

26 November 2007

Ms Therese Gillespie  
Corporate Director for Children and Young People  
South Gloucestershire Council  
Bowling Hill  
Chipping Sodbury  
South Gloucestershire  
BS37 6JX

Dear Ms Gillespie

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNCIL**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) for your local authority. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan where it was available, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. 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.

### **Overall effectiveness of children's services**

**Grade 3**

South Gloucestershire Council consistently delivers services above minimum requirements for children and young people. Outcomes in each of the five main areas are good overall. Children's services are making a number of valuable contributions to improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people in the area.

Leadership of children's services is strong and the council has made good steps in working more closely with its partners. There has been good improvement in nearly all of the areas for development identified by the last APA. The council knows itself well and sets ambitious targets for improvement. The clearly written Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and the reviews of its progress, demonstrate a good capacity for further improvement.

### **Being healthy**

**Grade 3**

#### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. There are good partnerships between the council and health agencies and a clear focus on health outcomes across services. Beacon Status has

been achieved for Healthy Schools, with all schools participating, and a well above target 78% having achieved the National Healthy School Standard. The recent Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) fostering inspection rated Being Healthy as excellent.

There is a good range of information and advice available to children and young people and their carers about healthy lifestyles. Universal services provide good support, and performance indicators across the range of health services, such as the proportion of mothers smoking during pregnancy, low birth weight, infant and perinatal mortality, deaths of children and young people under age 15, immunisation and breast-feeding rates are all better than in similar authorities and national averages. All GP practices have child health surveillance services. There is low usage of Accident and Emergency (A&E) facilities, indicating that GP services are used appropriately. Dedicated, children and young people's A&E facilities are provided at Bristol Royal Hospital for Children.

Admissions to hospital of young people under the age of 20 with mental and behavioural disorders due to substance misuse are half the national average. The Youth Offending Service effectively refers and enables access by young people to substance misuse services, and these referrals receive a timely response.

The level of annual health and dental assessments for children and young people who are looked after is very good, and, at 93%, has been above the figure for similar authorities and national averages for the past five years. The work of the looked after children's nurse is valued by children and young people and other professionals. Good attention is paid to delivering a service to teenagers who may resist the concept of a health assessment, with opportunities for health advice being offered to them in user-friendly ways. The needs of those children and young people who are placed out of county are appropriately met. The successful achievements of the nurse are limited by the fact that this is a part-time post.

A full review of services to children and young people who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities has led to improved multi-agency working.

The continued rise in teenage pregnancy is a shared priority for the authority and other agencies. Successful recruitment to the post of the Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator has led to recent improvements in the coordination and focus of a range of advice and support services, with good use of local data.

Previous recruitment difficulties within the CAMHS service have now been resolved and two consultant psychiatrists have been appointed. Waiting lists for assessment have recently been reduced by a psychiatrist working with GPs on referrals. Twenty four-hour cover is now provided to meet the urgent mental health needs for children and young people and specialist mental health assessment is undertaken within 24 hours, both improving on last year's performance. Partnership working is effective between agencies for children and young people with complex, persistent and severe behavioural disorders.

## Area for development

- Continue to address the rise in teenage pregnancy by building on the good initial work of the Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator.

## Staying safe

**Grade 3**

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good.

A good range of advice and support to children and young people and their families is provided to promote wider safety awareness, including good involvement of services such as the Fire Service. Reductions in deaths and serious injuries of children and young people in road traffic accidents show that the authority is on track to meet government targets. The majority of young people report that they feel safe in their local area.

The draft Parenting Support Strategy has been developed across all agencies, and shows appropriate support to children in need. The rate of referrals to social care services which result in initial assessments is lower than in similar authorities and national averages. However, referrals as a whole have increased, with a larger proportion being dealt with by signposting or advice work through the duty system, and not becoming defined as a Child in Need referral. Completion of initial and core assessments within the required timescales is very good. The recent restructuring of the duty system, from a central duty point to three locality duty teams, has highlighted the need to ensure consistency across those teams. The authority plans to monitor how well this system ensures consistent access to services.

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) oversees and promotes child protection effectively as well as the wider safeguarding agenda. There have been no serious case reviews in the past two years, and the findings of the one review in 2005 have been well disseminated. Agencies participate fully in the work of the LSCB, and good training has been provided to a range of staff working with children and young people. South Gloucestershire has adopted the southwest regional child protection procedures, published in 2007, which ensures consistency for children and young people who may move between authorities. A review of the Victoria Climbié audit and an audit against Safeguarding Children in Education showed good compliance. The LSCB evidences good monitoring of safeguarding issues.

Issues for young people in the secure estate are well covered within overall safeguarding plans. Two previous social work posts within youth offending institutions are now no longer funded by the Youth Justice Board. The importance of providing this social work service, which was previously highly praised by prison inspections, is a clear priority for senior managers.

All children on the child protection register, and all who are looked after, are allocated to qualified social workers. Numbers on the child protection register have reduced, and remain below those for similar authorities and national averages. However, the authority argues convincingly that thresholds are appropriate and that the success of support to parents has led to fewer registrations. The percentage of Section 47 child protection enquiries, which came to initial child protection conference within 15 days, was the highest compared with similar authorities and well above national averages.

There are effective policies and protocols to establish the identity and whereabouts of children and young people, with good collaboration between the council and the police in the Missing from Care process. Good collaboration between agencies ensures that services are aware of new residents in the area, particularly those from Eastern European groups, who are increasingly moving to work in South Gloucestershire. There is good awareness of the location and needs of Traveller families.

There is very good achievement in the completion within timescales of statutory reviews of children and young people who are looked after, with a significant increase in the past year. The Independent Reviewing Officer team has achieved this by improving their knowledge of new entrants to the care system and stressing the importance of achieving the first, 28-day, review within timescales. An increasing percentage of children and young people who are looked after experience three or more placements during the year. This is explained by planned moves to match the needs of those children. However, this is an area for continued management oversight. Long-term stability of placements has improved.

Pathway planning takes place, with personal advisors allocated to all eligible care leavers.

### **Area for development**

- Continue to monitor and reduce placement moves for children and young people who are looked after.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

**Grade 3**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. The council received Beacon Status for its school improvement work in the spring of 2007. A recent Audit Commission survey also indicates that schools value the support and challenge provided by the school improvement team.

Inspection evidence indicates that early years provision is similar to that seen nationally. Children leave the Foundation Stage with better developed skills and abilities than are seen nationally although standards have fallen during the past two years. Following the recent appointment of a new senior adviser for early years good plans are now in place to reorganise and strengthen early years provision. Standards

at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 are significantly above the national average and higher than in similar authorities. Unvalidated results for 2007 indicate that there has been a rise in the percentage of children achieving the higher levels in Key Stage 1. This was an area the council had targeted for improvement. Provisional data for 2007 also indicate that the percentage of children achieving Level 4 and above at the end of Key Stage 2 has continued to improve in English, mathematics and science. Children make better than average progress between Key Stages 1 and 2.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are higher than national averages and in line with those in similar authorities. Unvalidated results for 2007 indicate that standards at Level 5 have risen again in English and science but remained at the same level in mathematics. Following a large improvement in GCSE results in 2005 there was a stall in improvement in 2006. Standards in this year were broadly in line with national averages but below those seen in similar authorities. Unvalidated results for 2007 indicate that standards have risen again. The school improvement team is working robustly and effectively with secondary schools to raise achievement in Key Stage 4.

The school improvement service is well led and managed, providing strong support and challenge to schools. This is borne out by the proportion of schools placed in a category of concern following inspection, which is lower than nationally. There is no secondary school currently in a category of concern. Schools placed in a category or deemed satisfactory have been well supported. In all cases, the improvement team already knew the barriers to improvement and effective action has been taken to bring about sustainable improvement.

Inspection evidence indicates that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well. One of the two special schools inspected during the past year was judged outstanding and the other was judged good. Children who are looked after are provided with good support and also achieve well. The council tracks the progress of pupils from minority ethnic groups well. These tracking data indicate these pupils generally achieve as well as other groups of pupils.

The attendance of children in both primary and secondary schools is above the national average and in line with similar authorities. The percentage of unauthorised absences in both phases is below similar authorities and the national average. The attendance of looked after children is good and above that seen in similar authorities. The Tellus2 survey, based on a sample of children and young people in the area, showed that they enjoy school and try to do their best. Fixed-term and permanent exclusions from primary schools are below the national average and in line with similar authorities. Permanent exclusions from secondary schools have fallen and are now in line with similar authorities. Fixed-term exclusions from secondary schools have also fallen although they remain above those seen in similar authorities. All pupils who have been permanently excluded from school receive their entitlement of at least 20 hours per week education.

## Areas for development

- Improve the attainment of pupils at age 16.
- Continue to reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions from secondary schools.

## Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Children and young people are supported well in developing socially and emotionally. The views of children and young people and their carers are sought across a range of the authority's corporate planning processes and across agencies. In the Tellus2 survey, more young people felt that they were listened to in school than the national average. The Participation Strategy has been endorsed by children and young people, elected members, and key services and agencies. The voice of children and young people is increasingly influencing planning but could be more consistent.

There are a good range of opportunities for children and young people to be involved in their local community and targeted projects, such as the Kids participation project for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the looked after children youth group, and the young carers project.

Children and young people were closely involved with the development of the anti-bullying strategy and toolkit. Young people have been trained to run their own website and helpline. Improved cross-departmental and school monitoring systems have improved reporting of racist, homophobic and disability related incidents and bullying and harassment complaints. An authority-wide partnership against hate crime is well-established.

The Youth Offending Service performs highly. Prevention of re-offending is consistently better than in similar authorities, and the number of new entrants to the youth justice system in the past two years has been approximately half that of similar authorities.

The percentage of children and young people who are looked after who have been given a final warning or reprimand or who have been convicted has improved, and is acceptable. Services are fully aware of the individual circumstances, as these percentages relate to low numbers and work is well focused on individual needs.

The participation of children and young people who are looked after in their statutory reviews is high, at 94%, above similar authority figures and national averages, representing continued good performance.

Advocacy services effectively support children and young people who are the subject of child protection procedures.

New partnership working has been developed across agencies. The Youth Service works closely and effectively with other agencies in health promotion, and reaches a high number of young people.

### **Area for development**

- Continue to work to ensure that consultation with children and young people is consistent across all corporate planning processes.

## **Achieving economic well-being**

**Grade 3**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good.

The council has a well-established strategic 14 – 19 policy with clear leadership and supporting infrastructure in place. The council has supported two successful diploma gateway applications. The Kingswood partnership has been successful in its application to offer all five vocational lines at all three levels. The Concorde partnership will be offering the creative and media diploma from 2009. These successful applications reflect the effective partnership working within the authority and the increasing breadth of the vocational provision offered to young people.

The percentage of young people entering education, employment or training is well above the national average and similar authorities. This figure is continuing to rise. The percentage of young people in employment with training has also been effectively increased. The percentage of care leavers and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in employment, education or training is above the national average and similar authorities. However, the percentage of teenage mothers in employment, education or training, although rising, remains below the national average.

Effective partnership with the Connexions service ensures that support for young people about to make the transition to further education, employment and training is good. The council works well with the Connexions service to track the routes followed by young people. The percentage of 16–18 years olds whose activity is not known is well below the national average and similar authorities.

The proportion of young people who continue in education after Year 11 is above both the national average and the figure in similar authorities. The percentage of 19 year olds achieving Level 2 qualifications improved in 2006 and was above the national average although below comparator authorities. The achievement of 18 and 19 year olds in Level 3 qualifications is below the national average and similar authorities. Raising achievement at this level has been a focus of the council's work during the past year. Provisional data indicate that standards rose in 2007 although this remains a clear priority for the council.

The council has a good range of housing provision for care leavers. The percentage of care leavers at age 19 who live in suitable accommodation is well above the national average. The percentage of young people housed in bed and breakfast accommodation is declining and below the figure seen in similar authorities.

The children and young people's information service is providing up-to-date and accessible information at key points for young people and parents. The council reports that there is increased usage of this service and high satisfaction rates by users. There has been considerable change in early years provision during the past two years. The number of providers has been reduced and the number of places increased. Full day care provision has increased while crèche and sessional day care provision have reduced. The provision and demand for places are effectively monitored at a local level and current provision meets demand. The rollout of children's centres is progressing well and the authority is ahead of its target to open 11 new centres by 2008.

### **Areas for development**

- Improve the attainment of 18 and 19 year olds particularly in Level 3 qualifications.
- Continue to improve the percentage of teenage mothers in employment, education or training.

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

**Grade 3**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The council is well led and managed and it has good capacity to improve.

Senior officers demonstrate a shared sense of purpose and drive to improve the quality of services, which is supported well by elected members. The council sets itself ambitious and challenging targets across all the *Every child matters* outcomes, with comprehensive needs analysis and data firmly underpinning planning. Good systems are in place to monitor service delivery and outcomes for children and young people. The views of children and young people, parents and other stakeholders are effectively sought. As a consequence the council knows itself well. The Children and Young People's Plan shows good evidence of prioritisation and targeting of effort on identified areas for improvement. Outcomes for children and young people are improving within the authority due to positive and effective working relationships with schools. However, the rate of improvement in achievement of 14 to 19 year olds is below the authority's expectations, and teenage pregnancy rates remain a challenge.

A particular strength of the council is the partnerships it has developed with other agencies to ensure coherence in its work to serve the community. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is well established and effective. Restructuring of social

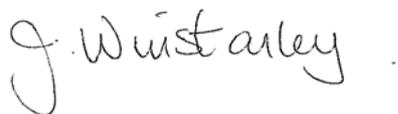
care teams to focus on multi-agency locality working is effective, with clear planning and timescales for completion, and with care being taken not to disrupt services to children and young people during the period of change. The Common Assessment Framework is being implemented within timescales. Implementation of the Integrated Children's System is underway. Despite some technical difficulties with the new system all changes are due to be implemented within the required timescale.

Safe staffing is a clear priority, and robust arrangements ensure that council and school staff are appropriately checked. The LSCB is working on a consistent process for safe staff recruitment across all member agencies. The council has relatively few social care vacancies, and a recent survey showed a positive view by staff of how they are valued by their employers.

The council's commissioning strategy has a flexible approach to securing services in the most economic manner, with effective arrangements for pooling or aligning budgets. Although funding for social care services is relatively low, extra resources have been allocated for the move to locality working, and the extra staffing required.

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.

Yours sincerely

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

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager  
Local Services Inspection