

26 November 2007

Mr Tony Howell  
Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families  
1st Floor Council House Extension  
Margaret Street  
Birmingham  
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Dear Mr Howell

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BIRMINGHAM 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 and Young People's Plan, 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. 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**

Birmingham City Council continues to deliver services for children and young people at above minimum requirements. The council is accurate in assessing the quality of its services and has responded effectively to the recommendations raised in the joint area review report. Leadership of the service is strong, forward thinking and well placed to improve further. It has a good understanding of the inequality in outcomes for children and young people and their families and a clear view of the necessary action to improve services to make a discernable difference. There is an increasing emphasis on prevention and early intervention leading to improved health, social care and educational outcomes, particularly for vulnerable groups. Users' views are often sought before decisions are made to change provision. There is a commitment to provide local services that are easy to access and meet children and young people's needs rather than those of the service provider.

The council's contribution towards improving outcomes for enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being remain good. The contribution to improving outcomes with regard to being healthy and for staying safe remains adequate

## Being healthy

Grade 2

### 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 adequate. Two recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

#### For action in the next six months

- Provide age-appropriate facilities for 16- and 17-year-olds with mental health problems.
- Improve the arrangements for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities for transfer to adult services.

Adequate progress has been made to improve the mental health needs of children and young people by reconfiguring services in the community and by better responding to need through existing services. There is an increased emphasis on early diagnosis and intervention to reduce pressure on acute services. Appropriate inpatient facilities and services are provided for 16- and 17-year-olds within timescales.

It is too early to judge the effectiveness of initiatives to improve services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These services are being suitably restructured and a transition strategy has been developed to improve the transfer of young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to adult services. A head of transition was appointed in July 2007 to lead the work. Training to implement the strategy is being undertaken during Autumn 2007. Agencies are working in partnership to improve the assessment of young people's needs and a data set is being compiled to aid transition priorities.

In the past year there has been a decrease in both infant and peri-natal mortality rates, reversing the upward trend in previous years. However, these remain significantly higher than the national average. The Birmingham Health and Well-being Partnership has developed a good action plan and provided additional resources to tackle this situation, as well as reduce underweight births and increase breast-feeding. Targeted work, particularly with those who are hard-to-reach is paying dividends. There are now more mothers who breast-feed and a reduction to below the national average in the number of expectant mothers who smoke. The number of teenage conceptions is higher than the national average but lower than in similar authorities. The conception rate is reducing at a faster rate than that seen nationally, as a result of effective targeting of particular localities and vulnerable groups.

The joint area review found that parents receive adequate support to keep their children healthy. There is a comprehensive range of services and treatment for looked after children and young people to ensure their general health is good. While a higher than national proportion of looked after children and young people had their

teeth checked by a dentist a lower proportion had up-to-date immunisations or annual health assessments.

School inspection findings indicate that healthy lifestyles are promoted well in schools, with many achieving Healthy Schools accreditation. However, the Tellus2 survey indicates that not enough children and young people eat healthily or take sufficient exercise and a significant minority want better information and advice about alcohol and smoking. Early years settings provide good health standards for young children with very few actions raised during inspections. The drugs action team assesses and treats substance misusers in a timely manner. Whilst there has been an increase in the number of substance misuse assessments conducted within timescales, this proportion remains below similar authorities and the national average.

Obesity levels are high. A multi-agency plan to bring about long term improvement is being developed. A body mass index of children and young people will provide a baseline against which to measure progress and provide a clearer view of priorities.

### **Area for development**

- The areas for action which formed the recommendation in the joint area review remain priority areas for further development.

## **Staying Safe**

## **Grade 2**

### **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 adequate. Some service areas have shown improvement while others require further development. Three recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

### **For immediate action**

- Improve quality of care planning and case file recording in social care services.

### **For action in the next six months**

- Establish effective systems to identify and safeguard privately fostered children and young people.
- Improve the rigour of quality assurance processes in social care.

The council have suitably improved the monitoring of case files and care plans by transferring relevant supervision notes onto files and by recording random audits and corrective actions. All child protection cases are now allocated to a qualified social worker. However, some looked after children and young people are allocated an experienced social work assistant under the supervision of a qualified worker.

Additionally, independent reviewing officers report to managers if care planning is not sufficiently clear.

The council has made some progress in identifying and safeguarding privately fostered children and young people. Following awareness raising, staff in schools and doctors surgeries have identified 12 such placements. The council is doing further work to advertise and target areas to promote safe and confidential referrals.

A number of sound initiatives have been taken to improve quality assurance processes in social care. For example, managers and reviewing officers are monitoring care plans and looked after children reviews to ensure that work is carried out to the required standard and within timescales.

The council has a rising number of referrals leading to initial assessments and initial child protection conferences. This rising trend has contributed to only 53% of initial assessments being completed within seven days; well below the national average, and 32.5% of initial case conferences occurring within 15 days of a child protection enquiry. The proportion of core assessments undertaken on time (69%), although improving, also remains below average. The council have analysed their statistics and identified priority actions, for example, in relation to domestic violence referrals. Similarly, prevention has improved through the multi-agency risk assessment conferences. Moreover, the number of repeat referrals of all children and young people has fallen and the proportion of children and young people re-registered remains low. This indicates that the council's frontline services are beginning to undertake more robust assessments.

There are higher than the national average numbers of children and young people both on the child protection register and looked after. Child protection reviews are being undertaken within acceptable timescales but at 99.2% remain just below that of similar authorities and the national average. Only 80% of reviews of looked after children and young people are undertaken within timescale, a proportion below national and similar authority averages. Difficulties of staff absence and the lack of co-operation of some children and young people, particularly asylum seekers, to participate in reviews remains an issue. The council recognises that to bring about further improvement it must quicken the implementation of the common assessment framework.

Birmingham continues to perform better than similar authorities in supporting and placing a good number of looked after children and young people with friends and families. Recent inspections show that residential and fostering services were judged to be safe and adequate. The stability of placements is good. The percentage of looked after children and young people who were placed for adoption although falling slightly remains good.

All schools are judged to have met the safeguarding standards, and recruitment practices are good with all employees suitably checked by the Criminal Records Bureau every three years. Health and safety concerns in early years' provision are being addressed through further training and advice. A number of sound initiatives

have been introduced to address fear of crime, perceptions children and young people have about crime and the number of road deaths.

The council has suitably responded to JAR findings by implementing a strategy for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A new head of service has been established and the service is to be reconfigured. Some work has taken place to look at better integration of assessments and co-ordination of services. However, safeguarding processes need to be further developed to ensure services are responding to children's needs.

The council's local safeguarding board was established early in 2006 and has a well established membership and constitution with relevant and active subgroups to support the business plans of the board. The partnership and participation of agencies shows a commitment to the safeguarding agenda. For example, there is good participation and involvement of the probation services in child protection cases. The board have identified two key areas to address from action plans arising out of serious case reviews which are domestic violence and anti-bullying issues. Schools now have effective anti-bullying policies which contribute to the action plan. The council takes its role to provide safety and protection to children and young people very seriously and provides good information on its website on this matter.

### **Area for development**

- Continue to fully implement the action plans from the last joint area review recommendations.

## **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. One recommendation emerged from the joint area review.

### **For action in the next six months**

- Improve services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to access leisure activities.

Good progress has been made in improving access to leisure services for those children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Additional resources were allocated to promote further inclusion and the injection of funds has led to a marked increase in participation rates, with over 1,800 children and young people now accessing various leisure activities close to their homes. Plans are being developed with targets to further increase uptake.

The joint area review judged that parents and carers receive effective early years support from a range of agencies and the needs of those from migrant communities with little or no English are well met. In addition, the growing network of children's

centres plays a strategic and coordinated role across the city in enabling many more children and young people, particularly the vulnerable, to access health and education services right on their doorstep. The quality of provision in the early years is good and children achieve well. Overall effectiveness judgements for child care and nursery inspections are generally better than in similar authorities.

From below average attainment on entry, children and young people make good progress over time to reach good standards by the age of 16. Since 2000, the gap in attainment has narrowed markedly for some ethnic groups in particular key stages. The value added between Key Stages 1 and 2 is similar to that seen nationally. Between Key Stages 2 and 4 it is good and better than the national picture. Looked after children and young people make good progress in all phases because of the effective specialist support they receive. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are generally making good progress in secondary school and at least the expected progress in primary school.

The percentage gaining five or more A\* to C grades is slightly above the national average and well above similar authorities. When English and mathematics are included the figure is above similar authorities and slightly below the national average. The percentage gaining one or more A\* to G grades is above the national average and well above similar authorities. Since 2003, the results trend has been consistently upwards and above that seen nationally. Most improvement in narrowing the attainment gap has been made in Key Stage 4 where all ethnic groups have improved at a rate twice the national average. Numbers of Black Caribbean boys receiving five A\* to C results have risen sharply from 18% in 2000 to 43% in 2006. Over the same period, Bangladeshi and Pakistani boys' results have improved much more than the national picture. Girls from these minority groups also reached good standards.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are well below average with a slightly falling trend in reading, writing and mathematics performance between 2004 and 2006. Evidence shows that the decline has been caused by rising numbers of young children entering school with little or no English and more robust teacher assessment. Provisional Year 2 results for 2007 show that the decline has been reversed; with an improvement in the numbers gaining the expected Level 2+ in all three subjects at a rate better than that seen nationally. There have been above average rates of improvement at Key Stage 1 in English for Pakistani and Bangladeshi boys. Standards at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3 are below average and in line with similar authorities. Between 2002 and 2006 there was a rising trend in Key Stage 2 results in both English and mathematics. The rate of progress in English was double that seen nationally. There has also been an improving trend in English results at both Key Stages 2 and 3 for Black Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls. Over the same period Year 6 mathematics results improved but at below the national rate. Provisional 2007 mathematic results show a rise in standards from 70.6% gaining Level 4+ to 72.7% with the rate of improvement increasing. The local authority recognises further action must be taken to raise standards for Black African and Pakistani young people, particularly in Key Stages 2 and 3, as their performance lags behind that of other ethnic groups.

Inspection findings indicate that the overall effectiveness of the majority of nursery, secondary and special schools and early years settings are good or better, with outcomes generally better than in similar authorities. Whilst the number of schools in special measures is below the national average, the number given a notice to improve is above the national and similar authority averages. During the spring term 2007, fewer schools were placed in a category than nationally and similar authorities. Overall, the rate of removal from a category is better than that seen nationally.

The joint area review judged that school improvement processes were effective and there was strong challenge to those requiring improvement. However, further support and advice is required before inspections start to prevent schools being given a notice to improve.

School attendance rates are close to the national average and have improved year-on-year. Targeted intervention campaigns such as 'Cool Cats' and 'Wise Up' have been effective in ensuring most children and young people attend school regularly. The Tellus2 survey indicates that the majority of children and young people enjoy school and are keen to do their best. Over the years fixed period and permanent exclusions in both primary and secondary schools have generally been above the national and similar authority averages. Since the joint area review some successful targeted initiatives have led to the exclusion rate falling significantly. For example, in one pilot project, schools worked very successfully to reduce exclusions by half. The aim is to encourage other schools to adopt similar approaches. The local authority recognises that too many Black boys are being excluded and is part of a national initiative to bring about further improvement.

### **Areas for development**

- Continue to raise standards at the end of Key Stage 1 and the attainment of Black African and Pakistani children and young people in Key Stages 2 and 3.
- Further reduce the percentage of schools given a notice to improve by further improving the support and advice provided to schools likely to fall into such a category.
- Continue to reduce the rate of fixed and permanent exclusions, especially for Black boys.

## **Making a positive contribution**

**Grade 3**

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

The contribution of services to outcomes in this aspect remains good. No recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

Children and young people are well supported in their social and emotional development through a wide range of projects. The Social and Emotional Aspects of

Learning (SEAL) programme has successfully been introduced in over half of Birmingham schools and is making a difference by improving children and young people's self esteem and confidence to comment on and influence issues that matter to them.

Vulnerable groups are effectively consulted and supported to improve and design services. For example, through the Disabled Children's Strategy, the views of users were sought to improve mainstream and special education provision to ensure it matches user's needs and aspirations. A champion for the disabled has been appointed to further support children, young people and their families to be involved in decisions that shape their lives. The joint area review found that support programmes for those who have experienced a traumatic event and young carers were good. Looked after children and young people are effectively encouraged to participate in strategic decision making through the corporate parenting executive.

The local authority places a very strong emphasis, and has well developed mechanisms, for involving children and young people in the decision making process. The Tellus2 survey shows that children and young people's views are listened to and a greater proportion than nationally had given their views about the local area through a youth parliament or meetings outside school. Since 2004, the number of young people aged 13 to 19 reached by the youth service has markedly increased to be nearly double the national average. Inspection findings indicate that children and young people in all schools and early years settings are actively encouraged to make a positive contribution and their personal development and well-being are promoted effectively.

The multi-agency approach to prevent re-offending is good. The recidivism rate continues to fall and levels are lower than in similar authorities. Whilst the number of first time offenders is much higher than normal, there has been a 3% reduction in the past year, but work remains to reach the 5% reduction target. An innovative and radical approach to reduce the high number of Black males who are in custody or first time entrants to the justice system has been piloted with very successful results. Robbery rates have speedily declined and there has been a reduction in the number of remands into custody. There has been a significant reduction in the number of looked after children and young people subject to a reprimand, final warning or conviction. This is a result of better communication between the police and children's home managers regarding what constitutes criminal action. In the past, the number of looked after children and young people participating in their statutory reviews was too low. There has been a marked increase, from 63% to 81% in the numbers communicating their views at reviews. Participation rates are now at an acceptable level.

### **Area for development**

- Continue to reduce the number of first time offenders and further reduce custody rates for young Black Caribbean males.

## 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. Two recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

#### For action in the next six months

- Improve services for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly transition plans to help them move to post-16 provision.

#### For action in the longer term

- Reduce the number of young people not in education, employment, and training.

Since the joint area review a manager has been appointed to take lead responsibility for coordinating and improving transition arrangements for those young people aged over 16 with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Transition planning has significantly improved and now 95% of young people have a suitable plan in place compared to before the joint area review when accurate data was not collected.

The effective targeting of hotspots has led to a significant reduction in the number of young people not in education, employment or training. The proportion of in education, employment or training has fallen from 13.6% in 2004 to 10% in June 2007. The proportion of young people leaving care and not in education, employment or training has been below average over the past three years. Most looked after children and young people now find safe accommodation and make good progress into education, employment and training when they leave care. Effective work by the Connexions service has resulted in a dramatic improvement in the not known destinations of young people from 14.8% in January 2006 to 4.82% in January 2007. Levels 2 and 3 outcomes by the age of 19 are below national averages but slightly above similar authorities. There has been an improving trend in results since 2004.

The joint area review judged that the local authority and its main partners, particularly the Learning and Skills Council, cooperate very effectively to provide most 14- to 19-year-olds with a broad and well coordinated curriculum. A clear rationale for 14–19 provision exists and a Partnership Board has been established to provide effective quality assurance. Area networks are seeking to involve industry in the delivery of diplomas. There are examples of successful initiatives to develop work-related learning and apprenticeships with local employers. The average points score of 16- to 18-year-olds in 2006 was well above similar authorities and above the national average. The average point score per GCE/VCE A/AS was above similar authorities and in line with the national average. Good progress has been made

developing an area wide prospectus. However, the 14–19 strategy remains in draft and does not contain quantifiable targets to further improve vocational standards which are below the national average. A senior adviser for 14–19 work has been appointed and staffing levels within both the Learning and Skills Council and local authority have been increased. This has increased their capacity to more effectively lead schools, colleges and work based learning providers to further raise vocational standards and improve provision post 16.

### **Area for development**

- Improve vocational standards by further improving the strategic leadership and co-ordination of post 16 provisions.

## **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 is good. One recommendation emerged from the joint area review.

### **For action in the next six months**

- Clarify how the change from high intervention services to preventative services will be implemented, including the ranking of priorities.

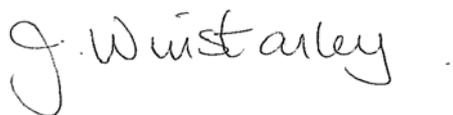
Since the joint area review senior leaders have taken time to consult with a range of partners and stakeholders to develop a strategy and a consensus about how to improve outcomes for children and young people, and how the various agencies will work together to deliver services. The strategy is an ambitious one and effectively clarifies how the local authority will move from high intervention services to preventative ones. Prioritisation is good. The strategy and implementation plan are based on a thorough analysis and research of need within the city and what policies and services will make the greatest impact. A long term cost benefit analysis of moving from high intervention to preventative service has been completed. A sound financial strategy is in place and the significant investment in the education and care of children and young people reflects the key role it plays in regenerating the city.

The joint area review judged that service management was good and that good partnership working and shared ambitions and priorities underpin services in Birmingham. Given that ambition remains strong, prioritisation is better and areas for development have been effectively tackled, the council has good capacity to improve further. Outcomes in education are improving and there have been significant improvements in social care as a result of much improved leadership and management and significant investment in this service. Social care outcomes are now adequate when in the recent past they were poor.

Overall the council has demonstrated good progress in meeting the joint area review 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". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a trailing dot at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager  
Local Services Inspection