

26 November 2007

Mr Jim Crook  
Interim Director of Children's Services  
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council  
The Council House  
College Road  
Doncaster  
South Yorkshire  
DN1 3DA

Dear Mr Crook

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

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment for your local authority. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan, your action plan arising from the joint area review and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. The letter also comments on your progress against the recommendations of the last joint area review. 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 2**

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council continues to deliver services for children and young people at an adequate level. The council has taken some effective actions to tackle the recommendations raised in the joint area review report. However, a number of deeper-rooted issues remain. The council is making a good contribution to improving outcomes in three outcome areas, and is now better equipped to deliver a more efficient and effective service to children and young people because of some important developments. These include: the rationalisation of the leadership and management of children's services into a single and more cohesive body; the embedding of a local neighbourhood and community strategy; the expansion of their integrated services model; and the collaborative partnerships that have been developed. The council has a good capacity to improve further, evidenced by its success in raising children and young people's achievement at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. Similarly, outcomes for a number of vulnerable groups are also improving. In addition, the council has effectively improved outcomes in a number of social care services for children and young people.

## 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 JAR report made two recommendations, which the council are tackling effectively.

#### For action in the following six months

- Evaluate and improve oral health initiatives' impact on dental health and re-assess provision for reducing the rate of teenage pregnancies.
- Review the location of key children's services on the hospital site.

In the last 12 months, the council has improved its promotion of healthy lifestyles and good health for children and young people in some key areas. There is some innovative joint work between the Primary Care Trust and schools, for example, in tackling oral health issues by introducing fluorinated milk in some schools. The council is proactive, innovative, and inclusive in the delivery of its health related services: action has been taken to improve neonatal services and plans are in place to locate key children's services on the hospital site.

Coherent partnership arrangements are making a real difference for vulnerable children and young people. For example, there is a specialist school nurse for looked after children and young people to ensure personal health plans fully promote their health and as a result, the health needs of children and young people in children's homes are met very well. The Youth Service is particularly good at supporting improved health outcomes for young people through advice and information. The Healthy Schools programme was on target in December 2006 and, although the recent floods in the area have affected progress, the council is confident it will meet this target. This programme is embedded in most schools; there is good take-up of healthy eating, high participation rates in physical activities, and a good awareness of the benefits of following a healthy lifestyle. Healthy outcomes for children and young people in secondary schools are considerably better than in similar areas. However, the number of young people who drink alcohol to excess is higher than other areas and remains an area for further improvement.

The needs of vulnerable groups and other key priorities are effectively targeted by multi-agency work. The teenage conception rate of 60 conceptions per 1000 is too high when compared with similar areas and the national average (41 per 1000). However, the impact of services is very good and Doncaster has made the biggest long-term reduction in the region over the last 8 years. Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for 16- to 19-year-olds are effective. Access is very good and waiting times low. Tier 2 CAMHS provided by the Primary Care Trust and local authority demonstrate a sound integrated approach. Arrangements for urgent mental health needs are good and progress towards comprehensive CAMHS services

is good. However, specialist therapy provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is not available locally. The PCT has acknowledged this and plans exist for local service delivery by December 2007.

### **Area for development**

- Provide sharply focused programmes to raise children and young people's awareness of the risks associated with drinking alcohol and drunkenness.

## **Staying safe**

**Grade 2**

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

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The joint area review report highlighted two recommendations, which the council are tackling effectively.

### **For action in the following six months**

- In relation to safeguarding, partners should agree:
  - thresholds for referral between services and agencies
  - a common approach to full assessment
  - arrangements to establish the whereabouts of all vulnerable children and young people.
- The council should ensure greater consistency in the quality of assessment, planning and recording of social services case files.

Action to improve the effectiveness of thresholds for referrals is progressing well. New protocols are in place and the executive group of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board is monitoring this effectively. Effective multi-agency work, such as shadowing between agencies, has led to a reduction in the number of referrals by 174 per 10000 this year. A similar coordinated approach to full assessment is progressing well. A new core assessment process is now in operation and there is agreement on the local format for the common assessment framework, however it is not certain that full implementation will be achieved by March 2008. Action to improve systems for managing the whereabouts of vulnerable children and young people is progressing well; including a review of policy, a second looked after children teacher and new administrative staff. This is leading to closer tracking and support for looked after children and young people.

Work to improve consistency in the quality of assessments and planning process is progressing well. However performance overall is variable and it will take more time for initiatives to have full impact. The local authority has been proactive in its efforts to tackle this and a borough wide duty and assessment team is in place. The quality of assessment is rising because of the introduction of standard assessments and officer's involvement in workshops to test out workflow issues. Some improvements have been achieved. For example, the number of children and young people

removed from the Child Protection Register is increasing, and the number subject to a child protection plan for two years or more is reducing. The number of child protection conferences held within 15 working days is better than in similar areas and the national average. Similarly, the number of core assessments held within 35 working days is better than the national average. The percentage of initial assessments within 7 working days of referral has increased from 34.9%, to 60.2%, but remains below similar areas and the national average. However, the number of repeat referrals within 12 months remains higher than in similar areas and the national average, and the number of core assessments and children subject to a child protection plan, though beginning to reduce, also remains higher than in similar areas and the national average. Satisfactory progress is being made in the introduction of electronic case files.

Progress is being made on reducing the number of children and young people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents, but the degree of reduction is lower than nationally. Targeted work is addressing this, and take up by children and young people is good. School inspections show that children and young people adopt safe practices very well. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is operating effectively; key performance indicators are being monitored quarterly and action planning is driven by data analysis. For example, closely targeted work is being done to improve responses on domestic violence which currently represent nearly 20% of child protection referrals. Serious case reviews are managed appropriately; there is good cross-authority working and a positive approach to learning from these cases. The number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities aged 14 who had a transition plan to support their move from children services to adult service is now very good, and above that in similar areas and the national average. The numbers of looked after children and young people in residential accommodation, fostered placements or placed for adoption has improved this year in line with national averages. The numbers of these children and young people fostered with relatives or friends is improving, but remains much lower than in similar areas and the national average. The local authority believe the below average performance in this indicator is because of their policy of encouraging and enabling relative carers to apply for Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders. Performance on adoption rates is back in line with similar areas and the stability of shorter-term placements for looked after children and young people is very good. The stability of longer-term placements is improving but remains worse than similar areas. Performance on looked after children and care leavers reviews have improved from 74% to 83% and are in line with similar areas. There are 4.3 full time equivalent social worker vacancies.

### **Areas for development**

- Continue to improve quality and consistency in the implementation of child protection thresholds for referral between agencies and full assessments.
- Ensure the full implementation of common assessment framework by March 2008.

## Enjoying and achieving

## Grade 2

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is adequate. Some improvements are evident, however, some previously identified issues remain a concern. The joint area review highlighted two recommendations, which the council have taken actions to address.

#### For immediate action

- The council should provide full-time alternative education for those permanently excluded from mainstream schools.

#### For action in the following six months

- The council should continue work with its partners to address the needs of children and young people with behavioural difficulties.

The council has responded appropriately to the recommendation that it provide full time education for children and young people permanently excluded from school. An action plan, based on collaborative working to identify support and agree access to appropriate provision and funding arrangements, is now in operation. It includes plans for better early intervention and improved assessment. The schools forum has agreed to fund an extension of the pupil referral unit provision to increase capacity in the authority. However, this work has not yet led to improved outcomes for children and young people. The percentage of permanently excluded children and young people provided with alternative tuition, particularly those receiving less than six hours a week, is 30.2%. This is much higher than in similar areas, and the national average, which is 3.0%.

The council has taken a range of suitable actions to address the needs of children and young people with behavioural difficulties. Some of these actions have had more impact than others. A key focus has been on preventative measures and better early intervention. In addition, the council is working with seconded secondary head teachers to develop effective partnership working. The Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme (SEAL) is in place in all primary schools, and a number of senior leaders from professional groups have received behaviour leadership training through nationally accredited programmes. The behaviour improvement programme is also delivering targeted support to a number of schools in behaviour 'hot spots'. The schools involved have all reduced fixed and permanent exclusions by over 20%. The council is planning to extend this provision more widely across its schools using its area collaborative model to embed best practice and develop better strategies to address the needs of hard-to-place children and young people. Nevertheless, the impact of these initiatives has been inconsistent. Fixed term exclusions in primary schools have fallen, and remain below similar areas and the national average.

Permanent exclusions in secondary schools have also fallen in the past year, and are in line with the national average. This contrasts with a rising trend of fixed term secondary school exclusions, which are above the national average and, although permanent exclusions in primary schools have fallen over the past year, they remain twice the national average.

There has been a continued trend of improved attainment at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 and the gap between boys and girls performance is closing.

In 2006, performance at Key Stage 2 was in line with similar areas in all subjects, and in line with the national average in mathematics and science, but below in English. Provisional results for 2007 show a 3% improvement in English and 2% improvements in mathematics and science at Level 4. This improvement is greater than the average nationally for English and science, and in line with the average for mathematics. Provisional results for Key Stage 1, whilst still broadly in line with the national average, are lower than they were in 2006.

The proportion of children and young people reaching level 5 or better in mathematics and science improved in 2006, although there was some slippage in English. Overall, this is in line with similar areas, but below the national average.

In 2006, at Key Stage 4, the rate of improvement exceeded the national average, both in terms of average points scores and the proportion of students gaining 5 A\* to C grades, including mathematics and English. Whilst this performance is still below the national average, it brings the council in line with similar authorities for achievement at 5 A\* to C. Provisional results for 2007 show a further 5% improvement in 5 A\* to C grades and a 2.7% increase when English and Mathematics are included. The diversification of schools' curriculum, including increased vocational opportunities, is also impacting positively on Key Stage 4 success rates. There has been a 16.8% rise in the percentage of looked after children and young people achieving at least one GCSE over the past year, but overall rates remain below similar areas and the national average.

Parents and carers receive good quality support. There is a good range of programmes available to encourage parenting skills, and provide accessible information and guidance. There are well-coordinated admission arrangements and the vast majority of parents receive their preferred choice of school for their children. The provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has also improved, with fewer statemented children and young people placed in mainstream schools and more in maintained specialist schools. These figures are above similar areas and the national average

The council continues to take action to address those areas where indicators are less positive. Unauthorised absence rates in secondary schools remain above similar areas and the national average. This is also true of the high proportion of looked after children and young people who missed more than 25 days of schooling, and the proportion of eligible looked after children and young people who sat at least one



GCSE or equivalent. The proportion of primary schools where surplus places exceed 25% is greater than in similar authorities and nationally, although the council's primary schools reorganisation, made possible by Building Schools for the Future funding, aims to address this.

### **Areas for development**

- Improve the percentage of permanently excluded pupils receiving fulltime education, particularly those receiving less than 6 hours.
- Decrease the proportion of looked after children and young people who missed more than 25 days schooling.
- Reduce the proportion of permanent exclusions in primary schools.
- Curtail the rising trend of unauthorised absence 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. The joint area review report highlighted two recommendations, which the council are tackling effectively.

#### **For action in the following six months**

- Councillors and council employees should implement their responsibilities for the Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Improve transition arrangements for the transfer of disabled young people to adult health and social services.

Good arrangements are in place to promote corporate parenting. Consultation on Care Matters has been undertaken with councillors, managers and staff, leading to plans to further strengthen strategic planning and services for looked after children and young people. Effective links between schools and adult services are improving the transition of young people with disabilities to adult services. A new transition social worker post has been created based in adult services, and funding has been identified to provide additional support for young people. The number of children aged 14 who had a transition plan to support their move from children services to adult service is very good at over 90%. This exceeds both the national average and the proportion in similar areas.

There are some good neighbourhood strategies providing a coherent approach to supporting children and families. Sure Start, schools, the Youth Service, and youth offending team provide good support for children's social and emotional development. Parenting programmes and mentoring programmes are well

established, sharply focused, and effective at tackling offending, bullying, and in supporting young people experiencing difficulty at school. Children and young people's involvement in decisions that affect them through area forums and the Youth Bank is good. Contributions made by school councils and the Youth Service are particularly effective in influencing the shape of services in important areas such as combating bullying. Increasing numbers of young people are involved in Youth Council elections. The arrangements for vulnerable groups to have their say are also good and the Youth Service and youth offending team are engaging with some of the most vulnerable young people in a broad range of programmes. In addition to their reviews, looked after children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities participate and express their views as part of routine consultations, and the council is effective at implementing these views. The Tellus2 survey was positive, and responses were in line with those nationally. The school survey was also mostly positive but identified the need to help children and young people to understand their civil and legal rights as an area for development. As a result the local authority is implementing 'Hear by Rights' standards across all services to improve consistency.

The impact of services on anti-social behaviour is good. A wide range of activities are offered for children and young people to divert them away from anti social behaviour and crime. The Youth Service is outstanding, and opportunities for young people to volunteer are good; for example, through Doncaster Royal Infirmary and Connexions. The performance of the Youth Offending Service is very good. The number of young people involved in re-offending is below similar areas and the national average. The trend in first time offenders is also positive over time, although the number of first time offenders has risen recently due to a change in policy by one of the partner agencies. This is an area for development. Action to reduce bullying has been effective. The number of racist incidents in schools has reduced in the last year and initiatives to promote the image of young people in the community are helping to improve the public's perception of the positive contribution young people make.

### **Areas for development**

- Introduce further ways to strengthen children and young people's understanding of their civil and legal rights.
- Work with partners to reduce the rate of first time offenders.

## **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 continues to be good. The joint area review report highlighted three recommendations, which the council have taken actions to address effectively.



### **For action in the following six months**

- The council should improve transition arrangements for children and young people with complex or profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities to post-16 education and training.
- Improve transition arrangements for care leavers and children and young people who offend to enter education, employment or training.

### **For action in the longer term**

- The council should improve the availability of appropriate accommodation for vulnerable young people living independently; young people leaving care who have the most complex needs; homeless young substance misusers, and children and young people who offend.

There is now better capacity within the service and a multi-agency approach is providing more suitable and affordable accommodation for vulnerable young people living independently. A new accommodation strategy is in place to improve the accommodation choices for care leavers, and provide additional solutions that meet the accommodation needs of vulnerable groups. This has led to a reduction in the average length of bed and breakfast accommodation and this is now lower than in similar areas and nationally. Similarly, although the overall figure of 83.9% remains below similar areas and the national average, the percentage of care leavers who are living in suitable accommodation has improved by 18.4% in the past year.

A more coordinated approach exists to improve transition arrangements for targeted groups, leading to a number of successful projects aimed at improving access to, and the availability of, skilled employment, suitable education, and training opportunities. The number of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities not in education, training, or employment has fallen at a faster rate than the national average in the past year; while the number of 16- to 19-year-olds re-engaging in education, employment or training has outstripped the national average and similar areas. The proportion of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities involved in work-based learning is much higher than the national average. The numbers of looked after children and care leavers in education, employment or training is very good, and in line with the national average. Some good progress has also been made in improving transition arrangements for young offenders and the numbers in education, employment or training is currently above the national average.

There have been some important improvements in the impact of council services on the economic well-being of children and young people, but these are against low starting points. There is a coherent 14–19 strategy in Doncaster, linked to local needs and priorities. This has underpinned the improved success rates for young people in national tests and examinations at Key Stage 4. Similarly, the proportion of 19-year-olds not in education training or employment is in line with the national average and below statistical neighbours. There is an improving trend in the participation rates of 17-year-olds in education and training, although overall figures

remain below the national average. The same is true for the percentage of young people achieving Level 2 by age 19. The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds whose current activity is unknown has also improved and is now below similar areas, but above the national average. The percentage of teenage mums who are in education, employment, or training has improved. Housing indicators have also improved; including the proportion of children aged 0 to 4 and 5 to 14 living in households where no one is working.

Nevertheless, several aspects remain a concern, and demonstrate a lack of impact. Although improving, standards remain below national averages at Key Stages 3 and 4, as do success rates for looked after children and young people. The proportion of young people completing year 11 who continue in learning is lower than similar areas and the national average. The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds, and 19-year-olds not in education, employment or training also remains above similar areas and the national average. In addition, the percentage of 16- to 19-year-olds with learning difficulties and/or disabilities not in education, employment, or training has risen over the past year, and is above the national average. The proportion of 19-year-olds whose current activity is unknown remains much higher than in similar areas and the national average.

### **Areas for development**

- Ensure procedures for tracking, identifying and arranging provision for 19-year-olds whose current activity is unknown are more effective.
- Address the rising trend of 16- to 18-year-olds, and 16- to 19-year-olds with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who are not in education, employment or training.

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

**Grade 3**

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

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is now good and its management of these services is strong. The joint area review report highlighted two recommendations, which the council have addressed.

### **For action in the following six months**

- The council should review the appropriateness of the wide range of areas for which the director of children's services is accountable.

## For action in the longer term

- The council should monitor and review the effectiveness and the impact of new ways of working, following the reorganisation of children's services and the proposed merger of the primary care trusts, for consistent provision and improved outcomes for vulnerable groups.

Since the joint area review took place, the council has reviewed the wide range of areas for which the Director of Children's services was accountable. A new leadership structure was introduced, which rationalised the remit of the children's services director, and removed the wider neighbourhood services dimension from the role.

The establishment of the Doncaster Children's Partnership Trust Board, which includes multi-agency 'theme boards' linked to each of the five outcome areas, is providing an effective monitoring and strategic coordination. This is helping to ensure consistent provision and improved outcomes for vulnerable groups. The council commissioned an external review of effectiveness to evaluate the impact of its integrated children's services model. The feedback has been positive.

Good improvements across a range of performance reflect the enhanced capacity of the council's integrated children's service. The rationalisation of service management has had a number of key benefits and has led to a more coherent and integrated approach, which focuses exclusively across the children's services remit. Key appointments of staff with a proven record of accomplishment in strategic planning and effective change management have been made. At corporate level there is a single voice representing children's services. There are clearer lines of accountability and a greater clarity of purpose. The partnership arrangements established have been rationalised, which has led to a better continuity and consistency of provision. In addition the neighbourhood management system enables a more responsive approach to local needs, with integrated services providing more effective prioritising and support within communities.

The Children and Young People's Plan is well conceived and demonstrates the council's ambition and commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people in Doncaster. There has been wide consultation across local communities and a range of stakeholders, together with a comprehensive needs analysis, which has informed the development of the council's priorities. Plans are both challenging and realistic. An effective performance management framework underpins the council's reflective approach to monitoring, evaluating, and improving services, and the review of the Children and Young People's Plan shows that a number of appropriate actions have led to improvements.

Doncaster is a Local Area Agreement Pilot Authority, which is helping it to ensure that resources are focused in areas of greatest need, and realign the distribution of resources to achieve greatest impact. Good cooperation between private, voluntary and public services are helping to secure value for money and holistic solutions. High priority is given to a range of preventative services, to safeguarding children and

support services for vulnerable children and young people. Decision making is sound and council resources are increasingly being deployed to best effect. In particular, smarter contracting and joint commissioning of services is leading to efficiency savings in some areas. However, the cost of some services is higher than for similar authorities and national averages. Work has begun to identify cost savings, without detracting from service quality while maintaining high levels of activity: including the high costs associated with out of area placements and private fostering arrangements.

The council demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring staff and partners have the necessary skills to deliver its priorities for services. The council has acted on feedback from a staff survey and taken action, for example in the area of communication. A good programme of professional learning and development exists at all levels of the council. There is a good approach to brokering services, and standard operating procedures have recently been reviewed. The council has received favourable external validation for its work in this area. There is a strong commitment to the recruitment and retention of staff, particularly social workers, to improve capacity. However, the proportion of social workers and residential managers obtaining the necessary Post Qualifying award, and the number of vacancies in social care posts for children and families needs to improve.

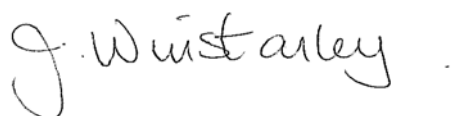
Overall, the council has demonstrated some good progress in meeting the joint area review recommendations and has shown good capacity to maintain and improve further its services for children and young people.

### **Areas for development**

- Improve the value for money obtained from the higher-cost services, particularly those associated with out of area placements and private fostering arrangements.
- Reduce the percentage of vacancies in social care posts for children and families.

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