

17 December 2008

Mr Peter Traves  
Corporate Director of Children & Lifelong Learning  
Staffordshire County Council  
Children and Lifelong Learning Directorate  
County Buildings  
Tipping Street  
Stafford  
ST16 2DH

Dear Mr Traves

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Staffordshire 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.

<b>Assessment judgement area</b>	<b>APA grade</b>
Overall effectiveness of children's services	3
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	4
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

Staffordshire County Council consistently delivers good services. It has sustained and improved performance in each of the five Every Child Matters outcomes for children and in capacity to improve. The council makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people; it provides services that are consistently above the minimum requirements and there are some outstanding features.

The council has made good progress in responding to the recommendations made in the 2007 APA. Overall achievement and standards have improved at all key stages in schools. The percentage of schools taking part in the National Healthy Schools Programme has increased to 98%. The proportion of both initial and core assessments of referrals to children's social care services carried out on time have improved. The stability and quality of placements for looked after children have improved considerably. There is now regular and systematic engagement with children and young people including innovative ways to seek the views of traditionally hard to reach groups. Decisive action has reduced levels of re-offending and fewer young people are offending for the first time. Nearly all vulnerable young people now have decent housing. The proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities remaining in education, employment and training (EET) is increasing at a faster rate than in comparable councils and nationally. However, some health inequalities remain and there are still a few gaps with some vulnerable groups. Young people from minority ethnic background remain overrepresented in groups that are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

## 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.

### Major strengths

- Good progress in the number of schools achieving national healthy schools standards.
- Sound strategic links between the work in schools and local targets for the reduction of childhood obesity.
- Good access to specialist and non-specialist child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and continued improvement in the range of services to support mental health and emotional well-being.
- The health needs of looked after children are closely monitored and a higher proportion receive annual health and dental checks than the national average.

<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Although in the context of overall good outcomes there are variations in health outcomes for children and young people in different known locations.</li> <li>▪ Limited progress towards the national target to reduce teenage pregnancy and on delivery of sex and relationships information and advice to teenagers.</li> </ul> |
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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 in this outcome area underestimates the important weaknesses and overvalues the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improvement in the time taken to complete assessments for children and young people referred for social care services. The rate for initial assessments completed on time is now good, above national average and rate for core assessments has improved and is acceptable.</li> <li>▪ The proportion of children and young people needing protection plans or coming in to care are low in comparison to the national average. Well-established partnerships contribute to maintaining safe environments and to the good range of preventative services.</li> <li>▪ All children and young people with protection plans are allocated to qualified social workers. All reviews are held on time, which is better than the national average and multi-agency work is effective in preventing further intervention.</li> <li>▪ Very high quality services for looked after children that maintain good levels of stability. Fostering services were judged outstanding in March 2008. A good range of options for securing permanent placements are in place.</li> </ul> |
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<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Safe recruitment responsibilities are clearly understood and training is well-established but there is limited monitoring.</li> <li>▪ Too few children with disabilities have transition plans to support well-managed moves to adult services.</li> </ul> |
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## Enjoying and achieving

**Grade 3**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. 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.

### Major strengths

- The council's school improvement strategy has contributed well to narrowing the performance gap that exists between schools. The school improvement service uses data effectively to identify those that are not performing well and target intervention.
- Children and young people, including most vulnerable groups, make good progress from low starting points. The sustained trend of improvement at all key stages is faster than that occurring in similar councils and nationally.
- Their standard of attainment is rising at a faster rate and is now in line with similar councils and the national average.
- Attendance rates have improved and are now slightly above those of similar councils and national averages. Similarly, fixed term and permanent exclusion levels are much lower than the national average and those in similar councils.
- The increasing number of schools that have been graded good or better in their most recent inspections. More schools have been removed from a category of concern than in previous years.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The attendance and achievement of looked after children are below average.

## Making a positive contribution

**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

- An outstanding range of well-coordinated, exciting, and engaging methods of consultation provides children and young people, including marginalised, vulnerable and hard to reach groups and individuals, with extensive opportunities to participate and contribute to the community. Innovations have gained national recognition and awards. Children and young people feel their views make a difference.
- Very high levels of looked after children contribute to their own plans and reviews.
- Vulnerable groups contribute well to wider service developments, which has a real impact on improving services or facilities, such as housing for the most vulnerable.
- The outstanding focus on providing more and better positive activities is responsive to children and young people's views and results in improvements in parks and play spaces and high take up of community and youth activities.
- Partnerships have been outstandingly successful in reducing the numbers of young people who offend and re-offend at a faster rate than in similar councils in the region and nationally.

<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The proportion of young people in the youth justice system who are in EET is too low.</li> </ul> |
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## 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><b>Major strengths</b></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A high proportion of vulnerable young people live in decent housing.</li> <li>▪ The percentage of young people achieving Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications by age 19 are rising at a faster rate than in comparable councils and are above the national average at level 2. The percentage of young people achieving Level 3 qualifications is above that achieved by similar councils.</li> <li>▪ The implementation of the high quality 14–19 Strategy provides a diverse range of curriculum opportunities for 14- to 19-year-olds and is already having an impact on reducing the number of young people NEET and retaining some groups with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in employment Post-16.</li> </ul> |
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<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Too few looked after children have pathway plans and personal advisers.</li> <li>▪ A high proportion of young people between the ages of 16 to 18 from minority ethnic background are NEET.</li> </ul> |
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## Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

**Grade 4**

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is outstanding and its management of these services is good. The council's self-evaluation of the grade for this area was accurate in nearly all respects. The extent and depth of needs assessments and local planning is very good across all services. Senior managers, council elected members and a range of partners give outstanding leadership in the direction of services for children and young people. The extent and depth of needs assessments at local level is very good across all services. As a result of excellent partnership work there is a recent history of delivery of innovative solutions to problems particularly for engaging young people at 14 to 19. The council has made exceptional progress in involving children and young people and their families at all levels in strategic planning and in judging effectiveness of provision. These arrangements have gained national awards for good practice. The successful focus on equalities and diversity is closing gaps in outcomes. Children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds are achieving well at all key stages. Boys'

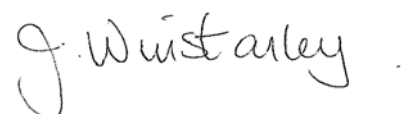
achievement is improving at a very fast rate against the national trend as is the rate of progress made by children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Sustainable resources have been secured to help vulnerable groups, support families and improve the stability of placements and achievement for looked after children.

<b>Major strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Ambition is outstanding and based on a clear vision, strong leadership and very effective strategic partnership.</li><li>▪ An excellent culture for change is evident at all levels and across partner organisations. The understanding and commitment to the recent changes has resulted in better integrated working at a local level with a good focus on individual needs.</li><li>▪ The focus on priorities is sustained and there is a good track record of improvement in all services and outcomes. Services undertake very good, detailed and insightful needs analysis.</li><li>▪ Many local developments including the ambitious 14–19 Strategy, a broadening curriculum, children's centres, extended schools and school re-organisation programmes are well underway and already showing benefits. Resources are directed to meet the need of priority services and programmes.</li></ul>
<b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Limited impact on closing the gap in some health inequalities.</li></ul>

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



Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection