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Mrs Susan Richardson
Director of Children and Young People's Services
St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council
Rivington Centre
Rivington Road
St Helens
WA10 4ND

Dear Mrs Richardson

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in St Helens Metropolitan 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	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	4

*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

St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council continues to deliver consistently good services which result in good and improving outcomes for children and young people. It is notably improving services and outcomes for looked after children and young people. The recent joint area review report published in May 2008 judged the council's services for safeguarding, looked after children, children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and service management to be good. It judged the council's capacity to improve to be outstanding. Since then there has been no apparent down-turn in performance and further improvements are evident particularly the reducing numbers of young people not in employment, education or training.

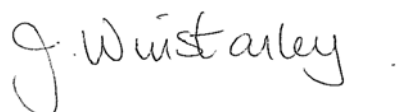
The council has made good progress in responding to the recommendations made in the 2007 APA. Transition planning for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved. The level of absence from school of looked after children and young people has fallen significantly over time and is now much better than that found in similar areas and the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training has also reduced. The high numbers of looked after children and young people and the increasing number of first time entrants to the youth justice system are both being tackled but remain as areas for development.

Children and young people's services have an outstanding capacity to improve further. The roles and responsibilities of officers are clear and leadership is strong. Partnerships with other services and agencies, including joint commissioning, are making very positive contributions in helping the council build further on its good performance. The council's ambitions for children and young people are prominent in many areas of its work and well determined priorities are being realised through effective strategic and operational plans. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development is consistent with the evidence.

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". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

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"> ▪ Health support for looked after children and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. ▪ Performance in reducing teenage conception is outstanding and rates have fallen dramatically in recent years. ▪ All schools are participating in, and an above average proportion are achieving, National Healthy School Status. 	<p>Being healthy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High infant mortality rate. ▪ High level of substance misuse related admissions to hospital of young people aged under 20 years.
<p>Staying safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Timeliness of initial and core safeguarding assessments. ▪ Effective inter-agency work to safeguard children and young people. ▪ Looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities live in safe placements. 	<p>Staying safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The high number of children in the looked after system. ▪ High level of repeat referrals to social care.
<p>Enjoying and achieving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Five or more A* to C GCSE results, including those with English and mathematics, are improving at a faster rate than comparator groups. ▪ Very positive picture in respect of fixed-term and permanent exclusions. ▪ Greatly improving GCSE results and an impressive reduction in absence rates for looked after children and young people. 	<p>Enjoying and achieving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standards in English at Key Stage 3.
<p>Making a positive contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involvement of looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in making decisions about their lives and shaping services. ▪ Rates of re-offending are lower than in similar areas and the national average. ▪ Participation and consultation arrangements for children and young people. 	<p>Making a positive contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing numbers of first time entrants to the criminal justice system including the rise of looked after children receiving a final warning/reprimand or conviction. ▪ Low numbers of young people accessing funded youth services.

<p>Achieving economic well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The number of 'not known' 16- to 18-year-olds is much lower than comparator groups. ▪ Post Year 11 participation in learning is high. ▪ The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in employment, education or training is reducing at a faster rate than comparator groups. 	<p>Achieving economic well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Level 3 attainment at age 19.
<p>Capacity to improve including the management of children's services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The May 2008 joint area review report judged capacity to improve further as outstanding. ▪ Ambition and prioritisation are excellent and based on comprehensive planning. ▪ Creative and effective leadership. ▪ Partnerships are strong. 	<p>Capacity to improve including the management of children's services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High level of repeat referrals to social care.