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17 December 2008

Ms Anne Whiteley
Director of Children's Services
Devon County Council
Room 126
County Hall
Topsham Road
Exeter
EX2 4QD

Dear Ms Whiteley

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Devon 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.

| Assessment judgement area | APA grade |
|---|------------------|
| Overall effectiveness of children's services | 3 |
| Being healthy | 3 |
| Staying safe | 3 |
| 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 | 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

Devon County Council is making a good contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people in the county. Implementation of effective, integrated multi-agency services has improved and this has had an impact on narrowing the educational gap for vulnerable children and young people, including those in the care of the council. The council makes a good contribution to supporting children and young people to make a positive contribution to their community. The council’s contribution to the health of its children and young people is good and to their economic wellbeing is adequate. In the case of safeguarding, the common assessment framework is not yet consistently established or embedded across the county. The response to the recommendations of the 2006 joint area review (JAR) and the 2007 APA letter has been effective and there is evidence of significant improvement in practice and service delivery. Performance at GCSE is variable across the county’s secondary schools and a higher proportion of children are permanently excluded from school than in similar councils. Although access to a wider range of 14–19 provision across the county has improved, outcomes for Level 2 and Level 3 courses are nevertheless below those for similar councils.

The council’s capacity to improve its services for children and young people is good and its management of these services is good. In the last two years strong senior leadership has managed significant service reorganisation driven by vision and ambition. This is underpinned by clear needs analysis, risk assessment and quality assurance processes.

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.

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| <p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good, well targeted multi-agency promotion and prevention work has resulted in improved health outcomes across the county. ▪ Excellent progress has been made in implementing the healthy schools programme with all schools participating, 73% of which had achieved Healthy School status by April 2008. This exceeds the national target and is better than the average for the south west region of England. ▪ The uptake by young people of drugs services including preventative services is high. |
| <p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The impact of the teenage pregnancy strategy in reducing conception rates of 15- 17-year-olds is limited and the reduction rate remains above the national average. |

Staying safe

Grade 3

Current information indicates that the council has made progress in the area of staying safe. The staying safe grade is provisional, pending the outcome of the serious case review which is currently being completed. Once this has been completed and assessed, Ofsted will confirm the provisional grade or revise if necessary.

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| <p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An increasingly wide range of effective multi-agency early intervention and prevention strategies and services has resulted in children and families receiving the help they need more readily and fewer children needing to come into the care of the council. ▪ Strong quality assurance procedures have led to improved practices, such as the consistent application of child protection thresholds across the county. ▪ The timeliness of initial assessments has improved significantly and they are completed at a rate above that found in similar councils and nationally. |
| <p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The learning from serious case reviews is not yet used systematically to improve practice. ▪ The common assessment framework is not yet consistently embedded across the county. |

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is satisfactory. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimates a number of important weaknesses and overvalues the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

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| <p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of schools, including pupil referral units, judged as good or better is higher than is found nationally. No secondary school was placed in a category of concern in 2006/7. The council provides effective support for those primary schools in a category, with innovative use of federations to support weaknesses in leadership. ▪ Results at Key Stage 2 have improved and are higher than in similar councils in English, mathematics and science. ▪ The percentage of looked after children achieving five or more grades A* to G is now above that in similar councils. |
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| <p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE grades at A* to C grades fell in 2007 and is below that in similar councils, with considerable variation between schools. ▪ Rates of exclusions in 2006/7 are well above those in similar councils and national comparators, with fixed and permanent exclusions in secondary schools rising. Permanent exclusions for statemented pupils in mainstream secondary schools are twice those in similar councils. ▪ The proportion of primary schools receiving a notice to improve since 2005 is higher than that found nationally and in similar councils. |
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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 in this outcome area underestimates a number of important weaknesses and overvalues the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

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| <p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A very strong culture of participation and decision making by and in consultation with children and young people, including hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups, has made a discernible improvement to services. ▪ Effective well coordinated actions by a range of agencies to lessen anti-social behaviour and prevent offending have led to a reduced number of first time entrants to the Youth Justice System. ▪ The proportion of looked after children communicating their views when their cases are reviewed has improved significantly in recent years and is now above the average for England and similar councils. ▪ Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also have good opportunities to review and influence the services that they receive. |
| <p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The number of final warnings, reprimands and convictions of looked after children is higher than national and local comparators. |

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 underestimates a number of important

weaknesses and overvalues the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

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| <p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A wide range of opportunities are available for 14- to 19-year-olds including seven 14- to 19-year-olds additional diploma lines for 2009 distributed across the county. Success rates for young people completing NVQ, work-based learning and apprenticeships are improving and greater than in similar councils. ▪ The proportion of those young people whose activity is unknown is very low. The number of young people in jobs without training has declined substantially. ▪ The proportion of looked after children that left school in 2007 and are now in employment is close to that for all Devon leavers. Participation in education, employment or training by age 19 for these young people is good and improving. All those eligible have personal advisors and increasing numbers are living in suitable accommodation. |
| <p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attainment at Level 2 and Level 3 is below that found in similar councils. ▪ Pathway plans are not in place for all young people leaving care. ▪ The proportion of teenage mothers in education, employment or training is lower than that found nationally or in similar councils. |

Capacity to improve, including the management of children’s services

Grade 3

The council’s capacity to improving services for children and young people is good and its management of these services is also good. A major reorganisation of children’s services in response to the JAR in 2006 is now complete. Senior leaders provide effective and ambitious leadership with a strong determination to improve provision for children and young people. Ambitions and priorities are clearly set out and shared with partners. Imaginative procedures to identify need ensure that the views of stakeholders, partners and service users are taken seriously. Commitment to team working amongst senior staff and more integrated services have led to the effective implementation of a wide range of proactive procedures across all remits, although progress has been slower in some areas than others. Joint commissioning arrangements are developing well to ensure effective multi-agency working. Recruitment and retention of staff are good and budgets are managed efficiently. Thorough analysis of data and careful monitoring, evaluation and review of services ensure that commissioning and implementation is focused and provides good value for money. Outcomes for children and young people have begun to improve. However, the impact of preventative services to support children who are at risk of low academic achievement and/or exclusion from school is not yet demonstrated.

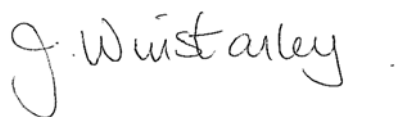
The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services, is good. Unvalidated data for 2008 indicate that further improvements, particularly for enjoying and achieving have been made.

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| Major strengths |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Effective action has been taken to tackle the recommendations of the 2007 APA and the 2006 JAR. Progress is rigorously monitored. The council knows its strengths and weaknesses well and makes good use of data to focus its resources.▪ Prioritisation is securely based on a thorough analysis of need, and priorities are set following extensive consultation with partner agencies, children and families.▪ The council is strongly committed to partnership working and has created very effective working relationships across services and agencies. |
| Important weaknesses and areas for development |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Early intervention and prevention strategies across education services are not yet fully developed.▪ The principle of equality of access to appropriate provision across the county is not yet fully embedded. |

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