing network of children's centres is under consideration. There has been a steady downward trend in pregnant women who smoke. Smoking has decreased markedly in those known to four of the children's centres, which has resulted in improvements in birth weights. However, average birth weights remain significantly lower than in the benchmark group and lower than the England average. Despite the council's intention to close the gap in outcomes between the east and west of the city, West Leicester lacks a co-ordinated approach to the health and well-being of children. It is below average on many health indicators. There is a low percentage initiating breast-feeding. At present, child surveillance services are provided by 85% of general practitioners in West Leicester compared with 97% in the east of the city. Full coverage in West Leicester has been commissioned from elsewhere. Following a visit from the National Support Team for Health Inequalities in April 2007, work is now underway to develop a specific strategy to address inequalities in infant mortality between Leicester and England and between different communities in Leicester.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted well in both primary and secondary schools. Three quarters of schools were judged good or better in school inspections. Although the proportion of schools achieving the national Healthy Schools standard is similar to statistical neighbours, it is less than the national average. All schools are involved in the School Sport Co-ordinator Programme. Teenage pregnancy is above that of comparable council areas and the England average. Rates of teenage conception rose in 2005, the last year for which figures are available. To reach the national target, a reduction of 29% needs to occur over the next three years. Youth workers

are now trained to give advice. Personal, social and health education advice is insufficiently targeted towards areas with higher rates of teenage pregnancy and in schools serving vulnerable groups.

Rates of immunisation are comparatively high in East Leicester. In the west, it is similar to the England average. Children's dental health is significantly worse than the national average. A strategy for improvement is ready for presentation to the Children and Young People's Partnership Board. An obesity strategy is in place which aims to improve diet and the physical activity levels of the very young by involving parents and carers.

There is comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provision. Both acute and non acute referrals from the Youth Offending Service are seen in an efficient manner. Towards the end of last year, staffing issues affected the rate of referrals but this has now been rectified. There is a 24-hour emergency service in place and all specialist referrals are seen within 13 weeks, with urgent referrals being seen within two to seven days. The after care and re-settlement service run by the youth offending team provides good support to young people with drug or alcohol problems. Urgent referrals related to looked after children and young people are responded to on the same day if necessary. Each city residential unit has a primary healthcare worker who meets regularly with the staff group. The CAMHS/CBII service is an effective early intervention service. It is successfully targeting children aged 0–11 years, concentrating on their behavioural, psychological or mental health needs. In general, inter-agency arrangements are successful.

Health screening for looked after children and young people has declined from last year. This is due to the introduction of new processes and is now below that of comparable councils and the England average. Action has been taken to address this issue. The council provides early support for disabled children from 0–5. Working in partnership with the voluntary sector effective early identification and support is provided for those with severe or complex needs. This has seen a significant reduction in the age of identification of children requiring and receiving specialist support. Consideration is being given to extending comparable support services until 19.

Area(s) for development

- Ensure a more co-ordinated approach to the health and well being of children in West Leicester.
- Ensure an integrated and targeted approach is taken towards teenage pregnancy.
- Ensure that strategies relating to the physical health of children are implemented.

Staying safe

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area is good and improving.

The council has a number of key strengths. It is doing a great deal to ensure that children and young people are provided with a safe environment. Robust procedures are in place to ensure the safety of children when on school trips or visits. The number of road traffic accidents has reduced dramatically. The council's anti-bullying guidance and resources and racial incident reporting procedures, developed in conjunction with the police, are highly regarded. Each provider organisation has appointed a lead officer for safe employment. In response to the Bichard report, there has been a thorough self-audit of recruitment practices across agencies. Criminal Records Bureau monitoring processes and checks in schools are implemented effectively. Contracts with the voluntary sector are audited annually with an emphasis on safe recruitment. All children's centres run a 'safe and healthy homes' scheme which provides thorough risk and safety assessments. In the pilot areas, this has achieved a 35% reduction in admissions to hospital through accidents in the home.

There is a good range of preventative services such as specialist family support services, which work with complex cases. The council and its partners are using the New Parks area as a test bed for the delivery of integrated prevention services using the common assessment framework. New procedures relating to private foster care have been effectively introduced. As a result, the numbers known to the council have almost doubled. The number of looked after children and young people has reduced slightly and is one of the lowest amongst comparable councils. Last year, the percentage of referrals leading to an initial assessment increased significantly to be in line with the national average. Almost two thirds of initial assessments were completed within seven working days. This is comparable to similar council areas. In addition, there has also been an upward trend in completing core assessments since 2003–04. Again, this is close to the England average. It is commendable that 91% were completed within 35 working days.

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements are sound. Leicester was a pilot area and good links have been retained with adult care services. All cases of children on the child protection register are allocated to qualified social workers and all cases were reviewed on time. The rate of re-registrations has fallen for the third year, illustrating that cases have been actively worked with. The rate of registration increased markedly last year, making the city the highest amongst comparable councils. Rates have, however, declined in the first quarter of the current performance year. A feature is that children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds are much less likely to figure on the register. The council has investigated the reasons for this and is satisfied that thresholds are applied consistently.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures have been fully revised. All recommendations stemming from serious case reviews have been implemented. The council's Safeguarding Unit is a well managed and resourced service. Some 71% of initial child protection conferences are held within 15 days of enquiries. This is well above the England average. The Safeguarding Unit is progressing to provide independent chairing and review of complex cases of children in need. Against this positive background, there has been a rising trend of repeat referrals since 2002–03. The council has found this to be a data collection problem and has taken corrective action so that to the first quarter of the current performance year the rate has been 12% below the England average. Last year, the referral rate to social care was much greater than that of comparable councils. The reasons for this are being investigated by the council. There are robust systems for children missing from care and better use of data is helping to track pupils more effectively.

Leicester has a high percentage of children in kinship care, above that of comparable councils. It has a low use of externally contracted placements and residential care. Placements for children are comparatively stable, both in the short and long term. The percentage of looked after children adopted in 2006–07 was close to the national average. The great majority of care leavers had pathway plans and had been allocated personal advisors. Last year, there were positive external inspections of the fostering and the adoption services. Almost all reviews of looked after children and young people took place on time. However, against this positive background, only 78% of looked after children were allocated to a named qualified social worker compared with an England average of 95%.

The council has well-developed arrangements for child protection work with disabled children. A variety of effective communication methods are employed. Two specialist workers are employed in the duty and assessment team. A local council-run respite unit is being developed into a resource centre for this group of children.

Area(s) for development

- Review the performance measurement and management of referrals as well as thresholds, with other agencies.
- Ensure that looked after children and young people are allocated to named qualified social workers.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 2

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate.

Findings from school inspections and the Tellus2 survey show that an overwhelming majority of children and young people enjoy their education. Most try their best at

school and are proud of their achievements. The attitudes and behaviour of most are good.

The overall quality of early years provision is secure enabling most children to get a sound start to their education, often from a very low baseline. The council has prioritised provision in the early years and increased the number of settings within the city. There have been substantial increases in child care places and childminders are providing a wide and flexible choice of early years provision. Most early years settings are judged to be satisfactory or better in inspections, with few that are outstanding. There are particularly good outcomes on children enjoying and achieving and making a positive contribution. Targeted intervention in the Foundation Stage, including children's centres, is beginning to see an impact on pupil learning. Although there have been improvements in literacy and personal and social education, results remain low. The gap between the authority and national outcomes has not perceptibly narrowed. Most children make at least satisfactory progress.

Despite some improvements in 2006, standards of attainment in schools remain too low. They continue to be below those of similar authorities and well below national average figures. The low level of child development on entry to school coupled with a high level of pupil mobility and turbulence have a detrimental impact on standards. Targeted challenge and support by the authority has led to some improvements, notably in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 and mathematics and science at Key Stage 3. Standards at Key Stage 1 were slightly lower in reading and writing and English at Key Stage 3. This mirrored the national picture. Standards in Key Stage 2 are some of the lowest in the country. Too many schools achieve below floor targets, although the number is reducing year on year. Overall, rates of progress are broadly in line with that expected at the end of all Key Stages. Girls achieve significantly better than boys in most aspects across all Key Stages.

The gap between local and national averages is slowly narrowing but the year-on-year improvement required to make a significant difference is inconsistent in some subjects. Trends show that change over time has been more rapid in Key Stage 1, where it is well above the national average and similar authorities. The pace slows at each subsequent Key Stage, so that by Key Stage 3 the rate of improvement is around that found nationally, but less than that of similar authorities in mathematics and science. Performance in secondary schools is improving with more young people than ever achieving 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE. Despite this, standards remain below the national average and are too low.

The on-going work of the Raising Attainment of Looked after Children team has led to improved achievement for looked after children at Key Stage 4. However, their attainment at Key Stages 2 and 3 continues to be low. Most other vulnerable children and young people, for example those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, generally make satisfactory or better progress than their peers in both primary and secondary schools. Fewer children and young people are excluded from schools as a result of well-targeted and preventative work. There were no primary school exclusions in 2006. The recently implemented 'Fair Access Protocol' with managed

moves is ensuring that a high proportion of excluded pupils are provided with alternative provision. After good improvements in recent years, attendance rates in primary schools are lower in 2006 because the proportion of unauthorised absences rose sharply. Although attendance in secondary schools improved overall, the percentage of unauthorised absence remains almost double that of similar authorities and the national average. The percentage of looked after children and young people missing 25 or more days attendance is high, but improving. The introduction of the Pupil Attendance Strategy along with a range of parenting, fast track to prosecution and truancy sweeps are starting to reduce absence rates across the city.

The authority has strengthened its procedures to identify and challenge schools in consultation with all stakeholders. A robust School Improvement Framework document has been developed which has all round support from schools and other partners. The authority is taking decisive action with schools to improve standards through challenging dialogue and increased expectations. It has shown a clear intention to address identified weaknesses head on by issuing a 'Formal Warning Notice' to one school. There are now no secondary schools in an Ofsted category of concern. However, there is an increasing number of primary schools judged to require Special Measures or a Notice to Improve. The proportion is much higher than similar authorities and the national average. In addition, the local authority has been unable to prevent some schools slipping back into a category.

A broad range of recreational, leisure and cultural facilities are available and are well used. Leicester's adventure playgrounds offer children and young people the opportunity to play freely and safely. The council's 'Play Strategy' successfully promotes inclusion, addressing the needs of all children, including disabled children. The council has Beacon Status for its work in providing cultural and support services to hard-to-reach groups. In addition, the well-established Parent Partnership Service provides effective advice, support and information networks for parents. The percentage of primary schools with surplus spaces has increased slightly in 2006 and is almost double that of similar authorities and nationally.

Area(s) for development

- Improve the rates of progress in core subjects for all groups of children and young people, especially boys, from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4.
- Continue to target, support and intervene in primary schools that achieve below floor targets and reduce their number.
- Reduce the number of primary schools that are causing concern.
- Improve attendance rates in secondary schools by further reducing the number of unauthorised absences.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area is outstanding. This has played a very significant part in enabling children and young people to make a positive contribution. The Youth Service, despite falling staff numbers, is reaching more young people than nationally.

Children and young people's involvement in making decisions about the services provided by the council is given a very strong focus. A range of fora such as school councils, the city's Young People Council and the Young People's Forums are firmly established. They make a key contribution to informing the design of services that are then shaped to meet the needs of children and young people. Young people are consulted fully on a range of issues that affect them. 'Hear by Right' is being used by organisations as an audit tool with 14 schools trained in its use. Youth MPs meet with the Director of Children's Service on a quarterly basis. They are to be joined by executive members from the Youth Council. Looked after children and young people use 'Stand Up and Speak Out' to comment on services, supported by the Children's Rights Service. Children and young people have provided the council and the Tellus2 survey with very positive feedback about the range and quality of services. They say that their views are listened to in decisions about the local area and many believe Leicester is a good place to live.

A great deal of effective work on anti-social behaviour has taken place. The council has a clear approach to tackling anti-social and pre-offending behaviours. It has recently developed and implemented a range of strategies in partnership with a number of groups. Group work is provided to 150 parents of 8–13 year olds who are at risk of nuisance behaviour. Further work is being undertaken to target young people in the transition to secondary school. The city has three Junior Youth Inclusion programmes. They have worked with more than 200 children who are at risk of involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour. Parenting contracts are used in schools. The council is one of the pathfinders for the 'Respect' programme. Extended services in and around schools provide a wide range of activities for children and young people. Creative Partnerships Leicester and PE and Sports Club Links have been instrumental in funding creative programmes cross phase in 19 city schools and increasing participation in physical education and sport. There is good joint activity with leisure services in the council. There has been a seven year programme of investment in one large estate, including the provision of sporting activities for young people. This has resulted in large decreases in reported crime.

Work targeted to meet the needs of young people with disabilities demonstrates the council's inclusive approach. They have been consulted about processes used for transition to adult care. Currently, between 75% and 90% of young disabled people have a transition plan and the council needs to clarify which children should take part in the process and ensure that they are all included. Services to young carers are currently provided by the 'Care Free' project, run by Barnardos. A recently approved

council strategy will shortly result in each agency identifying a lead person to support young people for whom caring is an issue in their lives.

A reparative justice scheme, established in response to concerns about the relatively high numbers of first-time entrants to the youth justice system has led to a 21% reduction in entrants, so far, in 2007–08. Offending by looked after children and young people has been higher than in comparable councils. However, they are now being included in the reparative justice scheme. Re-offending rates are below those of comparable council areas. Some 87% of children who were looked after attended and participated in their reviews. This is above that of similar authorities and that found nationally. This shows continuing improvement. Looked after children are well supported at transition stages by the Raising Attainment of Looked After Children team and young people are currently in higher education. There is an annual awards event for those aged 16 and over and those leaving care. These services for looked after children are outstanding as a result of the corporate approach to parenting taken by the council.

Area(s) for development

- Clarify which young people should be part of the multi-agency transitions planning at aged 14 and ensure that all of these are included.

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.

Findings from school and college inspections and the Tellus2 survey shows that the vast majority of children and young people value education. They have got clear views about what they want to do when they leave school and a higher proportion than nationally want to study and go to university.

Although standards remain below those of similar areas and nationally, recent good improvements in GCSE results mean that more 16 year olds are equipped to join the world of work or continue with their studies. There have also been good improvements in the attainment of learners at 19, where the percentage of young people achieving Level 3 is above that of similar authorities and the national average. The 13–19 partnership gives a strong lead to developments in this area and has been judged positively in a recent National Audit Office evaluation. The city's 13–19 strategy plans are coherent and combined into an effective city-wide approach. There has been good involvement of all major stakeholders such as Connexions, the Learning and Skills Council and the Education Improvement Partnership in the construction of its plans. Good partnership working exists with Leicestershire. A cohesive infrastructure operates separate but connected initiatives, recognising the artificial nature of the city and county boundaries. Good progress is being made in developing an area-wide prospectus. Nine specialist diplomas are to be submitted in

December 2007, for implementation in 2009. Time has been well spent in establishing the city-wide infrastructure prior to making this submission. Provision has been thoroughly reviewed leading to an increased range of vocational pathways and progression routes and established effective links to industry. A co-ordinated approach between Connexions and the Learning and Skills Council helps promote job opportunities well and improve young people's recruitment. Children and young people receive good, impartial advice and guidance about career development. Events such as the 'Big Match' help effectively to link young people with the world of work.

Participation rates of 17 and 19 year olds in employment, education and training are increasing. Furthermore, the achievement of those young people who stay in education and training is improving. The proportion of young people completing an apprenticeship has increased in successive years. Achievement, retention and success rates in colleges are now similar to those found nationally. A thorough analysis of data has identified that white males, particularly in the west of the city, have lower participation and progression rates. The authority, in collaboration with the Learning and Skills Council, has targeted this group. This has led to some improvement, but there is still much to do. Precise intervention has led to a significant reduction in the proportion of young people not engaged in education, employment and training. Although the percentage of young people not engaged in education, employment and training remains above regional and national rates, there has been a trend of good reductions. The proportion has fallen by 12% to 10% in 2006 with month by month improvement. Targeted programmes for vulnerable and minority groups, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, young offenders and young mothers are in place to reduce this further.

The council has been particularly successful in enhancing the life chances of some vulnerable groups. The increase in child care places and settings is helping many parents balance their children's needs with work commitments and family life. It is supporting parents and carers returning to work and helping to reduce long term unemployment. Strong corporate parenting promotes strongly the economic well-being of looked after children. The Raising the Attainment of Looked After Children team, involving the Education Welfare Service, learning mentors and attached psychologists makes a significant contribution, resulting in good educational achievement. The vast majority of care leavers settle successfully into suitable accommodation provided by the council and other partners.

School inspection findings show that economic well-being was judged satisfactory or better in four fifths of primary schools. In secondary school inspections this year, a number have been judged outstanding. This is increasingly helping young people to develop their workplace and other skills and contributes positively to their future economic well-being.

Area(s) for development

- Continue to reduce the high proportion of young people not engaged in education, employment or training by targeting further minority and vulnerable groups.
- Increase participation and success rates of young learners from white backgrounds in the west of the city.
- Develop the resource capacity of both personnel and buildings to ensure successful implementation of the new diplomas.

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

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council has demonstrated a good capacity to improve services. This has been accomplished against a background of change, but this has not been allowed to deflect the authority's drive for improvement. The authority's vision and ambition are set out clearly in a comprehensive and well focussed CYPP. Its priorities for improvement are unambiguous and focus on better outcomes for children and young people. The recent review of the plan demonstrates that good progress is being made in a number of areas as a result of decisive and sharply focused actions. This has led to good improvements in making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being. However, in some areas, such as improving achievement in primary and secondary schools and improving the health of children and young people in the west of the city, progress has been slower. This is because some of the actions taken have not yet had time to impact sufficiently. The authority knows that these remain key priorities for improvement.

The council has an honest view of its relative strengths and weaknesses with a proactive and responsive approach to improvement. A key driver behind this improvement is high quality leadership coupled with effective relationships and joint working between the council and key strategic partners. The Building Schools for the Future programme is very ambitious but has the potential to transform education in the city. A range of effective partnerships such as the 13–19 Partnership, the Education Improvement Partnership and the School's Forum supports this work well. It also works well with the voluntary and private sectors. In addition, the council is working very closely at both strategic and operational levels on an increasing number of projects with partners in neighbouring Leicestershire and further afield. This is helping to overcome many of the artificial boundaries to learning and progress.

Aspects of the workforce planning and development are beginning to improve and help the council to reduce costs in some sectors whilst still improving outcomes. In addition, performance and financial management are more aligned to the CYPP and

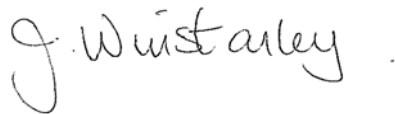
better targeted on raising standards. Robust data are collected systematically which enables the progress of key vulnerable groups to be tracked. Partnership work is continuing to ensure that this data can be routinely accessed to support joint planning and commissioning. The council is a very good corporate parent; looked after children generally do well in Leicester. There are clear plans to develop and improve a number of health services. However, many are currently not at the delivery stage.

Area(s) for development

- Fully implement and embed the workforce planning and performance management strategies so that they positively impact on outcomes 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".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection