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Dr Sonia Sharp
Executive Director Children and Young People's Services
Education Department
Sheffield City Council
Town Hall
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Dear Dr Sharp

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Sheffield 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.

Assessment judgement area	APA grade
Overall effectiveness of children's services	3
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	2
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	3
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	3

*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

Sheffield City Council delivers services for children and young people that overall are above minimum requirements. The council’s capacity to improve, including its management of services, is good. The council demonstrates a clear ambition for improving the life chances of children and young people. It is successfully establishing partnership working between services, and outcomes for children and young people are improving steadily and, in some respects, rapidly. Areas for improvement in the previous APA have, on the whole been, tackled effectively, most notably in relation to staying safe, school attendance and the engagement of 16 to 18-year-olds in employment or education. There are, however, some areas where progress has been slower, such as the rate of teenage conceptions, the school attendance of looked after children, attainment in Key Stage 2 and the number of schools causing concern. Provision for economic well-being has some very strong features and the council’s effectiveness in focusing on learners and outcomes in the development of its 14–19 provision is being used as a model of good practice.

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 for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of mothers initiating breast-feeding continues to increase and has been consistently higher than for similar councils and nationally. ▪ Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are accessible and targeted where need is highest. All new cases are seen by specialist services within the target timescales which is better than performance nationally. ▪ There continues to be good integrated action to address substance misuse for example through the Healthy Schools programme. Hospital admissions are reducing with a high percentage accessing specialist young people’s services.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The rate of reduction in teenage conception is slower than that found nationally. ▪ Only 28% of non-specialist CAMHS cases have been seen within the four week timescale which is worse than last year’s performance and lower than national performance.

Staying safe

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The strong focus on prevention and well managed child protection services have ensured comparatively low and reducing numbers of looked after children and good performance on national child protection indicators. ▪ Good action to address bullying, a priority specifically identified in response to young people's views, includes detailed returns from schools on bullying incidents. ▪ There are good and responsive initiatives, such as floating support and the development of specialist courts, which are making an impact on domestic abuse.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The percentage of looked after children who have been placed more than twenty miles from their home address in the last year has doubled to 13.4%. This is almost twice as high as the percentage in similar councils.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. This is lower than the council's self-assessed grade. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence, but there has been insufficient progress in some important areas. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a steady rate of improvement in children's performance in national tests and assessments at most key stages, though these remain below the national average. Unvalidated data provided by the council indicates further improvements at Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2 in 2008. ▪ There is a good trend of improvement in the number of 16-year-old students achieving at least five GCSEs grades A* to C including English and mathematics. In this respect, the proportion (40.59%) matched that of similar councils in 2007. ▪ Effective action has reduced the days of schooling missed by children. Attendance figures are now in line with similar council areas and below the national level for primary school children. They are better than similar council areas and below the national average in secondary schools. Sheffield permanently excludes far fewer pupils than average, and though the number of

fixed term exclusions is higher than comparators, there has been an overall reduction in the time lost. The strength of the system for supporting excluded children has been recognised nationally.

- Well focused intervention and support are improving some specific outcomes for children in the schools given intensive support. The reduction in schools where less than 30% of children attain five GCSEs at grades A* to C has accelerated and Sheffield now has a slightly smaller proportion than its statistical neighbours, though more than the national proportion.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The rate of improvement in attainment in primary schools is slower than in similar council areas, although in 2007 it was faster than the national rate of improvement in English and Science at Key Stage 2. Sheffield has a relatively high proportion of primary schools in which children make less than the expected progress.
- There is no clear trend of improvement in the overall quality of schools. A high proportion of schools are in Ofsted categories of concern compared with similar councils. The council recognises that a more robust and systematic strategy to recruit retain and develop the best teachers and headteachers is needed to secure sustained improvement in standards.
- Attendance rates for looked after children are below the national average.

Making a positive contribution

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

- There has been good progress in reducing the numbers of young people who commit further offences with consistently better performance than that found nationally or in similar councils.
- There is good support to enable looked after children to contribute to their reviews. Nearly all (95%) have done so which is higher than the rates nationally and for similar councils.
- The council demonstrates a strong commitment to the involvement and participation of young people including looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Although there has been a reducing trend, too many young people are becoming first time entrants to, or newly involved in, the criminal justice system, with over representation of those from black and ethnic minority groups.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good and there are some very strong features. The council judged this area to be outstanding. While there are undoubtedly a number of notable features, further improvement is still needed in some important outcomes, as the council acknowledges in its self-assessment. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good progress in reducing the percentage of young people not in employment, education or training from 10.5% to 9.5%. Despite this, the council's performance is still 1% point above the average for similar councils and above the national average. ▪ The proportion of young people aged 19 years achieving Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications is improving and is significantly closing the gap with similar councils. The proportion of ethnic minority students achieving level 3 qualifications now matches all students in Sheffield. ▪ Post-16 support for vulnerable groups has rapidly increased their participation. The percentage of teenage mothers in education or employment has increased significantly and is higher than the national average. Sheffield has developed a very good range of initiatives to improve the educational achievement and progression, personal and welfare support for care leavers. Both participation in apprenticeships and GCSE achievement have improved. All care leavers have a personal adviser and the proportion with a pathway plan has increased well, though it is still below the national proportion.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of young people who have a learning difficulty and/or disability who are not in employment, education or training is above the average for statistical neighbours and the national average. Improved provision is not yet having a sustained positive impact on the number of this group not in employment, education or training.

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

Grade 3

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is good and its management of these services is good. The council's self-assessment confirms this. The council is bringing about steady and sustained improvement in outcomes for children and young people from a low base. It has a very clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and has set ambitious targets for improving outcomes. Good action has been taken to address capacity in the social care workforce and there are low levels of social work vacancies compared with other councils. The capacity of partners is harnessed well to deliver a more

integrated response for example through jointly funded posts and plans to co-locate social care and police staff to address domestic abuse referrals. Progress on joint commissioning with the Primary Care Trust, however, remains a priority for development.

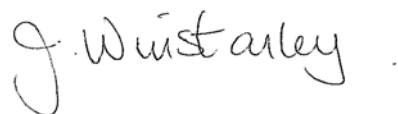
There is a strong focus on effective prevention and numbers of looked after children are both stable and comparatively low. Arrangements for engaging the views of children and young people in shaping new developments, including those for vulnerable groups, are notably effective. The council has been instrumental in securing better attainment at most key stages and increasing numbers in education and employment. Its strong commitment to accelerating the pace of improvement has been demonstrated in the past year by, for example, the extra funding allocated to recruit headteachers and teachers, the increased rigour of interventions in schools, and the 430 volunteers who help young readers, one third of whom are council or public sector employees.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Where the council has focused effort and resources on improving outcomes for children and young people, this has had a positive and sustained impact, for example on: staying safe outcomes; children’s attendance; achievement at Key Stage 4 and the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training. ▪ The council’s self-assessment is honest and accurate, and clearly recognises what needs to be done to improve further. ▪ Workforce capacity has improved and the capacity of partners is increasing through good strategies to make maximum use of joint working.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Joint commissioning with the Primary Care Trust is insufficiently developed. ▪ The annual survey of schools indicates marked dissatisfaction with the council’s services particularly from primary schools.

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".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection