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Mr Stuart Smith
Executive Director of Children's Services
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Dear Mr Smith

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This performance profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the local authority has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of all inspected and regulated services for children and young people, arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against national measures. More weight has been given to the outcomes of Ofsted's inspections and regulatory visits (Blocks A and B in the performance profile).

The annual assessment derives from a four point scale:

4	Performs excellently	An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
3	Performs well	An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements
2	Performs adequately	An organisation that meets only minimum requirements
1	Performs poorly	An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements

Within each level there will be differing standards of provision. For example, an assessment of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, an assessment of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects. As in 2009, while the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's assessment, meeting or not meeting the minimum requirements alone, does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

Liverpool City Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Liverpool City Council continue to perform well.

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Nursery provision and primary schools are mostly good as are the majority of secondary schools. All special schools are good or better and of the two pupil referral units, one is good and one is satisfactory. The very little inadequate provision is found in two childminding settings and four primary schools, and the amount of satisfactory provision in early years and childcare is particularly high. The further education college is outstanding and sixth forms in schools are mostly good or better. The four local authority children's homes are all good as is the authority's adoption agency; however, fostering arrangements are only satisfactory. The very large majority of services and settings are good or better at helping children and young people stay safe and achieve well in education.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much that was strong and no areas for priority action. The private fostering arrangements managed by the local authority are satisfactory.

National performance measures show the very large majority of outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas, as are nearly all educational attainment and progress indicators. From a very low starting point more children are making satisfactory progress through early years education and in primary schools, although about one fifth of schools do not meet the minimum standards for English and mathematics at Year six. At the age of 11, results in national tests are average and have been sustained over time for most children, including for children from low-income families and for those with special educational needs. An increasing number of 16-year-olds are achieving good examination grades. Results that are now in line with similar areas show sustained improvement, but young people from low-income families do less well than their peers.

Key areas for further development

- Improve early years and childcare provision so that more is good or better.
- Improve those primary schools which do not meet minimum standards for 11-year-olds.
- Improve the achievement of 16-year-olds from low-income families.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are almost always successful. All schools and children's homes are very good at this, although childminders and the pupil referral units do not do as well. As one of the most deprived local authorities in England, Liverpool's challenges are immense and improving poor health is a key priority area in the Children and Young People's Plan. Improvements in health outcomes include the increased services for those children and young people with mental health difficulties and more children reporting that they have good relationships with their families and friends than nationally. Levels of obesity have reduced for five-year-olds but increased for those aged 11. Physical activity and healthy lifestyles are promoted strongly but participation in high quality sports activities is lower than elsewhere. The proportion of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is high but reducing slowly.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always good, although some childminders and the fostering services do not do as well. Of 16 private children's homes in Liverpool the majority are good, but five are only satisfactory and one is inadequate. The joint area review of 2008 judged safeguarding services to be good. Local services work well together to protect children at risk of harm and considerable progress has been made in reducing child deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents and hospital admissions caused by unintentional or deliberate injuries, but these are still higher than the national average. The unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services judged the monitoring of performance and the quality of safeguarding support to be good, although it found some weaknesses: for example, in the electronic recording system and in the use of management information to improve performance. A strong focus on anti-bullying strategies in schools and local communities has been highly effective and far fewer children report that they have been bullied than elsewhere.

Nearly all settings are good at helping children and young people to achieve well and enjoy their learning. Support from the local authority is successful in its work to help the weaker schools raise standards. This is confirmed in the most recent monitoring visits to the four primary schools that need to improve. Provision for learning in primary and secondary schools is almost always good and all special schools are good or outstanding. Most children do well in their early years and in most primary schools when compared to similar areas. The gap between those 11-year-olds from low income families and all other pupils is reducing at a faster rate than elsewhere. Some 24 primary schools however do not achieve the minimum standards in English and mathematics at 11-years-old. Girls do consistently better than boys in national tests at this age. Standards have risen in secondary schools and, by the age of 16, increasing numbers of young people gain five or more A*- C GCSEs or equivalent, including English and mathematics. Steady and sustained progress has been made over a number of years and performance in 2009 is in line with similar areas. The local authority reports that unvalidated data for 2010 show further strong improvement in the numbers of pupils gaining good GCSEs. Young people from low-income families however do not do as well at this age as the rest. Behaviour is outstanding in nearly all secondary schools; this is better than elsewhere. The

number of secondary pupils who are often absent from school is in line with similar areas and reducing steadily year-on-year.

Successful arrangements are in place for involving children and young people in planning local activities and a number of consultation events take place regularly to review the range of services and facilities available. The Schools Parliament and youth councils are important ways of helping young people make decisions and influence policies locally and city-wide. Far fewer young people report having been drunk or taking drugs recently than similar areas. Re-offending by young people in Liverpool is lower than in similar areas and most young people who offend are helped to find suitable work or training.

Good impartial advice and guidance is helping young people make the right career choices and a strong partnership between the local authority, schools, colleges and local businesses is increasing opportunities for training and work for 16- to 18-year-olds. More 17-year-olds are now in training and gaining qualifications. Considerable progress has been made over time in reducing the numbers of young people not in education, work or training. Those young people achieving good GCSEs or equivalent qualifications by the age of 19 are increasing in number, and the gap in achievement between those from low-income families and the rest is closing well and is now in line with other areas. Good support is given to care leavers to find suitable accommodation and increasing numbers are helped in to appropriate work or training.

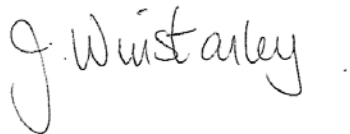
Prospects for improvement

Nearly all outcomes for children and young people have been sustained or are improving from a low base-line in Liverpool. The local authority is clear about what still needs to be done and targets for improvement in the Children and Young People's Plan are realistic. Strong partnership working is demonstrated through sustained improvements in education and training, particularly for 14- to 19-year-olds. Educational outcomes are getting better year-on-year for 16-year-olds with very strong performance reported by the local authority in 2010 and have been sustained for most 11-year olds. The local authority is providing good support to further improve these. However, its success in reducing the number of primary schools where children do not make sufficient progress at age eleven, has not been consistent over time and more must be done to improve standards. Work is also required to improve provision in early years and childcare settings to ensure standards are as good as the best. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services found the monitoring of performance and quality systems to be effective and staff well qualified and skilled. Social care data collection and its reliability remain a concern, although recent local children in need data show most outcome measures to be in line with the national average. Targeted activities are helping

young people whose circumstances have made them vulnerable to have better prospects and by most measures the youth offending service is working well. This demonstrates strong improvement from a disappointing set of inspection findings in 2009.

This children's services assessment is provided in accordance with section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

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, Children's Services Assessment