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Mr Damian Allen  
Executive Director of Children's Services  
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council  
Education Office  
Huyton Hey Road  
Huyton, Liverpool  
L36 5YH

Dear Mr Allen

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Knowsley 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> Data yet to be confirmed

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	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	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**

The overall effectiveness of children's services has improved since the previous annual performance assessment and is good. There is clear evidence of progress in responding to the recommendations of the joint area review (JAR) report, published in February 2008, which judged local services for safeguarding to be adequate and sought additional impetus for improving some education outcomes. The council's capacity to improve is good. It continues to improve outcomes for children and young people from low baselines whilst driving through an ambitious programme to transform education provision across the borough.

Within the staying safe outcome there are strong examples of preventative work and innovative practice having a positive impact. For example the work undertaken to successfully reduce bullying. The contribution to improving outcomes in health, positive contribution and achieving economic well-being continue to be good. These are achieved well through participation and effective partnership working at both strategic and locality level. Working against a challenging set of demographic factors the local partnership led by the council has reduced the local teenage conception rate more quickly than the England average. The integrated youth and youth offending services are bringing about a reduction in the number of young people who re-offend although the number of first time entrants remains high. The percentage of school leavers going on to full time education has increased and the successful completion of apprenticeships is outstanding.

The innovative approach to 14–19 provision in the area has achieved notable improvements against some key performance measures. Some developments, however, are too recent to determine their impact. Many students achieve well overall in secondary schools and value added scores exceed those nationally between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. Despite this, GCSE results are low. Rates of school attendance are improving but persistent absence from a small minority remains an important problem. The overall number of young people who are not in employment, education or training is reducing and the numbers following work-based learning including apprenticeships is high. Whilst improvement in many outcomes it is evident, the challenge remains to achieve education outcomes for children and young people in Knowsley that compare favourably in all respects with those found in similar council areas and the England average.

## **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

- Numbers of teenage conceptions have decreased over the years. Overall there has been a decrease of 26.5% since the baseline was set in 1998. This is a significantly greater reduction than that found in similar council areas or the England average.
- Infant mortality rates are low when compared to similar areas or the average in England. This is a notable achievement.
- Young people with substance misuse problems are well supported. A successful approach to early intervention and support ensures that 22% of known abusers under 18-year-olds receive treatment compared with 11% in the North West.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Despite good improvements this year, the overall numbers of women initiating breast-feeding remains low. Currently only 33.2% of women choose to initiate breast-feeding compared with 68.3% in similar areas.
- The number of children with dental cavities remains above that of similar areas.

## Staying safe

## Grade 3

Current information indicates that the council has made progress in the area of staying safe. However, the staying safe grade is provisional, pending the outcome of the serious case review which is currently being completed. Once this has been completed and assessed, Ofsted will confirm the provisional grade or revise if necessary.

### Major strengths

- Excellent strategies are in place to ensure instances of bullying remain low. A recent national survey of young people's views reports 72% of those living in Knowsley have never been bullied compared with the national average of 56%.
- There have been significant improvements in the timeliness of initial assessments and core assessments and these now compare well against similar council areas.
- Looked after children are provided with good quality placements, for example adoption and fostering services were judged to be good in their most recent inspections.
- All looked after children and all children subject to a child protection plan are allocated to a qualified social worker.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The number of looked after children is now above the average found in similar areas and well above the England average.
- The percentage of reviews of looked after children fell to 85% last year and is now below the performance of similar councils and the England average.

## Enjoying and achieving

**Grade 2**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. This is in line with the council's self-assessment. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

### Major strengths

- The quality of provision in early years settings is good. Outcomes for children at age five significantly improved in 2008.
- The council makes good use of data to identify underachieving schools, set targets and provide support to raise standards. Levels of attainment at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 have steadily improved in recent years. Contextual value added measures from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 were above the national mean in 2007. Recent unvalidated data indicates the trend of improvement has been sustained.
- The proportion of primary schools judged good or better for overall effectiveness is above the national average. Children make good progress to achieve standards that are broadly in line with the average of similar areas and national averages at Key Stage 2.
- Fixed term exclusion rates have reduced and are below average in both primary and secondary schools. Those who are excluded receive good quality provision in the pupil referral unit.
- Looked after children receive good support and have good levels of achievement. The gap between the achievements of looked after children and all children narrowed at Key Stage 4.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Although improving from a low baseline, standards achieved by children at Key Stages 3 and 4 are below those achieved in similar areas and nationally.
- Five of the ten secondary schools attained below the 30% target for children achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics in 2007.

- Despite good improvements in attendance rates at secondary schools in recent years too many young people do not attend frequently enough. Reducing persistent absence and improving the attendance of looked after children remain key priorities for the council.

## 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 for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

### Major strengths

- An above average proportion of young people in Knowsley are in contact with the youth service.
- There are clear standards in place which enable children and young people in Knowsley to participate effectively.
- The percentage of young people in Knowsley who re-offend is low. It is below that found in similar areas and the England average.
- Looked after children contribute well to their reviews with 95% doing so compared to 91% nationally.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The number of young offenders who are in employment education or training is low. Although it increased in the last quarter from 50.8% to 63.5% the number is significantly below that of similar areas (74.2%) and the England average (72.5%).

## 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

- Many young people choose to attend education and training in neighbouring areas and a direct comparison with similar councils is difficult. The overall rate of improvement in the percentage of young people achieving Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications is five times greater than the national average.
- The percentage of Year 11 school leavers who continue in learning increased in 2007/08 and is now above the national average. The participation of 17- year-olds in education and training also shows a steady improvement.

- The numbers benefiting from apprenticeships has traditionally been very high. The proportion successfully completed is now well above the national average. Apprenticeships are particularly well targeted toward vulnerable groups.
- The 14–19 partnership is well embedded. Students have access to a wide range of curriculum opportunities including vocational education and the development of functional literacy and numeracy skills. Good progress has been made in the delivery of diplomas.
- Outcomes for care leavers are good. The proportion of care leavers engaged in employment, education or training is above the national average.

#### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- Although the overall number of young people who are not in employment, education or training is reducing, the proportion is above the national average and that found in similar councils. This is in part due to the relatively high number of young people who access learning outside the borough at 16 years of age. Disengagement of 18-year-olds also remains a challenge.

### **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 is good. Senior officers and councillors have a strong shared conviction to realise their mission statement and improve the lives of children and young people, and make Knowsley a borough of choice. The areas identified as priorities for improvement through the Local Area Agreement and in the children and young people's plan are appropriate and founded on good analysis of need. Children and young people's views are sought and they have made good contributions to strategic planning. Added impetus to drive forward improvement followed from the JAR last year and many recommendations in the report have been tackled successfully.

The council is driving through an ambitious transformation of education provision across the borough. All secondary schools will be replaced by seven new community-based Centres for Learning in September 2009. As well as creating new governance and leadership models, broadening the curriculum and personalising the approach to teaching and learning, the council is developing the centres to support the delivery of localised services to children and families. Alongside this, the council has demonstrated effective planning by strengthening leadership and management capacity across a number of key areas of service following recommendations from previous inspections. There has been a year-on-year improvement in most of the key outcomes for children and young people. However, the rate of improvement in some key areas such as attainment at Key Stage 3 and the percentage of students achieving five or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics has not been as rapid as similar councils.

<b>Major strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Strong drive and commitment of leaders to implement change and improve provision for children and young people.</li><li>▪ Effective partnership and integrated working at strategic and locality level.</li><li>▪ Good needs analysis including consultation with children and young people.</li><li>▪ Year-on-year improvement in some key outcomes for children and young people from low baselines.</li></ul>
<b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Despite improvements, some key outcomes for children and young people in Knowsley remain stubbornly below those in similar councils.</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".

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection