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Making Social Care  
Better for People



Ms Therese Gillespie  
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South Gloucestershire

**1 November 2006**

Dear Ms Gillespie

**2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment process for your local authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

**Summary**

Areas for judgement	Grade awarded <sup>1</sup>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people	4
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	3

<sup>1</sup>

Grade	Service descriptors	Capacity to improve descriptors
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Excellent / outstanding
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate

South Gloucestershire Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements for children and young people. The majority of services demonstrate that they are improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people. Partnerships with health, and other agencies, are good and make a significant contribution to improving services. Progress since last year's APA has been good with improvements in all key areas. The involvement of children and their carers is evident in design, delivery and evaluation of the council's work. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) was devised with a good level of consultation with stakeholders and sets out the council's priorities clearly and imaginatively, showing that it has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. It also sets clear targets for improvement. Strategic planning is very good and progress towards integrated services, based on localities with clearly identified needs, is excellent. The council is effectively, and efficiently, managed with evidence of innovative practice. The council's capacity to improve its services further is excellent.

## **Being healthy**

The council makes a good contribution towards improving the health of children and young people in the area.

There is a clear agenda for change with well defined priorities agreed with partners.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are developing well with new members of staff in place. There has been real progress in response systems and a complete review of the referral process, including clarification of roles which has improved the service provided. A challenging target to improve waiting times for the service has been included in the local area agreement. The youth offending team, which is closely integrated with the children's service, demonstrates a good referral process to CAMHS and excellent referrals for assessment and treatment for those who are drug misusers. There is a high proportion of young people in treatment for substance misuse and the proportion in young people's treatment services is excellent.

Although low, teenage conception rates have increased in the last two years which the council is addressing through a range of appropriate measures. There is more accurate data collection, and analysis, and a new teenage pregnancy coordinator will be in post for September. This is an upgraded post at a more strategic level.

The health of looked after children is monitored well and there is good access to support services. The looked after children nurse has been successful in working with children and foster parents and this has resulted in 95% of children receiving timely health and dental checks, a significant improvement, and well above comparator averages.

The council has prioritised the development of Healthy Schools status and is achieving above targets with an expectation of reaching 100% by 2009. Inspection data show that, in those schools inspected, there was a higher proportion of good and very good judgments relating to participation in sport than in comparators.

A good range of physical activities forms part of the healthy living initiatives in the CYPP. The majority of early years settings provide healthy environments for young children with good outcomes compared to national averages.

The targets set for the council in this area rely on the involvement of partners to achieve results. There are examples of innovative practice, for example where the department for children and young people has worked with housing to change council house allocation for foster carers, enabling the provision of a placement where young mothers can be supported. Another example is the piloting of the joint agency health promotion programme 'active for life' in 19 schools. Materials have been developed with young people and these are used in the home to monitor television viewing.

## **Staying safe**

The council makes a good contribution to outcomes in this area.

The re-evaluation of thresholds has resulted in an increase in the number of referrals of children in need and the proportion leading to initial assessments are more in line with comparators. The council has responded well to these increased pressures. There has been a good increase in the number of core assessments undertaken although this is still below comparator averages. The timeliness of assessment continues to be very good for both initial and core assessments. Partner agencies and service user feedback has confirmed their satisfaction with the response to referrals.

The council has worked effectively with its partners to improve the recognition and response to emotional abuse and neglect. This has led to a rise in initial child protection conferences and a subsequent rise in the number on the Child Protection Register. All children on the register have an allocated social worker and all reviews are conducted at the required intervals. Duration on the register, and de-registration rates, are slightly higher than comparators and the council has appropriately strengthened the role of the 18 month review of all children on the register to ensure that effective action is being taken.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is operational and is charged with driving forward the staying safe outcome. An audit is planned to review the consistency of approach to safeguarding children between agencies and the Victoria Climbié audit. This, and the development of information sharing protocols, are appropriate initial actions. The business plan is in development.

There has been an increase in the number and a change in the profile of looked after children this year. The council has recognised that the increase in younger children will have implications for their planning processes and recruitment of adoptive and foster placements. There has been a good reduction in the number of children in residential care, although still above comparators, alongside an increase of children in foster placements and successful use of treatment foster care. There has been a reduction in out of area placements, which is a good outcome for children. All adoptions this year were made within 12 months of the best interest decision. However, adoption rates are low and the council failed to meet a key threshold as the courts delayed two children's adoptions.

Placement stability presents a mixed picture. Short-term stability is good and stability for children looked after for more than two and a half years is above comparators. However, children's placements are more frequently disrupted when they have been looked after for more than four years. The council is clear that some of these are planned moves of older children leaving school or moving towards independence. The council has an appropriate, and innovative, range of strategies to improve this performance through early intervention. An example of this is the Casual Placement Support Team where young people are linked with a specially recruited worker for individual time and support.

Reviews of looked after children are not being conducted in a timely manner. This has been due to calculations made on monthly planning rather than days, so some reviews were two or three days late. A new system is in place to ensure dates are met.

The Disabled Children's Strategy is developing well, with continued involvement of carers and young people. Small groups of multi-agency professionals and carers are progressing work streams to develop the integrated service and the framework of support will be based around the Every Child Matters outcomes. Current service provision includes flexible home-based support and residential respite services, which carers and young people value.

Schools are providing safe, secure environments for learners. They are informing learners of the key risks to their safety and how to deal with them.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

The council's services make a good contribution to improving the enjoyment and achievement of children and young people.

Standards and achievement are good overall. Children are supported well in their early years, enabling them to make good progress towards meeting the early learning goals. Performance at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 shows steady improvement and Key Stage 4 results rose significantly this year. Most groups of children achieve well, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although the achievements of boys and African Caribbean pupils are relatively lower. Achievements of looked after children are relatively high. An increasing number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive appropriate in school support at an earlier stage than previously, although a small number of pupils in exceptional circumstances have to wait too long for their statements to be issued. Good partnerships between foster carers, social workers and teachers have resulted in improving the achievements of looked after children.

Attendance shows an improving trend over time. Effective work between schools and the education welfare service is supporting the improvement of attendance, particularly in three targeted secondary schools. The percentage of looked after children absent from school is an inaccurate figure as it includes those on study leave. Primary school exclusion rates are low. Initiatives to reduce permanent exclusion in secondary schools have been

particularly successful, but fixed-term exclusions remain too high and are being targeted by the council.

The council has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and is tackling the raising of standards systematically. Support for school improvement is good, focusing on schools where standards are not as high as they should be and is tailored carefully to school needs. The council closely monitors these schools and tracks their progress effectively. A detailed review of provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities resulted in innovative proposals to increase specialist provision and reduce the number of out of authority placements. The plans to improve provision for these children and young people within the council are progressing well, with strong commitment from all parties. Data are used effectively to determine future trends and predicted needs in relation to school places, and analyses have resulted in creative plans to rationalise and improve educational and extended provision.

There is a clearly defined strategy to create and promote a culture of enjoyment, achievement and engagement for all, based on a clear audit of need and wishes of the young people in South Gloucestershire. The responses of the majority of children and young people indicate that they enjoy school and the range of activities on offer. There is strong collaborative work across the council to promote cultural and sporting opportunities for children and young people, including the development of the extended school and play strategies.

### **Making a positive contribution**

The council's services for children and young people make a good contribution to improving outcomes in this area.

There is good evidence of increased participation by children and young people. There is increased systematic consultation at every level, including hard to reach groups, and an improving dialogue between young people and decision makers. This is clear in the CYPP, with the accompanying children's DVD making their priorities clear. The area wide multi-agency participation group is working effectively, developing a good participation strategy, which includes dissemination of best practice, planning and training relating to consultation, involvement and events. Processes are developing well for sharing multi-agency information, to ensure most vulnerable children and young people are known and supported. Advocacy arrangements for children and young people are comprehensive and effectively monitored. Schools, and early years' settings, are providing good opportunities for young children to develop socially and emotionally.

Most children with learning disabilities have transition plans to support their move from children's to adults' services and almost all young people have transition plans in place to support their move from compulsory education. A recent participation conference provided a good opportunity for young people to highlight best practice in relation to the effective involvement of young people with disabilities. Following a thorough review of services, the council has highlighted a need for more information to parents of children with learning

difficulties and/or disabilities at all stages and for more accessible and enjoyable personal development and leisure activities.

The youth offending team continues to perform highly. Although proportionally more young people committed offences this year, this was largely due to a change in policing methods. However, too many looked after children are offending. The council has a good track record of involvement of young people in funded youth services, which indicates that it is well placed to meet its future targets for increasing participation and accreditation rates.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

The council's services for children and young people make a good contribution to improving outcomes in this area.

Actions taken to improve post-16 achievement have been entirely appropriate and sharply focused. The partnerships with the Learning and Skills Council, FE colleges and the coordinated school clusters have improved self-evaluation, planning and mapping of provision. Robust action has been taken to tackle areas of weakness, particularly the variation between sixth forms. The achievement of young people in post-16 education in schools is generally still not as good as young people nationally, but the council is expecting their actions to have a positive impact by the time students take their examinations in a year's time. A greater proportion of students complete learning apprenticeships than is seen nationally.

Young carers are becoming increasingly involved in raising awareness and developing services. The progression rates of young people into education, training and employment rose in 2005 and are above the national average. There has been a significant reduction in the percentage of young people involved in employment without training. Few young people are not in education, employment or training. This is reflected in an increase of the number of care leavers in education, employment and training. The new work placement scheme and casual placement support workers are part of the strategy to further improve this outcome.

Improved promotion has resulted in more families caring for children with learning disabilities receiving direct payments to support their needs more effectively. The council is involved in an initiative to develop national guidance on disabled care leavers, 'Future Positive', which is to be published shortly. There is productive multi-agency working relating to housing needs, including innovative solutions to good quality temporary accommodation by housing associations and private landlords. There has been a range of good initiatives to develop accommodation for care leavers resulting in all of them being in suitable accommodation, which is an excellent performance.

## **The council's management of its services for children and young people, including its capacity to improve them further**

The management of the Children and Young People's Department in South Gloucestershire is excellent. The management team demonstrates clear vision and effective prioritisation. The enthusiasm for change, and to achieve improved outcomes, is evident and reflected within the wider management culture. Tenacious leadership ensures that initiatives are followed through with successful outcomes.

Budget management is effective. The council has achieved a balanced budget despite increased demands in social care. Efficiency savings were made through decreasing the council's reliance on the use of independent fostering agencies and out of council placements, with strengthened in-house foster care. This is very good. Planning for next year has taken account of the new demands that will be placed on the budget by an increase in younger children being looked after by the council.

Implementation of the change for children programme is well advanced with strategic structures in place to support the development of the locality model and integrated teams. Strong management has driven forward the model for integrated service delivery and the management team has worked effectively with partners to achieve this.

Performance management has developed well this year with considerable investment in systems, which can be used with partners. Monitoring systems, and indicators, are increasingly being brought together to enable effective joint performance management. Internal performance management is effective with a clear link from strategy through to team performance, with early detection of reducing performance by the management team resulting in prompt action. Target setting is good overall and clearly expressed in the CYPP, with challenging targets developed for the local area agreement. Some targets in social care are not sufficiently challenging. The council shows good engagement with national priorities, translating them into local targets.

The Commissioning Strategy for 2006–2009 is in draft form and has been developed by a partnership team. This is an overarching strategy setting out the principles and priorities of commissioning which will be achieved through a strategic commissioning group. This is rightly seen as key to determining the best use of resources in order to provide needs led services for children and families. Involvement of young people and their carers is central to the strategy and the council demonstrates excellent involvement of young people in both commissioning and evaluation of services.

The draft workforce strategy outlines the plans to improve effectiveness and safety in the recruitment and retention of staff. The changes in structures and roles, which will continue this year, account for the high social care staff turnover but this is mainly due to movement within the department. The council has a strong commitment to, and plans for, staff development.

Partnership work is well developed strategically and operationally. This is evident in the progress made towards integrated teams, extended schools and a joint disability service. The council is building on the relationship with partners by developing integrated systems for working.

Children are central to the planning, implementation and evaluation of services. Children and young people's voices are clearly heard in the CYPP and the council is able to show how they have offered training and encouraged participation of young people in the evaluation and design of services.

The council is ambitious and innovative. New projects and systems are set up to deal with performance that is difficult to improve. The council is able to demonstrate how changes have been made with other partners to improve outcomes for children. The council shows the capacity to make short-term gains while putting in place the policies and procedures to secure sustained improvement.

This is a council that knows itself well, has high expectations and manages its services effectively and efficiently. The council's capacity to improve is excellent.

### Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• joint working between agencies</li> <li>• increased numbers of looked after children having timely health and dental checks</li> <li>• proportion of schools achieving the Healthy Schools status.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• further reduce CAMHS service waiting lists and continue development of the service</li> <li>• reduce the rate of teenage conceptions.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improved response to initial referrals</li> <li>• timeliness of assessments is very good</li> <li>• sound child protection practice, well audited</li> <li>• increasing the number of children in foster placements and kept within the authority.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase the number of children adopted</li> <li>• improve the timeliness of reviews of looked after children.</li> </ul>



<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• educational achievements of looked after children</li> <li>• good and improving standards at Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4</li> <li>• the support for schools where pupils are underachieving.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• further reduce the levels of fixed-term and permanent exclusions from schools</li> <li>• improve the achievement of boys and children from African Caribbean heritage.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• involvement of young people in planning, development and evaluation of the authority's work</li> <li>• the use of advocacy services</li> <li>• good work with an effective YOT.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduce proportion of looked after children receiving final warnings, reprimands and convictions.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• range of housing provision for care leavers</li> <li>• increase in Direct Payments for families of children with disabilities</li> <li>• effective use of coordinated clusters and partnerships.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• further improve standards and achievement of 16 to 19 year olds.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• partnerships with other agencies</li> <li>• clear identification of priorities</li> <li>• excellent budget management</li> <li>• involvement of stakeholders in planning and evaluation</li> <li>• innovative practice.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• set more challenging targets in social care.</li> </ul>

**Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA**

- Post-16 achievement.
- The level of fixed-term exclusions from secondary schools.
- Offending rates of looked after young people.
- CAMHS development and outcomes.

We confirm that the children's services grade will provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) and will be published to the Audit Commission. The social care judgement is for CSCI information only.

Yours sincerely



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