

17 December 2008

Ms Heather Tomlinson  
Director of Children and Young People's Services  
Bristol City Council  
PO Box 57  
The Council House  
College Green  
Bristol  
BS99 7EB

Dear Ms Tomlinson

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Bristol City 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> Data yet to be confirmed



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	3
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	2
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

Bristol City Council delivers minimum requirements for children and young people. The council's capacity to improve services for children and young people and the management of services is adequate. There have been clear improvements in some aspects of the council's work, strengthening its quality and its capacity to improve, however the impact of provision is inconsistent and there are varying rates of progress in different aspects of the council's responsibilities. The council has made good progress in improving the outcomes for being healthy. Safeguarding is overseen by the Local Safeguarding Children Board and supported by involvement of the private and voluntary sectors. The council has tackled the significant challenge of historically low standards of educational achievement well so that standards are now on a sustained upward trend, though they remain well below average. Good strategic planning and collaboration have improved the 14–19 curriculum, resulting in an increased participation in education, employment and training by young people. However, the outcomes for looked after children in aspects of enjoying and achieving and staying safe are lower than found nationally. Aspects of staying safe which were areas of development in the 2007 APA have not been effectively tackled. Although recent unvalidated data shows a continuing upward trend in educational standards and more progress in addressing some of the issues raised above, the rate of improvement across the council's responsibilities remains inconsistent.

## 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><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improved collaboration between the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and children's services has contributed to good progress in identifying and meeting the needs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including those with complex needs. This was an area identified as needing attention in the 2007 APA.</li> <li>▪ Good progress has been made in reducing waiting times for child and adolescent mental health services.</li> <li>▪ Improvements have been made in the number of looked after children receiving health and dental checks.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Although recently improved, the rate of reduction in teenage pregnancy is slower than in similar councils and is currently not sufficient to reach the required target.</li> </ul>

## Staying safe

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

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A high percentage of child protection cases are reviewed within timescales.</li> <li>▪ Improved coordination of work on domestic violence with the police and relevant agencies is improving the safety of children.</li> <li>▪ Improvements in adoption rates, foster placements and placements with family and friends provide good levels of stability for looked after children.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is a lack of analysis of the discrepancy between the increasingly high number of children and young people who are referred to social work teams and the lower than national percentage progressing to an initial assessment or full core assessment; this was identified as an area for development in the 2007 APA but has not been done. The rate at which referrals progress to initial assessments is improving compared with national figures, but performance remains below that nationally and in similar councils.</li> <li>▪ While the timeliness of completion rates of initial assessments is improving compared with national figures, it remains below similar councils and nationally.</li> <li>▪ The number of looked after children has continued to rise, while that in similar councils decreased in the same period.</li> <li>▪ The timeliness of looked after children's reviews is low compared with the national figure.</li> </ul>

## Enjoying and achieving

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.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Standards are improving at a faster rate than nationally and faster than in similar councils.</li> <li>▪ There has been a significant reduction in the number of schools in Ofsted categories of concern and an improving proportion of schools being judged good</li> </ul>
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or outstanding in school inspections.

- Standards in the Foundation Stage have improved and are in line with those found nationally.
- Standards at Key Stage 1 have improved and are in line with those in similar councils but below those found nationally.
- Attendance at primary and secondary schools has continued to improve at a faster rate than in similar councils.

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

- Standards remain well below average at Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.
- Rates of fixed term exclusion from school have risen. They are higher than in similar councils and nationally.
- The attendance of looked after children is below national figures. Looked after children in the council did not perform as well in national tests and public examinations as those in the rest of England.
- More statements of special educational need were completed in the council than nationally or in similar councils and the proportion rose whereas elsewhere it fell. The number completed in a timely fashion was lower than national figures.

## **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**

- The use of restorative justice principles in residential homes and the wider community has resulted in reductions in anti-social behaviour.
- There has been a reduction in the number of first time offenders in the youth justice system, supported by effective involvement of the youth offending team and a high level of integrated working between appropriate agencies.
- Children and young people of all ages systematically participate in designing, evaluating and implementing plans for improving provision and services in the area.

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

- The proportion of looked after children given a final warning has fallen, but is higher than the national figure.

## 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 and overvalue some of the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The overall proportion of young people in employment, education and training has risen and is better than in similar council. The proportions of young mothers and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities within this category have also risen and are better than in similar council and nationally.</li> <li>▪ The curriculum has been carefully mapped across Bristol, leading to better diversification of courses and pathways, and improved collaboration between providers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The proportion of young people achieving Level 2 qualifications is below similar councils and nationally. Results have improved, but at a lower rate than in similar councils and nationally.</li> <li>▪ The proportion of eligible children that have pathway plans in place is lower than in similar councils and nationally.</li> <li>▪ Fewer care leavers live in suitable accommodation than in similar councils and nationally.</li> <li>▪ The proportion of young people from some minority ethnic groups who were not in education, employment or training is higher than in similar councils.</li> </ul>

## 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 services is also adequate. The council's work is developed by ambitious and challenging targets, clear prioritisation and the building of strong and sustained links with other organisations to deliver its services and drive forward change. The Academies programme and the thorough mapping of 14–19 curriculum provision across the council demonstrate how the council plans for long term and sustained improvements, rather than relying on quick solutions to ingrained problems. Improvements in achievement at the end of the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 4 provide encouraging signs of the embedding of its work to improve standards in schools. Good working arrangements with partners have improved the health of the young people in the area. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) provides a strong basis for driving forward and evaluating change. However, the rate of improvement, though sustained in some areas, is

inconsistent across other aspects of the partnership's work, such as outcomes for looked after children. The council has taken recent action to remedy the shortcomings noted in this letter which in some cases, such as the provision for looked after children and the rate of exclusions from school, is having a positive impact. However, the important challenge is to ensure that strategic planning results in consistency across all areas of the council's work so that the sustained and encouraging improvements noted in some areas are not undermined by failures to improve services in others.

### **Major strengths**

- Strong and clear senior leadership is improving services and outcomes in some areas. Collaboration with national and local organisations is improving provision and outcomes and strengthening capacity.
- Budgets are pooled effectively and commissioning is clearly based on improving outcomes.
- Ambitious targets based on clear prioritisation make the CYPP a good working document for planning for, and implementing, change.
- Children and young people are systematically involved in designing and evaluating services.

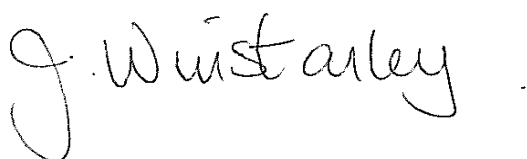
### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- Performance management is robust in some areas but insufficiently embedded in others to ensure that priorities are adequately identified and monitored.
- The gap between performance in Bristol in comparison with similar councils and nationally remains wide in significant areas of provision and the rate of progress is not uniform or sufficiently rapid across all aspects of its responsibilities. Consequently, the capacity to improve is not of a consistent quality across the Every Child Matters agenda.

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



Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection