

26 November 2007

Mr A Ayre  
Strategic Director of Children's Services  
Bath and North East Somerset Council  
PO Box 25  
Riverside  
Temple Street  
Keynsham  
BS31 1DN

Dear Mr Ayre

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET 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**

Bath and North East Somerset Council consistently delivers services for children and young people at a good level in all respects. The developing integration and good co-operation between all children's services and other agencies are having a positive impact. As a result, there are clear indications of significant improvements in the achievement and well-being of children and young people. Standards are above those of similar authorities and well above national averages for most indicators. However, although this is a high achieving council, this masks the challenges it faces in areas of social deprivation. The council is proactive in tackling these challenges and there is growing evidence of success.

### **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. The council and the Primary Care Trust are working effectively together to ensure that resources are well targeted.

The rate of teenage pregnancies has fallen in the last year, but the council recognises the need to improve this further. The council has reviewed its strategy in this area and has involved young people with the intention of seeing a continued decrease in numbers of teenage pregnancies over the coming years. There is active engagement of all the key mainstream partners such as health, education, social services, youth support services, and the voluntary sector. High priority is given to developing a comprehensive programme of sex and relationships education in all schools. The Tellus2 survey, which gained the views of 865 children and young people, reported that a high percentage received good advice on sex and relationships. There is a strong focus on targeted interventions with young people at greatest risk of teenage pregnancy. The council has invested in improved access to contraception, the distribution of condoms, early identification and the targeting of vulnerable young people. These are positive initiatives, but it is too soon to judge their impact. The council currently supports teenage mothers by providing them with access to facilities in Bristol. There are plans to use local early years and extended services so this group of young women can be appropriately supported within their own communities.

The majority of schools are participating in the National Healthy Schools Programme, and this exceeds the national target of 50%. The number of school nurses has increased and their work supports the targets in the public service agreement on obesity, sexual health, accidents and substance misuse.

The child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) promote the mental health and psychological well-being of children and young people. The council continues to give high priority to promoting mental health. CAMHS is now providing a comprehensive service and waiting times have been reduced to 13 weeks in line with the national average.

Professionals work closely together, supporting children and young people with disabilities, and those with complex health needs. The council has made good progress in tackling substance misuse. Providing specialist assessment and early intervention means that the council is performing better than similar authorities and against national averages.

All looked after children and young people have a dedicated nurse and 88% of these children and young people receive timely health and dental checks which is higher than similar authorities and nationally. All looked after children and young people have free access to leisure facilities, ensuring their health needs are recognised as a priority.

### **Area for development**

- Ensure that the downward trend in the rate of teenage pregnancies is improved further.

## 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. Child protection continues to be effective and staff are well trained. Most children and young people who completed the Tellus2 survey said they felt safe in the area where they live. Children and young people who are on the Child Protection Register have an allocated social worker and their cases are reviewed on time. This is higher than in similar authorities and nationally. The numbers on the register continue to decrease and are lower than those for similar authorities and nationally. Good support services have reduced the number of children and young people on the Child Protection Register who are subject to domestic violence. Some children and young people have not always had timely initial and core assessments, but the council has recently improved its practice, and problems relating to recording both types of assessment are being resolved. The council is keen to involve parents, carers and young people in planning for care and in assessments. Parents and carers are fully involved when their children are placed on the Child Protection Register. They are given information verbally and in writing, advice and, if appropriate, they are directed to other services. There has been an increase in the number of children and young people contributing to child protection conferences and plans.

There have been difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff to the children and family team but this has now been solved and new staff receive good induction, training, support and mentoring.

The number of looked after children and young people in foster placements is higher than in similar authorities and nationally, which is a good outcome. All looked after children and young people have an allocated social worker. However, only 75% of looked after children and young people had their cases reviewed on time. This is lower than similar authorities or nationally and the council has recognised that it has not always focused on meeting all the review targets. A small number of children and young people are looked after outside the council area and this is because external establishments can better meet the needs of these particular children and young people. The number of looked after children and young people who were adopted during the year is higher than similar authorities and nationally. During a recent inspection, the fostering service was judged to be providing excellent outcomes for children and young people.

The council has an effective anti-bullying strategy. Children and young people had highlighted this as an area of concern. As a result, the council has implemented a number of initiatives, including peer mentoring in some secondary schools and the friends project for some Year 6 children and young people. Early indicators show that these initiatives have been successful.

Effective transition plans are in place for young people with disabilities, providing early planning to ensure that services provide continuity of support focused on

individual needs. Over 90% of young people with a learning disability had a transition plan to support their move to adult services. This represents continued good practice.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is well led and the key agencies work effectively together to safeguard children and young people. Lessons learnt from a serious case review have been appropriately disseminated to staff.

### **Areas for development**

- Ensure that the Child Protection Register assessment process is timely and all recording is accurate.
- Improve the timeliness of case reviews for looked after children and young people and ensure that review targets are met.

## **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. Although the percentage of children and young people achieving expected levels in English at Key Stages 2 and 3 dropped slightly in 2006, attainment in all key stages is above that of similar authorities and well above national averages in English, mathematics and science.

At Key Stage 1, the percentage of pupils achieving above the expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics in 2006 was between 3% and 5% points above the national average. At Key Stage 2, this was 3% points in English and science and 6% points in mathematics. At Key Stage 3, pupils exceeded the national average by almost 6% points in English, 5% points in mathematics and over 8% points in science. The council has responded very well to the challenge of raising attainment further in English and improving boys' achievement through a careful analysis of strengths and weaknesses. This has resulted in intensive and well focused challenge and support to schools and has made the best use of limited resources. Consequently, early indications suggest that there has been a significant improvement in these areas, particularly at Key Stage 2.

Very good results in GCSE have been maintained and improved. The percentage of pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A\* to C continues to be above that of similar authorities and, in 2006, was over 9% points above the national average. These high standards have been sustained over a number of years and the trend remains an improving one, with children and young people making better than expected progress from their starting points. The attainment of Black and minority ethnic groups is satisfactory, which is an improvement from the last annual performance assessment, but the council recognises that this could be improved further. The attainment of children looked after by the council has been satisfactory in the past, but there is evidence that this has improved considerably as a result of effective tracking and support. Most other vulnerable children and young people, for

example those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress in relation to their starting points and achieve well in relation to their capabilities.

Children have a good start to their education. The children's centres and initiatives such as the family literacy and learning project are focusing appropriately on improving achievement in the Foundation Stage, particularly in areas of deprivation. Children achieve above national expectations by the time they transfer to Key Stage 1. In the early years provision, although at least satisfactory, scope exists for increasing the number of good, or better, providers.

All schools are providing effective education, care and services to meet the needs of learners. No schools are currently in one of Ofsted's cause for concern categories, which is an improvement since the last annual performance assessment. The results of inspection evidence, and the Tellus2 survey, indicate that most children and young people enjoy school. This is a very positive picture and reflects the impact of the council's effective and comprehensive procedures to support and challenge schools to achieve well. However, support for children and young people for whom English is an additional language, whilst adequate, is insufficiently developed.

Children and young people's attitudes and behaviour in schools are mostly good or better. The work of the newly established Specialist Behaviour Service has had a significant impact on reducing, by over half, the number of permanently excluded pupils to 18 in 2006-07. Although the number of pupils who have been excluded over a fixed term is still too high, it has not increased in recent years and the number of days for which they have been excluded has gone down slightly.

School attendance is in line with national averages and similar authorities, although unauthorised absences have risen slightly. This is due mainly to the council's introduction of more robust procedures to monitor attendance and challenge any unauthorised absence. Legal actions increased from five in 2003/04 to 164 in 2006/07.

The council has acted effectively to reduce the number of surplus places in primary and secondary schools which has been too high. However, because of the rural nature of much of the area, the number of surplus places remains much greater than the national average in primary schools.

### **Areas for development**

- Raise the attainment of Black and minority ethnic groups.
- Improve the support for children and young people for whom English is an additional language.
- Reduce the number of fixed term exclusions.

## **Making a positive contribution**

**Grade 3**

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

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council has taken effective steps to increase the involvement of children and young people in making decisions about its services and to consult them about how effective they feel these services are. Elected members hold frequent meetings with children and young people, and two young people sit on the Overview and Scrutiny Panel which is considering the future of secondary education in the area. The Tellus2 survey indicates some concern from young people about local transport, and the council has responded to this by commissioning further work to see how it can be improved. This demonstrates well the council's positive attitude towards listening, and responding, to the views of children and young people.

Inspection evidence indicates that almost all schools and early years settings were good or better in helping children and young people to make a positive contribution, and the work of the children's centres and early support services has also helped to ensure positive outcomes in this area, particularly for vulnerable children and young people. Effective multi-agency work, particularly between the youth offending team and the police, is having a positive impact on anti-social and pre-offending behaviour. As a result, offending and re-offending rates throughout the area have fallen, and in particular in areas such as Royal Victoria Park where instances were previously high. The number of offences by looked after children and young people are above the national average and above those in similar authorities, although the actual numbers are very small and the council is working hard to try to reduce them.

The council has been successful in involving vulnerable children and young people more in decision making; this is illustrated by the increase in applications from three to 22 for the advocacy pack for looked after children and young people, which was designed by children and young people themselves. However, the involvement of parents and carers in strategic planning and decision making is not sufficiently well developed or coordinated. A good start has been made on improving transition pathways for young people with complex needs, but further work is needed to improve outcomes.

### **Areas for development**

- Involve parents and carers more in strategic planning and decision making.
- Improve transition pathways for young people with complex needs.

## **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. This is an improvement since last year and reflects the progress

in developing the council's plans for 14–19 education in the area. There is an increasing range of vocational options pre- and post-16 and good provision of courses at Key Stage 4. This has resulted in more young people staying on in education, employment and training and a decrease in the number of 16- to 18-year-olds in jobs without training. The percentage of young people completing apprenticeships has increased significantly from 10.8% in 2004/05 to 55.6% in 2005/06. This represents very good progress as the number is now above that of similar authorities and almost 8% points above the national average. The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds who are not in education, employment and training, including those from vulnerable groups, has improved since 2004/05. This is now 3.5% points below the national average and is a result of a more coordinated approach by council services. However, the quality and range of courses for 19-year-olds, although adequate, are underdeveloped. As a result, the percentage of 19-year-olds not in education, employment and training, although below the national average, has risen slightly and is above that of similar authorities.

Area-wide plans to develop 14–19 provision further are complete and have been well received in the consultation process, particularly by providers of education and training. It is too soon to judge the full impact of these plans, but there is evidence that collaboration between institutions to provide a coordinated approach to post-16 education, employment and training is improving, although the council recognises that there is still further work to do before this is sufficiently well embedded.

The council liaises well with local employers, and has taken full advantage of local building development schemes to encourage and negotiate employment opportunities for young people. The provision of childcare is good, particularly in areas of deprivation, and this is helping to support young parents in accessing training courses and employment.

### **Areas for development**

- Improve the quality of provision for 19 year-olds.
- Improve collaboration between institutions providing post-16 education and training.

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

**Grade 3**

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

The council has a good capacity to improve its services for children and young people. The management of these services is strong and demonstrates effective leadership with a co-ordinated approach towards driving up improvement. Although this is a high achieving council, there is no sense of complacency. Senior managers share a common vision and work well together to ensure that well judged priorities are identified and issues resolved. The 2006 review of the Children and Young People's Plan is detailed, comprehensive and provides a clear picture of the council's

good progress towards achieving a successful outcome for these priorities. Resources, although limited, have been well targeted and this has contributed to improved outcomes. The council, therefore, provides good value for money. There is a clear commitment to equal opportunities and to celebrating diversity. This is an area that the education services are developing well, for example through the award of an inclusion quality mark.

The close working practices and integration of all the services are developing well, but the local authority recognises that more robust health service performance data is required to ensure better improvement planning of being healthy. In education, improvement planning is good, as it is in specific multi-agency projects such as speech and language. However, it is less well developed in mainstream health services.

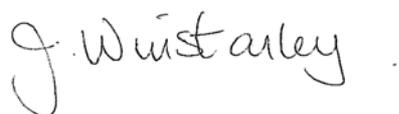
Staff appraisal systems are clear and link well to professional development. However, monitoring systems to ensure that all staff are suitably trained in safeguarding children and young people are not sufficiently robust and the council recognises the need to improve this.

#### **Areas for development**

- Improve health service performance data to ensure better improvement planning.
- Improve systems for monitoring staff training in safeguarding 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