

26 November 2007

Ms Edna Sutton
Director, Children, Young People and Families
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Berneslai Close
Barnsley
S70 2HS

Dear Ms Sutton

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BARNSLEY 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 (CYPP), 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

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council consistently delivers services that are above minimum requirements in helping to improve outcomes for children and young people. The council has responded positively to the recommendations raised in the joint area review report and has made significant progress since that time. The council has fully met the most immediate priorities for allocating social workers to cases and improving social care files, and is making good progress in relation to the other recommendations. The joint area review judged outcomes for children and young people to be adequate and improving in many areas. This continues to be the case. It found the contribution the council makes towards improving outcomes with regard to being healthy, staying safe and enjoying and achieving to be good, it remains so. Similarly, the support to children and young people for making a positive contribution continues to be outstanding. The council's contribution to economic well-being was judged to be adequate in the joint area review and it is now good. Overall, the council is making good progress with its ambitious agenda for integrating services within the new children's service authority and improving the life chances of children and young people in areas of significant social and economic disadvantage.

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 remains good, as judged by the joint area review. Two recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

For action over the next six months

- Improve access to the speech and language therapy (SALT).
- Reduce waiting times to specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and improve CAMHS provision for 16 and 17 year olds.

The council has responded positively to the areas for development. A full service review of the speech and language service began in January 2007. An interim report was produced in August 2007, with findings and recommendations in development. The council has made good progress in relation to CAMHS provision and has achieved all three of the proxy indicators. A new referral system is being embedded at tier 3 to ensure that vulnerable groups are targeted and there is more choice available for 16 and 17 year olds seeking to access services. There has been good progress in reducing waiting times and all new referrals are seen within four to six weeks.

Health needs are well known and understood and there is good emphasis on prevention and early intervention in meeting the health needs of children and young people. Infant mortality rates are in line with the national average and immunisation rates are high. Obesity baseline data are routinely collected and intervention pathways for obese children have been implemented, including a Fit Kids Club that targets the most obese children. The Tellus2 survey reported that the majority of children and young people felt they were very or quite healthy and of 61 schools inspected, most were judged to be good or outstanding in promoting healthy lifestyles for pupils. Whilst progress in increasing the number of schools meeting the Healthy Schools Standard has been slower than in similar authorities, the council is confident that it will meet the target of 55% by December 2007. There has been an 11.3% overall reduction of teenage pregnancies from the baseline set in 1998 and the Department for Children, Schools and Families reports that there is a well co-ordinated strategy in place to take this work forward. There is much good work in providing advice and guidance to young people on sexual health issues, with improved access to assessment clinics and the introduction of a Chlamydia screening programme. Good attention is paid to the health needs of looked after children and this performance is better than statistical neighbours and the national average.

Area for development

- Reduce the number of teenage pregnancies.

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, as was the case in the joint area review. Three recommendations for action were highlighted in the joint area review report.

For immediate action

- Ensure that all children and young people who have been assessed as in need of services are allocated a social worker or a lead practitioner as appropriate, to minimise risk and ensure improved provision and outcomes.
- Improve, and monitor, the quality and completeness of entries in children's social care files and ensure decisions and actions taken are recorded.

For action in the next six months

- Review, and evaluate, systems for assuring quality, especially in relation to social care to ensure that senior managers have detailed information about the level of risk being managed.

Since the joint area review good progress has been made across all three recommendations. There have been no unallocated child protection cases and all cases were reviewed within timescales. All looked after children have an allocated social worker, which is now better than the national average. Children in need who are not on the child protection register, or looked after, are allocated from within the social work team or allocated a worker from the voluntary or independent sector where appropriate.

A review of all child protection cases has been undertaken and a robust monitoring system has been implemented to ensure the tracking of cases and completion of key activities. The Local Safeguarding Children Board has established a quality assurance group to oversee this work and quarterly feedback is given to social workers to aid professional development. A joint safeguarding and welfare post at assistant director level has been established with health to ensure that safeguarding is embedded across all services.

There has been an increase in the number of child protection conferences and initial assessments undertaken. However, there has been a reduction in the number of initial and core assessments completed within timescales.

The stability of placements for looked after children is good and all care leavers have a pathway plan in place. The number of looked after children cases reviewed during the year has reduced from 93% in 2006, to 75% in 2006-07, and is now lower than the national average. While the council can demonstrate an 8% increase over the

last six months, this is an area that requires improvement. Over 90% of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities aged 14 or over have a transition plan in place for managing the move to adult services, and this compares favourably with statistical neighbours and the national average.

Good progress is being made with the implementation of the Common Assessment Framework, with 277 assessments completed to date. Very good multi-agency work has resulted in schools, children's centres, school nurses and domestic violence workers all taking the lead in the production of common assessments.

Areas for development

- Improve the number of initial and core assessments completed within timescales.
- Continue to improve the number of looked after children reviews completed within timescales.

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 continues to be good, as judged by the joint area review. One recommendation emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the next six months

- Promote awareness of, and access to, recreation and extended learning provision for all groups of children, young people and their families.

The council has made good progress with the priority for action. There is now full service extended provision in 43% of schools, which is higher than statistical neighbours. Partnership working is increasing the range of voluntary learning provision and recreational activities. A Positive Activities Stakeholder Forum monitors this provision to ensure that it is worthwhile and safe. Through work on the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links strategy, all schools are in a school sport partnership and 82% are offering two hours of sport per week. A recently launched website provides a single point of access to recreation activities in the borough.

Good early years Foundation Stage provision has been sustained since the joint area review, although there is an above average proportion of satisfactory childcare settings. There is a strong focus, by the council and its partners, on moving satisfactory to good, and on effective integration of the support and challenge provided to the private and maintained sectors. The priority identified for this work is, rightly, improving communication, language and literacy, especially speaking and listening. There are some indications of impact on children's performance in the Foundation Stage profile although, overall, the levels of performance are below average.

The strong school improvement strategy noted in the joint area review report continues to deliver year-on-year improvements in standards. Validated data for 2006 show that the progress made by children and young people in Barnsley schools between the end of Key Stages 2 and 4 is above average, and their progress within Key Stage 4 is in the top 25% nationally. Unvalidated data for 2007 show considerable increases in standards in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 further closing the gap with national averages. The number of schools below Key Stage 2 floor targets, which was a concern in 2006, has fallen considerably. There is only one school in an Ofsted category of concern. Effective support and challenge ensure that schools in categories are removed in around a year. There are good arrangements for allocating support and challenge to schools in proportion to need and the number requiring the highest level is reducing. Standards in Key Stage 1 fell in 2007, according to the unvalidated data, and detailed investigation of the causes by the council confirms the priority being given to language development in the early years Foundation Stage is appropriate.

The council continues to improve its inclusion of children and young people. It has good arrangements for monitoring the progress of vulnerable pupils, and for improving this progress through joint work between inclusion and school improvement officers. Schools have agreed with the council to fund three cultural diversity workers to improve the induction, and support, for pupils newly arrived from other countries. This is a constructive response to the school survey data where schools judged the council's support for children and young people from minority ethnic groups and for those with English as an additional language in the lowest quartile. The achievement of looked after children is generally good and above national and statistical neighbour averages at Key Stages 1, 3 and 4. The proportion of pupils achieving the lowest grades in national tests, whilst high, is reducing at a faster rate than nationally. Ofsted inspections judge the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to be satisfactory in primary schools and good in secondary schools. The council has made good progress in reducing the incidence of unauthorised absence since the joint area review. This is a result of the improved collection and analysis of data which has enabled precise targeting of support and challenge.

Area for development

- Improve achievement at all key stages, but particularly in the early years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

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 is outstanding, as judged by the joint area review. The joint area review report made no recommendations.

The joint area review reported that children and young people are given excellent opportunities to participate in decision-making and in supporting the community and this area continues to be a major strength. The Voice and Influence Task Group is motivated and committed to driving this work forward. The LISTEN standards have been implemented and the next step is to embed these standards across all service areas, including partners.

There is an established multi-cultural youth committee that now has responsibility for a £10,000 budget. A full-time worker has been appointed to help facilitate this group and also provide support for the increasing numbers of refugee and asylum seeking children and young people. There is good work on peer mentoring and promoting volunteering opportunities for children and young people, including vulnerable groups. There has been increased participation and engagement of young people in the Youth Service, which has exceeded its target of 25% involvement.

Opportunities for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have increased and a recent participation event, Speaking Up, enabled young people to contribute their views, particularly about transport issues. The Youth Committee has good representation of young people from vulnerable groups. The recent youth elections ensured that ballot papers were produced in Braille and visual aids were used to enable young people with complex needs to participate. The number of looked after children, who contribute their views to statutory reviews, has increased from 76% in 2006 to 82% in 2006-07 and is now just below the national average. There is a new contract in place with the NSPCC to support the rights of looked after children and provide advocacy.

There is very good work in reducing the number of first-time entrants into the youth justice system and whilst targets have not been met for a 5% reduction in re-offending, rates are lower than statistical neighbours and the national average. There is good joint working between the Youth Offending Team and the police. A protocol is in place to ensure that, before any decisions are taken regarding anti-social behaviour orders, the police consult with the Youth Offending Team to reach the most appropriate decision. Plans are also in place to implement restorative diversion strategies with an aim to reduce low level offences. The numbers of looked after children subject to a reprimand, final warning or conviction are reducing and remain below the national average.

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, which is better than the judgement in the joint area review. The actions of services within a well constructed 14–19 strategy have led to improvements in a number of key areas that are generally above those nationally and in similar authorities. Nevertheless, the council acknowledges that even with these improvements outcomes are still below average and more work is

needed to close the gap with the national average. Two recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the longer term

- Engage more people in education and training at age 16.
- Extend the availability of supported accommodation for vulnerable groups.

The council is making good progress with the areas for action. Since the joint area review, the percentage of young people not in education, employment or training at age 16 has reduced at a greater rate than statistical neighbours and nationally, and it now stands at 10.5%. This is still above the national average, but the gap has closed considerably in the last two years. Much work has been done to extend the availability of supported accommodation for vulnerable groups, including care leavers. In addition, a family intervention project has been established to help them avoid eviction. The impact of this can partly be seen in the data for vulnerable families, showing that their length of stay in hostels or bed and breakfast accommodation has reduced and is now in the lowest quartile nationally. The council has continued to increase the amount of child care provision and the latest figures show that 85% of parents have their needs fully met while a further 10% have their needs partially met.

The good partnership approach, noted in the joint area review report, continues to bring significant improvements in 14–19 provision. The secondary school learning alliances and their collaboration with local colleges and work-based learning providers have broadened the curriculum offer for young people. This has helped around 1,100 students to follow a course suited to their needs away from their own school, with over a third of these at the colleges. There is very effective liaison between schools and Barnsley College which is improving the transition of post 16 students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This is helping to improve retention rates. The council uses the Aimhigher project and a partnership with Huddersfield University to increase the percentage of students aspiring to higher education, including looked after children. The overall percentage of students going to university rose last year from 16% to 24%.

Since the joint area review, the council has made a very successful diploma submission to Gateway One. Five diplomas are ready for introduction in 2008 and 2009. A barrier to the success of the 14–19 strategy is the difficulty in engaging employers. The council reports that, as a result of much work to inform employers of the benefits of partnership, there will be sufficient support for the Gateway Two submission. The council has identified funding to maintain the 14–19 project team after the Learning and Skills Council funding ceases in 2008.

The impact of the council's work can be seen in the improving figures for participation and achievement, although they are still below average. Participation at age 17 has risen from 63% to 78% in the last year. Level 2 and 3 achievement at

age 19 remains below average, but is improving at a faster rate than regionally and nationally.

Area for development

- Continue to improve the figures for post 16 participation and achievement.

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 longer term

- Progress formal management structures of the children's service and ensure skill gaps, and competencies, for multi-agency working are addressed.

The council is making good progress with the area for action. The management structure for the new children's service authority was established in April 2007. A comprehensive professional development programme is being implemented to ensure that both leaders and frontline workers have the skills for integrated service delivery. A target for 80% of social care workers to have NVQ level 3 will be met ahead of time in December 2007. The council has a lead role in a national project to develop new models of school leadership, fit for the extended remit of schools in the provision of integrated services.

Recently appointed senior leaders give strong direction to the implementation of an ambitious CYPP. Section and project leaders are very clear about their contribution to the plan and they are enthusiastic in delivering it. Good collection of data and other intelligence inform the identification of priorities for the plan. Governance is strong and partnership work is developing well. Schools generally give good support to the work of the new children's service authority.

A key priority for the new children's service authority is the introduction of nine "well-being partnerships" to provide integrated, preventative services at a local level. Four are already fully operational and the remaining five will be in place by the end of 2007. Each partnership is using the Common Assessment Framework and information sharing as a focus for building teams around the child. So far, this is bringing about good progress in developing multi-agency work. Around 600 practitioners from over 130 different agencies, schools, services and settings have been trained; 277 assessments have been completed involving professionals from different services and are producing an improvement in the quality of referrals to social services.

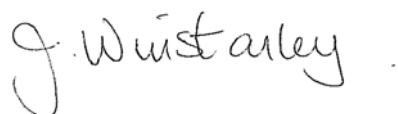
Area for development

- Complete the implementation of an integrated children's service and continue to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Overall the council has demonstrated good progress in meeting the joint area review 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