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Mr Stuart Gallimore
Director of Children and Young People's Services
West Sussex County Council
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Chichester, West Sussex
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Dear Mr Gallimore

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.

West Sussex County Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs poorly (1)
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Children's services in West Sussex County Council perform poorly. This is because the most recent inspection of safeguarding arrangements has reported that services are inadequate with too many children left without adequate protection. Services for looked after children are adequate.

The very large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The quality of childcare has improved since the last assessment and the large majority of childminder and childcare settings are now good or better. Nurseries and early years provision in primary schools is also strong with the very large majority good or better. Just over two thirds of primary schools are good or better, as is the case nationally, with four that are inadequate. The overall effectiveness of secondary schools has improved but remains satisfactory overall, although none are inadequate. After the age of 16, a very large majority of provision is good or better and consistently so across colleges of different types and school sixth forms. Special schools are much improved with three quarters now good or better, although one is inadequate. Other special schools located in the county, including residential special schools, are mostly good and none are inadequate. One pupil referral unit is good and two are satisfactory. Children's homes run by the local authority are all at least good, as are the local authority fostering and adoption agencies.

The very large majority of national measures of performance are in line with or better than comparators but assessments of children's special educational needs often take too long. Standards achieved by five-year-olds are below those of similar areas and are not improving as quickly. Results in national tests for 11- and 16-year-olds and standards achieved by the age of 19 are the same as for similar areas, as they are for children and young people from families with low incomes. Children and young people from families with low incomes are not, however, catching up with others in the county and neither are those with special educational needs.

Key areas for further development

- As a matter of urgency, improve the effectiveness of child protection services.
- Improve standards achieved by five-year-olds more quickly.
- Improve standards for children and young people from families with low incomes and those with special needs so that they catch up with others in the county.
- Improve the time taken to complete assessments of special educational needs.

Outcomes for children and young people

Inspected services, settings and institutions are consistently good or better at encouraging children and young people to live healthy lives, with the exception of one sixth form college. Fewer young children are too overweight than elsewhere and increasing numbers are taking part in physical activities or sports regularly. Most looked after children have up to date health and dental assessments. Misuse of drugs or alcohol is broadly average although the authority has found increasing numbers of young people excluded from school for short periods for this reason and services are working with those at risk. Services to support children and young people with emotional or mental health problems are increasingly available within local communities and prompt in their response. Appropriate support is provided to meet the health needs of looked after children. Numbers of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant are not reducing as quickly as for England overall.

Although Ofsted inspections have found schools and other settings to be consistently good or better in implementing arrangements to keep children and young people safe, the overall effectiveness of safeguarding services across the county is inadequate. The number of initial assessments of children's needs completed promptly by the local authority is increasing but rates continue to be well below average, as are the rates for completing detailed full assessments when required. However, too many assessments are of poor quality resulting in insufficient prioritisation of action to protect children. Actions to keep children and young people safe within their communities are mostly successful and surveys undertaken by the authority and its partners indicate that the vast majority of children and young people in the county feel safe. Numbers admitted to hospital due to unintentional or deliberate injuries are relatively low and reducing, but there has been an increase in deaths or serious injuries due to traffic accidents. Incidence of bullying is broadly average and institutions are increasingly vigilant and prompt in their response where bullying has been identified as a major concern by children and young people.

The very large majority of inspected services are good or better at helping children learn. Standards achieved by five-year-olds, however, are below those of similar areas and are not improving as quickly. Results in national tests for 11- and 16-year-olds are the same as for similar areas and, as for similar areas, there has been no improvement over the last three years for 11-year-olds. However, provisional results for 2010 show improvement for 16-year-olds. Very good progress has been made in reducing the number of secondary schools which fail to achieve the minimum standards for pupil performance, but the number of primary schools increased last year having previously reduced well. Improving outcomes of children whose circumstances have made them vulnerable is a priority for the local authority. Children and young people from families with low incomes are beginning to do better at the ages of five and 16 but they are not catching up with others in the county. Children and young people with special educational needs do relatively well; attainment is improving for 16-year-olds but not at the age of 11 and they are not catching up with their peers at either age. Statements of special educational needs are not always completed quickly enough. The majority of looked after children are making satisfactory or better progress in relation to their starting points. Gaps in

attainment between them and their peers are closing, although the rate of improvement is slow. Behaviour of pupils is good in the large majority of secondary schools and the number with poor attendance are reducing well.

Arrangements for involving children and young people in organised activities in their local communities are consistently implemented well and the local authority is increasing opportunities for them to do so. Fewer young people are committing crimes for the first time but re-offending rates are too high. Despite improvement, too many young offenders are still not working or continuing with their education or training and fewer than average have suitable places to live. Opportunities for looked after children and young people to contribute to their communities are in place, although there is insufficient evidence of how their views influence the development of services.

Children and young people are helped well to develop the skills and attitudes required for working life, although the pupil referral units need to do more. Young people are increasingly better qualified by the age of 19. More 16- to 18-year-olds are not working or in education or training, although numbers remain broadly average. Most looked after young people and those leaving care are in education, employment or training and almost all care leavers are now provided with suitable places to live. The number of young people from families with low incomes gaining qualifications by the age of 19 are similar to other areas but those gaining higher level qualifications are not increasing and they are not catching up with their peers in the county.

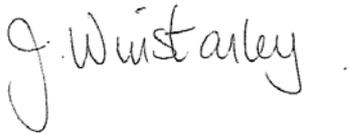
Prospects for improvement

The overall effectiveness of many institutions, settings and services has improved since the last assessment, as have most outcomes for children and young people. However, both the overall effectiveness of safeguarding services and the authority's capacity to improve them are inadequate. Despite significant financial investment and recent re-organisation of services to improve the capacity and performance of children's social care, assessments of children's needs are still not regularly completed promptly, and the authority has not been successful in bringing about consistent improvements in the quality of social work practice. Performance management and audit arrangements have failed to identify concerns raised by inspectors. Ofsted's monitoring visits to weaker schools show the local authority to provide good support to help them improve and there is only one secondary school not achieving the minimum standard of pupil performance. Primary schools not achieving the minimum standard have reduced, but standards achieved by 11-year-olds have remained the same and unvalidated data for 2010 show no further improvement. The youth offending service performs adequately but with good capacity to improve. Capacity to improve services for looked after children is adequate. A few dedicated elected members are actively committed to corporate parenting but this is not yet universally the case. The Children and Young People's Plan provides a general overview of progress and clarifies broad areas for further work. It recognises that work remains to be done to close attainment gaps between different groups of children and young people and places increasing emphasis on

reducing inequalities and improving outcomes for groups whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. It does not, however, identify the serious safeguarding concerns found by inspectors.

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 style with a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment