

26 November 2007

Ms Jan Douglas  
Interim Director of Children, Families and learning  
Middlesbrough Borough Council  
PO Box 69  
Vancouver House  
Middlesbrough  
TS1 1EL

Dear Ms Douglas

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MIDDLESBROUGH BOROUGH 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 and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the assessment.

### **Overall effectiveness of children's services**

**Grade 3**

Middlesbrough Borough Council continues to deliver good services overall for children and young people. Despite the fact that many outcomes remain below national averages, the gap is narrowing across several and considerably in some. The council is tackling the areas identified for improvement in the previous APA with some notable successes, such as the good improvement in attainment of 11 year olds at Key Stage 2. Together with its partners, Middlesbrough's children families and learning service is making a number of significant contributions to improving the well-being and achievements of children and young people across an area that faces deep-rooted challenges to improving health and social and economic well-being.

### **Being healthy**

**Grade 2**

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

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. In the past 12 months, the council has continued to work closely with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and other health partners to address the many health challenges in Middlesbrough. The recent joint appointment of the

Director of Public Health by the council and the PCT supports this work. The Healthy Schools Programme, successfully embedded in nearly all schools, is a key conduit for bringing together the work of the council and its partners in helping tackle key health issues such as healthy lifestyles, teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol misuse, smoking during pregnancy, smoking rates in children and young people, obesity and dental decay. The developing Children's Trust Board is working hard to ensure joined up working on these issues but it is too early to see improvement in some of the intractable health issues that Middlesbrough faces. Schools recognise the significant efforts taken and have graded the council highly in the annual survey of schools' views on the contributions of local services to promoting children's healthy lifestyles; encouraging healthy eating and the promotion of sport, recreation and exercise.

The previous very high rate of teenage pregnancies fell by 13.1% from the 1998 baseline to the figure in 2005, which was almost in line with similar councils. However, the trend since then has not been one of continuous improvement. The Healthcare Commission has been concerned about the effectiveness of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy which has now been reviewed in order to target actions more clearly in areas of need. Good work in tackling these issues continues to take place in schools, through the work of the sexual health service and Sure Start programmes, and with parents of young people. The Connexions service is also working well to increase choices for young women. However, much of the work in reducing teenage pregnancy rates is funded by special grants, the future of which is uncertain after March 2008.

Substance misuse is a major problem in the authority and this affects the lives of many families and young people. For example, current levels of substance misuse are heavily implicated in high levels of domestic violence and neglect of children in the borough. In 2006, the proportion of young people under 18 who were receiving treatment was 7% for the borough as a whole, which is below the average for the north east. However, of those who came into contact with young people's services because of the effects of substance misuse, 90% received treatment and this is an improved figure on the previous year. Changes have been made to substance misuse services in order to continue to improve outcomes. For example, the council has commissioned the services dealing with drug and alcohol misuse to work together. The service has improved its systems for identifying problems and checking that its work has been effective for the people it works with. There are good links with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the youth offending service, and much good work is taking place. The rate of health checks for looked after children is very good.

### **Areas for development**

- Reduce the rates of teenage pregnancies and ensure funding supports this work.
- Reduce the number of young people who are substance misusers and ensure those under 18 can access treatment.

### 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 system for dealing with enquiries, contacts, referrals and initial assessments for social care is good with clear signposting to other agencies and services. There is an unusual profile of indicators for entry to the social care system with very low rates of referrals and re-referrals and a high rate of referrals leading to initial assessments. This profile reflects the way that entry to the system has been set up. The council has a good record on helping children and young people receive the help they need quickly: initial and core assessments, initial child protection conferences, reviews of children on the register and reviews of looked after children are completed within required timescales.

Children move in and out of the child protection system more often than those in similar authorities. This reflects the very high rates of substance misuse (a primary concern in 33% of families whose children are registered) and domestic violence in the borough. The council and its partners make good efforts to help improve the lives of children and their families who experience such difficulties. A proactive approach by the council to identifying families who are misusing substances, and a high rate of police protection orders, both contribute to the high rate of emergency admissions. The multi-agency service, Families First, is working intensively with substance misusing families and has had considerable success in keeping children with their parents or safely with other relatives.

Teams of care workers are beginning to work together to be more effective in providing support where there is most need. For example, in order to address the high levels of domestic violence, a number of initiatives have recently joined together in the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing service which is a multi-agency response led by the police. Although spending on family support appears relatively low, other agencies, such as Sure Start, also provide good services to families. A review of preventative services and of associated budgets is underway. There are high numbers of children on the child protection register. It is not clear whether all these children need to be registered or whether some children could be managed safely within the Children in Need system without registration. The council expects to improve outcomes for vulnerable children by intervening earlier, sharing information and continuing a determined approach to reducing alcohol abuse, including with schools. There has not yet been time for these actions to show an impact.

The proportion of children who are looked after by the council has remained relatively stable over the last five years and is currently below that of statistical neighbours, although much higher than the national figure. The council makes extensive use of private placements for looked after children, especially for residential care as there are no council-run children's homes. Some 20% of looked after children are placed outside the council's area but most are in long-term independent fostering agency placements in neighbouring areas. Rates of stability of placements are good and very good, reflecting careful matching of placements to children's needs.

## Areas for development

- Improve preventative measures so that there are fewer emergency admissions to the looked after children system.
- Review the threshold between the Children in Need and child protection systems to ensure that children and families receive the help they need in the most appropriate way.

## Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Indicators show that Middlesbrough is among the 10 councils coping with the highest levels of deprivation. Families' expectations of the benefits of education have historically been low. This has made a difference to the abilities of many children beginning their education and, until recent years, continued into all phases. Consequently, a high proportion of children enter early years education with skills well below those expected for their age and their attainment remains below average when they enter school. However, targeted actions to support children and train staff continue to be successful in narrowing the gap, particularly in areas of deprivation. The annual Audit Commission school survey indicates that schools value early years services highly and the majority of settings are judged to be at least satisfactory and often good following inspections of childcare and schools.

The 2006 results showed a sustained improvement in the attainment of 11 and 16 year olds. Provisional 2007 test results for 11 year olds indicate that the gap between Middlesbrough averages and national averages continues to reduce well so that standards are now broadly similar. Middlesbrough's 2007 results indicate they are one of the most improved councils nationally. The attainment gap between boys and girls, and between pupils from different minority ethnic backgrounds, is also narrowing. Continuing these reductions is a priority for the council. The proportion of 16 year olds who achieved five A\* to C GCSEs in 2006 rose by four percentage points, close to that in similar authorities. Provisional 2007 results indicate further improvement of four percentage points to 53%. Results show similar improvements in the number of pupils leaving statutory education with at least one GCSE. However, there is still much work to do. For example, although rising well, the proportion of 16 year olds achieving five A\* to C GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is well below the national average. The attainment of pupils aged seven fell in 2006 and fell further in 2007. For pupils aged 14, standards in English in 2006 remained static, below similar authorities, and dropped in 2007. In mathematics, following a good increase in 2006, provisional data indicate the 2007 target will not be met.

The majority of children who responded to the Tellus2 survey said they enjoyed or mostly enjoyed school. Attendance is broadly similar to that of pupils nationally and early 2007 data show an improvement in both primary and secondary pupils'

attendance, with a corresponding reduction in the proportion of authorised absences. Robust action has been taken to challenge persistent non-attenders and the council no longer requires support from the Department for Children, Schools and Families to reduce the number of schools with persistent absentees. The majority of 'priority' primary schools have met their attendance targets. In 2006 the proportion of pupils who were permanently excluded in primary schools was higher than that found nationally. In secondary schools it was broadly similar. Fixed-term exclusions remained high in both key stages. Ways of dealing with poor behaviour have been reviewed and a new partnership agreement with schools has been in place since January 2007; however, it is too early to evaluate its impact.

Good use of numerical data and detailed information has ensured that the council has a good knowledge of its schools. Timely support and intervention have resulted in a significant reduction in the number of schools causing the council concern, from 10 to three in three years. Two of these are schools in an Ofsted category of concern following their inspections. Actions taken by council services have been reported on positively during inspectors' monitoring visits to these schools. Different services are also working together effectively to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people. Targeted, sometimes individual, support has ensured that more children looked after by the council attend school regularly so that there has been a good reduction in the number of absences over the past two years. The number of pupils aged 11 who achieved Level 4 and above in 2006 English and science tests was higher than that of similar pupils nationally. This was also the case for those leaving statutory schooling aged 16 with at least one recognised qualification. However, although achievement is improving, few looked after children achieve five A\* to C GCSEs and the council has prioritised actions to improve this.

In recent years, the council has increased the level of funding, guidance and training provided to mainstream schools to support the inclusion and achievement of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities more effectively. Since September 2005, 93% of primary schools that have undergone a section 5 school inspection have been judged good or very good for how well pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress. This is a higher proportion than in similar councils. Judgements about progress of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in secondary schools are similar to the national average.

Services across the council, such as the youth service, arts development, libraries and leisure services are working well together and, as a result, the participation of children and young people in recreational, arts, cultural and out-of-school activities have increased. Good progress has also been made on the development of extended services and integrated children's centres and nearly half of schools now provide the government's recommended 'core offer' for extended schools. Schools value the council's support for extended schools highly and in the Tellus2 survey more young people than nationally said they attended after school activities and clubs.

## Areas for development

- Raise standards at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 3.
- Reduce the number of permanent and fixed-term exclusions.
- Raise the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A\* to C GCSEs, including English and mathematics.

## Making a positive contribution

**Grade 3**

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's consultation with young people is effective. Young people are able to inform the development of services which affect their personal lives and council provision more generally. For example, the Youth Council works effectively as a consultative mechanism for the children, families and learning service; although work to establish local youth forums is still at an early stage. Good, well established actions are taken to ensure that children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are consulted about their care plans and what should happen as they make the transition into the next phase of their lives. The council listens to their views, and their parents', and responds. For example, following concerns from parents of disabled children about lack of consultation opportunities, the council took effective action to set up a parents' planning forum and involve parents closely in both a review of current provision and consequent development of services for children with autistic spectrum disorders. The contribution of the Gleneagles Centre, which provides valued short breaks and the Home Support service, is very well received by parents. Some 99% of children who are looked after by the council communicated their views to their statutory review. Children's participation officers are employed to promote involvement of children who are looked after in decisions about their care and there is strong political commitment to the corporate parenting role.

Although re-offending rates have fallen considerably, the rate of first-time entrants to the youth justice system is rising. This is partly attributable to the changes in national policing policies where some actions that were not previously classed as offences are now being brought into the system. The survey of schools' views indicates high levels of satisfaction with the effectiveness of the council in enabling children and young people to contribute positively to their local community, and in providing a range of interventions to deflect children and young people from anti-social behaviour. The council has benefited from close partnership working with Middlesbrough Football Club. The team are powerful role models for many young people in the area and they provide much support and involvement in activities. Looked after children's achievement events, employment programmes, multi-agency conferences, Connexions events and engagement with schools are some examples of the effective collaboration.



## Areas for development

- Ensure effective links between the Youth Council and youth forums to widen the involvement of children and young people in the decision-making process.

## Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. A wide range of childcare is available to support families, particularly in disadvantaged areas. This, supported by the good range and uptake of family learning and parenting courses, is helping families to improve their employability opportunities, develop their potential, and support their children's learning. Over time there has been a reduction in the proportion of homes with young children where no one is working, but at 30% this still remains amongst the highest nationally.

Effective progress has been made in developing a strong 14–19 partnership since the 14–19 area-wide inspection of 2005. Action plans are in place and the September guarantee of training or learning places for all young people who want one has been implemented. This includes individual learning plans that enable on-going tracking of individual young people. Although student standards, progress and achievements are sometimes well below the national average, they are often close to that found in similar areas. There has been a steady improvement across a number of key indicators. The partnership is aware that improvements have been incremental and expects the step change to take place from 2008, when its work is fully embedded.

By 2006, the average point score of 16–18 year old students entered for GCE/VCe/A/AS qualifications, although improving, was below students in similar council areas and below the national average. Provisional 2007 information indicates a continued increase overall, with some significant improvements in a number of post-16 education settings. In 2006, the percentages of young people achieving Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications by age 19 were broadly in line with similar areas, but an increase of seven percentage points from 2004 to 2006 represented a faster rate of improvement than nationally at Level 3. Provisional information indicates further improvement. From a very low base, an increasing number of 16 year olds are continuing their education, with participation rates increasing by 8% in the two years to 2006. This is much faster than the national average increase. There has also been an increase in numbers entering employment with training, but a slight reduction in those taking part in work-based learning. This is in part due to the requirements of the Education Maintenance Allowance which is diverting some young people into further education.

The Children and Young People's Plan recognises that the area had one of the highest rates in the country of young people aged 16–18 who were not in education, employment or training, 12.6% in November 2006, although this was close to those

found in similar areas and a reduction from 2005. More effective data management as well as targeted actions by the Connexions service has reduced this further and also reduced the proportion of young people whose destinations are not known to the service. Good support is given to vulnerable groups to guide them into education, employment or training. This includes young people who have offended and those who are leaving care, where rates of 80% and 82% respectively are higher than those found nationally. Over 94% of care leavers are provided with suitable accommodation. Although the proportion of teenage mothers in employment and training in 2006/07 is low at 29%, this represents a significant increase on the previous year and reflects the picture in similar council areas. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in education, employment or training rose from 18.2% in 2005/06 to 26.6% in 2006/07, higher than that found in similar areas and nationally. There was, however, a slight fall in the proportion involved in work-based learning from 2005 to 2006. The partnership has prioritised some innovative actions to improve outcomes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including joint working between Tollesby Special School and Middlesbrough College.

### **Areas for development**

- Increase the proportion of young people engaged in education, training or employment.
- Improve the achievements of young people who are aged over 16, including teenage mothers and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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

**Grade 3**

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

The council has good capacity to improve its services for children and young people. Strengths and areas for improvement are well understood as a result of a clear analysis of what is currently happening across the local area and of what is needed to improve. This analysis has provided a set of clearly focused priorities and targets within the Children and Young People's Plan. The council's review of the first year of the plan indicates that, whilst health inequalities and some aspects of their performance remain hard to improve, there have been some significant successes in narrowing the gap between outcomes for most children and those who are most vulnerable. The general trend is one of improvement. Children's service planning has improved since the last APA and there is more coherence between plans across the council that involve children and young people. However, high level financial resources are not identified and some key priorities are funded only for the short term. Joint commissioning and workforce development strategies are now beginning to make a difference to service provision and multi-agency working.



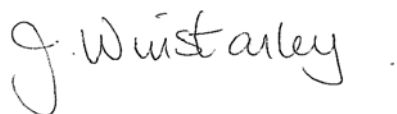
The council places improving outcomes for children and young people, including vulnerable children, at the heart of their work in providing services and regenerating the town. This commitment is reflected at the highest level. It can be seen for example, in the higher than national average investment in resources for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for the council's youth services. Elected members provide effective scrutiny to support the improvement of outcomes for all children and young people, including children looked after by the council. The annual school survey indicates that schools value highly the many services the council and its partners provide. Some 67% are rated within the top quarter of all children's services nationally and nearly all have improved since the previous year's survey. Schools also recognise the extent to which the local community and regeneration initiatives take account of the needs of children and young people. The interim director of Children and Families Services provides strong leadership and has set a clear agenda for moving forward, taking difficult decisions where necessary. She is keen to share Middlesbrough's areas of good practice and learn from the best; she welcomes external support and challenge. The interim Director and senior management team, including the lead member for children, are temporarily working with the Department for Children, Schools and Families to challenge areas that remain hard to improve and strengthen the team until the current vacant posts are filled.

### **Areas for development**

- Recognise high level financial resources in the Children and Young People's Plan.
- Ensure the strategies for workforce development and joint commissioning are implemented and that their impact and effectiveness are reviewed.

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