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Mr Dean Ashton  
Director of Children, Young People and Families  
Cornwall County Council  
County Hall  
Treyew Road  
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Cornwall  
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Dear Mr Ashton

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Cornwall 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	2
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	2
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

Cornwall County Council makes an adequate contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people. It delivers services which are improving and are now at least adequate across all five outcome areas. Good progress has been made in response to most areas identified in the 2007 APA. However, whilst the promotion of healthy lifestyles is adequate overall, the child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are inadequate. The CAMHS strategy is not yet fully implemented and waiting times for assessment have lengthened. The JAR judged effective action has been taken to improve safeguarding and this aspect of the service is now adequate. Whilst social care support for families in crisis is adequate overall, access to provision is inconsistent across the county. Thresholds for access to children's social care services are appropriate but were not introduced until early 2007 and therefore are not always well understood by all those who may make referrals. There has been significant improvement in the placement stability of looked after children although placement choice remains limited.

The council is working well to improve several aspects of its educational provision. It has been particularly successful in raising standards for children in Key Stage 1 and in reducing exclusions from schools. Its school improvement work has reduced the number of schools in a category of concern. The proportion of young people aged 16 to 19 in education, employment or training is higher than for similar areas and nationally. In part, this is due to the effective support offered to vulnerable young people. However, the achievement of young people attending school sixth forms has fallen. This was an area identified for improvement in the 2007 APA. The council's capacity to improve including its management of services is adequate. Children's services are a key priority for the council, its elected members, chief officers and partners.

## Being healthy

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 underestimate a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Good advice, guidance and support provided by children's centres which operate as an effective communication hub for a wider network of health services.</li><li>▪ Effective partnership working to provide information, advice and guidance on safe sexual health.</li><li>▪ Teenage pregnancy levels have remained lower than those of similar councils.</li><li>▪ Good support and information available to young people to access smoking cessation and substance misuse programmes.</li></ul>

- Effective support for young people with established and severe problems of substance and alcohol misuse.
- Good partnership working to meet the needs of children and young people with complex and/or severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

**Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- The child and adolescent mental health service is inadequate. It is poorly integrated with other services and access to the service is variable. The revised strategy is not yet fully implemented and most children and young people, unless they are in crisis, wait far too long for assessment. The proportion of new non-specialist cases seen within four weeks has decreased dramatically from 65% to 18.4%, and for those seen within 26 weeks from 88.3% to 62.6%. This compares with the national average of 39.8% and 89.7% respectively. Specialist provision is available in Plymouth where there are improved waiting times, more in line with, or above, the national average.
- Designated doctor and nurse provision for looked after children is not available to care leavers.
- Speech and language therapy (SALT) provision does not meet need, particularly at secondary level. Physiotherapy and occupational therapy resources are limited.

**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**

- The provision of children's social care services has improved significantly since early 2007 and is now adequate.
- Good partnership working to reduce bullying, harassment and racial abuse.
- Proactive and effective approach to raise awareness of private fostering.
- Effective partnership working to track, return and follow up looked after children who go missing. This has led to significant improvements in placement stability.
- More effective preventative work resulting in fewer children entering care.
- Comprehensive and well coordinated services to address domestic violence.

**Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- The common assessment framework is not consistently established or embedded across the county.
- Inequitable access across the county to social care support for families in crisis and thresholds for access to children's social care services are appropriate but

are not always well understood by all those who may make referrals.

- Identification and provision of services to young carers.
- Insufficient placement choice for looked after children.
- Insufficient respite care provision and undeveloped transition arrangements for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

## 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 for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

### Major strengths

- Due to the strong work of the school improvement service the number of schools in a category of concern has reduced significantly.
- Improved standards at the end of Key Stage 2 that are now in line with national averages.
- Strategies to improve attendance and reduce exclusions have had a marked impact and sustain an improving trend. Unauthorised absence is lower than in similar councils whilst attendance overall is now close to the national picture. Exclusions have fallen steadily each year and are now significantly lower than those found nationally.
- The attendance at school of looked after children is higher than found in similar councils and nationally.
- There is good educational provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities with a high proportion receiving their education in mainstream school.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The proportion of children and young people gaining five or more good grades at GCSE that include English and mathematics is 44.13%. This is lower than the proportions for similar councils and nationally which are 48.17% and 46.52% respectively.

## 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

- A wide range of opportunities are available which involve children and young people in strategic planning, design, delivery and evaluation of services.

- Re-offending rates and numbers of first time entrants to the youth justice system remain lower than those of similar councils and nationally.
- The majority of care leavers benefit from good personal support for their transition to independence.

**Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- The proportion of supervised juveniles in education, employment and training has fallen.
- Limited consultation with children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on the planning of services.

**Achieving economic well-being**

**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 underestimate a number of important weaknesses. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

**Major strengths**

- The proportion of young people in education, employment or training is higher than for similar areas and nationally.
- High success rates in most further education college provision.
- Good support is provided for vulnerable young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those who are looked after, and teenage mothers, to enable them to access work and training.
- A high proportion of care leavers are in education, employment or training and at the age of 19 all are in suitable accommodation.

**Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- The achievement of young people attending school sixth forms has fallen. The GCE/VCE average point score per young person entered is significantly lower than in similar councils or that found nationally.
- Guidance and advice for young people attending schools with sixth forms regarding their post-16 options.
- The current 14–19 strategy lacks a detailed implementation plan with clear targets and milestones.
- Collaboration between institutions to plan and deliver post-16 provision is comparatively limited.
- The lack of a strategic approach to tackling the limited availability of public transport restricts the options of some young people to pursue education and training courses, work-based learning and employment.

## 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 and its management of these is adequate. It has a clear and compelling vision, shared with partners, for the development of children's services in Cornwall. Effective governance arrangements are in place. Major strengths are the wide ranging and systematic assessment of need, the quality of leadership at senior level, the strength of working relationships between partner agencies and the commitment to common goals. Priorities are well reflected in the Local Area Agreement indicators and give adequate attention to equality and diversity issues. Effective prioritisation directs the resources available towards delivering the key priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). There is clear determination to enable young people and their families to voice their opinions and play a part in the development of services. Relative weaknesses are in the quality of some middle management, the precision and rigour of action planning and aspects of performance management, the poor focus on delivering value for money, and the limited progress made in joint workforce planning. The recent JAR judged there to be insufficient evidence as yet of the ability to deliver sustained improvement across children's services. Whilst there has been improvement in some areas of the council's services, there has been a lack of sustained improvement of others. The council's self-assessment is adequate although in some areas there is a lack of detail in demonstrating impact.

### Major strengths

- Clear vision for the development of children's services in Cornwall shared by partners and based on a good quality needs assessment that draws fully from a major programme of consultation with children and young people, including a wide range of vulnerable groups.
- Very good leadership at senior level that is starting to have a positive impact.
- Consistently constructive and effective working relationships between partner agencies are now in place with a strong commitment to common goals to improve children's services.
- Effective prioritisation directs the resources available towards delivering the key priorities in the CYPP.
- Equality impact assessments have recently been completed and plans are in place to ensure full compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.
- The local council has a comprehensive performance management system, focusing on key performance indicators, both local and national. Seventy-five per cent of children's performance indicators improved in 2006–07.
- Effective governance arrangements both individually and collectively. The responsibilities placed on the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services are discharged effectively.

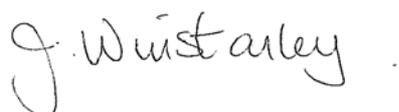
### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- Inequitable access to services remains a key issue, with significant local variations in provision.
- Progress towards establishing formal children's trust arrangements has been relatively limited to date but is on target for delivery by 2011.
- Many action plans to deliver strategic objectives lack precise and measurable outcome measures and targets and most do not identify clearly the resources required.
- Work to ensure that the partnership delivers good value for money is at an early stage and under-developed generally.
- Joint commissioning is limited but developing. There have been some joint appointments by the council and the Primary Care Trust which are helping to improve joint working.
- The limited progress made in joint workforce planning. Whilst each partner agency has its own workforce development strategy, there is very limited joint workforce planning at present.

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