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Mr Dean Ashton  
Director of Children, Young People and Families  
Cornwall County Council  
New County Hall  
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Cornwall  
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Dear Mr Ashton

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CORNWALL COUNTY 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 where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the assessment.

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

**Grade 2**

The authority consistently delivers services at an adequate level. Some of its services make a good contribution towards improving outcomes for children and young people, particularly in improving their achievement, health and economic well-being. The performance of school sixth forms continues to be an area for improvement. Following a period when the authority's contribution to ensuring children and young people stay safe was inadequate, it has reorganised the management of services in this aspect. Adequate performance has been established only recently and the full impact of changes in delivering services to keep children and young people safe has yet to be achieved.

## Being healthy

## Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The number of schools which have achieved the Healthy Schools Standard is higher than the national average and exceeds the national target. School inspection data show that a higher proportion of schools than the national average are good or better in enabling learners to be healthy, particularly at secondary school level.

The health care needs of expectant mothers and mothers of young children are met well overall. The numbers of low birth weight babies are very low, and the number of mothers initiating breast-feeding is above the national average. The percentage of GPs providing child health surveillance services is above the national average. Teenage conception rates are close to the national average. Perinatal mortality rates are variable and infant mortality rates, and deaths of children under 15 years, are below the national average in some parts of Cornwall, yet better than average in other areas.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) performance indicators are good. Improvements have been made in access, emergency arrangements and the transition to adult services. Significant investment has been made in improving CAMHS. This has resulted in increased staffing levels. Plans are in place for a high performing neighbouring trust to link the service in Liskeard and Launceston. The council has assessed its progress towards a comprehensive CAMHS as good and evidence of recent changes supports this view. Implementation of the CAMHS framework is well on target. There is a marked difference in the waiting times achieved by Plymouth hospitals and Cornwall hospitals in assessing CAMHS cases. However, whilst the proportion of non-specialist cases assessed within four weeks in Cornwall is good, and above the national average, the non-specialist under 26 week assessment times are below the national average and require improvement.

The proportion of young people under 18 years receiving treatment for substance misuse has improved by almost one third between 2005 and 2006, although improved accessibility and availability of these services are needed to bring this figure in line with that of similar authorities.

Additional staff to support children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been appointed and community nurses are now appointed in each CAMHS team. A framework for nursing and therapeutic support is being implemented effectively. Children and young people who are looked after receive adequate assessments of their health needs, although the percentage who receive annual health and dental checks is now below the national average.

## Area(s) for development

- Consolidate the newly developing strategic plans for CAMHS.
- Improve the accessibility and increase the number of substance misuse treatment programmes dedicated to young people.

## 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 number of referrals of children in need continues to be significantly higher than in comparable authorities and the national average. The number of referrals leading to an initial assessment is low, whilst the numbers of initial assessments that are then identified as needing a core assessment are very high. The timely completion of both initial and core assessments is at an acceptable level.

All children on the child protection register now have an allocated social worker. However, the number of children on the child protection register is above that for comparable authorities, as is the number of child protection registrations. Whilst first-time registrations are below the national average, re-registrations and de-registrations remain higher than average. Taken together, these indicators show that the gate-keeping thresholds and the assessment processes have not been working effectively. The authority has reviewed thresholds for intervention and the child protection registration processes. It has recognised that too little intervention was being made at the stage when children were in need. Recent evidence of updated data collected by the authority shows that newly revised procedures are beginning to have a positive impact on the outcomes for children. Consolidation of these changes, greater consistency and an established culture for safeguarding are becoming more evident. The timeliness of reviews for child protection and looked after children are both very good and above average.

The stability of placements for looked after children and young people continues to be unsatisfactory. However, more recent data reflect a clear increase in stability and it is likely that this improved trend will continue because of the introduction of a Time Out unit to provide respite care and help prevent the breakdown of placements. The provision of pathway plans, and allocation of personal advisers are very high and these have a positive impact on outcomes for care leavers.

Adoption rates for looked after children are above the national average, although the timeliness of those placed within 12 months of the decision is just below the national average. The percentage of children who are looked after who are placed with family and friends is below the national average. The number of looked after children with an allocated and qualified social worker is very good and only four are currently unallocated, of whom two are in new adoption placements.

The number of transition plans in place for young people with disabilities aged 14 years and over has significantly improved from last year and it is now close to the proportion for statistical neighbours, although below the proportion in most other authorities nationally.

Ofsted inspection reports on schools show that a high proportion of them are judged to be good, or outstanding, in helping learners to stay safe. Results of the Tellus2 survey carried out recently, with a small sample of young people in Cornwall, show that a high proportion feel safe in their schools and in the wider community.

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

- Review the gate-keeping procedures and thresholds of intervention for children in need.
- Reduce the number of children and young people on the child protection register and the rate of re-referrals.
- Improve the stability of placements for looked after children and young people.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

## **Grade 3**

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

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Early years provision continues to be good. An above average proportion of early years settings are judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding. The number of children's centres continues to increase and their role has been extended to provide a good range of targeted support to children and families with additional needs.

Achievements at all key stages between 2004 and 2006 are broadly in line with the national average. At Key Stage 1, the performance of boys in English has been lower than the national average in recent years. The authority has introduced strategies which have been successful in raising achievement in this subject. The percentage of boys achieving the higher levels in reading is now above the national average. Performance is slightly below average in writing, but an upward trend has been established. Results in GCSE examinations have improved steadily over the past three years with the percentage of pupils achieving five higher grades rising from 55% to 58%. These results are broadly in line with the national average, although the proportion of pupils gaining five A\*-C grades which includes English and mathematics has remained stable and is below the national average. Value added measures show that pupils make good progress in relation to their starting points between Key Stage 2 and the end of Key Stage 4.

School improvement work is good and has focused sharply on tackling areas of weakness. The authority has a robust system for identifying schools at risk of

underperformance. The number of schools in one of Ofsted's categories of concern has fallen overall and is below the national average. No secondary or special schools are in a category of concern. Work on improving the performance of pupil referral units has been particularly successful and has resulted in a significant fall in the number in a category of concern from four to one. The authority has closed its remaining underperforming pupil referral unit and is implementing plans to establish new provision as from September 2007.

Children and young people who are looked after have a good attendance rate and achieve results in GCSE examinations which are much higher than the national average for this group. A higher than average proportion of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive their education in mainstream schools. Evidence from school inspections suggests these learners make good or better progress in the large majority of schools which is better than the national average. The authority has reduced its reliance on statements of special educational need and is very successful at completing statements within the expected time.

Children and young people's enjoyment of education and behaviour are judged good or outstanding in over 95% of Ofsted school inspection reports. The authority has made good progress in reducing the number of children and young people excluded from school which is now lower than the national average. However, a relatively low proportion of children and young people excluded are provided with more than 20 hours of education each week. The authority is reviewing its provision for children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The number of authorised absences from school has been historically above the national average. The authority has taken strong action to reduce this figure through targeting particular schools and working closely with parents. Current data show this work is having a positive impact and attendance rates for the most recent school year rose in primary and secondary schools.

Children's services have been restructured to forge closer links between education, family services and the youth service. Different groups of parents and children and young people have been consulted to match provision to their requirements. The authority has implemented successfully a strategy to manage falling rolls and has far fewer surplus places in schools than comparative authorities or the national average.

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

- Increase the number of children and young people gaining good GCSE grades in English and mathematics.
- Improve boys' achievement in writing at Key Stage 1.
- Ensure that children and young people who are excluded from school are provided with at least 20 hours of education each week.

## Making a positive contribution

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. Children and young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and parents are consulted on the development of services and are able to influence decision-making. The Big Wide Talk engaged several thousand children in developing ideas to improve the quality of services. There was wide participation in the youth parliament and school councils are well established. Children from social care services have been involved in recruitment processes for senior management staff.

The authority has given a high priority to the inclusion of Black and minority ethnic groups and to raising awareness of different cultures. Historically, this area of the authority's work has been weak and a great deal of work has been completed in the past year. The authority has undertaken race equality impact assessments on its policies and services and increased the capacity of its diversity team. A training programme has been implemented and all schools have produced equality and diversity plans. There is closer engagement with Black and minority ethnic groups and new working parties have been established which are beginning to contribute to change in the authority.

Action taken by the Youth Offending Team has reduced offending and re-offending rates and there is a lower than average rate of first-time entrants to the youth justice system. However, the number of children and young people who are looked after who are given a final warning, or reprimand, has increased and is above national comparators. The authority has provided sound reasoning for this increase and a change in policy has been implemented to deal with some problem behaviour without recourse to the judicial system.

The proportion of looked after children who participate in their reviews is significantly lower than average. However, the authority is reviewing its recording of this information and more recent data show that the number is increasing. Independent reviewing officers are now monitoring each review specifically regarding the young person's contribution and passing on this information to senior managers.

The authority has introduced new systems and appointed additional staff to improve advocacy arrangements for young people. Advocacy services for children and young people with disabilities are in their infancy and have not yet demonstrated their full impact for young people. The authority has improved its information systems for monitoring the effectiveness of services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many of these changes are quite recent and their full effect on improving children and young people's ability to make a positive contribution has yet to be demonstrated.

## Area(s) for development

- Improve participation in their reviews of children and young people who are looked after.
- Improve advocacy and information services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Reduce the numbers of final warnings/reprimands for looked after children and young people.

## Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good.

A clear 14-19 strategy underpins the close collaboration between a wide range of partners, including employers, colleges and the local Learning and Skills Council. This collaboration has been effective in extending vocational opportunities for young people. The proportion of work-based learners achieving success in national vocational qualifications by the age of 19 is consistently higher each year than the national average, as is the proportion that gain a Level 2 qualification. A submission for a new diploma in 'creative and media' has received category 2 approval for a start in 2008. The proportion of young people aged between 16 and 19 years not in education, employment or training is below the national average.

The council is successful in improving the economic well-being of vulnerable groups of young people. The work of the leaving care team continues to be successful in helping a higher than average proportion of young people leaving care to secure a place in education, employment or training. A higher proportion of these young people also live in suitable accommodation. Work of the integrated youth support services is having success in targeting specific groups not in education, employment or training. There is good transition planning for vulnerable groups. The retention of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in post-16 education, employment or training is consistently higher than the national average. Day care provision has grown and is planned flexibly to allow parents to return to work.

The number of young people continuing their education after the age of 16 years is high. Participation declines slightly afterwards and this may be linked to transport difficulties. The authority has established a transport partnership with local colleges and a recent survey of leavers' needs has gauged the impact of rural isolation on their education. The authority intends to use this information in its 14-19 strategic development planning.

A smaller proportion of young people than in many other authorities, choose to attend school sixth forms to study for their A-level examinations. The effectiveness of a high proportion of school sixth forms has been judged good, or better, in Ofsted school inspection reports. However, the success of young people in A-level examinations varies across schools and continues to be below average overall. The authority is promoting collaboration between sixth forms and has introduced a system for tracking students' progress. The full impact of this work has yet to be realised.

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

- Raise students' attainment in school sixth forms.

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

**Grade 2**

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

The council has adequate capacity to improve its services for children and young people. Senior leaders demonstrate a shared sense of purpose and drive to improve the quality of services. The views of children and young people, and other stakeholders, are sought and used to inform planning. A thorough review of the delivery of services has resulted in restructuring and changes in senior management positions. More cohesive delivery of services is being achieved by the recent merger and unified management of school improvement work with the family services and integrated youth support service. External support has been used effectively to strengthen the capacity of management and to ensure changes are embedded and able to secure continuous improvement. The new structure supports integrated service delivery and, in a relatively short time, it has had an impact on improving underperforming areas of the council's work. There is still inconsistency in the strength of management in some parts of the service. Appointments to a small minority of senior leadership positions have yet to be made or have been made only recently. The pace of improvement in social care services has been slow until recently and sustained high performance has yet to be demonstrated.

Financial resources are well managed. The cost of some services has grown significantly in recent years and the per capita expenditure on family support services is higher than for similar authorities and the national average. Some of this increase is explained by the need to improve areas of work which were previously neglected. The authority is properly reviewing its financial costs and is monitoring expenditure in key areas to ensure it is generating the expected improvements. The authority has a relatively stable staff and a low level of vacancies. It has taken steps to improve the recruitment of headteachers, which continues to be an area of difficulty.

The authority has made considerable progress in the past year in strengthening the management of its services. It is well placed for further improvement.

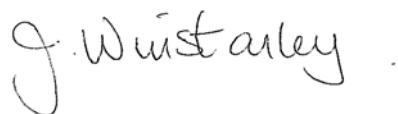


**Area(s) for development**

- Improve the management of social care services to sustain effective delivery.

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