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Dr Ian Birnbaum
Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Learning
London Borough of Sutton
Children, Young People and Learning Services
The Grove
Carshalton
Surrey
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Dear Dr Birnbaum

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Sutton 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	4
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	4
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

The London Borough of Sutton makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people and it consistently delivers services that are above minimum requirements. It has sustained outstanding performance in services to enable children and young people to enjoy and achieve. Outcomes relating to economic well-being continue to improve and remain good. This is reflected in high levels of achievement and the low numbers of those not in education, employment or training. Health outcomes have improved overall since the 2007 APA and are now outstanding. This is reflected in performance in a number of areas such as the very high proportion of mothers initiating breast-feeding and the effectiveness and availability of support to reduce alcohol and substance misuse. Safeguarding arrangements appear good, however, there are a higher than average number of referrals and re-referrals. A participation strategy is now in place and there is evidence of a range of opportunities for children and young people to have a voice in decision-making. Nevertheless, there is a lack of systematic structures to involve some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of services.

The council has a relentless drive for improvement based on a secure understanding of its local needs and its own strengths and weaknesses. Since the 2007 APA, the council has made very good progress in the areas identified for development, particularly in relation to: waiting times to access child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), timeliness of initial child protection referrals, adoption rates for looked after children, re-offending by young people who are looked after and joint commissioning of services. Strong and effective leadership and management, along with robust monitoring of performance, have ensured that a very good record of improvement has been maintained. However, in areas such as corporate parenting and some outcomes for some vulnerable children and young people, the pace of development and its impact has been slower. The council's overall record of sustained improvement indicates good capacity to maintain this upward trend.

Being healthy

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths

- Effective health promotion to tackle inequalities is resulting in outcomes which are well above average across a range of indicators.
- Effective targeting and support to respond to alcohol and substance misuse.
- Health care assessment and support arrangements and access to CAMHS provision via the joint adolescent service.
- Health assessments and support for looked after children and young people.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Timely access to CAMHS, to meet the particular needs of a small minority of children and young people, particularly those with learning disabilities and/or difficulties. |
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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.

Major strengths

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a good range of family support services with clear investment in early intervention and prevention. ▪ The identification of hot spots for anti-social behaviour and bullying has supported an improvement in young people feeling safe. Mentoring services for victims of bullying provide additional support for vulnerable groups. ▪ Timeliness of core assessments has improved significantly to a level which is above national and similar councils. ▪ Good private fostering arrangements. All private fostering placements are assessed and all young people have an allocated social worker. |
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Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Higher than average numbers of child protection referrals and re-referrals. ▪ Auditing of safeguarding practices across the partnership by the Local Safeguarding Children Board is not yet sufficiently systematic and robust. |
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Enjoying and achieving

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evidence of continuing improvement within the context of a trend of very high attainment, particularly at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. This includes exceptionally high performance at the end of Key Stage 4 which is well above the national average and similar councils. ▪ Success in removing gaps in the educational performance of ethnic groups. ▪ Provision and outcomes in early years settings. A higher than average proportion of early years inspection judgements are good or better. Performance |
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<p>in reducing inequality is above average.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong and effective services are provided to support schools.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Permanent and fixed term exclusions from special schools are higher than 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 weaknesses 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"> ▪ A broad range of opportunities for children and young people to make their views known with evidence of some impact on service delivery, for example, in how youth service funding is used to develop youth related activities. ▪ Strong performance by the youth offending team, particularly in its multi-agency preventative work with the younger age group, is reducing anti-social behaviour and preventing them from entering the youth justice system. ▪ Increased access to flexible short break provision 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"> ▪ The lack of systematic structures for engaging with the most vulnerable children and young people.

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>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A-level attainment in schools is exceptionally high and well above the national average and similar councils. ▪ The proportion of young people achieving Level 2 and Level 3 by age 19 continues to remain above similar councils and nationally. ▪ There are lower than average proportions of young people not in education, employment or training. This includes more vulnerable groups such as teenage parents and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The attainment gap between those who were entitled to free school meals and their peers, while reducing, remains high at Level 2 and Level 3. ▪ Despite improvements in the provision of suitable accommodation for care leavers, there is still a lack of suitable accommodation and high use of bed and breakfast accommodation for some young people. |
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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. Strong strategic leadership, effective partnership working and high ambitions to achieve excellence underpin the pace of continuous improvement in performance. This is reflected, for example, in the improvements made in the areas identified within the 2007 APA. Improvement has been slower in relation to the rate of re-offending by young people, although many of these are now over 18 years old. Good prioritisation, coupled with robust monitoring of performance, has driven improvements well in most outcome areas. For some outcomes, such as educational attainment, improvements have increased previously high standards. The council has a secure understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and recognises that there is a need to strengthen the development and impact of corporate parenting where the pace of improvement has been slower.

The comprehensive CYPP review, based on a thorough understanding and knowledge of local needs and current performance, provides an effective framework for further improvement. Appropriate emphasis is given to equality and diversity and, in particular, to narrowing any gaps in achievement between groups. Children’s Trust arrangements have developed well. There is a strong emphasis on early intervention and prevention and good examples of where the council has re-directed investment to provide for more vulnerable children and young people, such as those with autistic spectrum disorder. Financial management is strong and operational capacity is good, although there are higher than average vacancies among social care staff.

<p>Major strengths</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong strategic leadership and effective leadership and management of services. ▪ Robust monitoring and scrutiny arrangements which ensure a strong track record of improvement. ▪ Well-targeted and secure financial management which underpins capacity to improve. |
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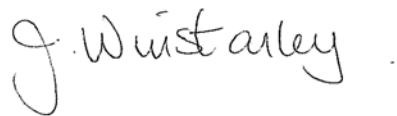
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The slow pace of improvement in relation to corporate parenting. ▪ Retention and recruitment of social care staff. |
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The 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 small dot at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection