

26 November 2007

Paul Clark
Corporate Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Harrow
Civic Centre
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Dear Mr Clark

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

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 (CYPP), your action plan arising from the joint area review (JAR) and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. The letter comments on progress since the recent JAR. 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 contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people is good. The council has responded positively to the recommendations raised in the JAR report and has made significant progress since that time. In particular, outcomes for being healthy have improved and the council's contribution to improving outcomes in this aspect is now good. The contribution the council makes towards improving outcomes for enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being remain good. The contribution to staying safe remains adequate, although there is clear evidence that the council has made changes in the management of social care services for children and young people and that these are beginning to have a positive effect on outcomes. Overall, the council has taken significant steps to improve integrated working in the new children's services department and there is a good commitment to improving all services.

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 aspect is good. Two recommendations emerged from the JAR.

For action in the next six months

- The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) should develop links between school counselling arrangements and specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to ensure quality assurance, proper supervision and a more integrated service.
- The CYPSP should establish a forum for regular consultation with families of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Since the JAR the primary care trust and its partners have made considerable progress on improving outcomes for children and young people. The percentage of expectant mothers smoking has fallen steadily and is much better than the England average. The proportion of mothers initiating breast-feeding has risen year on year and is now also significantly better than the England average. Immunisation rates for children at their second and fifth birthdays have improved and are above national comparators. The percentage of deaths of children and young people under 15 has fallen from its 1998/2000 baseline and is now in line with similar authorities.

The council's provision through CAMHS has improved, although there is more to be done to ensure that a full range of services is in place. Waiting times for CAMHS are now considerably below the England average. The percentage of mental health in-patients aged under 18 on CAMHS wards is in line with the England average. The proportion of young people under 18 in substance misuse treatment is significantly better than the England average. The percentage of annual health assessments for looked after children is also better than the England average. Childcare registration and inspection actions on standards that relate to health requirements are in line with the England average. Evidence from section 5 school inspections suggests that the extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy is better than the England average.

The council and the primary care trust have made steady progress in developing an action plan to improve specialist CAMHS. A service level agreement for family therapy has been agreed with the involvement of school heads. The project has now been set up in two primary schools and one high school and the success of this work is being carefully monitored. Structures are in place for the development of a comprehensive CAMHS across the council and there are plans for this to be fully implemented with trained and qualified staff and, protocols in place, by April 2008. Services for 16 and 17 year olds with learning difficulties are already fully in place. There is now an established CAMHS for children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Referrals to CAMHS from the youth offending team (YOT) are low. This is because good clinical provision within the team is effective and only the most complex cases which cannot be managed within the team are referred to CAMHS.

The council has an established system to consult with parents and carers of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through the council website, by telephone or in writing. Leaflets are in several community languages and interpreters are available for people whose first language is not English. An effective

action plan has been drawn up and a social care forum, which aims to seek the views of parents and carers, is due to commence in the next few weeks. Other groups, a strategic group and an advisory group for learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been formed to review all aspects of provision. Some re-commissioning of services has also started which is specifically targeted at children and young people on the autistic spectrum. An integrated approach has been developed which has resulted in a clinic at Northwick Park for children with no clear diagnoses, who have difficulty accessing services.

Young people receive good services from the drug action team. All young people are seen by a trained paediatric clinical specialist. The percentage of young people who are assessed within the statutory timescale has improved and 100% are assessed within 10 working days. However, the number of assessments completed within five working days is below national comparators.

Teenage conception rates remain below the England average but the rates have not decreased as much as those of similar authorities despite the effective partnership across the council. Although there has been a significant reduction in teenage conception rates, at the current rate of progress, Harrow is unlikely to meet the government target. Nonetheless, there is a robust teenage pregnancy strategy in place and, a number of effective measures have been put in place to continue to reduce teenage conception rates.

Area(s) for development

- Continue to reduce the rate of teenage conception.
- Improve assessments within five working days for young people who require substance misuse assessment.
- Continue to improve CAMHS.

Staying safe

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 aspect is adequate. Five recommendations emerged from the JAR.

For immediate action

- The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) should ensure that all partner agencies, including the voluntary sector, have safe procedures and practices for vetting staff, volunteers and contractors for persons having contact with children and young people.
- The council should consult all partner agencies in a review of the threshold criteria for social care assessments and service provision.

For action in the next six months

- The council should systematically implement its audit of social care case files to ensure good quality of practice and recording and to inform its performance monitoring processes.
- The council should review the eligibility criteria for social care support to families of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and increase the range and coverage of provision.

For action in the longer term

- The LSCB should develop specific and measurable action plans to enable its priorities, as detailed in the CYPP, to be implemented. These priorities and actions should be widely communicated to LSCB front-line staff and the wider community to ensure commitment and understanding at all levels.

In response to the recommendations above the council has taken appropriate action and now has a good system in place for fully vetting volunteers and contractors.

The council's improved partnership working through the LSCB has resulted in an increased level of referrals that is higher than the England average. Officers have reviewed the council's eligibility criteria with its partners and there is evidence of a consistent use of agreed thresholds at the frontline. For example, since the JAR, one central point has been introduced for referrals through the Duty and Assessment Team in the Referral and Assessment Service. In addition, workforce re-modelling under the Social Care Workforce Strategy has increased the capacity and responsiveness of practitioners and managers.

The volume of initial and core assessments has increased. Whilst repeat referrals are above the England average, the LSCB has recently undertaken an audit of referral activity with social care and partner agencies to analyse and respond to practice issues. The completion of initial and core assessments within statutory timescales is well below the England average. However, within the past six months there is evidence of a significant improvement in the timeliness of completion of initial and core assessments.

The council has also taken effective action to address poor performance and the previously high level of social worker vacancies and is no longer reliant on agency staff. The number of children on the child protection register and their duration on the register is above the England average. During the previous period of workforce instability, a longer period of registration was deemed preferable in order to avoid premature de-registration and the withdrawal of the protective network system. More positively, this is now being addressed through systematic auditing in social care and regular management reviews. All child protection cases are allocated to a qualified and permanent social worker and each case is reviewed within statutory timescales. The LSCB has started the process of improving an understanding of its

action plan amongst front-line practitioners and will be evaluating and auditing this over the next six months.

Of children and young people looked after, 93% of cases have been reviewed within statutory timescales which is significantly above the England average. All looked after children and young people are allocated to qualified social workers. The short term stability of placements for looked after children and young people is much better than the national average. However, long-term placement stability is well below the national average and the council is targeting ways of improving this through improved care planning, resource management and multi-disciplinary input at the new Child Care Panel. The number of children adopted has declined considerably and timeliness in completion of adoption is also well below the England average. However, the new domestic adoption partnership arrangement between the Council and Coram Family Services in September 2006 has improved performance considerably with top band performance predicted for 2007-2008.

The number of care leavers with pathway plans and personal advisors has fallen from 100% to 85%, primarily due to staffing difficulties. However, the council has put secure measures in place to address this. A multi-agency care proceedings and permanence tracking panel is now established and this has begun to develop performance improvement in relation to permanency planning and adoption indicators. The numbers of children and young people in residential care are higher than the national average; the council recognises that placement choice requires significant development and has begun to review those children in residential care and the expansion of fostering provision.

Some 75% of children and young people looked after who are aged 14 to 18 have transition plans for their move to adult services. There is an established multi-agency transitions board which ensures that all young people are appropriately prepared for such transition. In addition, the re-commissioning of local providers for domiciliary care now better reflects the needs of children and young people.

Area(s) for development

- Continue to improve the timely completion of initial and core assessments.
- Improve long term placement stability for looked after children and young people.
- Improve the rate and timely completion of adoptions.
- Reduce the numbers of looked after children and young people in residential accommodation.

Enjoying and achieving

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 aspect is good. One recommendation emerged from the JAR.

For action in the next six months

- The council should reduce further the number of permanent school exclusions, especially of primary school pupils with special educational needs.

Since the JAR the rate of school exclusions has fallen. However, despite a reduction, permanent exclusions of secondary pupils remain above national figures and the council acknowledges that this remains an area for development. Several strategies are resulting in some success, including: managed moves between secondary schools; a 'Rapid Intervention Team' of staff to support schools to meet the needs of individual children and young people; and, the establishment of off-site provision at Harrow Tuition Centre for Key Stage 3 pupils including Year 7 pupils from primary schools. The 'Behaviour for Learning' project is well-established in all high schools with plans to develop it in primary schools. Exclusion figures for primary pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are now in line with those nationally, as are those for primary and secondary fixed-term exclusions. To build on this improvement the council has set a target to reduce fixed-term exclusions by 450 over the next year, with appropriate plans to develop specialist provision and outreach support.

The attitudes and behaviour of children and young people have been judged good or outstanding in 90% of recent inspections. Figures are similarly high for enjoyment of school and this is endorsed by the results of the Tellus2 survey. Attendance rates are average in primary schools although authorised absence is high. Analysis shows that, in the main, the lowest attendance is in first schools. Inspections generally say that schools are doing what they can to tackle issues of absence. Attendance in secondary schools is good and the attendance of looked after children and young people continues to improve.

Children get a good start to their education. The proportion of early years settings judged to be good is higher than average. Early years advisors are aware of the relatively weaker provision in settings offering sessional day care and target those settings effectively for support and advice. Foundation Stage provision in schools is generally stronger than the national picture. A high proportion of schools are judged good or outstanding in inspections. At present, no schools are categorised as causing concern and the only Harrow school to have been in special measures was removed from the category in the summer of 2006. The JAR noted that the excellent strategy for school improvement was founded on good relationships between school improvement services and schools. Support and challenge for schools is both effective and well-targeted.

Children and young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well in Harrow schools. Standards are good. In all key stages and in most subjects, results are above those achieved nationally and in similar authorities, and this has been the case for several years. Figures are rising steadily year on year. GCSE results continue to rise at a good rate. The proportion of young people gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C is above the national figure at 65.1%, with 54.2% achieving five or more A*-C grades that include English and mathematics. Progress measures between key stages are above the national rate and consistently good. Even the school with the lowest value added score between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 is above the national figure. Raising the attainment of minority ethnic groups, specifically Black Caribbean and Black African children and young people, is a high priority for the council and an area for development. The project to raise Black pupils' achievement operating in primary schools has met with some success in its first year. Although these groups do as well as their peers nationally, the local authority recognises that there is more to do to narrow the gap with their peers in Harrow. The proportion of looked after children and young people that are entered for, and gain success in examinations has risen, although figures are not yet comparable with similar authorities.

Area(s) for development

- Improve the achievement of ethnic minority children and young people.
- Reduce further the number of exclusions, especially the permanent exclusions of secondary pupils.

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 aspect is good. One recommendation emerged from the JAR.

For action in the next six months

- The CYPSP should develop a strategy for encouraging younger children, including younger looked after children, and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to participate and give their views.

The council's strong commitment to hearing children's voices is exemplified by the number of opportunities that are created for young people to participate in decision making. Events such as the 'Gig in the Park', a musical event involving large numbers of children and young people, and 'Operation Empower', where young people discuss concerns that affect them at a youth conference each year, give young people the chance to demonstrate their talents and to contribute their views. The council has set targets to ensure that participating groups of young people are representative of the wide spectrum of need and ethnic diversity found in the borough. A student

advisory group for primary age pupils has been set up with the support of the secondary school advisory group and the youth council is used effectively as a vehicle for gathering the views of young people. School councils are well-established and children and young people's positive contribution is frequently a strength that is noted in inspection reports. This is reflected in the Tellus2 results which indicate that a higher than average number of children and young people have had the opportunity to vote in a school or class election and consider that schools take account of their views. A good proportion of looked after children contribute effectively to their reviews.

The youth offending service performs well. Its good work in making significant reductions in the number of first time offenders has been recognised by the Youth Justice Board and is being used as a model of good practice for other London authorities. The numbers reoffending are below the national figures although they rose slightly between 2005 and 2006. Programmes such as the summer programme designed to engage those at the highest risk of reoffending have been successful. The general crime rate in the borough is falling with the second largest reduction in London. Although Harrow has the lowest crime rate in London, fear of crime is high and this, too, was reflected in the Tellus2 survey.

At the time of the JAR the youth service was inspected and judged inadequate despite some strengths in relationships between staff and young people and some effectively targeted work with vulnerable groups. Since then the council has taken steps to make the required improvements thorough devising and implementing a thorough action plan in conjunction with the National Youth Agency. The management structure of the service has been realigned to provide improved leadership and appropriate actions are being taken to audit needs, improve the curriculum, provide training for staff, and set in place systems to monitor the quality and impact of the service. Meanwhile a variety of activities has been provided around the borough, including some summer events for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and some with new partners such as Watford Football Club. Despite this good response, the council is not yet able to demonstrate an impact on outcomes for young people and this remains an area for development.

Area(s) for development

- Secure the planned improvements in the youth service.

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 aspect is good. Two recommendations emerged from the JAR.

For immediate action

- The council should ensure direct payments are promoted in compliance with the statutory requirement.

For action in the next six months

- The 14–19 collegiate should engage voluntary organisations and private training providers in the development of the 14–19 strategy and curriculum.

The number of people in receipt of direct payments has risen and no families are awaiting payments. This is because a coordinator for direct payments ensures that they are promoted for those families that need them. In addition, the financial rate of direct payments is being increased.

In response to the JAR, representatives from voluntary organisations and private providers have joined the 14–19 Strategic Partnership Board. A project through Connexions also involves three voluntary organisations with the 14–19 strategy. Although well-targeted at specific groups and communities at risk of dropping out, these providers are unlikely to contribute a large number of placements. Finding suitable placements is a challenge in Harrow because there are few large companies. However, the partnership is working to find alternatives, such as developing links with contractors working in schools and capitalising on preparations for the Olympics in 2012.

The council is making good progress in implementing its 14–19 strategy. Members of the collegiate work together well to provide cohesion in provision and to meet the needs of the young people of Harrow. Although in its first year, the collegiate has been successful in beginning to stem the flow of young people engaging in education outside the borough. Results at Level 2 and Level 3 are good but national vocational qualification results are lower than national averages and similar authorities. Participation rates are high and a large number of young people continue their education after Year 11. In the Tellus2 survey almost two thirds of children and young people indicated they are ambitious to study rather than enter employment; this compares well to the national figure.

The proportion of young people aged 16 to 19 who are not in education, employment or training is falling and lower than London and national figures. However, figures for teenage mothers in this situation are high. The number of young people completing their apprenticeships has risen dramatically although the council acknowledges that providing a broad range of vocational education and opportunities for work based learning is still a challenge. Good initiatives to expand the curriculum include the development of the skills centre in partnership with the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The collegiate has been selected as a pathfinder authority for the creative and media vocational diploma.

Despite some effective programmes targeted at young offenders most at risk of re-offending, the number of young offenders gaining entry to employment is low. For young people leaving care the council has improved its system for developing pathway plans. A personal adviser funded by the Connexions service supports these young people and a good number participate in education, employment or training. The LSC funds places at Harrow College for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to have access to education beyond the age of 16.

The council's priority to improve the availability of decent housing is reflected in the significant reduction in the time that children and young people spend in bed and breakfast and hostel accommodation. Both figures are low when compared with similar authorities. However, fewer care leavers are in suitable accommodation than in the previous year with more in residential placements than in the past.

Provision for childcare places is not growing as fast as in similar authorities although latest figures show they are on course to increase by 650 in 2006–07. A high proportion of potential providers drop out before completing registration. However, those that do complete the process are of good quality. The childcare sufficiency audit is underway and this is identifying where there are gaps in provision in localities and where there are vacancies. The council has exceeded its target for the uptake of places under the childcare affordability programme as part of the West London Alliance, enabling parents to return to employment or, to take up training opportunities. Three children's centres are operating fully and six more are on the way. Five of these are in schools and will help the council to realise its ambition to make schools the focus for the community.

Area(s) for development

- Develop further provision for work based learning and programmes to support young offenders' entry into employment and teenage mothers in education, employment or training.

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

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is good, and its management of these services is good. Two recommendations emerged from the JAR.

For action in the next six months

- The CYPSP should accelerate the process of developing a formal structure for partnership working, including joint commissioning and joint workforce planning.

- The CYPSP should identify the priorities in the CYPP which are the most important for the partnership and the resources required for delivery.

Overall management of services is effective. The council has made steady progress in developing its work with key partners. It has successfully strengthened existing partnerships with the primary care trust and the Police and voluntary sector groups. Partner agencies now have clear identified priorities that link with those in the CYPP. As part of development work arising from the JAR, the council commissioned a consultant to review its family support services and joint commissioning and has begun to work on its recommendations. The council recognises that there is more to do to complete and implement work on joint commissioning.

The council has now developed a clear corporate vision. The large number of CYPP priorities identified as an action area in the JAR has been reduced to a core of highly focused ones centred on meeting the changing needs of the borough's diverse community. These priorities are clearly linked with the council's strategic improvement plan. A key focus, for example, is the provision of high achieving schools at the centre of community services. The priorities are now based firmly on an analysis of needs and the capacity to deliver them is supported by a three-year financial plan. The latest financial projection predicts a balanced budget that makes the required savings and meets future priorities.

The recent restructuring of senior managers' posts has resulted in strong leadership with clear lines of accountability for heads of services and more robust performance management arrangements. This is delivering clear analysis of key areas for performance improvement particularly for the most vulnerable groups of children and young people. A rigorous approach to monitoring outcomes and targets through multi-agency sub-groups is also building trust between partners.

Overall the council demonstrates good capacity to improve its services. There is sustained good performance in educational outcomes, economic well-being and in opportunities for children and young people to participate in decision making. There have also been recent good improvements in children's health outcomes and there is evidence of capacity building for CAMHS. The council recognises that outcomes in the staying safe objective are as yet only adequate and there is much to do. However, there is evidence of progress in this area and the council has responded to the considerable weakness in the stability of its social care workforce by improving social worker recruitment.

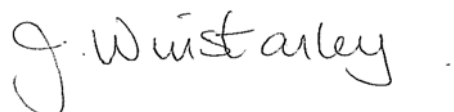
Area(s) for development

- Continue to develop a joint workforce strategy.
- Continue to develop joint commissioning.

Overall the council has demonstrated good progress in meeting the JAR recommendations and has shown a good capacity to maintain and improve further its services for children and young people.

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