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Mr Maurice Bates
Interim Executive Director of Children's Services
North East Lincolnshire Council
The Municipal Offices
Town Hall Square
Grimsby
DN31 1HU

Dear Mr Bates

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in North East Lincolnshire 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	3
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	2
Making a positive contribution	3
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

North East Lincolnshire Council's services for children and young people now deliver above the minimum requirement for its users. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services, is good.

The council has responded positively to the recommendations raised in the joint area review in 2007 and has made significant progress since that time. There has been good improvement in those areas identified as the most immediate priorities, particularly in improving provision and outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, in hastening improvement in standards at Key Stage 4 and post-16, and in strengthening the support for young carers. The council's support to enable children and young people to be healthy, to make a positive contribution and to achieve economic well-being is now good. Particular successes have included improving the provision of child and adolescent mental health services, developing more effective transition plans for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and in improving post-16 provision through strong and effective partnership working. Services have had some significant impact in raising attendance in schools and in reducing exclusions. Schools that are significantly underperforming receive effective challenge and support. Standards continue to rise, although they remain below national averages at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, and the overall rate of progress made by young people by the age of 14 is improving but from a low starting point. The contribution the council makes towards safeguarding children and young people appears to be good, though the performance management arrangements of some children's homes range from good to unsatisfactory.

Overall, the council is making good progress with its ambitious agenda for improving outcomes and the life chances of children and young people across the area. Despite improvements in a number of key outcome areas there is not yet a sufficient track record of sustained impact in some key respects, notably Key Stage 3 performance, narrowing the attainment gap generally and tackling the high rates of teenage pregnancy to agree with the council's own self assessment of 'outstanding' capacity to improve.

Being healthy

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

- Good progress in establishing a comprehensive child and adolescent mental health service, particularly for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for looked after children.

- Good health care for looked after children, with comprehensive and accessible services targeting specific needs such as their emotional and sexual health.
- Good multi-agency support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including joint commissioning of services.
- Good access by young people to substance misuse services.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Continuing high numbers of teenage conceptions with a much slower rate of improvement compared with similar areas.
- Low number of mothers initiating breast-feeding compared with similar areas.

Staying safe

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 is broadly accurate but overestimates comparative performance and the extent of progress in some respects. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths

- Development of effective preventative and family support services has contributed to a continuing reduction in numbers of child protection referrals.
- The proportion of children who are looked after continues to decrease and is now a third lower than that found nationally
- Effective implementation of the common assessment framework, with significantly better rates for completion of initial and core assessments than in similar areas.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Performance management arrangements of some children's homes mean that they do not all comply with all regulations.
- The number of children and young people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents is higher than in similar areas.
- The process for completion of serious case reviews lacks sufficient rigour.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. Although the council has identified most of its strengths and areas for development, the council's self-evaluation underestimates some important weaknesses and gives too much weight to the significance of improvements that have been made.

Major strengths

- The rate of improvement in the percentage of young people achieving five good passes at GCSE is well above the national trend.
- Rates of attendance are improving at a faster rate than nationally in secondary schools, and attendance in primary schools and by looked after children is now above average.
- Significant reductions in the number of fixed and permanent exclusions from schools.
- No primary schools in an Ofsted category of concern with effective support for those schools in such a category, including a pupil referral unit.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Progress of pupils at Key Stage 3 is improving but they do not do as well as found nationally.
- The proportion of secondary schools in an Ofsted category of concern is above the proportion found nationally.
- The educational attainment of young people leaving care varies from above average to below average over time and in 2007 was lower than that achieved by this group nationally.

Making a positive contribution

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 Participation Strategy builds on well-established opportunities for children and young people to influence strategy, service design and decision making within the area.
- Excellent opportunities for looked after children to comment on decision making affecting their lives.
- Good reduction in numbers of looked after children receiving final warnings or convictions.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The number of children and young people from minority ethnic groups involved in participation and consultation events is low.
- The numbers of young people accessing youth services in 2007 was well below the national target.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good partnership working is improving the numbers of 16- to 19-year-olds who are moving into employment, education and training. The proportion who are not in education, employment and training is reducing and is now well below the national average. ▪ Work-based learning completion rates have increased and are significantly better than regional and national averages. ▪ Strong support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, reflected in the good progress of this group of learners. ▪ Despite the proportion of young people who achieve a Level 2 qualification being below the national average the rate of improvement is faster than the national average or similar areas.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of young people who achieve a Level 3 qualification is well below 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. The management of these services is also good. Partnership working is strong and is having a positive impact in improving outcomes in a number of key areas including the introduction of joint commissioning, the implementation of the 14–19 strategy, and the establishment of a comprehensive child and adolescent mental health service. The improved coordination of services are having a discernable impact on outcomes for children and young people. Improvements in service delivery are becoming firmly established. The council's capacity to improve remains good.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Well-developed Strategic Partnership and Children's Trust arrangements, including the innovative strategic development of 'Children's Trust Plus' and delivery structures. ▪ A robust Local Area Agreement, with clear priorities for the council and a discernable improvement in some key outcomes over the last couple of years. ▪ Effective local area partnerships and a local area based delivery model now established.
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- Development of a framework for joint commissioning, with associated improvements in provision, including access to a comprehensive child and adolescent mental health service.

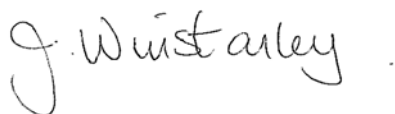
Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Impact of support to schools to improve the attainment and progress of children at Key Stage 3.
- Impact of the strategy and multi-agency support to reduce rates of teenage pregnancy.

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". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection