

26 November 2007

Mr Chris Spencer
Corporate Director of Education and Children's Services
London Borough of Hillingdon
Civic Centre
High Road
Uxbridge UB8 1UW

Dear Mr Spencer

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

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. 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 London Borough of Hillingdon delivers above minimum requirements for users in most service functions. The council has made good progress in tackling the issues for improvement recommended in the joint area review of 2006 and last year's annual performance assessment. There is clear improvement in most areas, although the pace of improvement varies. At best, it is rapid and impressive. Hillingdon is successfully closing the gap in those areas where performance has fallen below the national average, for example in the overall performance of secondary schools and few such areas remain. Good partnership working, and the targeting of resources where they are needed most, have been effective in improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people, including the most vulnerable. There is a clear and ambitious vision for children and young people which is shared by officers, members and partner agencies.

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.

There is a strong partnership between the council and the Primary Care Trust (PCT) at both strategic and operational levels. The PCT's budget deficit is being firmly tackled; services to keep children healthy are unaffected by the PCT's measures to deal with the deficit and are being further developed. A good range of initiatives in schools, such as the school travel plan programme, and services provided by the PCT helps parents and carers to keep children and young people healthy. A parenting commissioner has been appointed and the parenting strategy group is to map the provision of support for parenting in schools and early years settings.

The council is upgrading the local Travellers' site and is providing better health information and advice. This is being coordinated by a new inter-agency Traveller and Gypsy Forum, which includes user representation. These developments have contributed well to improvements in the health of Traveller communities.

There is a wide range of initiatives, and activities, to promote healthy lifestyles. For example, the Healthy Hillingdon partnership provides good information and has successfully established projects to tackle health issues, particularly in the south of the borough. The partnership's initiatives are having a positive impact. Inspections show that early years settings, and schools, make generally good provision to promote the health of children and young people and in primary schools the provision is often outstanding. Many schools provide healthy eating and physical activity programmes. The number achieving Healthy Schools Status has increased, but is currently significantly below national and comparator group averages. Intensive support is being provided to 17 schools to help them towards the Healthy Schools standard, which they are expected to achieve by the end of the year.

A new policy has been implemented, supported by staff training, to target the low rates of mothers who initiate breast-feeding. Most early years services provide well for the health of children attending and 98% of general practitioners provide child health surveillance services. A good range of sexual health information, and initiatives, have contributed to a reduction in teenage pregnancies since 2003. Although still higher than the national average, rates of teenage pregnancy have declined in line with national average and absolute rates are in line with similar areas. However, progress towards the target for 2010 is slow. Almost half of those children and young people who responded to the Tellus2 survey felt they would like better, and more, information on sex and relationships.

There has been good progress toward developing a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Stronger links between the Youth Offending Service and CAMHS has led to significant improvement in the assessment, and referral, of young people with mental health issues and substance misuse needs. Services for 16- to 18-year-olds requiring mental health support are good and partnership working is in place for persistent, and complex, cases. Twenty-four hour cover is in place and specialist health assessments are undertaken within 24 hours.

The mental and physical health of looked after children and young people is well promoted. Nominated staff in schools track their academic progress and dedicated school nurses deal with their health needs. High proportions of looked after children and young people receive annual health checks, immunisations and dental care; this is above the national average and that of similar areas.

There is a good level of support for children and young people who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families. This has been improved in response to a review of their needs; for example, through the appointment of a multi-agency early years co-ordinator, and the child development centre which supports children on the autistic spectrum.

Areas for development

- Increase the numbers of schools achieving Healthy Schools Status.
- Reduce levels of teenage pregnancy and improve availability of information on sex and relationships for young people.

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 Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is strong and well established with a wide range of multi-agency representation. It is well informed and up-to-date in practice. There are effective measures to check, audit and monitor performance and systems for consultation are well established. As a result, there is good strategic direction on safeguarding issues. A diverse range of sub-groups of the LSCB have clear remits to take forward specific areas of work. For example, a training sub-group ensures that good multi-agency training is provided and continually developed.

Hillingdon works well with other agencies, in particular the Police and the PCT, to ensure there are safe protocols and practices to safeguard the high numbers of vulnerable children. There are good protocols to deal with children and young people missing from care and from education, and an officer has been appointed to track children and young people missing from school.

Safer neighbourhood teams together with Police Ward Panels and Parks Patrol teams contribute well to providing a safe environment. The Tellus2 survey showed that, on average, children and young people in Hillingdon felt less safe around the local area, on public transport and going to school than elsewhere in the country. The council responded promptly to children and young people's concerns about public transport by appointing 18 community safety officers to travel with them. It has also developed an anti-bullying strategy, a policy to deal with harassment and appointed

an anti-bullying co-ordinator and steering group. Most early years provision makes good practical arrangements for the safety of children that attend and inspection reports show there are some providers of day care and childminding with outstanding safety arrangements.

There has been good progress in developing the common assessment framework and the role of the lead professional. Partnership working, to tackle domestic violence, is improving; there is a dedicated worker in schools and more multi-agency training.

Data shows that the outcomes for safeguarding children and young people are better than those found nationally or in similar areas in several aspects; for example, the low percentage of repeat referrals, the timeliness of initial child protection conferences and the review of child protection conferences within timescales. In 2005–06 just over half of core assessments were completed within timescales, significantly below average. However, a significant increase is projected for 2006–07 which would bring performance to an acceptable level.

All children and young people on the Child Protection Register have allocated qualified social workers and all looked after children and young people have allocated workers. Although not all are qualified, the council takes care to ensure they have the necessary skills and relevant experience to work with the high numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people. A clear, and robust, system is in place to make sure those who have need of a qualified worker are allocated one. The high numbers of looked after children and young people, particularly unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people, make recruitment of sufficient qualified staff a challenge.

The number of looked after children and young people have reduced significantly. Resultant savings have been reinvested to further develop initiatives to prevent children coming into care. A review of fostering has led to improved borough-wide structures. For example, new foster carers have been commissioned to provide for children and young people with a high level of need and this means that the number in residential care are significantly lower than elsewhere. Placements are stable and the proportion of children and young people placed for adoption is greater than nationally and in similar areas. High levels of care leavers have pathway plans, and there are good links between children and adult services.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well safeguarded. Outreach support and access to direct payments have increased. A purpose built children's respite centre is now established. There is a transitions protocol for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progressing to adult services and a pilot transition planning scheme for those aged 14 and above. A very high proportion of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have transition plans.

Area for development

- Improve the timeliness of core assessments.

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. There have been significant, and swift, improvements in important areas and good progress has been made in closing the gap between the highest and lowest performing schools.

Young children get off to a good start in Hillingdon's early years settings, where inspections found that provision is good. The proportion of children reaching the expected standard in the Foundation Stage profile has increased year on year and in 2007 exceeded the council's target. Support for parents of young children has also improved and the wide range of classes, and support groups, is increasingly well used. The evaluation of the impact of a national project being carried out in Hillingdon to improve young children's social skills (Playing and Learning to Socialise) shows positive results.

Performance at Key Stage 1 is above the national average, but the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels is lower. Performance at Key Stage 2 is in line with the national average in mathematics and science and there was a good improvement in English this year; the results are above average. The performance of primary schools has always been just above the national average. The targets set for improvement have tended to be comfortable rather than challenging but steps are being taken to make target setting more rigorous and to set a greater challenge for schools.

The picture at secondary level, however, is one of rapid improvement. The impact of the work of the restructured, and strengthened, school improvement team shows in the substantial improvements which have taken place in those secondary schools targeted for intensive support. Hillingdon had a history of under-performing secondary schools and a lack of engagement between the schools and the school improvement service. The early signs of improvement, noted at the last annual performance assessment, have rapidly been built upon. First, there has been a good rise in GCSE results; results have increased by ten percentage points in three years and the unvalidated 2007 results are in line with the national average both for the proportion gaining five good GCSEs and when mathematics and English are included. Importantly, the best improvements have come from some of the lowest performing schools, two of which have more than doubled their results this year. This is the first year in which no secondary school has failed to reach the floor targets at either key stage.

Second, there has been a significant increase in results in English at Key Stage 3 which are well above those achieved nationally. This partly stems from some well targeted work to improve boys writing. Third, there has been a shift in culture. Schools are open, and willing, to engage with the school improvement service, other local authority agencies, London Challenge and the National Strategies. All partners are working together in a co-ordinated, and sharply focused, way that is leading to rapid and noticeable improvement. Schools are beginning to share resources and expertise. Initiatives such as holiday revision sessions, provided across schools, are also seen to have had a positive impact on results.

Hillingdon has had no schools requiring special measures for two years. Three secondary schools were given a notice to improve last year and another was removed from that category but still required support. The outcome of the inspections was no surprise to the authority, which knows its schools well. The model of providing intensive, and appropriately targeted, support has proved its effectiveness at the two schools whose results improved dramatically. It has also had an impact in two others where Key Stage 3 results are better and the value added between Key Stages 2 and 3 has improved and is now average. As well as support to raise standards, the school improvement service works effectively with schools to increase the capacity of the school's leaders and managers to sustain improvements. There is a good understanding that the pendulum should not swing too far and schools become too dependent.

There has been a substantial reduction in the number of permanent exclusions. The weekly clinics, in their infancy at the time of the last annual performance assessment, have proved their worth because the level of exclusions is one quarter of what it was three years ago. This is another good example of the effectiveness of collaborative working and collective responsibility between schools and the authority. Attendance at primary schools has improved, and exceeded, the authority's target and the national average for last year. Secondary school attendance has remained static and in line with the national average but work has begun with particular schools where attendance is relatively lower.

Looked after children and young people do well in Hillingdon schools. The Looked after Children Education Team helps ensure their educational needs are well catered for and reports this year's results at Key Stage 2 were the best ever. A greater proportion of looked after young people leave school with a qualification than nationally and their attendance is excellent. Those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities do as well as similar young people across the country and those who have a statement of special educational need are more likely to leave school with some form of qualification.

Areas for development

- Strengthen target setting and speed up the rate of improvement in primary schools.

- Further close the gap between the highest and lowest performing schools.

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.

Swift, effective action was taken to address the fall in numbers of children and young people taking part in their statutory reviews; this was a weakness which was noted in the annual performance assessment last year. The council's target has been greatly exceeded and performance in this area is now very good.

Children and young people have a clear, and strong, voice in Hillingdon and there have been further improvements to the way in which they are enabled to make their views known. In over one third of schools inspected in the last year, the extent to which learners make a positive contribution was judged to be outstanding and in no instance was it found to be inadequate.

The opinions of children and young people have been given due weight in the revised Children and Young People's Plan. The Youth Council plays an important role in ensuring that young people influence decision making and provide information on important matters, through for example, its good links with individual school councils. Young people's achievements are also celebrated and accredited in a variety of ways, such as the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. A dedicated worker has been employed to try to engage those who are harder to reach with the result that there has been a fourfold increase in the number of young people reached by the youth service. The figure is now close to the national target. In order to maintain this level of improvement, council members have agreed to fund further developments in youth provision. Young people in care, and those who have recently left care are enabled to make a positive contribution to the quality of their own, and others, lives through regular meetings, training opportunities and by training others.

Following a review of provision for managing behaviour, steps were taken to implement the recommendations which included several of the *Every child matters* outcomes. Greater clarity in the structure, and leadership, of both behaviour and attendance have helped lead to the improvements in attendance and exclusions noted above. The council reports that better partnership working with the Police and the use of anti-social behaviour contracts has been particularly effective in improving young people's behaviour and preventing the need for anti-social behaviour orders.

Validated information for 2005–06 indicated that the number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system had not decreased and the proportion of repeat offenders had risen. However, recent steps taken by the council have led to a reduction in the figures for first-time offences and the council's target was significantly exceeded.

Insufficient progress has been made in reducing re-offending rates, which remain high. Steps are now being taken to analyse precisely why some young people re-offend and others do not, in order to inform the support that is provided. The proportion of young people in care who offend has fallen; these vulnerable young people are no more likely to offend than any other person.

Area for development

- Strengthen efforts to reduce 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 rapid improvement in GCSE results means that more 16 year olds are well equipped either to join the world of work or to continue with their studies. The proportion of young people who gain Level 3 qualifications is greater than average but the proportion gaining Level 2 qualifications is below average. There is an ambitious target for the proportion of young people gaining Level 2 qualifications by the age of 19 and the improved GCSE results will have gone some way towards meeting this target. In Hillingdon, fewer young people are not in education, employment or training than nationally. This includes those from vulnerable groups; the proportion of young people in work-based provision who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is better than those nationally. They are given good guidance, and support, and all have multi-agency transition plans. The proportion of looked after young people engaged in education, employment or training at the age of 19 is high.

The 14–19 strategy group gives a strong lead to developments in this area. Provision has recently been reviewed and the strategy reshaped to better reflect local needs. Collaboration between providers has improved and the authority works well with its partners to develop, and expand, the range of options for young people. Secondary schools are increasingly working well together to provide complementary educational and vocational opportunities for young people. The improvements are clear. For example, in all secondary schools, including those schools given a notice to improve, inspections judged sixth form provision to be good or outstanding.

Good steps are taken to make sure young people live in suitable accommodation and to prevent homelessness. No 16- to 17-year-olds who are looked after live in temporary accommodation and the percentage of care leavers living in suitable accommodation is higher than in similar authorities. However, young people generally feel that housing is expensive for them and the council has responded by making this a priority in their action plan. Members, for example, are to look at designating some housing specifically for single young people.

Good progress has been made in improving access to childcare. The council's survey of parents indicated that information about childcare, and access to places, has improved. Good data is held on the need for different types of childcare; the information has led to a growth of out-of-school places and provision for babies to better meet parents needs. Financial assistance has also been secured to help parents meet the cost of childcare. The Young Carers' project has continued to expand and funding has been obtained to provide training for schools and other groups across the country.

Area for development

- Increase the proportion of 19 year-olds gaining Level 2 qualifications.

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

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

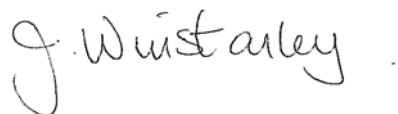
Overall, the council has made good progress in meeting the recommendations from the joint area review and annual performance assessment and it has good capacity to sustain this and improve further its services for children and young people.

The senior leadership team is strong and experienced and middle managers are capable and enthusiastic. There is a clear commitment to further improvement. The council is well placed to take forward its ambitious and challenging agenda that is clearly focused on improving the lives of children and young people. The council is a good corporate parent; looked after children and young people do well in Hillingdon. Good relationships and effective work in partnership with other agencies at both a strategic and operational level are strong features of the council's work.

The thorough review of the 2006 plan for children and young people and the action plan arising from it have clarified and sharpened priorities. The integrated services structure is well embedded. There is a good track record of targeting resources well and of secure financial management so that services are sustained and improved even in the light of the need to make significant savings.

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 dark ink, reading "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection