

26 November 2007

Ms C Godfrey
Director of the Department for Children and Education
Wiltshire County Council
County Hall
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire BA1 8JN

Dear Ms Godfrey

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WILTSHIRE 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 where it was available, 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 2

Wiltshire County Council delivers services for children and young people which are above minimum requirements in four of the five outcome areas. The gap between the outcomes for most children and young people and those who are more vulnerable is decreasing in a number of areas. However, weaknesses in enjoying and achieving and the authority's capacity to improve, including service management, mean that overall effectiveness is adequate. In these areas, the authority is taking steps to improve provision and outcomes but some actions are at an early stage of implementation and others have yet to bring about desired improvements.

Being healthy

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 authority is proactive, innovative and inclusive in providing its health-related services and is developing strong partnerships. It is continuing to improve its performance in promoting healthy lifestyles and good health for children and young people. Smoking in pregnancy is declining and breast-feeding rates and

immunisation levels are improving and are better than the national average. Ninety percent of schools are in the Healthy Schools programme and early years providers performed above the national average in this aspect. Outcomes for improving physical health are, in general, above the national average with the exception of oral health for children aged five, which is too variable across the authority.

Wiltshire has achieved an 11.8% reduction in teenage conceptions since the national baseline year of 1998, which is very slightly below the national average. The authority is continuing to make this a priority area in order to reach the target for 2010. There are some good initiatives in this area such as an accessible 'No Worries' scheme in pharmacies and medical centres, a condom distribution scheme and the introduction of a sex education charter.

The local area agreement aims to reduce smoking, levels of drinking alcohol and the impact of drug taking. It also aims to increase the amount of exercise taken and encourage healthier eating. This work has been effective; a survey of secondary school pupils shows a significant increase in non-smokers and a decrease in children using alcohol and drugs. The work on substance misuse is a good example of effective joint commissioning and multi-agency working. A large number of staff have been trained in this area, enabling schools and youth development workers to educate young people. Agencies have not met timescales for meeting assessments of children and young people referred by the Youth Offending Team with mental health and substance misuse needs. These are below national averages although this is now being tackled.

There is a fully comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) which has specific provision for looked after children and children with disabilities. CAMHS is not consistently accessible and there are some specific gaps in service provision and differing thresholds across the county. The council, working in partnership with the newly established Wiltshire primary care trust (PCT), is developing a more integrated, county-wide approach to make CAMHS both more effective and accessible.

The recent inspection of the fostering service rated the provision for the health needs of looked after children and young people as good. Health assessments and dental checks for looked after children are timely. Performance has improved in these areas which are now in line with national averages.

Area(s) for development

- Develop an integrated and accessible CAMHS, which is delivered in a consistent way across the authority.
- Improve timescales for assessments of children and young people with mental health and substance misuse needs.
- Improve oral health for children aged five in some areas of Wiltshire.
- Reduce levels of teenage pregnancy further in order to meet the national target.

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.

There are appropriate and agreed thresholds for access to child protection and family support services. The percentage of referrals is below the national average as are the number of core assessments and of children on the child protection register. The number of repeat referrals is slightly below the national average indicating an appropriate threshold. All children on the child protection register are allocated to a social worker and all child protection reviews are held on time. Improvements in the proportion of initial child protection conferences held within 15 days are such that performance in this area is now above the national average.

The number of re-registrations on the child protection register is high. The authority's detailed audit of the circumstances of all the re-registrations demonstrates the very specific circumstances of individual cases that led to this. The authority has established auditing and tracking systems to ensure that thresholds are applied appropriately. It is committed to the participation of parents and children in the child protection process and has developed an advocacy service with the voluntary sector. This enables children to participate more effectively in their child protection conferences. The percentage of core assessments and initial assessments completed within timescales has improved and is above the national average.

The authority continues to have a low number of looked after children and young people. The council was judged as good in this area in the inspections of its fostering and adoption services. The timeliness of reviews for looked after children has improved but is still two percentage points below the national average. The stability of their placements has improved and fewer of these children, when compared with the national average, had more than three moves in the last year. The long-term stability of placements has also improved and performance is now above the national average.

The authority has a high number of children placed in residential care and does not have a sufficient range of choice in local placement. A third of newly looked after children and young people are placed more than 20 miles away from their home. The authority is planning to boost local placements by increasing the number of foster carers and working with an independent provider. The authority has invested in the fostering service by improving allowances and support to foster carers, though meeting targets for increasing the number of foster carers is proving challenging. The authority has greatly improved the number of looked after children placed with family and friends. Targets and timescales for further improvement are not yet fully in place. Wiltshire has continued its very good performance with regard to care leavers; all have pathway plans and are allocated a personal adviser.

Adoption work has improved a great deal but performance remains just below the national average. The authority has set targets for further improvement this year that it expects to meet and is implementing a clear recruitment strategy for adopters. The authority has recently increased staffing and has plans to recruit a manager to take an overview of the adoption service. The council has a higher proportion of children placed for adoption within 12 months of the adoption decision than the national average.

Wiltshire has a well-established culture of safeguarding which is evident in the routine work of individual agencies and key partnerships. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) has a good level of representation and has taken on its wider role. An evaluation of the LSCB found it to be making good progress.

The authority has demonstrated through a recent survey that its anti-bullying strategy is effective and fewer children and young people have reported being bullied. Good engagement with schools has helped to prevent bullying through improved monitoring. Views expressed by young people through the Tellus2 survey indicate that they feel at less risk of being bullied and are more positive about the effectiveness of schools in dealing with this than their peers in other areas. The majority of children report feeling safe and that their concerns about these issues are listened and responded to. A slightly higher percentage of young people in Wiltshire feel safer around their local area, on public transport, when going to school, and whilst in school, than the national average.

Area(s) for development

- Improve the timeliness of looked after children and young people's reviews.
- Increase local placement choice.
- Increase the number of adoptions.

Enjoying and achieving

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.

Provision for pre-school children is good. Ofsted inspections of child care settings show the provision to be mainly good or better, and of generally higher quality than in similar authorities. However, in primary schools inspected, 57% of Foundation Stage provision was judged good or better compared with 78% in similar authorities. Foundation Stage profile scores are above national averages and further strategies are in place to improve communication, language and literacy. Provision of children's centres and child care is well planned with a major expansion to the number of children's centres on track for completion in 2008.

Standards and improvement in primary schools are inconsistent. At Key Stage 1, reading is improving at a faster rate than in similar authorities but improvements in writing lag behind. Standards in writing and mathematics are also below those in similar authorities. At Key Stage 2, however, standards in English are in line with similar authorities but standards in mathematics and science are below, despite improvements in all three subjects. There are signs that the gap between boys' and girls' attainment is narrowing in primary schools. Actions to improve the overall effectiveness of primary schools through re-organisation of the school improvement service, improvements in school self-evaluation and provision of professional development for school leaders have yet to have a discernible impact. Consequently, judgements of overall effectiveness from primary schools' inspections are mainly satisfactory rather than good and are not as high as those for similar authorities. Effective changes have been made to the authority's arrangements for supporting and challenging schools causing concern. As a result, the proportion of schools inspected requiring special measures or a notice to improve has been reduced. However, there are still too many schools subject to these categories as over 3% of all schools have required special measures since 2005, which is more than double the national figure and that for similar authorities. The authority provides good support for schools in categories of concern.

Standards as shown by the 2006 GCSE results are in line with those in similar authorities and with national averages. GCSE results did not improve from the previous year and so do not compare favourably with changes nationally or with similar authorities. The authority is tackling this through clear direction for school improvement partners to challenge schools where targets are too low. Early indications for 2007 are that this strategy and improvements to the curriculum are raising standards. Results of national tests overall at Key Stage 3 are in line with those in similar authorities and above national figures for mathematics and science. Improvement rates in English and mathematics at Key Stage 3 are below those found nationally. No secondary schools are below the government floor targets for results at Key Stage 3 and GCSE. Value added measures from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 are above average. Inspection judgements on the quality of provision in secondary schools compare well with similar authorities.

School attendance is in line with national averages and similar authorities. The Tellus2 survey involving 719 children and young people indicates that pupils' enjoyment of school is above the national average. Judgements on behaviour from Ofsted inspections are mainly good and in line with outcomes for similar authorities. Permanent exclusions are in line with levels in similar authorities for primary schools but above for secondary. However, in one locality collaborative work between schools has effectively reduced the number of permanent exclusions. The authority sees this model of collaboration as an effective way to bring about further improvements. The authority continues to provide the nationally expected 20 or more hours of tuition for permanently excluded pupils. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are permanently excluded, including those from special schools, is low.

There is a mixed picture of quality of provision and outcomes for more vulnerable children and young people. Inspection judgements indicate that compared to similar authorities, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do well in secondary schools but judgements on progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in primary schools are satisfactory rather than good, which compares unfavourably. The percentage of statements of special educational needs is below national and similar-authority averages. The arrangements for issuing statements have improved as a result of effective action taken by the authority.

The attendance of looked after children and young people is acceptable but has not improved. In 2006, the percentage of young people who were looked after and who gained at least one GCSE declined. The percentage of young people leaving care with one GCSE was below that in similar authorities. In 2007, of the 14 children looked after who gained at least one GCSE, 13 gained five passes. Those looked after young people not achieving GCSEs followed alternative curriculum provision better suited to their needs. As a result, many progressed to further education, including a pupil in secure accommodation who was supported by the authority. All of the most recent looked after cohort who completed their compulsory education remain in education, employment or training. The authority has a number of strategies in schools and in supporting carers which are improving the engagement of looked after children with their education. The attainment of Black and minority ethnic pupils is too variable and improvement has not been consistent for children and young people from all minority ethnic groups. The authority is building on effective work done to engage Black and minority ethnic families by piloting strategies to raise Black and minority ethnic pupils' attainment in two secondary schools. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this work.

Area(s) for development

- Improve the overall effectiveness of primary schools.
- Improve attainment at all key stages.
- Improve the attainment of Black and minority ethnic pupils.
- Improve the attainment of looked after children and young people.

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.

Children and young people make a strong contribution to the review of the Children and Young People's Plan. As well as being involved in youth councils and the Wiltshire Youth Assembly, children and young people participate effectively in community activities and influence the services provided for them. These include the development of a radio station and website to publicise activities for young people,

the development of a sex education charter, improved alternative sports activities and social facilities for young people in some localities, and better environmental awareness. In addition, there is a good range of advocacy services provided for more vulnerable children and young people.

The percentage of looked after children and young people contributing to their reviews has increased by five percentage points to 78%, but it is still too low. The authority has a number of strategies to improve these figures but they have yet to impact fully. They include involving children and young people in improving the format of personal education plans and better opportunities for children and young people to participate in the review process.

Inspection judgements for pupils' social, moral and spiritual development and the extent to which they make a positive contribution are good, including those for special schools. This is reflected in the Tellus2 survey, which shows higher than average percentages of pupils who are able to vote in school-based elections, help someone in their locality, and feel their voice is heard in school.

The percentage of 13-19 year olds reached by the Youth Service has improved and is well above both the national average and the national target for participation. Partnership work with the Youth Offending Team (YOT) is strong, as shown in effective early intervention strategies. For example, Connexions and police neighbourhood teams work closely with the YOT, which also mentors looked after children and young people at risk of offending and supports the authority's parenting strategy. As a result, the percentage of first-time entrants to the youth justice system is lower than in similar authorities, as is the percentage of looked after children warned or convicted of an offence. The number of anti-social behaviour orders issued is also low.

Area(s) for development

- Increase the percentage of looked after children and young people who contribute to their reviews.

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 percentages of young people gaining Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications by the age of 19 have improved and are well above national averages, and at least in line with outcomes in similar authorities. Inspection judgements on the quality of education provided by sixth forms are positive. This reflects the standards achieved at advanced level by 16-18 year olds, which are above national and similar-authority averages.

The percentage of young people aged 16-18 who are not in education, employment or training has increased and stands at 6% compared with 5.6% for similar authorities. Although it is lower than the national figure of 7.7%, the upward trend is in contrast with the falling trend nationally. In addition, the percentage of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are not in education, employment or training at 17% is over 5% higher than comparator authorities and 1.9% higher than the national figure. The percentage of teenage mothers who are in education, employment or training and the rate of improvement in this area are in line with national figures and those for similar authorities. A specialist Connexions personal adviser for care leavers has been appointed. As result, there has been a slight increase in the proportion of care leavers who are in education, employment or training, which remains in line with that in similar authorities and nationally. The percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation is much improved from 81.3 % to 96.7%, which is above similar-authority and national figures.

The authority has developed structures for collaborative work at 14-19 although arrangements for collaboration are more advanced in some localities than others. Two diploma submissions for 2008 were successful and the authority is working effectively in partnership with the local Learning and Skills Council to tackle weaknesses identified in other submissions. For example, employers are being engaged more effectively to take an active part in developing diploma submissions. The authority is also at an early stage in working with employers on strategies to reduce the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training.

Inspection judgements for preparation for future economic well-being are in line with those in similar authorities. There is a good range of vocational education and training provision in the authority. The rate of increase in the number of young people completing apprenticeships has improved dramatically from 22% to over 85% and now compares well with similar authorities. NVQ success rates for work-based learners, including those who are from Black and minority ethnic groups and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are above national averages.

Area(s) for development

- Reduce the percentage of young people who are not in education, employment or training.
- Reduce the percentage of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are not in education, employment or training.

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

Grade 2

The council has adequate capacity to improve its services for children and young people, and its management of these services is adequate.

The senior management team has a clear vision and ambition to improve services by increasing preventative work and its early intervention approaches, and is developing pathways to achieve this. The recent development of some additional preventative services has been achieved through joint planning and aligning budgets, as in the use of extended schools and children's centres. However, joint commissioning is not yet sufficiently robust to give the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

There are promising signs of the authority establishing a strong partnership with the newly established PCT but this work is at an early stage of development. The recent appointment of the director for public health jointly between the council and the PCT demonstrates their commitment to improving the effectiveness of the partnership. The authority is improving its partnership work with the local Learning and Skills Council and has an effective partnership with the police and probation services. The council has developed a clear and challenging strategy to develop choice in local placement of looked after children and young people and to reduce the high cost of residential placements. This longer term strategy has not yet had an impact on outcomes for these children and young people.

The council has taken steps to improve the quality of education particularly in primary schools. These strategies have brought about improvements for schools causing concern but have yet to impact fully in all schools. Where there are areas of weakness the council is taking steps to improve provision and outcomes.

Officers and elected members scrutinise budgets monthly to monitor expenditure and value for money. Performance management is becoming more effective. As a result, some priority areas have improved to a good standard, such as accommodation for care leavers. Other areas, such as the percentage of looked after children contributing to their reviews and the proportion of schools inspected going into categories of concern, have improved but still have some way to go. The authority has given a high priority to analysing outcomes and to improving equality impact assessments for vulnerable groups of children and young people.

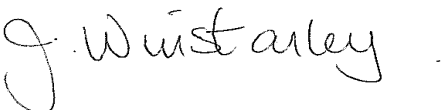
Evaluation of the effectiveness of the Children's Trust Board indicates good cooperation between partners and procedures to enable children to participate in policy and service development. The authority is developing its workforce to reach its targets. The Children and Young People's Plan is being reviewed as part of the agreed cycle to set more specific targets.

Area(s) for development

- Secure arrangements for joint commissioning in particular with health partners.
- Develop and improve partnership working at a strategic and operational level with health partners.
- Improve performance management to provide more rapid benefits.

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 "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection