

26 November 2007

Ms Rosalind Turner
Director for Children and Young People's Services
Suffolk County Council
Endeavour House
8 Russell Road
Ipswich
IP1 2BX

Dear Ms Turner

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) for your local authority, some aspects of which were conducted at the same time as the analysis stage of the joint area review (JAR). The 2006 APA informed the scoping of the JAR at the planning stage and the initial findings of the 2007 APA were taken into account by the review team at the end of the analysis stage. The outcomes of the JAR were then considered alongside a review of recent data in arriving at the final APA judgements for 2007. As a result, many of the areas for development highlighted in this letter align with the recommendations in the JAR report and should be similarly aligned in any future action plan produced by the council and its partners. The judgements in the letter also draw on your assessment of progress or review of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted and other inspectorates. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this and for the time given by you and your colleagues to the assessment process.

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

Suffolk County Council continues to deliver services for children and young people which are above minimum requirements. Consequently the council's contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people is good across all five outcomes. The most recent JAR in 2007 reported an effective emphasis on inclusion with good services for looked after children and young people and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This is having a positive impact on improving outcomes for those children and young people who are most vulnerable. The response from children and young people to service delivery and provision is mostly positive and particularly so for aspects of staying safe and being healthy. The council's capacity to improve is good. Amongst its senior officers, there is a strong emphasis on identifying underperformance and taking decisive action to bring about improvements.

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 authority continues to make a good contribution to maintaining and improving the health of children and young people. The CYPP clearly sets out the council's priorities for promoting healthy lifestyles and supporting the sexual, emotional and mental health of children and young people, and for tackling substance misuse. Infant mortality is low. Early years settings promote healthy lifestyles and maintain the health of young children in their care very well. Outcomes in out-of-school and full day care settings compare particularly well with the national picture. School inspection judgements indicate improving and positive outcomes for promoting children and young people's health and well-being, with few schools judged less than good and many primary schools judged outstanding. There are good and improving outcomes for engaging children and young people in at least two hours of physical activity weekly. Schools' participation in the Healthy Schools programme now almost matches that of similar authorities but few schools have achieved the award and the council is behind in meeting its target. A higher profile has been given to monitoring and tackling childhood obesity, which is high at age 11, and on reducing further teenage conceptions.

The recent JAR commented on the excellent attention paid to the health needs of looked after children and young people. There has been good progress in the development of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). A fully comprehensive service is now operational, with particular improvements in access at tier two and in waiting times. The recent JAR noted inequalities in the availability of services, which the council acknowledges and is tackling. A new joint health and social care commissioner post and a new consultant psychiatrist for children with learning disabilities have been appointed. Access to the service for young people with a learning disability has improved, and a greater variety of care packages is being used, such as respite care and shared care schemes. The local authority recognises that schools require more support for dealing with children and young people's mental health needs; a third of primary schools are now using the social and emotional aspects to learning programme (SEAL). Positive action has been taken on tackling substance misuse, with a drugs and alcohol team working in schools and the launching of a young futures programme to divert young people at risk into more positive actions.

Area for development

- Remove inequalities in access to the child and adolescent mental health services and strengthen the support given to schools in dealing with children and young people's mental health needs.

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 authority has established strong local partnerships, working at both strategic and operational levels. The Suffolk Safeguarding Children's Board has good representation from statutory and voluntary agencies. The recent JAR acknowledged the board's strong commitment to, and effective leadership in, ensuring a good safeguarding culture across the council. The board's annual report and business plan provide a clear review of objectives and improvement priorities for the coming year. The take-up of child protection training in schools and settings is good and comments from participants are predominantly positive. The contributions of early years settings to safeguarding children in their care and the provision of safe environments are very good. School inspection outcomes for supporting children and young people adopting safe practices are good and they are particularly strong in primary schools. Outcomes from secondary school inspections are less positive. There has been a reduction in the number of children and young people who have been killed or seriously injured on the county's roads. Travel plans are being developed in all schools and a good proportion has been approved. The Tellus2 survey of children and young people's views indicates that they feel safe in their locality. The authority's system for supporting schools in meeting safeguarding arrangements is working satisfactorily. The number of racist incidents in schools continues to fall and the council demonstrates good practice in countering racism. While the authority has been proactive in tackling bullying, this remains a concern for a number of children and young people. Anti-bullying strategies are in place and increased support has been offered to schools.

The recent JAR found the current policy and procedure for referral, assessment and support of children in Suffolk to be good. Performance on the timeliness of core assessments has improved, but the proportion of initial assessments completed within seven working days requires improvement. The performance on the timeliness of initial assessments has declined over several years and, at 46.4%, the authority is now well behind its statistical neighbours' rate of 70.1% and the national average of 64.4%. The number of referrals of children in need has reduced and is below both national and comparator rates while the number of repeat referrals has also reduced slightly and is below that of comparator councils but above the national average. The Common Assessment Framework is being rolled out across the authority and it is anticipated that this will have a positive impact on these indicators. New internal guidance has also been issued on dealing with an increasing number of referrals that involve domestic violence. The number of children on the child protection register is slightly higher than that of comparator authorities, but the percentage of re-registrations is relatively low. All children on the register are allocated to a social worker and all child protection register reviews are completed on time.

Outcomes for looked after children and young people are good. The number of looked after children is a little higher than that of comparator authorities; placement

stability is good and performance on the timeliness of reviews of looked after children is very good. More children and young people are placed in foster care or in adoptive placements than in comparator authorities, but the numbers placed with relatives or friends remains relatively low. The most recent fostering services inspection report indicates a wider range of attendees at reviews than had previously been the case. Transition planning to adult care services is good, but there is a large number of children who are placed at home and have remained there for some time without having had their care orders revoked. The authority is aware of this issue and is taking action to resolve it.

Areas for development

- Further reduce the relatively high numbers of looked after children and young people and those on the child protection register.
- Increase the number of timely initial assessments.

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. Standards are mostly in line with or above similar authorities at the end of the Foundation Stage, and at the end of Key Stages 1, 3 and 4. Progress between key stages is at least satisfactory except between Key Stages 1 and 2. This mostly positive situation is similar to that found in previous years. The authority acknowledges that, although outcomes at the end of Key Stage 4 are good, progress in improving them further compared to similar authorities has slowed. At Key Stage 3, standards and trends for improvement are better in English and science than they are in mathematics. As identified more fully in the recent JAR, the progress made by vulnerable children and young people is at least satisfactory and in some cases good. Most children and young people with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities and those who are looked after have good support and enjoy school. In 2006, results for looked after children at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4 exceeded the Department for Children, Schools and Families targets. Targeted support for specific groups of Black and minority ethnic pupils resulted in significant improvements for some groups in their results at Key Stage 4. A positive response has been made to help the increasing number of children and young people from Eastern Europe to settle into education and achieve well.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have been below similar authorities for some time and children's achievement at Key Stage 2 was a focus of the most recent JAR. The review noted the authority's determined action to improve standards and results in 2006 showed a marked level of improvement in English and mathematics. Despite this, outcomes for pupils at age 11 remain below that of similar authorities and pupils continue to make insufficient progress from Key Stage 1 to 2. The review also noted that progress made by Black and minority ethnic children and young people is

generally in line with expectations, although the progress made by Black Caribbean children is significantly lower than expected. The authority recognises the need to maintain a robust and sustained focus on raising standards at Key Stage 2 and this is reflected strongly in the CYPP priority action plan. A review of the three tier schooling system concluded that the transfer of pupils between schools half-way through Key Stage 2 was contributing to underperformance. This has led the council to decide to introduce a two tier model aimed at producing a more coherent educational experience.

Children receive a very good start to their education. Ofsted judged the contribution made by settings and Foundation Stage classes to the development of learning and quality and standards to be good or better in four out of five inspections, with none judged inadequate. Almost all schools are providing effective education, care and services to meet the needs of learners. Evidence from the Tellus2 survey and school inspections indicates that children and young people enjoy school and achieve well, particularly those in primary and special schools. The current overall proportion of schools causing concern is lower than for similar authorities, nevertheless a small number of primary and middle schools were given a notice to improve or placed in special measures in the last year. The recent JAR reported a substantial reorganisation of the school improvement service, which has become more sharply focused on identifying and tackling underperformance. This is reflected in the outcomes from Ofsted monitoring visits to schools currently in categories. Inspectors judged the support given to these schools by the local authority to be good, with progress on tackling the key issues to be at least satisfactory.

School attendance is broadly in line with similar authorities. Absence rates that are authorised compare favourably with those in similar authorities but unauthorised absence rates in secondary schools are higher. School attendance of looked after children and young people is below that of similar authorities and the authority has commissioned a specific monitoring programme to improve outcomes. Ofsted inspections judged behaviour to be good or better in the overwhelming majority of schools, although it is not as good in secondary as it is in other schools. The levels of fixed-term exclusions are lower than for similar authorities. Dramatic falls in the numbers of permanent exclusions have been achieved in the last two years. The authority has devised attendance and behaviour toolkits for schools to help them reduce the numbers of fixed-term exclusions and persistent absence. Looked after children are still over-represented in children excluded from school, but the numbers have reduced. The recent JAR judged the work of pupil referral units to be making a significant contribution to improving the life chances of children and young people with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. There are increasing numbers of children and young people in recreation and leisure activities outside of school. The authority's target for establishing extended school provision has been exceeded and gaps in provision identified. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have good access to recreation and leisure including through the Playing for Success programme.

Areas for development

- Further raise standards and improve achievement for pupils at Key Stage 2.
- Improve attendance for looked after children and young people and reduce unauthorised absence rates in secondary schools.

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. Ofsted inspections record positive outcomes in most schools and particularly in primary and special schools. The support of early years settings to the social and emotional development and to the positive behaviour of children in their care is good. Inspection grades for out-of-school settings are more positive than those found nationally. Increasing numbers of primary schools are using the SEAL resources to strengthen the social and emotional aspects of learning. The authority has plans to extend this to secondary schools.

The authority and local district councils have made good use of the 'Having My Say' initiative to influence planning, delivery and evaluation of services. Groups of young people have had the chance to take part in interviews of council staff and contribute to policy development. The recent JAR reported on how the views of children and young people were used positively in reviewing the CYPP to bring about changes in provision. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been involved in helping to commission services from design to procurement. The authority's viewpoint survey has given children and young people the chance to give feedback on the usefulness and impact of forums such as school councils. The target for getting young people involved in volunteering has been exceeded in the Young Suffolk volunteer programme. The recent JAR reported the strong promotion of advocacy services and the appointment of two additional children's rights officers. The evidence of a local survey showed that young people knew how to seek help if needed. The Tellus2 survey indicates that those questioned believe their views could contribute even more to making decisions in their local area. Good strategies for supporting parents and families were seen in the JAR. Also recorded were the good improvements made in ensuring successful transition between phases, with good increases in the numbers of young people in Year 9 who had transition plans. The percentage of looked after children and young people who contributed to their reviews has increased and there has been a reduction in those who received a final warning, caution or conviction.

The recent inspection of the Suffolk Youth Service found it to be improved, adequate and providing satisfactory value for money. A clear strategic vision from managers, strong partnerships with other organisations and good support for those who are vulnerable are helping to meet young people's needs. The persistent lack of suitable

funding continues to have an adverse effect on the quality of provision. The Youth Justice Board annual assessment records positive outcomes in most performance indicators but some aspects show less improvement, including young offenders' access to mental health services. The Suffolk Youth Offending Service works collaboratively with other agencies to prevent offending and a clear commitment to the reduction of re-offending has shown good results. The Suffolk Youth Offending Team engages more young offenders in education employment and training than comparator authorities and good links are established between Connexions and the Youth Offending Service.

Areas for development

- Further strengthen the work of the Youth Service and access to it for young people.
- Reduce re-offending among young people and improve mental health screening and service provision for young offenders.

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. The authority has a well-established and effectively organised 14-19 strategy for education and training. Strong leadership and management from senior officers and an effective working partnership with the local Learning and Skills Council and Connexions service have resulted in improved outcomes for children and young people. The authority has a well used web-based prospectus, Futures4Me, and is engaged in collaborative working with other authorities to strengthen it further. Local 14-19 partnerships have been successfully established with good improvements in outcomes for young people achieved in some localities. Outcomes for young people attending sixth forms show an improving trend but remain below that of similar authorities. The authority recognises that achievement at A-level in high and upper schools requires further improvement and a full programme of review and support has been established. This is linked to the work of school improvement partners.

Good improvements have been recorded in the results achieved by young people attending colleges, particularly those on Level 1 and Level 2 courses. The authority took a full and active part in the specialised diploma gateway process and three of the thirteen bids were successful. The success rates for the young apprenticeship scheme are the highest in the East of England, although a relatively low proportion of young people opt for work-based learning and training. The percentage of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) remains higher than the national and statistical neighbour averages. The rate has fallen since last year's APA but fluctuates. The authority is taking action to reduce the rate further by improving the advice and guidance given to young people. The recent JAR reported that the

number of looked after young people engaged in education, employment and training is very good in comparison with similar councils. Outcomes for looked after children and young people are good, with a good percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation and in employment, education or training. Although the take-up of work based learning by young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved, the opportunities to progress into employment and work-based learning are underdeveloped. The authority is on target with its children's centre programme and action has been taken to engage harder to reach families. The number of new childcare places has increased and the authority is making good progress towards meeting its target. A young people's action group has been created to tackle homelessness and improve the quality of housing offered to those who are vulnerable.

Areas for development

- Further reduce the proportion of young people not engaged in education, training and employment.
- Further improve outcomes for 16 to 18-year-olds attending sixth forms.
- Improve access to employment and training for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people **Grade 3**

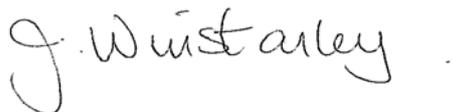
Summary of strengths and areas for development

The management of services for children and young people is good. Ambition to improve services is excellent and is set out clearly in the comprehensive CYPP. Tightly focused priority action plans and regular reviews of progress are used well to set and monitor ambitious targets for each of the five outcomes. The authority has strong leadership, exemplified in the commitment to inclusion, in improving outcomes for the most vulnerable and on taking difficult decisions in the best interests of all children and young people. Good progress has been made in securing improvements on the issues identified in the last APA. The authority recognises that the impact of some of its strategies has yet to be realised and that further improvements are required in outcomes at Key Stage 2 and in improving results in sixth forms. The council's work with other partner organisations is good. The Children's Trust and Local Children's Safeguarding Board are well established and include good representation from a variety of statutory and voluntary agencies. The positive integration of social care and education services has resulted in better coordination and performance. Recruitment, retention and training are all good. The recent JAR reported on the extent to which good leadership and management extend through children's services and are highly valued by a mostly stable workforce. Performance is managed well at all levels and clearly focused on outcomes. Value for money is good and the council uses its resources effectively. Prudent financial

management and creative spending solutions enable the authority to make effective use of a financial settlement which is below the national average.

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 and 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 large initial "J" and a period at the end.

Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection