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17 December 2008

Ms Moira Swann  
Corporate Director of Children's and Services  
Cumbria County Council  
5 Portland Square  
Carlisle  
Cumbria  
CA1 1PU

Dear Ms Swann

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Cumbria 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.

<b>Assessment judgement area</b>	<b>APA grade</b>
Overall effectiveness of children's services	2
Being healthy	2
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	2
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	3
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

Cumbria County Council delivers services for children that meet minimum standards and are at least adequate in all respects. The children’s services leadership and management team provides a clear strategic direction and has made considerable progress in establishing structures to support improvement, for instance the commitment to local delivery of services. The Children’s Trust is established. The Children and Young People’s Plan includes priorities based on an evaluation of need and is rooted in a commitment to preventative work. However, there is a need to further strengthen capacity, at local level, to deliver the council’s ambitious intentions. In the past year the improvement in outcomes in safeguarding has been sustained, and areas of improvement are evident across the five Every Child Matters outcomes. At least adequate progress has been made on most of the recommendations of the 2007 APA; on some, progress in the past year is good. The above average standards reached by 11-year-olds and the good progress in implementing the government’s 14–19 reforms are particular strengths. However, challenges remain for the council. Critically, the weaknesses in secondary education are not yet overcome; schools have continued to be placed in Ofsted categories of concern and attendance remains below average. Furthermore, the quality of provision for, and standards achieved by, some vulnerable youngsters in a pupil referral unit (PRU) need to improve. Though teenage conceptions have reduced, in parts of the county alcohol and substance misuse persist as significant issues for some young people.

## Being healthy

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The council’s self-evaluation of its strengths is accurate but insufficient weight has been given to the limited progress in developing the contribution of secondary schools to supporting young people’s emotional health and well-being and to the inequity of access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services across the county.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The rate of teenage conceptions is now lower than that found in similar councils and nationally.</li> <li>▪ The proportion of looked after children who have had health assessments and dental checks (88%) has improved and is above the averages for similar councils and nationally.</li> <li>▪ The availability of services for under 18-year-olds with risk taking behaviours, including those associated with alcohol and substance misuse, has improved. The need for such services is important because in some areas of the county the numbers engaging in risk taking behaviours is high.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Despite good progress towards a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental</li> </ul>

Heath Service, inequities of access remain across the county.

- The proportion of schools participating in the National Healthy Schools programme in April 2008 was lower than that found in similar council areas and the national average.
- As the council acknowledges, in secondary schools, further development is required in the provision to improve children and young people's emotional health and well-being and for designated nursing support.

## Staying safe

**Grade 3**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect appears to be good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

### Major strengths

- Improvements in outcomes, noted in the previous APA, have been sustained. As a result, previous weaknesses related to referrals, re-referrals and initial assessments have improved and the timeliness of reviews is now very good for child protection cases and good for looked after children.
- Personal Actions Plans for looked after children are recognised nationally as an example of best practice.
- The strong focus on family placements leads to a high rate of stability for looked after children and standards of provision in the council's children's homes are good.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The council acknowledges that the number of young people engaging in risk taking behaviour relating to alcohol and substance misuse in some areas of the county is high.
- The timeliness of core assessments has slipped and it remains poorer than in similar councils and nationally.

## Enjoying and achieving

**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 in this outcome area does not take sufficient account of the weaknesses in educational provision, and achievement in some secondary schools and in one of its pupil referral units. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

### Major strengths

- Standards in primary schools rose considerably in 2007, particularly in English

and mathematics and, by age 11, a higher proportion of children reached the standard expected for their age than in similar councils and nationally.

- Standards at GCSE, for looked after children and care leavers, have improved well. More than twice as many of these young people obtained five good passes at GCSE as in similar councils and their success rate exceeded the national average by a considerable margin.
- For the most part, provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The council achieves high performance standards in producing statements of special educational need promptly and a good proportion of youngsters with statements are educated in mainstream schools. The rate of exclusions from special schools is lower than that seen nationally and in similar councils.

### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- School inspections have shown significant weaknesses in provision in some secondary schools and in one of the council's three PRUs. Since September 2005, a much higher proportion of secondary schools have been placed in Ofsted categories of concern than in similar councils or nationally. During the last year, though some schools have been removed from these categories, a further three secondary schools have been judged to require special measures to improve. These schools represent a significant number of young people for whom the education provided is not of an acceptable standard. In addition, a PRU, catering for vulnerable youngsters, and where responsibility for governance lies with the council, was given Notice to Improve and, on re-inspection in July 2008, was found to require special measures.
- Attendance rates in secondary schools have declined and remain lower than those found in similar council areas and 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**

- Children and young people have good opportunities to influence and shape the services they receive.
- The reduction of first time offending by young people, over the last two years, has been faster than in similar council areas and the national average.
- The proportion of supervised juveniles in full-time employment, education or training has risen and is greater than in similar councils and nationally.
- The proportion of looked after children who participate in their statutory reviews has improved rapidly; it is now good and slightly higher than in similar councils and nationally.

<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p>
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|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The proportion of young people reached by the youth service is lower than the national target and the national average.</li> <li>▪ The rate of young people re-offending is higher than in similar councils and the national picture.</li> </ul> |
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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 in this outcome area did not take sufficient account of the outcomes for young people compared with other similar councils. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good 14–19 partnerships have assisted in the good introduction of Diplomas.</li> <li>▪ A higher proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds are in employment, education or training than in similar councils or nationally.</li> <li>▪ The proportion of looked after children and care leavers in employment, education or training is very good, and more teenage mothers are in employment, education or training than in similar councils and nationally.</li> <li>▪ Success rates for young people at college and in work-based learning are better than the national average for vocational qualifications.</li> </ul> |
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<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p>
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- |  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Although there has been an improvement, there are still fewer looked after children and care leavers with Pathway Plans and personal advisers than in similar councils and nationally.</li> </ul> |
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## 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. The Children's Trust is now operational. The Children and Young People's Plan shows the council's high ambition for children's services and a grasp of where improvement is needed. The plan has been drawn up in consultation with partners and children, young people, and their families and partnership working is integral to it. Priorities and the strategic direction are clear but planning for improvement at local level, though improved, is no more than adequate. The council's self-assessment of its children's services accurately identifies strengths and areas for development and how it intends to deliver improvements across outcomes. The council acknowledges that there are areas 'where the pace of change needs to move faster'. However, its overall evaluation of its effectiveness is optimistic in regard to some outcomes. In particular, it has not given sufficient weight to the weaknesses in

secondary education which undermine the quality of provision for many young people.

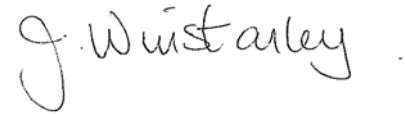
The council's strategies are leading to improvements in provision and outcomes in several council areas, for instance in enabling children and young people to stay safe. The structure of services and locality teams has been adjusted to better support integrated services and to develop capacity and accessibility of services in local areas. For example, local multi-disciplinary teams are being established and, following pilots, local delivery platforms. The council has action in hand to tackle most of the weaknesses and areas for development identified in this APA.

<b>Major strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ At senior level in children's services, there is a clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve provision and a strategic approach to determining priorities and strengthening partnership working. Organisational changes support the council's capacity to realise its ambitions through a preventative strategy.</li> <li>▪ Transition to the Children's Trust has been managed effectively and has strengthened strategic planning and partnerships.</li> <li>▪ Staffing has improved. Social care vacancies are greatly reduced and are now in line with those in similar councils; the proportion of well-qualified residential child care workers is greater than that seen in similar councils and nationally; and unfilled teaching vacancies remain much lower than in similar councils and are only a sixth of the national average.</li> </ul>
<b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The capacity for locality-based delivery of services is adequate but the alignment of local planning with the council's strategic priorities and cross cutting themes is not consistently tight enough.</li> <li>▪ The quality of provision in some secondary schools and a PRU is inadequate and there is a high number of surplus places in secondary schools.</li> <li>▪ For some young people, the incidence of risk-taking behaviour is too high.</li> </ul>

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' and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection