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17 December 2008

Mr Bruce Buckley
Deputy Chief Executive and Strategic Director
Children and Younger Adult Services
Derbyshire County Council
County Hall
Matlock
Derbyshire
DE4 3AG

Dear Mr Buckley

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Derbyshire 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	4

*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

Derbyshire County Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements for children and young people. Services are cost-effective and there is some innovative practice taking place. The management of children’s service is outstanding, as is the council’s capacity to improve. In general, the council’s response to the recommendations of the 2007 APA and the joint area review has been good. There have been clear improvements in the council’s work to ensure all children and young people are safe. In part, this has been brought about by evaluating practice and learning from the experiences of service users and their families. There have also been improvements in relation to youth offending, with a reduction in number of young people entering the youth justice system for the first time. Several indicators for enjoying and achieving have also improved to be in line with averages nationally and for similar councils. However, there is a need for further improvement in terms of reducing the rate of teenage conceptions and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are excluded from school. There is also a need to arrest the decline in the performance in some areas.

Being healthy

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective action is taken to ensure that looked after children are healthy through annual health check assessments, designated doctors and targeted services. ▪ There have been improvements in child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) for 16- to 17-year-olds and in access to 24-hour service for urgent cases. ▪ Services for children and young people have been reviewed and a new joint strategy agreed which has led to greater consistency in practice across the relevant services.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CAMHS for children and young people who have learning disabilities are not yet fully implemented. There has also been an increase in the average time taken to see less complex cases.

Staying safe

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

- Active steps have been taken to review safe recruitment practice across the county. Multi-agency working has resulted in a new protocol and procedures for investigating allegations against professionals. This is being more rigorously implemented.
- Child protection performance is good and better than in similar councils. All children have an allocated qualified social worker, ensuring good child protection planning and review.
- Effective preventative actions have resulted in low numbers of children becoming looked after.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Despite implementation of multi-disciplinary thresholds and performance management, referrals and re-referrals to the child protection assessment service have continued to rise. Whilst significant steps have been taken, monitoring is not yet embedded in practice.

Enjoying and achieving

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 in this outcome area overvalues the areas where progress has been made. For example, the extent of improvements in standards at the end of Key Stage 4 compared with similar councils. In contrast, insufficient weight has been given to one area of decline in the achievement of looked after children or the high level of exclusions of primary pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths

- Children in early years settings achieve higher standards than nationally in terms of their personal, social and emotional development, and in communication, language and literacy.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are well above the national average in reading and above the national average in writing and mathematics.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are good in mathematics.
- The rate of improvement in standards and the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or above at the end of Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science is greater than similar councils. In English it is also greater than the national trend.
- Outcomes for five or more GCSEs at A* to C, including English and mathematics, are good.
- Attendance has improved in primary and secondary schools and is above the national average and that for similar councils.

<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The rate of improvement of in achieving five A*-C at Key Stage 4 is slower than that found nationally and in similar areas. ▪ The percentage of looked after children leaving care with at least one GCSE has fallen over the last three years to below the national average and the average for similar councils. ▪ Fixed-term exclusions for pupils with statements of special educational needs in primary and special schools are well above the levels in similar councils and nationally. |
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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 gives insufficient weight to some important weaknesses, such as the effectiveness of action to prevent looked after children offending. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A broad range of actions has been taken to ensure further consolidation and improvement in the participation of young people in decision-making. ▪ There has been an increase in the availability and use of advocacy services. ▪ The proportion of young people aged 13 to 19 reached by publicly-funded youth services is higher than national and similar council comparators. ▪ There has been a proportionally greater decrease in the number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system when compared to similar councils. |
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<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Although there has been an improvement, the proportion of looked after children who were given a final warning, reprimand or conviction remains well above the national average and the average for similar councils. ▪ Mechanisms for consulting with, and involving more, vulnerable groups of children and young people are not yet embedded in practice. ▪ There proportion of looked after children participating in reviews has fallen from 92% to 88% and is now below the averages nationally and for similar councils. |
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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.

<p>Major strengths</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportions of young people achieving Levels 2 and 3 by the age of 19 are good and improving. ▪ The proportion of care leavers, aged 18 to 21, who have a pathway plan and personal advisor is well above that found in similar councils. ▪ The number of young people completing an apprenticeship has increased significantly and the year-on-year change is above the averages nationally and for similar councils. |
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<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a low and declining proportion of teenage mothers who are in education, employment or training. Numbers have fallen over the last three years and are now below the national average and the average for similar councils. |
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Capacity to improve, including the management of children’s services

Grade 4

The council’s capacity to improve its services for children and young people is outstanding, as is its management of these services.

The council provides effective leadership for children’s services. The focus of action is clearly set out in the Children and Young People’s Plan. A needs analysis at district level has been used effectively to inform delivery plans and help ensure resources are targeted at areas of need. There is clear evidence that the council is improving some areas of services. The rate of improvements in some outcomes, for example staying safe and enjoying and achieving, is good. The council has been successful in recruiting and retaining staff and prioritises its budgets effectively. Progress has been made in most of the areas for development identified at the last APA. For example, there has been the development of multi-agency thresholds to ensure appropriate levels of referrals and re-referrals for children identified as being in need. In some cases, developments have not yet brought about significant change for some vulnerable groups. For example, the number of looked after children receiving final warnings, reprimands and convictions is still too high. However, performance management is now more explicitly linked to outcomes for children through service plan evaluations. At the strategic level, this is being ensured through a well established Children’s Trust Steering Group.

<p>Major strengths</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Senior leadership in the council are leading improvements effectively. ▪ The Children and Young People’s Plan is based on a detailed needs analysis. ▪ A strengthened remit of the Children’s Trust Steering Group is helping to improve the evaluation of provision. |
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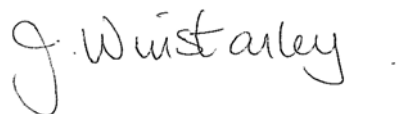
Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Improvement in provision is slow for some vulnerable groups. |
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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".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection