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17 December 2008

Mr John Nash
Director for Children's Services
Dorset County Council
County Hall
Colliton Park
Dorchester
Dorset DT1 1XJ

Dear Mr Nash

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Dorset County 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

Dorset County Council delivers good services for children and young people. The council has made good progress in responding to the recommendations made in the 2007 APA and the joint area review report, published in December 2007, which judged local services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and capacity to improve to be good.

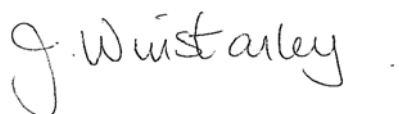
Outcomes for children and young people in each of the five key areas are good. The council delivers services which are consistently above minimum requirements. There is good evidence of innovative practice. For example, the Young People Doing Good Project has enabled young people to undertake local community work. It has attracted both local and national interest and promoted a positive profile of young people. Good opportunities encourage children and young people to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles, although of those under the age of 18 that misuse substances, the proportion receiving treatment from young people's services remains below average. Staying safe has improved and is now good. For example, effective arrangements are now in place to track the whereabouts of children and young people missing from school, home or community placements. There is a strong focus on preventative services, joint working with partner agencies and effective measures are in place to promote environmental and home safety. Most children and young people, including those from vulnerable groups, achieve well in relation to their starting points. Standards and achievement at the end of each key stage are above national averages and those of similar councils. There are a wide range of opportunities for children and young people to make a positive contribution through involvement in community projects, volunteering and citizenship activities. Participation rates are good. Young people are prepared well for their working lives. Education and training for 14- to 19-year-olds are of good quality and their impact is seen in the above national average post-16 attainment levels and below national average numbers who are not engaged in education, employment or training. The authority's strategy for delivering the new 14–19 Diplomas is developing well.

The council continues to use its resources effectively and its capacity to improve further is good. It has clear ambitions for children and young people based on a well-researched understanding of local need. This is shared with partner agencies and gained from wide-ranging consultation that includes children and young people. Many priorities focus on equality and diversity issues, such as the challenges faced in overcoming social and economic deprivation and the effects of rural isolation. There is clear accountability and decision-making to support service delivery. Overall, value for money is good. Staff are committed and retention rates are good. Performance management is improving and has become better embedded throughout children's services. 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". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

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"> ▪ Good education, resources and support to enable children and young people to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles. ▪ Good sexual health services. ▪ Effective action taken to reduce waiting times for appointments with the child and adolescent mental health services. 	<p>Being healthy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Of those under the age of 18 that misuse substances, a low proportion receive treatment from young people's services. ▪ Progress in reducing teenage pregnancy in the Weymouth and Portland areas is too slow.
<p>Staying safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective work to promote environmental and home safety. ▪ Children and young people at risk of harm are given timely and well-coordinated inter-agency support. ▪ Looked after children have access to a good range of local and high-quality foster care and residential placements. 	<p>Staying safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The percentage of initial assessments completed within seven working days has fallen.
<p>Enjoying and achieving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most children and young people enjoy school and achieve well. Academic standards are above national averages and those of similar councils. ▪ There is good provision and outcomes for vulnerable children and young people, especially looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. ▪ Permanent exclusions have fallen and all exclusion rates are below average. 	<p>Enjoying and achieving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standards in mathematics in Key Stage 2 and English in Key Stage 3 are in line with national averages and are not rising as fast as those in similar councils.
<p>Making a positive contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good take up by children and young people to become involved in community, citizenship and volunteering projects. ▪ Re-offending rates and numbers of first time entrants to the youth justice system continue to reduce and are below those of similar councils. ▪ The proportion of supervised juveniles in education, employment or training has steadily increased. 	<p>Making a positive contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involvement of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in service planning.

<p>Achieving economic well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Post-16 standards are typically above national averages and those of statistical neighbours. ▪ The percentage of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training has continued to decline and is below average. Participation rates for those from vulnerable groups are good. ▪ Partnership working and the authority's strategy for delivering the new 14–19 Diplomas is developing well. 	<p>Achieving economic well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Too many care leavers without pathway plans and/or allocated personal advisers.
<p>Capacity to improve including the management of children's services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clear and challenging ambitions shared by partners and staff. ▪ Clear outcome-focused priorities for the provision of children's services. ▪ Good capacity through strong leadership, effective partnership working and effective deployment of resources. ▪ Good value for money. 	<p>Capacity to improve including the management of children's services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance management systems across all children and young people's service areas are not fully embedded.