

9 December 2010

Mr Paul Moffat  
Corporate Director of Children's Services  
Northumberland County Council  
County Hall, Morpeth  
Northumberland NE61 2EF

Dear Mr Moffat

## **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, 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.

## Northumberland County Council children's services assessment 2010

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs well (3)</b>
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Children's services in Northumberland County Council perform well.

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Most early years and childcare settings are at least good, as are the primary and secondary schools, including most schools' sixth forms. The special schools, the pupil referral unit, the four local authority children's homes and the independent specialist college are good or better. The local adoption agency is good. There is, however, some less strong provision. The general further education and tertiary college is only adequate, as are five school sixth forms. The fostering agency is adequate. Only half of the private and voluntary children's homes are good and one independent special school is adequate.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much that was strong and no areas for priority action.

The very large majority of national performance measures show that outcomes are at least in line with or above the averages for England or similar areas. Results at age 16 match those in similar areas, but at age 11 they are below. Children and young people with special educational needs and those from low-income families do less well than others of the same age nationally. In recent years there has been a rise in the number of young people achieving good qualifications by the age of 19 and more 16- to 18-year-olds are in work, education or training.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve education outcomes for children and young people who have special educational needs and those from low-income families.
- Improve overall results at age 11.

### Outcomes for children and young people

Nearly all schools, the majority of early years settings and children's homes are good at encouraging children and young people to live healthy lives. The take-up of school lunches is good, and fewer children than in similar authorities are overweight at the age of 11. More young people take part in sport. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is falling at a faster rate than nationally. The review of the 2009-2010 Children and Young People's Plan clearly identifies the need to continue to support families and target specific localities across this large county. This is confirmed by inspections. For example, a recent inspection of a children's centre reported that parents praise activities that encourage them to

provide healthy food for their children, and there are classes to help pregnant mums and young parents to give up smoking. However, in this particularly locality, smoking rates remain much higher than in the rest of the county.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always good. The inspection of front-line social care services reported that managers of local teams work well together to deliver reliable safeguarding services. Consistency in practice is maintained across this large county with good scope to respond to local needs. Every effort is made to ensure that children in care have stability in their lives and children referred to social care services are assessed quickly. Ofsted's inspections of schools and colleges confirm that staff know how to protect children from harm and are clear about their responsibilities. The majority of children and young people report that they feel safe and, overall, the proportion who feel bullied are not worse than in similar areas. The Family and Children's Trust has rightly identified the need to analyse the data more carefully and consider issues such as bullying linked to cultural differences, domestic violence or anti-social behaviour.

The very large majority of childcarers, primary, secondary and special schools are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. The pupil referral unit is also good. However, in some primary and middle schools, the progress children make in English and mathematics between the ages of seven to 11 is too slow and, despite improvement, some schools do not reach the expected levels. Over several years now results in national tests have been below similar areas. The local authority recognises that some primary and middle schools require intensive support. Standards have risen steadily in the secondary schools and, by the age of 16, young people do as well as in similar areas in their GCSE examinations. Provisional results for 2010 show further improvement. Behaviour in secondary schools is almost always good and the number of secondary pupils who are often absent from school is lower than in similar areas. Young people who are made more vulnerable by their particular circumstances, in particular children and young people with special educational needs and those from low-income families, do not achieve sufficiently highly and results for them are below similar groups nationally.

Children and young people are increasingly involved in improving the services they need. For example, young people were part of the development of the Northumberland Economic Strategy in early 2010 and gave their views on the economy and its impact on their lives. The issues they raised influenced priorities for development in the county. The local authority is adding a new priority to its work for the coming years to ensure that young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have a say and receive better support when they transfer to new provisions or adult life. Inspections show that staff in schools, and in the children's homes, listen to young people well to improve the quality of provision. In some settings more can be done. For example, the inspection of a children's centre reported that more account should be taken of parents' evaluations of services when developing provision. The inspection of the youth offending service judged that the service was performing well. Fewer young people break the law more than once. The local area has taken effective action to reduce the number of young people who break the law for the first time. The review of the Children and Young People's Plan

identifies the need to reduce the numbers of 13- to 15-year-olds who drink too much. Perception of anti-social behaviour is above the rest of the county in the south east.

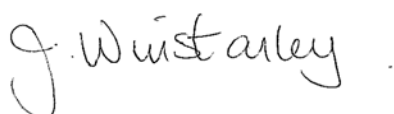
The 2008-2011 Children and Young People's Plan and its 2009-10 review are realistic about what has been achieved to date and identify the weaknesses yet to be addressed. The review gives particular importance to tackling child poverty. It recognises that some groups of young people, often living in challenging contexts, do not do as well as all young people of the same age and need more support to secure a good future. They are, in particular, young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those who offend, young mothers, those leaving care and young people from low-income families. Overall, there has been an increase in the number of young people in Northumberland who gain good qualifications by the age of 19. Young people do as well as in similar areas at that age. However, this is not the case for those from low-income families with fewer achieving good qualifications and progressing to higher education. The number of young people not in work, education or training matches similar areas. Inspections show that schools, including the sixth forms and the special schools, prepare young people well for adult life.

### **Prospects for improvement**

Almost all outcomes for children and young people are improving. The local authority's review of its Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates a good understanding of different localities and the need to address inequalities across this large county. Progress has been made in important areas, such as reducing the number of young women under 18 who get pregnant and securing maximum stability for children in care. The inspection of the youth offending service judged that the service had excellent capacity to improve its performance. The inspection of front-line child protection services found that the review of performance was used well to drive continuous improvement in safeguarding practice. The Families and Children Trust Board is demonstrating its commitment to tackle the slower rate of learning in the final years of primary education through the school reorganisation programme. The challenge of improving standards further, sustaining the viability of rural schools and re-modelling less successful schools is recognised.

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 black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment