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17 December 2008

Ms Sharon Scott
Director of Children's Services
Milton Keynes Council
Saxon Court
502 Avebury Boulevard
Milton Keynes
MK9 3HS

Dear Ms Scott

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Milton Keynes 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	1
Being healthy	2
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	1
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	1
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	1

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale
4: outstanding/excellent; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate*

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 1

Milton Keynes Council delivers services for children and young people that do not meet minimum requirements for users. Although good performance has been achieved in one area, important educational outcomes for children and young people are below average. The rate of improvement has been too slow. The very recent restructuring of children's services together with significant new appointments, has provided the impetus for change and strategic vision but there has not been time for the impact of these changes to be felt.

The council has made progress with regard to the 2007 APA recommendations for being healthy, and limited progress on making a positive contribution. The council has maintained its good performance in engaging with children and young people. There has been good progress in some aspects of staying safe but progress remains limited in several others. The self-assessment grades for being healthy, economic well-being and enjoying and achieving overestimate the council's impact. Although the council has directed resources at improving the attainment of children and young people, the measures have not ensured that learners at Key Stage 4 or post-16 are doing as well as in similar councils or nationally. The educational attainment of looked after children remains inadequate. Progress on developing the role of special schools has been slow.

The council has not responded effectively to the service management recommendations of the last APA during the reporting year. Whilst some improvements have been made, the pace of change has been too slow. Similarly whilst there has been some collaboration between teams, the council accepts that this has been inhibited until recently by the structure of the organisation. The council's assessment of its capacity and overall effectiveness as adequate has been judged inadequate.

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 underestimates a number of important weaknesses and overvalues 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">▪ A higher proportion of children and young people have had health assessments and dental checks than similar councils.▪ The child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) is good and its progress towards providing a comprehensive CAMHS is better than the national average.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Substance misuse services are underdeveloped and a lower proportion of young people are in treatment than the regional average. ▪ Teenage conceptions are higher than average. A consistent trend has not yet been established. |
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Staying safe

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

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is good range of family support services. ▪ Rates of adoption are better than average. ▪ Timescales for completing initial assessments are significantly better than similar councils and the national average. |
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Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local placement choice is limited and there is a higher proportion of looked after children in residential accommodation than similar councils. ▪ There is a lower proportion of reviews for looked after children held within timescales than similar councils and the national average. ▪ Long term placement stability is below average. |
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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 underestimates a number of important weaknesses and overvalues the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1 are in line with national averages. ▪ The Milton Keynes Behaviour Partnership has enabled secondary schools to reduce permanent exclusion very sharply and ensured a good alternative curriculum is offered. |
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<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pupils in Milton Keynes schools do not make as good progress as pupils nationally. Progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 dropped in 2007 and is well below the national average. Progress between Key Stages 1 and 2 is also below average. ▪ The proportion of students gaining five or more good grades at GCSE including English and mathematics is lower than the proportions for similar councils and nationally. ▪ The proportion of students achieving five or more good grades at GCSE is well below the proportions achieved by students nationally and by students in similar councils. ▪ The proportion of young people leaving care with GCSEs is too low and below the average of similar councils. ▪ The percentage of statements of special educational need issued within the required timeframe is well below average. |
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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.

<p>Major strengths</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a higher rate of participation by looked after children in their reviews than similar councils. ▪ There is good participation of young people, including looked after children, in the planning and development of services, which has had a demonstrable impact. ▪ There has been effective work in reducing the number of young people who enter the youth justice system for the first time. |
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<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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Achieving economic well-being

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 underestimates a number of important weaknesses and overvalues 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 proportion of care leavers who are in education, employment or training is well above the national average. ▪ The significant increase in the average point score achieved in A/AS level examinations.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportions of young people who achieve Level 2 qualifications and the proportion who reach Level 3 qualifications by age 19 are well below the averages nationally. ▪ The timeliness with which work based learners achieve NVQs is lower than that achieved nationally. ▪ The proportion of young people continuing in education or work based learning after the age of 16 remains below average. ▪ The proportion of young people aged 16–18 whose current activity is not known has risen and is higher than the averages nationally and for similar councils.

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

Grade 1

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is inadequate, as is its management of these services. Until the appointment of the new Director of Children's Services in May 2008, strategic leadership and performance management was inadequate. There has been insufficient integrated working between service areas. Delays in restructuring children's services have contributed to the limited progress made on the children's services agenda. The council had identified its two major priorities as safeguarding and raising achievement but despite teams securing some improvements in many service areas their efforts have not yet had enough impact. The council accepts that it has not used data well enough to set challenging targets. In making its self-assessment, the council overestimates the quality of its work in important areas.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relationships between the council and its partners, including schools, the voluntary and business sectors, are good and improving. ▪ In some areas performance is beginning to improve from a low base.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of strategic leadership, uncertainty and delays in restructuring the children's service has led to limited progress on the children's services agenda. In particular collaboration and integration are still at an early stage of development. ▪ The council has not made sharp use of data to identify its strengths and

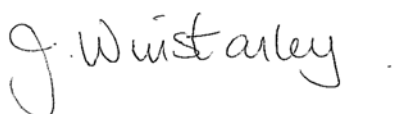
weaknesses and to develop priorities and appropriately challenging targets.

- Performance management has been insufficiently robust and not sufficiently focused on the needs of current children and young people in the council.

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