

26 November 2007

Mr Stephen Prewett
Director of Children's Services
Dorset County Council
County Hall
Colliton Park
Dorchester
Dorset DT1 1XJ

Dear Mr Prewett

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

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment 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 annual performance assessment informed the scoping of the joint area review at the planning stage and the initial findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment 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 annual performance assessment 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

Dorset County Council consistently delivers services for children and young people to a good level. Together, children's services are making a good contribution to improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people.

Services are making a discernible difference and are of clear benefit to most children and young people. Outcomes are mostly better than those found nationally. Consultation with children and young people is good and feeds well into strategic planning and decision making and is starting to make a notable difference in key areas. For example, young Travellers were consulted on their needs and, as a result, the authority's Partnership Board was able to support the bid they made to the Youth Opportunities Fund for a youth worker to work with them on accessing training and

leisure opportunities. Effective mechanisms are in place for consultation with vulnerable groups.

The responses of most children and young people to service delivery and provision are positive and the capacity to improve is good.

There have been some notable improvements in the quality of services in 2007. For example, the Healthy School standard target has again been exceeded. Services for looked after children and young people have continued to improve and are now good. The proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE passes has risen. There are very good participation rates in terms of contact by young people aged 13 to 19 with the youth service. Good progress has been made in developing the partnerships formed to ensure the authority has the capacity to offer the full range of vocational diplomas for 14- to 19-year-olds across the region. Multi-agency collaboration is well established and joint commissioning is developing steadily, helping the authority ensure that children's services are responsive to need.

Being healthy

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council continues to make a good contribution towards the health of children and young people in the area. Healthy lifestyles for children and young people are promoted through links between health staff and children's centres.

Good outcomes have been demonstrated in many areas. For example, there is a 100% uptake in child health surveillance and all targets have been exceeded in immunisation programmes, putting the area ahead of comparator groups. Rates of breast-feeding initiation have continued to improve and remain above the national average. Dorset's Child Health Promotion programme has been implemented ensuring the early identification of health problems. Identified needs are addressed through multi agency partnerships, including the Be Healthy group.

However, in some outcomes, further improvement is still needed. The proportion of expectant mothers smoking during pregnancy in South West Dorset remains significantly above the national average, while a further substantial improvement in South and East Dorset maintains a strong performance against comparator groups.

Since last year, there has been continued progress on achieving Healthy Schools status and current achievements are in line with the national average. School inspections have shown 100% of primary schools and 95% of secondary schools to be good or outstanding in promoting healthy lifestyles. In most schools, children and young people were eating and drinking healthily and also taking regular physical exercise.

Over the last two years, the annual performance assessment has identified the rate of teenage conceptions as a challenge to the area, and this continues to be the case. For the county as a whole the number of teenage conceptions remains below the national average, but the rate of reduction is decreasing and is now significantly

below the government's target figure. The diagnosis of Chlamydia amongst 16- to 19-year-olds showed a significant increase and is now above the national average. There are plans to increase school nurse provision in Weymouth and Portland to reduce the level of risk-taking behaviour, and improve access to contraceptive services across Dorset. As yet, it is too early to provide evidence that these plans are having an impact on outcomes. To date, services have not been fully evaluated, making it difficult to ascertain which approaches work best when deciding on the interventions that will be made.

For the past two years the proportion of young people under 18 receiving treatment from substance misuse services has been exceptionally low. Originally this was thought to be a problem of data accuracy but the continued low figure suggests that interventions are not child focused. There continue to be problems related to data validity, which were identified some time ago.

The 2006 annual performance identified some improvement in the availability of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), but with key provision for some of those with greatest need still not in place. In 2007, a new CAMHS strategy is in place to drive performance improvement and a specification for a county-wide CAMHS has been put out to tender. A more robust system of prioritisation, based on assessments, has ensured services are now targeted and timely. This has resulted in a much improved, better coordinated and responsive service. Waiting lists have decreased markedly across the county.

However, although improved, waiting lists for CAMHS in West Dorset remain longer than in the east of the county. Good progress has been made towards a comprehensive CAMHS, and protocols and plans are in place, but only partially implemented for partnership working between agencies for children and young people with complex, persistent and severe behavioural and mental health needs.

Health services for looked after children and young people are generally good with 85% of health assessments being completed within expected timescales but work to improve healthy lifestyles for looked after children and young people has not yet been shown to be effective.

Areas for development

- Work to lower teenage conception rates.
- Clarify and address the reasons for the apparent low take up of treatment services for substance misuse.
- Strengthen partnership working to ensure adequate provision to meet the health needs of the most vulnerable.

Staying safe

Grade 2

Summary of strengths and areas for development

Council services make an adequate contribution to keeping children and young people safe. Most children and young people report they feel safe in their schools and home areas. Standards of health and safety throughout children's services are reported to be high. There is an anti-bullying strategy that has been informed by the views of children and young people.

Although numbers remain below the national average, there has been a steady increase in referrals over recent years. This is partly due to the inadequacy of the data recording system which fails to discriminate between formal referrals, messages and requests for information. This system has not enabled managers to fully evaluate the extent of demands upon their service, to identify trends and plan strategically. Repeat referrals have also increased and are now significantly above the national average. A high proportion of assessments are completed within seven days and the proportion of core assessments completed within the timescale is now good. The joint area review has identified concerns about the quality of assessments and their impact on planning for children and young people. Numbers of children and young people subject to a child protection plan have increased since last year but remain below the national average. The rate of re-registrations is now good. All children and young people on the register are allocated to a qualified, and experienced, social worker and 100% of child protection cases were reviewed within required timescales.

Systems for identifying the whereabouts of all children and young people are not comprehensive or well coordinated. Children and young people educated at home, or placed in hospital or special units, as well as gypsy and Traveller children and young people are effectively monitored. Following an audit of private fostering, increased numbers of children and young people have been identified and are being monitored. However, the system for identifying children and young people who go missing from school does not link to the Police missing persons system. Those systems for identifying the whereabouts of pre-school children, children and young people with poor school attendance and those in language schools are underdeveloped.

Services for looked after children and young people are good and there has been a significant improvement in placement stability. Numbers of looked after children and young people remain relatively low and there are some good arrangements for reducing the need for children and young people to become looked after, with plans to integrate and develop services further. An acceptable, but falling, number of children are adopted, and there have been significant improvements in the speed of the adoption process but some children and young people would benefit from sharper, and timelier, permanence plans to avoid unnecessary placement changes. Most care leavers now have Pathway Plans and these are regularly, and independently, reviewed. A small number of looked after children and young people still do not have a named worker who is a qualified social worker. This arrangement,

a response to staff shortages, is generally viewed positively by the children and young people, but it is neither satisfactory nor sustainable in the long-term and is contrary to current guidance.

A new safeguarding unit has been established to oversee safeguarding activities within the council. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is now firmly established and fully funded. The Local Safeguarding Children Board has demonstrated a strong commitment to partnership work, although the joint area review has found its work programme to be modest. Workgroup chairs are drawn from different agencies and the group is working closely with Bournemouth and Poole Local Safeguarding Children Board, particularly on learning lessons from serious case reviews. Work is in progress to implement the common assessment framework and the Integrated Children System is due to become operational in April 2008.

Placements of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities within the independent and non-maintained sector are decreasing, although there has been a slight increase in joint funded placements. Numbers remain above the national average. The authority regard the establishment of an agreed protocol to measure outcomes from this sector as a priority. Two major priorities for the authority are the review of Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Behaviour, Emotional and Social Disorders provision and the need to enhance in-county provision and reduce the reliance on out-county independent / non maintained provision. The development of specialist Behaviour, Emotional and Social Disorders provision, that includes care facilities, is considered an important component of this.

Areas for development

- Assure and improve the quality of assessments in children's and young people in social care.
- Ensure that comprehensive and coordinated arrangements are in place for monitoring the whereabouts of all children and young people.

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. Inspection findings show that, overall, children and young people enjoy school and achieve. The authority is proving effective in coordinating early interventions and support, increasingly through multi-agency work, to address identified achievement issues, particularly for more vulnerable children and young people. However, in 2006, variation existed in performance across schools at Key Stages 2 and 3. Although standards generally compare well in relation to the national average, the rate of improvement within Dorset has slowed. Value added measures between Key Stages 1 and 2 dropped from 100.5 in 2005 to 100 in 2006 and Key Stages 2 and 3 value added measures have fallen slightly each year since 2002.

The overall picture is that pupils in primary schools make good progress and achieve good standards. Children's scores on the Foundation Stage profile are above average. In 2006, standards are above national averages at Key Stage 1 and are generally above the national average at Key Stage 2. Value added measures between Key Stages 1 to 2 are above the national average, although the authority has recognised that in English some middle schools are performing less well when compared with most primary schools.

In secondary schools, standards are generally above the national average at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. The numbers achieving five or more GCSEs graded at A*-C in 2006 continue to show a rising trend of improvement and are above the national average. Value added measures between Key Stages 2 and 4 are above the national average. The Raising Achievement Project has had a good impact, for example, results in the nine schools targeted for local authority intervention improved by 6% in 2006.

The authority has set up a comprehensive strategy for improving the progress made by children and young people and raising standards at Key Stages 2 and 3 in schools serving areas of higher social deprivation.

Most children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least good progress, as confirmed by school inspection evidence. The proportion attaining nationally expected levels is above the national average in each key stage. Statements of special educational need are now issued within the expected timescales.

The majority of minority ethnic pupils achieve well in schools, particularly at GCSE, where scores were above the national average. Work undertaken by the Traveller Education Team has led to a 2% increase in achievement for Traveller and gypsy children, who now make progress in line with the national average between ages 11 and 16. In Dorset looked after children and young people regularly exceed the national average attainment for this group of learners.

Children are getting a good start to their education. An above average proportion of early years settings receive good and outstanding grades in Ofsted inspections. School inspection reports show that the overall effectiveness of most schools is good or better. There are no schools in a formal Ofsted category of concern. The local authority continues to be highly effective in intervening where schools are at risk of underperforming and in supporting the development of data informed self-evaluation procedures across all schools.

Children and young people's attitudes and behaviour in schools are good or better, as judged by Ofsted inspections. Well targeted preventative work has ensured that few children and young people have been excluded from schools. Permanent exclusions figures have declined to 11 and continue to decrease.

School attendance is broadly in line with national averages. The proportion of looked after children and young people who miss 25 days, an area for improvement in the 2006 annual performance assessment, remains above average.

Areas for development

- Raise the attendance of looked after children and young people; reduce the variation in attainment across schools at Key Stages 2 and 3.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Children and young people are consulted regularly and are making a good contribution to informing the design of services. For example, they are involved in the recruitment process for key personnel within the council. As a result, services and opportunities are being shaped to meet the needs of children and young people and more vulnerable groups. However, the council recognises that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have limited opportunities to influence county wide services.

Innovative approaches have been successful in increasing participation in a wide range of activities, such as the production of DVDs by young people attending a range of events including the Youth Achievement Award and young carers forum. Young people are represented in the National Youth Parliament and a County Youth Forum has been established. An audit of all participation activities is currently being undertaken in order to establish a comprehensive overview of provision and identify where opportunities for development exist.

The extent to which children and young people are making a positive contribution is judged to be at least good in almost all schools inspected and is outstanding in around a third. School inspection findings indicate that behaviour in schools continues to be good or better. The authority has a well established anti-bullying strategy. Children, young people, parents and staff were consulted on this at a conference in 2006 and have been integral to its development. A pilot project in five schools is using a national recording system to monitor incidents and to track outcomes. A recent survey of 600 pupils will give data on incidence, nature and location and parents are leading the development of an information pack. An accreditation system is in place for Rights Respecting Schools. Additional capacity has been created in the appointment of a project leader for anti-bullying to work in partnership with the agencies involved.

The target rates of contact by the youth service with young people aged 13 to 19 years exceed those nationally. As a result, young people are well supported in developing emotionally and socially, and in developing positive relationships with others. There are high levels of satisfaction with the authority's youth service provision, as determined through its bi-annual survey. Youth service provision was

judged to be good in its last Ofsted inspection. Children and young people enjoy the range of activities it helps develop and respond well to the support it offers. Close partnership with other services has been successful in improving the range of opportunities made available. For example, it has worked with the library service to secure the funding needed to create a Book Bar at Lyme Regis Library for young people, who help run the facility and gain the opportunity to get their volunteer work accredited.

There are effective parenting programmes available for those that need them. Information, advice and counselling provision is well signposted and targeted effectively according to identified needs. The network of children's centres have a parenting and family support strategy which directs support at particular transition points for families, such as when infants begin settling into childcare. Specialist advice is widely available to parents and carers of vulnerable children and young people.

Looked after children and young people are well supported, through both discrete services and mainstream school provision. Almost all looked after children and young people attended and participated in their reviews.

Area for development

- Ensure that children and young people with learning disabilities and/or difficulties are actively involved in decision making about county wide services.

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 area is good. There is good access to childcare services, adult and family learning. The children's information system is effective in providing comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date information, which is readily accessible to parents and young people.

There continues to be a good proportion of young people who are in education, employment or training. The proportions of young people achieving Levels 2 and 3 by age 19 are above the national average. Children and young people have good opportunities to undertake modern apprenticeships and the number that do so are well above the national average. There is good provision of impartial careers information, advice and guidance to 13- to 19-year-olds.

The council is proving successful in helping those who need additional support to gain employment or training and to secure their own economic well being. The proportion of care leavers who are in education, employment or training at age 19 is significantly higher than the national average. The number of care leavers who are now living in suitable accommodation has risen steadily over the last four years and is above the national average. The council is piloting a young person's supported

housing panel and working strategically to ensure access to existing provision to vulnerable groups including teenage parents.

A coordinated strategy to tackle the proportion of 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training has met with success and, overall, rates are now below average. The authority is intervening to support learners in Weymouth and Portland, where the proportions remain above average. Additional resources have been allocated to establish individualised learning programmes for those at risk of disengagement in Key Stage 4.

Since the last annual performance assessment, good progress has been made in increasing the number of courses available. Partnerships for 14–19 are developing well and are building the capacity to offer a range of new vocational diplomas. There is still more work to do to ensure that education and training for 14- to 19-year-olds is sufficiently flexible and wide ranging to ensure equity of access and opportunity for students across the county. The local authority is providing clear strategic leadership in addressing issues regarding transport, timetabling and employer engagement.

Standards in sixth forms remain in line with the national average. Young people make satisfactory progress from GCSE to A level. The authority now has a clear improvement strategy for raising post-16 attainment levels and has set challenging targets. It has identified the need to improve consistency in the quality of teaching across subjects in school sixth forms and monitor students' progress more rigorously.

Area for development

- Raise post-16 attainment levels.

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. Its management of these services is effective. The 2006 Children and Young People's Plan shows that the authority has a developing preventative strategy and many of its priorities are focused on securing equality and diversity. The council actively seeks the views of service users, including parents and carers, and encourages children and young people to influence the design and delivery of children's services. However, needs analysis data are not formally collated and analysed to provide a comprehensive overview.

The council is effectively coordinating partner agencies in the delivery of the children's plan and the partnership has been restructured to reflect the five *Every child matters* outcomes. Multi-agency collaboration is well established and joint commissioning strategies are proving increasingly effective in helping to ensure that children's services are responsive to need.

Value for money overall is good, and there are systematic actions in place to review policies and processes to improve value for money where issues of underperformance are identified. However value for money is yet to be shown in all areas and work is in progress to tackle a number of issues such as school transport and out-of-area placements.

The council and its partners have the people, skills and capacity required to deliver priorities. Performance management systems are in place and beginning to be used to identify areas for improvement. The progress made towards the targets for improvement is regularly reviewed.

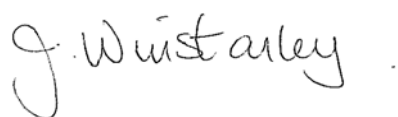
The council has a good track record of identifying areas of poor performance and targeting them for improvement. Many of its priorities are targeted on equality and diversity issues, such as the challenges faced in areas of social and economic deprivation and the effects of rural isolation. Close analysis has led to the identification of pockets of educational under-performance, for example to improve achievement for children and young people in Portland. Resources have been used strategically to pursue these priorities. For example, some of the additional funding created by making the effective school improvement service income generating, has been allocated to supporting looked after children and young people.

Area for development

- Development of systems to use local data in evaluating service provision and outcomes.

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