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Ms Jo Davidson
Group Director - Children and Young People
Gloucestershire County Council
Shire Hall
Westgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 2TG

Dear Ms Davidson

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Gloucestershire County 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	2
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

Gloucestershire County Council makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for most children and young people. It delivers services for children and young people at a good level, with many good and some outstanding features. Safeguarding arrangements are adequate and there is strong multi-agency commitment to making further improvements. The council has made good progress in responding to the recommendations made in the 2007 APA and the recent JAR report. Immediate, successful action was taken where required and other longer-term priorities are being taken forward in a robust action plan. This is carefully aligned to the detailed CYPP and is monitored and evaluated assiduously. Some improvements have been made in decision making processes at the point of referral. The consistent application of appropriate thresholds for access to core child protection services is not yet fully embedded in practice. Achievement in schools is high and continues to improve. The figures for those children and young people in education and training are amongst the highest in the country. However the council acknowledges that the number of young people from vulnerable groups is under represented in these figures. Good opportunities exist for children and young people to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles and to make a positive contribution in key decisions that affect them. The council’s capacity to improve further is good. It has clear ambitions for children and young people, based on a thorough understanding of local needs. This is gained through effective and wide ranging consultation coupled with strong partnership working. The council continues to work hard with increasing success to narrow the gap between the good outcomes for the majority of children and young people and the small number who are more vulnerable.

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"> ▪ The percentage of schools participating in and achieving national Healthy Schools standards exceeds average national and similar councils’ percentages. ▪ Good access to, and take up of, health services to meet the needs of looked after children. ▪ Effective, well targeted multi-agency promotion and preventative work, which is leading to improved outcomes.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Front-line services to children and young people with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities and their families are insufficiently integrated. ▪ More young people requiring non-specialist children and adolescent mental health services have to wait longer than four weeks than the England average.

Staying safe

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. 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"> ▪ A wide range of effective multi-agency early intervention and prevention strategies and services. ▪ Effective identification of private fostering and good support given to private carers. ▪ Very good progress in the timeliness of reviews for looked after children. Performance is better than the averages for both statistical neighbours and England.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Although some progress has been made, the consistent application of appropriate thresholds for access to core child protection services is not yet fully embedded in practice. ▪ The arrangements to enable a qualitative assessment of individual agency's case files and services for safeguarding children are under developed. ▪ Services to safeguard children and young people who have witnessed, or have been the victims of, domestic abuse are not sufficiently co-ordinated.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standards of attainment in all key stages are above the national average and higher than similar councils. ▪ The council is in the top quarter nationally for the proportion of young people achieving five A* to C GCSEs. ▪ The council has made significant progress in narrowing the gap so that performance of looked after children by the end of Key Stage 4 is well above the national average and higher than similar councils for this group of young people.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fixed term exclusions for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are significantly higher than the national average.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective participation by children and young people, including looked after children, in decision making processes at all levels in issues that affect them. ▪ Very high percentage of children and young people who are involved in offending are in full time education, training or employment. Performance has been consistently better than the average for England and statistical neighbours. ▪ Good processes between the police and other agencies leading to a reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour by young people.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engagement of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in mainstream provision and their ability to contribute to their communities through volunteering activities is underdeveloped.

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"> ▪ Well above average performance in A levels or equivalent Level 3 qualifications including good NVQ success rates. ▪ Post-16 provision in a significant proportion of sixth forms and colleges is judged to be either good or outstanding in inspections. ▪ The number of young people in education and training is one of the highest in the country.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disproportionate number of vulnerable groups not in education and training, particularly children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, young mothers and those from black and minority ethnic communities. ▪ The 14–19 provision has insufficient curriculum choice.

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. Since the last APA and the recent JAR report the council has made significant progress in key areas, most notably in some aspects of safeguarding and improved provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The JAR action plan is comprehensive and the strategies for improvement are appropriately embedded both in the CYPP and the exemplary planning and monitoring processes for partnership working. The CYPP remains a very detailed document and continues to state the council’s high ambitions clearly, particularly for those children and young people who are more vulnerable. Gaps in provision are identified consistently and prioritised carefully showing a prompt response to emerging needs. The council has a good understanding of the needs of its communities and its self-assessment is thorough and accurate. The strategies and business plans to deliver the priorities are mostly in place, but some, such as a joint workforce strategy, are still in development. A more robust approach to contracting and partnership agreements is being implemented.

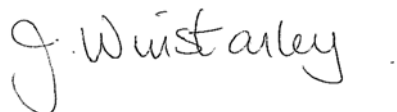
The council provides high profile and innovative leadership in shaping the vision of the Local Strategic Partnership and its delivery through the Local Area Agreement. Joint commissioning arrangements are developing well to ensure effective multi-agency working. Financial resources are allocated appropriately to areas of most need. Performance management is good and underperformance is tackled effectively. Most children and young people have a range of opportunities to contribute their views which they use effectively. The level of engagement of all community and voluntary groups and schools in the strategic partnership is still an ongoing challenge for the council. Appropriate arrangements are in place to develop a more local perspective to planning in order to reflect the diversity of the county.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong, innovative leadership of children’s services by senior managers, councillors and partners. ▪ A very detailed CYPP that is underpinned by a comprehensive assessment of need. ▪ Robust planning and monitoring processes for multi-agency working across the partnership.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consultation with all groups to reflect the local perspective and diversity across the county. ▪ Underdeveloped joint workforce strategy.

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 style with a small dot at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection