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17 December 2008

Ms Liz Nicholson  
Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services  
Shropshire County Council  
Children & Young People's Services  
Shirehall  
Abbey Foregate  
Shrewsbury  
Shropshire  
SY2 6ND

Dear Ms Nicholson

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Shropshire 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	4
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	4
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

Shropshire County Council delivers a good service to improve the outcomes for the majority of children and young people. Health needs are very well supported, particularly for vulnerable groups. Very high engagement in education, employment and training demonstrates the council’s commitment to achieving economic well-being. There are a few weaknesses in staying safe, enjoying and achieving, and making a positive contribution and these areas are judged good. The council has a comprehensive awareness of safeguarding issues but there are weaknesses in the timeliness of core assessments and the placement stability of looked after children. Continuing strong support for schools and colleges ensures that standards and achievement are very high. However, the proportion of looked after children entered for GCSE or equivalent and their performance at that level have declined. Children and young people take advantage of the good range of opportunities to influence the work of the council. However, looked after children do not have formal access to the elected members who act as their corporate parents.

The council has made a good response to many of the issues raised in last year’s APA, however, the reduction in the number of looked after children who offend is low, as is the attendance of a particular group of looked after children.

## 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.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Health needs, including health inequalities, are well understood and linked to provision of services through effective joint commissioning. This leads to improved health outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and their families, for example, the Confidential Health and Advice Service for Teenagers.</li> <li>▪ Well-embedded consultation on all aspects of health and well-being includes vulnerable groups and results in positive change and improvement.</li> <li>▪ Looked after children have the opportunity to contribute directly to their personal health plans and reviews in a format designed to encourage their input and ownership.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p>

## 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 a number of important weaknesses. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The local arrangements for responding to safeguarding issues are comprehensive and well understood across the partnership. This leads to effective multi-agency assessment and support services.</li> <li>▪ Strategies and protocols are well established to ensure information about the needs of children and their families is effectively shared. This leads to the early identification of potential risk and prompt provision of information, support and guidance. All workers are aware of, and routinely use, a wide range of high quality services that prevent, wherever possible, the need for children to become or remain looked after.</li> <li>▪ Planning and review arrangements for children with a child protection plan and who are looked after appear good compared with similar councils and nationally.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The low number and timeliness of core assessments for children are well below statistical neighbours.</li> <li>▪ There is insufficient sustained improvement in placement stability and adoption compared with similar councils.</li> <li>▪ Shropshire has had two serious case reviews. The process for contributing to and completion of serious case reviews lacks sufficient rigour.</li> </ul>

## Enjoying and achieving

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> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Standards and achievement are consistently above national averages and better than statistical neighbours. Results at the end of Key Stage 4 are well above average and demonstrate excellent progress for children and young people in secondary schools.</li> <li>▪ Attendance in schools has improved and is better than statistical neighbours and the national average.</li> <li>▪ Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported with a higher proportion than nationally being educated in mainstream schools.</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>▪ The proportion of looked after children who miss 25 days at school has risen and remains high compared with statistical neighbours and nationally.</li> <li>▪ The proportion of looked after children in Year 11 sitting at least one GCSE/equivalent examination has declined and, for the last two years, has been below the averages nationally and for similar councils. There has been a decline in the proportion of those leaving care with one GCSE grade at A*-G or equivalent in 2007/08.</li> </ul> |
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## 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 areas for development in this outcome area underestimates a number of 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>▪ Very good involvement of young people, including those in vulnerable groups, in service planning, design and delivery.</li> <li>▪ Very strong support from the youth service for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities leads to improved Every Child Matters outcomes.</li> <li>▪ Good reduction in first time offenders in youth justice system because of effective prevention initiatives.</li> <li>▪ Looked after children demonstrate effective communication skills and have the confidence to speak out on issues that matter to them for example the design of their annual celebration evening. Care leavers report extremely positive experiences and are supported well to achieve their aspirations.</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>▪ The rate of offending by looked after children has risen and remains high.</li> <li>▪ Looked after children do not meet formally with elected members as corporate parents to ensure their collective views are heard and acted upon.</li> </ul> |
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## Achieving economic well-being

**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.

<b>Major strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Well above average proportion of young people in education, employment or training after the age of 16.</li> <li>▪ A high proportion of young people who gain Level 2 or 3 qualifications before the age of 19.</li> <li>▪ Good support for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities when transferring to adult services ensures that a better than average proportion enter work-based learning.</li> <li>▪ Young people leaving care receive suitable accommodation and good practical and emotional support to help them live independently.</li> </ul>
<b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b>

## Capacity to improve, including the management of children’s services

**Grade 3**

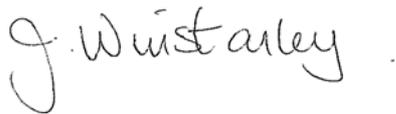
The council’s capacity to improve its services for children and young people and its management of these services is good. Several aspects of the council’s work remain outstanding. Strong leadership and ambition which engages partners has maintained very high standards in schools. Restructuring within children’s services has strengthened the ability to improve further. However, the self-evaluation did not take sufficient account of areas which were identified last year for improvement and which have remained static or slightly worsened. For example the number of looked after children who offend or who miss more than 25 days school in a year. The council has put in appropriate plans to tackle issues raised in the recent JAR.

<b>Major strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Well developed strategic overview and guidance.</li> <li>▪ Very good arrangements for commissioning and working with voluntary organisations are in place and these increase capacity to meet the diverse needs of children and young people.</li> <li>▪ Effective use of the common assessment framework to deliver high quality multi-agency support.</li> </ul>
<b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Underperformance in some key areas which have not improved since last year.</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

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