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8 November 2011

Ms Sue Cook  
Interim Director of Children's Services  
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council  
Civic Centre  
Victoria Avenue  
Southend-on-Sea  
Essex SS2 6ER

Dear Ms Cook

## Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in April 2011 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services 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 other published data.

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of inspection outcomes including the arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against similar authorities and/or 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 2010, 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.

## Southend-on-Sea Borough Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Southend-on-Sea Borough Council perform well. This performance has been sustained from 2010. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Most providers help children and young people to stay safe and enjoy learning. Areas of strength remain as last year with progress in some key areas for further development. As found elsewhere, changes to secondary school provision are taking place and some schools have become academies. Previous inspection judgements for these schools have been taken into account in the assessment.

In April 2011, Ofsted's annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found some strengths, much that is satisfactory, five areas for further development and no priority areas requiring urgent action. Strengths include the ready access social workers have to managers and experienced social work staff for case discussion, advice and direction. This is highly valued by staff and leads to good morale and low staff turnover, enabling consistency of provision to children and young people. Most of the areas for development identified in the previous annual inspection carried out in May 2010 have been addressed.

### Strengths

- As last year, the very large majority of provision for children under five in nurseries and primary schools is good and some is outstanding.
- The high proportion of effective primary schools continues and three-quarters are good or better. The local authority provides good support for the very small number of schools that are in Ofsted categories of concern.
- Most secondary schools continue to be good or better. Four outstanding secondary schools have become academies in the last year. Of the eight local authority maintained schools, five are good or outstanding. The one inadequate secondary school is making satisfactory progress in improving the quality of provision with good support from the local authority and other external advice.
- The number of good special schools has improved. This was an area for development last year. Three of the four schools inspected during the year are good. However, a school for children with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties, previously judged good, is now only satisfactory.
- Both the fostering and adoption agencies are good as are most independent fostering agencies commissioned by the local authority to support children in its care. Just over a half of the private or voluntary run

children's homes used to place looked after children are good or better, although two are inadequate.

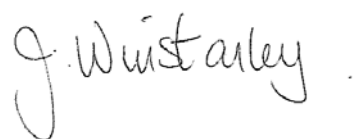
- All published indicators for education standards and progress are at least in line with national averages and a large majority are above similar areas. Performance shows a continuous trend of improvement in attainment for 16- and 19-year-olds. The proportion of looked after children attaining five A\* to C grades at GCSE is above similar areas.
- The proportion of young people engaged in education, training or employment at the age of 16 is greater than in similar areas. More 19-year-olds from low-income families achieve level 2 and level 3 qualifications than nationally and the gap with all young people in Southend-on-Sea is reducing more rapidly than elsewhere.

### **Areas for further improvement**

- The consistent trend of improvement since 2007 in the achievement of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage has not been maintained. For the first time performance indicators show the proportion of five-year-olds attaining the expected level is no longer above the national average. Only one of three children's centres, inspected for the first time during the year, is good with two being satisfactory.
- Attainment for young people with special educational needs was identified as an area for improvement and the local authority identify this as a priority area. Since the last assessment there is a slight improvement in the proportion of 16-year-olds in this group gaining five or more higher level GCSE grades, including English and mathematics. However, the gap in attainment between these young people and their peers in Southend-on-Sea has increased as standards for all young people have risen at a faster rate.
- The proportion of 16-year-olds from low-income families who achieve at least five higher level GCSE grades including English and mathematics, continues to be slightly below average. The gap between these young people and others of the same age in Southend-on-Sea shows an increase since the last assessment and is wider than almost all other areas nationally.

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 "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment