

26 November 2007

Ms Carol White
Group Director of Children and Young People's Services
Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Town Hall
Crossley Street
Halifax
HX1 1UJ

Dear Ms White

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

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council consistently delivers good quality services for children and young people and some aspects are excellent. The council knows itself well and has clear priorities for further improvement. The well-being and achievements of young people are improving rapidly in most areas, and the council is able to show clearly where focussed activity has had a good impact.

Being healthy

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is excellent. The council has effectively addressed issues from the joint area review of 2005 and the annual performance assessment of 2006. Utilising an impressive range of innovative approaches, the council has continued to improve its contribution to the promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and young people. The 'Choices' website and the widely promoted information cards on sexual health are both excellent examples.

Innovative joint working between schools and the Primary Care Trust ensured that nearly all six-year-old children had an assessment of their health needs to target interventions such as those to reduce the prevalence of obesity. Every school in the borough is actively involved in the Healthy Schools Programme. All schools are expected to gain the award which recognises effective work in helping children and young people choose a healthier diet and partake in increased enjoyment of physical activity. Integrated services are being organised on a geographical basis to meet local need and focus services on vulnerable groups.

Well planned and innovative methods are used successfully to engage children, young people and their families in taking charge of improving their health. A specialist team of professionals provides excellent support to improve the health of looked after children. Multi-agency planning and delivery of services have been highly effective in reducing the number of teenage conceptions and increasing the number of mothers who breast-feed. Performance in these two areas is excellent compared to similar councils. There has been an improvement in the dental health of children, and for looked after children particularly so, but the council and its partners are aware that the figures for tooth extractions and fillings are still much higher than the national average. The attention given to the health needs of looked after children has resulted in sustained rapid improvement since the joint area review and the annual performance assessment of 2006 so that Calderdale's performance is now in the top band at 7% above the national and 9% above that of similar councils

The Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service is an excellent example of the strong partnership arrangements that ensure young people in the borough are well supported. The progress towards providing a comprehensive Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service is good and has improved to be above statistical and national comparators. The proportion of non-specialist cases being seen within 26 weeks is a percentage below the national average but on the last available figures, of the proportion of those dealt with within four weeks, the service has been able to improve performance to be 66% compared with 51% nationally. The Drugs Action Team has strongly improved its performance ahead of other comparable councils to meet the needs of young people with substance misuse.

Area for development

- Work with partners to continue to improve oral health.

Staying safe

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution that the council's service for children and young people makes to the improved outcomes in this area is good. The Calderdale Safeguarding Children Board has taken a strong lead to improve practices to identify at an earlier stage those children whose circumstances place them at risk. Individual agencies work well together; they are informed by relevant strategies and guidance, which are fully in

place and properly compliant with requirements. The council has ensured that staff in all agencies have been trained to identify where children are vulnerable and are confident that they provide appropriate interventions so that children are safe. This has led to an increase in the number of children subject to an inter-agency child protection plan. However, there are two groups of staff where the attainment of qualifications is less than the average: those working in residential children's homes and those who require additional child-care qualifications. The independently chaired safeguarding board provides leadership to ensure the lessons learned from the findings of serious case reviews are acted upon.

The council performs better than the average in preparing early years providers to provide a safe environment. Many of the indicators around the provision of a safe environment for very young children are better than the average.

Excellent systems are in place to ensure that Calderdale outperforms comparable authorities in the high number of investigations that lead to a conference within the required timescales. Reported figures indicate that more children than the national average do not receive an initial assessment within agreed timescales. The council reports that the data reflect previous mis-classification of what constitutes a referral and do not reflect the good performance of the multi-agency working. The cases of nearly all the children who come in contact with the care services are properly reviewed, and the low numbers who return indicate good assessment and planning. The council has continued to improve the quality of assessments and so has been able to refocus them more effectively. The council is aware that the timeliness of some assessments needs to improve and is monitoring the incidents and their causes. The number of children who are looked after by the council has increased and officers note that this is due to increased awareness about vulnerable children and the consequent additional interventions to protect them.

Performance in relation to the percentage of looked after children who are adopted is very good and the council ensures that such placements are arranged promptly. The number of reviews of looked after children continues to improve and this is an area of strength compared to other authorities. Almost all looked after children have an allocated social worker. However, the council's figure of just over 94% is less than the national of 95% and of similar councils with almost 97%. For the few children where allocating a qualified social worker is difficult to ensure in the short term, the council remains confident that there is close monitoring of potential risks, and continuity of contact. A small, but decreasing, number of children have their placements disrupted and the work of the multi-agency team to support them is expected to reduce this further. The team ensures that a wide range of advice is provided to children and their carers. A good range of approaches ensures that looked after children can make their views known.

In 2006 to 2007, 63% of looked after children attended and participated in their reviews and more young people contributed by submitting a written response. Although this represents an increase since 2005–2006, the council acknowledges that this requires further improvement.

Areas for development

- Improve the number of assessments completed within required timescales.
- Increase the percentage of looked after children participating in their reviews.
- Increase the proportion of residential staff and children's social workers with an appropriate qualification

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. A higher than average number of the children and young people who responded to the Tellus2 survey said that they enjoy their lives. The council has contributed well to their enjoyment of life and learning in a number of ways, for example: the Wider Opportunities Programme is supporting almost 3,000 primary pupils to learn a musical instrument; specialist PE schools and their linked primary schools are increasing the number of young people taking up sporting activities. The proportion of children and young people attending school is above the national average and that of similar councils. The number of exclusions is also above the average but the council maintains that this is part of a planned behaviour policy and that re-integration is a priority.

Inspection of early years settings indicate that there is no inadequate provision but the proportion of those judged good or better is less than the national and similar councils.

There has been continuing improvement in the educational achievements of children and young people in Calderdale and it is most marked in the standards reached by primary school pupils in Year 6. In 2006 they were good, and the unvalidated results from 2007 indicate further improvements. The achievements of these pupils and their schools place the authority as the best performer in West Yorkshire and, on many of the measures, the best in comparison with similar councils. Standards at Key Stage 3 continue to rise: they are above the national average and those of almost all similar authorities. The percentage of 16 year olds who gained five GCSEs at grades A* to C was 58% in 2006 and has improved in 2007. This is in line with the national average and above the results in similar councils. However, despite the small overall improvement in GCSE results in 2007, the measure of progress is below average. There is wide variation in how well secondary schools ensure children and young people make progress from their starting points. In response, the energetic approach of Learning Services to challenge and support its schools has resulted in discernible improvements. For example, only one secondary school remains below the 2008 floor target: the minimum proportion of students to gain five GCSEs at grade A* to C.

Looked after children are supported very well to achieve. The proportion of looked after children who gain GCSEs has risen to above the national average and that for similar areas. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The council monitors the progress made by children from Black and minority ethnic families and although there is variation, attainment has generally improved and what was a gap for some groups is narrowing.

Inspection reports indicate that most primary schools are outstanding in their ability to help pupils achieve, and that in secondary schools it is generally satisfactory or good. A small number of schools cause concern but the council's support has been highly effective in making improvements.

The overall trend of the number of statements of special educational need continues to fall, although there has been an expected rise in those for pre-school children as a result of planned approaches from multi-disciplinary teams to improve early intervention.

Areas for development

- Improve the progress made by all young people at age 16.
- Ensure that the council's priority for personalised learning is understood and embedded within all secondary schools.
- Support schools in using information about students' progress so that they effectively support all children to achieve of their best.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. In 2006 the council carried out a comprehensive survey of young people's views. The 2007 Tellus2 survey of Year 6 pupils confirms many positive aspects, and validates the council's actions to improve others. The six, well established, Young People's Forums are active, meet regularly with police representatives, health officers, and other partners and they talk directly with the council's Lead Member. Their views feed directly into the Youth Council and the Metropolitan Borough Council. The council's planning process, and much effort from council officers, goes into ensuring that the wishes of children and young people are incorporated into council planning. Parents and children were closely involved in the consultation to build a new library in Park Ward. The council provides much high-quality information and advice although officers plan to improve such guidance within its 13–19 initiative.

The council and its Lead Member for Children's and Young People's Services empower a dedicated Participation Team which focuses effectively on improving borough wide systems which allow Calderdale's young people to know how they can, and do, have a say in what happens. Some 70 children and young people, including eight who are deaf, have been trained in recruitment and selection skills, and young people have been directly involved in the recruitment of ten key council appointments. The next planned recruitment involving young people is that of the Head of Children's Services in the Primary Care Trust.

Young people have written and designed good quality information to help each other be healthy and stay safe. A group of young people who have responsibility for looking after others has devised a self-help booklet which the council has printed and distributed to all young carers. Young people from one forum have produced a film to highlight the ways young people can tackle bullying. Some of its impact has been linked to an increase in the reporting of race and hate incidents, and schools have responded well: the proportion of those incidents brought to a successful conclusion has improved from 40% to 97%. A dedicated forum for young people with disabilities is successful and the council has made great efforts to respond to their requests. Calderdale's work in including person centred planning for young people with special education needs and learning difficulties and/or disabilities is recognised as best practice and the council leads regional seminars. The level of participation by young people in youth provision continues to increase. The re-organisation of education in North Halifax is a matter of great communal concern and the council involves and includes the views of young people via their forums, school councils and community groups. A residential event held in March, 'Speaking Up', developed an action plan for the future of the North Halifax Area Forum. The aim to continue to involve young people is being purposefully developed through the Calderdale Challenge.

Fewer young people re-offend in Calderdale than nationally or in comparator councils. The Arrest Referral Scheme and Restorative Justice are two of a wide range of approaches taken to reduce re-offending rates. The authority has set as a priority meeting the challenge of increasing the numbers of young offenders who are in full time education, employment or training. The authority has recognised that there is an inconsistency of approach between the police aim to improve the reporting of minor infractions and the council's aim of keeping vulnerable young people from the problems which "getting a record" can make worse. Police and council representatives meet regularly. Both organisations are agreed that they wish to reduce youth crime, and the Director of Children's Services has taken a very proactive step by contacting the government minister directly to contribute to a national joint approach.

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. The council has a clear development plan to help children and their families from conception into an enjoyable and self-reliant adulthood.

Good liaison with providers of child care draws on an analysis of where there is the most urgent need and ensures that families are able to take advantage of an increasing number of places. Free short-term childcare has had a high take up by parents. Well planned and flexible childcare provision is being extended to enable more parents to return to employment.

All looked after young people are offered the option of remaining within council care until they are 19. Their route to independent adulthood is strongly supported by access to appropriate courses. The ratio of looked after children who remain in education, training or employment at the age of 19 is significantly higher than nationally and in similar councils.

Calderdale's 13–19 Plan has been successful in a number of ways which are supporting the economic well-being of young people. Opportunities for vocational education are well promoted through a borough-wide system of collaborative networks involving all secondary schools and the college. Strong and improving partnerships within the three clusters in 'Campus Calderdale' have improved the curriculum offer and now around 500 young people are accessing chosen courses outside their own school. The authority is ready to offer two new diplomas, and there is a well-coordinated approach to the re-submission of others. There has been a significant growth in the number of apprenticeships. A flexible approach to the development of programmes helping young people make the transition into employment appears to be effective in increasing participation. The numbers of young people gaining qualifications at Level 2 and Level 3 by the age of 19 is above the national and comparative proportions. The proportion of those who have made progress aged 16 is below the national and that of comparator groups.

Children and young people receive good advice and guidance about career development. A coordinated approach through Children's Information Services and Jobcentre Plus helps to promote job opportunities and improve young people's recruitment. Over the past three years, the percentage of young people, including looked after children, who remain in education, employment or training after 16 has risen and is above the national and comparators. However the proportion of those who do not remain so engaged at 19 or whose destination is unknown is above average and the council acknowledges that this aspect needs to be improved.

The council has undertaken careful analysis of the needs of children and young people in North Halifax; it has consulted widely with stakeholders and is moving

forward with its planning to effect a solution which will significantly improve the economic well-being of young people who live there.

Areas for development

- Bring to a successful conclusion the review and planning for improvements to children's and young people's economic well-being across the borough and in North Halifax in particular.
- Increase the proportion of young people over the age of 16 who are in education, employment or training.

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

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council articulates its vision very clearly: it intends to work intensively and effectively to ensure that the children and young people living in the borough are supported to have the best possible start in life. The council's Ambition Statement has been widely publicised and shared with partners. It has demonstrated rapid improvement and sharp analysis of what needs to be done next. Its capacity to improve further is outstanding.

Focus on each of the aspects in *Every child matters* is succeeding in both improving outcomes for children and young people and also making sure that council staff employ the same keen approach to joint working. Well considered structures, which were put in place over the last two years, have become embedded, allowing staff across different services to liaise effectively to give rounded care, and in particular to vulnerable children. The extremely well informed steer from senior leadership and service-level management, as well as partnership working between services and with outside bodies, are obvious strengths.

Children and Young People's Services use a variety of methods to keep service users informed. The council's website is less accessible.

The Calderdale Children and Young People's Plan is a well organised, readable document which is designed to be generally accessible. It clearly tells the people of Calderdale what its council officers know and what they wish to celebrate. The plan also sets out, openly and accurately, what needs to be done to make things better. The consequent planning to make those changes is precise, costed and resourced.

Working to that plan and monitoring its progress in high profile, and very public, quarterly reviews, the Director and her officers move quickly to deal with any shortfall and respond to the unexpected. The focus is on both long term universal support for children and young people and also what is immediately necessary for

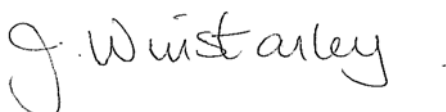
some vulnerable children; so, budgets are managed carefully to ensure improvements for all, as well as an effective response to areas of greatest need. For example, Children and Young People's Services have been proactive in making efficiency savings in some areas which have partially offset unexpected and unpredictable costs elsewhere. The Director has commissioned urgent and long term expenditure necessary to rescue and protect young people in dangerous and exploitative situations, and continues an informed dialogue with the wider council about its management. There is, inevitably, a tension between preventative and responsive costs. The Audit Commission has noted that Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council gives very good value for money.

Area for development

- Refine planning and costing for preventative work so that good indicators improve further.

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