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Mr Andrew Webb
Corporate Director, Children and Young People
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Children and Young People's Directorate
3rd Floor Stopford House
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Stockport
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Dear Mr Webb

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Stockport Metropolitan Borough 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	3
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	4
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	4
Achieving economic well-being	3
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	4

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

Overall effectiveness of children’s services

Grade 3

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council’s contribution to outcomes for children and young people is good overall. Children and young people are encouraged to be physically active and have increasingly good access to the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS). Improvements have been made for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities using these services as well as reducing waiting times for specific services in relation to speech and language. Very good improvements have been achieved in completing core assessments within national timescales and are better than national and other similar councils. Educational attainment in the early years and during compulsory schooling is predominantly above average. However, attainment at Key Stage 3 is average in English and science. Excellent opportunities are available to children and young people to make a positive contribution to their schools and communities; these are widely taken up. Good provision is made to prepare young people for work. However, increasing the proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in work related activities remains a key priority.

The council has a strong track record of securing improvements. The management of services is outstanding, as is the capacity of the council to improve them further. Services are focused precisely on identified needs, including those of the more vulnerable members of the community. The users of services are effectively consulted and are mainly content with provision. The council is very successful in working with a range of partners and in securing excellent value for money. It has a clear view of its strengths. The weaknesses identified below need to be tackled within the council’s continuing policy of improving its provision.

Being healthy

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 in this outcome area underestimate a number of important weaknesses and overvalue 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"> ▪ Good progress is being made in achieving a comprehensive CAMHS with an increased capacity and access to services, supported by good working arrangements between services. More young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are getting access to CAMHS compared to 2005/06. ▪ Very good outcomes are being achieved in relation to children’s physical health. More schools have achieved and been assessed for Healthy School status than nationally and targeted work to promote physical activity is achieving good results. Local surveys indicate fewer young people are drinking, smoking or trying illegal drugs and more are eating more healthily. The fostering inspection confirmed that health arrangements for looked after children are outstanding.

High levels of immunisations, dental checks and health assessments are being achieved for looked after children.

- Children with complex health needs have good access to services such as speech and language, occupational health and physiotherapy. Significant improvement has been achieved in increasing the proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities having a transition plan, up from 81% to 95%.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Rates of Chlamydia and other sexually transmitted diseases are higher than they are in other similar council areas and Stockport is not achieving its targets for improvement.
- Rates of substance misuse related hospital admissions for young people under 20 years are higher than similar areas.

Staying safe

Grade 4

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

Major strengths

- Referral rates are below those found in similar areas.
- The common assessment framework has ensured over a third more children in need have received additional services.
- The fostering service is outstanding.
- Very good performance is achieved in completing core assessments.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

Enjoying and achieving

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 in this outcome area is mostly accurate. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths

- The performance of children with low prior attainment, and also that of boys, has improved more than it has nationally.
- At Key Stage 4, more students attain at least five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, than is the case nationally.
- All secondary schools meet the Government's target for 2008 of at least 30% of students attaining five good GCSE grades.
- Children and young people with Bangladeshi heritage attained higher levels than the local average at Key Stages 2 and 4 in 2007; those with Pakistani heritage were slightly below average in Key Stages 2 and 3 but above local and national averages in Key Stage 4.
- The percentage of permanent and fixed term exclusions from primary schools is much lower than that nationally. The percentage of permanent exclusions has been reduced from well above average in 2006 to slightly above average in 2007. All excluded children and young people receive tuition for 20 or more hours per week, and this is significantly better than the national picture.
- The council provides a good level of support and challenge to help its schools improve.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Standards in English and science at the end of Key Stage 3, although in line with national averages, are not as high as those attained at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 4.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

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

Major strengths

- Young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and looked after young people, are provided with an excellent range of opportunities to make a positive contribution.
- A high percentage of looked after children contribute to their reviews. This performance is better than similar council areas and the national average.
- School inspections indicate that learners are able to contribute well to the running of their schools through practical suggestions for improvement made to headteachers.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

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"> ▪ Partnership to develop provision for the 14 to 19 age range is strong and widely representative. Cooperation between the council and schools, colleges and employers is productive, for example in providing the increased range of apprenticeships available in the area, with 718 young people completing these last year compared with 640 the year before. ▪ After a setback last year in bidding to run diplomas, Stockport is now well placed to offer four diplomas this year and a further five next year. ▪ The percentages of young people reaching Levels 2 and 3 by the age of 19 are above national averages. The number of school leavers not in employment, education or training has reduced from 8.8% to 6.9%.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The percentage of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities not engaged in employment, education or training after the age of 16 remains too high, despite recent improvements.

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

Grade 4

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is outstanding and its management of these services is also outstanding. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence. The council has a clear understanding of its strengths and well conceived ambitions to develop its support for children and young people. It has demonstrated an ability to make and sustain improvements in the services it provides. It has responded positively and in a timely manner to the areas for development identified in 2007.

Major strengths

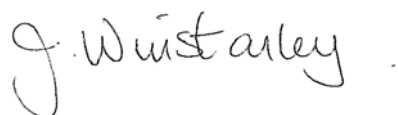
- Planning is highly effective as evidenced by the Children and Young People's Plan. This is based on effective consultation with stakeholders, clear analysis of needs including that of children in the most deprived areas of the community, and well attuned actions for development supported by precise targets. The management of improvement is strongly supported by regular and rigorous evaluation of performance and outcomes set against local and national benchmarks.
- In line with the Children and Young People's Plan, sustained improvements have been made in performance, including in the areas for development identified in the APA for 2007. These include, for example, improvements in the waiting times for formal assessments in occupational, physiotherapy and speech and language therapies, and in the rise to 95% of the timeliness of assessments and increased participation of looked after children. Such achievements underpin the council's capacity for further improvement of its services for children and young people which continues to be outstanding.
- Given the council's limited resources, its well managed response last year to a reduction in its budget, the consistently good and sometimes outstanding quality of the services provided to support children and young people, and the precise alignment of spending with agreed priorities, excellent value for money is achieved. This reflects the excellent quality and responsiveness of leadership and management of these services, and of highly effective partnerships forged to support them.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

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



Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection