

9 December 2010

Mr David Taylor  
Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services  
Shropshire Council  
Guildhall, Frankwell Quay  
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Shropshire SY3 8HQ

Dear Mr Taylor

## 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.

## Shropshire Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Shropshire Council perform well.

The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better, though there are relatively few outstanding settings. Provision in early years settings is good or better overall. However, just under a third of childminder settings are adequate. A majority of primary and secondary schools are good or better, though approximately one in four are only satisfactory. One primary school and one secondary school were judged inadequate during 2009/2010. One special school is good and the other outstanding, as is the pupil referral unit. All provision for students aged 16 to 19 is at least satisfactory. The two sixth form colleges are good. However, four of the eight secondary school sixth forms and the two further education colleges are only adequate. The three local authority children's homes are good. The local authority fostering and adoption services are adequate.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found no areas for priority action but a significant number of areas for development. Private fostering arrangements were judged to be inadequate in 2007.

National performance measures show the very large majority of outcomes are in line with and some are above the averages for England or for similar areas. Results in national tests are fairly close to the average for similar areas. In 2008 and 2009 children's standards by the start of primary school had increased on previous years to above that in similar parts of the country. Results at the age of 11 have remained fairly static over the last four years in line with those in similar areas, and nine primary schools are below minimum standards for educational attainment. At the age of 16, results have continued to rise in line with the rate elsewhere and are slightly higher than in similar areas as they are for the achievement of two A level qualifications or their equivalent by the age of 19.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve the consistency of provision for 16- to 19-year-olds in school sixth forms and the further education colleges.
- Increase the number of good and better primary schools.

### Outcomes for children and young people

Provision to support children and young people in leading healthy lives is good in the large majority of inspected settings and services. Health outcomes are in line or above those in similar areas or nationally. Breast-feeding rates at six to eight weeks from birth are in line with the England average. More primary school children have school lunches than in similar areas. The number of five-year-olds who are obese has

fallen and is now broadly in line with the average for similar local authorities, as is the case for children at the age of 11. Children over seven at risk of being obese are being supported through the MEND (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do it!) project. Services to support children and young people's emotional and mental health are developing in line with those in similar areas. The local authority is working with health partners and its schools to focus on mental health through targeted intervention and improving the skills and confidence of teachers to support children and young people.

The large majority of inspected services and settings make a good contribution to keeping children and young people safe. In the joint area review in 2008 arrangements to safeguard children were judged to be good as were services for looked after children. When measured against national indicators Shropshire's performance is generally in line with or above performance nationally and in similar areas. A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found strong partnership working, good follow-up to actions following serious case reviews and good working agreements with parents. However, the same inspection highlighted some key areas for development including: the need to improve the quality of initial assessments and the number carried out on time; delays in completing work caused by heavy caseloads for social workers; and not enough focus on outcomes in child protection plans. The local authority has published a comprehensive improvement plan to tackle the issues identified. Local authority children's homes are good. In addition to its own children's homes, the local authority also chooses to place children in private and voluntary homes within the county of which the very large majority were judged to be good or better at their most recent inspection. The reduction in the number of children and young people seriously injured or killed on the roads and 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 lower than that in similar areas.

The very large majority of inspected settings and services are good at helping children and young people to enjoy and achieve. The first of Shropshire's 18 children's centres to be inspected was recently judged to be outstanding. The proportion of children who do well by the end of the Reception year has increased in the last two years to well above that in similar areas. The number of children who make expected progress in English and mathematics between the ages of seven and 11 is in line with similar areas.. Standards in secondary schools are rising at around the same rate as in similar areas and all meet minimum educational standards. At the age of 16 young people do slightly better than in similar areas and Shropshire is in the top 25% of local authorities nationally for attainment at the age of 16. Behaviour in secondary schools is comparable to that in similar areas as are persistent absence rates, which are reducing.

Children and young people, including those from more vulnerable groups, are supported well to make a positive contribution to services through service planning, design and delivery. Participation in elections for the Shropshire Youth Parliament is high. Shropshire has one of the lowest rates of teenage conceptions nationally, with

a slight reduction in recent years. Ambitious targets for further reduction were not met in 2010. Support is being targeted appropriately at vulnerable groups of young people in specific areas of the county. The number of permanent exclusions from schools is a little lower than that across the rest of the country. Re-offending by young people in Shropshire is better than in similar areas, and by most measures the youth offending service works reasonably well.

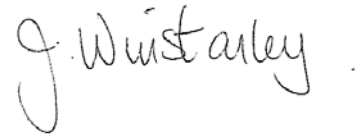
The majority of services and settings provide good support in preparing young people for adult life. However, the quality of provision for 16- to 19-year-olds in Shropshire is not consistently good, and depends on where students live or which type of establishment that they choose to attend. The two sixth form colleges and five of the school sixth forms are good. However, four school sixth forms and the two large further education colleges provide only a satisfactory standard of education. The proportion of young people in education, training or work is slightly better than in similar areas and the proportion of care leavers in this group is in the top 25% nationally. However, while local targets were met, the local authority did not achieve the nationally set target in 2010 for reducing numbers not in education, training or work. The proportion of young people who gain five or more higher level GCSE qualifications by the age of 19 is continuing to rise and is line with the average for similar areas. The proportion gaining two A level qualifications or their equivalent by the age of 19 is slightly higher than in similar areas. The proportion of young people from lower income families who progress to higher education is comparable to that in the rest of the country, as is the take-up of formal childcare by low-income families.

### **Prospects for improvement**

Many outcomes for children and young people in Shropshire are continuing to improve. Many are above national levels and almost all are similar or slightly better than the average for similar areas. The local authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates good progress in a number of key areas and a clear evaluation of what needs to be done further to achieve challenging targets. The local authority's five priorities for 2010/2011 are based on a comprehensive analysis of need, and focus on sustaining early intervention, supporting vulnerable groups and building and maximising capacity. Although there are very few inadequate schools, too many primary schools are only satisfactory and several perform below minimum standards. Post-16 provision remains too variable and both the fostering and adoption services are only satisfactory. The local authority has acted quickly to set up plans to tackle the areas for development identified in its recent inspection of front-line child protection services. The recent monitoring visit for the one inadequate primary school found that the school is making satisfactory progress and that support from the local authority is good.

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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment