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Ms Janet Donaldson
Director of Services for Children, Young People and Families
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
Level 10 Civic Centre
PO Box 40
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Dear Ms Donaldson

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Oldham 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	2
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	2
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	3
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	2

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale
4: outstanding/excellent; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate*

Overall effectiveness of children’s services

Grade 2

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council delivers services for children and young people that meet minimum requirements. The council’s capacity to improve, including its management of services is adequate. The very recent JAR found that ambition for children was strong and the council takes a strong lead in promoting community cohesion. However, the review identified important weaknesses in relation to strategic and financial planning along with the monitoring and evaluation of provision.

The APA 2006/07 judged overall effectiveness of children’s services as adequate and this continues to be the case. Good progress has been made in tackling some areas for improvement, notably numbers of re-registrations and timeliness of initial and core assessments and staying safe is now judged good. Other areas are beginning to show improvement, for example numbers of young people in education, employment or training including young offenders. Outcomes for enjoying and achieving remain adequate. At GCSE, significantly more young people obtained five passes at grades A* to C in 2007 and this is now in line with the national picture. The rate of improvement was better than in similar areas and nationally. However, although standards at Key Stages 1 and 3 and the proportion of learners achieving Levels 2 and 3 qualifications by age 19 are showing some signs of improvement, this has not been sufficient to close the gap and outcomes remain below the national average. Good outcomes have been maintained in relation to being healthy, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being. Outcomes for vulnerable young people are variable. For example, the safeguarding of looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good but their achievement is adequate. Additionally, the number of young people excluded from secondary schools is increasing and is particularly high for these two vulnerable groups.

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outstanding multi-agency action has reduced the number of conceptions amongst 15 to 17 year olds. There is a very significant reduction of 32.8% from the base year (1998) which is a great deal better than the national reduction of 13.3%. ▪ Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) waiting times for non-specialist cases for under four weeks is 67.2% compared to the national average of 38.8%. Specialist cases are also seen very quickly. ▪ Innovative multi-agency work for children and young people with life limiting illnesses is very good.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Infant mortality rates are significantly higher than the England average. |
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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 for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major Strengths

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Well targeted action to tackle an area for improvement in the 2006/07 APA has significantly improved the timeliness of initial and core assessments which are now better than in similar areas and nationally. ▪ Effective safeguarding arrangements are in place as shown by the number of re-registrations which reduced markedly in the last year. ▪ Looked after children receive good quality care and their long-term placement stability is better than in similar areas. ▪ The fostering service was judged outstanding in 2007/08. |
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Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Although improved in 2007/08, the proportion of re-referrals remains higher than in similar areas and the national average. ▪ Although action has been recently taken to accelerate implementation of the common assessment framework, in 2007–08 it was slow. |
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Enjoying and achieving

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The council's self-evaluation underestimates some important weaknesses. Although some improvements were made and standards are generally in line with those found in similar councils, they have not yet reached national averages in all key stages.

Major Strengths

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standards in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 have continued to improve at a steady rate since 2003 and are in line with similar councils and national averages. National recognition was received in 2007 for achievement at Level 4. ▪ Significant improvements have been made at Key Stage 4 in 2007 in the proportion achieving five GCSE A* to C passes, bringing standards into line with national averages. The proportion achieving those grades including English and mathematics is also improved. ▪ Standards in sixth forms are good, particularly at A-Level where they are higher |
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than those found in similar councils and nationally, and the trend of improvement continues.

- The school improvement strategy continues to be very effective as shown by the improvements in standards at Key Stage 4 and the fact that no schools have been placed in an Ofsted category following inspection.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Standards at Key Stage 1 are broadly in line with similar councils but have not improved fast enough to bring them into line with national averages particularly in reading and mathematics.
- At Key Stage 3 the proportion achieving Level 5 or better in English is in line with similar councils. The improvement seen in 2007 enabled the council to recover the ground it lost in 2006. Standards in mathematics and science are improving but, like English, remain below national averages.
- The educational achievement of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate. However, the council does not yet make best use of available data to raise standards for this group in mainstream secondary schools; its work on this is at an early stage of development. Additionally, a higher than average proportion of those with statements of special educational needs who are placed in mainstream secondary schools receive fixed-term exclusions.
- Permanent exclusions for those in secondary schools have increased. Exclusions of looked after children, both fixed-term and permanent, are high in comparison with others.

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 weaknesses for this outcome area underestimates the importance of two key areas for development.

Major strengths

- The Children and Young People Plan is well informed by the views of children and young people and suitably reflects their priorities.
- Very good action is taken to involve all children and young people, including those from vulnerable groups, in decision-making. An inclusive and effective youth council plays an important role in service planning.
- The proportion of looked after children contributing to each review of their care has improved significantly and is greater than the national average.
- Effective multi-agency action reduces first-time offending, which is notably lower than in similar areas.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Re-offending rates are higher than in similar areas and nationally.

- Evaluation of the impact of all children and young people's involvement in decision-making is under developed.

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.

Major strengths

- Participation and success rates in work-based learning are above national averages.
- An extensive range of vocational opportunities is provided to 14 to 16 year olds through successful collaborative partnerships.
- The participation of young people in education, employment or training has increased, notably amongst teenage mothers where the proportion is higher than is found nationally.
- The quality of provision in both colleges was recently judged outstanding and standards achieved are in line with or better than national averages.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The proportion of 19 year olds achieving Level 3 qualifications is well below national average.
- The proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in education, employment or training remains too low.

Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

Grade 2

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is adequate and its management of these services is adequate. The Children, Young People and Families Directorate has a relatively new senior management team and is facing major challenges including financial uncertainty. Medium-term financial planning is not yet sufficient. The council's ambition for improving services is good and well focussed on raising aspirations. Leaders have a good understanding of the relationship between attainment, regeneration and community cohesion with the Children, Young People and Families Directorate taking a prominent role. Successful initiatives are in place and have increased young people's understanding of different communities and cultures. There is a good focus on engaging the harder-to-reach and the most vulnerable and this is having an impact for some young people on their attitudes and motivation.

Performance monitoring and management are adequate. Overview and scrutiny arrangements have been weak overall and, although they have improved, it is too soon to identify impact. There has been a good focus on tackling high risk and low

performing areas. In children's social care there is evidence of action leading to improved performance and service delivery. There continues to be strong support for school improvement. Good progress has been made on workforce development. New systems are in place which will better support a focus on performance but the understanding of the impact of activities on outcomes is not secure.

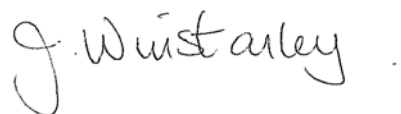
Prioritisation is adequate. Suitable priorities are appropriately targeted on areas of weaker performance, but resources to support the Children and Young People Plan are not identified across all partners. The council's financial position is facing significant challenge and uncertainty regarding possible efficiency reductions. The analysis of value-for-money is insufficiently developed. Some mechanisms to support the delivery of priorities, for example Building Schools for the Future, face risks to their delivery and the outcome is uncertain. Joint commissioning is developing effectively but slowly. Although some services are already commissioned, a joint commissioning strategy is not yet established.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The council has good ambition with a strong focus on promoting community cohesion. ▪ Well targeted action has brought about improvement in children's social care during 2007/08. ▪ Strong support for school improvement has raised standards and contributed to there being no schools placed in an Ofsted category of concern following inspection.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategic planning, medium-term financial planning and systematic analysis of value-for-money are not sufficiently robust. The potential impact of the council's uncertain financial position is unclear. ▪ Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of provision on outcomes is underdeveloped. ▪ There is a lack of pace in progressing key strategies such as the early intervention and prevention strategy and the inclusion strategy.

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".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection