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17 December 2008

Ms Helen Denton  
Executive Director for Children and Young People  
Lancashire County Council  
County Hall  
Preston  
Lancashire  
PR1 8RJ

Dear Ms Denton

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Lancashire 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.

<b>Assessment judgement area</b>	<b>APA grade</b>
Overall effectiveness of children's services	2
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	2
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	2

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

## Overall effectiveness of children’s services

Grade 2

The overall effectiveness of children’s services is adequate. The council’s capacity to improve, including its management of services, is adequate. The council has maintained its good performance in ensuring that children and young people are healthy, enjoy and achieve well, make a positive contribution and are prepared for their future economic well-being. The contribution to making a positive contribution is not judged to be outstanding because of the weaknesses, identified in the JAR, in elements of the participation of some looked after children and some of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Its provision for ensuring that young people stay safe is adequate. Referral and re-referral rates remain high and thresholds for need and response are not consistently agreed or understood by all agencies. Reviews of looked after children’s cases have improved from a low base in 2006/07, but the current rate of 86% is only adequate. Arrangements for the risk assessment of the high volume of domestic violence cases are not sufficiently robust. Although the management of services remains good, the council’s capacity to improve is adequate. Progress has been made in performance management systems but they are not sufficiently consistent, for example the fostering service required a year to improve after being judged inadequate. The self-assessment is on the whole too positive. Partnership working, such as in promoting careers education, is a clear strength. Strategies to engage children and young people are successful. Consultations are wide-ranging and lead to appropriate revisions of priorities. However, action plans arising from these priorities are not consistently precise.

## 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><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High priority is given to promoting healthy lifestyles including for looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.</li> <li>▪ Support for children and young people at risk of substance misuse is good.</li> <li>▪ Most schools, including all special schools, have achieved Healthy Schools Status and this has been recognised as a ‘beacon’ achievement.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The 2007 APA letter indicated that the reorganisation of the eight Primary Care Trusts into three had impacted adversely on the rate of change, particularly around services for 16- and 17-year-olds and 24-hour cover. These weaknesses in provision remain. Waiting times for access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) in the area covered by Lancashire Care NHS Trust are significantly higher than the England average.</li> </ul>

## Staying safe

## Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. These judgements confirm those awarded in the recent JAR for safeguarding arrangements. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimate a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p><b>Major Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There are good arrangements to establish the whereabouts of children. These include effective joint procedures to identify and track missing children.</li> <li>▪ The provision of information on all safeguarding matters is good.</li> <li>▪ The numbers of core assessments have increased substantially in the last year and are now almost in line with levels in England.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The fostering services were judged to be inadequate for the majority of the period of this APA. Very recently they have been judged to be satisfactory.</li> <li>▪ Services for looked after children were judged in the JAR to be inadequate.</li> <li>▪ One council children's home has been assessed as being inadequate in two consecutive inspections relating to building/environment and staffing issues.</li> <li>▪ Most indicators in respect of safeguarding are in line with comparator and England averages and are adequate overall. However, high referral and re-referral rates and a comparatively low rate of initial assessments require improvement.</li> <li>▪ Progress is being made in the implementation of the common assessment framework alongside a continuum of need model. However, clarification of thresholds for access to services and the role played by different agencies is still in progress.</li> <li>▪ The percentage of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents remains comparatively high despite improvements last year.</li> </ul>

## 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.

<p><b>Major Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The quality of provision in most schools and early years settings is good.</li> <li>▪ Overall standards of attainment are rising and achievement is particularly strong at Key Stage 4 where the rate of improvement is above that found nationally.</li> </ul>
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- The quality of support for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and in particular the use of data to monitor progress.

#### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- Standards of attainment of looked after children and young people, although improving, remain below the attainment of other young people.
- The levels of attainment at Key Stage 4 in the most deprived areas of the council remain an area for further improvement.

### **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 underestimate a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

#### **Major strengths**

- There are well established systems and structures for seeking the views of children and young people, including looked after children and hard to reach groups, to influence strategic planning and service delivery.
- An increasingly effective youth service is raising the number of children and young people reached and the levels of recorded and accredited outcomes
- A well structured system for tackling anti social behaviour and crime has succeeded in reducing re-offending rates to below the national level and increasing the proportion of supervised juveniles in full time education, employment or training.

#### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- Procedures for ensuring that children and young people who are looked after are able to participate in school activities do not guarantee consistency of access for all.
- Despite an improving trend a lower proportion of looked after children contribute to their reviews than is found in similar council areas.
- The reviews of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and classified as receiving enhanced school action plus support are not sufficiently structured to ensure that the voice of these young people is heard.

### **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><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Partnership work is good with some effective developments in careers education to better inform children and young people of the opportunities available at transition points. Effective and innovative projects for vulnerable groups have helped raise aspirations.</li> <li>▪ The percentages of young people achieving both Level 2 and Level 3 by age 19 have improved from below to above the averages nationally and for similar councils between 2005 and 2007.</li> <li>▪ Effective systems ensure personal advisers follow up all school leavers to offer a place in learning. Their work is well targeted, for example on looked after children and on young people who are in jobs without training, in order to provide enhanced support to convert these into apprenticeships.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is too much variation across the county in the levels of young people who are not engaged in employment, education or training.</li> </ul>

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

**Grade 2**

The council’s capacity to improve its services for children and young people is adequate and its management of these services is good, particularly with respect to education. This judgement confirms those made in the recent JAR. The council has strategies for prioritisation that are firmly rooted in wide-ranging consultation processes. These benefit from the use of multi-agency datasets and most significantly from the engagement of children and young people. Innovative practices enable children and young people to make a real contribution to decision-making. Strong strategic partnership working has led to good commitment to Children’s Trust arrangements. Clear priorities and levels of ambition are based on a thorough analysis of need. The council sets realistic targets but does not consistently set milestones and name responsible officers. Its responses to external inspection findings have been variable. Service management is good overall and results in generally good outcomes such as a high quality service for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and an improving trend of achievement in schools. Progress has been made in establishing performance management. In the fostering service failings in performance management contributed to an inadequate service which needed a year to be rectified. The council, unlike last year, has been inaccurate in its self-assessment and has rated itself too highly in two outcome areas, its capacity to improve and the overall effectiveness of its children’s services.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Partnership working is strong. All partners are committed to Children’s Trust arrangements.</li> </ul>
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- The degree of engagement with young people and the levels of their active participation in decision-making are good.
- Good use of consultation and multi-agency datasets leads to appropriate revisions of priorities and plans, such as the decision to focus the 61 children's centres in the first two phases in the 30% most disadvantaged areas of the county.
- Efficiency initiatives are helping to release savings to high priority services.
- Service management is good overall.
- Services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good and have an effective emphasis on inclusion which is enabling more children and young people to be educated in their local area.

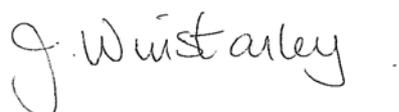
### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- The fostering service and services for looked after children were judged inadequate during the last year. The JAR identified that performance management systems did not secure safe outcomes and the fostering service has taken a full year to return to satisfactory levels.
- The recent JAR judged the council's response to external inspection findings to be variable.
- Not all service and action plans have precise targets, milestones and named responsible officers nor do they systematically include the needs of all sectors of the community.
- The council's self-assessment is too positive in a number of areas.
- The rate of progress in bringing about further improvement in some services is not sufficiently rapid; for example, in reducing the number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents and in reducing the variability across the county in the levels of young people who are not engaged in employment, education or training.

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