

17 December 2008

Mr Paul Burnett
Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Service
Northamptonshire County Council
PO Box 93, County Hall
George Row
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Dear Mr Burnett

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Northamptonshire County 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	1
Making a positive contribution	2
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

Northamptonshire County Council provides a service that delivers the minimum requirements for children and young people. Capacity to improve, including service management is adequate.

The council has changed markedly with the arrival of the new Chief Executive who has appointed a fresh senior management team and is driving forward an unrelenting culture of improved relationships with partners and greater accountability for all service providers. Under this framework, the new Corporate Director of Children and Young People has instigated radical and positive organisational change within a short period of time. There has been a far-reaching reconfiguration of services, including a new strategy for school improvement and a fundamental review of safeguarding arrangements. Decisive action has been taken to secure an integrated service that is focused better on meeting the needs of children and young people. The corporate director has been supported well in this by his senior managers. Services are geared towards area-based teams and a robust system of performance management has recently been introduced. There has been acceleration to the rate of progress in some areas but senior officers accept that outcomes in all areas are not yet as high as they could be. Action has been taken to tackle the recommendations of the joint area review of 2006 and the annual performance assessment of 2007.

The council has ensured that it continues to have good provision and outcomes for children and young people in terms of achieving their economic well-being. There is strong leadership and direction for the 14–19 strategy. Inspection judgements about the quality of residential care services are good. There has also been a marked decline in the permanent exclusion rates of secondary-aged children and young people.

However, there are some important weaknesses. There have been weaknesses in the serious case review process and the completion of serious case reviews lacks sufficient rigour. Children and young people's standards, particularly at Key Stage 4, did not improve from 2006 to 2007 and are below the national average and the average for similar councils. The proportion of schools, particularly primary schools in Ofsted categories of concern is relatively high. The performance of some vulnerable groups, including some minority ethnic groups and looked after children, is especially weak. There are some marked weaknesses in ensuring that all children and young people are encouraged to remain healthy and make a positive contribution. The council is not yet demonstrably cost-effective and does not contribute significantly to wider outcomes for the community.

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 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"> ▪ The Healthy Schools Programme has made rapid progress in the past year. Almost all schools are now participating and the number of schools achieving the award increased significantly from 10% in July 2007 to 54% by April 2008. ▪ The proportion of looked after children who have received their routine health checks on time has increased for the third year running to 92%, the highest in the group of similar councils and above the national average.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Although the rate of teenage pregnancies has fallen for the second consecutive year, it is not on track to meet national targets by 2010. ▪ The proportion of mothers initiating breast-feeding is too variable across the county. ▪ Joint commissioning of services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been too slow to develop.

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"> ▪ The inspection judgements for residential care services are good. ▪ Adoptions of looked after children increased from 10.4% to 12.7%. This is the highest in the group of similar councils and one of the highest nationally. ▪ The proportion of new referrals leading to initial assessments is higher than the average for similar councils and for England. The percentage completed within timescales improved for a fourth year, which is better than that for similar councils. ▪ All children aged over 14 years with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and who are receiving social care services have a transition plan to support their move to adult services.

<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Local Safeguarding Children Board arrangements for business planning do not sufficiently identify accountability or timetables for implementation. ▪ There have been weaknesses in the serious case review process and the completion of serious case reviews lacks sufficient rigour. ▪ The proportion of looked after children whose reviews are held on time is below the national average and the average for similar councils. |
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Enjoying and achieving

Grade 1

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is inadequate. 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>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inspection judgements for the Foundation Stage in maintained schools and in the private, voluntary and independent sectors show that three quarters are at least good, with a significant minority that are outstanding. ▪ Key Stage 1 results in reading and writing were above the national average and the average for similar councils. Results in mathematics were above the national average. ▪ Key Stage 3 test results in English in 2007 improved and were above the national average. ▪ Permanent exclusions in the secondary phase have reduced and are now below the national average and below that for similar councils. ▪ The music and performing arts service is very successful. |
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<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key Stage 2 results in English and mathematics were below the national average and the average for similar councils. ▪ GCSE results for those achieving at least five grades A* to C have not significantly improved from 2006 and remain below the national average and the average for similar councils. ▪ Relatively high numbers of schools, especially primary schools, are in inspection categories of schools causing concern. ▪ The proportion of schools not achieving the government's minimum targets for at least five GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics is higher than the national average and the average for similar councils. ▪ The performance of some vulnerable groups is particularly weak. Results at Key Stage 4 for Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Mixed Caribbean pupils are |
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significantly below average. Looked after children do not achieve well in their test results in English at age 11 and relatively few achieve at least five grades A* to C in their GCSE examinations.

- The attendance rate of looked after children of school age is significantly below the national average and the average for similar councils.

Making a positive contribution

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The youth offending service has improved very significantly over the past two years. The involvement of young offenders in education, training or employment has improved significantly. The re-offending rate for those waiting for court appearances has reduced and services for victims have markedly improved. ▪ The arrangements for the allocation of the Youth Opportunity Fund and the Youth Capital Fund are effective, involving 297 young people as project leaders. The new facilities are well used. ▪ There was a significant increase in the proportion of young people aged 13 to 19 reached by publicly funded youth services, which has almost doubled from 10.6% to 20.1%.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participation of young people in the planning and monitoring of services is inconsistent. ▪ The number of first time entrants into the criminal justice system has increased despite a downward trend nationally, although numbers are still lower than those of similar councils. ▪ Although increased, the proportion of looked after children involved in their reviews remains below that for similar councils.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a good 14–19 strategy based on effective collaboration. The county has been awarded 26 Diploma pilots to enhance curriculum choice for young people. ▪ There has been a reduction in figures for the third consecutive year for those not in education, employment or training. This proportion is now below the national average and in line with those for similar councils. ▪ The proportions of young people from vulnerable groups in education, employment or training are above the national average and the average for similar councils. These include looked after young people, teenage mothers and young offenders. ▪ There has been an almost threefold rise over the last three years in the numbers completing an apprenticeship.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Although improved, performance in Level 3 qualifications remains below that for similar councils and the national average.

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. While there are some strengths in outcomes for children and young people, a range of important weaknesses remain. Since the last annual performance assessment, the relatively new Chief Executive of the county council and the Corporate Director of Children and Young People’s Services have brought renewed vigour and a strong determination to improve provision and outcomes for children and young people. Their leadership and vision are having a significant impact upon partnership working and the delivery of services. The council’s lead member for children and young people continues to provide strong political leadership.

There has been a far-reaching reorganisation of senior leadership across the council, which has been complemented by a reorganisation of services for children and young people based around four distinct geographical areas of the county. This is enabling the better coordination and integration of services, for example the school improvement service. Such major reorganisation is underpinned by the recent implementation of a comprehensive management competency framework for all staff but it is too early to make a judgement on its impact. The radical organisational changes implemented have been undertaken against a backdrop of greatly constrained funding. However, the services for 2007–2008 were delivered within budget. Partnership working has been improved. There is much stronger integration with the primary care trust. A new partnership strategy for the child and adolescent mental health service has been developed and implemented, although its impact on outcomes is not yet fully apparent. Senior leaders have a good understanding of needs, which takes into account the views of users. They have realistically high

aspirations and this is demonstrated by their 'Going for Gold' approach, which plans to ensure that the outcomes for children and young people are in the top quartile of the country by the year 2012.

Major strengths

- The new leadership demonstrates appropriately high ambitions.
- Far-reaching reorganisation of services and better partnership working.
- The introduction of robust performance management systems and greater accountability.

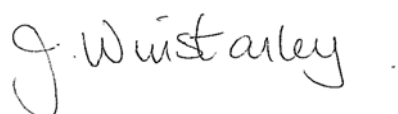
Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Ensuring better outcomes for all children and young people, especially for enjoying and achieving.
- Embedding the new structure for the Children and Young People's Service.
- Embedding area-based working with greater integration and better outcomes.

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