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26 November 2007

Mrs A O'Sullivan
Director of Children and Young People
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Oldgate House
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Huddersfield
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Dear Mrs O'Sullivan

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN KIRKLEES METROPOLITAN 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) where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted and other inspectorates. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this and for the time given by you and your colleagues to the assessment process.

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

Kirklees council delivers services that improve outcomes for children and young people at a good level. This concurs with the findings of the recent JAR. Together, children's services are making a number of significant contributions to improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people within a district that is diverse and complex. The quality of strategic planning is good and senior leaders continue to provide clear direction for improvement. Whilst aspects of education provision are still variable, actions taken since the APA of 2006 have begun to reduce

the gap in outcomes for most children and young people, and those who are most vulnerable. The council actively seeks the views of children and young people to inform their planning, for example through the Kids Count in the Community scheme. The council has good capacity to improve.

Being Healthy

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. Schools are working towards the Kirklees Healthy Schools Standard award, which sets more challenging standards than the National Healthy Schools Standard programme. More than 25% of schools had achieved the Kirklees Gold Standard and over 50% had achieved the National Healthy Schools Standard by the end of July 2007.

The council places good emphasis on prevention and early intervention for the health needs of vulnerable children and young people. Teenage conception rates are lower than average for the region. The strategy to tackle substance misuse focuses on prevention. Information is presented creatively to young people in schools as part of the broader personal health and social education programme and is well received. Treatment is offered in partnership with Lifeline. The latest data (2006) reveals that the proportion of those in treatment who are under 18 has reduced and is lower than average, suggesting more needs to be done to help young people who need treatment. Infant mortality rates are high in Kirklees and the higher rates are concentrated in the more disadvantaged areas. The CYPP signposts reducing infant mortality, with a focus on particular hotspots, as one of the initial seven shared priorities of the local public service board. The council acknowledges that more needs to be done to understand the causes, and is in the process of developing a strategy with partners. The CYPP also highlights the high levels of dental decay among children in Kirklees, where the rate of tooth decay in five year olds is amongst the worst in England.

Good progress has been made towards a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The service is not yet at the stage reached in most other areas, but the council and partners have closed the gap in 2006–07. The main area for development now is in services for young people with complex mental health needs. The service is able to access CAMHS wards, but this is at a hospital 40 miles outside the area. Waiting times for new cases have grown longer due to the CAMHS team taking on additional roles. CAMHS provides priority services to looked after children and their carers with waiting times under four weeks for this group. A service level agreement between CAMHS and the youth offending team (YOT) ensures targets are met. Almost all looked after children received an annual health assessment in 2006–07. Performance improved from that achieved in 2005–06 and remains better than the average for councils in England. The appointment of dedicated health staff has helped to sustain performance and improve health outcomes for this group of young people.

Areas for development

- Develop strategies to address infant mortality and the high levels of dental decay among children.
- Improve access to drug treatment for young people.
- Further development of CAMHS strategy and CAMHS provision.

Staying safe

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. Safeguarding outcomes are reviewed regularly to ensure that guidance is well targeted to meet needs. For example, multi-agency plans are in place to reduce the number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents. These include skills training for driving, cycling, walking, riding, and promoting road safety. Consequently, the council is on track to achieve the government target for reduction by 2010. The Children Missing from Education Team monitors and reports on this vulnerable group of young people. Information is shared with other agencies within Kirklees and across councils. Multi-agency protocols are in place to deal with young people missing from home and a successful project, commissioned through Barnardos, supports young people when they return home. A national award winning project working with local Madressahs on child protection has increased numbers from the Asian community participating in training events. The local public service board includes reducing bullying as one of its priorities for action. There are many examples of good initiatives in place to counteract bullying but further work is needed to co-ordinate practice and establish reliable reporting systems.

During the year the Common Assessment Framework has been introduced, duty and assessment teams have been restructured, and new guidance has been issued. Systems for referral and assessment are in transition and are yet to be fully embedded. Survey information and performance indicators for referral and assessment and for the child protection system demonstrate that thresholds are not consistent. The rate of new registrations on the child protection register (CPR) during the year has reduced significantly over the past two years and is considerably below the rate for similar councils. The council reports a recent increase in the number of children on the CPR due to improved referral systems and increased awareness and recognition of child protection issues among staff across agencies. The percentage of children who had been on the CPR continuously for two years or more or deregistered from the CPR during the year remains higher than in similar councils, suggesting delays in securing good outcomes in these cases. However, all reviews of children on the CPR were conducted within timescales and all registered children have an allocated social worker. The council believes gatekeeping arrangements and governance are good.

The proportion of children who are looked after is below average but has increased during 2006–07. The council has a good parenting support strategy and there is a wide range of preventative services for younger children. Outcomes for those who are looked after are generally good. All looked after children are allocated to a qualified social worker and the council's policy stipulates more frequent visits to children than the minimum set out in the regulations. Additional support is available for looked after children from VOYAGE, the children's rights service, and independent visitors if required. However, performance on placement stability has declined in 2006–07. A strategy to reduce residential provision is underway and this is linked to planned growth in council foster care. Kirklees has been successful in expanding its fostering service with a net increase of 21 foster homes in 2006–07. Recent inspections of the fostering and adoption services are positive and there has been investment in the adoption service to ensure compliance with the Adoption and Children Act. The percentage of looked after children cared for by a relative or friend is much lower than in similar councils and this is a long term trend. The council explains this as due to positive use of residence orders and special guardianship orders with appropriate levels of family support enabling children to live with relatives without being in public care.

Areas for development

- Establish clear thresholds for referrals and child protection.
- Reduce the length of time children remain the subject of a child protection plan.

Enjoying and achieving

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 area is satisfactory. However, effective steps have been taken to ensure that progress has been made in tackling areas for improvement identified in the APA in 2006. Targets for three and four year olds have been met in providing high quality, affordable childcare and early years education. Progress made by children during the Foundation Stage is above the national average and improving. By contrast, standards at Key Stage 1 have fallen particularly in writing and mathematics. Although results remain similar to those seen nationally, the council has targeted this phase as a specific area for improvement as part of its own review. Rigorous challenge and support by the council has contributed to sustained improvement in standards at Key Stage 2, which are approaching the national average in English, mathematics and science. At Key Stage 3, standards in 2006 were also broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving five A* to C at the end of Key Stage 4 has continued to improve. The council can demonstrate the impact of intervention strategies to raise standards with the unpublished results of tests taken in 2007 by children and young people in a

number of schools targeted for additional support. These results also indicate that the gap is closing in the standards attained between the north and south of the borough as a consequence of an accelerated rise in standards in North Kirklees.

Although standards are rising overall, the achievement of all children and young people remains too variable relative to their starting points. In 2006, the progress made by pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 was significantly below the national average. However, the achievement gap is closing between other key stages, particularly between Key Stages 1 and 2. The developing role of the school improvement partner enables the local authority to hold secondary schools more effectively to account for the achievement of pupils. Outcomes from the JAR confirm that some of the more vulnerable groups of children and young people perform less well, particularly Pakistani boys and Black Caribbean pupils. While adequate progress has been made by the council in closing the achievement gap of Pakistani boys there is no specific strategy to improve standards for Black and minority ethnic groups.

Inspection evidence confirms that most schools provide effective education, care and services to meet the needs of learners. Children get a sound start to their education. No early years setting has received an inadequate grade in Ofsted inspections. Results of the Tellus2 survey indicate that children and young people generally enjoy school and share similar views to young people nationally. They feel better informed about the range of activities available to them out of school via leaflets, posters and internet websites. The number of schools causing concern continues to fall as a result of effective monitoring and well focused support. Nevertheless, two schools have required a notice to improve since September 2006 and one school has been subject to special measures. Behaviour is mostly satisfactory or better and has improved where the authority's behaviour strategy has targeted its resources. Consequently, permanent exclusions have continued to fall and the higher than average number of fixed-term exclusions has been lowered in mainstream schools. However, the number of fixed-term exclusions from special schools is higher than average. Additional evidence from the JAR confirms that as a result of the collective efforts of schools and the council, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of excluded children and young people gaining at least 20 hours education.

The council has tackled inconsistencies emerging in attendance between individual schools in order to improve rates, which have fallen slightly compared with recent years. The attendance and achievement of looked after children have been prioritised by the council and an individualised programme of support and guidance has improved both attendance and the opportunity to achieve more at school. School inspections indicate that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as other groups.

Areas for development

- Raise standards at Key Stage 1.

- Narrow the achievement gap between different groups of children and young people.
- Reduce fixed-term exclusions in special schools.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. Children and young people are supported in developing socially and emotionally. School councils, active in most schools, are enabling children to become informed and responsible citizens and make a positive contribution to the school and the wider community. Peer support programmes operate in many schools, and Children's Fund projects, such as Befrienders, involve children volunteering to support each other. The Young Carers Scheme, run by Northorpe Hall Child and Family Trust, offers support for young people who care for a family member. The scheme is highly valued by those involved.

Many opportunities exist for children and young people to participate in decision making and in supporting the community, for example, the Kids Count in the Community scheme and the Shout it Out interactive website. A monthly magazine produced by the council's young people's service is compiled and edited by children and young people. Participation by looked after children and young people is encouraged through VOYAGE. Young people take part in staff recruitment and contribute to the foster carer training programme. The opportunity to feedback on experiences and shape services has led to increased take up by children and young people.

A multi-agency programme, Positive Activities for Children and Young People, is designed to deter children and young people from offending and antisocial behaviour. A YOT senior practitioner is seconded into the Anti Social Behaviour Unit to improve communication, co-ordination, and preventative services. Positive early interventions by the YOT have prevented most young people referred from becoming the subject of an antisocial behaviour order. The Kirklees Crime Prevention Strategy has strengthened partnership working. However, the YOT has been unable to achieve the targets set by the Youth Justice Board for reduction in the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system and for reduction in the re-offending rate. There has been progress in helping young offenders into employment, education or training, which was highlighted as a key area for improvement in the 2006 APA.

The ratio of looked after children who receive a final warning, reprimand or conviction compared with the general population is higher than in similar councils, and increased in 2006–07. During the year the council has set up restorative justice practices in residential and foster homes. Participation of looked after children in reviews was a key area for improvement in the 2006 APA. The council commissioned the services of VOICE to help make participation more meaningful for young people.

Participation has improved considerably in 2006–07, and is now in line with the average for similar councils.

Areas for development

- Rates of offending and re-offending.
- Offending by looked after young people.
- Ensure that the council and police service have a clear understanding of the impact of targeting young people who offend.

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 area is good. Comprehensive guidance provided by the council that reflects the diversity of the community enables parents, children and young people to access a good range of packages of care, support and education to promote their economic well-being. The council is committed to engaging young people in making their own decisions about their futures. For example, children who are looked after are increasingly encouraged to participate in their planning and review meetings with an increase from 66% to 86% in 2006. Actions taken by the council, as part of the Kirklees Tackling Poverty Strategy, have enabled individuals and families to maximise income through take up of benefit and tax credits. Child care provision is readily available for young parents.

The gap between the outcomes of most children and young people and those who are the most vulnerable is closing. Transitional plans at all educational stages are strong and provide good guidance for children and young people about their learning options and career development. Effective steps have been taken to help young people aged 11–19 to prepare for working life. A 14–19 strategy based on effective collaboration has been established and good progress has been made towards collective delivery of the new Diplomas from September 2008. Good procedures are in place to assess learning needs which results in a more relevant curriculum for learners. Opportunities for vocational education are well promoted and good opportunities exist for work-based learning. A higher than average number of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities attend work-based learning and their success rates are higher than average. Participation in education, training and employment for this group of young people is above the national average. However, the JAR recognises that while success rates for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in work-based learning are good pre-16, post 16 provision is less well developed.

Post 16 achievement rates continue to improve year on year. The number of Level 1 and 2 courses available has increased and retention rates, particularly in Level 1 and

2 courses have risen and are above national average. Overall, there has been an increase in the participation rate of young people in education, training or employment since 2003. Inspection findings indicate good quality teaching and learning and curriculum development that increasingly meets the needs of learners. Increased involvement of all partners has helped young people secure jobs with the council or undertake apprenticeships. However, the proportion of young people who are not in education, training or employment has risen and is above the national average. The council is committed to tackling this issue by working closely with partners including Connexions, and has met short term targets for improvement. A coordinated approach through the Children's Information Services helps to promote employment opportunities. The proportion of young people who have completed apprenticeships has risen and is above the national average. Provision for vulnerable young people is good. For example, the proportion of care leavers in education, training or employment is above average as a result of improved relationships with partners and increased awareness of their role as 'corporate parents'. The council is working hard to improve the quantity of decent and affordable housing for vulnerable young people which is identified as a priority in the CYPP.

Areas for development

- Reduce the numbers of those who are not in employment, education or training.
- Continue to improve the quantity of decent affordable housing.

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

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council has good capacity to improve its services for children and young people. Directors of service understand their roles and work together effectively as a team to achieve shared goals. The council is ambitious for children and young people in Kirklees and works with partners well to improve their outcomes. Strong senior leadership and good corporate support for improving children's services provision have enabled progress to be made on areas for improvement identified at the APA in 2006. Good performance management ensures the council is well aware of its development needs. The council and its partners have produced a robust needs analysis as part of the CYPP and have agreed priorities with all the major stakeholders for the period 2006–9. Financial management is good and resources are well directed to priorities with good emphasis on preventative services.

The council's own evaluation of its performance is more generous than the findings of the APA with regard to staying safe and capacity to improve. Kirklees is making good progress in implementing the Children's Agenda but this is not yet reflected in all key performance outcomes. For example, inspectors found that thresholds for

intervention and support to children and young people, and the quality of assessments of children in need were inconsistent.

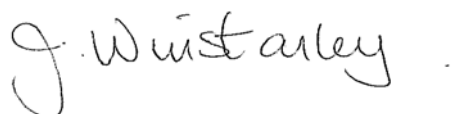
The CYPP sets out challenging ambitions and makes clear its intended outcomes but links with other plans are not always explicit. Multi-agency working is becoming well established. However, a transparent and strategic commissioning system is not yet in place and joint commissioning is also relatively underdeveloped. The council routinely engages children and young people and parents in identifying and responding to needs. It is responsive to the range and complexity of the needs of children and young people.

Areas for development

- Develop a transparent strategic commissioning system.
- Establish links between the CYPP and other plans more explicitly.

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 Inspections