

26 November 2007

Mrs Maggie Atkinson
Group Director Learning and Children and Director for Children's Services
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
Civic Centre
Regent Street
Gateshead
NE8 1HH

Dear Mrs Atkinson

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH 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, your action plan arising from the joint area review (JAR) and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted and the other inspectorates. The letter comments on progress since the recent JAR. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this and for the time given by yourself and your colleagues during the process.

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 4

Gateshead Council consistently delivers at least good and very often outstanding services for children and young people. The council has responded very positively to the recommendations raised in the JAR. The contribution the council makes to staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being is now outstanding. It continues to make a good contribution to being healthy. Overall there is an outstanding commitment and capacity to improve all services.

The council is fully committed to tackling areas of relative weakness. It has ensured the needs of vulnerable groups are met in the provision of children's services and, with the systems it has in place to ensure they are consulted, can contribute to assuring the quality and development of children's services. The council has sustained high standards in its services and their outcomes. It has successfully brought about improvement in areas that are challenging. Its performance is very often above similar authorities and usually in line with, and often above, national comparisons. It is wholly committed to delivering services with its partners. In the few areas where improvement is needed it is bringing this about by working very

effectively with others. Partnerships are securely in place and the council enjoys the confidence of those it works with. It also has the necessary financial systems and capable staff to continue to deliver high quality 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 area remains good. No actions were highlighted in the JAR report.

The 2006 JAR judged health outcomes to be generally good and improving. Most children and young people who responded to the Tellus2 survey consider themselves to be healthy. Services, including early years settings and schools, provide very good support to parents, children and young people to enable them to adopt healthy lifestyles.

Strategies have been developed in partnership with local health providers to improve the health of children and young people and to reduce health inequalities across the borough. These include a range of programmes that have led to reductions in the misuse of substances, increased take up of physical activities and an improved focus on emotional well-being. Good services are in place to enable hard-to-reach groups such as Traveller families and those from minority ethnic groups to access health services. A Children's Centre for the Jewish community has been established and improved access and take up of a range of child health services have been achieved through innovative joint working relationships. An example of this is a clinic with child care facilities which has successfully addressed the known low take up among Jewish mothers of immunisations for their children.

Specific attention is being given to reducing childhood obesity and promoting healthy living. A successful pilot project, which has now been fully adopted, has resulted in the council achieving its Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) stretch target to reduce the weight of children who took part. Almost all schools have participated in the Healthy Schools Programme. Participation in the Healthy Schools Standard is high. All schools have achieved the local Smoke Free School Award.

Breast-feeding rates have improved significantly and the LPSA stretch target has been exceeded, but rates remain significantly below statistical neighbours and national rates. Although smoking during pregnancy continues to reduce, levels are significantly higher than those found nationally and in similar areas. The proportion of babies with low birth weight is higher than national and statistical neighbours. Except for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) immunisation, which has risen, immunisation rates have fallen slightly and are below statistical neighbours. The council and health partners recognise the challenges they face in improving these areas. They have put in place a range of actions to bring together strategies and resources to enable them to be tackled in a more holistic way. An example of this is

the use of specialist health visitors, midwives and health assistants, based in children's centres, to target health advice to pregnant women about obesity, smoking cessation techniques and the benefits of breast-feeding.

There is very good performance in reducing teenage pregnancy. Rates continue to fall and are significantly lower than statistical neighbours but slightly higher than the national average. The rate of reduction was significantly better than the national average and the rate in statistical neighbours. Chlamydia rates are significantly above the national average. This is in part due to increased detection. Issues raised by the JAR have been well addressed. Young people can now access advice at local access points reducing the need for them to travel into a neighbouring borough. Joint work with regional health partners ensures that young people receive consistent messages about sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, specific work has been undertaken to target advice to new students during the recent 'Fresher's Week' at the local further education college.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) remain a key strength. Comprehensive services are available, and this represents very good performance. The number of children and young people accessing services has almost doubled since 2003. Waiting times remain good overall and are better than the national average. Children and young people who are looked after have their health monitored with 87% having regular checks. The vacant post of psychologist for looked after children has now been filled and this has enabled them and their carers to receive very good support.

Good arrangements are in place for the early identification and assessment of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The JAR noted that there were long waiting times for speech and language therapy and this has been tackled effectively with the appointment of an additional speech and language therapist.

Areas for development

- Reduce the rate of chlamydia.
- Reduce smoking amongst pregnant women.

Staying safe

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is outstanding. No actions were highlighted in the JAR report.

The council has a history of providing good child protection and safeguarding arrangements and the JAR assessed services as good. Performance in many areas is

better than the national average and that of similar authorities and good progress has been maintained over recent years. Areas for improvement highlighted in the JAR have been closely monitored and significant improvements are evident as a result of the council's targeted action.

Most children and young people who responded to the Tellus2 survey said they felt safe. A higher proportion of children and young people than found nationally feel safe at home, in school and on public transport and most feel that bullying is dealt with well. Inspections of schools judged that almost all are good and many are outstanding in ensuring that learners stay safe. Issues raised by the JAR are being addressed with a specific emphasis being given to reducing racist abuse experienced by Jewish children and young people.

In relation to child protection arrangements, the rate of referrals of children in need has always been below national and comparator figures but the percentage of repeat referrals at 13.3% is significantly better than both of these. Performance in relation to initial assessments has always been better than statistical neighbours and national averages but dipped for the first time in 2006–07 from 75% to 60.6%. The council put in place improved monitoring and tracking arrangements which have resulted in significant improvements. Performance is now back up to the previously good levels. The number of core assessments completed on time has improved from 72% to 81% to a level which is significantly better than statistical neighbours and the national average. De-registrations from the register are high and above those of similar councils and national averages. Re-registration rates are very low and very few children remain on the register for more than two years. This is significantly better than the national average and statistical neighbours. All children on the register have their reviews completed on time and this is higher than statistical neighbours and national performance.

Children, young people and families have very good access to a range of flexible family support and preventative services. The number of children subject to child protection procedures and who are on the register has increased over the last two years and is significantly higher than statistical neighbours and national figures. However the council has a good understanding of the reasons for this and can point to an increasing number of families who are involved in substance misuse, in particular alcohol abuse, and who pose a risk to their children. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has a clear strategy for responding to this and has taken the lead in implementing the Hidden Harm Strategy. The work of the LSCB is well coordinated with drug and alcohol abuse services in other agencies. This ensures that treatment services take account of the needs of children, young people and families. The Common Assessment Framework is used very effectively across agencies to capture, record and share information relating to substance misusing parents.

Most children and young people who are looked after live in foster placements. The stability of children' and young people's placements is better than that found nationally and they are safeguarded well. Very good efforts are made to find

adoptive placements for those who need it. Comparatively low numbers are placed with relatives or friends under formal fostering arrangements but the council has positively promoted guardianship as a good alternative. For many years the council has ensured that all looked after children and young people have a named qualified social worker allocated to them.

Performance in relation to timeliness of reviews for children and young people who are looked after had dipped but close monitoring of this has now resulted in very good performance. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are protected very well and almost all of them have a transition plan. This is a significantly higher proportion than is found nationally or in similar authorities.

The LSCB is well established and has good, up to date policies and procedures in place. There is a history of effective interagency working and practitioners have well organised access to good quality training and development opportunities. Arrangements for establishing a local Child Death Review Panel in conjunction with South Tyneside and Sunderland local authorities are progressing very well and are on track to meet national timescales.

Area for development

- Reduce the numbers of children on the child protection register.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is outstanding. The JAR report highlighted one action to be taken in the next six months.

For action in the next six months

- The council should ensure that personal educational plans for looked after children and young people are a significant part of their educational planning and that the rate of completed plans improve.

The council has acted very effectively and the rate of completed personal educational plans for looked after children and young people have improved significantly from 59% to 70%. With those begun but awaiting completion the figure will rise to 84%. This rate of improvement has been achieved since the council appointed a personal educational plans coordinator in early 2007. Overall it represents a 25% improvement over six months. The increased staffing in this area demonstrates the council's committed and effective response to this recommendation.

The standards attained by children and young people in education are above similar authorities and the national average. The value added between Key Stage 2 and Key

Stage 4 is well above the national figure. The added value between Key Stage 3 and GCSE has improved and is also higher than the national figure. In Key Stage 2 standards have been consistent over several years. In 2006, standards in English were above similar authorities and in line with the national average while in mathematics and science they were above both of these comparators. Key Stage 3 outcomes have improved. Standards in English have been rising for several years and in 2006 were above similar authorities and in line with the national average. There has been the same steady improvement in mathematics and standards are now above the national average and above similar authorities. Science has also improved; results of national tests continue to be in line nationally but are now above similar authorities. The percentage of children and young people achieving five or more GCSE grades A* to C is well above the national average and similar authorities. Furthermore, the percentage gaining these grades when English and mathematics are included has improved and is now above similar authorities and just above the national average. All secondary schools have met their national GCSE targets.

Attendance is in line with the national average in primary schools with unauthorised absence lower than the national average and similar authorities. Overall attendance is in line in secondary schools but authorised absence does just rise above that of similar authorities and the national average. The council is aware of this and has approaches to tackle it in place. Permanent exclusions are much lower in primary schools than in similar authorities and nationally, and fixed term exclusions continue to fall. They are also much lower in secondary schools than nationally and in similar authorities. Exclusions of children and young people who are looked after and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are much lower than national figures and those in similar authorities. The provision of alternative tuition for children and young people who are permanently excluded is well above the national figure and above similar authorities.

The percentage of children and young people in care who achieve at least one GCSE grade A* to C is good, and the percentage of children and young people in care who miss schooling is lower than the national average and the average in similar authorities, and is good.

Based on Ofsted inspections the quality of education in the council's schools is very effective. Most schools are judged good or better overall. The proportion of outstanding primary schools is in line with similar authorities, and is much higher for secondary schools. There are strengths across all the inspection judgements in primary and secondary schools compared with similar authorities, including in behaviour, the quality of teaching and learning and in enjoyment of education. In secondary schools these areas are often judged as outstanding. The progress made by looked after children and young people, and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is better than in similar authorities.

The quality of early years provision as judged by Ofsted inspections has proportionately more outstanding settings than nationally and in similar authorities.

This is especially so for the quality of teaching and learning and enjoyment of education.

The number of schools in a formal category of concern has fallen to one. It is very well supported and making good progress. The council's Raising Achievement Service, which has achieved Beacon status, has a very well organised system for monitoring schools' performance and providing challenge. The service also has distinctive and innovative practice in its themed inspection reports on issues of significance for the local authority, including post 16 education. These reports are based on research and set out clear recommendations to assist schools to improve and share good practice.

The council is managing the reduction of surplus primary school places effectively. A review of secondary places will report shortly. A review of provision for special educational needs is also taking place and the council is seeking to consult fully where there is debate about provision. The number of children and young people with special needs not in mainstream education remains higher than similar authorities and nationally but is reducing.

Area for improvement

- Reduce authorised absence in secondary schools.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is outstanding. The JAR highlighted no actions to be taken.

The work of the council in carefully involving all young people, including offenders, children and young people who are looked after, and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who have left school has developed significantly. Groups consulted about the quality of services include the Youth Assembly and the Neighbourhood Forum and there are also specific consultative bodies to ensure vulnerable groups are included. The involvement of children and young people has extended to assuring the quality of services, ranging from testing websites to anonymously enquiring about services to assess their quality. Work on young people as inspectors of services is also well advanced. They are also involved at a strategic level in meeting directly with councillors about services and as members of committees in community centres influencing and contributing to decisions about services which affect them. The commitment to include children and young people in gauging quality and ensuring they can voice their views is a notable strength of the council.

The scale and range of accreditation of activities in the community, including Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network qualifications, outdoor activities and

Duke of Edinburgh awards, is high and is celebrated in an awards ceremony. The number of young people reached by the Youth Service is well above the national average.

Most recent figures show that re-offending is higher than the national figure but now in line with similar authorities. The number of first time offenders is higher than the national figure, and the council recognises the need to reduce the number.

The proportion of children and young people who are looked after who receive a final warning, reprimand or conviction, is much lower than nationally and in similar authorities. The incidence of anti-social behaviour and other nuisance is low as a result of well organised work by the council where the youth offending team, other agencies and schools work closely together.

In 2006, the proportion of children and young people who are looked after who participated in and contributed to their reviews was higher than nationally and in similar authorities. This represented a significant improvement.

Area to improve

- Reduce the number of first time offenders in the Youth Justice system.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is outstanding. The JAR highlighted two actions to be taken in the longer term.

For action in the longer term

- The council should ensure that all young people leaving care are provided with sufficient choice of accommodation.
- The council and its partners should further develop the 14–19 vocational curriculum to ensure all young people have good access to a range of career options.

The council has acted on the accommodation choice for young people leaving care very effectively. It has created a housing protocol where these young people are given the highest priority status. This enables them to have both a greater choice of suitable and appropriate accommodation, and areas, to meet their needs. In addition there is a system of offering them taster flats so their independent learning skills can be monitored, as well as the choice of a scheme of supported lodging for those who have greater needs on a day to day basis.

Through the Education Improvement Partnership comprising all secondary schools, the further education college and a range of work based learning providers, the council, along with the Learning and Skills Council has acted very effectively as a partner, to ensure that the 14–19 vocational curriculum has developed significantly. The courses, qualifications, and study locations offered to students and young people are comprehensive and include vocational diploma courses and new specialist facilities. Ofsted inspections of secondary schools judge the majority to have an outstanding 14–19 curriculum. A greater proportion of schools are judged as outstanding in promoting economic well-being compared with similar authorities.

The proportion of young people who continue in education after Year 11 is in line with the national average and similar authorities. The proportion of children and young people who are looked after and are in education, employment or training is above the national figure and above similar authorities and is very good. The Young Apprenticeship Scheme has been the most successful in the region. The increase in achievement at Level 2 is the highest in the government office region and above the national figure and similar authorities. It is also above similar authorities at Level 3.

The proportion of young people aged 16 to 18, and at 19, not in education, employment or training is higher than the national figure but has improved due to the work of the council with a range of partners, including Connexions. It is now closer to that of similar authorities and reached the target set for the council.

The proportion of young people aged 17 remaining in full time education remains lower than the national percentage. Extensive work with partners has brought about improvement.

Provision for early years education has expanded, complemented by the increasing number of children's centres. There is a wide range of settings which enables adults to return to work and where young children receive good education and care. Extended schools also provide childcare and parenting support and children's centres provide a well planned link with the Orthodox Jewish community. A recent council audit of sufficiency has judged that there is now surplus capacity. The process of managing this is being considered in a systematic way by the council.

Area to improve

- Improve the proportion of young people aged 17 continuing in education.

The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services for children and young people **Grade 4**

Summary of strengths and areas for development

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

highlighted three actions, one to be taken over the next six months and two actions to be taken in the longer term.

For action over the next six months

- The council and partners should develop clear and robust procedures for measuring value for money in all activities related to improving provision for children and young people.

Well understood procedures are now in place to gauge value for money at the planning stage and during the implementation of projects, and these are used throughout children's services. They include requirements on services to demonstrate how value for money is achieved, how benchmarking is used and how the service is meeting corporate priorities. There is a clear and well judged emphasis on efficiency gains, not as economies, but to ensure that budgets and staff are used as effectively as possible. Children's services are responding very well to this approach and demonstrating value for money in the delivery of services.

For action in the longer term

The council should ensure that

- all plans clearly specify targets, timescales, accountabilities and resource implications; and
- that all financial arrangements with external partners, whether through contracts or grant aid, specify clearly the requirements of the council in such a way that their delivery is capable of being monitored.

The council has acted very effectively in relation to these areas. The council's budgets are generally in line with statistical neighbours and the national average and sometimes above, but the outcomes are also consistently good or outstanding and therefore it delivers good value for money. All plans include the detail necessary to ensure clarity about what is to be achieved and how progress can be measured. They are costed carefully in advance. The Children and Young People's plan, and its review, have clear priorities and well judged adjustments have been made by the council to take account of changing priorities. They are based on a careful analysis of needs and sharply targeted on gaps in service provision and where, with partners, the council can take a lead. Plans have clear priorities, identify where impact is expected and how this will be measured and against what targets, and assessed risks. It is clear where there has been improvement for vulnerable groups, such as increased take up of direct payments for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Contracts with external partners include clear requirements to indicate outputs and outcomes and the nature and frequency of monitoring in order to assure quality and value for money. An example is the three monthly reporting on parenting programmes by the council which includes reporting numbers entering the programme, completion rates and user satisfaction rates.

Planning shows very good awareness of where the council has strengths and where it needs to develop further. The council's strong commitment to improvement is evident in its work with a range of partners to deliver high quality services, and to tackle identified issues. It has well thought out strategies to bring about improvement, for example in schools, and a range of effective partnerships including the Education Improvement Partnership. New governance arrangements for the Children and Young People's Partnership and a joint commissioning strategy are currently being agreed with partners as part of Gateshead's children's trust arrangements

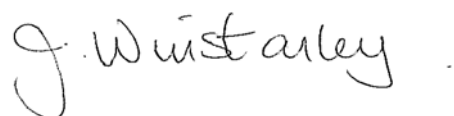
Integrated working has developed further, and includes improved arrangements for sharing information across agencies. Joint funding has also developed as illustrated by the appointment of the Director of Public Health in conjunction with neighbouring councils. There is a growing number of services which are jointly planned or jointly commissioned for example the disabled children's service.

There are very capable senior managers in all elements of children's services in the council, and they are very well led by the director with the effective involvement of the lead member. The council has a track record of improvement and innovation, including initiating research and involving young people in its members' overview and scrutiny work. This has been recognised regularly by national awards. Its inventiveness, its interest in national and local good practice and its attention to evaluation demonstrates its very good capacity to continue to improve.

Overall the council has demonstrated outstanding progress in meeting the JAR recommendations and has shown outstanding capacity to maintain and improve 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