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Mr J Gilbert
Group Director of Children Services
Swindon Borough Council
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Dear Mr Gilbert

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

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	2
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	2
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	2
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 2

Swindon council delivers services for children and young people that meet minimum requirements for users and make an adequate contribution to improving outcomes. In a number of areas, there is evidence of good practice and effective contributions to the quality of services for children and young people in the community. However, there has been insufficient impact on attainment at Key Stage 4 and post-16. The council’s capacity to improve, including its management of services, is good. There is effective leadership, good partnership working and planning is based on the needs of users. There are good plans in place to achieve further improvement in the future.

The council has made significant progress with regard to the 2007 APA recommendations for staying safe, making a positive contribution and service management. There has also been good progress with regard to being healthy. However, the council has not succeeded in ensuring a consistent downward trend in the rates of teenage conceptions. The measures introduced since the last APA to improve educational achievement have been good. However, standards remain stubbornly below those nationally and in relation to statistical neighbour averages at Key Stage 4 and in key qualifications post-16. There has not been sufficient time for the many good changes to provision for young people aged 14 to 19 to have a measurable impact on standards. There is evidence of good overall improvement with good capacity for improvement in the future.

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 council has been effective in promoting healthy lifestyles for children and young people. ▪ The proportion of children and young people who have had health assessments and dental checks is higher than in similar councils. ▪ The partnership arrangements with health are good. These include effective joint commissioning and good integrated working between the services provided for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hospital admissions as a result alcohol misuse remain high. ▪ The number of teenage conceptions per 1,000 population is higher than in similar councils and nationally. However the reduction from the base year (1998) has been greater than in similar councils and nationally.

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"> ▪ Effective preventative and early interventions services have reduced the number of referrals, the number of children subject to a new child protection plan and the number of looked after children. ▪ The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is well led and effective in promoting safeguarding in the community. ▪ Child protection processes are timely and effective and outcomes for children with child protection plans are good.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of reviews for looked after children that are held within the required timescales is lower than in similar councils. ▪ The proportion of initial assessments completed within timescales is lower than 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. 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"> ▪ Children under five make good progress. ▪ Attainment at Key Stages 1 and 2 is good. ▪ School attendance has improved and is now above the national figure. ▪ Progress at Key stage 3 has been faster than the averages for similar councils and nationally.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Results at Key Stage 4 are below those of similar councils and nationally. ▪ Permanent exclusions are rising.

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> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The rate of participation of looked after children in their reviews is higher than in similar councils. ▪ The participation of young people in the planning and management of services and activities which has led to demonstrable improvements. ▪ The council has been effective in reducing the number of young people who enter the youth justice system for the first time. ▪ The proportion of young people who offend who are in full time education, employment and training is higher than in similar councils. ▪ In 23 out of 26 schools inspected, pupils were judged to be making a positive contribution to the community.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Young people still say they would like a broader range of activities in their area, with better access to leisure and youth facilities.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. This is in line with the council's self assessment. 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 curriculum for 14- to 19-year-olds is broad and flexible. ▪ The 14–19 strategy is good and based on effective partnership working. ▪ There is good engagement of employers, especially with diploma work. ▪ The council has used a wide range of surveys and procedures to gather the views of 16- to 19-year-olds.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Despite improvements in the last year the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training remains higher than the average for similar councils. ▪ Success rates for learners aged 16 to 19 remain below the averages nationally and for similar councils.

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, as is its management of those services. Since the last APA, the council has made significant progress in key areas, most notably in some aspects of staying safe, being healthy and making a positive contribution. The council has high ambitions and priorities have been based on a thorough analysis of needs. In the area of enjoying and achieving, the council has overestimated the impact of its work in raising the standards of attainment of young people at Key Stage 4. However, in general, its self-assessment is thorough and accurate in identifying the key areas for improvement.

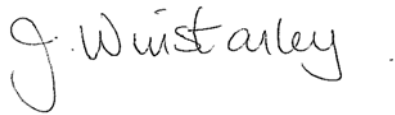
A significant proportion of the council’s senior management team are new, including the Director of Children’s Services. The council is now developing a consistent track record of improvement. There are good mechanisms for planning which include contributions from children and young people. The council is increasing the capacity of middle management through training and development and it has been successful in reducing the number of social care vacancies. Performance management arrangements are comprehensive and include benchmarking. Partnership working is strong and includes good commissioning arrangements and integrated working in both universal and targeted services. Improved multi-agency working, good preventative services and earlier intervention to support children and young people demonstrate effective management.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leadership is good and partnership working is strong. ▪ Capacity is being improved through reductions in social care vacancies and the training and development of middle managers. ▪ Performance management is good with effective use of data to inform priorities, planning and performance monitoring.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improvements in educational attainment at Key Stage 4 and post-16 are inconsistent.

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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection