

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0115 944 9193
Direct F 0115 944 9307
Midlands_apa@ofsted.gov.uk



17 December 2008

Ms Lisa Christensen
Director of Children's Services
Norfolk County Council
Children's Services
County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich, Norfolk
NR1 2DL

Dear Ms Christensen

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Norfolk 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	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

Norfolk County Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements for children and young people. It has some innovative practice and is increasingly cost-effective while making contributions to wider outcomes for the community. The council’s service management and its capacity to make further improvements are good. The council ensures that children and young people are kept safe and is helping to narrow the gap between the outcomes for most children and young people and those who are looked after or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The council has responded well to a number of the recommendations made in the previous APA. Outcomes for health, safeguarding and making a positive contribution remain good. Significant progress has been made in relation to achieving economic well-being, particularly in terms of increasing participation and success rates. Enjoying and achieving outcomes remain adequate as educational attainment does not match the performance in similar councils or nationally and there are too many schools in an Ofsted category of concern. There have been some improvements in standards, particularly at Key Stage 4, but overall they are lower than the averages nationally and for similar councils.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An effective protocol between the youth offending service and child and adolescent mental health service ensures good access to Tier 3 services. This provides prompt screening for mental health referral and higher than average rates of engagement in acute and non-acute services. ▪ Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support and diagnostic services at a very early stage and there are effective arrangements for palliative care. ▪ Obesity rates are better than average and the proportion of children and young people participating in at least two hours of physical education and sport each week and eating five or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day is above the national average.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Despite preventative and early intervention initiatives, teenage conception rates remain higher than in similar councils. ▪ There has been a decline in the number of looked after children receiving their annual health assessments and these are now below the averages nationally and for similar councils.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong multi-agency working. ▪ Improvements in the timeliness of initial and core assessments. ▪ Council services for fostering and adoption and children's residential homes range from good to outstanding. ▪ Improved early intervention and preventative work has contributed to a reduction in the proportion of children and young people who are the subject of a child protection plan. This is better than in similar councils and nationally.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of 14-year-old children with disabilities who have a transition plan to support their move to adult services is lower than the averages nationally and for similar councils. ▪ The proportion of looked after children cases that were reviewed on time was below the averages nationally and for similar councils.

Enjoying and achieving

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 3. ▪ The percentages of young people attaining five A* to C grades and five good GCSEs including English and mathematics improved further in 2007. ▪ Effective corporate parenting and 'virtual school' arrangements are leading to improved outcomes for looked after children.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Results in Key Stage 2 and in English in Key Stage 3 are below the averages nationally and for similar councils. ▪ The proportion of schools judged to be good or outstanding in their inspections is lower than the national average. From April 2007 to March 2008, six primary

schools, two secondary schools and a pupil referral unit were placed in special measures and two primary schools were given a notice to improve.

- Attendance rates in secondary schools have improved but remain below the averages nationally and for similar councils. The persistent absence of children and young people is a concern in 12 of them. Exclusion rates in primary schools are higher than in similar councils and nationally.

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.

Major strengths

- There are good opportunities for children and young people to vote in elections, share their views on council services and engage in decision-making, including the allocation of funding.
- The council has established innovative partnerships with youth groups to tackle substance misuse, to reduce the social exclusion of young parents in rural areas, and to develop short breaks for disabled young people and their families.
- The youth offending service continues to operate effectively and has responded well to concerns raised in the previous APA regarding the reduction of the number of looked after children and young people receiving a final warning or conviction. This has been reduced by two percentage points and now compares favourably with the situation in similar councils.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The proportion of looked after children involved in their own care reviews has increased but remains lower than in similar councils and nationally.
- Despite the joint working arrangements between the council and Norfolk Police the number of first timers in the youth justice system has not fallen.

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.

Major strengths

- Good progress has been made, through strong partnership working, including close involvement of young people, in preparing for delivery of the new 14–19 Diplomas.
- Post-16 participation rates have improved and the proportion of young people

not in employment, education or training has fallen to below the national average.

- Success rates for vocational qualifications are above the national average and more young people are completing apprenticeships.
- The proportion of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in education, employment or training has increased and is above the averages nationally and for similar councils. Four further education colleges have centres of excellence to increase opportunities for the young people to study closer to their homes. These young people achieve well.
- Young people who are looked after and continue their education beyond the age of 16 achieve well.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Young people's access to vocational education and training remains variable across the county.
- Too few teenage mothers are in education, employment or training.
- Despite some improvement, the proportions of young people achieving Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications by the age of 19 remain below the averages for similar councils and nationally.

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 as is its management of these services. It has shared its ambitions through good collaborative working with a wide range of partners. The Director of Children's Services, senior managers and councillors provide effective strategic leadership to deliver improvements to the clear priorities set in the Children and Young People's Plan. Self-review and further consultation with children and young people have helped to re-focus services towards those areas where improvements are less pronounced. Resources have been re-aligned and additional investment made in children's services to make further improvements. Value for money is good.

The council recognises its areas for development and has rightly placed raising educational attainment as one of its top corporate objectives. Overall, the council has contributed well to improving outcomes for children and young people in most areas, particularly in relation to achieving economic well-being. It is demonstrating that it has good capacity to make further improvements to its children's services.

Major strengths

- The Children and Young People's Plan reflects high ambitions based on a good analysis of need.
- Services have secured strong partnerships to improve outcomes.
- The council continues to build upon its beacon status for youth engagement and

ensures that children and young people make an effective contribution to the development of services.

- There has been a successful focus on narrowing the gap between outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people and the rest of the population.

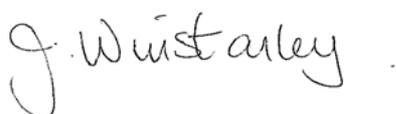
Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Insufficient progress has been made in reducing the number of schools causing concern, in reducing teenage conception rates and in ensuring that teenage mothers participate in education, employment and training.
- The council has made insufficient use of the available data to make an accurate assessment of the contribution of services to bringing about improvements in children and young people's enjoyment and achievement.

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