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Mr Stuart Smith
Executive Director of Children's Services
Liverpool City Council
Municipal Buildings
Dale Street
Liverpool
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Dear Mr Smith

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Liverpool 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.

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	3
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	3
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	3

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

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

Liverpool City Council continues to deliver services that are of good quality which result in good and improving outcomes for children and young people. The quality of provision makes a notable difference to their lives, especially for the most vulnerable children and young people. There is a strong drive to narrow the gap between the outcomes for these children and for most children, while continuing to improve provision and outcomes for all. The views of children and young people, including looked after children, are regularly sought and contribute widely to planning and influencing decisions. The council's dedication to further improvement is set out clearly in its plans and reflected in the commitment of its elected members and officers. As a result, well developed strategic partnerships continue to develop effective multi-agency working.

The council has made good progress in responding to most of the key recommendations made in the 2007 APA. Educational performance in young people achieving 5 or more GCSEs at A* to C, including English and mathematics has improved at a faster rate than comparator groups. The percentage of young people achieving Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications by age 19 has increased and is above similar councils and the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training, although still above the national average, has reduced at a faster rate than the national trend. Most health outcomes are improving year-on-year and the number of children and young people, including looked after children who re-offend is steadily reducing.

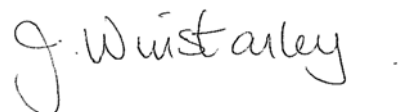
A high proportion of schools are judged good or better and educational attainment remains on an upward trend.

Children and young people's services have good capacity to improve further and are well managed. The council places improving outcomes for children and young people, including the most vulnerable, at the heart of their work. The leadership team is effective and provides a clear steer in its commitment to improve the lives of all children and young people in the council area. As a result, the council is building further on its good performance and has a good track record of sustained improvements in all outcomes. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development is consistent with the evidence. There are no additional recommendations to make as a result of the APA.

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 as part of this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues in preparing for the assessment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection

Major strengths and important weaknesses

Major strengths	Important weaknesses and areas for development
<p>Being healthy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nearly all schools are participating in the National Healthy Schools scheme and 86% in school sports. ▪ Good child and adolescent mental health services, includes 24 hour emergency cover and ensures all children needing services are seen within the national target of 26 weeks. ▪ There continues to be good progress in reducing teenage conception. The current rate of reduction of 28.2% compares very well against a reduction of 15.9% in similar councils. 	<p>Being healthy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The rate of infant mortality is significantly higher at 6.6 per 1,000 births than the regional average of 5.3 per 1000 live births. ▪ Breast-feeding initiation is improving but the 2006/7 rate of 48.2% is significantly lower than the regional average of 68.3%.
<p>Staying safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More children and young people report feeling safe in Liverpool than nationally. Some 72% report never having been bullied compared to 56% nationally. ▪ Assessment services are effective. Some 91.7% of initial assessments were completed within timescale, compared to 67.3% in similar councils and 95% of core assessments were completed within timescale compared to 79% in similar councils. ▪ The percentage of re-referrals is low at 8.3% compared to 20.3% in similar council areas. 	<p>Staying safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One children's home does not meet National Minimum Standards with regard to safeguarding. ▪ The fostering service was inspected in June 07 and judged as inadequate. A recent re-inspection judged it as adequate. ▪ The process for completion of serious case reviews lacks sufficient rigour.
<p>Enjoying and achieving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The percentage of young people gaining 5 or more A* to C GCSE results, including English and mathematics is increasing at a faster rate than comparator groups. ▪ A high proportion of schools are judged to be good or better. ▪ Attendance and exclusion data has continued to improve, reflecting the council's strong commitment to inclusion. 	<p>Enjoying and achieving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The percentage of children in the Foundation Stage achieving 78 points or more and 6 points or more in each of the Personal, Social and Emotional and Communication, Language and Literacy scales is below the national average. ▪ The percentage of children and young people at Key Stage 3 achieving Level 5 in mathematics has fallen to 70% which is well below the national average of 77%.

<p>Making a positive contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good improvements in the involvement of looked after children in reviews in the last year. Some 91% of looked after children are involved in their reviews and this now matches the national average. ▪ Good involvement of children and young people in reviewing the Children and Young People’s Plan and developing the Liverpool Parenting Strategy. ▪ There is a continuing good performance in reducing the number of children and young people who offend. For example, the number of first time offenders fell by 10%, and the number of children in care who offend, also fell from 2.4% to 2.1%, in 2007/8. 	<p>Making a positive contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The APA 2006/7 made a recommendation for the council to audit and evaluate the outcomes for young people as a result of their participation. This has been identified as a key priority for 2008/9. ▪ A participation officer has been appointed but it is still too early to judge the impact of this work.
<p>Achieving economic well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of young people achieving Level 2 and Level 3 at age 19, identified as an area for improvement in the APA 2007, has risen and is now above similar councils. ▪ The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in employment, education or training, whilst still above the national average is reducing at a faster rate than comparator groups. ▪ The participation rates of 17-year-olds in full time education and work-based learning have increased well this year to 78% and are now in line with the national average. 	<p>Achieving economic well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The percentage of care leavers aged 19 who are living in suitable accommodation is below comparator groups. ▪ The proportion of young people from ethnic minority groups who are at risk of becoming not engaged in employment, education and training, an issue identified as an area for improvement in the 2007 APA, has reduced but is still above the national average and similar council areas.
<p>Capacity to improve including the management of children’s services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The council continues to provide good leadership of the local partnership and is driving forward improved outcomes for children and young people. ▪ There is a strong commitment and ambition to make a difference to the lives of all children and young people. ▪ There is a good track record of sustained improvement in all outcomes areas. 	<p>Capacity to improve including the management of children’s services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The council needs to establish further improvements in the fostering service and in raising achievement in the Foundation Stage.