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Mr Nigel Richardson
Director of Children's Services
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Dear Mr Richardson

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.

Leeds City Council children's services assessment 2010

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Children's services assessment | Performs poorly (1) |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|

Children's services in Leeds City Council perform poorly.

Following an unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services which identified two areas for priority action, children's services were judged to be inadequate in 2009. A full inspection of safeguarding arrangements and provision for looked after children subsequently took place. This found that the overall effectiveness of services to ensure children and young people were safe was inadequate with provision for looked after children rated as adequate. The judgement of inadequate for overall effectiveness in safeguarding from this inspection is applied as a limiting judgement to the children's services assessment. As no other inspection has taken place in the intervening period since November 2009, this judgement stands and must therefore limit the annual assessment to performs poorly.

A large majority of types of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. All three domestic childcare settings and five of the six special schools are good or better and the sixth form college is outstanding. Around two-thirds of primary schools and local authority children's homes are good. Secondary schools, school sixth forms and further education colleges do not do as well. Not enough of these settings are good and a few are inadequate. The local fostering and adoption agencies are both good.

National performance measures show the large majority of outcomes are in line with the averages for England or for similar areas. Results in national tests and examinations are in line with similar areas for children at the end of the Reception year and for 11- and 16-year-olds. The gaps in achievement between children and young people who come from low-income families and their peers remain too wide at both the age of 11 and 16. Nineteen-year-olds from low-income families in Leeds do not gain as many qualifications as those from similar backgrounds across the country.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the quality of safeguarding.
- Improve secondary schools and sixth forms so that more are good or better.
- Increase the number of young people from low-income families who achieve well at the ages of 16 and 19.

Outcomes for children and young people

Ofsted's inspections show that most services and settings successfully promote healthy lifestyles. However, some inconsistencies in health outcomes remain in the local area. Good outcomes are seen in the increasing numbers of mothers who are still breast-feeding their babies after six weeks. Similarly, a growing number of young people think their parks and playgrounds are good. Children in care receive timely support for their emotional and mental health needs but there is still more work to do to improve services for all children and young people with these difficulties. The number of children who are too overweight at the ages of five and 11 has risen faster than in similar areas. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is still not reducing and this is a key priority for improvement in the local area.

The full inspection of safeguarding arrangements and provision for looked after children judged the overall effectiveness of safeguarding to be inadequate and identified a number of areas for development. These included improving the timeliness and quality of social work responses for assessments, case planning and recording. However, the good contribution of Education Leeds to the broad safeguarding agenda was acknowledged as was the good engagement of health partners. It was also noted that the local authority had recently undertaken significant work to prioritise improvements in front-line child protection services. Since this inspection, significant activity has taken place and reports to the Improvement Board by the local authority show better performance against some of the areas for improvement, including the timeliness of social care assessments. Ofsted's inspections of schools show that arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are mostly good. Hospital admissions are high and continue to rise. Services for children who have run away from home or overnight care have not been developing as fast as services nationally, although recent data show improvement. Feedback from children and young people indicates that Leeds continues to have low and decreasing levels of bullying.

Domestic child carers and the sixth form college are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. This is also true of the local authority's children's homes and local fostering and adoption agencies. Although inspections show most primary schools do well in this area, the number not reaching the expected standards rose in 2009. The local authority reports this number has reduced in 2010. Provision in pupil referral units and special schools is almost always good. Leeds has a large number of satisfactory secondary schools and sixth forms but too few are good or better. Pupils in their Reception year at school achieve at a comparable level to their peers in similar areas with a good improvement in standards in 2009. At the end of primary school and at the age of 16 attainment is comparable to that seen elsewhere although, by 2009, improvement had not been as fast as that of similar areas. Pupils from a number of minority ethnic groups do not do as well as others at the ages of both 11 and 16. However, the achievement of children in the care of the local authority shows good improvement at both the age of 11 and 16. Behaviour in secondary schools has improved considerably over the last three years, particularly in 2009. However, the number of secondary school

pupils who are often absent from school, while declining, remains higher than the national average and is a local priority for improvement.

The local area has a range of ways in which children and young people are involved in planning services. These include specific contributions to sexual health and anti-bullying work. Most services and settings are good at involving young people in decision-making and activity in their communities. Re-offending by young people in Leeds is worse than in similar areas although by most measures the youth offending service works reasonably well and was judged to have excellent capacity for improvement in its last published inspection. The number of young people who are offending for the first-time has reduced well over time. There has been a recent significant reduction in the number of young people involved in the court process who receive a custodial sentence. However, this number remains higher than in similar areas. More young people who offend have access to suitable housing than previously but this is not improving as fast as the national rate.

Most services and settings promote children and young people's future economic well-being reasonably well. Not all young people do as well as they can at the age of 19, particularly those from low-income families, although there has been steady improvement in gaining five good GCSEs or equivalent qualifications by this age. The number of 17-year-olds in school, college or other forms of training has improved but remains below that of similar areas. Local services have had good success in reducing the number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training. While recent data show a fall in the numbers of care leavers in education, employment or training this figure remains similar to that found nationally. The number of care leavers in Leeds who are given a suitable place to live when they leave care has fallen and is a focus for improvement in the local authority.

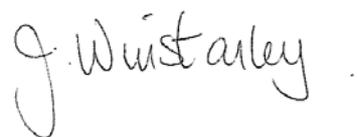
Prospects for improvement

Leadership of children's services has undergone a number of changes over the last year. These include the appointment of both a new director of children's services from September 2010 and a new independent chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board as well as significant changes to the leadership and functioning of the Children's Trust Board. The inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children in 2009 identified some key weaknesses. These included shortfalls in staffing levels, safeguarding procedures and leadership and management, notably a lack of effective leadership from the Local Children Safeguarding Board and insufficient challenge from all key bodies. However, it judged that the local authority had adequate capacity to improve in this important area of work despite a variable track record of delivering improvement. Inspectors noted the strong corporate steer for improvement from the lead member and the then current chief executive. The recently appointed new chief executive and the new leader of the council have continued to provide strong corporate support. The local area's review of its Children and Young People's Plan sets out how priorities have to be delivered alongside the Children's Services Improvement Plan. It is clear about the work that still has to be done to improve services and acknowledges the pressures of recruitment and retention of social care staff. It is also clear about the priority to narrow gaps in

achievement. An improvement board providing external scrutiny and reporting to the Secretary of State has supported this work and notes that progress is being made as well as significant challenges remaining. Ofsted's monitoring visits to weaker schools show that the local authority is doing good work to help them get better. However, in addition to the major task of improving safeguarding, continued effort is needed to further improve the quality of secondary schools, school sixth forms and further education colleges as well as to improve outcomes for children and young people from low-income families and from a range of minority ethnic groups.

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, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment