

9 December 2010

Ms Louise Goll  
Corporate Director of Children and Young People  
Somerset County Council  
County Hall  
Taunton  
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Dear Ms Goll

## Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This performance profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the local authority has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).

In reaching the assessment of children's services in Somerset County Council, Ofsted has taken account of all inspected and regulated services for children and young people, arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against national measures. More weight has been given to the outcomes of Ofsted's inspections and regulatory visits (Blocks A and B in the performance profile).

The annual assessment derives from a four point scale:

4	Performs excellently	An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
3	Performs well	An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements
2	Performs adequately	An organisation that meets only minimum requirements
1	Performs poorly	An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements

Within each level there will be differing standards of provision. For example, an assessment of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, an assessment of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects. As in 2009, while the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's assessment, the minimum requirements for each grade outlined in the guidance do not alone define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

## Somerset County Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Somerset County Council perform well, as they did in 2009.

The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The overall quality of education and day care provision for very young children is good. Pupil referral units are good but primary schools, secondary schools and school sixth forms are only adequate and special schools are poor. Further education college provision is good overall. The local authority's fostering and adoption services are good. Three of its eight children's homes are only adequate and another is inadequate.

The local authority's front-line child protection services have a number of strengths and three areas needing development. However, the aspects which are satisfactory or strong considerably outweigh those which need development. The local authority takes good steps to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements.

Performance measures show that a very large majority of outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better. This includes a very large majority of the main measures of educational attainment. Test and examinations results at all ages are broadly in line with the average in similar areas. The rates of improvement over recent years up to 2008/9 have almost all been significantly below the national average. However, provisional figures for both at the age of 11 and 16 in 2009/10 show improvement which is above the national trend. The achievement of children and young people from low-income families is below the average for this group elsewhere, particularly so at the age of 16 and 19. The achievement in national tests of those with special educational needs is also below average.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve the quality of provision for children and young people with special educational needs.
- Improve the quality of children's homes run by the local authority.
- Improve the educational attainment of young people from low-income families.

### Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of services give good encouragement and support to children and young people to lead healthy lives. The numbers of children who are seriously overweight at the age of five and 11 are very close to the average for similar areas. However, both figures have gone up in recent years and the comparative picture has worsened. The number of children and young people who regularly take part in sport is broadly average but here too the recent rate of change does not compare well

with elsewhere. The number of young women aged under 18 who become pregnant is higher than the average in similar areas and the reduction over the last decade has been modest, broadly matching the national picture.

The very large majority of individual services such as schools make a good contribution to helping children and young people stay safe. The local authority's front-line child protection services have a number of strengths and three areas needing development. However, the aspects which are satisfactory or strong considerably outweigh those which need development. Good progress has been made in improving multi-agency working and, in particular, in improving the early identification of problems and the provision of support before they become very serious. The local authority takes good steps to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements. The local authority's fostering and adoption services are good and when it buys extra help of this kind from private and voluntary organisations this is also good. However, the average length of care placement has gone down and is now much worse than the national average. Three of the eight children's homes run by the local authority itself are only satisfactory and another is inadequate. However, when it buys places in private and voluntary sector homes these are mainly good. There has been progress over the last few years in reducing both the number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents and the number of serious injuries to young people more generally. The number of children and young people who say they have been bullied is broadly in line with the average in similar areas.

The overall quality of education and day care provision for very young children is good and similar to the national average. Pupil referral units are also good. However, primary and secondary schools are only adequate and worse than nationally. Pupil achievement at the age of five and 11 is very close to the average in similar areas. However, at the age of 16 it is below. Achievement for children aged five has improved substantially over recent years, but at the age of 11 and 16 the rate of improvement up to 2008/9 was less than nationally and significantly so at the age of 16. However, provisional figures for both ages 11 and 16 in 2009/10 show improvement which is above the national trend. The number of primary schools failing to meet minimum requirements for pupil attainment has fluctuated, but with a recent rise. For secondary schools the number has gone down. However, there is now one inadequate school whereas there were none last year. Both behaviour and attendance in secondary schools are broadly average. At the age of 11 the achievement of children and young people from low-income families is below the average for this group elsewhere, although some good progress has been made in improving their performance and narrowing the gap between them and other children. At the age of 16, however, performance is well below the average in similar areas, there has been little improvement over recent years, and the gap has widened. The achievement in national tests of young people with special educational needs is below average, both at the age of 11 and 16. Also, the quality of special schools is poor overall and substantially below the national average. These schools provide for most of the pupils with the highest levels of need, many of whom are unable to take national tests.

The proportion of young people involved in organised group activities outside school is close to the average in similar areas, as is the number who say they have taken drugs or been drunk recently. Re-offending by young people is slightly higher than in similar areas, although the youth offending team works reasonably well. Good arrangements are in place within the very large majority of services to seek young people's views and involve them in decision-making. However, the position in the local authority's own children's homes is comparatively weak in such respects.

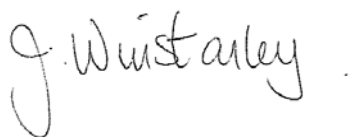
The very large majority of services give good support to young people to help them do well in later life. Further education college provision is comparatively good and caters for a very large majority of students aged 16-19 in the area. Three of the colleges are outstanding. However, the overall quality of school sixth forms is only adequate and below the national average. The proportion of young people staying on in education or training when they reach school leaving age is broadly comparable with that in similar areas, but the number aged 16 to 18 involved in education, work or training is much higher. By the age of 19 the proportion of young people achieving qualifications equal to five good GCSEs is broadly in line with the similar area average, as it is for those achieving qualifications equal to two good A levels. However, the rate of improvement over recent years has been significantly less than nationally in both cases. At the age of 19 the achievement of young people from low-income families is well below the average for this group elsewhere and the rate of improvement over recent years has been comparatively slow.

### **Prospects for improvement**

The local authority and its partners have a good grasp of local needs, not least because very effective steps are taken to obtain the views of children and young people themselves. This knowledge is used to set clear and appropriate improvement priorities. Collaborative working generally between the local authority and its partners is good. The track record of improvement over recent years is, however, mixed and in the broad area of educational provision it has not been strong overall. However, the very latest provisional figures for pupils aged 11 and 16 indicate a better increase than nationally. The improvement record is a better one in the area of safeguarding. This is particularly so in terms of arrangements to identify and deal with problems early.

This children's services assessment is provided in accordance with section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment