

26 November 2007

Mr Graham Badman  
Managing Director for Children, Families and Education Directorate  
Kent County Council  
Sessions House  
County Hall  
Maidstone, Kent  
ME14 1XQ

Dear Mr Badman

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN KENT COUNTY COUNCIL**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment for your local authority. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan, 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**

The services for children and young people delivered by Kent County Council are good and improving. The weaknesses identified in last year's annual performance assessment have been addressed by well thought out actions which have led to improvement in a number of key indicators. The integration of children's services is making a significant contribution to improving the health and well-being of children and young people. The council makes a good contribution towards improving outcomes for children and young people in enjoying and achieving, being healthy, staying safe and making a positive contribution. The Children and Young People's Plan is well constructed and a thorough review of the plan demonstrates that the council has a clear and accurate view of its own strengths and weaknesses. The council has outstanding capacity to improve its services further.

### **Being healthy**

**Grade 3**

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

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council works in close partnership with partners to improve the outcomes for children and young people particularly through the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

The health of most children and young people in Kent is good. Appropriate action has been taken to reduce substance and alcohol misuse and projects such as the Sunlight Project, which provides support for children and young people of substance misusing parents, have been set up to help. There has been increased participation in drug intervention and support programmes and effective joint commissioning arrangements are in place. There is a responsive substance abuse service for young people known to the Youth Offending Team (YOT).

Local services are proactive in seeking to provide information and advice about healthy living to children and young people. A recent survey by the Children and Young People's Partnership showed that awareness about healthy lifestyles is high. A county wide group has been established to oversee the promotion of healthy eating and to combat obesity. Contrary to national trends, there has been an increase of 10% in the take up of school meals. The council is on track to exceed its targets for the number of schools achieving the Healthy Schools Award. Some 71% of Kent schools are engaged with the Healthy Schools Programme, 95% are committed to the programme and 34% have already achieved the new enhanced national standard. This is better performance than similar councils and above the national average.

Positive health outcomes are being delivered through the children's centres with evidence of more children accessing speech and language therapy services. Schools are on track to meet national targets for 5- to 16-year-olds engaging in two hours of high quality sport and physical education per week and around one in four schools already offer three or more hours of good quality physical exercise per week. Parents and carers receive good support to keep their children healthy. The majority of General Practitioner practices provide child surveillance services; immunisation rates are generally good and above England averages.

The teenage conception rate is slightly below the national average. However the rate of change is modest and makes the government's 2010 target particularly challenging. The work of the Kent Teenage Pregnancy partnership includes a focus on targeted action in the most disadvantaged areas where there has been some success although there remain areas where this is not yet effective. Sex and relationships education is improving and the council is continuing to develop initiatives including school based youth workers supporting personal, social and health education programmes.

Good progress has been achieved in delivering comprehensive CAMHS and in increasing the level of services provided. Developing a CAMHS strategy has been the priority for this year and will serve to strengthen joint commissioning opportunities at both the local and strategic levels. Access to services for 16- to 17-year-olds requiring CAMHS has improved and waiting times for CAMHS Services are in general lower than the England average. The speed of response from CAMHS for young offenders has improved with 83% of acute cases being referred within 5 days, up from 19.6% in 2005/6. Tier 1 CAMHS services have been expanded this year through provision from children's centres. The emotional well-being of children is being

addressed through the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme which has been implemented by 25% of primary schools.

The Fostering Inspection in 2007 was positive about health outcomes for looked after children and young people. Similarly, the recent Kent Survey of children and young people showed a positive response from 11 to 16 year old looked after children about their health. However, the timely completion of health and dental assessments for looked after children and young people has declined further this year and shows the lowest performance nationally. In part the council reports that this is due to non-participation by looked after children and young people. The council and its Primary Care Trust partners further anticipate that recent and significantly improved data collection arrangements will show greatly improved performance.

Early Support and intervention services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are being improved by delivery through seven established Local Implementation Groups. Two more planned Implementation Groups will provide county wide coverage.

### **Areas for development**

- Continue implementation of the CAMHS strategy.
- Improve the timely completion of health and dental assessments for looked after children and young people and the collection of data on this indicator.
- Continue to focus activity to reduce teenage conceptions in those areas where the rate has not reduced.

## **Staying safe**

## **Grade 3**

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

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

The council makes a good contribution to promoting the safety of children and young people. A very good reduction has been achieved in the number of children aged 0 to 15 killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents. Many interventions contribute to safe play, work and travel for children and young people, such as the Small Steps programme which gives pedestrian safety knowledge and skills to pupils from Year 2 onward by providing on the road training.

All schools and 95% of early years settings inspected have been judged as satisfactory or better in ensuring children and young people stay safe. According to the Kent survey of children and young people around two thirds of pupils in Kent do not feel they have been bullied. Effective responses to bullying are in place. Kent Safe Schools have engaged with 6,500 children and young people through a further

online pupil survey on bullying which resulted in an anti-bullying strategy and the appointment of an anti-bullying co-ordinator.

An innovative Young People's Safety Forum which includes Kent Youth County Council, Medway Youth Parliament, the Fire Service, Kent Police and Kent Safe Schools, works with children and young people to raise awareness and enable them to identify issues of personal safety and devise ways of tackling them. Helpful support and advice is being provided to all parents through a parenting handbook and a similar teenage parenting handbook is also being made available for young families. Services to respond to the impact of domestic violence on children and young people have been expanded over the last year. A 24-hour domestic abuse information line is operating and Domestic Violence Safe Schools Project Officer posts are being piloted.

There was an 11% reduction in referrals of children in need to children's social care services in 2006/07; the overall percentage in relation to the population being lower than for comparator authorities and England. The council considers this reduction is due to changes in the recording of referrals and greater clarity about thresholds among partner agencies.

Of those referrals which went on to have an initial assessment, 75.3% were completed on time; this is higher than comparator councils and the national average. At 84% the numbers of core assessments completed within the required timescales is also higher. There has been a significant fall in the number of repeat referrals within 12 months of the previous referral, and this is now well below comparator councils and the national average. This suggests that the focus on timely assessments and clarity of thresholds is achieving a more appropriate response to those children and young people who need a service.

However, despite the overall reduction in numbers of referrals there has been a significant rise in the numbers of children and young people placed on the Child Protection Register. Fewer initial case conferences were held within the required timescales. There has also been a significant rise in the number of child protection re-registrations although this is within the acceptable performance band. All children and young people on the Child Protection Register are allocated to a qualified social worker and almost all child protection reviews (98.4%) take place on time.

The timeliness of initial child protection conferences has deteriorated and is now below comparator councils and national average. The council has however begun to take steps to address this.

Agencies work well together and there is strong interagency collaboration to safeguard children and young people. As well as the overarching Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB) three local safeguarding committees are in place. The KSCB has an effective business plan which ensures that good progress is being made on key priorities. New child protection procedures have been produced and interagency training is being reviewed to ensure that it is addressing local needs. The Board has

endorsed a private fostering statement of practice and received an annual report about private fostering. Appropriate protocols for children and young people missing from foster care, residential care and home have been discussed and agreed. Serious case reviews have been independently conducted and the lessons from them have been taken forward by the KSCB.

Kent's 'Staying Together' projects have been successful in reducing the number of looked after children and young people. The number of looked after children and young people has reduced this year and is now slightly below comparator authorities and well below the England average. Effective measures are in place to support families and to prevent children and young people becoming looked after. Kinship care is promoted and family group conferencing has been made mandatory for all children aged 10 or younger who are at risk of care proceedings or of living in inadequate accommodation. There was very good performance in the timeliness of the reviews of looked after children and young people. Placement stability both long and short term is good. At 92.5%, most looked after children and young people are in foster care or placed for adoption. The percentage of looked after children and young people adopted in the year has increased greatly and is very good. Projects like the multi-dimensional treatment foster care programme are enhancing foster carers skills particularly for looking after children and young people who have complex emotional needs.

Procedures for ensuring that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are effectively safeguarded have improved. A protocol has been introduced to ensure all professionals are aware of the risks and are better able to identify concerns. Three resource centres are being opened to provide respite and community services for children and young people with severe learning and physical disabilities and their families/carers; the first centre opened in October 2006 and a second centre (managed in partnership with the Children's Society) is due to open in December 2007. Parents and young people have been linked into the planning and delivery of these services and are represented on their management boards. Over 90% of children and young people with a disability have a transition plan to support their move to adult services.

### **Areas for development**

- Improve the timeliness of initial child protection conferences.
- Improve interventions and decision making for children on the Child Protection Register to reduce the number of re-registrations within 12 months.

## Enjoying and achieving

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.

Early Years provision promotes young children's development and well-being and helps them work toward achieving the early learning goals. Outcomes in the Foundation Stage are broadly in line with those nationally although the proportion of children meeting the early learning goals in reading and writing is below the national figures. The achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the median score has narrowed and is better than the national picture. There are fewer actions imposed on registration than occur nationally. The authority continues to make progress in delivering the ambitious target number of children's centres in a timely way.

Results at Key Stage 1 are broadly in line with the national average. Writing remains below average although mathematics improved in 2006. At Key Stage 2, results are broadly average but improving in both English and mathematics. Value added measures from Key Stage 1 to 2 are similar to the national average and are slightly above between Key Stages 2 and 3. Results at Key Stage 3 are in line with the national averages in all three subjects. The improved results in mathematics and science, in 2006, reflect the improving trend nationally. GCSE results are above the national average and improving in line with the national trend. Value added measures are above average from Key Stage 2 to 4, demonstrating pupils make good progress between these points.

Most minority ethnic, vulnerable and other groups of children and young people make similar progress to that of other children and young people in the county. The proportion of looked after children and young people who do not sit any examinations has reduced significantly and is now closer to the national average. The proportion of looked after children who leave care with one GCSE is better than the national picture. While the overall attainment of children and young people in care continues to be lower than the average for other children and young people in Kent, the gap is closing. Improving the attainment of these children and young people is a high priority and is included as a target for improvement in the Children and Young People's Plan.

The proportion of schools causing concern has continued to fall, particularly those that require special measures, although the proportion given a notice to improve is greater than the national figures. The local authority has taken rigorous action to identify, challenge and support these schools and this has resulted in significantly fewer learners experiencing an inadequate standard of education. Monitoring letters for schools in categories of concern indicate good support overall from the local authority, resulting in most schools making satisfactory or better progress in addressing the identified areas of weakness. The percentage of schools where

standards remain below the government's floor targets is reducing as a result of well targeted support programmes, such as the intensifying support programme, and is better than the national figures and those of other similar councils.

School attendance is close to the national average for both primary and secondary schools. The authority has brought in more rigorous procedures to ensure that schools report attendance accurately. This greater accuracy, however, has led to unauthorised absence for secondary schools rising to above average in 2006, having been below average for many years. Children and young people in care tend to have less regular attendance and this has been a factor in the increasing percentage who miss at least 25 days schooling a year. The council recognises this as a concern and is deploying resources effectively to improve attendance for this group of vulnerable children and young people. Attendance rates are starting to show some improvement.

Behaviour is judged good or better in the majority of schools inspected. Rates of permanent exclusion are above average although recent unvalidated data indicates a reduction in permanent exclusions as a result of carefully targeted intervention. The proportion of fixed term exclusions remains above average for both primary and secondary schools.

The council is taking effective steps to encourage collaboration between schools through the development of 23 school cluster groups. Some of these collaborative arrangements have already been effective in raising standards and in improving the quality of educational provision for children and young people. An independent report commissioned by the council confirmed that cluster arrangements were providing value for money and using resources well.

The Kent Local Area Agreement includes a priority to improve participation and engagement of children and young people in sporting, cultural and community activities. Each district council has supported projects which have improved participation in a variety of leisure and recreational activities. The views and wishes of children and young people are regularly sought and responded to, and actions are taken to enable those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to share their experiences and contribute to service development.

### **Areas for development**

- Reduce persistent absence from education, particularly for looked after children and young people in the 14 to 19 age group.
- Continue to improve attainment in primary schools.
- Reduce the number of fixed term and permanent exclusions.

## Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

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

Effective strategies are in place to seek the views of children and young people. The council has undertaken a comprehensive survey of the views of young people across the county and analysis of the results has been used appropriately to inform developments in services. Children and young people have good opportunities to participate in decision making processes. Over half of 7 to 11 year olds and more than two thirds of 11 to 16 year olds think they have a say in what happens in their schools. The council has continued to make good progress in providing activities for children and young people beyond the normal school day. Progress has been sustained in developing the ambitious target number of children's centres.

Inspection evidence shows that pupils make a positive contribution in most of the schools inspected. Although a lower proportion of secondary schools were judged good or better in this aspect than in other similar authorities, more schools were judged outstanding.

The council is at an advanced stage in developing an ambitious parenting strategy. A pilot project, which builds on the successful family liaison officer programme, provides school based Parent Support Advisers to reduce barriers to learning and to improve parental engagement. Vulnerable groups of children and young people, and those at risk, are being provided with mentor support and the council is actively encouraging its own staff to participate as mentors in these programmes.

Good use has been made of Youth Challenge and Youth Opportunities funds to develop a range of media and arts projects. The proportion of young people aged 13 to 19 reached by publicly funded youth services has continued to increase, with over 16% more young people reached by these services in 2005–2006. Figures are now above the national target and in line with the national average.

The Kent Youth Offending Team has shown consistent improvement in performance over recent years but the rate of re-offending, although improved, remains above the national average and that of similar authorities. Nearly all children and young people who were referred to the Power Projects in Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks have not re-offended.

The proportion of looked after children and young people who participated in statutory reviews, which was identified as a priority for improvement last year, has improved from well below to in line with the national average.



## Area for development

- Continue to reduce the rate of re-offending.

## 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.

The council has continued its innovative approach to inspire and motivate young people at Key Stage 4. It has continued to make good progress from a low base in the development of its vocational programme and the development of diplomas as part of the national 14–19 strategy. Curriculum provision has been broadened which has resulted in a significant increase in the number of young people following courses leading to a Level 1 or Level 2 vocational qualification. This has been assisted in some areas by investment in local vocational centres and school vocational centre projects.

There has been a year-on-year increase in the number of young people completing an apprenticeship and the percentage of young people who achieve a Level 2 qualification by age 19 has risen to above the national average but is below the average for statistical neighbours. The proportion of young people achieving a Level 3 qualification by age 19 has also risen and is above both comparators.

School inspection judgements show that the extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being is good or better in around half of primary schools and around two thirds of secondary schools. This is in line with the picture in other similar authorities.

The proportion of children and young people aged 16 to 18 who are in education, training or employment varies across the county and remains above the national figures. The council has targeted areas where the figure has been particularly low and this has had a positive impact on improving this indicator. The proportion of looked after children and care leavers who are in education or training is also improving and is above comparators.

The council works successfully with the Learning and Skills Council and other service providers to ensure that children and young people are well informed at all key transition points. The move of Connexions services to the council is being managed well and is on track to be completed over the planned two year period.

There has been a high take up of childcare places and the council is seeking ways to encourage other parents to take advantage of these services to enable more parents to return to employment.

The proportion of care leavers age 19 who are living in suitable accommodation, which was an identified area for improvement last year, has improved but remains below comparators. The council runs a dedicated Supported Accommodation scheme for vulnerable young people and is developing an accommodation strategy across the 12 district councils that are responsible for providing access to suitable affordable accommodation.

### **Areas for development**

- Continue to work with District Councils to improve the provision of appropriate housing for the most vulnerable.
- Improve the proportion of young people achieving a Level 2 qualification by age 19.

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

**Grade 4**

The council has outstanding capacity to improve its services for children and young people and its management of these services is outstanding.

The ambitions and priorities of the council are based on extensive research, analysis of data, and consultation with children, young people and other stakeholders. Thorough analysis identifies strengths and areas for development and weaknesses are prioritised and strategies put in place to bring about improvement. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) identifies clear targets for each of the five outcome areas and includes a realistic assessment and identification of the resources required to implement its strategies.

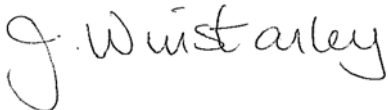
The council has made significant progress in the implementation and review of its CYPP. Children's Social Services and Children's Health Services are becoming embedded within the new Children, Families and Education Directorate. This has provided very good opportunities for collaborative working and innovative approaches to service development and commissioning. Partnership working is continuing to develop and children and young people have a real say in how services are developed and delivered.

Robust measures have been implemented to address all areas of concern. Through good service management almost all of the areas for improvement identified by the 2006 APA have been successfully addressed and those requiring further improvement remain key priorities in the council's Children and Young People Plan, including the accommodation of care leavers and the health assessments and attendance of looked after children and young people. The council has reviewed how looked after children and young people are supported and this has resulted in improved working practices and the adoption of a "Corporate Parents pledge".

Decision making processes are transparent, based on secure information, and anticipate need. Identifying opportunities and associated risks is fundamental to the council's planning. The council continues to give priority to preventative services. The establishment of the Kent Children's Trust (County Board) and four local "pathfinder" trusts are developing locally based commissioning of preventative services. Investors in People re-accreditation in December 2006 recognised business planning and performance management as strengths, both areas which were identified as strengths in the 2006 APA. The council has robust financial planning and sound budgetary controls as a result of rigorous reporting and review mechanisms.

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