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17 December 2008

Ms W Woodcock
Director of Children's and Services
Wokingham Borough Council
Civic Offices, PO Box 156
Shute End
Wokingham
Berkshire
RG40 1WN

Dear Ms Woodcock

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Wokingham Borough 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.¹

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.

¹ Data yet to be confirmed

The following table sets out the grades awarded for performance in 2008.

Assessment judgement area	APA grade
Overall effectiveness of children's services	2
Being healthy	2
Staying safe	1
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	3
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

Wokingham Borough Council provides services for children and young people that deliver minimum requirements for users. The management of services and the capacity to improve are adequate. Outcomes are good for enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being. Children and young people achieve well in education and have good opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives and make their opinions known. Care leavers and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well to lead independent lives. Outcomes for being healthy are adequate. Almost all schools are participating in the Healthy Schools Programme and teenage pregnancy is reducing. However, there has been slow progress in developing the new Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) strategy. Outcomes for staying safe are inadequate because of significant weaknesses in the quality of child protection work. Progress against the 2007 APA recommendations has been mixed. For example, exclusions from mainstream schools have fallen, but the timeliness of core assessments of children in need has deteriorated. Recent evidence, whilst highlighting some significant weaknesses, suggests that services have turned a corner and a new more open and supportive culture is emerging.

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 underestimate a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Virtually all schools are participating in the Healthy Schools Programme and just over two thirds have already achieved the standard. ▪ Good progress has been made in reducing the rate of teenage conceptions and Wokingham is on track to meet its 2010 target. ▪ Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who have complex receive good health care and support.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There has been slow progress in developing the new CAMHS strategy and service specification has been slow. A comprehensive needs analysis is not yet complete. ▪ Fewer than half of looked after children receive regular dental checks. ▪ Waiting lists are long for some specialist therapies for children in mainstream schools.

Staying safe

Grade 1

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is inadequate. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimates a number of important weaknesses and overvalues the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi-agency working, early intervention and the common assessment framework are being implemented well through the new neighbourhood teams. ▪ Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families receive good support.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The quality of child protection work is inadequate, with thresholds for children becoming subject to a child protection plan not clearly understood by partner agencies. ▪ Children's needs are not reassessed in a timely way. Many reviews for looked after children and children subject to child protection plans are not completed within required timescales. ▪ Initial and core assessments are of poor quality and are not completed within set timescales. This was an area for development in the 2007 APA letter. ▪ The Local Safeguarding Children Board has insufficient oversight of child protection practice and a failure to ensure consistent safe recruitment practice across partner agencies. ▪ There are insufficient numbers of social work staff, high turnover, and over-reliance on agency personnel. ▪ Poor recording of social care casework and use of an inadequate electronic database are putting children and young people at risk.

Enjoying and achieving

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"> ▪ Educational attainment is high in all key stages and there are no schools in an Ofsted category of concern. ▪ Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well. ▪ Effective behaviour support programmes have resulted in reductions in exclusions.

<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The educational attainment of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is below the national average. ▪ The educational attainment of looked after children is below that in similar councils and nationally. |
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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.

<p>Major strengths</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Personal development and well-being is a strong feature in schools and learners make a positive contribution to the community. ▪ Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have good opportunities to participate in leisure and recreation activities and their views are taken into account in planning services. ▪ Good support is provided to ensure that looked after children and care leavers are involved in their reviews and in making decisions that affect their lives. |
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<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth work provision offers young people limited opportunities for decision making. |
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Achieving economic well-being

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>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High numbers of students are achieving Level 2 and 3 qualifications by age 19. ▪ Care leavers are prepared well to achieve economic well-being by a multidisciplinary team that provides good assistance with accommodation, health, education, training and employment. ▪ Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported at key times of transition in their lives. |
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<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The range of post-16 provision for young people with the most complex needs is limited. |
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Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

Grade 2

The management of services for children and young people and the council's capacity to improve are adequate overall. Universal services and outcomes for most children and young people in Wokingham are good. Educational attainment is amongst the highest in the country. However, the council has underestimated significant shortcomings in the being healthy and staying safe outcomes, and there are many weaknesses which make staying safe inadequate overall.

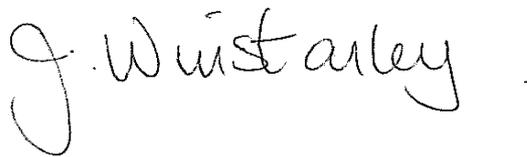
Capacity to improve, including service management, is adequate. The council has a good track record of securing improvement in education and universal services for children. Management and leadership of children's services are improving through a strengthened senior leadership team. The council's new leadership and Chief Executive share a clear view and support the need for improvement, particularly for vulnerable groups. Recent service management changes and procedures have been introduced and there are emerging improvements in prioritisation for social care, locally delivered services, preventative services and early intervention for vulnerable children.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High educational attainment has been maintained. ▪ Locality and multi-agency working arrangements have been implemented successfully. ▪ There is effective engagement of children and young people in the development of services.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Equality impact statements are not robust. ▪ Performance monitoring in aspects of social care services and safeguarding need to be improved.

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 large initial 'J'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection