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Mr Keith Woods
Director of Children's Services
Isle of Wight Council
County Hall
High Street
Newport
Isle of Wight
PO30 1UD

Dear Mr Woods

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in the Isle of Wight 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.¹

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.

¹ Data yet to be confirmed

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	2
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	2
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	2
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

Isle of Wight Council continues to provide adequate services for children and young people which are consistently in line with minimum requirements. The previous APA in 2007 judged that the council services were adequate, and since then many of the areas that were identified for further development have been strengthened. Although the rate of improvement has not always been as quick as the council and its partners might have hoped, for example in relation to the emotional well-being of children and young people, there are a significant proportion of good and very good indicators in the standardised national comparator information compiled for the APA process. However, there are some areas that require serious attention. The council is aware of the nature and scope of the improvements that are required. The focused action that is currently being taken is designed to ensure that all improvements are achieved and sustainable.

The council maintains an adequate performance across all outcome areas with the exception of making a positive contribution where good performance is achieved. Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. Multi-agency work to provide early intervention and support to families is adequate and health outcomes are satisfactory. Outcomes for enjoying and achieving are adequate. However, in spite of steady progress in raising standards of attainment in most of the key stages in education overall, they are still below the national average. Children and young people have a wide range of interesting and creative opportunities to participate in decision-making and the council has a good record of adopting imaginative and successful ways of consulting with young people, for example through 'The Big Day Out' which reached over 5,000 people. Children and young people's services have adequate capacity to improve further. The council is very ambitious for children and young people on the island and recently increased strategic capacity is being used to promote further progress. For example, a Children's Trust Executive, with a dedicated Children's Trust Coordinator reporting directly to the Director of Children's Services has been introduced. There is a clear focus on promoting inclusion and tackling disadvantage. Priorities are accurate and knowledge about performance is increasingly being used to drive improvements in those areas where it is effectively embedded.

Being healthy

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

- Significant increase in children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who have a transition plan which has eased their transfer from paediatric and young people's services to adult care.

- Good outcomes as a result of the alcohol, drug and substance misuse strategies resulting in young people being identified, targeted for services and receiving effective support.
- Good responses to referrals for specialist child and adolescent mental health services.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The rate of reduction in teenage conception and pregnancy, although in line with similar councils, means that the government's 2010 target for a 50% reduction in teenage pregnancy will not be met.
- There has been insufficient progress in developing services to improve the emotional well-being of children and young people.

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

- Good use of special guardianship orders and placements with family and friends as a means of securing family placements for looked after children and young people.
- Stability of all placements is continuing to improve and the council's performance in this area is equal to, or better than, the averages of all other councils.
- Good and improved performance against timescales for core assessments, performance that places the council in the top band and which exceeds national averages.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The use of data and other performance management information to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of some social care services is underdeveloped.
- Too many children are subject to further child protection plans.
- The rate of reduction in the number of children who are looked after is too slow.

Enjoying and achieving

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consistently good early years and Foundation Stage provision with good outcomes for children. ▪ Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 continue to be above average, have improved at Key Stage 3 and have continued to improve at the end of Key Stage 4. ▪ Good provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensures that they make progress which is at least as good as that expected nationally. ▪ Schools causing concern are effectively identified and robustly challenged by the Learning and Achievement team who take appropriate and timely action.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children and young people's progress between Key Stages 1 and 2 is below that expected nationally and the trend of improvement is not secure. ▪ Although Key Stage 4 results have continued to improve, they remain persistently below the national average.

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.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The council uses imaginative and creative approaches to engage children and young people and seek their views, and it listens and responds to what they say. As a result, a high proportion of children and young people take part in consultation activities. ▪ Recidivism in relation to community orders supervised by the youth offending team has been reduced. ▪ As a result of effective early intervention and inter-agency working, the number of vulnerable young people entering the criminal justice system for the first time has declined to a level which has significantly exceeded the Youth Justice Board target.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The number of looked after children and young people involved in their statutory reviews has declined from the previous high level.

Achieving economic well-being

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 for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There have been steady improvements in the proportion of young people achieving Level 2 by age 19. ▪ The 14–19 partnership has been effective in improving provision; for example, its promotion of successful collaboration has increased, to above the national average, the number of young people accessing work-based learning. ▪ Effective targeted provision has reduced the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The percentage of young people achieving A levels is below the national average. ▪ Although the provision for diplomas is improving, the level of engagement by schools and the speed of course development is too slow. ▪ The attainment of care leavers aged 16 or over with at least one GCSE or equivalent is below similar councils and the national average.

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. Since the last APA and JAR, the council has made progress against most recommendations. For example, the standard of attainment of children and young people at the end of Key Stage 4 is steadily improving and closing the gap between the council's performance and the national average. The educational context will be subject to future changes as there are significant plans for a whole-island school reorganisation, the consultation process for which is almost over. There is strong political and officer commitment to follow this through in order to ensure further improvements in educational provision.

The contribution of the council to safeguarding and outcomes for looked after children has been maintained. Appropriate attention has been paid to addressing the issues raised in the APA and JAR, although some of this work is not yet complete. For example, a good performance management framework has been developed but it is not yet fully embedded across all operational areas of the council. This has impeded the council's ability to evaluate the impact of its services, a key requirement if its intention to continually improve the service it offers is to be achieved.

Within the last year a significant re-organisation of the council has taken place. This has strengthened the strategic capacity of the children's service, although it has temporarily resulted in an increase in the number of acting posts in senior positions. It has closely aligned senior and middle management posts and responsibilities with the council's objectives to modernise the children's service, introduce effective commissioning and strengthen integration and partnership working. Officers of the children's services are ambitious and are using stretch targets in the local area agreement to improve further services which are already of good quality.


The council has been judged by the Audit Commission to provide adequate value for money but challenges remain, for example in redressing the balance between the current high levels of expenditure on looked after children and the low and falling levels of expenditure on family support services. Councillors are, however, committed to supporting the children's service and have endorsed its strategic direction by committing the council to maintaining the budget while examining opportunities to "spend to save" as a means of tackling some more complex problems.

<p>Major strengths</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good use of targets in the local area agreement to stretch already good performance in key areas. ▪ Restructuring and recruitment to senior management and third tier posts has increased the strategic capacity of the children's service. ▪ Reduction in unfilled social work posts has had a significant impact upon operational capacity.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A good performance management framework is in place but is not yet fully embedded in the operational arm of children's services or across the partnership. ▪ Expenditure on children and young people who are looked after is too high and is having a consequential impact upon the currently very low levels of expenditure available for family support.

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 large initial 'J'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection