

17 December 2008

Ms Di Smith
Director of Children's Services
Brighton and Hove City Council
Kings House
Grand Avenue
Hove
BN3 2LS

Dear Ms Smith

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

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	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

Brighton and Hove City Council consistently delivers services for children and young people that are above the minimum requirements for users. The management of children’s services is good. The council places a high value on this area of its work as reflected in the high level of spending and the proportion of children and young people able to access services.

The council has good capacity to improve services further. Good progress has been made since last year’s APA on the majority of the areas set for improvement, although this is not the case for all areas. Support for children and young people to be healthy is good, with a comprehensive child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS), a new integrated service for children with disabilities and some progress made on reducing teenage pregnancies. Services to help children and young people stay safe are good. The effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and good managerial oversight of integrated working has strengthened the extent to which children and young people are helped to stay safe. Nevertheless the common assessment framework, intended to make assessments of children with additional needs, is not sufficiently promoted for all ages and some data about initial assessments and the cost of placements is not accurately recorded. Children and young people continue to enjoy their education and achieve well but the council’s impact on improvements in this aspect has been variable with some areas for improvement identified last year remaining as priorities. Children and young people’s contribution to the community is good. The council’s services contribute well to the future economic well-being of children and young people. Good progress has been made in ensuring a higher proportion are now engaged in education, training and employment after the age of 16, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Nevertheless there is further to go in supporting young offenders in taking up the opportunities available. The council has had limited success in improving the achievement of young people in school sixth forms as compared to those attending the sixth form colleges in the city.

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.

Major strengths

- A high proportion of schools have achieved Healthy School status.
- A comprehensive CAMHS, with prompt response times, targeted support in schools, and support for looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Services for children with disabilities are jointly commissioned and are delivered through the new integrated children’s disability service located at Seaside View.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health promotion work is not yet making a consistent impact on levels of obesity, smoking and drinking among all children and young people. |
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Staying safe

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

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial and core assessments of children in need are completed in a timely fashion. The LSCB works effectively at both a strategic and operational level to ensure children and young people are safeguarded. A range of new, targeted family support strategies and services offering early intervention and support, are beginning to have a good impact on improving outcomes for children and their families. Multi-agency Area Panels provide good managerial support and oversight of a range of work with children and young people at high risk in various circumstances. |
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Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The common assessment framework for children and young people with additional needs was not being used with all age groups by the required date of March 2008. The proportion of reviews of looked after children completed on time has fallen. |
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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

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people make a good start in the Foundation Stage and do well during Key Stages 1 and 2 so that their academic achievement and personal development are above average when they leave primary school. Achievement is good at secondary school during Key Stage 4 so that the standards reached by the age of 16 are above those in similar areas. School improvement work is effective so that schools in categories of concern |
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<p>improve quickly and are supported in raising standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children and young people who are looked after make good progress, attending and achieving well at school.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The gap in achievement between different secondary schools remains too wide, most notably at Key Stage 3 but also at Key Stage 4. ▪ Fixed term exclusions from secondary schools, including for children and young people with statements of special educational need, are too high and attendance remains too low.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The participation of children and young people is good in making decisions about the services provided to them and in evaluating their effectiveness. ▪ Work with children and young people is well targeted at those at risk of offending to prevent them committing offences for the first time. ▪ Participation by looked after children and young people and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in using and evaluating the effectiveness of the services provided.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of supervised young offenders engaged in education, training or employment, while improving, remains well below that of similar councils and the target set for all councils of 90% engagement.

Achieving economic well-being

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>Major strengths</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collaborative working by the council with partners, including employers, to develop provision for 14- to 19-year-olds and ensure they are well informed about what is available to them. ▪ Good levels of achievement by young people at Level 2 and 3 by the age of 19.

- High levels of participation in education, training and employment by looked after young people.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Achievement in some school sixth forms is too low.

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

Grade 3

The council’s capacity to improve its services for children and young people is good, and its management of these services is good. The council, working within the Children and Young People’s Trust (CYPT), is ambitious for improvement; setting challenging targets for its priority areas, and having a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses through effective self-evaluation. In most instances, where strategies are identified as not making the required impact, the CYPT effectively refocuses its efforts and switches resources in order to improve outcomes. Partnership working is a strength and is well-focused on supporting vulnerable groups of children and young people through integrated team working. The development of such teams is innovative and offers much potential for further improvement of services. Nevertheless the council recognises the challenge of monitoring the performance of these teams because of the complexities of gathering appropriate information to demonstrate the impact they are having. The council is well focused on improving the efficiency of spending on services for children and young people but here too a significant challenge remains in bringing costs down without adversely affecting the impact made. The council has made good overall progress since the last APA in improving services for children and young people. However, there are some inconsistencies in the impact made on the areas identified for improvement and there are some areas which require attention.

Major strengths

- The council and its partners sets ambitious targets through the Children and Young People’s Plan and the Local Area Agreement in relation to priority areas, which are shared at all levels of the organisation, and resources are targeted at areas of highest need.
- Partnership working within the CYPT, in particular the innovative integrated teamwork, and with external partners, is improving outcomes in many areas.
- Performance management is increasingly effective. It is based on self-evaluation, comparing progress with other council areas; consultation, including with children and young people; and external scrutiny, which has enabled reassessment and adaptation of strategic plans in order to improve outcomes.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

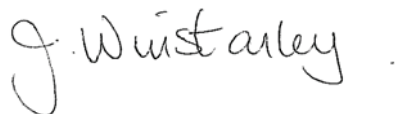
- Mechanisms to assess the impact of integrated working on improving outcomes, and achieving value for money are not fully effective.

- Some inaccuracies in data input in relation to the rate of initial assessments of children in need and the costs of care provision for looked after children, are hindering opportunities for the council to measure its progress.
- The impact and pace of improvement is not consistent across all services.

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". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a trailing dot.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection

