

17 December 2008

Mrs Catherine Fitt  
Executive Director of Children's Services  
Newcastle City Council  
Room 243a  
Civic Centre  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE99 2BN

Dear Mrs Fitt

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Newcastle upon Tyne City 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.

---

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



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   | 3         |
| 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**

Newcastle upon Tyne City Council delivers a service for children and young people that meets minimum requirements. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services is adequate. A number of changes in senior personnel were introduced in 2007 and there continues to be a strong determination to tackle poverty and improve outcomes for children and young people.

The council's contribution to being healthy is good with most health indicators showing a broadly good picture. There are improved contributions in the areas of economic well-being and positive contribution of children and young people and these areas are now also good. In other areas, despite some improvements, progress in addressing weaknesses has been slow. For example, in staying safe, actions identified in the JAR and previous APA have not yet been fully implemented. The council has made some progress in improving the way in which children and young people enjoy their education and achieve success. For example, children permanently excluded from school are immediately offered alternative provision in the pupil referral unit and while the attainment of children in primary schools continues to be below average, the gap between local and national attainment is reducing steadily. Nevertheless, the number of permanent exclusions and persistent absentees remains high.

## 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  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Services to ensure the health of looked after children are good.</li> <li>Mental health services are effective and promptly delivered.</li> <li>A high number of schools are successfully promoting children's health.</li> </ul> |
| Important weaknesses and areas for development   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The rate of teenage conceptions has reduced but is still high.</li> </ul>   |

## 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 area underestimates a number of weaknesses. The council has identified key areas for development and is in the process of putting in place potentially useful structures to deliver improvement. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

### Major strengths

- Children who become subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP) are reviewed in a timely manner and are subject to a CPP for short periods when compared to similar councils.
- A high number of looked after children are in foster care, all have qualified social workers and the timeliness of reviews is very good.
- The short-term stability of looked after children is good and the processes to ensure that children are adopted speedily are effective.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Appropriate thresholds for referral and re-referral are not fully in place, this has resulted in a high rate of referral to social services in 2007-08. Nearly twice as many children as in similar councils subsequently become subject to a CPP.
- The timeliness of initial and core assessment has been slow. For example, in the case of initial assessments, the council met the expected standard in only 40% of cases in 2007-08, which is much lower than in similar councils who reach 80%. There have been similar weaknesses in the timeliness of initial assessment since 2005-06. Data provided by the council indicate that the timeliness of initial assessments has improved significantly in recent months. In the case of core assessments, in 2007-08 the council met the expected standard in only 64% of cases, which is much lower than in similar councils who reached 84%. Data provided by the council indicates that the timeliness of core assessments is improving, although in September 2008 it was still below that expected.
- The number of looked after children is high when compared with similar councils.

## 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

- Performance at Key Stage 4 has improved significantly with the percentage of young people gaining five or more GCSE grades A\* to C improving from 52% in 2005 to 62% in 2007.
- Outcomes for children in early years provision remain good. A high proportion of nursery education settings are good or outstanding and are in a good position to implement the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.
- Some of the most vulnerable young people, including looked after children and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress when compared with similar councils.
- No secondary schools are in an Ofsted category of concern.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The percentage of young people gaining five or more GCSE grades A\* to C including English and mathematics although improving, remains below the national average.
- Standards attained in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2 are improving but are still low in comparison to the national average.
- High numbers of children are permanently excluded from school, although fixed period exclusions are in line with similar councils.
- High numbers of children are persistently absent from school, although attendance overall is in line with similar councils.

## 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

- There has been a continuing reduction in first-time entrants into the youth offending system.
- There are low levels of offending by looked after children.
- The consultation with young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on service provision and budgeting has improved and is now good.
- The involvement and consultation with looked after children has improved and is leading to improvements in the service.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The number of offenders not in education, employment or training is reducing but still high.
- Re-offending rates have improved but are still higher than those of similar council areas.

## 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

- The proportion of young people aged 16 to 19 who are not in education, employment or training shows a consistent declining trend and is significantly below the level found in similar councils.

- The proportion of young people aged 19 who achieve a Level 2 qualification is well above that of similar councils and approaching the national average. The proportion achieving a Level 3 qualification has improved and is well above that of similar councils.
- The college of further education provides outstanding education and training to a large number of young people including vulnerable groups and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Success rates on vocational courses are improving at a faster rate than those seen nationally.
- The prompt implementation of a 14–19 strategy has led to the smooth introduction of the new diplomas and enrolment of significant numbers of young people on some new programmes.

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

- The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds whose current activity is not known is high when compared to 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. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development is largely accurate although it overvalues staying safe outcomes and underestimates the significance of areas for improvement within enjoy and achieve. Children's services are a key priority for the council, its elected members and chief officers. The council and its strategic partners are strongly committed to social inclusion, equality and diversity and the promotion of community cohesion. They have developed a set of shared priorities for improvement. The reorganisation of parts of the service and the appointment of new directors provides the basis for an effective team. Significant improvements have been made to the arrangements to ensure children and young people are able to make a positive contribution to the community and gain economic well-being. Most educational outcomes for children and young people are improving but in some cases the pace of change is slow. Gross expenditure on services to children per capita is high. Budgets are prioritised in both annual and specific plans to match areas for development set out in the children's plan and self-assessment. However, managers do not always trace back the impact additional resource allocation has on key outcomes. This is particularly significant in the council's response to child protection referrals. Many areas of work have improved, however, overall the council's response to staying safe and enjoy and achieve outcomes remain satisfactory, as was reported in the JAR. Based on this track record the council has demonstrated an adequate capacity to improve.

#### **Major strengths**

- Good progress in improving the positive contribution made by children and young people.

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Continued improvement in GCSE results.</li><li>▪ Good progress in improving the economic well-being of young people.</li></ul> |
|--|

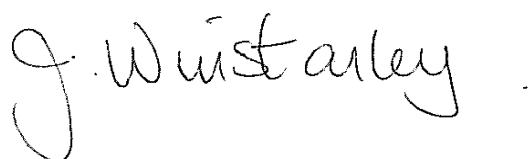
|   |
|---|
| <b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b> |
|---|

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The council has been slow to act on the recommendations of the JAR and APA to implement appropriate and consistent thresholds for referral to social care.</li><li>▪ Progress to improve the way in which all children and young people enjoy their education and achieve success has been slow in some aspects. This area of work has remained adequate since the last JAR.</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 "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager  
Local Services Inspection