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Mr Ian Curryer
Acting Corporate Director of Children's Services
Nottingham City Council
The Sandfield Centre
Sandfield Road
Lenton
Nottingham NG7 1QH

Dear Mr Curryer

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Nottingham 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.

Assessment judgement area	APA grade
Overall effectiveness of children's services	2
Being healthy	2
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	2
Achieving economic well-being	2
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 2

Nottingham City Council delivers services for children and young people that meet the minimum requirement for service users. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services is good. Its ambitions and priorities are clearly set out and shared with key partners. Mature partnerships within the Children's Trust across social care, health and education have resulted in many noticeable improvements. Strong leadership drives a clear determination to improve the lives of children and young people through the Early Intervention initiative. This well-planned and consistently delivered strategy is beginning to have an impact across all five Every Child Matters outcomes. The council has made concerted efforts to deliver on the recommendations of the JAR of 2007 and there is evidence of improvement in a number of key areas. Access to child and adolescent mental health services is good. Safeguarding is given a high priority across all partner agencies. Steady and sustained improvements have been made in the standards of 7, 11 and 16-year-olds, and as a result the gap between their attainment and that of the general population is closing. School inspection outcomes have continued to improve and there are no schools in a category of concern. Nottingham City routinely invites children and young people to contribute their views through representative groups to inform improvements in services. The percentage of young people who are not in employment, education or training fell appreciably in the last year and is below that found nationally and in similar councils. However, despite the evident progress, outcomes remain below average in a number of respects. The council recognises that there are some areas of its work that require continued development and additional resources. Progress to improve teenage pregnancy rates and to reduce obesity in children has been too slow. The attainment of all groups of pupils remains below the national average. Pupils' attendance in primary and secondary schools is improving as a result of recent initiatives but remains below average overall. The improvement in common understanding of the levels of need required for children's social care services and the timeliness of assessments is slow. Most children and young people are helped to behave responsibly but the incidence of offending by young people remains too high.

Being healthy

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 is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths

- Good access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).
- Improved early take up of maternity services: increased rates of breast-feeding are in line with the national average.
- Good focus on healthy lifestyles and emotional well-being in all children's services.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continued high prevalence of teenage pregnancy. ▪ High proportions of families affected by drug and alcohol misuse and high incidence of substance misuse among some groups of young people. ▪ Too few schools deliver a good number of hours of physical education compared with the national averages. |
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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 is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategic leadership by the Nottingham City Local Safeguarding Children Board is improving the focus of partners on early intervention strategies to prevent family breakdown. ▪ Prompt action taken to safeguard children and young people most in need of protection, for instance, those affected by domestic violence. ▪ Good improvement in the range and availability of foster placements and the quality of residential settings for looked after children. |
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Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A significant decrease in the percentages of initial and core assessments for children's social care services completed on time, to levels below the national averages. ▪ Slow progress on the development of the common assessment framework and thresholds and the implementation of updated electronic recording systems. ▪ Too many looked after children are waiting too long for their agreed adoptions to take place and the rate of looked after children's reviews held on time remains significantly below the national average. |
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Enjoying and achieving

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

- Most pupils, including vulnerable groups, make good progress from their low starting points. Their standard of attainment is rising and achievement is improving in all key stages faster than nationally and in similar councils.
- Early Years Foundation Stage results have continued to improve, particularly in communication, language and literacy as a result of timely early intervention and support.
- The increase in the number of schools that have been graded good or better in their most recent inspections; currently no school is in a category of concern.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The attainment of all groups of pupils in all key stages is below national benchmarks.
- Attendance in primary and secondary schools although rising, is below the national average and the rate of exclusions in secondary schools remains too high.

Making a positive contribution

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 is accurate in most areas but it overestimates the progress made in engaging hard to reach and vulnerable groups.

Major strengths

- Increased voice of children and young people at the strategic level as a result of the improved coordination of consultative groups, including school councils.
- Significantly better performance on reducing first time offender rates than that in similar councils.
- Progress on the implementation of integrated youth services offer focusing on early intervention and prevention.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The progress made in engaging some hard to reach and vulnerable groups in positive participation in the community is not consistent across all groups and the impact of some initiatives is not yet evident.
- Persistent high rates of secondary school absence, continued prevalence of drug misuse and high rates of offending in some areas. The impact of crime and antisocial behaviour is evident in the high levels of children and young people who at times feel unsafe in the community.
- Low participation in employment, education and training by some age groups has been identified by the council as limiting improvement in re-offending rates among these groups.

Achieving economic well-being

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 is consistent with the evidence.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The 14 to 19 strategy is well-planned and has resulted in good progress towards implementing the new diplomas, developing good employer engagement and improving the curriculum. ▪ The number of young people, including vulnerable groups, not in employment, education or training has fallen, exceeding the government target, and is below the national level and that of similar councils. ▪ Strong emerging partnership for the Connexions service is provided by joint working between the Nottingham City council and a neighbouring council.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Despite a year-on-year improvement, the level of young people gaining Level 2 and Level 3 at age 19 is below national figures and those of similar councils. ▪ The number of young people completing apprenticeships remains low and is below national levels and those of similar councils. ▪ The proportion of care leavers with pathway plans and similarly those with personal advisors is below national levels and those of similar councils.

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

Grade 3

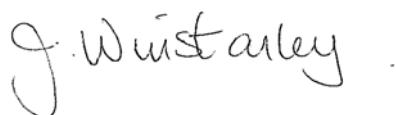
The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is good and its management of these services is also good. There is effective leadership and direction resulting in a shared commitment to achieve the ambitious targets for improvement across the council. Strategic plans focus very well on the priorities identified for the council and on moving resources to early intervention and support in all services. Consequently the track record of improvement in key areas is good. Despite significant changes to the senior leadership team, and shortages in the social services permanent workforce, there has been sustained progress in implementing the recommendations made by the JAR in 2007. Effective self-assessment based on good analysis of a wide range of data has resulted in some significant improvement in the achievement and well-being of most groups of young people. However, systems for recording children's social care data have not been in place long enough to bring about consistent improvement in some areas of practice.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Strong leadership, ambitious vision and effective partnership arrangements.▪ Good track record of improvement in educational achievement at all key stages.▪ The successful implementation of the Early Intervention Strategy is having a positive impact on improving outcomes across children's services.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ High vacancy rates in the children's social care workforce hinder the speed of improvement.▪ Recently introduced initiatives are not fully embedded and there is inconsistent improvement in outcomes in social care.

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



Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection