

26 November 2007

Mr Colin Green
Director of Children, Learning and Young People
Coventry City Council
Civic Centre 1
Earl Street
Coventry
CV1 5RS

Dear Mr Green

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN COVENTRY CITY 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), your action plan arising from the joint area review (JAR) and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. The letter comments on progress since the recent JAR. 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 council delivers good services for children and young people, has a track record of achieving good improvement and is making faster progress relative to the performance of other councils. It has demonstrated that it is accurate in assessing the quality of its services and using effectively its extensive data analysis. It has responded positively to the issues raised in the JAR and good progress has been made since then, in particular improving some aspects of social care such as the secondment of a social worker to the police domestic violence unit, and this has improved the assessment of domestic violence referrals by both police and social care, and improved the whole efficiency of the service. The contribution the council makes towards improving outcomes for being healthy, enjoying and achieving and achieving economic well being remain good. Staying safe is judged adequate, as there is still work to do to achieve more consistent performance on some social care indicators so that they are comparable to statistical neighbour and national benchmarks. Outcomes for making a positive contribution to the community were judged outstanding at the JAR and this remains the case. The council has demonstrated a commitment to improving services for all young people and their parents and carers with the addition of their own sixth *Every child matters* outcome: Supporting Families, Friends and Communities. This is a highly appropriate and relevant issue to Coventry and demonstrates that the council has vision and creative energy to identify and support local need.

Being healthy

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. No recommendations emerged from the JAR for immediate action and only one for action in the next six months.

For action in the next six months

- Develop a strategy for CAMHS to ensure effective planning and delivery of services.

The council has made good progress in developing and implementing a strategy for the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS). The service has been targeted to improve assessments and intervention for those children who most need them. The CAMHS service is now performing better and achieved threshold performance, in line with 79% of trusts. Access to the service has increased and although waiting times have fluctuated, overall waiting lists have come down. There is a well-established service for looked after children and an outreach provision has been established based with the fostering service, to offer help and advice to young people and their carers including foster carers and residential staff. This has contributed to better placement plans and timely support to staff and carers. The Coventry Primary Care Trust (PCT) is committed to improving CAMHS and has established a training programme for all staff to identify and recognise early signs of self-harm and eating disorders. There are very good transition arrangements for 16 to 17 year olds. An out-of-hours rota with specialist staff is available and has been agreed and merged with a neighbouring authority. The youth service is also committed to provide preventative intervention and have been provided with additional funding to support Tier 1 assessments.

The contribution of all services to improve outcomes for all children being healthy is good. The CYPP demonstrates that partnerships have been strengthened and are now effective in supporting the health of young people in the area. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been involved well in developing their awareness of leading a healthy lifestyle. This includes contribution to a sexual health video and in designing safer and accessible sports and leisure activities. A higher percentage of schools than nationally or statistical neighbours participate in the Healthy Schools programme, although fewer have yet achieved Healthy Schools status compared with statistical neighbours. The behaviour and education support teams (BEST) work well in schools. Being healthy is judged favourably in school inspection reports especially in primary and special schools. No schools in the City were judged to be inadequate on this issue.

Teenage pregnancy rates are above national averages. Figures have declined year-on-year since 2002 and are now very close to statistical neighbours. A teenage pregnancy strategy designed to reduce under 16 and 18 year old conception has clear and convincing plans to reduce figures to below national averages. A number of

good initiatives are in place to help reduce the figures like the Clinic in a Box, and the roll out of the emergency contraception pharmacy scheme with more pharmacists being included in giving out condoms and Chlamydia screening.

However, in spite of a developing multi-agency strategy to tackle obesity, 20% of young people are obese. The council is aware of this and has increased access to sport and leisure facilities for young people. The One Body One Life programme which targets the most needy neighbourhoods is beginning to have an impact in reducing obesity and improving family lifestyles. Additionally, a number of good initiatives are in place to ensure children receive the best health advice; for example, more teachers are now accessing training for the certificate of personal, social and health education (PSHE).

There are many positive signs of improvement. Infant mortality rates are rapidly closing the gap on national averages and are now better than the benchmark group average. Projects based in the most deprived areas are targeting drug and smoking issues and The Tellus2 survey suggests that alcohol consumption amongst young people is lower than that nationally. Furthermore, the proportion of expectant mothers smoking (19.0%) is lower than statistical neighbours but slightly higher than national averages. Similarly, the proportion of mothers initiating breastfeeding (63.0%) is better than statistical neighbours and slightly lower than national averages at 68.9%.

The health needs of looked after children is good and children have regular health and dental assessments. The percentage of looked after children who have an annual health assessment is in line with local and national figures. There is a good data system to monitor their health requirements and a dedicated nurse is making a difference to the health needs of these children.

Staying safe

Grade 2

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 adequate. No actions were identified for immediate action from the JAR, and only one recommendation emerged for action in the next six months. No recommendations were identified for action over the longer term.

For action in the next six months

- Ensure good practice in social care is consistent in all areas, including the use of police powers in relation to child protection.

The council has made some progress to ensure that good practice in social care is becoming more consistent, but there is still work to do. The secondment of a senior social worker to the police domestic violence unit has made significant improvements in the quality of response to domestic violence referrals. The system is now more effective and has improved the whole efficiency of the unit. Regular monthly

meetings of senior staff from both services and established protocols have improved communication and early intervention in these cases.

All child protection cases are allocated a qualified social worker and all are reviewed on time. The council has for the last three years undertaken and conducted an audit to ensure services are compliant with the recommendations made in Lord Laming's report and has received positive reports. A number of key indicators of progress are however not showing improvement.

A number of initiatives are in place to reduce child protection referrals and to help families earlier. There is an increasing focus on the family and provision of services to strengthen the Supportive Families, Friends, and Communities network. Family group conferences are held in all localities of the city so that all families are supported and given timely advice on how to keep their children safe and avoid family crisis.

The proportion of referrals of children in need leading to initial assessments has increased to 38% but remains below statistical neighbour and national averages. The number of completed core assessments has reduced and is now below statistical neighbours and national figures. The council have reviewed this situation and are closely monitoring the child protection plans and are confident that this figure will improve. The proportion of initial assessments completed within seven working days has reduced and at 48% was significantly lower than statistical neighbour and national figures. The percentage of core assessments that were completed within 35 working days of their commencement is however in line with neighbour and national figures. The implementation of the common assessment framework and improving post-registration support have been a key way forward to improve provision. However, electronic systems have slowed progress as staff learn how to use the new system.

The council has established a local safeguarding board. A development officer has produced a clear three-year business plan. Multi-agency partnership is good and shows that agencies regularly attend child protection meetings. Missing children protocol is in place and all children failing to attend school are tracked. Key staff are engaged in multi-agency public protection arrangements and there are appropriate links to the local safeguarding board. The arrangements to register and identify private fostering arrangements are good. A dedicated and named person monitors all registrations. The council have identified five new cases and dealt with these within seven days and have been promoting awareness in the community of the duties and functions of private registration arrangements.

The council has been successful in reducing its proportion of looked after children and those children subject to a child protection plan. Only 72% of looked after children are allocated to a qualified social worker. However, the remainder are allocated to experienced and trained social care staff but who do not have a social work qualification. All statutory reviews of looked after children are conducted on time. All staff are checked against the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and the council works hard to make sure that looked after children and children with learning

difficulties and/or disabilities are kept safe. Initial placement stability is good; however long-term placement stability has declined slightly. Nearly all children have their reviews conducted on time and a good proportion (95.4%) have the opportunity to have their views and concerns heard. There is a below average number of looked after children being adopted, or seeking to be looked after as a result of the granting of a special guardianship order. There are very low numbers of young people with pathway plans but an increasing number being allocated to personal advisors. A dedicated complaints officer is available to handle all complaints by children. There are positive inspection reports for both fostering and adoption services, with 100% of the required standards being met.

More actions are raised on early years childcare settings when they are first visited for registration purposes compared with statistical neighbours or national comparisons. Most were judged to be providing satisfactory outcomes in terms of safety when inspected. Whilst this is not as good as the national trend, the council has raised awareness of their services so that new registrations contact them first, and appointed additional dedicated staff to support new settings.

There are good measures in place to tackle bullying in schools and in supporting the council's foster care service. The council has an anti-bullying co-ordinator and good progress has been made to have a coherent strategy in place and implement it. None of the children reported bullying as an issue in the fostering inspection report in 2006. However, young people still find the way bullying is dealt with in schools is an issue for them compared with other young people nationally. Almost all children and young people who took part in the Tellus2 survey reported feeling safe or quite safe in their local communities and schools, similar to the national picture. The council's successful summer diversionary programmes and evening and twilight activities involve large numbers of young people, demonstrating impressive collaboration with the range of youth services.

The council provides strong leadership in working with partners to reduce crime and tackle anti-social behaviour and, as a result, crime has significantly reduced. Feedback from parents and carers about young people shows that all schools have safe road crossings outside schools and road traffic accidents have fallen.

Areas for development

- Ensure that performance measures for children in need services are consistently monitored.
- Improve the numbers and timeliness of initial and core assessments.
- Ensure all looked after children are allocated to qualified social workers.
- Improve the number of looked after children being placed for adoption.

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. Three recommendations emerged from the JAR, none for immediate action or for action within the next six months.

For action in the longer term

Maintain and further improve educational outcomes for all children and young people by:

- Improving the success rates for young people, especially those aged 16 and those looked after by the council, so that more are able to progress to higher education.
- Expanding the range of vocational education options, especially at Level 1.
- Improving the capacity of the education welfare service to support further improvements in school attendance.

The council has made overall good progress with these recommendations. There has been improvement in the success rates of young people aged 16 in 2006 and the trend has continued in 2007. Unlike previous years, looked after children did not perform as well in 2006, especially those achieving five or more GCSEs. Their outcomes were below that of local and national comparisons. A single integrated service for looked after children will be in place for December 2007 with agreed actions and strategies to improve educational performance.

Provision for vocational education at Key Stage 4 has been significantly expanded from 600 to over 1000 students, enabling more access to vocational provision tailored to ability and aspirations. The range of vocational education options especially at Level 1 have expanded considerably in each of the four federations as well. Significant additional resource has been allocated to this priority.

The capacity of the education welfare service has improved since the JAR. In 2006 attendance was almost at the statistical neighbour average and below national averages by 0.35%. A review of the service, clarification of core functions and key activities agreed with schools has further improved the provision. Attendance is now the best across the city for ten years. Persistent absence has reduced by 37% in secondary schools.

Children receive a good start to their education. During inspections, the majority of early years settings were judged to be providing mostly good or satisfactory outcomes for young children. Higher proportions than the national average were judged satisfactory. Standards in the Foundation Stage are good overall although slightly below national averages in communication, language and literacy and in mathematical development, a view supported by school inspection reports.

Satisfactory standards from 2005 at Key Stage 1 were maintained in 2006 and the gap between local and national results was reduced by 1–2% in all three core subjects. At Key Stage 2 there is an improving picture across the last four years in English and mathematics. In English Level 4+ results have risen from 72% in 2003 to 78% in 2006, and in mathematics results have risen by 4% over the same period from 69% to 73%. Overall there has been a decrease in the number of schools below the floor targets. This clearly demonstrates an improving picture in nursery and primary schools.

Key Stage 3 standards are improving in line with local and national trends although not so in English. At Key Stage 4 there is steady improvement year-on-year and 97.8% of young people gained one A*–G grade in 2006, above local and national figures. 39.6% of young people gained five A*–C grades including English and mathematics, below the national average but very close to statistical neighbours. 48.1% of young people gained five A*–C grades, an increase of 1.7% from 2005. Indicators from the 2007 results show continued improvement with 68% of secondary schools achieving their best ever results. Trends over time indicate that Key Stage 4 standards in Coventry are improving, but historically not as quickly as statistical neighbours or national trends, with the exception of five A*–C grades including English and mathematics. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same progress as statistical neighbours.

The Tellus2 survey confirms that young people enjoy coming to school although a larger proportion than nationally acknowledge that they could try harder and would like more help from their teachers. The 2006 attendance target has been met through good support from the Education Welfare Service. The city has the lowest exclusion rate compared with statistical neighbours, and is an example of best practice. A locally agreed policy between schools at Key Stage 3 ensures that all young people who are experiencing difficulties are appropriately supported to settle in another local school.

The school improvement service is well-led and managed and knows its schools well. Headteachers hold the service in high esteem. Support is valued and well-targeted at schools. This is demonstrated by the fact that there has been no school judged to require special measures for four years. The service has a determination to continually challenge schools and to raise the bar of expectation. The barriers to improvement are well known to the authority and appropriate action has been taken to bring about sustained improvement. They are aware that whilst there is a lot of satisfactory and good work in schools across the authority with none inadequate, there is not enough that is judged to be outstanding.

Impressive collaborative working between a wide range of agencies ensures that young people have the best chance to enjoy and achieve. Those who struggle receive extra support, and those who need a bespoke curriculum, get it. The council does not give up on the most challenging young people but redesigns programmes that will re-engage and motivate them. Parents and carers are positive about the support provided by the council through the Supporting Families, Friends and Communities outcome. One outcome has been to make them more aware of how

they can support their child at school. Some say they would like more full-day childcare for those who work and other parents and carers felt they would like to have even more information about what the children are studying at school. Some young people's responses to consultation concerning the council's CYPP reported that they would like more acknowledgement of achievement in areas other than purely academic work. Convincing young people of the significance of their various achievements and recording them remains a challenge for all services.

Areas for development

- Improve the way young people's achievements other than academic ones are recorded.
- Improve the rate of progress at Key Stage 4.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect remains outstanding. No recommendations emerged from the JAR. The involvement of young people and their parents in designing and shaping their community is impressive.

Even though this is an outstanding aspect of the council's work, they are never complacent, but are constantly looking for more ways of enabling Coventry's young people to make a positive contribution to their community. The sixth local *Every child matters* initiative, Supporting Families, Friends and Communities, is a good example. Throughout the council, young people are provided with a wide range of opportunities to engage in discussion and decision making about the services that are provided for them. This involves making judgements about the quality of services and in deciding the nature of future developments. Focus groups are asked their views and responses gauged and acted on. However, compared with national figures, the Tellus2 survey reveals that some young people feel that they do not have enough opportunities to make decisions, be part of their school council, contribute to charity work or help someone within their local community. Notwithstanding these comparisons, the council has a strong determination to involve all parties more in city and local community initiatives. Traditionally hard-to-reach, vulnerable and other groups of children and young people are included in the consultation. The 'Voice of Care' group is a good opportunity for looked after children to express their views directly to elected members. The involvement of young people in designing their local play area in parks is another good example that affects the local community, as is the implementation of the NHS trust youth council's recommendations on the planning of the children's department in the new hospital.

A core part of the success and quality of this aspect of the council's work is the very effective nature of partnership working and data sharing across the city. The Youth Service is very successful at engaging 37% of young people aged between 13 and

19, significantly above the national benchmark of 25%. A number of community activities are in place to ensure children participate locally in sport and leisure activities and are able to have a say in how activities are provided. The in-house domestic violence video to help victims and children recover from the experience is a further example. The children's champion and a parents' champion have developed a user involvement strategy and the Connexions service are encouraging children to get involved in the delivery and design of their services as well. Children and young people have played an integral part in shaping the anti-bullying strategy and continue to develop the youth council which has representatives on the UK youth parliament. Members of the youth council have also been part of the grant panel for the allocation of large capital funds, for example the development of a popular cyber café in a challenging local community, and the production of a termly youth newspaper that has large circulation as a supplement in the Coventry Evening Telegraph.

A number of services are targeted at the most deprived areas of the city and the more hard to reach families. The children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to participate in service design and are involved in various services to ensure they are included. Looked after children's views were sought regarding the review of the council plans as well.

The anti-bullying strategy is producing results and offending and re-offending rates have dropped in the city. This has been a real success story and recidivism is lower than national and statistical neighbours. The recording of racist behaviour is also conducted through the anti-bullying strategy. Children are encouraged to participate and be involved in local groups and play activity to avoid getting involved in crime or anti-social behaviour. The Positive Futures sport programme is a popular initiative to encourage and work with children who are excluded or likely to be excluded to improve their behaviour. Some of those attending have become tutors, peer mentors and role models to other young people.

Restorative justice sentences for young offenders to do some gardening for the elderly in their community is a very positive way of offenders giving something back. Whilst there is a lot of anecdotal evidence of charity work in schools, this type of contribution to the community by all young people through local voluntary work or national and international charity work is less well recorded.

Area for development

- Ensure that young people's charity work, especially that which supports their local community, is recorded and celebrated.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. No recommendations emerged from the JAR.

The council has continued to demonstrate that it is making good progress with this aspect. Primary schools are continuing to make progress in ensuring pupils are developing basic skills that will support their future economic well-being. The consistency of positive findings in school inspections concerning the personal development and well-being of young people demonstrates that they are developing suitable work place social skills and attitudes. The significance of the work related learning opportunities and the broad vocational work-based curricular opportunities in secondary schools and post-16 demonstrate a high commitment by the council to ensure that all young people develop the necessary skills to find work and take their place in society. The large number of young people who stay in education post-16 is testimony to this aspect of the council's work.

In 2006, 94.2% of Year 11 remained in employment education or training, well above local and national figures. This figure is 1.2% up on the previous year and a record high for the city. The percentage of young people aged 19 achieving Level 2 and Level 3 courses is above statistical neighbours and closing the gap on national comparisons. At age 19, fewer care leavers remained in education, employment and training than statistical neighbours, a decrease from the previous year. However, the reduction of those claiming benefits in some of the most challenging areas of the city suggests that the direction of travel is becoming more positive. A re-negotiated external contract has sustained good performance for care leavers being placed in, or remaining in suitable accommodation. Performance in this area remains in line with local and national comparators.

The 13–19 curriculum has been held up as example of good practice nationally and continues to provide young people with a wide range of appropriate courses in different locations that interest and motivate them. The challenge has been and remains for the council to meet the demand of young people's chosen courses, especially at Level 1 and in practical courses such as construction. The increase in those young people achieving English and mathematics GCSE; their developing confidence and independence to get to a work placement or course location on time; the increasing focus on future pathways for the most vulnerable children and young people, all suggest that achieving economic well-being is developing well. Schools have been successful in supporting some of the most disengaged young people in achieving accredited outcomes, with some sitting GCSEs. The Youth Justice Board reports the value of the local authority's management information system in accessing up to date information on a young person's educational status. Some schools have used the Youth Inclusion Project well to support vulnerable children and young people.

Challenges continue to face the council such as the closure of key industries in the city; the higher than average drop out rate of young people from post-16 courses; and the higher percentage of young people who live in households where no one is working compared with statistical neighbours and nationally. Despite these challenges, achievement at post-16, whilst lower than national averages, is higher than statistical neighbours.

Capacity to improve, including the 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 good and its management of these services is good as well. Two recommendations emerged from the JAR. There were no recommendations for immediate action in this area.

For action in the next six months

- Ensure that medium to long-term financial planning by all partners identifies the resources necessary, including those to be delegated to the Commissioning Trust, to meet the needs of children and young people in Coventry and to deliver the priorities in the CYPP.

The council has made good progress with this aspect. Financial barriers outside the control of the council make strategic and long-term planning more difficult, especially when funding is allocated to an area where measurement of outcomes and the capacity to link inputs to outcomes is difficult, or can only be evaluated over longer timescales. Short term funding rarely allows for such rigorous longer-term evaluation to enable sound judgements on value for money and its effectiveness. This can mean that the council, while able to develop effective strategies, is not able to follow these through when short term funding ceases, or ceases before the full benefit of such a project can be clearly identified.

For action in the longer term

- Improve the processes for assessing the value for money of services for young people by linking resources to outcomes.

The council has made good progress with this aspect. A champion has been appointed within the service to ensure that services are providing value for money. A joint commissioning service has been developed with a focus on value for money, which has reviewed existing contracts, identified service needs and developed the market. For example, making efficiency savings with external providers. Links have been made with a private company to give additional impetus to the council's value for money work and this will be informed by Audit Commission work on comparison of value for money across local authorities.

Performance across the council is good overall albeit the staying safe agenda has a further distance to travel and is currently judged adequate. The appointment of a new Director of Children's Services this year has re-focused the staying safe agenda and the vision. Key priorities have been identified and the pace of improvement in a short space of time is impressive. The council knows itself well and what it needs to do to improve. It has high aspirations. Services work hard for the sake of Coventry's young people and their parents and carers. The CYPP is a clear and extensive document although, as reported in the JAR, it remains the case that whilst it sets out clear aims, priorities and outcomes, it is less precise about measurable targets, although these are clear in the various operational plans. Sustainable year-on-year funding remains a key barrier to further improvement and strategic planning.

The strong determination for services to work collaboratively and share data and information is also impressive. Consistency across the services is improving, but there is still work to do, especially with the social care aspect of the staying safe agenda. The challenge is to communicate these high aspirations and expectations to all young people and their families in Coventry and continue in the drive to further raise standards and achievement so that every individual will have the opportunity to achieve their potential and take their meaningful place in society.


Area for development

- Include more regular measurable targets in the CYPP.

Overall the council has demonstrated good progress in meeting the JAR recommendations, and has shown good capacity to maintain and improve further its services for 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".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection