

26 November 2007

Mrs Judith Pettersen
Director of Children's Services and Lifelong Learning
London Borough of Hounslow
Children's Services and Lifelong Learning
The Civic Centre
Lampton Road
Hounslow
Middlesex TW3 4DN

Dear Mrs Pettersen

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF HOUNSLOW

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 where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. Information and comments drawn from the Tellus2 survey of the views of children and young people and the Audit Commission's school survey have also been taken into account. 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

Hounslow Council consistently delivers good services to children and young people. The council has continued to make good progress in most aspects of its work since the joint area review (JAR) in 2006. This has been possible because of the high priority placed on preventative action and shared responsibility with partners for improvements to services. Partners work well together through an ethos of mutual trust. They interrogate weaknesses and build upon the things that they know work best. The council's capacity to improve, including the management of children's services, is now good.

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. Services are working together effectively to enable parents and carers to receive support to keep their children healthy, and healthy lifestyles are promoted for children and young people. The percentage of babies with low birth weight is lower than in similar areas, and immunisation rates are higher. However,

smoking during pregnancy has not reduced, and the proportion of mothers initiating breast-feeding is lower than in similar areas, although still higher than the national average. There is now a dedicated midwife for smoking cessation and activity is being targeted towards ethnic groups with high smoking rates. Teenage pregnancy rates have fallen considerably and are now below the national average. Oral health of five year olds has improved from being very poor to just above the national average. Almost all schools are participating in the National Healthy Schools Programme, and progress is on track to achieve the December 2007 target. School inspections found that most schools were good or outstanding in enabling learners to be healthy.

Good progress is being made towards a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Protocols and plans are in place for all aspects of this service, and are being implemented. The reconfiguration of CAMHS services has increased access to children and families and also to other professionals. Robust management action has been taken to ensure that assessments for young offenders are timely, following some delays in 2006. Substance misuse services are well used by young people and provide a good range of information, treatment and support. Poor performance in the service provided to young offenders was identified and the contract has now been brought in-house; recent figures show marked improvement in assessment times. Hounslow Primary Care Trust is now responsible for the commissioning of healthcare services to young men at Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre, and there is much closer monitoring of services. All young men are now screened for primary and secondary healthcare needs including immunisations and vaccinations, and mental health and substance misuse services are provided.

Health assessments for looked after children and young people are consistently at a very good level. There is a dedicated health team for looked after children and health action plans are tracked and monitored monthly for all looked after children. The looked after children nurse has recently won an external award for the high quality of her work. Access to services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well coordinated, and staffing levels have been increased to support transition arrangements. A parenting course is available for children diagnosed with autism, and mental health support is being increased to address the needs of an increasing number of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Area(s) for development

- Sustain the improvement in reducing the rate of teenage pregnancy.
- Reduce the proportion of expectant mothers who smoke during pregnancy, and increase the proportion of women initiating breast-feeding.

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 number of children killed or seriously injured on the roads has reduced by 69% from the baseline figure, and is better than the England average. In the Tellus2 survey 67% of respondents said that they felt very/quite safe around the local area; this is below the national average of 74%. The Audit Commission school survey also reported that local services needed to be more effective in reducing the fear of crime in children and young people.

Assessment and care management processes are good. The percentage of referrals leading to initial assessments has increased, as has the number of core assessments, and performance on timeliness has also increased in line with national averages. The re-referral rate is consistently low, indicating that referrals are appropriate. All children on the child protection register have allocated social workers and all cases are reviewed on time. The registration rate is relatively high but reducing; the council has analysed prevalence rates for registration and is developing preventative work which particularly targets domestic violence, and also focuses on Black and minority ethnic groups with higher levels of registration. Re-registrations have improved to a satisfactory level and the timeliness of de-registrations is good.

School inspections found that most schools were good or outstanding in ensuring that learners stay safe. The council has made it a priority to address bullying and discrimination and has produced comprehensive policy guidance for schools and parents, which is yet to have significant impact; in the Tellus2 survey 31% of pupils reported that schools didn't deal with bullying very well, a figure similar to the national average. The council has recently won an award for its Learning to Respect scheme that has helped over 2,000 schoolchildren explore issues around domestic violence and abusive relationships. Although the number of early years providers is small, a higher than average number were found to be unsatisfactory. These issues have now been addressed and strategies have been developed to increase the amount of good and outstanding provision.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) had a slow start with relatively poor attendance. The Director of Children's Services and Lifelong Learning chairs the Board. Seven sub-groups have been established with good representation from different agencies, and attendance has recently improved at Board meetings. There has been one serious case review report to the LSCB and learning has been disseminated across individual agencies and through LSCB training. A recent report was presented to the LSCB regarding safeguarding at Feltham Young Offender Institution, which has two social workers seconded from Hounslow. The council reports that there has been significant positive cultural change at Feltham in the last two to three years, and the report shows a significant drop in allegations against staff. Initial feedback from the recent inspection at Feltham has been very positive.

All looked after children and young people have an allocated social worker; the timeliness of reviews has improved and is now at a good level. Placement stability is consistently very good and there is continued high performance in the ratio of looked after children who are adopted. There is a very low incidence of disrupted adoptive placements. The council is continuing to increase the number of local foster carers enabling most newly looked after children to be placed within twenty miles of home. Inspections of the local authority adoption and fostering services have assessed outcomes for looked after children and young people as good. Over 90% of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have a transition plan, and this has been the case for the last three years.

Area(s) for development

- Work with other agencies to address the issues raised by children and young people who report that they do not feel safe in the area.
- Continue to support early years providers to increase the proportion of good and outstanding provision.
- Strengthen the impact of the LSCB by ensuring good multi-agency commitment and clear follow-through of decision-making.

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. Actions taken by the council over the past year have resulted in improved standards of attainment and rates of attendance, and a decline in the proportion of those educated out of the borough. In the recent Tellus2 survey, the proportion of children and young people in Hounslow that say they enjoy school is higher than the national average. They have access to a wide range of recreational and leisure activities through youth centres and schools.

The council knows its schools very well and is developing a more strategic approach to ensuring the responsibilities and accountability of both parties. This is illustrated by the closer partnership of schools in addressing issues of curriculum design and exclusion. As a result, although still too high, there are early signs that the number of young people excluded from secondary schools is declining. Two schools were given a notice to improve in recent inspections and there are no schools in the borough requiring special measures. This compares favourably with schools nationally and in similar circumstances. Over the past year the council has supported schools to track the progress of different groups more effectively. This is beginning to make a difference to the way in which schools set targets and how they support those who are identified as underachieving.

The JAR report in 2006 stated that children and young people's achievement had risen steadily across all key stages and often at a greater rate than nationally. This is

still the case. As a result, standards have reached national averages and the progress that children and young people make from their starting points is slightly above national expectations for children and young people of all ages.

At the end of the Foundation Stage pupils reach standards that are in line with national averages but with wide variations, revealing some underachievement for the youngest pupils. The Early Childhood and Childcare Services is currently piloting work with schools and childcare providers in preparation for requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage. When compared to similar councils, pupils in Key Stage 1 achieve higher standards in writing and mathematics and those in Key Stage 2 do better in science. There are wide variations between schools in the amount of progress made from Key Stages 2 to 4 and from Key Stages 3 to 4. The attainment of boys, pupils from White and mixed British backgrounds, as well as for those of Somali and Traveller heritages is below that of other pupils. Children and young people who are looked after by the council and many with a learning difficulty and/or disability make good progress. The proportion of children and young people achieving 5+A* to C was above national averages as well as above those for similar councils for the first time in 2006.

Attendance rates are now in line with national averages with attendance at secondary schools slightly higher than that in primary schools. Unauthorised absence in primary schools is too high but represents a vigorous approach to only authorising absence for acceptable reasons. Children and young people excluded from school do not all receive their entitlement to full-time education; current provision compares poorly to that in other local councils. This is being addressed so that excluded children and young people receive full-time tuition through the Pupil Referral Service (PRS). Periods of exclusion for those with statements are also higher than expected nationally with an increase in the past year but this figure was affected by difficulties in one particular school that has now closed.

The number of new statements of special educational need has reduced over the past year as a result of delegating funds to schools to support some aspects of learning difficulties and disabilities. This is helping to address the high proportion of children and young people with statements compared to similar councils and national averages. The proportion of statements completed within time scales is too low and not improving.

Area(s) for development

- Further reduce the proportion of children and young people excluded from school.
- Improve the analysis of data so that schools are supported in evaluating the reasons for children and young people's progress as well as reasons for underachievement.

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. The 2006 JAR report recommended that the council increase the participation of all children and young people. The council has taken this on board in a systematic and thorough way as shown by the high profile of young people's views in the new Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). The council feels that a listening and consultation culture is developing. The young people report more of a mixed view through the Tellus2 survey. They feel that their views contribute to decision-making but are less positive about how they are listened to in the running of their school. At the top of their list for improvements to their areas are safer neighbourhoods with less crime, and a cleaner environment with less litter. In general, recent consultations show that the views, worries and aspirations of young people mirror those of the adults in Hounslow. Their views are represented in council meetings and reported back through secondary school councils by Young Ambassadors. Representatives are also invited to attend the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel for some agenda items. Young people are keen to make the most of opportunities offered, such as establishing the PEEPS Panel (named by the group and short for the Young People's Education and Empowerment Programmes Panel). This group are responsible for gaining finance through bids and distributing funding. Children and young people that are looked after by the council are similarly active within the community, with 30 accredited as Total Respect Trainers, some working at a national level. Young people with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities were consulted during reviews of the PRS and Connexions Service. However, the council is mindful of the need to gather the views of this group more systematically so that they can have a greater influence on services.

The council places high priority on strategies that will prevent and deter children and young people from crime and anti-social behaviour. As a result of carefully targeted support and monitoring, there has been a significant reduction in anti-social behaviour and crime in some areas, helping children and young people to maintain stability in their lives and education. The detached outreach team and children's centres play a key strategic role in this respect, working in identified hot-spots and liaising closely with schools, the youth service and Connexions service. For example, there is a programme to support the social and emotional development of young children in preparation for starting school.

This has been an unsettled year for the Youth Offending Service. Difficulties with recruitment and management of information have meant that the full range of support has not always been available for those who need it most, resulting in an uncharacteristic dip in performance last year. There was an increase in those who re-offend, although this still represents an overall reduction over time when compared to the national picture. The number of young people offending for the first time varies from year to year but is consistently below that for similar councils.

Area(s) for development

- Develop strategies to gather the views of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Strengthen the strategic working of the Youth Offending Service, particularly making more effective use of resources.

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 Tellus2 survey shows that young people in Hounslow have high aspirations to attend university. There is a higher proportion of young people in full-time education compared to nationally. The council has a strong focus on strategies that will help young people to successfully access appropriate courses so that they can further their education, develop skills and improve their prospects for employment. Those who are looked after by the council are particularly well supported through coordinated work to support and encourage their goals and aspirations. This includes good opportunities for them to develop independence and life-skills. As a result, the proportion engaged successfully in education, employment or training is high and they also benefit from suitable housing.

The proportion of young people not in employment, education or training increased in 2006 but this is against the trend of the past two years. Information available so far for 2007 shows that the council has reversed the downward trend and is on track to meet its targets. When compared to similar councils the proportions of young people not engaged in employment, education or training are higher for young mothers, young people with a learning difficulty and/or disability, and those from White and mixed ethnic backgrounds.

The council's strategy for developing the curriculum for 14 to 19 year olds is developing well. The work of the new Education Improvement Partnership has been positively received by schools and has developed strong links with West Thames College. The partnership has successfully addressed previous weaknesses in coordinating the provision and has successfully applied to deliver two diploma courses in the future. The council acknowledges that there is more work to do to ensure that young people can participate in a broad and coordinated curriculum throughout the borough. There has been an increase in apprenticeships with an above average completion rate this year. The standards that students attain at A level are below the national average but the progress that they make, particularly those with lower grades for GCSE, has improved steadily over the last four years. Success rates for those following work-based learning courses are below national averages and those with a learning difficulty and/or disability do not have sufficient access to these placements. However, the council has responded to this issue as highlighted in the 2006 JAR report by increasing dedicated posts within the Connexions Service from one to three, with a fourth planned to work specifically with the PRS.

The economic well-being of young children is supported by an increasing availability of childcare provision, especially for full-time day care. The council has a clear strategy to increase provision in areas of greatest need and is sensitive to the particular circumstances of vulnerable groups such as those who are newly arrived to this country.

Area(s) for development

- Further reduce the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training.
- Broaden the range of curriculum opportunities for those aged 14 to 19 through extended collaboration of schools.

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

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council has good capacity to improve its services for children and young people. Its management of these services is strong. There is effective senior leadership and good corporate support for improving children's services provision. The CYPP 2007-2010 is comprehensive, clear and detailed and provides a good baseline for measuring improvement, although it would benefit from more information on financial resourcing. The council is clear in its vision and is focusing on prevention and early intervention. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership has been restructured and re-launched, and services are being reshaped to align more clearly with *Every child matters* outcome areas. Partnership work is good and is being strengthened through the development of integrated working and joint commissioning. Positive partnership working with schools has supported school improvement. Young people are very much involved in service development and in staff appointments.

Following the JAR in early 2006 the council has strengthened its financial planning arrangements; accountability has been improved and budget managers are now fully involved in budget setting. The proportion of the budget spent on children in need is at a consistently good level. The average gross weekly expenditure per looked after child is relatively high, although not dissimilar to comparator councils. Gross expenditure on services to children and young people per capita appears consistently higher than other councils; the council believes that this is inaccurate and is attributable to disaggregation issues, which are now being investigated. Performance management has been much improved and monitoring is now comprehensive and frequent, allowing swift corrective action to be taken if necessary.

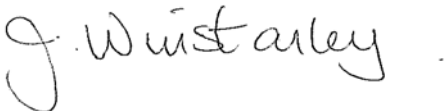
The number of vacancies for social care staff has reduced to below the national average and the number of staff leaving has similarly reduced. The number of residential childcare workers with NVQ Level 3 has been at a low level, but this issue has now been addressed and numbers are already increasing.

Area(s) for development

There are no major areas for development.

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