

4 December 2007

Mr Gareth Williams
Director of Children and Young People's Services
Leicestershire County Council
Room 115
County Hall
Glenfield
Leicestershire
LE3 8RF

Dear Mr Williams

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) for your local authority, some aspects of which were conducted at the same time as the analysis stage of the joint area review (JAR). The 2006 APA informed the scoping of the JAR at the planning stage and the initial findings of the 2007 APA were taken into account by the review team at the end of the analysis stage. The outcomes of the JAR were then considered alongside a review of recent data in arriving at the final APA judgements for 2007. As a result, many of the areas for development highlighted in this letter align with the recommendations in the JAR 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 (CYPP) 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

The council consistently delivers services for children and young people at a good level. Children's services are making significant contributions to improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people so that these become better than good. The contribution to children and young people being healthy and to staying safe is good. The council's contribution to young people achieving economic well-being has been strengthened through a well targeted 13–19 strategy and outcomes are good. The contribution to children and young people's enjoying and achieving is good. The council's impact on children and young people making a positive contribution and its capacity to improve are outstanding.

Being healthy

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Services are having a positive impact on improving outcomes for children and young people, particularly those who are the most vulnerable. Young people have access to good advice and guidance on an individual basis. The council is proactive and inclusive in providing its health related services. There is effective promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and young people, involving well coordinated action by the Primary Care Trust and its partners. National and local targets in relation to the Healthy Schools Programme have been met.

Overall, the data on the health of children and young people is better than similar authorities and significantly better than the national average. The proportion of expectant mothers who smoke during pregnancy is higher than the national average but there is a range of initiatives to address this issue. The percentage of babies with low birth weight is also lower than the national average. Although the annual health assessments and dental checks of looked after children and young people are good, they have decreased recently. There is a strong commitment to reducing childhood obesity and a baseline has been established for all children and young people. Family learning courses support parents and children to learn together to develop healthier ways of living. Teenage pregnancy rates are overall below the national and regional average. Teenage pregnancy rates are, however, particularly high in the more deprived areas and services are now being targeted in these areas.

Good progress has been made on provision of a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). An updated 2005–07 delivery action plan is in place. The impact of CAMHS for children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. CAMHS provides effective assessment, intervention and treatment to enable children and young people experiencing such difficulties to remain at home. A good proportion of new specialist cases meet the target waiting time for assessment and treatment of under four weeks. However, for non-specialist cases waiting times are not as good and are worse than the national average. The Drugs Action Team has an effective substance misuse strategy across all four tiers of service and its impact is monitored effectively. The proportion of those in substance misuse treatment who are aged less than 18 has risen over the last three years but remains below the regional average.

The provision of services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Effective support is provided by specialist health visitors. Good joint working between the partner agencies, including the voluntary sector, has led to additional funding to employ health care staff for children and young people receiving respite care.

Areas for development

- Improve the waiting times of under four weeks for new non-specialist CAMHS cases.

- Continue to improve the proportion of young people in substance misuse treatment.

Staying safe

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The Local Safeguarding Children Board has been established with the full endorsement of all partner agencies. This has agreed a set of key priorities to address the wider safeguarding agenda. The Board is shared with Leicester City and Rutland councils and cross boundary partnership working is effective.

There has been an anti-bullying strategy in place since 2003. The anti-bullying team has worked successfully with the Conflict Resolution Schools Programme to introduce peer mediation schemes in 15 primary and secondary schools. E-safety is still an area of concern and this is being addressed by a newly formed working group under the auspices of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Leicestershire has one of the lowest levels of child pedestrian casualties in the country. However, the number of children aged 0 to 15 killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents has increased recently, although the council is still on track to meet its target of 50% reduction by 2010.

Referrals of children and young people in need have decreased but are above the national average. The number of initial and core assessments carried out within the statutory timescale is above similar authorities. However, there has been a decrease in the number of children in need referrals which lead to initial assessments. These are now significantly lower than comparators. Re-referrals have been successfully reduced and are lower than the average for similar authorities.

Children and young people most at risk from abuse are protected very well by good professional practice and inter-agency collaboration. The number of Section 47 enquires which lead to initial child protection conferences within the required timescales is very good. The number of children and young people on the Child Protection Register has fallen as a result of early intervention and effective preventative work. Child protection procedures are implemented effectively and practice is managed and audited well. All children and young people on the Child Protection Register have an allocated social worker and almost all reviews are carried out on time. Re-registration rates have fallen but continue to be higher than similar authorities.

The proportion of children who are looked after continues to reduce as a result of good preventative measures, effective decision making and targeted services. Outcomes are good. Timeliness and adoption of children and young people in care are very good and are better than similar authorities and national averages. Stability of placement is good. The percentage of those placed with family and friends has improved and is in line with the national average. However, for longer term placement stability, the rate has deteriorated due to a higher number of teenagers

remaining looked after for longer. All reviews are carried out within the statutory timescale and are above the national average. However, the percentage of looked after children and young people with a named qualified social worker is lower than that of similar authorities. The council has taken a decision to allocate looked after children cases to workers with other relevant qualifications and this is proving to be effective.

The number of older care leavers with personal advisers has fallen and is below the national average, but the council has taken effective steps to improve this quickly. Of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities aged 14 to 18, a good 90% have transition plans for managing their move to adult services, thus indicating that all such young people are appropriately prepared for such transition.

Area for development

- Improve the percentage of children in need referrals which lead to initial assessments.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. There is an improving trend in attainment at all key stages and standards are at least above those of similar authorities and national averages. Standards at Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics are above similar authorities and national averages. Standards remain above national averages at Key Stage 2 in all three subjects. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards in these subjects are above those of similar authorities and well above national averages. The proportion of students attaining five good passes at GCSE has risen since 2006 and is broadly in line with the national average but below similar authorities. GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, are above the national average. Intensive challenge and support by the council is helping to improve the progress made by pupils from Key Stage 3 to GCSE but pupils' progress remains below the national average. Most vulnerable children and young people, for example those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress. There is an improving trend in the attainment of looked after children and young people so that their attainment of five good GCSE passes is slightly above the national average. However, the attainment at one A*-G grades remains below similar authorities and national averages.

Children are getting a satisfactory start to their education. Overall, early years provision promotes children's development and well-being effectively and helps them to meet early learning goals. Most early years settings are judged as satisfactory in Ofsted inspections and the council is stepping up action to ensure that many more are judged as good or better. Most schools are providing effective education, care and services to meet the needs of learners. Results of the Tellus2 survey, carried out with in excess of 1,000 children and young people in the authority, showed that on the whole they enjoy school. This view is supported by school inspections where the

majority of children and young people are judged to enjoy school. The proportion of schools causing concern has decreased significantly since September 2005. There are no secondary or special schools in an Ofsted category of concern. Two primary schools require special measures and two of the three with a notice to improve have had the category removed during 2006-07. Overall, the proportion of schools causing concern is below similar authorities and the average nationally.

Children and young people's attitudes and behaviour in schools are mostly good or better. Permanent exclusion figures in primary schools rose in 2006 to be slightly above national figures. In secondary schools, permanent exclusions are declining and are broadly in line with national figures. Fixed term exclusion figures in primary schools are below similar authorities and national figures. In secondary schools, the figures broadly match those of similar authorities and are below national figures. This reflects the positive impact of the strategies used in the authority.

School attendance is broadly in line with national averages and similar authorities. There are fewer unauthorised absences in primary schools than those found nationally and in secondary schools, these are in line with national figures. However, unauthorised absences in secondary schools are above similar authorities. The percentage of looked after children and young people who missed a total of at least 25 days of schooling in 2006/07 was above similar authorities and national figures, although there was some improvement from the previous year. Well targeted preventative action is underway, linking the authority's work on improving attainment and attendance.

There is a good range of accessible and rewarding recreational and voluntary learning activities. The opportunities reflect the needs of socially excluded groups and they are given particular encouragement to take them up. Participation in activities provided by the youth service and their partners in the voluntary sector is good.

Areas for development

- Improve pupils' overall rates of progress between Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Continue targeted action to improve unauthorised absences in secondary schools.
- Continue to improve the attainment and attendance of looked after children and young people.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. Children and young people's involvement in making decisions about the services they receive is given a very strong focus and, as a result, services, activities and programmes are shaped to meet children and young people's needs and wishes.

The council actively encourages children and young people to make a positive contribution. The youth service supports young people very well in developing their skills to take part in Leicestershire's Youth Council and local forums and provides a very good range of opportunities for young people to undertake voluntary work. Children and young people, particularly those from vulnerable groups, are supported in managing changes and responding to challenges in their lives. The Tellus2 survey gives very positive feedback from young people about the range and quality of services. An effective example of contribution by young people is 'The Jitty' which is produced by young people for young people. It provides very good information, advice, entertainment and news. It allows access to consultation information and involvement by a wide range of young people. The Healthy Schools Programme contributes very well to children's and young people's emotional and social development. A well established youth service project provides particularly good information, specialist guidance and peer support to young refugees and asylum seekers. The project has achieved national recognition for its excellent practice.

Looked after children and young people are supported well to make a positive contribution. A T2C ('Time to Change') group, consisting of looked after young people, has conducted very successful negotiations with District Council officers, resulting in free access to leisure and recreational activities. Such access has also been extended to children and young people who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The T2C members have also been involved in a training programme for social work students at a local university. Young people are also involved in training for foster carers and have delivered briefings on Hear by Right to staff from partner agencies. There has been a further reduction in the number of looked after children and young people being subject to a reprimand, final warning or conviction, so that this is now broadly in line with the national average.

There are extremely good links with the youth offending service which has received the highest rating by the Youth Justice Board for overall performance. The number of first time offenders has reduced and is better than the national average. The council is making significant progress towards the Youth Justice Board's reduction target for 2008. The involvement of parents and carers in shaping the council's services is generally good but lacks a systematic approach. The council acknowledges that this aspect needs to be improved further.

Areas for development

- Embed the systematic involvement of parents and carers in shaping the council services.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. There is an overall 13–19 strategy which is being vigorously implemented. Good progress is being made towards the collective

delivery of the new 14–19 diplomas. Opportunities for vocational education are promoted well through very effective collaborative networks involving secondary schools, the Connexions Service, the Learning and Skills Council and inter-authority links with Leicester City Council. There is a good focus on learners' needs and curriculum change to widen access and participation. An increasing number of young people continue to stay on in education, employment and training. The proportion of young people aged 16 to 18, and at age 19, who are not engaged in education, employment and training is below the regional and well below national rates. The percentage of young people achieving a Level 2 qualification by age 19 has continued to increase over the last three years and is above the regional and national figures. The achievement and retention rates in colleges of further education at Levels 1 and 2 are good. There is a coordinated approach to provide a children and young people's information system which is comprehensive and accessible to parents and young people.

Strong corporate parenting promotes the economic well-being of young people who are looked after by the council. As they grow older, their participation in education and training is good. The council reports that high numbers of care leavers settle successfully into suitable accommodation provided by the council and other partners. The number of childcare places has increased more than the number of providers, indicating that existing providers are expanding. There is a higher than national average increase in the number of places offered in out of school care and a lower than average increase in full day care places. The council is currently undertaking a county wide consultation to identify the type and range of childcare needs so as to further improve provision.

Area for development

- Ensure that there is an effective strategy in place to respond to the findings from the consultation on childcare provision.

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

Grade 4

The council's capacity to improve, including the management of its services for children and young people, is outstanding. The *Every child matters* agenda is very firmly embedded in the council's drive for improvement. There is active, visible and effective leadership which has the trust of partners and leaders in the educational community. Members are effectively involved through working closely with areas and services and so are able to demonstrate accountability. Children and young people are effectively involved in review and service planning. The review of the comprehensive and detailed 2006 Children and Young People's Plan is thorough and priorities are based on a good analysis of need. The plan is also linked effectively to the council's other plans, thereby ensuring a sense of common purpose. The plan is rigorously monitored and reported on through regular and robust activities, demonstrating very good performance management.

Ambition and prioritisation are very strong. The council sets itself high targets based on a very good understanding of its strengths and areas still requiring further improvements. As a result, it has demonstrated very good progress in improving outcomes for children and young people. A notable example is the very good use of performance data with individual schools to bring about improvement in attainment at Key Stage 4. The number of schools achieving the Healthy Schools standard has increased so that it is above the national target. The number of schools in an Ofsted category has decreased significantly to be below the proportion in similar authorities and there are no secondary schools in a category of concern. Partnership working ensures that children's services are flexible and responsive to need. The commitment of health partners, the voluntary sector and district councils is very strong. The high quality of partnership work is reflected in the excellent work of the Safeguarding Board. Similarly, there has been very good progress in strengthening partnerships to support the implementation of the 13–19 strategy.

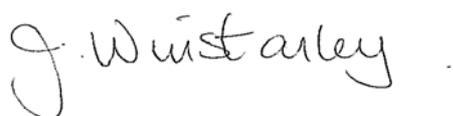
Corporate parenting is effectively directed and well resourced. Older looked after children make a good contribution through the T2C group which has a noticeable impact on service provision. Since the last APA, good progress has been made on formulating a joint commissioning framework with partner agencies; implementation of the framework is underway. The Connexions partnership's commissioning services from the voluntary and community sectors has been recognised nationally as an example of good practice. Staff recruitment and retention is good and sickness levels are low. Social care is fully staffed. Staff development arrangements are very good. The council has continued to allocate year on year growth for children's services from a lower than national average budget and resources are very well managed. Spending is below average and outcomes are good overall.

Area for development

- Ensure that the joint commissioning strategy is implemented fully.

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 style with a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection