

26 November 2007

Mrs Pat Jefferson  
Executive Director for Children and Young People  
Lancashire County Council  
PO Box 61  
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Lancashire  
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Dear Mrs Jefferson

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

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

Lancashire County Council consistently delivers services for children and young people that are good and make a difference to the lives of children and young people. The contribution of services to improving outcomes in all areas is good. There is some variation in outcomes across the wide range of social and economic contexts within such a large county, but the council is aware of these issues and is tackling variations rigorously. The council pays good attention to the need to design services to reflect local needs and to involve the local communities and councils in the process. There is effective consultation with young people to ensure that services are designed to meet their needs. Effective partnership working is a strength of the council; there is good capacity for improvement due to an effective senior leadership team with a proven record of responding to challenges to bring about positive change.

### **Being healthy**

**Grade 3**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council has worked effectively with its partners to promote healthy lifestyles for children and young people across the county. All schools are

now engaged with the Healthy Schools Programme which is a marked improvement on last year. By the end of March 2007, 66% of schools had achieved the Healthy Schools Status and this exceeded the national target. The innovative approach to this initiative which includes parental education as well as work with children, earned the council Beacon Council status in 2007. Most primary and secondary schools were judged as good, or better, in enabling learners to be healthy and this compares favourably with similar councils.

The use of children's centres to support early intervention, prevention and access to midwifery services has had a positive impact on the rates of breast-feeding. Most areas show an upward trend in the rate since 2003 and it brings some into line with comparator authorities and is clearly narrowing the gap. Immunisation rates at second birthday have generally shown year-on-year improvement and are higher than in comparator authorities and the national average. The rates at fifth birthday have dropped slightly this year but are still generally in line, or better, than the national average and comparator authorities. The figure for decayed, missing and filled teeth remains significantly higher than the national average and will be a priority for the newly reorganised Primary Care Trusts.

Health promotion is targeted effectively to vulnerable groups of children. The number of looked after children that attend their health assessments has increased significantly from last year and is now above the national average and that of comparator authorities.

Teenage conception rates have fallen overall and are now showing a 14.6% reduction from their base year rate in 1998. This is better than the national average and that of comparator authorities. There are a number of localities where the rates have not fallen as much and the council is now focussing its strategy on these areas. Reducing the rates further remains a priority for the council next year.

Young people have not always been assessed for substance misuse in a timely manner and performance was below that of similar authorities and the national average. Recent improvements to the service, including the training of staff have seen the figures improve so that they are now in line with the national average and only slightly below similar areas. The number of young people receiving treatment for drug misuse has increased and, between April and June 2007, the authority had achieved 92% of the national target for the year.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) have made some progress from last year and its development is in line with similar areas. However, the reorganisation of the eight primary care trusts into three has impacted on the rate of change particularly around services for 16 and 17 year olds and 24-hour cover. CAMHS performance in relation to waiting times for non specialist and specialist support are better, or in line, with similar areas for most of the county.

### **Areas for development**

- Reduce the number of children with decayed, filled or missing teeth.

- Progress the development of CAMHS with the newly aligned Primary Care Trusts particularly in relation to provision for 16 and 17 year olds and 24-hour cover.

## Staying safe

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.

Safeguarding arrangements for children and young people have continued to improve in the last year. Most schools were judged to be good, or outstanding, in the extent to which learners adopt safe practices. Effective road safety measures have contributed to a continuing downward trend in the number of children and young people killed, or seriously injured, on the roads.

Good performance has been sustained in the area of child protection including some significant improvements. The numbers of initial assessments completed within timescales have consistently risen since 2003 to well above the national average and comparator authorities and are now at 73.5%. Completion of core assessments have also shown year on year improvement. The council has achieved these improvements despite a large rise in the number of referrals in the last 12 months. All children on the register have a named social worker and all have their cases reviewed within prescribed timescales. The numbers of initial child protection conferences held within 15 working days of a s47 enquiry is 54% and this is much higher than in similar authorities. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is well established and well represented by partner agencies. Serious case reviews are discussed regularly at the board and updates given in relation to each child so that the board is kept fully informed. There is evidence of lessons learnt from serious case reviews being taken forward by the board, for example, in the development of a protocol for the identification and management of perinatal maternal depression after a serious case review identified that the management of post natal depression in Lancashire lacked consistency and clarity around roles and responsibilities of the partners.

The number of looked after children has remained at a fairly steady level and although it is above comparator areas it remains below the national average. Looked after children continue to have secure and stable placements in the short-term but long-term placement stability is slightly below the performance of comparator areas and the national average. The council are undertaking some innovative work with Lancaster University to improve long-term placement stability. Most looked after children aged 10–16 years live in foster care, or adoptive placements, and the council's performance on the number of children adopted is good. There has been a year on year improvement in the number of looked after children that have their cases reviewed within timescales, but the numbers are not yet as high as in similar authorities or the national average.

The number of care leavers that have a pathway plan is not as high as in other areas and although high numbers of eligible young people have a personal adviser not all care leavers benefit from this. The council attributes this issue to the way they collect their data rather than a practice issue and is receiving urgent attention by them. A higher proportion of care leavers live in suitable accommodation compared to similar areas and relatively low numbers live outside the council boundaries.

### **Areas for development**

- Increase the number of care leavers that have pathway plans and personal advisers.
- Increase the number of looked after children that have their cases reviewed within timescales.

## **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. The council effectively supports early years and Foundation Stage provision to ensure that quality is good, particularly for nursery schools. Almost all 3–4 year olds access their entitlement to a free early education place. There is effective support for families, particularly through parenting programmes within the family and resource centres. Interventions are appropriately targeted in areas where children and young people are most vulnerable in order that they make better progress. Early years provision is of good quality, particularly for nursery education.

The strong start that children receive to their education continues across all key stages. Standards in Key Stage 1 are broadly in line with the national average. Standards in Key Stage 2 are rising and remain above the national average in each of the core subject areas, with mathematics being particularly strong. In Key Stage 3, standards are also rising and are above the national average and those for similar councils in mathematics and science. Although they have fallen slightly in English, they remain above the national average. GCSE results continue to improve and are equally strong with 59% of young people attaining five or more A\*-C grades of which almost 47% included English and mathematics. These results are above those for similar councils and the national average. Rates of progress within key stages are broadly in line with those of similar councils and are on an upward trend. The council is carefully monitoring the progress of underachieving ethnic groups at GCSE. Overall, attainment gaps are being narrowed, but sustaining the progress of Pakistani young people remains problematic.

The council is similarly monitoring, and appropriately addressing, variations in achievement across the county, such as the drop in parts of East Lancashire. The percentage of young people leaving care with at least one GCSE is below that for similar authorities. However, the numbers of young people leaving care were small in

2006 and overall outcomes were more significantly affected by the results of individuals. An increased percentage is entered for examinations and many care leavers achieve significant success outside the GCSE examination system. The council is making very good progress towards meeting government targets for the expected achievement of young people at age 16.

These good outcomes for children and young people are the result of provision that is mostly better than that in similar councils. Inspections of early years and Foundation Stage settings show that teaching quality, and the extent to which children enjoy their education, are consistently better than in similar authorities and outcomes are higher than those found nationally. Primary schools are more effective than those of similar authorities on all measures. Very few primary schools are judged to be inadequate. The results of inspection outcomes in secondary schools are only slightly less positive. The proportion of secondary schools judged to be inadequate is in line with the national average. Almost all schools judged inadequate make progress within appropriate timescales since the school effectiveness service is aware of the difficulties and provides effective support to bring about improvement.

The proportion of behaviour of children and young people that is judged by inspectors to be good, or outstanding, is high across all phases of education. Attendance is better than the national average in all phases. Although exclusions in secondary schools are higher than national overall, the number of days lost by fixed term exclusions is declining and higher proportions of permanently excluded children and young people than in other authorities, receive more than 20 hours of alternative tuition. These improvements are the result of strengthened partnership approaches in local areas. Consultations with children and young people help the authority to successfully develop educational provision to meet their needs. Consequently, wide ranging educational activities, often related to health and citizenship themes, are available to children and young people. There are good arrangements to improve the range, and numbers, of alternative recorded outcomes for young people.

### **Areas for development**

- Continue to narrow the attainment gap for ethnic minority and looked after children and young people.
- Make further increases to rates of achievement.

## **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. There is particular strength in the way the council's Beacon status for Healthy Schools is supporting children and young people's emotional well-being and helping to address anti-social behaviour, an area about which children and young people expressed concern during previous consultation. The engagement of

children and young people in the democratic process enhances opportunities for them to develop socially. The proportion of good or better provision to enable children and young people to make a positive contribution is above that for similar authorities in both primary and secondary phases. For example, 35% of secondary schools were judged outstanding in this aspect compared with 27% nationally. A growing number of school support programmes for emotional health and well-being are quality marked. Schools are supported by the overall quality of CAHMS and particular pockets of good practice. Likewise, children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported through their increased integration with mainstream children and young people. The authority's staying safe priorities have helped to reduce pupils' fear of bullying as an aspect of anti-social behaviour.

As a result of coordinated strategies by the youth offending team, which is a model of national good practice, rates of offending and re-offending have reduced. Although the percentage of the most prolific re-offenders is rising, close liaison with the police is bringing increased success. The council is retaining an appropriate focus on engaging young people with a wide range of things to do and a focus on volunteering and citizenship. Initiatives are tailored to local community needs.

The quality of the youth service, and the levels of consultation and involvement of children and young people, are clear strengths. Young people's confidence and self-esteem improve as a result of their achievements and their involvement in local democratic processes. Youth services reach higher percentages of young people than nationally because there is a better ratio of youth workers to young people. Lancashire youth services currently reach a third of 13–19 year olds; this is more than 5% above the national average. Numbers of recorded outcomes and performance against targets for accredited outcomes from youth work programmes and advice and guidance services have both increased. A variety of well chosen initiatives are underway to encourage children and young people to participate even further in decision making and community support. These include a project worker, a Youth Charter, a pilot project with school councils and the involvement of children in funding decisions through Youth Banks.

Vulnerable children and young people are particularly encouraged to participate in decisions that affect them. Peer education opportunities provide good support, particularly for those with severe and complex needs. Youth workers have made creative use of drama and music to enable young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to explore their feelings and to promote community cohesion. Looked after children's feedback has influenced the design of the care leaving service and the involvement of young people in staff interviews and staff training. The percentage of looked after children participating in their reviews has risen from 74% to 81% in 2006–07, although it remains below the 87% rate nationally and for similar authorities.

The council is in the process of establishing an improved range of data to better assess the impact of its strategies, for example, in relation to the numbers actively engaged in leisure pursuits and school councils and the quality of support for young people leaving care or those in the youth justice system. Limited data is available to

enable the council to monitor the impact of its work with vulnerable or minority ethnic groups, although case studies enable good practice to be shared. The authority recognises that sustained long-term improvement in outcomes for vulnerable children and young people will necessitate increased engagement with improving community cohesion.

### **Areas for development**

- Continue to increase the participation of looked after children in their reviews.
- Develop baselines from which to evaluate the impact of positive contribution strategies on outcomes for particular groups.

## **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. The council, with its partners, has developed an effective strategy for the development of its 14–19 provision. There is good collaborative work between all partners in seven areas across the county to develop enhanced provision and to prepare for the delivery of the new diplomas, although not all schools are fully engaged. The developments are progressing well and there are good examples of the pooling of funding sources to establish shared facilities to enhance vocational education. These developments are supported by sponsorship from local employers in some areas, but the council recognises that developing further links with employers is a priority.

There is a broad range of good quality provision in schools and colleges in the county. Standards achieved by young people at ages 16 and 19 are improving, but are not consistent across all areas. The proportion of young people gaining five or more A\*-C grades at GCSE at the end of Key Stage 4 has risen steadily and at 59% in 2006 is above the national average and that of similar authorities. There has been a further improvement in 2007. The proportions of young people gaining Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications by the age of 19 are improving and are above those in similar councils, with 70% gaining Level 2 qualifications and 44% gaining Level 3 qualifications. In addition success rates in work-based learning for all groups of children and young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from minority ethnic groups, are above those found nationally. The number of young people successfully completing apprenticeships has increased significantly to over 2900 in 2006.

The council has successfully focused on reducing the number of young people that are not involved in education, employment or training. The number of young people aged 17 in work-based learning and education has risen steadily and is now at 78%; above the national average. The proportion of young people aged 16–18 who were not in education, employment or training in 2006–07 was 7.7% which was in line

with that found nationally. However, local authority data for January 2007 show a decline to 7.1% which represents good progress against the extended local area agreement target. Through the Connexions service the council is using local area agreement resources to appropriately target work with young people not in education, employment or training across the county. The council has also identified there has been a decline in the levels of some groups of vulnerable young people engaged in education, training and employment in 2007, including young mothers, care leavers and those known to the youth offending team. The council is targeting these groups through a multi-agency approach to increase the levels of involvement. These initiatives include a scheme to support young mothers through distance learning packs that is proving successful.

The support for looked after children to make the transition to adult life is effective. There are good levels of support from personal advisers, but not all care leavers have access to this support. The proportion of care leavers living in suitable accommodation is above that of similar authorities at 85%. The proportion of young people in care at 16, who are in education employment and training at age 19, was very good in 2006–07. There is also effective support for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to prepare for adult life. Transition planning is well developed and there are effective initiatives to support young people to pursue suitable educational provision.

### **Areas for development**

- Continue to address the regional variation in the levels of young people who are not engaged in employment, education or training.
- Continue to reduce the rates of young people not in education, employment or training for the most vulnerable groups.

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

**Grade 3**

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

The management of the services for children and young people is good. There is good capacity for further improvement. The council has a track record of responding well to challenge and the views of external regulators. It has made good progress in addressing issues raised in the previous annual performance assessment, for example, in strengthening its performance management systems.

There is an effective children and young people's strategic partnership which has been strengthened by extending the membership of schools, the private and voluntary sectors. The review of the Children and Young People Plan has been thorough and has involved a detailed analysis of need and consultation with relevant partners. This has resulted in an appropriate review of priorities to focus on the key areas for improving outcomes for young people. The process of consultation with

young people is well established and there are plans to extend this further by representatives becoming associate members of the partnership.

There is strong senior leadership within the directorate and the support of leading elected members for their work is clear. The capacity of the senior team has been strengthened by the appointment of assistant directors to oversee cross-cutting themes. The links with local councils have been strengthened, despite tensions over potential changes to two tier council arrangement, through the formation of an officer group with representatives from all councils to oversee *Every child matters* issues. Links with the newly reorganised Primary Care Trusts continue to develop. The Audit Commission school survey shows that, while schools overall are supportive of the council's services, some secondary schools have significant concerns.

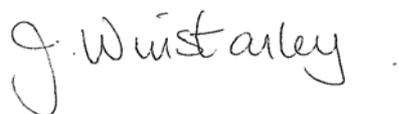
The management of change has been robust and carefully structured to build strong partnerships and ensure engagement. The joint working on areas for development by partnership members and lead officers has been an effective strategy as illustrated by the development of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Detailed planning on trust arrangements, implementation of the common assessment framework and workforce reform has established sound bases for implementation, and milestones in the project plans are being met. Progress on establishing an integrated approach to the provision of services for children, including links to health, are well established in the east of the county and are now being rolled out into other areas. The development of structures for the integrated delivery of front line services is well advanced.

### **Area for development**

- Ensure that all secondary schools are committed to the planned developments.

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