

26 November 2007

Mr Matt Dunkley  
Director of Children's Services  
East Sussex County Council  
PO Box 4, County Hall  
St Anne's Crescent  
Lewes  
East Sussex  
BN7 1SG

Dear Mr Dunkley

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

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) for your local authority, some aspects of which were conducted at the same time as the analysis stage of the joint area review. The 2006 APA informed the scoping of the joint area review at the planning stage and the initial findings of the 2007 APA were taken into account by the review team at the end of the analysis stage. The outcomes of the joint area review were then considered alongside a review of recent data in arriving at the final APA judgements for 2007. As a result, many of the areas for development highlighted in this letter align with the recommendations in the joint area review report and should be similarly aligned in any future action plan produced by the council and its partners. The judgements in the letter also draw on your assessment of progress or review of the Children and Young People's Plan where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted and other inspectorates. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this and for the time given by you and your colleagues to the assessment process.

### **Overall effectiveness of children's services**

**Grade 3**

East Sussex Council consistently delivers services for children and young people at an above average level. Children's services in the local authority and other strategic partners are making a good contribution to improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people.

The consultation with, and involvement of, children and young people is outstanding and contributes successfully to strategic planning and decision-making. Differences in key areas continue to be made and the capacity to improve further is outstanding.

There have been some notable improvements in the quality of services in 2007. For example, the Healthy School Standard target has again been exceeded. Although the proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE passes has not significantly improved, schools and training providers are adding good value given the starting points of young people. The education and training outcomes for all vulnerable children and young people remain very good. Multi-agency collaboration is very well established and joint commissioning helps the authority ensure that children's services are responsive to need whilst also providing good value for money.

## **Being healthy**

**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 aspect is outstanding.

The council works very closely with its partners to provide services that are innovative, inclusive and have continued to lead to improved outcomes. For example, following the implementation in the east of East Sussex of a new breast-feeding strategy, which used trained peer supporters and was delivered through children's centres, the proportion of mothers initiating breast-feeding increased. Building on its success the council intends that the model will be rolled out through children's centres in the west of the county.

Interventions are appropriately targeted to meet inequalities identified through health equality audits and multi-agency agreed priorities. Health promotion and services are suitably directed at these high risk groups by the council through partnership arrangements including co-location of services, effective joint commissioning, specialist provision and enhanced services. Examples include increased smoking cessation projects and the substance misuse service, which has co-located specialist practitioners in other young people's services such as the care leavers and looked after children's services. Further examples of effective partnership include a pooled budget for children's equipment, a lead professional's scheme for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and enhanced health visiting protocols for all vulnerable groups including the minority ethnic population and homeless families. The gap between most children and young people, and those most vulnerable, is being narrowed as demonstrated by the good outcomes from these and other similar projects.

There is also a continued focus on reducing waiting times and increasing easy access to health services with some positive results. For instance, the re-design of therapy services across the county means families receive more timely and effective assessment, response and treatment. Waiting times have been reduced dramatically in areas where there had been a waiting list for speech and language services, and are now at a good level as a result of the work of the integrated Communication Team. In addition, the services are now local and accessible in children's centre areas. Waiting times for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) also improved but further work is required as they are inconsistent across the county. The

joint area review identified the monitoring of outcomes for children in vulnerable groups and responsiveness of services to the needs of those from Black and minority ethnic communities as areas for improvement. One of the key roles of the children's centres is to promote mental and emotional health. This is helping parents to access more easily initiatives, such as postnatal depression support groups, and work with health practitioners offering Brazelton assessments aimed at improving communication and bonding between parent and child. A programme of training on perinatal depression is being rolled out to all appropriate children's centre staff during 2007–08, so that the service will be available across the county.

National and local targets in relation to the Healthy Schools Programme have been exceeded and there have been good results from healthy eating and school meals initiatives. The take-up of sport and physical activity opportunities by children and young people, including those from all vulnerable groups, is increasing and is now at a high level.

The family intensive support service for children with disabilities is now available across the county and is well regarded by those using it. Health data for looked after children are better than England and statistical neighbours and continue to improve year on year. Children who are looked after contributed to an effective audit programme designed to continually improve their health. The council is also addressing the areas for improvement that were identified in last year's APA. A number of innovative projects has been established to meet the need for emotional support to dual heritage children and to support their parents in developing their parenting skills. Progress has been made in reducing the number of teenage conceptions in targeted areas, such as children who are looked after, and in geographical areas where the incidence was particularly high. Further such targeted work is still required as progress has been limited. Agencies fully recognise this and have established a robust strategy and range of actions designed to facilitate a reduction in teenage conceptions.

Health outcomes for children and young people are similar, and in some cases significantly better, than in other comparable authorities.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Reduce the number of teenage conceptions.

### **Staying safe**

**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.

Councillors are active in undertaking their corporate parenting role and in working effectively with partners to continually reduce risks such as environmental hazards and environmental safety. For instance, in the last 12 months a working group

involving a range of voluntary and community groups as well as statutory bodies reviewed community safety arrangements and developed a safety action programme for the next year. This includes the development of a resource and guidance pack for secondary schools providing curriculum support in addressing domestic violence issues. The resource offers complementary material to the wide range of information and educational programmes that currently exists for children and young people and their parents and carers.

The joint area review found that clear and comprehensive guidance and good training were provided for staff on safe recruitment practices, although recording practice was inconsistent.

A wide range of high quality, supportive, early intervention and safeguarding provision is available and is used successfully. Services are appropriately focused on all vulnerable groups. There is clear evidence that preventative support services are leading to a sustainable reduction in the incidence of child abuse and neglect and are clearly enabling children, who would otherwise become looked after, to become well cared for. For example, the sharp increase in the number of young people accommodated in Hastings in the first half of 2006 was reversed as a result of a combination of the extension of family mediation, more family group conferencing and closer working with schools.

The recently restructured duty and assessment teams have improved joint working with health, the police and other professionals. Assessments of need are undertaken in an inclusive and timely way. The percentage of initial and core assessments completed within the required time is better than similar councils and the national average. The low number of repeat referrals and re-registrations on the child protection register suggests that in most cases workers put well-focused support or intervention in place, and that most cases are not closed inappropriately. The joint area review found that there was some inconsistency in the application of thresholds and in the quality and timeliness of file recording. Senior managers have already devised sound processes to tackle this and audit future practice. The joint area review recommended the need for agreed and published threshold guidance for access to targeted social care services.

Appropriate action is taken to protect children who are most at risk of abuse. All children on the child protection register are allocated to a social worker and all child protection reviews are held on time. Where a decision is made to hold an initial child protection conference, as a result of a s47 investigation, these are held in a timely way. Other child protection outcomes, such as the time which children remain on the child protection register, are at a good or better level.

The percentage of looked after children with a suitably qualified worker has increased. The low number was seen as an area for improvement in the last APA. There is also an allocation protocol in place now. The issue of allocating unqualified workers in some cases was scrutinised by the joint area review team who considered it demonstrated satisfactory use of resources as well as sound risk management and emphasis on continuity. The percentage of looked after children's reviews held within

the required timescale remains at a good level and is better than similar councils and the national average. The percentage of looked after children adopted during the year remains at a very good level and adoption plans are put in place speedily. The long- and short-term stability of placements for children who are looked after is very good.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Ensure that there is agreed and published threshold guidance for access to targeted social care services.
- Ensure that the council's staff recruitment systems and file recording consistently meet current guidance on safer recruitment.

## **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.

Child care provision judged at initial registration and in subsequent Ofsted inspections is significantly better than for statistical neighbours and national averages. An above average proportion of early years settings receive good grades in Ofsted inspections, although slightly fewer are judged to be outstanding. This ensures that the vast majority of children are getting a good start to their education.

Schools continue to make a difference to children and young people's achievement as they move through the key stages and value added data from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4 demonstrate that they make good progress. Inspection findings also show that children and young people enjoy school. Most children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least good progress, as confirmed by school inspection evidence. The authority is proving effective in coordinating early interventions and support.

Overall in 2006, at the end of Key Stage 1, children and young people in East Sussex reached standards either in line with, or one percentage point lower, than for the rest of England in reading, writing, mathematics and science. In 2007, unvalidated results show that standards at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 in East Sussex have improved in all four indicators compared with England. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards in reading and writing are lower compared with the national picture and continue to be a focus for improvement, although achievement is still satisfactory. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 for 2007, though still unvalidated, are much improved compared with those of 2006.

There are no pupil referral units, secondary or special schools in an Ofsted category of concern. There are some variations in achievement across the county depending on the school's locality and its intake. The local authority knows its schools very well. It gives appropriate focus to supporting schools in difficulty and supporting schools

with higher numbers of children in care and from minority ethnic groups. Consequently, where schools have been judged by Ofsted as a cause for concern they have already been identified by the local authority as underperforming and are already in receipt of specific support. This support also means that schools are swiftly improved and stay in the Ofsted category of concern for a minimum length of time.

Attendance in all schools is better in East Sussex compared with national averages and statistical neighbours. Authorised absences are significantly higher elsewhere whilst unauthorised absences are lower. This difference is because some parents/carers in East Sussex absent their children for holidays during term-time without official permission. The local authority is taking robust action and has applied the full rigour of the law to reduce the proportion of unauthorised absences.

The deputy directors monitor the progress and attendance of children and young people who have been permanently excluded on an individual basis. In order to mediate the re-integration of children and young people into schools in Hastings, following such exclusions, a panel has been set up and is chaired by a newly appointed manager of integration supported by headteachers on a rotational basis. The result has been greater transparency and better re-integration of young people back into school or college.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Continue support for schools through effective strategy work and targeted resources so that all schools can continue to improve to the level of the best.
- Improve standards in writing and reading at the end of Key Stage 3.

## **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 aspect is outstanding.

The council actively encourages children and young people and their families to shape the support and services they receive and this commitment is fully integrated into practice at all levels. In the Big Vote, 13,562 young people aged 11–18 voted for the Youth Cabinet and UK Youth Parliament through 50 stations, in places such as schools, colleges and youth centres. One of the criteria for Healthy Schools Status is to have an active school council and East Sussex has already exceeded the national and local targets by a significant margin. School council members represent pupils as associate governors in some secondary schools. During 2006, a Participation Worker was dedicated to working with schools to improve their school councils. This led to the innovative project to work with schools to implement education-based Hear by Right. The Youth Project RESPOND managed the highly successful sell out 'Parklive' event with minimum adult support. They worked in conjunction with the East Sussex Development Service and Hastings Beer and Music Festival.

The council targets resources to enable users to not only feed in their views, but to take decisions on how to use resources to make improvements. Young people are actively involved, alongside adults, in the Action in Rural Sussex at grant panel level for allocating the Local Network Fund. Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Funds involved over 90 young people as decision-makers, allocating £350,000 to 163 activities for 13 to 19 year olds across East Sussex. One of the projects, XTRAX, won the national Actions Speak Louder YOF Award for the impact of this work in relation to working with vulnerable young people around issues of teenage pregnancy, sexual health, smoking and substance misuse in Hastings.

Support for children and young people, particularly those from vulnerable groups, is accessible and of high quality. The Girls Extravaganza programme, a county-wide initiative, supports the most isolated and vulnerable young women to build confidence and assertiveness skills whilst accessing education about a range of issues such as emotional and physical health needs. Good provision and well-developed strategies assist all vulnerable children and young people to deal with transitions and major changes and events in their lives. These include primary to secondary school peer mentoring, support to Traveller children and young people at all critical phases, focussed support to identified young carers and a rapid response service to support children and young people to cope with traumatic events.

The year-on-year increase in partnership funding is allowing the already wide range of leisure, recreation and preventative provision to be enlarged and made available to more children and young people from all vulnerable groups. The joint area review reports this positively but it also found that the provision of leisure resources for looked after children and care leavers was uneven across the county and that there was a comparative lack of provision for young people with autism and autistic spectrum disorders.

Effective partnership arrangements are in place to reduce youth offending and prevent anti-social behaviour. Acceptable behaviour contracts are used in all areas of the county to help reduce anti-social behaviour and positive activity programmes have been run in high risk areas. Each district within East Sussex has a multi-agency panel to agree targeted intervention programmes to reduce the risk of offending and strengthen protective measures. Joint funding has enabled a wide range of well-targeted projects to be set up. These include an intensive family intervention service for parents of children and young people identified as being engaged in anti-social behaviour.

There has been a significant fall in the number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system in 2006/07 compared with 2005/06, and this area now compares well with the national average. In addition, overall re-offending has continued to fall as has that of looked after children and young people.

The proportion of looked after children and young people who contribute to their reviews has reduced but remains at an acceptable level. The proportion of looked after children and young people who have been cautioned or convicted of an offence is in line with the national average.

## Area(s) for development

- Ensure evenness of provision across the county of leisure resources for looked after children and care leavers.
- Improve the comparative provision of leisure resources for young people with autism and autistic spectrum disorders.

## 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. The education and training outcomes for the most vulnerable remain very good.

In 2006, Ofsted inspections judged the overall effectiveness of secondary school, special school and college education to be at least satisfactory and often good. Nevertheless, overall standards reached by the 14–19 age group are lower than those of statistical neighbours and national averages. However, the value added by education and training is high and increasing more rapidly, with the greatest impact on the outcomes for the most vulnerable young people. This was noted in the recent joint area review where the very good multi-party working was seen to be significantly improving provision. The review also noted that the overall proportion of young people in East Sussex who are not in education, employment or training at aged 16 continues to fall and is below that of the national average, although the proportion remains high in some of the most deprived areas. Furthermore, the report acknowledged that the impact of the innovative measures put in place was improving the rate of 17 and 18 year olds taking part in education. The proportion of looked after children and care leavers who are engaged in education, training or employment at the age of 19 continues to be very good over the last three years.

There was a dramatic increase of 44% in 2006 in the number of young people completing apprenticeships which was an area for improvement in the 2006 APA. There was also a good increase in the number of child care places available to enable parents to return to work.

There is good information and guidance provided by the local authority and its partners that ensure a good proportion of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are participating in employment, education or training. There is also highly effective strategic planning based on review of provision and assessment of need for this group of children and young people. Overall, the great majority of all young people aged 14 to 19 participate in education or training of their choice. This is because most young people in education attend a college where there is a wider range of courses than is found in East Sussex schools. But this is also because providers work together to ensure that courses are viable and they avoid competing for learners. Supplementing this work, there is an outstanding



range of specialised diplomas for post-16 and East Sussex is in a good position to meet the national target.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Improve standards reached by children and young people.
- Continue to reduce the proportion of young people not engaged in education, training or employment.

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

**Grade 4**

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

The council has outstanding capacity to improve its services for children and young people. The council has made good progress against the recommendations from the previous APA. However, the 2007 joint area review identified areas for improvement, particularly with regard to the extent to which provision is effective in improving outcomes for children and young people in vulnerable groups and in a few aspects of frontline practice. The council has acknowledged these and is taking appropriate action.

The council has a strong track record in identifying areas of poor performance and successfully targeting support that leads to improvement. A very good example of this is the use of school-based data. However, in the recent joint area review the quality of data in some other areas was found to be variable, for example in youth services and health. Many of the council's priorities are targeted on equality and diversity issues, such as the challenges faced in areas of social and economic deprivation and the effects of rural isolation. Vigorous action continues to be taken to increase performance. The hard federation of three secondary schools in Hastings, while still embryonic, has the capacity to greatly improve the outcomes for the young people who attend those schools.

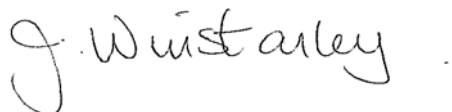
Financial management reflects the integration of services. As noted in the joint area review report, the energetic voluntary sector adds much to the capacity to improve outcomes for diverse groups, whilst also helping to provide shrewd funding. Partnerships are very well developed. Performance management and workforce capacity is good.

### **Area(s) for development**

- Improve the quality and use of data in all areas to that of the best.

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".

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager  
Local Services Inspection