

26 November 2007

Ms Moira Swann
Corporate Director of Children's Services
Cumbria County Council
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Dear Ms Swann

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CUMBRIA 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, 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 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

Cumbria County Council delivers services that exceed minimum requirements in all but one outcome. There is evidence of improvement in all outcomes since the joint area review. The council has responded positively to all of the review's recommendations. The council has a good understanding of local and countywide needs and shows determination to improve services further. A key priority in this large and geographically diverse county is to develop locality-based capacity. The council promotes healthy lifestyles, successfully in many ways, but has more to do to reduce risk-taking behaviour on the part of some young people. There has been significant recent improvement in outcomes in safeguarding and the range of preventative services has increased. Well-targeted actions have had a good degree of success in raising educational standards where there has been underachievement. The involvement of children and young people in the development of planning of services is much greater than at the time of the joint area review. Children and young people are helped to achieve economic well-being. The proportion not in education, employment or training is low. What has been achieved so far and the good quality of leadership and management show the council has good capacity to improve further.

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. One recommendation emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the next six months

- Improve the range of residential respite care services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Following the joint area review, the authority has engaged with parents, carers and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities regarding this matter. At the time of the joint area review the residential respite provision was due to close. This has been put on hold whilst needs are considered.

Against a background of change, agencies have worked together well to reduce health inequalities and there are several examples of targeted interventions leading to improvements. Healthy lifestyles are supported well by extended schools and children's centres, and in primary schools as seen by the very high level of participation in the national free fruit and vegetable scheme. Analysis of needs underpins priorities and the strategies to tackle them. For example, baseline data have been collected to ascertain the prevalence of obesity and this is being used effectively to target interventions in specific areas of the county.

The proportion of women choosing to breast-feed their baby has increased across the county and is now that seen in similar authorities and nationally. This improvement has been most marked in Carlisle and Eden. The number of women who smoke during pregnancy varies across the county but is falling in all areas. Despite the evident improvements in preventative services, there has been an increase in the number of low birth weight babies. The authority is aware of this and has responded by undertaking an in-depth study looking at a wide range of possible contributory factors, such as indices of deprivation and rates of teenage pregnancies. This study is intended to support the planning and development of relevant services.

The county's immunisation rate is good overall and in some regions it is higher than that seen in similar authorities. The number of children with decayed, missing or filled teeth has increased significantly in parts of the county. In response the council has produced a strategy to promote oral health. This considers how dental health services might be best targeted but does not encompass how wider services might be involved in promoting oral health.

Supporting young people in making positive choices to live healthy lifestyles and avoiding risk-taking behaviours remains a challenge for the authority. It has set reducing smoking, drinking, substance misuse and the rate of teenage pregnancies as priorities. Teenage pregnancies have increased to a level above that in similar authorities. In parts of the county, high numbers of young people who are admitted

to hospital with mental health problems are a direct result of drug misuse. Progress has been made in coordinating substance misuse services and the early indicators are promising, with an increase in the number of young people accessing drug treatment. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are developing well and waiting times for assessment have reduced. The authority has not yet secured a consistent level of support for young offenders across the county.

The health needs of looked after children and young people are met. A new multi-agency service is set to improve the provision of health services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities by providing a single access and assessment point for health and social care needs.

Areas for development

- Reduce the number of teenage pregnancies.
- Promote a wider range of strategies for preventative dental hygiene.
- Ensure that access to a full range of CAMHS services and drug treatment and support services is available throughout the county.

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, due to a recent trend of rapid progress, is good. One recommendation emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the next six months

- Improve the responsiveness of services to the needs of children and young people from Black and minority ethnic communities.

The authority has taken effective steps to tackle this matter. It has increased the level of training about the needs of children and young people from Black and minority ethnic communities for staff across all services, but with a particular focus on those in social care services. A recruitment campaign has resulted in an increased number of foster carers from Black and minority ethnic communities. Training to raise awareness of ethnic and cultural issues has been provided for all foster carers who provide care for children and young people from Black and minority ethnic groups. Information to assist staff and to support families from Black and minority ethnic communities has been placed on the authority's website. An evaluation of thresholds and the responses of services to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people from Black and minority ethnic communities shows that the above average numbers in these groups who are receiving services reflects individual needs appropriately.

The authority is improving rapidly and there is evidence of significant recent improvement in many staying safe outcomes. Cumbria's Local Safeguarding Children Board is well-established with an effective structure to support safeguarding work across the county. A good framework has been established for performance management and a significant trend of improvement can be seen since the joint area review in September 2006. Improvement is evident across most staying safe outcomes though work remains to be done to consolidate and build on recent gains. Improvement was evidenced in additional up-to-date data provided by the authority. As well as the improvements in outcomes, the range of preventative services has increased and the common assessment framework and lead professional model are being rolled out across the county.

The decrease in the number of children and young people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents in Cumbria has been more rapid than that seen nationally. School inspections show that the proportion of schools providing a good or outstandingly safe environment is higher than in similar authorities.

There has been improvement in the number of referrals and this is now in line with similar authorities, having previously been high. This has been achieved through a better understanding of thresholds for referral and improved recording practices. However, incompatibility of data between the old and new recording systems, and overlap in their use, has given a false impression of the rate of re-referrals because some were double counted in the past. Auditing of the data suggests that the actual number of re-referrals is below that of similar authorities. Tracking and monitoring have now been improved by the early introduction of the integrated children's system which enables the authority to build children's and young people's records continuously to provide a more comprehensive picture.

The position regarding the number and timeliness of initial and core assessments has also improved. At the end of last year the number of initial assessments was in line with similar authorities, showing a significant improvement since the joint area review. The number of core assessments carried out in Cumbria has increased significantly since the joint area review. The proportion of initial assessments undertaken on time has improved greatly, from 48.7% to 71.4%, which is in line with similar authorities. Significant improvement is also evident in the proportion of core assessments completed on time, from 48% to 69%. The authority reports further recent improvements in the numbers and timeliness of initial and core assessments. Improved performance management procedures are used to check carefully the timeliness and quality of assessments, for instance that children are always seen as part of an initial assessment. The trend of improvement in referrals and assessments indicates a positive shift in outcomes that would be expected to show clearly in the next full year's data set.

Improvement in the quality of assessments has resulted in an appropriate rise in the number of children on the child protection register. Registration rates are low and the amount of time children spend on the child protection register appears to be well managed. Timescales for child protection reviews and reviews of looked after children have slipped and are currently below those seen in similar authorities last

year. All children on the child protection register have an allocated social worker. The views of children, young people and carers have been sought with regard to the case conference process and the findings used to improve procedures and raise staff's awareness of the impact of their work on families at times of stress.

Increased support for families has resulted in a reduction in the number of looked after children. The authority is successful in ensuring a good degree of stability of placements. High numbers of children (especially older children) are supported in foster placements. Last year, not all reviews of looked after children were conducted within timescales. Also, not all looked after children had an allocated social worker but the authority has acted successfully to rectify this. Nonetheless, the authority reports improvements since April 2007 which can be expected to show in the next full year's data set. There is a good emphasis on securing permanent placements for children who cannot return home, with high numbers of children being adopted. The number of care leavers with a personal advisor and a pathway plan dropped last year.

Areas for development

- Ensure that referrals and re-referrals are recorded accurately.
- Ensure that reviews are carried out within timescales.
- Ensure that young people leaving care have a pathway plan in place and access to a personal adviser.

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

- Enable more children and young people, particularly the most vulnerable, to take part in leisure and recreational provision by working more closely with parents and carers to remove barriers to participation.

Sound progress has been made on this recommendation. There are at least satisfactory arrangements in all geographical areas of the county to ensure that vulnerable children participate in leisure and recreational activity but arrangements are not yet consistent across the county. There are examples of very good practice, such as the 'leaping to leisure' programme for looked after children, which was evaluated very positively by the participants. The directorate has committed to the purchase of leisure passes for looked after children.

Parents and carers receive good support in helping their children to enjoy and achieve. The good features of this support that were seen at the joint area review have been maintained. The authority is making sound progress towards its target for the creation of children's centres and extended service schools and is working with a wide range of partners to develop this provision.

Childcare provision is of a sound quality, though a higher than average proportion of providers had things to attend to when they first applied for registration.

In primary schools, the quality of provision is good and children do well. School inspections rate academic achievement in Cumbrian primary schools better than in similar authorities. Children's enjoyment of education is considerably greater than that seen in this sector in similar authorities. In 2006, standards at age 11 were above the national average. The 2007 test results, provided by the authority, show a continuing trend of improvement in standards in primary schools. In recent years the rate of improvement in this sector has been more rapid than that in similar authorities.

Improvement has not yet pushed through to secondary schools. On several measures in the secondary sector the authority is not keeping up with the rate of improvement seen nationally and in similar authorities. Nonetheless, the percentage of children obtaining five good passes at GCSE matches that seen nationally and in similar authorities. That said, the proportion where these passes include English and mathematics is higher than in similar authorities and nationally. Too many secondary schools are currently causing concern. Nevertheless, the authority is implementing robust strategies to tackle this weakness, including pushing forward on creating academies. In some of the schools causing concern, exam results in 2007 show a great improvement on the previous year.

The authority supports schools successfully. This is evident, for instance in the rise in test results in primary schools that have received a programme of intensive support from the authority's school improvement service. Almost all of these have seen an improvement of 10% or more in 2007.

Achievement at 14–19 years is often good but the proportion of young people entering higher education is below average. The University of Cumbria has been established since the joint area review and the authority believes this will attract more young people to enter higher education and to remain in Cumbria and contribute to the county's economy.

Several groups of vulnerable or potentially vulnerable children achieve better in Cumbria than in similar authorities and nationally. This is the case for looked after children and, in primary schools, for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Black and minority ethnic children do particularly well. They reach a higher standard than the average for the county. The 2007 test and exam results show that the gender gap has narrowed from the previous year. Boys' performance was better in reading and writing at age 11 and overall at GCSE.

School attendance rates are above the national average and, in primary schools, they are better than in similar authorities. However, attendance of looked after children is below average.

Area for development

- Improve achievement in secondary schools.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Three recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

For immediate action

- Increase the participation of vulnerable children and young people, and in particular looked after children, in reviews that plan for their future.

For action in the next six months

- Extend support to young carers.
- Increase the involvement of children and young people in the future planning for the development of children's services.

The authority's commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people is seen in the good progress made on these issues since the joint area review. Immediately following the joint area review, senior managers worked with the independent reviewing officers to ensure that looked after children and young people contributed to reviews and plans for their future. This year all these children have contributed.

The range of support available to young carers has increased since the joint area review. Five support projects are now in place, reaching increasing numbers of young carers. Additionally, the authority is proactive in identifying and supporting 'hidden' young carers, such as the children of drug abusing parents.

Children and young people are now much more involved in planning for the development of services. For example, they are represented on the anti-bullying strategy steering group and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are involved in service re-design. Involvement is supported by the authority's adoption of the Hear by Rights standard. The authority's programme of service reviews includes engagement with children, young people, parents and carers.

A high proportion of schools have school councils which enable all pupils to contribute to school life and decisions. Recently, school council representatives from across the county had the opportunity to meet and share ideas and issues.

High numbers of young people in Cumbria smoke, drink, and use illegal drugs, in comparison with similar authorities. The authority plans to introduce an integrated youth service with wider range and reach in order to increase engagement and reduce young people's risk-taking behaviour.

The number of first time entrants into the criminal justice system has reduced, following multi-agency interventions. Strategies to keep young offenders in education, training and employment are successful and the rate of young people who re-offend is falling. Nevertheless, it is higher than in similar authorities. Looked after young people are almost three times as likely to offend as other young people and this is slightly higher than the rate in similar authorities.

Areas for development

- Reduce the number of young people who re-offend.
- Reduce the number of looked after young people who commit offences.

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. No recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

Strengths noted in the joint area review report have been maintained. There are many positive features in the way children and young people are helped to achieve economic well-being. For example, the authority's spending on provision and support for families is rising and compares favourably with that in similar authorities. The number of childcare places has increased more rapidly than in similar authorities and the authority is on line to meet its target for the establishment of children's centres and extended service schools. Inspections judge the effectiveness of colleges as good overall and the effectiveness of provision for 16-19 year olds in schools is better than in similar authorities. The Connexions service is in touch with more young people in Cumbria than in similar authorities.

There is, nonetheless, a degree of variability in the effectiveness of provision for 14-19 year olds across the county, though taken overall it is good. There are effective plans to support the delivery of the new 14-19 vocational diplomas. The proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training has reduced considerably and is lower than in similar authorities. A high proportion of those in training are engaged in work-based learning but the proportion completing apprenticeships lags behind that seen nationally and in similar authorities. The

number of young people progressing into higher education is low. Primary schools are better than those in similar authorities at enabling learners to achieve economic well-being, secondary schools less so.

Areas for development

- Increase the proportion of young people progressing to higher education.
- Improve provision for 14-19 year olds in regions of the county where it is least effective.

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

- Ensure that procedures are implemented to monitor the impact of the Children's and Young People's Partnership.

Good improvement has been made on this recommendation. Performance management is now a strength in the management of services.

The present Directorate Management Team has been in place for a year. It shows determination and ambition to improve outcomes further. Senior managers have pushed forward on key priorities and good progress has been made on several priority areas. The impact is evident, for example, in the most recent achievement against performance indicators for safeguarding. Improvement has been achieved against the backdrop of a major management restructuring in the directorate and the Primary Care Trust, and the pressures associated with the county's recent bid for unitary status.

Priorities have been identified through consultation, including with children and young people: the review of data, including comparisons with the national picture and similar authorities; and analysis of needs, which vary across the county. These priorities have been tackled vigorously. As a result, there is now clear evidence of improvement. The recent pace of improvement has been rapid in several areas where it was most needed. Skills gaps have been recognised and a programme to strengthen management at every level and in the different regions is well under way to support improvement in locality-based delivery of children's services. The Directorate Management Team has evidence from its survey of staff that the vision and priorities for children's services are understood by the vast majority of staff. However, capacity in the regions varies and the documents underpinning

development, the children and young people's plan and the preventative strategy, do not provide fully coherent and aligned guidance for staff to further improve services in line with countywide and local needs.

The arrangements for monitoring and managing performance have been strengthened. Senior staff and councillors receive full and timely information to support prioritisation and management decisions and to ensure proper scrutiny across the *Every child matters* outcomes. In particular, the local safeguarding children board has developed a good system of oversight and management of core safeguarding work.

Good capacity for improvement is clearly evident in what has been achieved so far and in the protocols and partnerships established to support continuing improvement. There are numerous examples of strong partnership working and commissioning of services is well underway, for instance in relation to establishing children's centres.

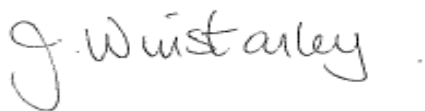
Areas for development

- Develop capacity for locality-based delivery of services.
- Ensure coherence and clarity in the children and young people's plan and the preventative strategy in order to support further improvement and locality-based delivery of services.

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 "J. Winstanley".

Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection