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26 November 2007

Mr John Freeman  
Director of Children's Services  
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council  
Westox House  
1 Trinity Road  
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West Midlands  
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Dear Mr Freeman

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DUDLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) for your local authority. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the assessment.

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

**Grade 3**

The contribution of the local authority towards children and young people being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being is good. The local authority's management of its services for children and young people, including its capacity to improve, is also good. The local authority has responded well to the recommendations raised in the joint area review and has maintained the quality of its work. It has made good progress in improving the quality of 14–19 education and training and has increased the provision of programmes to prepare young people for employment. As a result, outcomes for achieving economic well-being have improved. The local authority knows its strengths and has a clear understanding of what it needs to do to improve further.

## Being healthy

Grade 3

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The CYPP demonstrates that partnerships continue to be effective in supporting the health of young people. Infant mortality and perinatal mortality remain lower than average. Immunisation rates are better than national averages, as are the numbers of GP practices providing child health services.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted effectively through the Healthy Schools Programme, with all schools participating in the scheme and high levels of participation in sports. The local authority aims to build on this success by setting new targets for post-16 participation in sport, which is currently lower than other age groups.

Teenage pregnancy is declining faster than nationally and in similar authorities because of well-targeted local authority support to ensure the 2010 target is met. Good progress has been made on smoking cessation programmes. The authority has implemented the UNICEF requirements to achieve the children friendly status to promote the importance of breast-feeding. However, in spite of this good work, breast-feeding rates are low.

The health needs of looked after children and young people are addressed well, illustrated by the high proportions who receive timely medical and dental checks. As a result, children and young people have far lower incidence of tooth decay than that found nationally and in similar authorities.

The quality of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is effective. There is a multi-agency group in place which is responsible for the overall strategy for mental health services. The service for looked after children and young people includes a dedicated CAMHS and sexual health service. The youth offending service is particularly effective in making a difference to a greater proportion of children and young people than found nationally in providing specialist mental health and substance misuse services. This includes advice and guidance to parents who may also have mental health and substance misuse problems. The re-organisation of CAMHS, with a greater emphasis on early intervention strategies, has reduced waiting times this year.

### Area(s) for development

- Increase the number of mothers who breast-feed.

## Staying safe

Grade 3

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is well established with

good cooperation, contribution, participation and commitment from other agencies. There are no serious case reviews in the area but the council and its partners continue to be proactive in extracting practice issues from action plans and previous reviews in order to support professional development. The Local Safeguarding Children Board continues to respond to the government's agenda and is well managed and proactive in providing leadership and direction to all partner agencies. It has established pertinent initiatives and appropriate reporting mechanisms.

The local authority promotes preventative services well in order to reduce the numbers of children and young people who come into care. The common assessment framework has been implemented. There is evidence that this process is making a difference in that referrals for social work assessment are more appropriate because low levels of need are met by other agencies, therefore, reducing the need for further intervention.

The performance in completing core assessments is high, but completion of initial assessments is satisfactory. All children and young people who are subject to a child protection plan are allocated a qualified social worker and a high proportion of their reviews are carried out on time. This compares very favourably with both statistical neighbours and the national average.

The timeliness of reviews of looked after children and young people has shown some deterioration and is below both statistical neighbours and the national average. The local authority has reviewed its procedures and implemented new protocols to address this issue. This action has increased the number of reviews carried out on time this year. The proportion of those young people who are looked after, and allocated a suitably qualified social worker, has also declined. In order to ameliorate the effects of this, and to provide support for these young people, the authority has introduced young persons' advisors.

The use of kinship care for looked after children has increased as has the number of adoptions of looked after children. Improvement has been especially marked in the number of children being placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision being made, and is comparable to similar authorities. The stability of such placements is good as a result of early planning and matching of the young person's needs. Stability of placements for looked after children and young people is good in both the long and the short term.

The authority demonstrates excellent performance in supporting and planning for the transition from children's services to adult services for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Safeguarding checks in schools, and for council employees, are undertaken and promoted. Crime has fallen in the area. The authority has effective strategies to combat bullying, with the most recent findings of a survey suggesting that young people feel that when incidents of bullying occur they are dealt with in a timely and effective manner.

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

- Increase the number of initial assessments completed within time limits.
- Improve the review processes for looked after children and young people and increase the allocation of qualified social workers.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

**Grade 3**

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

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Early years provision and nursery education form a good basis for children's development. Inspection reports identify that the quality of provision for children in the Foundation Stage is good. Parents are becoming more involved in their children's education through the authority's consultative procedures and through the development of children's centres.

The authority is proactive in successfully implementing intervention strategies to drive up standards. Results for pupils aged seven have improved and are in line with national averages. Key Stage 2 and 3 results show a better rate of improvement than nationally with standards in line with the national average and rates of progress slightly above those found nationally. The authority is well aware that mathematics is a relative weakness across Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and continues to provide effective support through its consultants and the Intensive Support Programme, which has increased teachers' confidence in the teaching and assessment of mathematics.

The value added from Key Stages 2 to 4 is good and above the national average. Students aged 16 perform satisfactorily in GCSE examinations and the proportion that achieve five or more A\*-C grades continues to rise and is better than the local authority's statistical neighbours. The proportion of students achieving at least one GCSE A\*-G grade is much higher than both the national average and statistical neighbours. Those young people who sit AS and A levels consistently attain higher results than the national average and those of comparable authorities. Overall, looked after children and young people achieve well, as illustrated by the high proportions that attain at least one GCSE pass. The local authority has recently appointed a headteacher of the virtual school to oversee their needs.

Inspection findings show that nearly all children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least satisfactory progress, and in over 60% of

schools inspected, their progress was either good or outstanding. Consultation on the future shape of provision for children and young people who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been completed and the new strategy implemented. All children and young people educated at home and registered on the local authority's database receive 20 hours or more tuition each week, which is well above the national figure.

Inspection evidence from 2006 to 2007 shows that most schools are good and children and young people do well. Personal development is good in most schools. Children and young people enjoy school and appreciate the range of activities on offer. Attendance, including that of looked after children and young people, is broadly average. There are higher levels of exclusions in secondary schools than in similar authorities but recent data suggest that the number of children and young people excluded is reducing.

Schools are effectively supported to develop their self-evaluation by local authority-led training on generic issues and through tailored support for individual schools. The School Improvement Policy is consistently applied in order to identify accurately strengths and areas for improvement. The local authority's interventions in schools causing concern are effective. Two schools no longer require a notice to improve.

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

- Improve results in mathematics at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.
- Reduce the number of exclusions, especially in secondary schools.

## **Making a positive contribution**

## **Grade 3**

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

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. There is a wealth of opportunity for children and young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to participate effectively in decision-making and other activities. Over 6,000 children and young people, and 150 organisations, for example, were involved in the development of the play strategy. Six young advisors have been recruited to support the assessment of service delivery and review. Children and young people are increasingly involved in recruitment, selection and commissioning processes; for example, Rant about the Grant, which involves children and young people in decision-making processes related to small grants. The youth service makes an effective contribution in providing activities that enable young people to make a positive contribution to their community.

Children and young people looked after by the local authority are well supported in making a positive contribution and they feel that their views are listened to. Issues raised in the joint area review regarding the proportions of looked after children

participating in their reviews, have been positively addressed. The local authority now has a quality assurance protocol agreed within children's social care between the independent reviewing officers and those responsible for care planning in respect of looked after children. Reviewing officers are now involved in tracking cases and, consequently, the proportion of looked after children and young people contributing to their own reviews has increased but remains below that of statistical neighbours and national figures.

Mentoring in schools is becoming increasingly effective and delivered through the Behaviour Improvement Programme. Learning mentors successfully support children and young people on a daily basis. Learning link workers organise groups and informative events to include parents and carers. The Prevention and Intervention Service, which aims to prevent children being placed in care, trains young people to become effective peer mentors. The local authority has successfully bid to be part of a pilot in partnership with the Rainer Foundation to provide mentoring for looked after children and young people.

Action to reduce anti-social behaviour is effective, although local authority surveys and consultations in the borough reflect unease among residents and young people about crime especially on public transport. The last year has seen a significant improvement in the performance of the youth offending team which is now at Level 4 (good). This has been brought about through effective partnership working and creative practice. There has been a reduction in the number of young people entering the youth justice system and in the proportions of young people re-offending. The national target has been exceeded and there has been some effective work to tackle the risk factors underpinning youth crime. Voluntary youth provision has some excellent examples of work bringing together different race and faith groups, and supporting young Muslim people.

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

- Reduce young people's fear of crime and anti-social behaviour, especially on public transport.
- Increase the numbers of looked after children and young people participating in their reviews.

## **Achieving economic well-being**

**Grade 3**

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

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. There is a thorough and comprehensive strategic plan for learners aged 14–19, resulting in effective collaboration between the local authority and its partners in implementing. Good progress has been made in introducing the new diplomas, especially in the Halesowen partnership. A higher proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups enter further education compared to the local

population as a whole. Most outcomes show improvements from last year. In particular, very good progress has been made in reducing the numbers of 16–19 year olds not in education, employment or training, which is two percentage points below that found nationally. The proportion of all young people continuing in education post-16 is increasing and is just below the national average. Most young people leaving care live in suitable accommodation and good strategies for improvement are being developed. The provision for vulnerable groups and children from disadvantaged communities is good. Participation rates in learning for 16–18 year old mothers, care leavers, and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are below national averages but increasing.

Fewer young people than nationally failed to achieve any GCSE passes. The local authority works well with the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions to ensure that young people have good advice and guidance at key transition points. Attainment at post-16 varies across the different types of provision, with some performing highly while others are rapidly improving and moving closer to the national average. The proportions of students attaining Level 2 and 3 qualifications by the age of 19 is moving closer to the national average and those of statistical neighbours. Young people who study for GCSE/VCE/A/AS examinations do well, with the average points scores being well above the national average and those of statistical neighbours.

Achievement in work-based learning is improving and is in line with the national average. The local authority has a thorough awareness of learner success rates through the comprehensive data on success rates in work-based learning and further education, including analysis by sex, disability and ethnicity.

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

- Improve outcomes, progression and participation rates post-16, including for young people who are looked after by the council and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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

**Grade 3**

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

The capacity to improve, including the management of children's services, is good. There is strong corporate leadership including effective discharge of corporate parenting responsibilities. Senior and middle leaders have a good grasp of performance and a clear awareness of their roles in contributing to good outcomes for young people.

The Children and Young People's Plan provides an accurate analysis of strengths and weaknesses of services and sets out a clear direction of travel. Improving the

achievement and life chances for children and young people, and supporting their families are identified as key priorities in the 2006/09 CYPP and the community strategy.

The authority invests significant funding in education and social care services for children and young people. The shared vision of putting children and young people first is well illustrated by ensuring budget allocations are targeted at improving services for children and young people. However, the cost of some services, not all of which are under the authority's control, is greater than others. For example, the weekly costs of looked after children continue to rise; this is mainly the result of an increase in the numbers of children and young people entering care and the use of some costly out-of-borough placements, resulting from court orders.

Priorities are informed by national and local issues, and are supported by effective partnership working, as reflected in the comprehensive needs analysis undertaken by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. The involvement of young people, parents and carers, as well as statutory agencies and the voluntary sector, is evident. Good progress has been made in establishing Children's Trusts with new governance and commissioning arrangements currently planned. Dudley has completed a detailed re-organisation of both the local authority's and the Primary Care Trust's management structures.

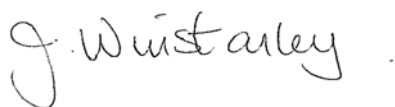
Overall, the council has demonstrated good progress in meeting the joint area review recommendations, especially in improving the quality of 14–19 education and training. High importance is placed on ensuring that children and young people achieve well and educational outcomes are rising. Therefore, the authority has shown good capacity to maintain and improve further its services for children and young people.

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

- Invest further in providing preventative services in order to achieve a balance of spend between early intervention services and statutory services for looked after 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, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager  
Local Services Inspection