

24 March 2011

Ms Kath O'Dwyer  
Executive Director of Children's Services  
Warrington Borough Council  
2nd Floor, New Town House  
Buttermarket Street, Warrington  
Cheshire WA1 2NJ

Dear Ms O'Dwyer

## Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This performance profile, published in August 2010, includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the local authority has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of all inspected and regulated services for children and young people, arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against national measures. More weight has been given to the outcomes of Ofsted's inspections and regulatory visits (Blocks A and B in the performance profile).

The annual assessment derives from a four point scale:

4	Performs excellently	An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
3	Performs well	An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements
2	Performs adequately	An organisation that meets only minimum requirements
1	Performs poorly	An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements

Within each level there will be differing standards of provision. For example, an assessment of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, an assessment of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects. As in 2009, while the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's assessment, meeting or not meeting the minimum requirements alone does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

## Warrington Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

In October 2009, a full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children in Warrington identified serious weaknesses resulting in an inadequate judgement for safeguarding. A second full inspection was carried out in January 2011 to assess the progress made in addressing these weaknesses and judge the impact of this on the outcomes for children and young people. The publication of the 2010 children's services assessment letter for Warrington was therefore deferred until March 2011 so that the outcome of the most recent inspection could be taken into consideration. This assessment letter is based on the August 2010 performance profile and the January 2011 inspection of safeguarding and looked after children's services.

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs adequately (2)</b>
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Children's services in Warrington Borough Council perform adequately. In January 2011, a full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children judged that the local authority's performance was adequate. This represents significant improvement since 2009 when safeguarding services were judged to be inadequate. Statutory requirements for safeguarding services are now met and considerable progress has been made in recruiting qualified and experienced social work staff. However, the 2011 inspection found that some systems and plans are very recent and have yet to have a demonstrable impact on outcomes for some vulnerable children and young people.

The overall effectiveness of the large majority of inspected services, settings and institutions is good or better within educational settings, showing performance that is often above similar areas. The pupil referral unit and two of the three special schools are good or better. The large majority of nursery and primary schools are good or outstanding, as are secondary schools, college and sixth form provision. More than half of all early years and childcare settings are good or better. There is very little inadequate provision. The large majority of the 12 children's homes run by the private and voluntary sector are good or better. Local authority fostering and adoption services are satisfactory, as are the two local authority children's homes.

Performance measures show that almost all outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or similar areas, as are all educational attainment and progress indicators. Most children achieve well in their early years and their progress in primary school is better than in similar areas. Results in national tests are outstanding for 11-year-olds and continue to improve. Sixteen-year-olds do better than their peers in similar areas. The local authority is having some success in improving educational outcomes for 16-year-olds from low-income families and is beginning to close the gap in attainment. Children and young people with special educational needs do at least as well as those of the same age nationally and better than their peers in similar areas. An increasing number of young people are gaining

good qualifications at the age of 19 and the gap in achievement between this group and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds has reduced.

#### Key areas for further development

- Continue to improve arrangements for safeguarding in front-line social care services in partnership with other agencies.
- Improve early years and childcare provision so that more is good or better.
- Reduce further the attainment gap at the age of 16 for those from low-income families.

### **Outcomes for children and young people**

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are effective. Overall performance is satisfactory or better for children's homes and childminders, the independent special school and the local authority fostering agency. Performance has been sustained in most areas of health with good progress made in reducing the number of children who are very overweight at Reception age, and with improved arrangements in services that support children and young people with emotional and mental health difficulties. The local authority is concerned about an increase in those children in Year 6 who are very overweight and a number of strategies have been identified to address this issue. Children's satisfaction with parks and play areas has also increased and high numbers participate in high quality sports. Warrington has made very good progress in reducing the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant but the number of mothers who breast-feed their babies is still below the national average.

Safeguarding provision is judged as good or better in the majority of school and college inspections, where strong multi-agency work is ensuring families and children with the most complex needs receive the right support when they need it. Work to ensure children and young people feel safe has been undertaken across services and agencies to improve the arrangements for children's safety within the community. The most recent data for the number of children and young people who are killed or seriously injured as a result of road traffic accidents show a marked reduction. Hospital admissions caused by unintentional or deliberate injuries have reduced slightly and are now in line with the national average. Fewer children report that they have been bullied than last year with good measures in place to raise awareness in schools. Social care services for those children and young people most in need of protection and keeping safe are improved and are now judged to be adequate. Effective training has raised awareness of safeguarding responsibilities amongst partner agencies. Contacts and referrals are responded to promptly. The recruitment of a stable, permanent workforce has been a major contributor to this improvement, as has the review and clarification of thresholds. Outcomes for looked after children are at least adequate. There is now a clear vision for improving further the services they need and the commitment to sustain recent improvement is supported by partner agencies.

Provision to help children and young people achieve well and to enjoy their education is good or outstanding in nearly all settings. Ofsted monitoring visits confirm that the two schools in an Ofsted category have received good support to improve from the local authority. Recent national results for 11-year-olds show consistently strong and improving performance. In 2010, more young people at the age of 16 achieved five good GCSEs including English and mathematics than ever before, above similar areas and continuing a trend of improvement. The local authority has made strong progress in reducing the gap in achievement between the majority of children at the age of 11 and 16 and those from low-income families, with both groups achieving well. Behaviour is good or outstanding in nearly all schools and the number of young people with frequent poor attendance is considerably lower than similar areas and falling dramatically from an already low base.

In Warrington, children and young people play an active role in the decisions that affect them. All schools have a school council and IMPACT, the youth parliament, has developed a local manifesto which highlights the current issues and concerns of young people across the area. Its membership is broad and includes care leavers, young people who offend, disabled young people and representatives from all parts of the borough. Rates of first-time offending and re-offending have reduced and are in line with similar areas. An inspection of the Halton and Warrington Youth Offending Service in 2009 found that the service was performing well in many key areas.

The last three years have seen good improvements in the number of young people achieving high level qualifications by the age of 19. The gap in achievement between the majority of young people and those from low-income families is reducing and there has been an increase in the levels of achievement for both groups of pupils. This remains a key priority for the local authority and is supported by good quality careers advice and guidance. Support is successfully focussed on those young people who are more likely to leave school without a job or training. The percentage of young people not in education, work or training increased during 2009 but reduced in the last year. The number of care leavers who continue their learning and gain qualifications is rising. There is a good range of strategies to help those who are not in education, training or work placements find a suitable vocational pathway or gain employment.

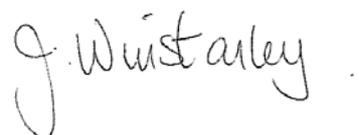
### **Prospects for improvement**

Overall, while much provision in Warrington is good with some that is outstanding, children's services overall perform adequately. Following the inspection in 2009 which judged safeguarding to be inadequate, the local authority moved swiftly to address weaknesses. The most recent inspection in January 2011 found that the serious weaknesses have been tackled sufficiently well for services to now be judged adequate. Considerable resource has been invested by the local authority and improvements across a number of areas have been identified. Importantly, there is now an ambitious yet realistic plan to drive improvement and a substantial increase in workforce capacity. A new multi-agency structure for safeguarding children has

been established, the management team strengthened and the historic backlog of cases has now been completed. However, much remains to be done. Some processes have yet to be consolidated, such as quality assurance and the quality of assessment and care planning. The local authority has successfully targeted its resources and its efforts to ensure support is provided in the schools and other settings where there is the most need. While educational outcomes for children and young people from low-income families is improving, narrowing the gap in performance between them and all children and young people in Warrington continues to be an important challenge.

This children's services assessment is provided in accordance with section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment