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17 December 2008

Mr Clive Webster  
Director of Children's Services  
Southampton City Council  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Civic Centre  
Southampton  
Hampshire  
SO14 7LY

Dear Mr Webster

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Southampton City 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.

<b>Assessment judgement area</b>	<b>APA grade</b>
Overall effectiveness of children's services	2
Being healthy	2
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	2
Making a positive contribution	2
Achieving economic well-being	2
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

Southampton City Council delivers services for children and young people that are adequate and meet minimum requirements. The council’s capacity to improve, including its management of services is adequate. There has been satisfactory progress on some of the recommendations raised in the joint area review and APA in 2007. However, the council has not met some important targets within its Children and Young People’s Plan. Performance has been slow in some key areas including the development of the 14–19 strategy; or it has deteriorated such as the increase in the percentage of 16- to 19-year-olds, including young people from vulnerable groups, who are not in education, employment or training.

There has been some effective targeting of services for the most vulnerable groups of children. There is good partnership working with health services, but this has yet to impact sufficiently on key outcomes for children and young people, such as reducing the overall teenage conception rate and access to treatment for substance misuse. The council did not meet the specified level in the key threshold relating to the percentage of child protection cases that were reviewed in 2007/2008 and performance on the timeliness of core assessments deteriorated, both of which have affected the grade for staying safe.

Outcomes in enjoying and achieving are adequate. Provision for the early years continues to be good and is leading to improved outcomes for young children. Standards at Key Stage 4, although still lower than average, are rising steadily. Standards at Key Stage 1 have not improved in three years. The rate of progress in raising standards at Key Stages 2 and 3 is slow and too variable to sufficiently narrow the gap with the national average. Young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have good opportunities to voice their views and are involved in the development of services. However, the number of young people offending, including those that are looked after, is an area of concern for the council.

## 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. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<b>Major strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Progress towards a comprehensive child and adolescent mental health service is very good; waiting times for specialist services have reduced and are now good.</li> <li>▪ The number of families with children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receiving support has increase through well-integrated multi-agency work.</li> <li>▪ Significant reduction in waiting times for speech and language initial assessments.</li> </ul>

- Health outcomes for looked after children are good.

### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- The teenage conception rate has increased to a level above that of similar councils and nationally. At its current rate of reduction, the council will not meet its 2010 target for reducing teenage pregnancies.
- The quality of personal, social and health education is too variable, especially in the area of sex and relationships.
- Waiting times for speech and language therapy, following initial assessment, remain too long.

## **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 underestimate a number of important weaknesses. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

### **Major strengths**

- Effective early interventions maintain low rates of re-referrals and re-registrations. A high proportion of referrals lead to initial assessments.
- Good targeted prevention work is gradually reducing the number of children and young people becoming looked after and those with a child protection plan.
- High number of looked after children adopted in 2007/2008 and good rates of older children in foster placements or placed for adoption.
- In inspections the fostering service and the council's two children's homes have been judged to be good or better.

### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- Almost one in ten reviews of child protection plans were not conducted within required timescales. The council did not meet the specified level in this key threshold.
- The level of performance on timeliness of completion of core assessments is lower than average.
- The proportion of children with three or more placement moves increased and is higher than average.
- Private fostering arrangements are judged to be inadequate.

## 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 analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area underestimate a number of important weaknesses. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good provision of early years education is leading to improved outcomes at the end of the Foundation Stage.</li> <li>▪ A faster rate of year-on-year improvement at Key Stage 4, than is the case nationally, has led to a significant reduction in the number of schools below the floor target.</li> <li>▪ The percentage of looked after children aged 16 or over with at least one GCSE at grade A* to G or at least five grade A* to C GCSEs is better than in similar councils and above the national average.</li> <li>▪ Wide range of leisure and cultural activities leading to high standards of achievement in music, the arts and in sports.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High rates of absences from primary and secondary schools. The percentage of looked after children who missed at least 25 days of schooling has increased to a higher level than the national average.</li> <li>▪ Fixed term exclusions in primary and secondary schools particularly for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are significantly higher than average.</li> <li>▪ Standards at Key Stage 1 have not improved in three years.</li> <li>▪ The rate of progress in raising standards at Key Stages 2 and 3 is too slow to sufficiently narrow the gap with the national average particularly in English and mathematics.</li> </ul>

## Making a positive contribution

## 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 underestimate a number of important weaknesses. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Very good consultation and participation of children and young people, including those from vulnerable groups, in the development of services.</li> <li>▪ Significant improvement in the proportion of looked after children contributing to reviews.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The number of first time entrants to the youth justice system has increased to levels higher than average.</li> <li>▪ The proportion of supervised juveniles in full time education, employment or training is lower than average.</li> <li>▪ The proportion of looked after children and young people given a final warning/reprimand or convicted increased significantly during 2007/2008 to a high level.</li> </ul> |
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## Achieving economic well-being

**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 underestimate a number of important weaknesses. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Significant improvement in establishing links between local businesses and education provision.</li> <li>▪ Improving NVQ success rates for all work-based learners under the age of 19.</li> <li>▪ In 2007/2008, the proportion of care leavers achieving at least one GCSE at grade A* to G is well above average.</li> </ul> |
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<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The percentage of 16- to 19-year-olds that are not in education, employment or training has increased and is higher than average.</li> <li>▪ The proportion of young people achieving Level 2 by the age of 19 remains too low.</li> <li>▪ Development of a comprehensive range of provision has been inconsistent and slow in meeting the needs of 14- to 19-year-olds.</li> <li>▪ The proportion of eligible looked after children with a pathway plan is considerably lower than average.</li> <li>▪ The percentage of 19-year-old care leavers in suitable accommodation has reduced and is well below average.</li> </ul> |
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## Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

**Grade 2**

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is adequate and its management of these services is satisfactory. The Children and Young People's Plan is regularly reviewed and areas for development arising from inspection are woven into existing priorities to provide a clear strategic agenda.

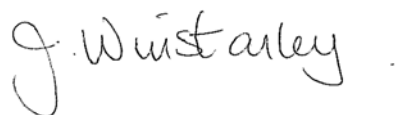
Ambition remains high for children and young people, but overall the council has made slower than planned progress regarding the development of integrated working arrangements. However, in April 2008, a new structure for children's services was implemented and senior management strengthened. This is already improving multi-agency and multi-professional working in some key areas. Notably children and youth support, where there is a developing shared understanding and ownership of issues affecting older children and young people in the area, such as offending and conception rates. There has also been a city-wide reorganisation of secondary schools, during which progress on secondary school attainment has been maintained. However, it is too soon for the impact of integrated working and school reorganisation to be seen in terms of improved outcomes for children and young people in many areas. The changes have been managed without any significant increases in available resources or additional management capacity. However, some services, such as social care teams, are stretched and progress in some areas, such as the 14–19 agenda, has been slow. While the council is aware of its strengths, it underestimates its weaknesses. There have been improvements in performance management within social care teams, for example in the recording of assessments. However, much of this improvement is recent and yet to be sustained. The use of data to understand and manage key priorities, particularly around outcomes for young people such as the number of young people not in education, employment or training, remains an area for development.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The recent organisation restructure has led to greater integration across services and a renewed focus on early intervention and youth support services.</li> <li>▪ Effective implementation of the secondary school reorganisation.</li> <li>▪ The council continues to perform well on achieving value for money.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The use of data in and across some outcome areas is not sufficiently robust to ensure shared understanding, ownership and management of performance improvement.</li> <li>▪ Self-assessment underestimates the weaknesses in the council's performance.</li> <li>▪ The record of improvement is too variable; in some key outcome areas such as teenage conception rates, the number of young people not in education, employment or training and the stability of short term placements, performance has deteriorated.</li> </ul>

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 "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection