

26 November 2007

Mr Pete Dwyer
Director of Learning Culture & Children's Services
City of York Council
Mill House
North Street
York
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Dear Mr Dwyer

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

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) for your local authority. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP), 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 4

The council has sustained and further improved the quality of its services for children and young people, against a continuing background of low levels of funding. The outcomes for education and for social care are outstanding in nearly all aspects. Standards in schools are above average and contribute considerably to the economic well-being of young people. There is a clear strategy for 14–19 curriculum development and strong partnership working. The council continuously strives for improvement in how well it provides for young people, especially the most vulnerable. It has improved the outcomes for children's safety and well-being, and for many aspects of their health.

Being healthy

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 local authority continues to make good progress from a solid platform in many areas in relation to child and family health. Young people surveyed in York responded more positively on many health-related aspects than others nationally.

Headlining this progress is the City's achievement in respect of the Healthy Schools Award, where two thirds of all schools have attained the award, exceeding the

national target. Only six other authorities have achieved higher rates. All the council's schools are signed up to the scheme and they are optimistic of continued funding.

Very good progress is being achieved in relation to the immunisation programme for young children. The overall trend for health and dental checks for looked after children and young people is good and improving. For example the rate for immunisations is very high, well in excess of national figures and the figures for dental checks are 6-7% better than regional or national averages.

Partnership working by the council is a clear strength, illustrated by the highly effective links between the Youth Offending Service and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Acute emergency responses to mental health issues, including substance misuse, compare very favourably with statistical neighbours and the national picture; young people are being assessed more promptly and are accessing services which more closely meet their needs. Having young people represented on the executive board of CAMHS is a very positive move. Wider programmes are developing in relation to drug misuse, such as programmes for parents who are drug users, with signs of good attendance.

The new children's centres are providing a hub point in local communities for partnership work. Teenage pregnancy rates remain higher than anticipated. While the overall rate of pregnancy for 15–17 year olds is similar to both national and statistical neighbour averages the trend is one of increase rather than the significant decreases shown by the national average and statistical neighbour figures. The local authority recognises that, in partnership with others, there is need for further work actively consulting with young people in, for example, the use of long-acting contraceptives. This consultation work has commenced.

Work has been done across all outcome areas to ensure that the integration of services for children with disabilities and their families has remained a priority. Services centred around the new children's centres are accessible to disabled children and young people, and a directory of services has been published for them.

Area for development

- Show greater impact of actions taken to try to reduce teenage pregnancy rates.

Staying safe

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. York has a good record in provision for staying safe and has further improved outcomes since the APA in 2006. Young people surveyed responded slightly more positively than others nationally on staying safe, and a greater proportion said that they felt very safe on public transport.

The council has established a child index (contact point), re-launched through YorOK, to address previously identified shortcomings. This incorporates a role for staff in giving customers informal advice, a new early intervention route-map for vulnerable children and new publicity material in a range of accessible formats. The benefits of this system are starting to be seen and utilised more fully by partner agencies. The council now distinguishes more clearly between enquiries and referrals, which should in future reduce the overall figure for child protection referrals and reduce re-referral rates.

Completing initial and core assessments within the required timescales were areas for improvement at the last APA, and both have since improved significantly. Whereas before only one fifth of core assessments were completed within the timescale, this is now well over four fifths. Two thirds of initial assessments are completed within seven days, compared to one half previously.

All child protection reviews were completed on time. Every child on the register was allocated a social worker and re-registration rates reduced to one in ten. This indicates good professional practice and robust decision making.

The percentage of reviews for children looked after by the council that were completed on time has risen considerably and is now in line with the national figure. Systems are in place to continue to improve this. Further emphasis has been placed on ensuring that all relevant staff understand the importance of timely reviews and independent reviewing officers have been given new responsibilities to quality assure the process.

There are very few looked after children. The number of looked after children is below the national average and, whilst the care population has increased, the number of admissions to care show a significant reduction. Placement stability is good. It is much better than it at first appears in the data, because the council is very successful in moving looked-after children and young people to adoption. The council has improved placement stability overall, despite a very small number of individual teenagers who had very demanding needs in their placements. The authority's permanency panels have looked carefully at each case with the aim of moving young people quickly to long term stability. The authority's figures show that only 7% of placements are genuinely unstable, representing very few young people.

The City of York Safeguarding Board takes a lead role in child protection and on the wider safeguarding agenda. It is pro-active and innovative, encouraging excellent partnership working, particularly in relation to domestic violence and in the investigation and monitoring of allegations against professionals. The board has been commended for its work in developing the coverage of clearances completed through the Criminal Records Bureau for staff in independent schools.

Area for development

- Continue to explore the means of improving the longer term stability of the small number of looked after young people who move placements frequently.

Enjoying and achieving

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. Standards in schools are above average in all key stages and have risen still further. In Key Stage 3 standards are well above national average. Provision for family learning is excellent. The programme for developing children's centres and extended schools is well ahead of regional and national comparators.

Early years provision is in line with national expectations, with the quality of full-day care much better than usually found. School inspections show that the quality of the Foundation Stage is good. Results are well above national averages, with particular strengths in sounds and letters.

The authority has taken action on the few areas of comparative weakness identified at the last APA and this has resulted in further improvement. For example, standards in reading and in writing at Key Stage 1 have improved and are well above national averages. Reading and writing have also significantly improved at Key Stage 2 and the achievement of boys is much better.

Children and young people's progress in secondary schools is faster than the national average and the rate of progress between ages 11 and 14 has increased. Standards at Key Stage 3 are good. At GCSE, the proportion of young people gaining at least five grades A* to C is above the national average and continues to rise. Notably, half of all young people gain at least five grades A*-C including English and mathematics, well above the national figure.

Standards and progress, though above average, fluctuate a little across the core subjects of English, mathematics and, more noticeably, science.

Inspection outcomes in all schools are at least satisfactory and often good. More schools have been graded outstanding by inspectors than in 2006. No schools are currently in an Ofsted category. The one school which had been given a Notice to Improve now provides satisfactory education. The authority targets support carefully to the schools where it is most needed. The quality of support has been recognised by national awards of Beacon status for school improvement and for early intervention.

The authority's analysis of examination and test results for summer 2007 show that the trend of improvement continues. At Foundation Stage, linking sounds and letters has improved still further and Key Stage 1 results are very good compared to similar

authorities. Results at Key Stage 2 are the authority's best ever in all three core subjects; similarly at Key Stage 3 in English and in science. At GCSE there has been a further, significant, increase in the proportion of young people gaining five or more grades A* to C.

Attendance in both primary and secondary schools is above national average. Moreover, attendance in secondary schools has improved. The authority is aware that there are still a few schools where patterns of absence are more entrenched, but has strategies in place to address this.

The Tellus2 survey and the outcomes of inspection show that enjoyment is high. Behaviour in schools is good. There have been more exclusions, but this is part of a carefully managed policy for behaviour, which successfully re-integrates children and young people back into school. The most recent data show that the number of exclusions is now falling.

The progress of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The Department for Children, Schools and Families has noted 'exemplary practice' in how effectively the authority tracks their progress. The achievement of looked after children and young people is satisfactory and is in line with national figures. This represents an improvement on 2006.

Areas for development

- Improve science at Key Stage 2.
- Increase the proportion of schools which are graded 'good' when inspected, rather than satisfactory.

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. The council continues to make significant and innovative efforts to support and encourage the development of children, young people and their families through a range of initiatives and services. In 2006 the City achieved a further Beacon recognition for early intervention in improving the lives of children and helping to prevent failure. Building on this strength the local authority uses creative means of consulting with young people, recently focusing on specific issues such as the anti-bullying strategy. The local authority has succeeded in getting young people actively involved at a time when schemes like youth forums were beginning to be less effective nationally. Numbers involved in volunteering to help in their community are less strong.

The authority is committed to anticipating problems before they become intractable. For example, a group of nearly 200 young people (10% of the population) were identified as possibly vulnerable at the point of transition from primary to secondary

school. The local authority carefully researched and developed a successful transition programme.

Consultation with families and other stakeholders is very strong and highly effective. There was extensive consultation about the CYPP and parents' views sought on school provision. These views directly influenced what is provided, such as when the Children's Directorate acted on the views of looked after children in formulating its pathway plans.

The authority has used the Youth Service and its partners to focus on inclusion strategies for 'hard to reach' young people. The 'Positive Engagement through Choice' and 'Alternative Learning Programmes' focus on young people who have been excluded from school, the latter utilising one to one mentoring for considerable periods of time. Both schemes have been successful in getting pupils back into mainstream schools.

There has been a steady reduction in the numbers of first time offenders entering the Youth Justice system since the first quarter of 2005, with the total number now one quarter less than at that point. The authority recognises that the overall rate of re-offending has increased. The authority is encouraging schools to get more directly involved with young offenders, to help them understand the value of restorative justice.

In addition, in partnership with Connexions, the Youth Service seeks to prevent anti-social behaviour and offending through 'Youth Inclusion and Support Panels'. These target young people who are considered to be at high risk of offending or of getting drawn into anti-social behaviour. The Stronger Families programme also recognises the need to engage with their parents and has met the authority's own targets with 150 parents so far involved.

Children and young people with disabilities are involved as fully as possible in decisions that affect their lives, such as accessibility to leisure facilities, support in transition into education, employment and training and provision of services in children's centres. The authority is working with the Children's Society and 16–17 year olds on 'tell us about direct payments' and on advising about transport and accessibility. The 'Show me That I Matter' panel has been running for 12 months and has been effective in engaging looked after young people in challenging council officers about decisions and planning. They were particularly incisive in examining the decision to close one of the authority's children's homes.

The council has increased the reach of its programmes to encompass the needs of different groups of children and young people, not only those who are socially disadvantaged. For example it has supported gifted and talented young people through master classes delivered by independent schools. All the young people in the City can benefit from the extensive 'Schools Out' scheme with holiday activity programmes which this year involved almost 55,000 young people.

Area for development

- Encourage young people to get more involved in voluntary work in their community.

Achieving economic well-being

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. Young people's views on this aspect are in line with the picture nationally and in several respects better, indicating above average satisfaction. Family learning is excellent. The development of children's centres and extended schools is well ahead. The number of childcare places has grown to over 20 per 100 children, which is above national average and beyond the figures projected in the authority's plan.

The proportion of young people in education or training is very good and is much higher than average. There are very low levels of young people not involved. This figure continues to fall, partly as result of the successful personal development opportunities provided which encourage the young people to move on to more formal learning. Four fifths of all young people aged 16–18 are in some way involved in education. This includes an increasing number of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or who are vulnerable. Success rates in work-based learning are significantly up. The proportion of young people involved in this has increased also, though it is not yet at national figures.

Guidance for young people is good. There have been further improvements to provision, closely targeting resources to local needs, for example, by the opening of gateway shops and a purpose-built skills centre. The authority has taken recent steps to make access to guidance equally easy for all groups of young people, but is aware that these actions need to be developed further and their success monitored. The authority has made some inroads on ways to try to tackle homelessness.

The strategy for 14–19 education is well established and underpinned by strong partnership working on a range of sustainable initiatives. Headteacher and partners' curriculum planning groups are active at local level. Employers are engaged, though less well represented at the strategic level. Young people have a wide choice of curriculum pathways, including vocational. All schools now have a vocational offer and greater numbers of pupils are following such courses. College survey inspections show good links with schools have increased choice for pupils and had a good impact on their attitudes to learning and achievement. Preparation is well ahead for the introduction of four vocational diplomas.

Schools equip pupils well with basic skills. Half of all pupils in schools gain five or more grades A* to C at GCSE, including English and mathematics. This is well above the national figure and is higher than at the last APA. Provisional results for 2007 indicate that this figure has increased still further.

Results at Levels 2 and 3 qualifications are well above national averages. Over half of 19 year olds have reached Level 3. Achievement has increased in Further Education. Attainment at A/AS level is high, with sixth form provision particularly strong and one Leading Edge school established. The authority is managing to reconcile the competing demands of these different strands and initiatives in formulating a city-wide strategy for 14–19.

Areas for development

- Seek ways to encourage greater involvement of employers in the strategic direction of 14–19 education.
- Look further at how to ensure access to impartial guidance for all groups of young people.

Capacity to improve including the management of children's services

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The authority has made good progress since the last APA. It has sustained high levels of service and improved still further. It has addressed the points from the last APA very well, improving the reach of its services despite continuing budgetary pressures and low levels of funding. Many outcomes for health and for staying safe have improved.

Resources are targeted well, to maximise effect. The local authority officers have specific, delegated responsibilities for key functions and know their aspects well, getting actively involved. Data systems have been enhanced so that the local authority, schools and providers can pinpoint where there may be slippage from plans or underachievement and can target this promptly. Strong partnership working underpins much of this.

The CYPP shows clear analysis of need and identifies appropriate priorities. The local authority has thus far shown high capacity to manage its very tight budget and to cope with change. Moreover, an ambitious programme of capital funding for new-build and refurbishment is nearing completion, which has directly improved the quality of a number of schools. The authority's analysis of attainment in the 2007 public examinations and statutory tests shows considerable improvement yet again, in some cases representing the best ever results.

The authority is adept at staying ahead of the game, with continuing involvement in initiatives aimed at further improvement. It has a strong track record of becoming successfully involved in innovative practice which has been recognised at national level. Systems are well established and the local authority is small enough to know its providers well, to be able to build up good relationships with stakeholder and to intervene early to effect improvement.

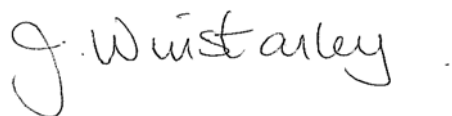
These qualities serve the local authority well, providing the continuity needed to sustain performance during several recent changes to the key leadership posts. The opportunity has been taken to streamline and to integrate services still further. The new post-holders bring considerable experience gained at senior levels. They form a cohesive team who share the clearly articulated priority accorded by the elected members to education and care. The council has to make further budgetary savings, but the children's services team are confident efficiencies can be made, without risk to core services.

Area for development

- Continue to ensure the smooth transfer of functions to the new structure and post-holders.

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