

9 December 2010

Ms Sally Rees  
Corporate Director of Children and Lifelong Learning  
Staffordshire County Council  
County Buildings, Tipping Street  
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Dear Ms Rees

## 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 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.

## Staffordshire County Council children's services assessment 2010

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs well (3)</b>
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Children's services in Staffordshire County Council perform well.

The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The large majority of early years settings are good, though a small number are inadequate. Performance in primary and secondary schools is more variable; although the majority are good, a significant minority are only satisfactory. In 2009/2010 six primary schools and two secondary schools were judged to be inadequate. Provision for 16- to 19-year-olds is variable and too much provision is only satisfactory. Just under half of the 47 school sixth forms and three of the five further education colleges were judged to be good or better at their most recent inspection. Nearly three quarters of special schools and special school sixth forms are good, as are four of the six pupil referral units. The local authority fostering agency was judged to be outstanding at its most recent inspection. Four of the five local authority children's homes are outstanding and one is good.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found a balance of strengths and satisfactory practice with some areas for development. There were no areas for priority action. In July 2009 an inspection of safeguarding arrangements and provision for looked after children reported that both were adequate. Private fostering arrangements are good.

National performance measures show the very large majority of outcomes are in line with the averages for England or for similar areas. This includes almost all the main measures of educational achievement. Children in the Reception Year do better than the average for similar areas. At ages 11, 16 and 19 performance is in line with the average for similar areas. However, the number of primary schools which do not meet minimum standards rose sharply in 2009. For young people caught up in crime, their re-offending rate is worse, and by most measures the youth offending service performs less well than in similar areas.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve the quality of post-16 provision in secondary schools and colleges.
- Reduce the number of primary schools which do not meet minimum standards.
- Improve the effectiveness of the youth offending service and reduce the rate of re-offending of young people.

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

Provision to support children and young people in living healthy lives is good or better in the majority of inspected settings and services. Health outcomes are generally in line with those in similar areas or seen nationally. Breast-feeding rates at six to eight weeks from birth are below the average for similar areas. The take-up of school lunches in primary and secondary schools is in line with the average for similar local authorities. Obesity rates are around average for five-year-olds, but are below average for 11-year-olds when compared to similar areas. Children's level of participation in physical activity and sport has continued to rise in line with the national trend and is similar to that elsewhere. Children and young people rate their relationships with family and friends similarly to the rest of England. Progress in moving towards a comprehensive child and adolescent mental health service is slower than that across the rest of the country.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are good in the majority of settings and services. When measured against national indicators Staffordshire's performance is generally in line with performance nationally or in similar areas. The effectiveness of safeguarding services in Staffordshire was judged to be adequate in July 2009. A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found: effective contact, referral and assessment arrangements; evidence of regular supervision of social workers by their managers; and good family support arrangements. The inspection also identified some inconsistencies in working with other agencies on long term planning arrangements. Road safety remains a priority for the local partnership and the number of children and young people seriously injured or killed on Staffordshire's roads is reducing. Hospital admissions for unintentional or deliberate injuries are in line with the national picture. In a recent survey the proportion of children and young people who reported that they had experienced bullying was higher than that in similar areas; the implementation of an anti-bullying strategy is a priority for the coming year. While an inspection in 2009 judged services for looked after children overall to be adequate, the quality of the local authority fostering service and that of most of local authority children's homes is outstanding. The most recent data show that the stability of placements for looked after children is in line with similar areas and that found nationally, and that cases are reviewed within required timescales.

Provision to help children and young people achieve educationally and enjoy their learning is good or better in the very large majority of inspected services and settings. The quality of settings for young children and for those in special schools is good overall. By the end of the Reception Year children's attainment is better than their peers in similar areas and the gap between the lowest and highest achieving children is closing. By their last year in primary school children do as well in national tests as their peers in similar parts of the country. However, 23 primary schools still do not meet minimum standards for educational achievement. Secondary school performance has risen slightly and is now close to the average for similar areas; all but two secondary schools in Staffordshire meet minimum education standards. The number of secondary school students who are regularly absent from school continues to improve and compares very favourably with similar local authorities.

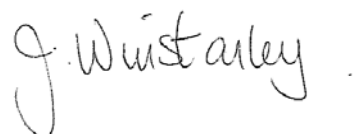
Children and young people are supported well to contribute to the community and to planning and reviewing services. Groups whose circumstances have made them vulnerable, such as looked after children and those with disabilities, are positively encouraged to take part in service planning. The proportion of children and young people excluded from school has fallen and is slightly lower than in similar areas. However, rates of re-offending by young people in Staffordshire are worse than in similar areas and by most national indicator measures the youth offending service performs less well than elsewhere.

Young people get good support overall to do well in adult life. The percentage of young people in education, training or work continues to rise in line with similar areas. The proportion of young people who gain the equivalent of five or more good GCSEs or two A level qualifications by the age of 19 is also rising and is comparable to similar parts of the country. However, the quality of post-16 educational provision is not uniformly good across the county, with variability in school sixth forms and further education colleges. Although a high proportion of care leavers are in suitable accommodation, fewer young people who offend are found a suitable place to live.

### **Prospects for improvement**

Many outcomes for children and young people are improving in Staffordshire, generally at the same rate as in similar local authorities. The local authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates good progress in a number of areas. The plan sets out clearly local successes as well as current priorities, including the need to reduce inequalities for the groups whose circumstances have made them most vulnerable, with a specific focus on "closing the gap" in four priority geographical areas. An inspection in 2009 judged that the capacity to improve for safeguarding services was good, and that for looked after children services it was adequate. Strengths included a stable and committed workforce and good political and managerial leadership. However, the report highlighted that performance targets are not always sufficiently challenging and performance management was not always used consistently to drive up standards. Provision in schools continues to be variable, with too many primary schools achieving below minimum standards and eight schools judged to be inadequate in the last year. Monitoring reports published to date judge progress to be satisfactory in three of these schools and inadequate in one.

Yours sincerely

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

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment