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17 December 2008

Mr Terry Piggott
Executive Director of Children, Schools and Families
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Municipal Offices
Smith Street
Rochdale
OL16 1YD

Dear Mr Piggott

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Rochdale 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.

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	3
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	2
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

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council provides a service that overall delivers above the minimum requirements for users. The council’s service management and capacity to improve are good. Good partnership working contributes to improvements, for example, in the health of children and young people. Nonetheless, there continue to be significant inequalities in some of the health outcomes experienced by children and young people in Rochdale compared with those in similar councils. In some key areas, such as the proportion of young people gaining at least five good GCSE passes and the number of looked after children and care leavers with pathway plans, outcomes have improved. In others, such as standards at Key Stage 2, previous gains have been consolidated. The school improvement service continues to provide clear challenge and good support to schools to improve provision and raise standards. However, some aspects of the council’s work have not seen improvement. For instance, inspection of the fostering service found that good practice in taking the views of children and young people into account is not fully embedded.

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 is accurate, but insufficient weight has been given to some important weaknesses, for example, the impact of actions on sustaining and improving outcomes.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are good child and adolescent mental health services which ensure timely access to support, including almost 100% of children being seen within 26 weeks. Specialist support for 16- to 17-year-olds and 24-hour emergency cover are fully in place. ▪ There are good health services for looked after children, with 85% having an annual health assessment, and 95% receiving their immunisations, compared to the average performance across England of 79.9%. ▪ The rate of reduction in infant mortality is good at 5.4 per 1000 live births, compared to 7.0 per 1000 live births in similar councils.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work has continued to tackle the health inequalities experienced by many children and young people in Rochdale. Despite a significant reduction, the number of teenage conceptions remains higher than in similar councils. Improving outcomes for dental health, obesity and substance misuse also continue to be challenges for the council and its partners.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All children on the child protection register, and looked after children, are allocated to suitably qualified social workers. ▪ Very good performance ensures that 100% of the reviews of children on the child protection register and 90% of reviews of looked after children are held on time. ▪ Recent inspections judged the adoption service to be good. ▪ Repeat referrals are lower than similar councils. Initial assessments increased from 41.7 to 62.4% in line or very similar to similar councils.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In September 2007 Rochdale Local Safeguarding Board identified that the percentage of staff who had received basic child protection training was below their own target of 50%.

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 is accurate but insufficient weight has been given to some important weaknesses such as standards at Key Stages 1 and 3 and levels of attendance.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The trend in improvement in GCSE results is above that seen nationally. There have been significant increases in both the proportion of young people gaining at least five good GCSE passes and those meeting this threshold with passes that include both English and mathematics. Standards are in line with those of comparator councils but below national averages. ▪ The rise in standards at Key Stage 2 in 2006 to broadly in line with national averages was sustained in 2007. From children's starting points, this represents good progress. ▪ There have been improvements to early years provision and outcomes since the 2007 APA. Although below average, the proportion of children reaching the level of development expected for their age overall and with regard to their personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy rose in 2007. The proportion of good or better childcare providers has risen markedly to slightly below average.

- Support for schools causing concern is good.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Standards at Key Stages 1 and 3 are in line with those of comparator councils but below national averages: the gap to the national average is not closing.
- The performance of looked after children varies considerably year-on-year. Although the percentage of care leavers with at least one GCSE is very good, the percentage of looked after children entered for at least one GCSE dropped significantly in 2007. The percentage of looked after children who missed more than 25 days of schooling in the last academic year rose and is well above that found in comparator councils and nationally.
- Levels of attendance in both primary and secondary schools are below those found in comparator councils and nationally. Although attendance is rising in both phases, in primary schools this rise is at a slower rate than found in similar areas and 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 is accurate, but insufficient weight has been given to some important weaknesses, for example, the impact of actions on sustaining and improving outcomes.

Major strengths

- There is a strong culture of participation. Young people are consulted on the developments of a wide range of services and represented on a number of panels.
- There are good opportunities for children and young people to contribute both in and outside school; there are school councils in all secondary schools, 70% of primary and 25% of special schools.
- Children and young people made a good contribution to the identification of appropriate outcomes in the refreshed Children and Young People's Plan.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The recent inspection of fostering services judged opportunities for children in foster care to make a positive contribution as inadequate because the service does not consult young people enough either generally or in their annual reviews of foster carers.
- The number of children and young people supported by the youth service decreased significantly in 2006/07, the last year for which figures are available.

Achieving economic well-being

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 is accurate but insufficient weight has been given to some important weaknesses such as the quality of provision for work-based learning and the standards reached by young people.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Young people in school sixth forms gain average point scores in AS and A level examinations that are in line with those in similar councils and the national average. ▪ The proportion of looked after children in education, employment or training is high. The council provides them with good support and accommodation after the age of 16. All looked after children and care leavers have a personal adviser and, although not all have a pathway plan, the proportion who do has risen this year. ▪ The percentage of teenage mothers in employment, education and training is well above that in similar councils and the national average due to sufficient childcare provision and effective support.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recent inspections have judged a major provider of work-based learning to be inadequate. ▪ There is a coherent strategy in place to reduce the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training and the council has successfully drawn in external funding to support this. The council's figures show a small decrease in the percentage of young people not in employment, education or training, including those from ethnic minority heritages, but this still remains too high. ▪ The proportion of young people with Level 2 or Level 3 qualifications has improved but remains below that found in comparator councils and, at Level 3, well below the national average. ▪ Participation in apprenticeships has improved slightly but overall and timely success rates are below averages.

Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

Grade 3

The council's capacity to improve services for children and young people is good and its management of them is also good. The Children and Young People's Plan has a clear and ambitious vision for the lives of children and young people in Rochdale: appropriate priorities shape developments designed to achieve this. In a recent refresh of the plan, in which children and young people played a part, targets for the required improvements have been more sharply focused to better inform evaluations

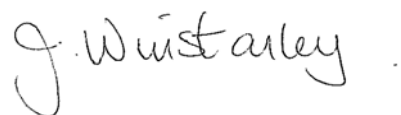
of progress. These will effectively support comprehensive arrangements for performance management and are well-considered given that the council's self-assessment does not take full account of weaknesses in a number of areas. The council's ambition for children and young people remains strong and is well supported by work developing with partners, such as those in the voluntary and community sectors. Nonetheless, the council's track record of improving outcomes for children and young people is uneven. Despite some persistent weaknesses in dental care, obesity, and stalling standards at Key Stages 1 and 3, outcomes in the areas of being healthy and enjoying and achieving have remained good overall. Significant progress with strategic planning and success in resourcing new post-16 provision, noted in the 2007 APA, is being built upon. However, in the interim, outcomes for young people are not improving with sufficient pace and a significant element of the provision for work-based learning is not of sufficient quality. Opportunities to make a positive contribution are not available for all children and young people.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As part of an interim review, the Children and Young People's Plan has been strengthened through the addition of more sharply focused targets. These will enable performance to be monitored more closely, so increasing levels of accountability. ▪ Partnership working in the delivery of services for children and young people across all areas of the Every Child Matters agenda is extending successfully to include the voluntary and community sectors. ▪ Arrangements for performance management are comprehensive, operate at all levels and include the views of children and young people.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The council's self-evaluation of outcomes in a number of areas does not take full account of aspects requiring further development. ▪ Although some strengths emerging in the 2007 APA have been built on, and a number of areas for development have seen improvement, in some respects improvement lacks pace.

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