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17 December 2008

Mr Tony Howell  
Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families  
Birmingham City Council  
1st Floor Council House Extension  
Margaret Street  
Birmingham  
B3 3BU

Dear Mr Howell

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

<b>Assessment judgement area</b>	<b>APA grade</b>
Overall effectiveness of children's services	2
Being healthy	2
Staying safe	1
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	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

Birmingham City Council delivers services for children and young people that meet minimum requirements. The council’s capacity to improve, including service management is adequate. The council’s self-assessment is not always accurate in assessing the quality of its services. This is because in some outcome areas a number of important weaknesses have been underestimated and on occasions there has been an overvaluing of the areas where progress has been made. Improvement on the 2007 APA areas for development has been inconsistent and not uniform across all outcome areas. Outcomes for staying safe are inadequate.

Outcomes relating to being healthy remain adequate. Healthy lifestyles are being promoted well in schools. However, teenage pregnancy rates are rising along with increasing obesity in primary aged children. Staying safe outcomes had been improving and were adequate in the 2007 APA. Since then performance in some important areas has deteriorated and past improvements have not always been sustained. This has meant social care outcomes are now inadequate. For example, there are high numbers of looked after children and child protection plans compared to similar councils. Serious case reviews have been inappropriately commissioned, and a number of reports produced are inadequate. Enjoying and achieving outcomes are adequate. Educational attainment is good at the end of Key Stage 4 and standards are starting to rise at the end of other key stages. However, the percentage of schools causing concern is above similar councils and the national average. The areas of making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being remain good. There is effective multi-agency work to reduce re-offending and outcomes for most young people aged 16–18 continue to improve.

## Being healthy

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. This is in line with the council’s self-assessment. The council’s analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good promotion of healthy lifestyles in schools, including a range of physical activities to promote exercise and improve fitness and effective engagement in the National Healthy Schools Programme.</li> <li>▪ Young people have good access to Young People’s Services for substance misuse.</li> <li>▪ Services to promote the health of looked after children are good, including regular review of health plans, including dental and optical checks.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The conception rate for those under 18 has risen to a figure significantly higher than the national average and the achievement of the Government target for a 50% reduction by 2010 is unlikely to be achieved.</li> <li>▪ Rates of obesity in primary aged children are rising, with 16% of Year 6 children overweight or obese. This represents a 6% increase in obesity in this year group since 2005/06.</li> </ul> |
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## Staying safe

## Grade 1

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is inadequate. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area omits a number of important weaknesses in relation to safeguarding the most vulnerable children. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The impact of work to combat bullying, harassment and discrimination is good.</li> <li>▪ A comparatively low proportion of children have a child protection plan for more than two years, and re-registration rates are low.</li> <li>▪ Placement stability for looked after children is good.</li> </ul> |
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<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Very high levels of referrals and re-referrals with high thresholds for children's social care specialist services.</li> <li>▪ The percentage of referrals leading to initial assessment has declined and is below comparators. The timescale for the completion of initial assessments has improved, but also remains below comparators.</li> <li>▪ Serious case reviews have been inappropriately commissioned with long delays in completing them. A number of reports produced were inadequate.</li> <li>▪ Very low spend on family support and insufficient family support services result in high numbers of looked after children and child protection plans compared to similar councils.</li> <li>▪ A high percentage of looked after children are in residential care.</li> <li>▪ The percentage of looked after children allocated to a qualified worker is below comparators.</li> </ul> |
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## 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 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>▪ The percentage of young people achieving five or more A* to C GCSE grades or their equivalent has been above the national average and well above similar councils since 2005. The percentage achieving five or more higher GCSE grades including English and mathematics has been above similar councils since 2005. Children and young people have made good progress between Key Stages 2 and 4 since 2005.</li> <li>▪ The percentage of young people leaving care aged 16 or more with five or more A* to C GCSE grades or their equivalent is above similar councils and the national average for looked after children.</li> <li>▪ There has been good improvement in narrowing the attainment gap for minority ethnic groups in Key Stage 4.</li> <li>▪ A greater proportion of newly looked after children are placed within 20 miles of their home than nationally and in similar councils.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is below the national average. Attainment in writing at the end of Key Stage 1 was well below the national average and below similar councils. Standards in writing are falling at a greater rate than that seen nationally.</li> <li>▪ The proportion of schools causing concern is above similar councils and the national average. In 2007/08, a significant number of primary schools causing concern had made inadequate progress on their Section 8 monitoring visit.</li> <li>▪ The percentage of both fixed-term and permanent exclusions is much higher than similar councils and the national average. The permanent exclusion rate for Black boys and fixed-term rate for Black African children in primary schools is increasing.</li> <li>▪ The attendance of looked after children deteriorated in 2007/08 and is worse than that of looked after children in similar councils and nationally.</li> </ul>

## 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><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Effective multi-agency action has steadily reduced re-offending.</li> <li>▪ More young people than the national average take part in Youth Service activities. The ratio of full-time youth workers to young people is better than the national average.</li> <li>▪ There are well-developed mechanisms for involving children and young people in the decision-making process. Vulnerable groups are effectively consulted and supported to improve and design services. For example, through the Disabled Children's Strategy, the views of users were sought to improve provision in mainstream and special education.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In 2007/08, there was a rise in the number of first-time offenders. The overall number of first-time entrants in the youth justice system is much higher than similar councils.</li> <li>▪ Custody rates for young Black men remain high, despite a slight decline in the number of them entering the justice system for the first-time.</li> <li>▪ While there has been a recent rise in the number of looked after children communicating their views at statutory reviews the percentage is currently below comparators.</li> </ul>

## 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>▪ In 2007/08, there was a dramatic rise in the proportion of 16 to 18 year olds in education, employment or training (EET). The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training is below similar councils.</li> <li>▪ The percentage of young people achieving Levels 2 and 3 by age 19 has increased year-on-year since 2005 and is better than similar councils. The overall NVQ success rate for all work-based learners aged under 19 is rising sharply and at a rate above that seen nationally.</li> <li>▪ In 2007, results for 16 to 18 year olds in sixth forms entered for GCE/VCE and A/AS were well above similar councils and above the national average.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The percentage of care leavers aged 19 living in suitable accommodation is falling and below comparators.</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 also adequate. The Brighter Futures strategy and the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) outline an ambitious vision to improve the life chances for the city's children and young people. Strategic priorities are based on a thorough needs analysis and research of the local context. The council appropriately evaluates costs and outcomes and uses comparison and benchmarking measures to increase its self-awareness and efficiency. The council effectively communicates decisions about these ambitions to councillors, officers, staff, and to children and young people.

The council is moving from high intervention, reactive work, to prevention and early intervention with some success. Nevertheless the actions to bring about improvement and deliver ambitions are inconsistent. Data show that performance has improved in some areas but deteriorated in others, particularly for vulnerable groups. For example, while placement stability for looked after children is good, their absence rate from school has increased. While there is an improving trend in the proportion of mothers breast-feeding the rate of teenage pregnancy is increasing. The council's self-assessment is not always accurate in assessing the quality of its services and the balance of strengths and weaknesses to determine the overall effectiveness of provision. Improvement on the areas for development identified in the 2007 APA has been inconsistent. There has been a significant reduction in the number of young people not in education, employment or training and vocational standards have improved. In contrast, the number of schools causing concern remains above similar councils and the percentage of both fixed-term and permanent exclusions is much higher than similar councils and the national average.

Lead responsibilities and resource requirements are generally made explicit in plans, but milestones and target outcomes are not always identified. For example, the CYPP and self-assessment do not specify improvement targets for attainment in Key Stages 1 and 2. Partnership working is not yet fully effective, and improving or maintaining services is proving difficult in some areas. The contribution of different services is not always fully integrated to ensure the needs of vulnerable groups are coherently and consistently met.

### Major strengths

- The Brighter Futures strategy and the CYPP outline an ambitious vision to improve the life chances for the city's children and young people.
- Strategic priorities are based on a thorough needs analysis and research of the local context.

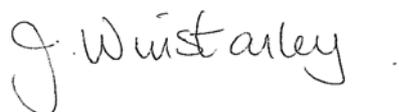
### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- Action to deliver ambitions, improve services and remedy the areas for development identified in the 2007 APA letter has been inconsistent. As a result, performance has deteriorated in some outcome areas, particularly for vulnerable groups.
- The management of serious case reviews is not yet good enough.
- Serious shortages in the social care workforce, together with a sharp drop in the percentage of residential case workers with NVQ Level 3 in health and social care, impacts negatively on the council's capacity to fully deliver social care services efficiently and effectively.

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