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17 December 2008

Ms Rosalind Turner
Director for Children and Young People's Services
Suffolk County Council
Endeavour House
8 Russell Road
Ipswich
IP1 2BX

Dear Ms Turner

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Suffolk County 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 | 3 |
| Staying safe | 3 |
| 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 | 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

Suffolk County Council provides services for children and young people that consistently deliver above minimum requirements. It has sustained its strong performance reported in last year's APA. It is making good progress in responding to the recommendations made in the recent JAR report published in November 2007, which judged local services for safeguarding, for looked after children and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to be good. Performance in all five Every Child Matters outcomes continues to be good. Health services for looked after children are a particularly strong feature. There has been a good reduction in teenage conceptions. Although the number of schools that have achieved Healthy School status is low, children and young people report that they receive good advice regarding healthy lifestyles from schools. The well-established Local Safeguarding Children Board has made good progress in developing the wider safeguarding agenda; children and young people report feeling safe in their locality. Most children and young people continue to achieve well in schools, colleges and other settings. Steady improvements have been made in the attainment of 11- and 16-year-olds and attendance rates in primary and secondary schools are improved and above average. School inspection outcomes are good overall but too high a proportion of middle schools are in a category of concern. Suffolk routinely invites children and young people to contribute their views to inform improvements in services. The percentage of young people not involved in education, employment or training (NEET) fell appreciably in the last year but remains above that found nationally and in similar councils.

The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services, is good. Ambitions and priorities are clearly set out and shared with partners. Strong leadership drives a clear determination to improve the lives of children and young people. The council continues to discharge its corporate parenting responsibilities well. Thirty-five children's centres have opened this year and the common assessment framework is widely used to identify needs at an early stage and to deliver multi-agency support to families and children.

The areas for further development set out in your self-assessment are consistent with the evidence. However, following the APA an additional area for development has been identified as follows:

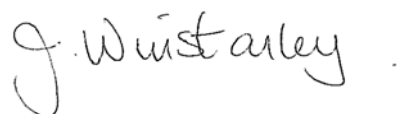
Staying safe

- Too narrow a range of interventions in response to referrals of families in which domestic abuse or substance misuse are significant issues.

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 as part of this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues in preparing for the assessment.

Yours sincerely

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

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection

Major strengths and important weaknesses

| Major strengths | Important weaknesses and areas for development |
|--|---|
| <p>Being healthy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good quality health assessments and health promotion advice for looked after children. ▪ Good reduction in the rate of teenage conceptions to lower than that of comparable council's and the national average. ▪ Effective services for children with disabilities and their families. | <p>Being healthy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Insufficient progress in the development of some aspects of children and adolescent mental health services. ▪ Lower than average proportions of schools achieving Healthy School status. |
| <p>Staying safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured on the road. ▪ The effectiveness of a well-established Local Safeguarding Children Board. ▪ Looked after children are supported well and placement stability is good with a high proportion placed in foster care or for adoption. | <p>Staying safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The timeliness of initial assessments remains below the national average and that of statistical neighbours. ▪ Insufficient response to referrals that involve domestic abuse and substance misuse. |
| <p>Enjoying and achieving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Achievement of looked after children. ▪ Improvements in attendance and a reduction in permanent exclusions. ▪ Improvements in attainment at Key Stages 2 and 4. | <p>Enjoying and achieving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relatively high number of middle schools subject to special measures or a notice to improve. |
| <p>Making a positive contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very good involvement of children and young people in shaping services. ▪ Improved advocacy and transition services for children with additional needs. ▪ High levels of participation of looked after children in their reviews. | <p>Making a positive contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comparatively high rates of first time entrants to the youth justice system and rising incidence of re-offending. |
| <p>Achieving economic well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High proportion of young people achieving Level 2 qualifications by age 19. ▪ Very good apprenticeship success rates for 16- to 18-year-olds. ▪ Good reduction in the proportion of young people who are NEET. | <p>Achieving economic well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Despite the good reduction the proportion of young people who are NEET remains above average, in particular those from vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups such as teenage mothers. |

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|---|---|
| <p>Capacity to improve including the management of children’s services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Strong leadership.▪ Clearly identified ambitions that are well supported by partners.▪ Effective use of data and management information to set priorities and to improve performance. | <p>Capacity to improve including the management of children’s services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The high number of vacant posts in social care. |
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