

26 November 2007

Mr Jonathan Crossley-Holland
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Dear Mr Crossley-Holland

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SHEFFIELD CITY 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's 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 (JAR). 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

Sheffield Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements. The recent JAR judged the overall effectiveness of children's services in improving outcomes to be good. Since then, outcomes have generally improved.

The council has an increasingly well informed understanding of the needs and preferences of Sheffield's diverse young population and a strong focus on making a difference for them. Inequalities in health and educational outcomes across the city are narrowing. The council has responded positively to the JAR and its progress on specific issues requiring improvement identified in the report is good. The contribution made to safeguarding has improved and is good. Appropriate and urgent action has reduced days missed from school, including for looked after children, whose attainment by the age of 16 and engagement thereafter is now much improved. Responses to the Tellus2 survey expressed views which overall were as positive as those found nationally. The council's capacity to improve is good.

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 JAR.

Strong health partnerships enable the council and partners to target effectively the persisting inequality in health outcomes between the most and least affluent parts of the city. Health professionals play a key role in developing multi-agency support teams and acute child health services are good.

Most health outcomes have shown a steady improvement since the JAR, including the proportion of mothers smoking during pregnancy and initiating breastfeeding. The proportions of babies born with a low birth weight and dying in early childhood have reduced. Very effective partnership working and improved monitoring has tackled the low proportion of looked after children receiving an annual health assessment and dental check. This has improved from 57% to 83% in the last year. However, there is a mixed picture in relation to oral health. Improvements remain stubbornly difficult to achieve in the least affluent parts of the city.

Progress towards a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service is good. Excellent and innovative work in supporting young offenders, noted in the JAR, has been sustained. Waiting times have improved and most specialist cases are seen within four weeks. Assessment of acute needs is much speedier than in similar authorities. Services are well targeted on the needs of looked after children and young offenders. Good action has been taken to develop targeted early intervention provision despite reducing resources, particularly in relation to secondary schools. Good action is being taken to ensure that services for newly referred 16–17 year olds are in place. The council is doing all it can to ensure that young people needing in-patient care are not placed on adult wards.

Services for children with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities continue to be highly valued by parents and sound progress is being made to develop city-wide integrated provision which incorporates the needs of children with less complex requirements. Parents are being better directed to relevant services for these children.

The council achieved its challenging target of 54% of schools being awarded the Healthy Schools Status. The proportion of young people responding to a recent survey who consider themselves to be very or quite healthy is similar to national averages. Parents receive good support to keep their children healthy and the delivery of health promotion through a variety of local agencies and partners is a real strength. This includes the effective support delivered through 19 schools by agencies working in Activity Sheffield.

Robust action has been taken in relation to teenage conceptions. Rates are higher than for England as a whole but have fallen recently, and were below statistical

neighbours' in 2005. Early prevention and multi-agency support is effectively targeted to the areas and schools with the highest conception rates and the most vulnerable young people. The council's data shows a further reduction in teenage conception in 2006, taking it just below the 1998 benchmark.

Young people who misuse substances, including those looked after and the children of substance misusing parents, are supported by a service specifically for young people. Drug education is included in the curriculum of most schools and good attention is paid to ensuring that workers from all agencies are able to recognise need effectively. There is no waiting time for specialist services and hospital admissions for substance misuse have reduced well.

Area for development

- Reduce numbers 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. Two recommendations emerged from the joint area review. The council responded promptly and robustly including strengthening leadership within social care.

For immediate action

- The council should address weaknesses in performance management in social care by ensuring that:
 - decisions on the response to child protection referrals are based on all available information and appropriate holistic multi-agency assessments and analysis; and
 - all children and young people at risk are allocated promptly to qualified and suitably experienced social workers.

For action in the next six months

- The council should set clear targets for reducing the proportion of looked after children placed out of the authority, to deliver better outcomes for those children.

All children on the Child Protection Register are now allocated to qualified social workers and systems to alert managers to pressures on allocation appear effective. Firm action to improve management and monitoring of front line social work has resulted in the restructuring of case files, and their regular, systematic and random auditing. Additional training for staff has been provided to address weaknesses in the

quality of assessments. Arrangements for analysing, reporting and monitoring performance have been strengthened. A detailed analysis of the increase in children on the child protection register during 2005/06 has been undertaken to inform and improve practice. The council has decided to reorganise front line social work teams following detailed consultation and assessment and the strategy is well advanced.

Improved multi-agency action to review thresholds for social care involvement has led to numbers of referrals falling by 27%. Numbers of repeat referrals have increased and this reflects the difficulties of working with older young people whose behaviour presents challenges for local agencies. The proportion of referrals leading to initial assessment has increased and the number completed within timescales has also improved from 55.5% to 71.2%: both are better than the national average. The council's data indicates the proportion of section 47 enquiries which led to initial child protection conferences within 15 days is now 50%.

The proportion of children subject to child protection plans is higher than found nationally. The council is confident that decision making is appropriate. There is improved and now good performance in relation to re-registrations of children and de-registrations are in line with the national picture.

Safeguarding, including the wider safeguarding agenda, has a prominent place and is strongly profiled in the CYPP. The Sheffield Safeguarding Children's Board carefully monitors the work of the 0–19 Partnership. The implementation of action plans arising from serious case reviews is thoroughly monitored and shared with the partnership to ensure that practice in all agencies is improved.

Preventative support remains strong and is appropriately prioritised and resourced. The Common Assessment Framework is well embedded in the performance management of seven new multi-agency teams. A new telephone service providing guidance on safeguarding issues has been well received; within its first three months it provided advice to 190 staff, 46% of whom were from educational settings. A school-focused pilot project is increasing the quality of information and support about safeguarding and is to be extended to the rest of the city. Young people responding to a recent survey feel safer on public transport than children nationally. Despite targeted action, the number of children injured or killed through road traffic accidents has only reduced by 25% compared with 48% nationally.

Most outcomes for looked after children have improved and are now good. The number of looked after children per 10,000 in the population is lower than in similar councils. A higher proportion is allocated to a qualified social worker than nationally and 91% of reviews are held within timescales. This compares well with the national average and those in similar authorities. The timeliness of placing children for adoption is also improved and Sheffield's very good performance in the proportion adopted has been maintained. The stability of placements, including those for children in long term foster care, has improved from 63.2% to 72.1% due to increased investment and additional support for carers; this is now better than the national average of 65.9%. Pathway planning for care leavers is, however, below the national average.

Action has been taken to tackle high numbers of looked after children placed outside the authority. Availability has been enhanced by 20 additional local placements in foster care and five in children's homes. Gate keeping and the provision of safe alternatives for children on the edge of care have improved. The council has taken the decision to enable young people to remain in current placements that meet their needs. The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles from their home address has reduced from 9.5% to 6.5%.

Areas for development

- Improve the number of referrals leading to child protection conferences within 15 days.
- Ensure all care leavers have an effective pathway plan.
- Reduce the numbers of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents.

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. There has been some good progress on improving outcomes. Two recommendations for action within six months emerged from the joint area review. These were:

- The council should, with schools, tackle rates of unauthorised absence and fixed term exclusions.
- The council should improve the educational achievement, school attendance and pathway planning of looked after children.

The council has taken immediate and effective action to tackle both recommendations. Though rates of absence and fixed term exclusions remain higher than national levels, progress in reducing them is good.

The council has taken a determined approach to reducing days missed from school for whatever reason. Rates of absence from school have reduced by about 0.4% across both secondary and primary schools since the JAR. The incidence of permanent exclusion in secondary schools has been cut dramatically from its high level in 2005-6 to match the target rate of 14 per 1000 pupils in 2006-7. This has been achieved by targeted reform of the curriculum, combined with a protocol agreed with headteachers. About fifty pupils at risk of exclusion were successfully reintegrated into schools in the last year. As a knock-on effect of the strategy, fixed term exclusions remain high, but their length is shortening.

The council has made reducing gaps between the achievement and life chances of looked after children and others a focus of the CYPP. Earlier identification and response to concerns has had a rapid and dramatic impact on outcomes for looked after children. The proportion absent from school for 25 days or more has been reduced by nearly 4% points in the last year and is now 14.4%. Significantly more looked after young people have taken and passed exams than in the past five years. Provisional results show the proportion gaining five A* to C grades at GCSE or GNVQ has doubled to reach 34.5% in 2007. The authority recognises, however, that it needs to do more about the educational achievement of looked after children in primary school and at Key Stage 3. Test results here were lower in 2006-7 than the previous year.

There are early indications that gaps in educational performance between the most affluent and least affluent areas of the city are narrowing. The current proportion of children in the Foundation Stage reaching six or more points in personal and social development and communications, language and literacy is very close to the target of 40%. Whilst still below national averages, local test results have improved at a better pace than nationally in Key Stages 2 and 4. The council calculates that 4.6% more learners gained five A* to C grades at GCSE in 2007, a rate of improvement three times that nationally, while the proportion achieving top grades including English and mathematics, already in line with similar authorities, has risen by 3.3% in 2007. The council's contribution to improvement is evident in the new vocational courses which are estimated to have contributed significantly to the improvement in outcomes for 16 year olds. Schools which have had targeted support from the authority have contributed well to improving performance. Following targeted support, the decline in English results appears to have been halted. The gaps between the attainment of boys and Black and minority ethnic pupils and their peers are narrowing. However, attainment in Key Stages 2 and 3, especially in mathematics, remains below average and pupils' achievement in general, remains only adequate. Both are rightly at the top of the authority's list for support and challenge.

The quality of early years settings and schools is generally good. There are, however, challenges that remain. The number of schools in an Ofsted category of concern has risen to nine, including three in special measures. These are making generally satisfactory progress in tackling problems. The council monitors performance closely and, through its restructured Learning and Achievement Service, has clearly focussed resources on tackling underachievement.

Areas for development

- Improve attendance.
- Raise attainment, particularly in Key Stages 2 and 3 and in mathematics.
- Reduce the number of schools in categories of concern.

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 JAR.

The council's *Every child matters* consultation has enabled 3000 children and young people annually to contribute to service planning. Communication has recently been strengthened through the development of the children's web site. In response to the findings of the enhanced youth inspection and the JAR, opportunities for participation at city council level, including for locally based groups, are well advanced. The good practice in democratic consultation already in place has been further strengthened. The Children and Young People's Council includes wide representation and is developing well.

Very high numbers of looked after young people contribute to reviews of their care, and their views are soundly valued, for example through the recently developed placement exit questionnaire. Their participation in service planning has been strengthened through recent surveys and developments in corporate parenting and in the delivery of the parenting strategy in service districts.

A new Youth Crime Prevention strategy and increased resources for early intervention, such as the effective intensive reading project, together with good targeting, have reduced first time offending by 8% in 2006-7. Re-offending rates, although below similar authorities', have risen. This is being tackled through restorative justice interventions, and recent data indicates that re-offending has reduced in all categories in 2006-7. The council rightly recognises the challenge of engaging young offenders in education, employment and training and is taking appropriate steps to tackle this. Good action to improve provision for black young people within the criminal justice system through a mentoring programme is tackling the over representation of this group. Offending by looked after children has reduced and is now just better than in similar areas. Dedicated resources are firmly focused on improving behaviour linked to offending.

Area for development

- Reduce re-offending rates, in particular for young black men.

Achieving economic well-being

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.

Families are supported well with overall good quality childcare, including a higher than average proportion of outstanding childminders, who are well supported by training. There has been a reduction in childcare places, but planning to ensure

sufficiency of childcare is well informed and linked to the development of children's centres and, increasingly, extended schools. About one sixth of schools met the core offer for extended service provision by March 2007.

No recommendations emerged from the recent JAR, which recognised that the very good management of 14–19 education and training was leading to good advice, opportunities and considerable improvements in participation. The refreshed CYPP includes further improving 14–19 attainment and participation in its Key Priority themes, through adding provision, improving prospectus and application arrangements and enhancing the curriculum and support for vulnerable young people. Good progress has been made on all these fronts, although considerable and concerted effort is needed to improve outcomes further.

Successful collaboration by the local learning partnership has supported strong progress in developing new provision. Four 14–19 diplomas have been approved. Opportunities post-16 are good and the range of vocational and academic provision is expanding. A common prospectus and sophisticated application system for 14–19 opportunities are in use. Effective steps have been taken to fill gaps in provision and to boost the participation of vulnerable young people.

Over recent years more young people are staying on in education, employment and training. Participation in Level 2 and 3 courses has risen, although not to the national level. For Black and minority ethnic students, progression to Level 3 now matches that of their peers. Outcomes continue to be far better than in comparable areas and nationally in the average point score achieved by students at GCSE and A/AS levels. The Tellus2 survey shows a higher percentage of young people than nationally aspire to university or further study and like where they live.

The participation by 17 year olds, and achievement of Level 2 and 3 and GCSE grades A* to C are all below the regional and national averages, but trends show strong improvement. The good effect of the council's targeted strategies is shown in the reduction in the proportions of those not in education, employment or training and young people whose destinations are 'not known'. The number of 16 year olds not in education, employment or training fell to 8.3% in 2006, a figure that compares very favourably with similar areas.

Accommodation for care leavers has improved, and their participation in work placed education, training or employment has risen strongly over two years and is now very good. This is partly as a result of the effective involvement of regeneration projects, an approach now being extended to those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Area for development

- Participation by 17 year olds and achievement of Level 2 and 3 and GCSE grades A* to C.

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 continues to be good. The JAR made no recommendations for action and noted a good level of ambition and self awareness which continue to be evident. Strong management and strategic leadership have resulted in improvements to front line social care services. These have already shown impact. Suitably urgent and effective action has been taken with schools to reduce absences and exclusions. This improvement includes looked after children, whose attainment has improved strongly and now compares well with the rate in similar authorities.

In all the areas where progress was less positive at the time of the JAR, there are clear indications of a positive direction of travel, though more remains to be done to ensure improvement in the outcomes which are generally adequate when compared against national figures. The gaps in attainment locally and nationally for pupils in the Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 4 have been reduced. In recent GCSE examinations, 22 out of 27 schools performed better than in 2006, narrowing the gap between lower and higher performing schools. Well-targeted measures to engage vulnerable young people in education or employment and to prevent teenage conceptions have had an impact. The council takes increasingly effective measures to support vulnerable and minority groups and to involve the full range of children and young people in making key decisions about their future and that of their community. The council and its partners are aware that gaps remain and are unremittingly focussed on accelerating the rate of improvement.

Progress towards integrated localised services is good and has ensured a strong safeguarding focus at Tiers 1 and 2. Career paths for workers are clear. The council funds the work of service districts and plans to give them incentives to achieve priorities such as reductions in the number of looked after children. Documents show good business planning with clear outcomes and a focus on evaluating customer feedback and targeting resources on more vulnerable families.

Partnership working in Sheffield is strong. The 0–19 Board and Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board have very senior representation from the council. Black and ethnic minority and voluntary sector representation has been supported with funding. Relationships with the Primary Care Trust remain good and firm negotiation has led to some practical solutions to sustain service delivery despite reorganisation and financial pressures. Commissioning is developing well. The Joint Commissioning Board is operating at local level on the basis of very good needs analysis. Raising achievement is devolved to local service district areas in accordance with the overall city strategy and with allocated resources.

Performance management is now robust in all areas, with clear evidence of good analysis by officers. Recruitment of social workers and communication of key messages about safeguarding and attainment to the workforce have improved.

Sheffield provides exemplars of practice to which others are referred, including its approach to developing schools for the future. Major changes in the staffing of the children's and young people's services have been managed in a way which has maintained positive attitudes in meeting the considerable challenges. The CYPP has kept pace with changing national and local priorities and sets out an ambitious vision with clear sight of gaps in provision and how resources are matched to priorities. In some parts, success criteria are not sufficiently precise and there is scope for developing local outcomes alongside performance indicators. A cross directorate risk register is in place, and the programme board is rigorous in its monitoring.

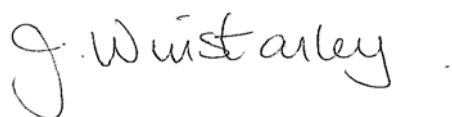
Area for development

- Sharper use of success criteria in the CYPP.

Overall the council has demonstrated good progress in meeting the JAR 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