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Ms Sharon Menghini
Director of Children's Services
Herefordshire Council
Children's Services Directorate
Brockington
35 Hafod Road
Hereford
HR1 1SH

Dear Ms Menghini

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Herefordshire 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	3
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	2
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 2

Herefordshire Council delivers services for children and young people that meet minimum requirements. Its good capacity to improve is reflected in further improvements in educational standards and achievement, particularly for young people aged 14 to 19. Health outcomes for children and young people continue to be good, particularly for those who are looked after. Children and young people make a positive contribution to their community. There have been improvements in most outcomes since the previous APA. However, some aspects of staying safe deteriorated, primarily as a consequence of shortages of social workers. Service managers identified weaknesses in the administration of Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and have taken swift and effective action to ensure compliance with requirements. The management of council services is adequate overall.

Being healthy

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. 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"> ▪ The health care and outcomes for looked after children are good. ▪ Good service provision results in low levels of teenage conceptions. ▪ A high proportion of mothers, including teenage mothers, are breast-feeding. ▪ Good progress towards a comprehensive child and adolescent mental health service is leading to reduced waiting times for assessment and treatment.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There has been a small but rising number of hospital admissions for alcohol misuse.

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outcomes for looked after children are good. They have good placement stability which compares favourably with similar councils and national averages. ▪ Serious injuries and death of children and young people on the county’s roads

have reduced and the council is making good progress towards reaching its 2010 target.

- Good progress has been made in identifying, assessing and assisting children, who through exposure to domestic abuse, may have suffered significant harm.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The timeliness of referrals and assessments for children and young people who need them is lower than the national average.
- Recruitment of social workers remains on target to meet the planned complement in 2009.
- Reviews of those on the child protection register have not all been timely.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. 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

- Standards are above average and achievement is good for children and young people at secondary school. Standards continue to improve faster than nationally.
- Educational outcomes for looked after children are good against comparator groups.
- Permanent exclusions are sharply declining, and all such children and young people are provided with full-time pupil referral unit places. The proportion of children and young people with statements of special educational needs who are excluded is lower than the national average.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Standards in Key Stage 1, although satisfactory, are not improving as quickly as other key stages, particularly in writing.
- Attendance of looked after children is weaker than in similar councils.

Making a positive contribution

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The number of first time entrants to the youth justice system is dropping, and is in line with similar councils. ▪ In the inspection of fostering services in March 2008, positive contribution of children and young people in receipt of this service was rated as outstanding. ▪ Comparatively high numbers of children take part in voluntary activities. ▪ The proportion of looked after children involved in their reviews is high.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Too many looked after children are issued with final warnings, reprimands and convictions. ▪ There are high levels of dissatisfaction amongst young people with the range of local activities and places for them to go. ▪ Progress towards a written plan for Targeted Youth Support and the Integrated Youth Offer has been limited.

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. However, insufficient weight was given to the impact of substantial, albeit recent, progress in the management and provision of courses for 14- to 19-year-olds.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standards and achievement overall for post-16 students are good, and rising. ▪ Participation in post-compulsory education is comparatively high, and rising. This is the result of the successful implementation of a wider range of courses both pre and post-16 courses and good progress in the development of provision for 14- to 19-year-olds. ▪ Outcomes for looked after young people are good. These include good accommodation for those leaving council care; the high numbers who stay in education or training; and the good advice and support provided for all. ▪ There is a rising, and above average, proportion of supervised young offenders in full time education, training and employment.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are insufficient progression routes into work-based learning for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. ▪ Although the proportion of young people who progress to work based learning and further education from the Entry to Employment programme (E2E) is

average, there are relatively high numbers who go into employment without training.

Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

Grade 3

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is good and its management of these services is satisfactory. There have been major changes since the previous APA to the way the council organises its services for children and young people. This has resulted in new leadership and management arrangements and much closer partnership between Children's Services and the Primary Care Trust. A clear focus on ensuring further improvement has resulted in most performance indicators being better than in 2007.

Performance management of children's services has improved over the last two years and is now good. The recruitment of social workers is on target to reach the recommended complement by March 2009. The 14–19 developments have had a strong impact on ensuring better outcomes for young people aged 16 and 18 or over in the area.

Major strengths

- Senior managers and members have identified the most important areas for improvement and resolved these promptly.
- The joint management team between Children's Services and the Primary Care Trust share a common ambition to ensure further improvements in outcomes for children and young people. As a result, outcomes in health and enjoying and achieving are good.
- The performance management of children's services is good.

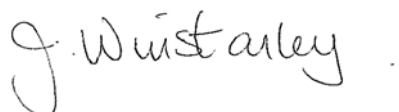
Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Service management has yet to impact on the timeliness of referral and assessment services for children who may require social care.

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, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection