

9 December 2009

Ms Kath O'Dwyer  
Strategic Director of Children's Services  
Warrington Borough Council  
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Dear Ms O'Dwyer

## Children's services annual rating

Ofsted guidance published in May 2009 explained that the annual rating would derive from a new performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the council has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant *Every Child Matters* indicators in the new National Indicator Set (NIS).

In considering the evidence in the profile to determine the children's services rating for 2009 it has become clear that the continuing gaps in the data are significant, particularly those relating to aspects of social care and services for Looked After Children. Ofsted has decided therefore to use 2009 as a transitional year easing into the full application of the new system in 2010. As a consequence, although the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's rating, we have interpreted the performance bands with flexibility and exercised professional judgement with caution.

The annual rating 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, a rating of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, a rating of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects.

## Children's services rating 2009

<b>Children's services rating</b>	<b>Performs poorly (1)</b>
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Children's services in Warrington Borough Council perform poorly.

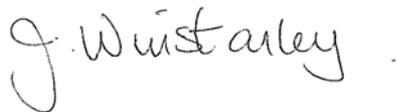
The overall effectiveness of the large majority of inspected services and settings is good or better, reflecting performance which is often above similar areas and seen nationally, particularly within educational settings. However, this is in marked contrast to the overall effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements which are inadequate.

The joint area review in December 2007 judged services for looked after children and safeguarding to be good. However, the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need identified three areas requiring priority action. A subsequent inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services judged the local authority's performance as inadequate for safeguarding with weak performance in the quality of assessments, child protection enquiries and child protection planning. Action to respond to the safeguarding and protection needs of some children and young people in care is poor. These findings are pivotal in determining the 2009 annual rating for children's services.

Most children do well in nursery education and when they move on to primary school. However, performance in just over half of childcare settings is judged to be good or better; this is below that found in similar areas and nationally. Secondary schools do well compared with similar areas, with the majority being good or better. Although school sixth forms are effective overall, there is more adequate provision than is the case nationally. Of the three special schools, two are good or better and one satisfactory. The pupil referral unit, children's homes and the local authority fostering arrangements are good. Judgements for all Every Child Matters outcomes are good or better in a large majority of inspected services and settings.

Performance against a large majority of indicators is in line with similar areas and nationally. The council does very well in most areas of enjoying and achieving, and achievement at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 is good for the majority of children. The achievement gap in the Early Years Foundation Stage is narrower than that found nationally. Children with special educational needs also do well and the gap between them and the majority is closing. The inequality gap in achievement at Level 2 is in line with similar areas and nationally, however at Level 3 is wider. The numbers of young people from low income families progressing to higher education is in line with similar areas and the national average.

The children's services rating is provided for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The rating of local authority children's services will contribute significantly to the managing performance theme of each local authority's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) organisational assessment and therefore to the score for each local authority overall.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, CAA