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Ms Debbie Jones
Corporate Director Children and Learning
Luton Borough Council
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Dear Ms Jones

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Luton 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	3
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	3
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

Luton Borough Council provides services for children and young people that consistently deliver above minimum requirements for users, with improvements in most outcomes. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services, is good. The council and its partners have clear ambitions that are based on a good assessment of local needs. There is strong support from elected members and good partnership arrangements to identify and devise the means of responding to issues that are identified. A number of plans, supported by an investment of resources, are in place but have yet to deliver further improvements in outcomes.

There are several particularly good features of the council's contribution to being healthy, including work to promote healthy lifestyles in schools. Progress towards the development of a comprehensive child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) remained static during 2007–08, and increased investment in the service has yet to demonstrate an impact. Similarly, a number of other initiatives have yet to lead to further improvements, including the provision for young people with complex needs from South Asian communities, and the integrated drug and alcohol provision within the youth service.

Good inter-agency relationships and the Local Safeguarding Children Board have led to appropriate and effective steps being taken to improve wider safeguarding arrangements. The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes in staying safe is good. Child protection processes and procedures are managed effectively. However, at an operational level, there are several issues that remain unresolved. The decline in this area of performance is attributable in part to a lack of clarity in managing cases involving domestic violence.

The council has taken steps to implement the recommendation of the 2007 joint area review (JAR) relating to the admission of children to public care. There is a good level of participation by these young people in their reviews and in wider consultation. However, the 2007 APA and JAR identified other key areas for improvement concerning looked after children. The council has recognised these issues by commissioning a number of initiatives and strategies and a plan for a more systematic approach to corporate parenting by members and the council.

There are a number of other positive developments. Whilst standards in schools remain below national averages, the council, and the school improvement service in particular, has worked effectively to challenge and support schools, leading to continued improvement in performance. The proportion of children and young people offending or re-offending remains better than in similar councils. The proportion of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET) has fallen further and is now better than in similar councils. However, whilst responsibility for managing and supporting young people has recently transferred to the council from the Connexions service, new strategies for improving the service management by reducing the proportion of young people whose education, employment or training (EET) status is unknown, and for improving the outcomes for significant minority ethnic groups, have yet to be fully realised.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Healthy lifestyles are well-promoted in schools and for pre-school children, and the council has reached the national target for schools achieving Healthy School status. Good advice is provided to the parents of pre-school children by primary care health staff. ▪ There is strong performance on the provision of health assessments for children in care, with a higher proportion of looked after children than in comparable councils receiving an annual assessment. Good quality health advice for looked after children is provided by a dedicated nurse and doctor. ▪ Teenage conception rates have continued to fall annually and are now considerably lower than those in similar councils, and the national average.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of mothers initiating breast-feeding has decreased every year since 2006 and is now lower than both similar councils and the national average. ▪ Progress towards the development of a comprehensive CAMHS is slower than that of both statistical neighbours and the national average.

Staying safe

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improve 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"> ▪ There has been a good reduction in the proportion of young people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents. ▪ Child protection procedures operate well and all children subject to child protection plans are appropriately allocated and reviewed. ▪ A larger proportion of looked after children are placed in foster care or for adoption than in similar councils and there are good care planning and reviewing arrangements.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance in the rate of referrals, re-referrals, the numbers of initial assessments and the timeliness of initial and core assessments has declined.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The majority of schools and early years settings are graded good or better for their overall effectiveness. There are no council schools or early years settings currently in a category of concern, and there has been a further reduction in the number of schools performing below floor targets. ▪ Standards at Key Stage 1 are now better than in similar councils in reading, writing, and maths, and show improvement from the previous year. GCSE pass rates are improving at a faster rate than in similar councils. ▪ Overall attendance and inclusion rates continue to improve in primary and secondary schools, and are now in line with or better than statistical neighbours. ▪ Alternative educational provision for those children and young people who are permanently excluded from school is considerably better than in Luton's statistical neighbours and in councils nationally.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Whilst standards continue to show overall improvement they remain below national averages, particularly in Key Stage 2 mathematics and science. ▪ School attendance of looked after children remains a concern. The rate is below both the national average and that of statistical neighbours, and has been so for the last three years.

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 in this outcome area underestimate a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are good and increasing opportunities for children and young people to express their views and opinions, both in schools and across the wider council. ▪ Overall rates of offending and re-offending by children and young people are lower than those of statistical neighbours and the proportion of supervised juveniles in full time EET is higher. This represents better performance than in similar councils. The work of the youth offending service is good. ▪ The involvement of looked after children in their reviews has improved further,

building on the improvements in 2005 and 2006. It is now better than in similar councils and in line with the national average.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The proportion of looked after children being given final warnings, reprimands or being convicted is still too high. This was an important area for development in the 2007 APA. The council recognises the need to improve this outcome in order to return to the position during the period 2003–2006 when comparative offending rates were consistently below the national average.
- Whilst the quality of youth work is good and the Tellus3 survey indicates that an average proportion are involved in organised out of school activities, the proportion registered as being reached by publicly funded youth services remains below target. Furthermore, looked after children are not sufficiently involved in youth activities. The council has recently put strategies in place to widen participation, including specifically for looked after children.

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 in this outcome area underestimate a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths

- The overall proportion of young people who are NEET has fallen and is now below that of statistical neighbours and the national average.
- Both Barnfield College and Luton Sixth Form College were graded outstanding for their overall effectiveness. Success rates at colleges are generally better than those of statistical neighbours.
- The proportion of young people gaining Level 2 and 3 qualifications has increased and is now above statistical neighbours but still below national figures.
- The proportion of young people leaving the care of the council who live in suitable accommodation has increased and is now just above that of Luton's statistical neighbours.
- Progress continues with 14 to 19 provision, including the introduction of the new diplomas. The Campus Luton 14 to 16 learner entitlement was launched in September 2007 and gives all learners in the borough access to at least one vocational programme.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The proportion of young people from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds, two significant minority ethnic groups in the council area, who are NEET remains above that of statistical neighbours. More generally, the proportion of young

people whose EET status is unknown remains higher than that of statistical neighbours or nationally.

- Success rates for work-based learning fell below national averages in 2007. The increase in the proportion of young people completing a work-based apprenticeship also remains below that of similar councils and the national average.
- The proportion of looked after young people with a personal pathway plan is below that of statistical neighbours and the national average. The council has introduced new performance targets for social workers and advisers, aimed at ensuring that all looked after children have a pathway plan, but it is too early for this strategy to show significant impact yet.

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 good.

The council and its partners demonstrate good partnership working arrangements, and plans are based on a good understanding of local needs. There are good levels of participation by children, young people and their families in the development of new services. Ambitions are clearly set out and agreed by its partners, and priorities reflect local needs in a diverse community with relatively high numbers of younger people. Capacity is good with an emphasis on joint planning in areas such as the strategy to increase the numbers of young people in EET, services for children with disabilities and CAMHS. A joint commissioning unit with the Primary Care Trust has recently been established. All relevant partners are working effectively towards children's trust arrangements, and the common assessment framework is well established. Performance information is used by the council and its partners to identify and rectify issues but the use of performance management systems to inform some strategies and planning is less well developed.

The council's self-assessment makes a number of references to recent plans and initiatives that have not yet led to better outcomes. Its evaluation of its grades in respect of making a positive contribution, achieving economic well-being, and capacity to improve including the management of services, is not supported by the evidence of its track record in these areas, for example, whilst the number of those in EET has appeared to decrease, the council's analysis does not take account of the larger than average number of young people whose status is unknown.

Major strengths

- Ambitions are clearly stated and agreed by the council and its partners, for example, in the Children and Young People's Plan.
- The council and its partners have identified a number of areas for improvement and have written strategies aligned to the investment of resources.

- Priorities are clearly stated and reflect local need.
- The common assessment process is well established.

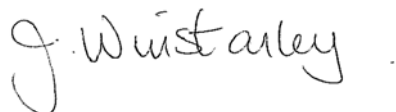
Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Performance information is not always used to inform service planning and commissioning.
- A number of plans and strategies have recently been established and have not yet led to better outcomes.
- The self-assessment is often descriptive, making several references to recently-established plans, strategies and initiatives without being able to demonstrate their impact on outcomes for children and young people.

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