

9 December 2009

Mr Andy Couldrick
Interim General Manager for Children's Services
Wokingham Borough Council
PO Box 156
Shute End
Wokingham
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Dear Mr Couldrick

Children's services annual rating

Ofsted guidance published in May 2009 explained that the annual rating would derive from a new performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the council has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant *Every Child Matters* indicators in the new National Indicator Set (NIS).

In considering the evidence in the profile to determine the children's services rating for 2009 it has become clear that the continuing gaps in the data are significant, particularly those relating to aspects of social care and services for Looked After Children. Ofsted has decided therefore to use 2009 as a transitional year easing into the full application of the new system in 2010. As a consequence, although the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's rating, we have interpreted the performance bands with flexibility and exercised professional judgement with caution.

The annual rating 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, a rating of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, a rating of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects.

Children's services rating 2009

Children's services rating	Performs poorly (1)
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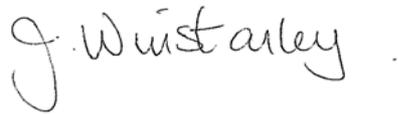
Children's services in Wokingham Borough Council perform poorly.

The overall effectiveness of the very large majority of inspected services and settings is good or better. However, this strong performance masks stark inconsistency between good education provision and long-standing poor performance in key areas of social care. The joint area review in January 2009 judged safeguarding as inadequate with fundamental weaknesses in child protection arrangements and the management of children's social care services. Support for looked after children was adequate. The recent inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need found capacity in front-line services has been strengthened significantly, alongside recent improvements in assessments and service delivery. However, inspectors identified many areas for improvement and there is much still to do. Priority action is required to establish an internal quality assurance system for case work practice. In addition, previously poor assessment of child protection risk has led, in some instances, to premature case closure. The potential safeguarding concerns about these cases have yet to be addressed.

Most children get off to a good start with good provision in childcare, childminder and nursery settings. A high proportion of primary schools is good or better, but the proportion of good secondary schools is below the average of similar areas. While no secondary schools are inadequate, four out of nine are only satisfactory. Special schools and pupil referral units are good. Most sixth form provision is good or better. The children's home is outstanding and the fostering service is good.

Despite performance against the large majority of national indicators in line with or above similar areas and the national figures, the local authority does not perform consistently well in all areas. While educational attainment is well above average overall and outcomes for children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable are improving in some areas, the picture is inconsistent for different groups. Staying safe indicators show significant areas of on-going poor performance, including the number of assessments and reviews completed on time and the stability of placements for looked after children.

The children's services rating is provided for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The rating of local authority children's services will contribute significantly to the managing performance theme of each local authority's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) organisational assessment and therefore to the score for each local authority overall.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, CAA