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Mr Ashley Ayre
Strategic Director, Children's Services
Bath and North East Somerset Council
PO Box 25, Riverside
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Dear Mr Ayre

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 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.

Bath and North East Somerset Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in Bath and North East Somerset Council perform excellently. In 2009, a transitional year, they were assessed as performing well. However, in 2010 there is enough good provision to meet the minimum requirements for this grade.

Overall, the large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The quality of day care provision for very young children is good and education provision for this age group is outstanding. Primary and secondary schools are good and sixth forms outstanding. However, the two further education colleges in the area are only satisfactory and these cater for more than half of the 16- to 19-year-olds in education and training. The quality of the local special schools is good. The local authority's own fostering agency is outstanding and its adoption agency is good.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services identified a broad balance of strengths and areas needing development but no very serious weaknesses requiring urgent action. Satisfactory 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. About a quarter are significantly better and this includes a large majority of the main measures of educational attainment. Performance at the end of both primary and secondary schools and by the age of 19 is comparatively very good. This includes young people with special educational needs and those from low-income families, who do better than the average elsewhere throughout their education.

Key areas for further development

- Encourage and support improvement in the quality of provision in general further education colleges.

Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of services give good encouragement and support to children and young people in living healthy lives. The number of children who are seriously overweight at the age of 11 is comparatively very low, with good recent improvement. However, the number of young people who say they have taken drugs or been drunk recently is significantly worse than average and has gone up recently. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is significantly below the average for similar areas but there has been only modest success, similar to nationally, in reducing this figure over recent years. Parents of

disabled children report relatively positive on their dealings with local services. This mirrors the findings of the inspection of such services in 2008.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are good overall. This includes the contributions made by individual services like schools. Provision is well coordinated, with good partnership working between the different agencies involved. There is a strong and effective emphasis on identifying problems early and giving support before they become very serious. The local authority's front-line child protection services have a broad balance of strengths and areas needing development but no very serious weaknesses requiring urgent action. Arrangements to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements are satisfactory. Provision for children in care is good overall. The local authority's own fostering agency is outstanding and its adoption agency is good. When necessary it buys provision from private and voluntary organisations which are similarly good. There has been a substantial reduction in the number of young people in care who have frequent changes in their care placement and the average length of placement compares well with the average nationally. The number of children and young people overall who say they have been bullied is about average. Good progress has been made in reducing the number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents.

Provision to help children and young people achieve more educationally is an overall strength. Whilst the quality of education and day-care provision for very young children is only broadly comparable to the national average, the overall quality of primary and secondary schools is very much better. This is despite two schools being judged to be inadequate in their most recent inspection, an increase of one from last year. Pupil achievement at the end of both primary and secondary school is comparatively very good. There has been a much better rate of improvement at primary level than seen nationally over recent years, although provisional figures for 2010 show a small decline. Throughout their education young people from low-income families do better than the average for this group in similar areas, and this is particularly so at the age of 16. Young people with special educational needs also do much better than average in national tests, both at the ages of 11 and 16. One of the local special schools is satisfactory, one is good and the other is outstanding. These schools provide for most of the pupils with the highest levels of need, many of whom are unable to take national tests.

A comparatively high proportion of children and young people participate in organised group activities outside school. Re-offending by young people is higher than in similar areas, although by most measures the youth offending team 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.

Children and young people overall get good support from the very large majority of services to do well in later life. School sixth form provision is outstanding. However, the two further education colleges in the area are only satisfactory and these cater for more than half of 16- to 19-year-olds in education and training. Improving the overall quality of education for 14- to 19-year-olds is a local priority. The proportion of young people achieving qualifications equivalent to five good GCSEs by the age of

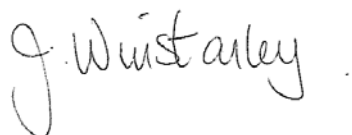
19 is much better than the average for similar areas and the same applies to qualifications equivalent to two good A levels. The proportion of young people involved in education or training after reaching the end of compulsory education is comparatively very high and there has been a substantial improvement in this figure in recent years. The proportion of young people aged 16 to 18 in education, work or training is also comparatively high.

Prospects for improvement

The local authority and its partners have a good grasp of local needs, not least because effective steps are taken to obtain both the views of children and young people themselves and their parents. The Children and Young People's Plan reflects this and sets appropriate priorities for improvement. Services collaborate well at all levels, from strategic planning to front-line service delivery. Services are better coordinated than they were, in particular for those with complex needs, and the successes achieved in such respects are one example of effective leadership. Appropriate steps are taken at a strategic level to monitor and evaluate progress in improving outcomes for children and young people and in delivering action plans. Performance management at individual case level is satisfactory but not as strong. Overall there is a good record of delivering service improvements.

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