

17 December 2008

Mr Colin Diamond
Director of Children and Young People's Services
North Somerset Council
Town Hall
Walliscote Grove Road
Weston-super-Mare
BS23 1UJ

Dear Mr Diamond

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

North Somerset Council delivers services for children and young people that are consistently above minimum requirements for users. There is evidence of innovative practice and very effective contributions to the quality of services for children and young people in the community. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services is outstanding. Very effective leadership and targeted planning with key partners have led to improved outcomes across all five areas with ambitious plans for the future following thorough analysis of performance.

Developments have continued to build on the positive outcomes for being healthy, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being outlined in the joint area review published in October 2006 and last year's APA. This has led to improved outcomes in both of these areas with excellent contributions from the council. Effective developments have continued in staying safe and enjoying and achieving and the outcomes for these areas are good, in line with the council's self-assessment. On the basis of the judgements reached across all Every Child Matters outcomes together with the council's capacity to improve and management of its services, there is evidence of good overall improvement with excellent potential to build on progress made. This leads to a judgement of good for the overall effectiveness of the council's children's services rather than the self-assessment grade of outstanding.

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.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The teenage pregnancy strategy has been one of the most successful in the country impacting strongly on a reduction in teenage conceptions. ▪ All specialist Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) cases are seen in four weeks, a reduction in waiting times and considerably better than other councils. Research indicates superior recovery from specialist mental health symptoms following treatment compared with national figures for CAMHS. ▪ Health assessments and dental checks for looked after children have shown a consistently high take-up of both services. Rates continue to be higher than similar councils.
Important weaknesses and areas for development

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Safeguarding Children Board is effective with good partnership and participation. Timeliness of initial assessments has improved and is now better than similar councils and nationally. Timeliness of core assessments has improved and is similar to other councils. Long-term stability of placements for looked after children has improved and is better than similar councils and nationally. There is a very high use of foster placements.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of looked after children has continued to increase and is now higher than similar councils. The number of repeat referrals has continued to increase and is now higher than similar councils.

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.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective integrated strategy for children under the age of five covering health, childcare and preparation for learning well linked to the roll-out of children's centres. High standards achieved in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 which are above national figures. Well led and effective school improvement strategy which is valued by schools.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foundation stage profile results for personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy development show good improvement for 2006/07 but remain below the national average.

- GCSE outcomes in 2006/07 are above the national average but some unevenness between schools keeps year-on-year rise modest. Improved value added measures for Key Stages 2 to 4 remain a challenge with strong Key Stage 2 standards.

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

- Participation of looked after children is outstanding including continued engagement with elected members, a peer buddy system and a higher percentage of participation in reviews than similar councils and nationally.
- The youth offending team is well regarded and successfully works in partnership to engage young people in a preventative way. For example, disaffected young people and those at risk of offending have been engaged through personalised learning plans and a range of services and activities.
- Young people are actively engaged in school councils and representatives are involved in the Youth Parliament. Opportunities are used very effectively to promote young people positively within the local community, an example being the arrangement of a 'summit' meeting between young people and senior representatives of the local media to exchange views, to encourage positive portrayal of young people and their achievements.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

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.

Major strengths

- Good progress is being made in developing 14–19 options with the introduction of two diplomas in 2008 and a further six in 2009. There are strong partnerships between schools and the college at Weston-super-Mare.
- Excellent performance has been maintained in allocating a personal adviser to every eligible looked after child.
- Good progress has been made with the provision of educational support and

information, advice and guidance for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through a multi-disciplinary approach.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Although all looked after children have a personal adviser a few do not have a pathway plan.

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 also excellent. The Children's Trust Management Board (CTMB) is well established and has very effective links to the Local Safeguarding Children Board and Strategic Schools' Forum (SSF). Continuity in planning and monitoring is reinforced by the CTMB and SSF having the same independent chair. Objectives and targets are clearly set out in an exemplary CYPP based on the views of service users, long-term aspirations, joint work with other agencies and partners together with excellent analysis of outcomes. At strategic level, needs analysis has been fundamental to the effective prioritisation at both a geographical level and in relation to vulnerable groups. Children and Young People's Services is very well led with its capacity further enhanced by effective partnerships with schools and other key agencies. Very effective performance management by the council demonstrates delivery of clear priorities within a framework where partners and service users contribute to decision-making, robust monitoring and the development of a professional, motivated staff. Performance indicators are drawn from statutory indicators, which allow for benchmarking, and localised indicators to address key areas of concern. Accountability is underlined through formal reports each quarter to elected members outlining the outcomes of key corporate performance indicators.

Major strengths

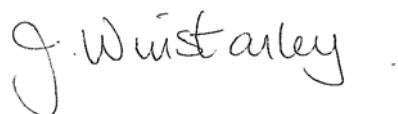
- CTMB is very effective with excellent links to the Local Safeguarding Children Board and SSF.
- Objectives and targets are very clearly set out in the CYPP based on views of children and young people and parents/carers, long-term aspirations, work with other agencies and analysis of outcomes. At strategic level, needs analysis has been very effective in developing priorities at both a geographical level and in relation to vulnerable groups.
- Children and Young People's Service is an able and very well led team. Capacity is further enhanced by effective advances in partnerships with schools and other key partners.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

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 "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection