

9 December 2010

Mr Andy Roberts
Strategic Director for Families
Surrey County Council
County Hall, Room 116
Penrhyn Road, Kingston upon Thames
Surrey, KT1 2DJ

Dear Mr Roberts

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, meeting or not meeting the minimum requirements alone does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

Surrey County Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Surrey County Council perform well. This shows significant improvements in a range of core safeguarding services as well as in other areas.

In 2008, the joint area review judged services for safeguarding to be inadequate. In 2009, outcomes improved and an unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services showed no areas in need of priority action, so the performance of children's services was judged to be adequate. A recent inspection of safeguarding and looked after children found provision for safeguarding remaining adequate because many changes are too recent to show sustained improvement. Setting this alongside notable improvements in other areas, children's services now perform well.

All groups of services and settings that are run by the local authority and inspected by Ofsted are good or outstanding. The large majority show improvement from 2009; most are now better than elsewhere in the country and few are inadequate. All services and settings do particularly well at supporting learning and achievement and at keeping children and young people safe. For the youngest children, childminders and childcare are good, as is the children's centre inspected. Nursery and primary schools are mostly good or outstanding, although three primary schools are inadequate and one needs to improve. Secondary schools are also mostly good or outstanding, although just over one quarter is only satisfactory, one is inadequate and two need to improve. For young people after the age of 16, provision is again mostly good or outstanding although about a quarter of secondary school sixth forms, further education and sixth form colleges are satisfactory and one of two independent specialist colleges is inadequate. Special schools and pupil referral units are good or outstanding overall. For children in care, fostering and adoption agencies are good or outstanding, as are almost all children's homes.

National measures of performance show almost all outcomes are in line with those in similar areas or found nationally, including for educational attainment and progress. Standards that are above average for five-year-olds, and slightly above average for 11-, 16- and 19-year-olds, show consistent improvement. Achievement for pupils from low-income families and for those with special educational needs has also improved. Gaps in attainment for key vulnerable groups are mostly smaller than in similar areas but mostly bigger than found nationally. Most gaps are closing well but that for 16-year-olds with special educational needs has got consistently bigger.

Key areas for further development

- Close the gap in educational attainment for 16-year-olds with special educational needs.
- Consolidate and sustain changes in services for safeguarding.

Outcomes for children and young people

Services and settings are very successful in encouraging children and young people to live healthy lives but services for children in care are inadequate in this respect. More services are now set up for those with emotional and mental health difficulties and these include support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. More children take part in sport regularly, and fewer five-year-olds than in similar areas are too overweight. Parents of disabled children are broadly satisfied with services. Relatively few young women under the age of 18 become pregnant; numbers have reduced quickly but not in all areas of the county. More teenage mothers are now in education, training or work.

Services and settings are also very successful in keeping children and young people safe and safeguarding arrangements for those in care are good. Within the community, fewer children are killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents and fewer are admitted to hospital because they are injured accidentally or deliberately. In front-line child protection services, average numbers of referrals are assessed by social workers in good time, but some have reached this stage because thresholds for accessing services are not clear enough. Most initial and full assessments are carried out on time. Inspection found most were of satisfactory quality and some good, with children and young people involved well. Risk is mostly assessed well and appropriate action ensures their safety. Nearly all meetings to review plans that protect children from harm are held on time. The number of children with these plans has increased significantly; some plans last for longer than they should and some children need another plan after the first one has ended because problems remain. Families are found quickly for children who need to be adopted. Almost all meetings to review plans for children in care are also held on time. Most are in stable placements but some who have short-term placements have a high number of changes.

Services and settings are highly effective at supporting young people to learn and achieve and almost all assessments of special educational needs are carried out on time. The achievement of five-year-olds has improved year on year but more slowly than in similar authorities. Although the gap for those not doing as well in their learning has closed, it has not done so as quickly as in similar authorities and seen nationally. Pupils make expected progress in primary schools but in 2009 did not do as well in tests at the age of 11 as the authority expected, although two more schools met the minimum educational standards for pupil performance. Gaps have closed well for children with special educational needs. All secondary schools continue to meet the minimum standards; more now have good or outstanding standards of behaviour and fewer pupils have poor attendance. At the age of 16, young people in care achieved higher grade examination results on a par with others nationally, showing a consistent rise in standards. As results for all young people have improved, the gap for those from low-income families has got smaller but that for young people with special educational needs has got consistently bigger.

Services and settings are good or outstanding at supporting children and young people to contribute positively to their communities. However, the recent inspection of safeguarding and looked after children found not enough account is taken of their views to improve services. Slightly more than average take part in organised activities outside of school, and young people getting drunk or taking drugs are about the same as in similar areas. Fewer young people now break the law for the first time, fewer than in similar areas do so more than once and fewer are given custodial sentences. Successful work is beginning to reduce the number of young people in care who are involved in crime. Above average numbers who offend are in education, training or work but far fewer now have a suitable place to live.

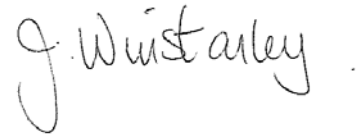
Almost all services and settings are good or outstanding at helping children and young people to achieve economic well-being, with the exception of the authority's fostering agency that is only satisfactory. At the age of 19, young people are increasingly better qualified and the achievement gap for those from low-income families has closed more quickly than elsewhere in the country. More young people than in similar authorities are in education, training or work. For those whose circumstances make them most vulnerable, the authority's apprenticeship scheme supports care leavers, teenage mothers and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. An average numbers of care leavers are now in education, training or work and most have a suitable place to live.

Prospects for improvement

Many outcomes are improving because of strong leadership and management and a number of successful partnerships, although the authority identifies a weakness with children's health partners. Good progress has been made with the Children and Young People's Plan. Its very thorough review shows good priorities and action that has been well targeted. In 2008, Surrey was told by the Government to improve the performance of its social care services. Change has been handled well: strong management of performance, good use of data and good self-evaluation drive improvement, although quality assurance is inconsistent in social care services. There is now a strong focus on the vulnerable and disadvantaged, a better approach to providing services and a priority for them to make a positive difference. Major overhauls of services have been undertaken or are underway and key documents are clear about what differences are expected. The recent inspection of safeguarding and looked after children found adequate capacity for improvement because the impact of plans is not yet wholly evident and change is not yet embedded fully. Secondary schools that are not good enough are making satisfactory progress with at least satisfactory support to do so. One primary school that is inadequate is making good progress because of support from the local authority, but Ofsted's monitoring shows the authority's plans for improving a second primary school were not clear enough. Ofsted's monitoring of satisfactory schools shows at least satisfactory progress. The youth offending service works well. It is performing well against national measures and has good capacity to sustain and improve performance.

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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment