

10 March 2011

Mr Trevor Doughty
Director of Children, Young People and Families
Cornwall Council
County Hall, Treyew Road
Truro, Cornwall TR1 3AY

Dear Mr Doughty

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This performance profile, published in August 2010, includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the local authority has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of all inspected and regulated services for children and young people, arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against national measures. More weight has been given to the outcomes of Ofsted's inspections and regulatory visits (Blocks A and B in the performance profile).

The annual assessment derives from a four point scale:

4	Performs excellently	An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
3	Performs well	An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements
2	Performs adequately	An organisation that meets only minimum requirements
1	Performs poorly	An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements

Within each level there will be differing standards of provision. For example, an assessment of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, an assessment of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects. As in 2009, while the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's assessment, meeting or not meeting the minimum requirements alone does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

Cornwall Council children's services assessment 2010

In September 2009, a full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children in Cornwall identified serious weaknesses resulting in inadequate judgements for both safeguarding and looked after children services. A second full inspection was carried out in January 2011 to assess the progress made and judge the impact of this on the outcomes for children and young people. The publication of the 2010 children's services assessment letter for Cornwall was therefore deferred until March 2011 so that the outcome of the most recent inspection could be taken into consideration.

Children's services assessment	Performs poorly (1)
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Children's services in Cornwall Council continue to perform poorly. In September 2009, a full inspection of the services for safeguarding and looked after children judged the local authority's performance as inadequate. A second inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in January 2011 found that significant weaknesses in safeguarding continue and are sufficient on their own to limit the children's services assessment to performs poorly. However, services for looked after children have improved and are now adequate.

In 2009 there were major weaknesses in the local authority's social work service for children and young people. While there has been some significant improvement in strategic management and service structure, the extent and rigour of focus on operational child protection procedure and practice has been insufficient. This leaves some children at risk of significant harm. There have been two reviews of child death or serious injury to children since last year. One was conducted well, the other satisfactorily.

In other areas, the large majority of individual services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. There have been significant improvements virtually across the board since last year and there is very little inadequate provision. The overall quality of education and day-care provision for very young children is good. Primary schools are adequate but secondary schools and pupil referral units are outstanding and nearly all the special schools in the area are good or better. Education provision for young people after they reach the end of compulsory schooling is good overall. The large majority of the local authority's children's homes are good, as are its fostering and adoption services. Good steps are taken by the local authority to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements.

Performance measures show that a very large majority of outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better. This includes all the main measures of educational attainment. Whilst stronger for the younger age groups, the local figures are all broadly in line with the average in similar areas and recent rates of improvement have been comparable to the national average. Throughout their education children and young people from low-income families do better than the average for this group elsewhere. This is markedly so by the age of 19.

Key areas for further development

- Ensure the recommendations made in the 2009 and 2011 safeguarding and looked after children's services inspection reports are fully implemented.

Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of services give good encouragement and support to children and young people to lead healthy lives. Provision for those with emotional and mental health difficulties has been a weakness in recent years. However, there has been some improvement in provision to tackle problems early, before they become very serious. The proportion of children who are seriously overweight at the age of five and 11 is broadly in line with the average for similar areas but has risen in recent years. The number of young women aged under 18 who become pregnant is higher than the average in similar areas and has also gone up in the last few years. The overall reduction over the last decade has only been modest, which is similar to the national picture.

The very large majority of individual services like schools make a good contribution to helping children and young people stay safe. However, there are still important weaknesses in the local authority's child protection services resulting in safeguarding arrangements which are inadequate overall. Children referred to social care services are not always adequately assessed nor are cases consistently managed effectively. There is significant drift and delay in completing some assessments. Child protection plans do not contain enough detail about the actions to be taken or include enough detail about identified risks. Although all child protection cases are now allocated to a social worker, not all records are up-to-date, contain sufficient detail or include clearly defined decision-making. Progress is being made in improving multi-agency working and, in particular, the early identification of problems and the provision of support before they become very serious. The local authority also takes good measures to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements.

The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children is adequate. Since 2009 services have improved with some identifiable improvements in outcomes for looked after children and young people. The local authority's own children's homes are much improved and mostly good, as are almost all the private and voluntary sector homes it uses. The local authority's own fostering and adoption services are good and when it buys extra help of this kind from private and voluntary organisations this is good too. Steady and substantial progress has been made over recent years in reducing the number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents. Progress has also been made in reducing serious injuries to young people more generally. The number of children and young people who say they have been bullied is broadly average.

The overall quality of education and day-care for very young children is good and there has been a significant improvement in the proportion of good or better provision since last year. Primary schools are adequate overall but reasonably close

to the national average. However, secondary schools and pupil referral units are outstanding and much better than nationally. The proportion of good or better provision has gone up significantly since last year for primary and secondary schools and particularly so for pupil referral units. Whilst stronger for the earlier age groups, children's achievement at the age of five and the local test and examination results at the age of 11 and 16 are all broadly in line with the average in similar areas. Recent rates of improvement have been comparable to the national average. Children and young people from low-income families do better than the average for this group elsewhere at both the age of 11 and 16 and there has been particularly good progress over recent years in improving their performance at the age of 11. The achievement in national tests of those with special educational needs is close to the average elsewhere, both at the age of 11 and 16. However, nearly all the special schools in the area are good or better and these provide for most of the pupils with the highest levels of need, many of whom are unable to take national tests. The impact of services to enable looked after children to enjoy and achieve is good.

The proportion of children and young people involved in organised group activities outside school is close to the average in similar areas, as is the number of young people who say they have taken drugs or been drunk recently. Re-offending by young people is lower than in similar areas and by most measures the youth offending service works reasonably well. Good arrangements are in place within the very large majority of services to seek young people's views and involve them in decision-making.

The very large majority of services give good support to young people to help them do well in later life. The standard of sixth forms is good overall and better than the national average. One of the two general further education colleges is good and the other satisfactory. These two colleges cater for just over 70% of the young people in the 16 to 19 age group who are engaged in education and training. More young people than average stay on in education or training when they reach school leaving age but the number of young people aged 16 to 18 involved in education, work or training is only broadly average. The numbers achieving qualifications equivalent to five good GCSEs and two good A levels by the age of 19 are very close to the averages in similar areas. The rate of improvement over recent years has been less than that found nationally for the former but similar for the latter. Young people from low-income families do markedly better than the average for this group in similar areas on both measures.

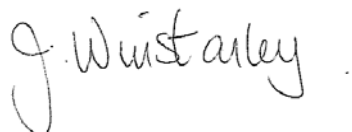
Prospects for improvement

The local authority and its partners have a good grasp of local needs and use this to set appropriate improvement priorities. However, the local authority has been aware of significant weaknesses in its child protection services for some years and problems continue. The recent inspection of safeguarding provision found some improvement in the leadership of children's social care services. Leadership and management are effective at the strategic level with adequate capacity for further improvement. Management structures and workforce capacity have improved. Recruitment processes are safe. However, management support for staff continues to be

inconsistent and managers do not provide sufficiently effective challenge to the quality of child protection and children in need plans. Significant improvements in performance management and audit systems have been introduced but they are not yet robust enough to identify and tackle poor practice. Robust risk-assessment is not consistently undertaken and partner agencies do not sufficiently challenge where there is a failure to follow statutory guidance. In other areas of its work the local authority has a good recent track record of delivering improvement with significant improvements since last year in the proportion of services, settings and institutions which are good or better, particularly in the early years, day-care and education sectors. Leadership and management across the partnership in respect of services for looked after children and care leavers have improved and are now adequate.

This children's services assessment is provided in accordance with section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

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, Children's Services Assessment