

26 November 2007

Ms Lorraine O'Reilly
Director of Children's Services
Brighton and Hove City Council
Kings House
Grand Avenue
Hove
BN3 2SU

Dear Ms O'Reilly

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BRIGHTON AND HOVE CITY COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment for your council. 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 comments on progress since the recent 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 3

The council's contribution to improving services for children and young people is good. Progress on the areas recommended for action in the joint area review has led to improvements in social care. There are more timely responses to referrals and the council now makes a good contribution to the staying safe outcome. There has been good progress in response to the joint area review recommendation about achieving economic well-being. Better strategies to reduce the number of children and young people not in education, training or employment have been introduced together with better tracking of their work or education destinations. A wider range of vocational courses is now on offer. The council's contribution to improving outcomes for being healthy, and enjoying and achieving remains good - as at the time of the joint area review. Support to enable children and young people to make a positive contribution is good. Some children and young people are not making a positive contribution and are involved in anti-social behaviour, as reflected in rising first time offences and school exclusions. The council shows strong commitment to improving the life chances of vulnerable groups through focusing its work on areas of most need and embedding multi-disciplinary approaches within its work. Leadership is good and the senior management team demonstrates good capacity for further improvement.

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 joint area review.

There are good partnership arrangements to provide preventative services with children's centres providing good access to health care so that, for example smoking rates among pregnant mothers have fallen faster than, and are below, the national average. Early years services provide good health outcomes for young children. The numbers of schools achieving healthy schools status and providing good levels of physical activity is high in comparison to similar authorities and the picture nationally.

The integration of health visitors and school nurses within area teams has resulted in further improvement in the already strong support for looked after children and young people. More receive health checks than is the case in similar authorities and there are good procedures linking information gained during these checks to referrals for other health and social care services.

Although the rate of teenage conceptions has declined since the baseline year of 1998, the trajectory is insufficient to meet the required target by 2010. Nevertheless, the rate of teenage pregnancy remains lower than in similar authorities although above the national rate. The authority and its partners are now targeting a range of services towards identified groups of young people who are at risk of becoming pregnant with the aim of further reducing the rate of conceptions.

There has been considerable progress towards the establishment of a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service since the joint area review. A service level agreement with the Primary Care Trust is in place for the provision of the service which is now fully operational at all tiers.

Area for development

- Further reduce the rate of teenage conceptions.

Staying safe

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. Five recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

For immediate action

- New organisational arrangements deliver better outcomes for all children and young people, in particular the improved responsiveness to all social care referrals and a significant reduction in the current levels of unallocated casework.
- Capacity is used effectively to enable the continuous allocation of all looked after children and young people to qualified social workers.
- All young people leaving care are supported by a named worker and do not transfer into the leaving care team until they are at least 16 years old.
- All partners agree clear and comprehensive access and eligibility thresholds for all services at all levels of risk and need for children and young people.

For action in the next six months

- Ensure implementation of a comprehensive commissioning strategy that improves the effectiveness of preventative services in safely reducing the number of looked after children and young people, and extends placement choice for those who need to be looked after.

The authority has taken suitable action to improve its responsiveness to referrals. It is piloting a joint multi-disciplinary allocation system in one of its area teams, providing an advice line to other professionals who may be considering a social care referral, and is working well to ensure that its information and communications technology systems are fully integrated. It has also taken action to implement the common assessment framework, to monitor performance on referrals and allocation systems more effectively and plans are well advanced to manage domestic violence referrals by means of multi-agency risk assessment conferences. A higher proportion of referrals are now taking place in a timely manner and performance is improving faster than in similar authorities although this currently remains slower than the national average. All referrals are now allocated to a social worker. Reviews of cases are prompt and levels of repeat referral are well below those in similar authorities and falling faster, indicating good support for children and young people once referred to services.

The numbers of looked after children and young people are high and there is a developing project plan to reduce the numbers; this primarily focuses on family group conferencing to prevent admissions to care where other options are more appropriate. The council takes seriously the need for continuous allocation to social workers and good progress is being made on improvement in this area. The council has made very good progress on reducing the use of distant placements for looked after children and young people and this is now much lower than in similar authorities. Robust supervision arrangements remain in place for unqualified staff who work with looked after children and young people. The number allocated to

qualified social workers remains lower than in similar authorities and in comparison to the national average, has improved significantly. The council recognises the need to increase the number of qualified social workers. It is proactive in staff development and unqualified staff who leave are rightly being replaced with qualified social workers.

The stability of placements for looked after children and young people is good; it has improved on the previous year and they experience less movement than in similar authorities. The council works effectively to prevent children and young people having to live in residential accommodation and far fewer are accommodated in this way than is seen nationally, although the proportion is just below comparable authorities. The council is successful in placing looked after children and young people in foster care or for adoption but fewer are placed with relatives and friends than in similar authorities.

The leaving care team has been renamed the 16+ support team due to the fact that young people now transfer after their 16th birthday and it is reported that looked after young people are now all allocated within that team.

Area for development

- Continue to increase the number of initial assessments completed within the required timescales.
- Continue to increase the numbers of looked after children and young people allocated to a qualified social worker.

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. No recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

Most children and young people enjoy school. They benefit from a wide range of educational and recreational activities, for example through the high proportion of schools offering extended opening and the rich cultural activity in the city.

Children make a good start to their education because early years provision is of good quality and their attainment is above that seen nationally and in similar authorities. The council is making good progress in opening children's centres, particularly in areas of most need, and these are helping less advantaged children to catch up with their peers. Attainment and progress in primary schools have improved. Standards by the end of Key Stage 1 are above the national average and that seen in comparable authorities; a picture replicated in Key Stage 2 with a sharp improvement in performance. The council is well aware that the picture in Key Stage 3 is less positive, although achievement remains in line with similar authorities, and it

is focusing closely on improving in this area. Results in national assessments for English were down on the previous year but remained in line with those in similar authorities. There were rises in the proportions of pupils reaching the expected levels in mathematics and science although standards remained in line with similar authorities but below the national average. Attainment at GCSE was similar to the previous year which had seen a marked improvement. Standards are above those seen in comparable authorities, although similar to the national picture, and the value added by schools is above that seen nationally and in similar authorities. Good progress has been made in reducing variations in achievement between pupils attending different schools in the early years and Key Stages 1 and 2. However, variations in the achievement of older pupils continue. Looked after children and young people make progress in line with their peers at Key Stage 3 but progress is good at GCSE.

Support for school improvement is effective for those in categories of concern. The majority of schools are positive about the quality of support and challenge provided by the council. There are sufficient places at school but planned moves to a new ballot system, where there is over subscription for secondary school admissions, have polarised opinion with groups of parents and carers strongly for and against the new procedures.

Much work has been done to improve behaviour in school and encourage regular attendance. The impact has been more positive in primary than secondary schools. Attendance is above average and rising in primary while in secondary it has fallen from being above similar authorities to a position in line with them. Council personnel, working with schools, have now established more rigorous procedures to tackle the causes of some pupils' poor attendance. Inspections of primary schools have judged behaviour good or better while in secondary schools, behaviour has been satisfactory overall. Exclusions have fallen in primary schools but remain above the national average. They have risen in secondary schools so that fixed term exclusions are above those seen in comparable authorities and permanent exclusions are average.

Early support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and they make good progress in the early years, in primary and in special schools. Progress is slower in secondary schools but is in line with national averages. In particular, some secondary schools do not always support pupils with behavioural difficulties effectively, reflecting the slower progress of these pupils and the higher exclusion figures. The council recognises this and is developing effective strategies to support both schools and pupils, including the prompt provision of high quality alternative education for those permanently excluded and more out-reach work from special schools to support mainstream colleagues.

Areas for development

- Improve attendance and reduce exclusions in secondary schools.

- Reduce the variation in achievement between schools at Key Stages 3 and 4 by improving those where achievement is weaker.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

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

There is a good range of support for children and young people's social and emotional development through increasingly joined up work between services. The youth service, which remains poorly funded by comparison to similar authorities, reaches large numbers of children and young people and reflects a council drive to target work on areas of greatest need. Children and young people report that they are helped to manage change, for example through personal and social development work in schools. The SEAL programme (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) is well embedded in primary schools and pilot work is underway for its use in secondary schools. The impact of support for vulnerable groups to manage change and make a contribution is variable. Some aspects of the council's work are innovative, for example in supporting the parents of young offenders. The council has a clear focus on supporting vulnerable groups such as young mothers and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However fewer of these groups than in similar authorities participate in education, training or employment and improvement in this area is slow.

The council has a strong history of being committed to involving children and young people in making decisions about their community. There are innovative opportunities to take part in decision making through the establishment of the youth council and the student councils operating in all schools. Overall children and young people, responding to the TellUs2 and other surveys, felt their views were taken into account. Procedures are good to ensure vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups, such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are looked after, are enabled to participate in decision making. These include a dedicated young people's forum and an advocacy service.

There is improved communication between different services about young offenders. Through this the youth offending team has brought about a fall in re-offending from the previously high levels so that it is now nearer the national average. The team has also made progress in gathering information on children and young people at risk of offending, working hard to enhance the good collaboration commented on in the joint area review, for example with the Partnership Community Safety Team. However it has not yet been able to make best use of all the information it holds to target its work and reduce the growth in new offending behaviour. As a result first-time offending has risen sharply when compared to similar authorities. The council has also had limited success in improving the engagement of young offenders in

education, training or employment with the proportion of those aged over 16 involved remaining below that in similar authorities. The council is well aware of the need for improvement and is taking a range of suitable measures to tackle these areas with a particular focus on working closely with the Police.

Area for development

- Reduce first-time offending.

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. Three recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the next six months

- Prioritise and ensure a reduction in the number of young people not in education, employment or training, including young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who offend.
- Ensure the plans to implement a suitable and comprehensive system to track the progress and educational/work destinations of all 14–19 year olds are completed and reviewed.

For action in the longer term

- Ensure that the plans to develop the quantity and range of educational and vocational courses at level 2 and below are implemented and reviewed.

Progress on implementing plans to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training is good although the number has continued to rise and remains above that for comparable authorities. Much effort has gone into reorganising council personnel into area teams, and into finding out why some young people are not engaging in education, work or training. Good strategies to encourage target groups such as young offenders on to education and training programmes are developing. The council recognises there is some way to go and that its new procedures will need to be consistently implemented if an impact is to be made. However, it has begun to make much more coordinated use of all the information and services it has to bring about improvement.

Good progress has been made to develop a system to track the educational/work destinations of 14-19 year olds. A nationally recognised system has been piloted and is ready for comprehensive implementation for the next academic year, linking the information available with that from the Connexions careers service.

Effective partnership between the key bodies involved in 14 to 19 curriculum development has resulted in good progress in developing Level 1 and 2 provision with 200 more places available on nine courses. Arrangements for joint commissioning between the council, schools, the local Learning and Skills Council and the colleges are good. Good progress is evident in developing diplomas; these link to local needs although there is too little representation by employers on the 14 to 19 partnership board to maximise their contribution. The development of an on line prospectus of courses is a worthy addition to the strong careers advice and guidance in schools and colleges.

The proportion of young people gaining Level 2 and 3 qualifications by age 19 is above average and rising. Achievement between 16 and 19 is broadly average. Young people do well on AS and A Level courses at the sixth form colleges and achieve standards above those in similar authorities. Progress is slower in school sixth forms; it is satisfactory overall but there is variation between different schools on both academic and vocational courses. Achievement at the college of further education is in line with those in similar authorities and with national averages, as are the standards reached. Achievement on work-based learning courses has improved significantly although it remains lower than in similar authorities, with male learners and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities doing less well than their peers nationally. However the council does a good job in ensuring that looked after young people over age 16 are in education, training or employment.

Support for families to help their children achieve economic well-being is good. Provision of child care is suitably planned to meet needs. Information provided to parents and carers about child care is good and the take up is above average. There are well planned links between services for example between children's centres and employment advice. The council is successful in improving the living conditions of children and young people. It includes a wide range of stakeholders in community regeneration, for example when planning youth work or through projects like EB4U (East Brighton for You). Good progress has been made to ensure vulnerable young people such as care leavers have decent housing although there are real challenges in bringing the council's own housing stock up to the standard required.

Area for development

- Consistently implement the strategies intended to bring about a reduction in the proportion of young people not in education, training or employment.
- Improve overall achievement in school sixth forms and reduce the variation between different institutions.

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. One recommendation emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the next six months

- Ensure that joint commissioning and de-commissioning of all services clearly identifies priorities and review process for initial and continued funding.

The council has taken appropriate action to improve the commissioning and de-commissioning of services. The joint area review noted weaknesses in commissioning health promotion and social care as well as services more broadly. Symptomatic of the council's positive response is the establishment of a joint paediatric acute commissioning board, which has developed a series of priorities for the commissioning of a range of healthcare services. These are monitored by the new post of service improvement manager for children's paediatric services. Similarly the Children and Young People's Trust (CYPT) has established a virtual commissioning team with the Learning and Skills Council. Strategic planning and monitoring is clear. It includes appropriate and tightly focused key priorities centring on reducing the numbers of children and young people not in education, training or employment, the number of school exclusions and the numbers of looked after children and young people. Strategic plans also include measurable success criteria and show how progress towards them is measured.

Since the joint area review, the council has built on its track record of success in most areas, for example improving the extent to which children and young people stay safe. It has continued to develop its integrated area teams and strengthen its partnership working arrangements both within the CYPT and with external partners. There is a strong culture of multi-disciplinary teamwork at strategic and operational levels and the council has a strong ambition to utilise these partnerships to develop its range of preventative services. This ambition is also reflected in the high level of investment in social care services and staffing levels while its workforce strategy recognises the need to recruit more qualified social workers. Where it has been less successful, such as in aspects of supporting all children and young people to make a positive contribution, the council has recognised this and taken action and it demonstrates good capacity to improve. Performance management operates effectively but is hampered by the fact that some data systems have yet to be reconciled and do not support the easy sharing of information between services.

The council has made good progress in working with vulnerable groups and some that are hard-to-reach. Its work is well focused on improving the achievement of less

advantaged children and young people, such as through the successful development of children's centres, effective support for schools in categories of concern and good progress made by groups such as looked after children and young people.

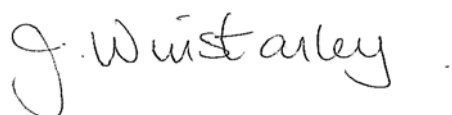
Area for development

- Continue to reconcile data systems so as to enhance service management.

Overall the council has demonstrated good progress in meeting the joint area review recommendations and 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 "J. Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection