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17 December 2008

Mr John Freeman
Director of Children's Services
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Westox House
1 Trinity Road
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Dear Mr Freeman

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Dudley Metropolitan Borough 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.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The following table sets out the grades awarded for performance in 2008.

Assessment judgement area	APA grade
Overall effectiveness of children's services	3
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	3
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	3

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale
4: outstanding/excellent; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate*

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council delivers services that are consistently above the minimum requirements for children and young people. All services can demonstrate how they are improving the achievement and economic well-being of children and young people. Early years provision is good, educational achievement at 16 has risen strongly and there are no schools requiring special measures. It is clear that these services continue to have a good impact on the outcomes achieved by children and young people in Dudley. There are significant strengths in all areas, especially enabling children and young people to participate fully in local decision making and thereby making a positive contribution to their local community. The council provides a good range of well-coordinated opportunities to enable young people to voice their views on a variety of issues. Importantly, services have worked effectively together to reduce anti-social behaviour through commissioning and running a series of successful projects. As a result, the rate of youth offending is low and reducing, as is the rate of recidivism. Services are working successfully to support young people most likely to offend. There are a significant number of initiatives in place to improve the health of children and young people, ensuring that they have access to a range of services to meet their needs, with schools contributing effectively to health promotion.

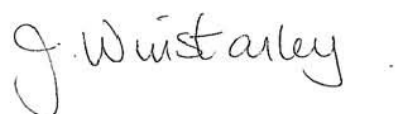
Although the council's contribution to safeguarding children and young people remains good, areas exist where performance has weakened. For example, overall performance in completing initial and core assessments remains high, but the timeliness of completing reviews of looked after children has fallen. The inspection of the fostering service shows that there are some weaknesses in care planning and risk assessment for some looked after children. The council have taken swift and decisive action to implement an effective action plan to address the recommendations raised and strengthen service delivery.

This well managed council has a good capacity to improve its services further. The council has strong leadership and an ambitious vision. Collaboration with strategic partners is effective and the council's performance management framework is good. Monitoring of schools' performance is both robust and effective; there is a strong track record in supporting improvement, together with pursuing new initiatives to develop interagency and partnership work. The council targets resources well to secure improvements. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development is consistent with the evidence. There are no additional recommendations to make as a result of the APA.

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 as part of this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues in preparing for the assessment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection

Major strengths and important weaknesses

Major strengths	Important weaknesses and areas for development
Being healthy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools contribute very effectively to health promotion. Effective partner and interagency work promote and provide support for healthy family lifestyles. Effective child and adolescent mental health services. 	Being healthy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low breast-feeding rates. Conceptions among those under age 18 are too high.
Staying safe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-agency collaboration and strategies ensure effective assessments of children most at risk of harm or abuse. A high proportion of disabled children are very well supported in their transition to adult services. 	Staying safe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk assessments of children in foster care. The timeliness of reviews of children in care.
Enjoying and achieving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good progress at Key Stage 4 and attainment that has risen significantly. Good early years provision. 	Enjoying and achieving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attainment of looked after children.
Making a positive contribution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good involvement of young people and demonstrable impact on services. Low and reducing re-offending rates compared to those found in similar areas. Good access to education and training. 	Making a positive contribution
Achieving economic well-being <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good 14 to 19 partnerships. Low incidence of young people not in education employment or training and a significant increase in the numbers of young people entering young apprentice schemes. The proportion of young people gaining Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications at ages 16 and 19 above that of similar councils. A-level scores are well above national figures. 	Achieving economic well-being <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progression and participation rates post-16 for vulnerable groups especially those young people who are in the care of the council and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

<p>Capacity to improve including the management of children’s services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good track record of improvement in educational achievement and economic well-being. ▪ The impact of the children and young people’s voice in decision making. ▪ Strong leadership, ambitious vision and effective partnership arrangements. 	<p>Capacity to improve including the management of children’s services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Insufficient number of qualified social workers in post.
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