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17 December 2008

Mrs Rose Collinson
Director of Children's Services
Medway Council
Gun Wharf
Dock Road
Chatham
ME4 4TR

Dear Mrs Collinson

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Medway 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	1
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	3
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

The council's contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people is at least adequate in almost all service functions across the five outcome areas and is good in outcomes for enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being. The outcomes for most children and young people are at least satisfactory and services are beginning to narrow the gap between outcomes for most children and young people and those who are the most vulnerable. Staying safe outcomes are generally improving and are now more in line with those of similar councils. Health outcomes are inadequate. There has been an increase in the rate of teenage conceptions, and the percentage of health assessments for looked after children has deteriorated. Good progress has been made in improving the quality of schools and as a result, the proportion of schools in Ofsted categories of concern has reduced. There is good consultation with children and young people and their views have a positive impact on service development. The council's strategies have led to improvements in participation and success rates, which have had a positive impact on the economic well-being of young people. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services, is adequate and there is clear evidence of improvement in most areas. Performance management data is increasingly robust and is used effectively to identify and target areas of weaker performance. Services are increasingly well targeted at vulnerable groups. Satisfactory progress has been made in the implementation of the action plan to address the recommendations of the 2007 APA although some of these improvements are only recent and have had little time to make a significant impact on outcomes for children and young people. The impact is already apparent in a number of areas, for example, the development of virtual schools to ensure the close monitoring of those children and young people, including looked after children, who are educated out of the area and the development of the first group of diplomas to broaden opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Being healthy

Grade 1

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is inadequate. The council has worked closely with the primary care trust to create a range of new posts to support improvements in health outcomes. However, the impact of these developments is yet to be realised. The council's analysis overvalues the progress made at this stage. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Good progress on the development of the Healthy Schools Programme.

<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Action taken to reduce the level of teenage conceptions has been unsuccessful. The rate of conceptions has now returned to the 1998 baseline and is higher than that of similar councils. ▪ There has been a lack of progress in the development of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), with limited access to some services. ▪ The percentage of health assessments for looked after children has continued to fall, in contrast to the national picture. |
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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. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development gives too much weight to the significance of some of the improvements that have 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"> ▪ Successful action has been taken to improve referral and assessment processes within social care services for children, and performance is now approaching that of similar councils. ▪ Very good placement stability for looked after children. |
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<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Progress on the implementation of the common assessment framework is too slow. ▪ The percentage of referrals that leads to initial assessment, whilst improving, is consistently below that of similar councils. |
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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 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"> ▪ Achievement at GCSE and GCE level is above that of similar councils and nationally. ▪ There is a lower proportion of schools requiring special measures than in similar councils and nationally. ▪ The proportion of permanent exclusions is well below that of similar councils and |
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<p>the national average.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educational outcomes for looked after children are good and are better than similar councils and nationally.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low overall standards in primary schools compared to similar councils and nationally. ▪ Fixed term exclusions from secondary schools are higher than in similar councils 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 and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p>Major strengths</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The council has good engagement with young people, enabling them to influence the development of services. ▪ Effective action is taken to identify and reduce anti-social behaviour and to develop positive activity programmes to enable vulnerable young people to participate. ▪ An effective Children in Care Council, where young people who are currently within the care system are given an opportunity to ensure their views are heard. Both senior officers and council members respond to the issues they raise.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participation of looked after children in their reviews is improving but is still below that of similar councils and nationally. ▪ Proportion of teenage mothers who engage in education or training is below the national average.

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"> ▪ The proportion of 16- 18-year-olds in education, employment or training is above that of similar councils and the national average. ▪ The proportion of children who were in care who are in education, employment

or training at age 19 is very good and is above that for similar councils and nationally.

- A significant increase in the number of young people completing an apprenticeship, where the year-on-year change has been well above that for similar councils or nationally.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Percentage of young people achieving Level 2 or Level 3 qualifications by age 19 is lower than similar councils and nationally.
- Participation in education and training post-16 increased but at a lower rate than in similar councils and nationally. The proportion of those progressing to higher education, although improving, is below the national rate.

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 also adequate. Good leadership of work with partners is proving increasingly effective in delivering the ambitious and challenging priorities agreed to improve outcomes for children and young people in Medway. Services are being strengthened through increasing integration and a culture of self-challenge. The council-wide reorganisation has seen the Director of Children's Services also taking on responsibility for Adults' Services and relocation of the council's headquarters. Progress has been made in most areas, including the delivery of commissioning priorities. However, difficulties in recruiting some key staff have limited progress in some areas, particularly in developing public health capacity. The council's self-assessment provided good evidence of robust action at a strategic level, but many of these developments have yet to have an impact on outcomes. Financial management is integrated with strategic and service planning and there is a clear and sustained focus on achieving value for money. Joint commissioning arrangements are developing and are increasingly cost effective. The council actively seeks and responds to the views of children and young people and partners, for example through the Medway Youth Parliament.

Major strengths

- The council is clear about its priorities and knows its weaknesses. The council is very focused on improving outcomes, particularly for the most vulnerable, and there is evidence of progress from a low base, notably in safeguarding outcomes.
- There is good and increasing use of performance data across children's services, particularly in school improvement.

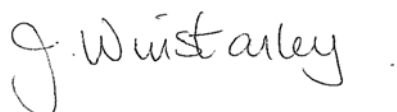
Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ There has been a deterioration in some health outcomes. Progress has been hampered by lack of capacity within health services.▪ Recent improvements to safeguarding outcomes have yet to be embedded. |
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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". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection