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17 December 2008

Mr Tony Porter
Acting Director Children's Services
Torbay Council
Oldway
Torquay Road
Paignton
Devon
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Dear Mr Porter

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Torbay 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	2
Staying safe	2
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

Torbay 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. There has been satisfactory progress on most recommendations raised in the joint area review (JAR) 2007. The council is currently undergoing a period of transformation. A newly appointed People’s Commissioner is about to take up post and there have been changes at senior management level within Children’s Services. This has caused some uncertainty, but progress on most priority areas has continued steadily. The council has managed to ensure that the move to locality working and the implementation of the early intervention strategy has not had a detrimental impact on specialist services. Much work has been done since the JAR regarding the development of strategies, for example the anti-bullying and placement strategies. However, it is too soon for the sustained impact of these strategies on outcomes for children and young people to be known. Some priority areas have not shown improvement and in some cases, such as teenage conception rates and the timeliness of the completion of core assessments, performance has deteriorated. For these reasons, the council’s contribution to being healthy and staying safe remains adequate overall. A good contribution has been made to help children and young people make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being. Very good outcomes have been achieved at Key Stage 3, and at Key Stage 4 outcomes were among the most improved nationally in 2007. Standards at Key Stage 1 and 2, however, are not as good and overall, enjoying and achieving is adequate.

Being healthy

Grade 2

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

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High participation of schools in the national Healthy Schools scheme. ▪ Good identification of, and access to, treatment for children and young people who misuse substances. ▪ Good progress towards a comprehensive child and adolescent mental health service.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The teenage conception rate is high and rising and is well above similar councils and national rates. At the current level the council will not meet the 2010 target for reducing teenage pregnancies. ▪ Not all 16- and 17-year-olds with mental health difficulties receive appropriate services.

Staying safe

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimate a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very low rates of children killed or seriously injured on the roads. ▪ The number of referrals to children's social care has reduced and is now lower than both statistical neighbours and England. ▪ The Early Intervention Strategy has led to increased awareness and use of the common assessment framework across partner agencies and effective new threshold criteria have been introduced. ▪ Continuing good performance on the timeliness of initial assessments, which is better than that found in statistical neighbours and nationally. ▪ Very good performance regarding looked after children's reviews being carried out on time.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poor performance regarding the completion of core assessments within timescales, despite a lower volume in 2007/2008. Only 63% of core assessments were completed on time, a rate lower than that found among statistical neighbours and nationally. ▪ Inadequate support for families following de-registration from the child protection register, leading to a high percentage of re-registrations, especially in the area of neglect and emotional abuse. In 2007/2008 re-registrations increased to 17.6%, higher than the rate found among statistical neighbours and nationally. ▪ Permanent placement outcomes for looked after children and young people, especially the low number of children adopted in 2007/2008, which, at 6.1%, was significantly lower than statistical neighbours and the England rate. ▪ The recently introduced anti-bullying strategy is yet to demonstrate impact.

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 analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimate a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths

- The well-focused work of the early years team has led to small but important improvements in outcomes for children at five years of age. Although children's scores remain below national levels, the team have helped reduce the inequalities gap and built firmer foundations for children's future education by boosting both personal and social development and communication language and literacy skills.
- Performance at Key Stage 3 is well above national levels in all Key Stage 3 subjects, especially English.
- Key Stage 4 performance is rapidly improving and was amongst the best nationally in 2007 with more pupils gaining five or more grades A* to C including English and mathematics than the national average. The proportion of pupils leaving school with no qualifications has declined.
- An area wide system to track pupil's performance is helping identify where further help is needed to raise standards, especially at the primary school level.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The attendance rate in 2006/07, including that for looked after children, was at its lowest ever and despite some improvements, 75% of priority schools still showed an unsatisfactory picture in 2007/2008.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are below those in similar councils and nationally. Two primary schools are in an Ofsted category of concern and a high proportion of others gain a satisfactory rather than good grade in inspection. Despite well targeted efforts and some improvements led by the school improvement team, the speed at which pupils are improving is too slow.
- Key Stage 2 results, although improving, remain below those nationally and are not catching up fast enough. Science results were the lowest when compared to those in similar councils.
- There is insufficient capacity to quickly improve school leadership in the primary sector. This undermines the council's strong effort to raise standards in a situation involving substantial number of transient pupils and entry standards below those found nationally.

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

- Children and young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are regularly engaged in decision making and have shaped the priorities of the Children's Trust.

- Integration of the youth service into the locality clusters has improved the reach and effectiveness of the youth service in the Early Intervention programme.
- Good engagement of young offenders in education, employment and training. The rate has been consistently higher than statistical neighbours and the national average over the 2006-2007 two year period.
- Very good performance on looked after children contributing their views to statutory reviews.
- A good youth offending service, impacting on the number of young people re-offending which is lower than that found in statistical neighbours and nationally.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Increasing percentage of looked after children and young people given a final warning/reprimand or convicted during 2007/2008, which is higher than the rate found among statistical neighbours and nationally.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Although there are some outstanding aspects, the council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area give insufficient weight to the impact of the weaknesses identified. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths

- There is excellent strategic development and partnership work on the 14–19 curriculum.
- The number of young people not in education, employment or training has improved and is now well below the national level.
- A high percentage of care leavers aged 19 were in education, employment or training in 2007/08 compared to other councils and compared to the local population of that age.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The proportion of young people who continue in education after Year 11 is in line with statistical neighbours but below the national average. Fewer 17-year-olds participate in education and training, including work based learning when compared to the national average.
- The rate of improvement in the percentage of young people achieving level 2 and level 3 qualifications by age 19 is slower than that of statistical neighbours and the national average.
- The percentage of young people achieving level 2 qualifications by age 19 is in line with statistical neighbours and the national average, rather than above.

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 council remains the key driver on delivery of the priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP), although partnerships within the Children's Trust are maturing and are used well to enhance overall capacity. Leadership is effective and the Acting Director of Children's Service has ensured that adequate momentum has been maintained towards the priorities within both the CYPP and Local Area Agreement. However, while an ambitious and wide-ranging transformation programme is in place which places commissioning at the heart of how it will operate, the restructuring of senior management has led to slower than hoped for progress in some areas, such as the development of the workforce strategy. Although overall the vacancy rate across Children's Services is low, there are some difficulties in recruitment to specialist posts such as within the adoption service. Children's Services are currently working within a difficult budget environment. The council's awareness of its strengths and weaknesses is insufficiently analytical and some areas have been given insufficient weighting in the council's self-assessment. Work has been ongoing with regard to key priorities and recommendations from the 2007 JAR. However, it is too early to see the impact of that work on outcomes in many cases. There have been improvements in some outcome areas during 2007/2008, such as the improved standards at Key Stages 3 and 4.

Some performance indicators do not show sufficient or timely progress and in some cases, for example teenage conceptions, the rates have increased. However, unvalidated local data demonstrates recent rapid improvements in school attendance and the short-term placement stability of looked after children.

Children and young people have been consulted in the development of strategies and services, and this includes those from vulnerable groups. For example, children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been involved in the development of the relationships and sexual health education programme within special schools.

Major strengths

- Capacity is enhanced through good partnership working.
- Effective management has ensured that adequate momentum has been maintained through a significant transitional period.
- High level of agreement regarding priorities for children and young people, which are embedded within the Local Area Agreement.
- Budget savings have been made through good commissioning in the area of school transport.

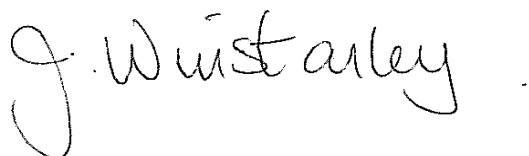
Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Self-assessment does not accurately reflect the position of the council in some outcome areas.
- The cost of placements for the relatively high number of looked after children is creating additional budget pressures.
- Commissioning work is still at an early stage of development.
- Slow progress on some key outcomes such as teenage conception rates and adoption.

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