

10 December 2007

Mr David Williams
Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services
Durham County Council
County Hall
Durham
DH1 5UJ

Dear Mr Williams

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) for your local authority, some of which was conducted at the same time as the analysis element of the joint area review (JAR). The 2006 APA informed the scoping of the JAR and the initial findings of the 2007 APA were taken into account by the JAR team at the end of the analysis stage. The outcomes of the JAR 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 JAR 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 (CYPP) 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 yourself and your colleagues during the process.

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

Durham County Council consistently delivers good services for children and young people and makes outstanding provision through the manner in which it supports children and young people to make a positive contribution. Effective progress has been made against most of the issues identified in Durham's 2006 APA letter by improving, for example, standards at Key Stage 4 and the much improved performance of looked after children and young people. This increase in educational attainment for looked after children and young people has been supported by increased stability in their placements. Further progress is still required to ensure that schools do not fall into Ofsted categories of concern and to improve standards in English at Key Stage 3.

Being healthy

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The authority makes a good contribution towards improving the health of children and young people in the area. Improving health outcomes for children and young people in Durham is in line with England averages but remains a challenge as overall being healthy outcomes began from a low baseline. The authority is working with partners in health to introduce the common assessment framework to support multi-agency working.

A county wide Family Support Strategy is in place and there is a good range of projects to support parents, such as a Parent Support Adviser and a health-led parenting project. There was a small increase in the number of mothers who smoke during pregnancy in all areas other than Sedgefield which achieved a 7.2% reduction. Overall rates remain high. The authority continues to focus on increasing breast-feeding rates across the county. Improvements are evident in most areas in the number of women who choose to do so. The work is supported by a countywide breast-feeding strategy which was launched in May 2006. As a result performance is now just below that of statistical neighbours but remains well below the average for England.

So far 99 schools have achieved the Healthy School standard. Baselines for take up of alcohol and substance misuse services have been established and 238 schools have adopted drugs policies and offer healthy food. There is a focus on obesity prevention with a range of healthy eating initiatives and increased levels of physical activity in schools. Levels of tooth decay remain high in the area but preventative strategies are in place for example in the Healthy Schools strategy support for positive dental hygiene. Immunisation rates for children and young people across all age groups are good, being above statistical neighbours and national comparators. Children and young people who require support from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service now have their needs assessed more quickly with 98.9% of those referred being assessed within 26 weeks.

Support is provided, through targeted work, to reduce the numbers of teenage pregnancies in identified hotspots. Overall rates are lower than in Durham's statistical neighbours. The authority is continuing to implement a Young People Substance Misuse Strategy, however, the proportion of young people receiving treatment fell last year while the number of young people admitted to hospital with mental health and behavioural disorders increased.

A healthy youth work standard has been developed between the youth service and the Primary Care Trust and has been implemented in seven projects so far.

Children with disabilities receive an initial assessment at a Child Development Centre. A formal partnership arrangement has developed for disabled children and young people with the agreement of the Trust, to enable effective and timely commissioning of services, particularly for those with complex needs.

Looked after children and young people have their health monitored with 87% having regular checks. The authority has adopted a long term focus on prevention and general well-being initiatives to address local health inequalities. This approach was identified in last year's APA with a recognition that the wide range of activity supported by the authority had yet to deliver improved outcomes.

Area for development

- Improve the oral health of children and young people.

Staying safe

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The authority makes a good contribution towards the safety of children and young people. The council, as lead for the local safeguarding children board, supports the whole safeguarding agenda. Inspection findings suggest that children and young people feel safe and supported in schools. Anti bullying schemes are in place and 36 schools have achieved the Anti-Bullying Award. There is also evidence of a decrease in racially motivated incidents. However the number of road traffic accidents where a child was seriously injured or killed rose last year from 23 to 36.

The local safeguarding children board is working with partner agencies to ensure Criminal Records Bureau and other vetting checks are undertaken for adults starting to work or having regular contact with children and young people. There is a joint agency approach to the management of sex offenders in the community, including the maintenance of a risk register; multi-agency public protection arrangements and registration with the police are effective.

The authority has identified homelessness as a key issue affecting the safety and well-being of children and young people in Durham and is working successfully with partners to reduce the number of homeless young people.

Durham has reviewed and improved the processes for managing the social care duty functions, these services are currently delivered by the council as part of the single number call centre. These changes have led to more accurate recording and greater clarity in identifying appropriately contacts which require advice or redirecting and referrals that require assessment. More accurate identification has reduced the high number of referrals recorded. The number of referrals received is now in line with statistical neighbours. The number of referrals which are re-referred for the same reason within twelve months remains low and in proportion to the reduction in the overall numbers of referrals. The number of referrals that have led to initial assessments has increased but is still below that of statistical neighbours. Timescales for initial assessments are judged as good, well above statistical neighbours. The time taken to complete core assessments is also judged as good; however the actual number of core assessments completed per 10,000 population remains low when

compared to the number of assessments completed by statistical neighbours. Although rising, the percentage of all child protection enquires ending in a case conference within 15 days was low at 21.4% when compared to the rates in statistical neighbour authorities of 49.6% and national averages at 34.6%. The method of calculation for this indicator has changed this year. This figure now suggests that higher numbers of child protection enquires are commenced in Durham which do not result in a case conference than in other authorities. The number of children subject to registration on the Child Protection Register or a child protection plan remains proportionate with only a small decrease in the number reviewed on time.

A Family Support Strategy has been developed to increase integration of local services and coordinate help for those in need of intensive support. The strategy is to be implemented county-wide. There is a strong focus on preventing children becoming looked after. During the last year, additional support prevented 99 children from entering care. Durham already has much lower numbers of looked after children than statistical neighbours, 39.4 per 10,000 compared to 60.3. Durham was selected as pilot for Parent Support Advisor pilot. Children entering care because of their parents' substance misuse has reduced by 3.2% to 51% as a result of targeted intervention in one area of the county.

A high proportion of looked after children and young people in Durham live in foster care. Short-term stability of placements remains very good and looked after children and young people in Durham are subject to regular reviews. Placement stability for looked after children in Durham is better than statistical neighbours. There is recognition of the needs of children and young people placed in Durham by other authorities with procedures and protocols in place to monitor their well-being. All looked after children and young people are allocated to a qualified social worker. Durham continues to ensure that looked after children and young people who can not return home are found permanent alternative families with 13.5% of looked after children for more than six months adopted last year.

Up to 90% of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have a transition plan in place. Safeguarding practice within special schools in Durham is rated at inspection as good or outstanding.

Areas for development

- Continue to increase the number of initial and core assessments undertaken.
- Monitor practice and recording systems for the numbers of child protection enquires commenced in light of the difference between Durham statistical neighbours and England averages.

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 area is good. Most children start school with attainment which is below that expected for their age. Nonetheless, by the end of Key Stage 1, the majority have made good progress and achieve in line with pupils in both similar authorities and nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards at Key Stage 2 remain similar to those seen elsewhere in both English and science but progress made in mathematics exceeds national results and those of similar authorities.

Pupils' performance at Key Stage 3 is more variable. Mathematics and science results match the average achieved elsewhere, however, standards in English are lower and lag behind those seen nationally but are similar to those in comparable authorities.

The impressive improvement in GCSE results of recent years has continued and the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades is now equal to that reached nationally and in similar areas. However, the proportion achieving five or more A* to C grades when English and mathematics are included continues to be below national levels but the gap is closing and is now higher than in similar authorities. In addition, the number of secondary schools performing below Department for Children, Schools and Families floor targets has reduced significantly over time with only one school now remaining in this category.

The performance of vulnerable groups of young people continues to improve. A greater proportion in local authority care achieve at least one A* to G pass at GCSE than seen nationally and the percentage who achieve five or more A* to C passes is amongst the highest in the country.

Inspection evidence confirms that most young children make a good start to their education in Durham. The quality of provision matches that seen in similar authorities. The majority of Durham schools provide effective education and care for pupils although a higher proportion of primary schools achieve good or outstanding inspection grades than secondary schools. Overall, the number of schools causing concern has declined since the 2006 APA although two schools are currently subject to special measures and a further two have been served with a notice to improve. The authority is outstanding in its support and challenge for school improvement. The protocols guiding intervention and support are clearly understood and effectively applied. The recent national award for the school improvement service is due recognition for the quality and impact of its work with schools.

Pupils' behaviour and their enjoyment of school are judged as mainly good or better in school inspections. The percentage of permanent exclusions is reducing because the local authority's preventative strategies are effective and there is good partnership working with schools. Primary exclusion levels have fallen and now match those seen nationally while secondary school exclusion rates are now below

national average but remain above similar authorities. In addition, the local authority makes extensive provision for permanently excluded pupils which is well above that made elsewhere.

Attendance rates in both primary and secondary schools remain broadly in line with those elsewhere. However the percentage of authorised absence has risen slightly in primary schools and is now above that seen in similar authorities and nationally while there has been a steady and consistent reduction in this figure in secondary schools. Unauthorised absence rates remain low in both school phases.

The percentage of surplus places has reduced in recent years in primary schools but has increased in the secondary sector. Nonetheless, both levels remain above both national levels and in similar authorities.

Areas for development

- Raise standards in English at Key Stage 3.
- Ensure schools do not fall into a category of concern.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The authority's contribution to outcomes in this area is outstanding. There has been a strong focus on involving children and young people in the local community and an equally strong focus on increasing the community's understanding of children and young people's needs through positive use of the media. In April 2006 Derwentside District Council was awarded Beacon status for positive youth engagement in democracy and community issues.

Information from school inspections suggests that in primary schools the extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community is above that of the national average and statistical neighbours. Even though the authority's youth service funding is below that of statistical neighbours the number of young people volunteering through youth services has increased by 57%. Some 4,483 young people were involved in elections for school councils, youth forums and the national youth parliament. The Youth Opportunity Fund awarded more than £400,000 to youth led projects; this money was awarded to the projects based on decisions taken by a trained supported panel of young people.

Durham has developed an Investing in Children award. A range of organisations within both the public and private sector in Durham have applied for this award. The standards the organisations have to meet to obtain the award have been set by children and young people. Each organisation is then inspected by a group of trained young people to see if the standards are being met. So far 183 organisations have gained the award; this represents an increase of 10% on the previous year.

Young people in contact with the youth service reported that 81% felt listened to by youth workers and that their views have influenced service improvement. Connexions have involved substantial numbers of young people in shaping their services, including commissioning and designing a web site. Local focus groups lead into a County Youth Forum and young people are representatives on the Connexions Partnership Board.

The Police Youth Strategy was informed by work with young people. Police training programmes have been developed with help from young people and three out of ten Police Respect Priorities were identified by young people. Overall the number of children and young people involved in offending and re-offending behaviour has reduced. However the rate of offending and re-offending by looked after children and young people was 2.43 times higher than in the overall Durham population.

Looked after children and young people are encouraged to express their views and 96% contributed to their reviews where key decisions are made about their future. A recent inspection of fostering services identified that children and young people in foster placement have excellent opportunities to make a positive contribution. Both children and young people with disabilities and looked after children and young people are involved through groups in local decision making. For example the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership has a young person's reference group and the Children's Network engages with 600 disabled children and their families. Offending rates and re-offending rates have fallen. The reason for a very recent increase in the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system has been identified. The council is working with partner agencies to tackle this issue. Offending rates for looked after children and young people are falling but remain higher than ideal with looked after children and young people being 2.4 times more likely to be cautioned or convicted of an offence than a young person not looked after.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The good contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area, identified in the APA report of 2006, has been maintained. Satisfactory progress has been made in the two areas identified as requiring improvement, notably by increasing the number of 16–19 year olds in employment, education and training and improving the performance of pupils in small sixth forms.

Efforts to engage more young people in education, employment and training are increasingly effective. The number of 16–19 year olds not in employment, education or training, has declined although the overall proportion remains above both national average and that of similar authorities. In addition, the proportion of looked after pupils who are engaged in education, training or employment has risen further and is now above similar authorities and national average. The effective engagement of the Durham 1000 project and the Connexions service has seen the number of 16–19

year old pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in education, employment or training rise sharply in 2006/07 compared to the previous year. The use of specialist vocational facilities and increasingly effective collaborative work between schools, colleges and training providers is further strengthening this work.

The local authority and Local Learning and Skills Council work together with increasing effectiveness in developing the 14–19 strategy. Priorities are well focused and this is leading to more secure engagement with other partners. Sharper accountability in monitoring the progress of initiatives is leading to better understanding of performance. There is a willingness to confront major barriers to progress and to tackle the high rates of youth unemployment in parts of the county. For example the introduction of the transport strategy is aimed at improving learner choice and opening access to education and training opportunities. In addition, a range of innovative solutions are being developed which includes video conferencing and greater flexibility in using teacher expertise around the county to promote further access to learning and training opportunities. Future planning for 14–19 students is also closely linked to proposals within the building schools for the future plans. Particular consideration is being given to securing access to sustainable educational provision in those communities which are too small to maintain a fully operational secondary school.

The authority and its partners have made satisfactory progress in preparing for the introduction of diplomas although only one, engineering, will be introduced in September 2008, with construction to commence in 2009. These successful bids were centred on strong school, college and employer partnerships and this approach is being used in further applications as three other initial bids were unsuccessful.

Recent inspection evidence confirms that all sixth forms were judged as at least satisfactory. The proportion of young people achieving the equivalent of two A levels by age 19 is rising although overall attainment remains below both national averages and similar authorities.

The local authority support in helping families return to work has involved a significant increase in the range of early years provision, mainly through the opening of 30 Sure Start Children's Centres and this will increase to 42 by 2010. These centres have focussed on increasing the supply of affordable child care but the local authority recognises that more is required to support families in accessing funding to meet their child care needs.

Area for development

- Reduce further the relatively high number of young people who are not in employment, education 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 has good capacity to improve its services for children and young people. Durham has a convincing track record of improvement; senior officers articulate a clear focus on priorities and offer a detailed understanding of service performance. Agreed priorities are based upon a detailed analysis of needs which has ensured that at both local and county level these are recognised and well understood. Priorities have appropriately informed the five *Every child matters* priorities expressed in the Children and Young Peoples' Plan, including the cross cutting themes of improving transport and improving the collation, analysis and use of data to better understand performance across all service functions.

The Children's Trust is now established and the five Primary Care Trusts covering the county have merged. Work between the five local children's boards and the council is effective. Strategic and local decision making functions are secure and all partners work together with increasing effectiveness. The alignment of services within the Children's Services Directorate is progressing well. A joint commissioning framework has been agreed but the extent of current commissioning activities and the use of pooled budgets is limited despite a clear determination on the part of the council and its partners to make progress in this area.

Performance management arrangements are good both within the council and the partnership. A range of social care and educational performance data is used to review progress and determine where further improvement is required. Notably, this evidence includes the views of children and young people. Senior managers demonstrate urgency in driving improvements and a range of examples where there is good impact are evident. These include continued impact on Key Stage 4 results, improvements in the attainment of looked after children in 2006, the increasing number of families engaged in early preventative and healthy living initiatives and the excellent local take up of immunisations.

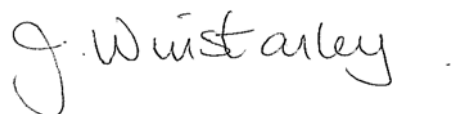
The council has effective systems in place to monitor and manage financial resources and seek efficiencies. Effective work has been accomplished for example in reducing out of county placements and although higher than average spending on in-county placements now occurs, these placements rarely breakdown. In other areas such as reducing the proportion of surplus places, further progress is still required.

Areas for development

- Extend commissioning arrangements.
- Reduce the number of surplus places in schools.

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 "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection