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Mrs Helen Watson
Director of Children's Services
South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council
Town Hall and Civic Offices
Westoe Road
South Shields
Tyne and Wear
NE33 2RL

Dear Mrs Watson

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough 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	4
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	4
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

South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services is good. The council has made good progress in responding to most of the recommendations made in the 2007 APA. Partnership working is very strong and senior officers and members are fully committed to making continued improvements in services. The pace of progress has been particularly good in improving outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children and young people, improving the educational attainment of young people between the ages of 11 and 16 and in improving the proportion of young people entering employment, education or training at age 16. There are some areas in which progress has been slower such as the impact of actions to improve the attainment, at five A* to C, of looked after children. The recent JAR identified some shortcomings in some safeguarding case work and in the leadership of the youth service. The JAR, however, judged most of the specific investigations it made into the quality of children’s services to be good.

Being healthy

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. 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"> ▪ Well developed child and adolescent mental health services with good coverage and availability. ▪ Low and reducing numbers of teenage conceptions which compare very well against the performance of similar council areas. ▪ Nearly all schools are involved in the National Healthy Schools initiative and a better than national average proportion has achieved the award. ▪ A high proportion of looked after children and young people receive health and dental checks.
Important weaknesses and areas for development

Staying safe

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 for this outcome area underestimates the importance of the findings in the recent JAR investigation into safeguarding arrangements.

Major strengths

- There has been a significant reduction in the number of road traffic accidents in the last year.
- There are low numbers of repeat referrals, high numbers of initial assessments and child protection reviews are carried out on time. High numbers of children with a child protection plan are allocated to a qualified social worker.
- Good interagency and partnership working through the Local Safeguarding Children Board.
- Safe and stable placements for looked after children.
- The recent JAR indicated that good services are provided for looked after children

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Low numbers of core assessments are completed on time.
- The JAR identified weaknesses in relation to the quality of recording in some social care cases.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

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

- No schools have been placed by Ofsted in a category of concern and attainment at Key Stages 1 to 3 is above that of similar areas and in line with national figures.
- The trend of improvement at Key Stage 3 is above and sometimes well above the national trend and standards at Key Stage 4 are improving rapidly. In 2007 the proportion of young people achieving five good grades including English and mathematics was above similar areas and in line with national averages.
- Actions taken to improve attendance have been successful. Attendance is now in line with the national average in primary and secondary schools.
- More children with statements of special educational needs are now educated in mainstream schools and there has been a reduction in the number of new statements issued.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The council acknowledges that outcomes at the end of the Early Years and Foundation Stage are too low.
- The proportion of looked after children achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE is

too low.

- The proportion of children with statements of special educational need receiving fixed term exclusions from secondary schools rose by 10% to 37.09%

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

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

- Mechanisms for consultation with children and young people including those looked after and with a learning disability and/or difficulty are embedded and influence the type of services made available to them.
- The rates of re-offending are lower than in similar council areas.
- The numbers of children participating in their review is very high and above that nationally and in similar councils.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The proportion of looked after children who commit offences is above that found in similar council areas.

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

- The proportion of young people completing Year 11 who continue in learning is improving and is now 91.7%. This compares favourably against similar council areas.
- Arrangements to support care leavers are very effective.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Although the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training declined last year it remains above the national average.

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 and its management of these services is also good.

There have been changes to the senior team and a new Director of Children's Services has been appointed. Middle management has been strengthened by the appointment of an additional tier of assistant heads of service.

Children and young people are at the centre of everything the council does and consultation and involvement are well embedded. The council has high and achievable aspirations which are based on a thorough analysis of need. Priorities and actions take account of the full range of equalities and diversity issues. Clear priorities have been agreed with all partners and are part of the local area agreement. Services are having a strong impact on improving outcomes for most children and young people. Most outcomes are better than in similar councils and most improvements in performance are sustained. Partnership working is good and has led to notable improvements in health outcomes. Effective use is made of external funding. The Building Schools for the Future and Transforming Our Primary Schools initiatives are progressing well and are being used effectively to reduce surplus places and improve provision. However, although progress has been made in reducing the number of statements of educational need, increasing the number of statemented children attending mainstream schools and consulting on proposals to review the provision made for children with special educational needs, the inclusion agenda has some way to go in ensuring that all children and young people are well supported in secondary schools. The council's scrutiny process supports service development satisfactorily but it is not yet effectively involved in monitoring or challenging service delivery against departmental or corporate priorities. The JAR identified weaknesses in relation to recording in some social care cases. The council's self-assessment accurately identifies the most important strengths and weaknesses but the council recognises that its judgement on capacity to improve was too generous.

Major strengths

- Evidence from the recent JAR indicated that the council has good capacity to improve and that service management is good.
- The council has high and achievable aspirations which are based on a thorough analysis of need and take into account the views of children and young people. They have effective services which support their ambitions and priorities and which take account of the full range of equalities and diversity issues.
- Partnership working is very good and well focused actions have maintained and in some areas improved performance.

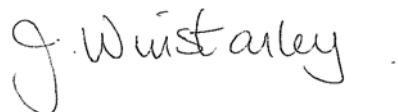
Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The quality of recording and management oversight in some social care cases. |
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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