

17 December 2008

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

Dear Ms Godfrey

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Wiltshire County Council 2008

This letter summarises the findings of the 2008 annual performance assessment (APA) for your council. The evaluations and judgements in the letter draw on a range of data and information which covers the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. As you know, the APA is not based on an inspection of your services and, therefore, can only provide a snapshot based on the evidence considered. As such, I am grateful to you for assuring the quality of the data provided.

Performance is judged on a four point scale as detailed in the handbook. I should emphasise that the grades awarded are based on an overall 'best fit' model. For instance, an outstanding judgement of Grade 4 reflects that overall most aspects, but not necessarily all, of the services in the area are working very well. We know that one of the features of outstanding provision is the drive for greater improvement and no council would suggest, and nor would Ofsted, that a judgement of outstanding indicates that everything is perfect. Similarly within a judgement of inadequate overall, Grade 1, there could be some aspects of the overall service that are adequate or even good. Judgements are made in a rounded way, balancing all of the evidence and giving due consideration to outcomes, local and national contexts, priorities and decision-making.

The following table sets out the grades awarded for performance in 2008.

Assessment judgement area	APA grade
Overall effectiveness of children's services	2
Being healthy	2
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	2
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	3
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	2

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale
4: outstanding/excellent; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate*

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 2

Wiltshire County Council provides adequate services for children and young people and meets only minimum requirements. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services, is adequate. The council has some good plans and has set itself challenging targets. It has had some successes in improving outcomes for vulnerable groups of young people and children which were areas for development in the 2007 APA, but progress is mixed. The council has been successful in reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training but there is more limited progress in other areas for example in relation to the provision of child and adolescent mental health services. The council has strengthened its range of partnerships which are particularly successful in providing for the youngest children and giving parents and young people a voice, but the sustained positive impact of initiatives and plans across all of its children's and young people's services is not yet evident. The council's self-assessment of progress is too generous.

Being healthy

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimates a number of important weaknesses and overvalues the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health assessments of looked after children are above those of similar councils. The council has developed effective maternity services, with high rates of breast-feeding and low infant mortality rates compared with similar councils and the national average. The numbers of young people aged 18 and under in specialist substance misuse treatment programmes are above the national average and similar councils.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rates of teenage conceptions have increased and the overall baseline reduction is less than similar councils. Accessibility and the provision of suitable child and adolescent mental health services for 16- and 17-year-olds are less well established than similar councils.

Staying safe

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimates a number of important weaknesses and overvalues the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Long term stability of placements for looked after children are above rates in similar councils. ▪ The percentage of looked after children with a named and qualified social worker is higher than rates in similar councils. ▪ The Local Safeguarding Children Board works effectively to ensure that actions are in place to safeguard children and young people.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rates of children with disabilities who have a transition plan in place have fallen to below rates in similar councils. ▪ Adoption rates for looked after children have fallen and are significantly below rates in similar councils. ▪ The numbers of initial assessments completed within 7 working days have fallen and are now below rates in similar councils. ▪ The numbers of looked after children fostered by family or friends have fallen to below rates in similar councils. There are high numbers of children in residential accommodation and high numbers placed more than 20 miles away from home. ▪ A low rate of common assessment framework completion has meant that formal referral rates to social services of children in need have increased.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The council's self-assessment of its strengths and areas of development in this outcome area underestimates a number of important weaknesses. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision for early years is a key strength. Inspections show a higher than average proportion of settings is good and outstanding. The council has made good progress in establishing children's centres. The impact of services in the core Super Output Area centres is good. ▪ At Key Stages 1 and 2 there is a general upward trend in standards which is inline with or sometimes above the national trend and that of statistical neighbours. ▪ There has been good improvement in boys' writing at Key Stage 2 following well focused support. ▪ An above average proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or over in all subjects at Key Stage 3, in line with statistical neighbours. ▪ There is good attendance overall, though slightly better in primary schools than secondary schools. A very high proportion of pupils who are permanently excluded is provided with suitable education.

- A higher than average proportion of pupils enjoy school and have positive attitudes.
- The quality of special schools is good.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- While improving, standards are consistently below that of statistical neighbours at Key Stage 1 and 2. Attainment gaps between boys and girls remain significant.
- Despite increases in 2007 at Key Stage 4 gains in performance over the last three years have been below the improvements nationally and that of statistical neighbours.
- The performance of looked after children is weak at Key Stage 4. Numbers are small but the target of 10% achieving a GCSE grade A* to C has not been met.
- The achievement of pupils from minority ethnic groups, while improving, is inadequate and there is much to do to meet the council's targets.
- A higher than national proportion of primary schools is in the category Notice to Improve or Special Measures. Wiltshire is in the lower quartile for schools judged on inspection to be good or outstanding. Seven primary schools were below floor targets in 2007

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths

- There is a wide provision of services to children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and good opportunities for their views to be contributed to decision making processes.
- Outstanding opportunities, via the youth development service, for young people to engage in decision making.
- Rates of re-offending and first time entrants to the youth justice system are low compared with similar councils and the national average.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The number of supervised juveniles in full time education, training or employment is low compared with similar councils.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and advice to young people are strong. The transition of Connexions to the council has been well managed. The proportion of young people not in education employment or training is below the national average and falling. Achievements of post-16 young people in education and training are better than national and statistical neighbours' performance. Overall there is good collaboration to develop a coherent 14–19 curriculum.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at post-16 are too limited because work-based learning opportunities are insufficient and specialist support is not available to meet the level of need. There is a low proportion of females and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities in work-based learning.

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

Grade 2

The council's capacity to improve and manage its services for children and young people is adequate. It has a committed and proactive leadership of its children's services and it is developing useful partnerships to tackle its weaknesses. There are early indications that these are having success in raising achievements and improving opportunities for its children and young people, for example by reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment and training. The council has set itself some challenging targets but it has some way to go to reach its goals for some of the most vulnerable groups, to eliminate inequalities and reduce achievement gaps. Management at all levels is improving but not yet robust enough to deliver, with full rigour, the plans and outcomes required to achieve a good quality service throughout. Services for children and young people represent adequate value for money. Self assessment is adequate but over generous.

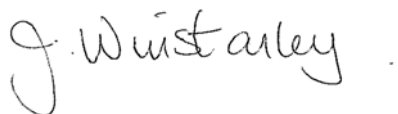
Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council and partners have high ambitions in their Children and Young People's Plan 2008– 2011. There is good engagement with parents and children and young people in order to shape services and strategy. There is good and improving partnership working in many aspects of the council's work.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management at all levels is not sufficiently robust to achieve ambitions. Delivery plans need to be smarter and applied more consistently at service level.

- There is slow progress in providing value for money in aspects of social care such as the unsustainable spend on fostering placements and special educational needs.

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.

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.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection