

9 December 2010

Ms Margaret Goldie  
Corporate Director for Children and Young People  
West Berkshire Council  
Avonbank House, West Street  
Newbury, West Berkshire  
RG14 1BZ

Dear Ms Goldie

## 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.

## West Berkshire Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
--------------------------------	-------------------

Children's services in West Berkshire Council perform well.

A very large majority of services and settings inspected by Ofsted are good or better and this continues the local authority's strong performance of previous years. The local authority's fostering service is outstanding and the adoption service is good. Children's homes are good overall, but provision in the private and voluntary sector is uneven. All special schools and pupil referral units are now good or better, as are almost three quarters of primary schools. Improvements in the quality of childcare and childminding overall mean that the large majority of provision is now good or better. The general further education college is good. Secondary schools and school sixth forms remain the weakest area of provision locally, with one third only satisfactory and one secondary school and its sixth form judged to be inadequate at their last inspection. Arrangements to help children and young people stay safe and to achieve well are good or better in the very large majority of services.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found a broad balance of strengths and areas for development. The local authority's work to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements is good.

Performance measures show that a very large majority of outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better. Test and examination results for children and young people at every stage of their education are in line with the average for similar areas. The local authority has been successful in improving the progress made by the lowest-achieving children at age five and narrowing the gap between them and others of the same age. Test and examination results for the very small number of children from low-income families and those with special educational needs have also improved consistently over the last three years, but there is still some way to go to close the gap between them and the majority of their peers at the end of primary and secondary school. The number of 17-year-olds in education or training was 11 percentage points below the average for similar areas at the end of 2008. However, recent local data suggest that the picture is now much improved.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve secondary schools so that more are good or better.
- Improve school sixth forms so that more are good or better.

## Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of services give good support to children and young people to live healthy lives. West Berkshire has one of the lowest teenage pregnancy rates nationally, with a consistent reduction amongst the under 16 age group since 2003. The local authority and its partners continue to focus efforts in the areas where the rate remains comparatively high. In contrast, screening for chlamydia, a sexually transmitted infection, is well below comparators and amongst the worst performance seen nationally. The number of mothers who breast-feed their babies is well below the national average. The number of children who are seriously overweight is in line with the average for similar areas.

Arrangements to help children and young people stay safe are good or better in the very large majority of settings and services. The fostering service has been judged to be outstanding at its last two inspections. The comprehensive training given to foster carers ensures that children and young people in care are very well supported. The adoption service and the large majority of children's homes are good. The stability of placements for children in care is much better than that seen nationally. Child protection services have a broad balance of strengths and areas for development. Referrals to the social care service are well managed and partnership work is well embedded, enabling prompt communication and effective collaboration between agencies. Work to assess the needs of children is mostly satisfactory and some is good. Inspectors identified a number of areas of development including the analysis of risks to children who may need protecting and reducing delays in providing support to families. The local authority has taken action in response to these findings and the most recent data show improvement in the number of assessments completed on time.

The large majority of services and settings provide good support to help children and young people achieve well and enjoy their learning. Behaviour in secondary schools is good overall and the number of children and young people with poor school attendance is about the same as found elsewhere. The quality of primary schools is good overall and improving, but the quality of secondary schools is not as good as that found nationally. The local authority gives effective support to the secondary school in special measures which is making satisfactory progress. Test and examination results at the end of primary and secondary school are in line with the average for similar areas. For five-year-olds, they are improving faster than the average in similar areas. However, results for 11-year-olds have changed little in recent years and, in 2009, six of the 66 primary schools did not reach the national minimum standards for pupil attainment. GCSE results are improving, but not as quickly as the average for similar areas over the last three years. For children and young people from low-income families and for those with special educational needs, attainment is improving year on year, but there is still some way to go to close the gap in performance between them and the majority of their peers at ages 11 and 16.

Support for children and young people to have a say in decision making is good or better in the very large majority of services. An Ofsted survey of integrated youth support arrangements found that young people are well supported in getting their

views heard. Re-offending by young people is broadly average. The youth offending team performs well overall, but the very small cohorts of young people involved can result in marked variation in performance against national measures from one year to the next. School exclusion rates have reduced from a high point in 2006 and are now in line with the national average.

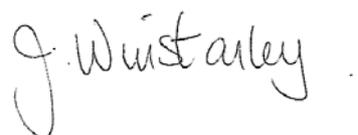
Children and young people get good support from the very large majority of services to do well in adult life. The local further education college is good, but the quality of school sixth forms overall is not as good as that found nationally. The number of 17-year-olds in education or training was 11 percentage points below the average for similar areas at the end of 2008. However, recent local data suggest that the picture is now much improved. The number gaining qualifications equivalent to five or more good GCSEs, or two A levels, at age 19 is in line with the average for similar areas and improving at the same rate. A multi-agency team provides dedicated support for young people who are not in education, training or work. All care leavers have somewhere suitable to live. The local authority and its partners are working together closely to improve the range and quality of courses and programmes on offer in the district.

### **Prospects for improvement**

Children's services performed well in 2009 and continue to do so. Provision in many areas is good and improving, but the quality of secondary schools and sixth form schools remains mixed. The local authority has a clear focus on raising standards, but knows there is more to do to reduce the attainment gap between children whose circumstances make them more vulnerable and the vast majority who do well. Partnership work is strong and effective. The Local Safeguarding Children's Broad has agreed an action plan following the recent inspection of child protection services and additional social work posts have been put in place to strengthen capacity and reduce workloads. The reorganisation in the youth service has given it a sharper focus on supporting young people with the greatest need, including those in care. The youth offending service has strong performance management arrangements in place to support its work in further reducing offending.

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 large initial 'J'.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment