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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Ms Davidson

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

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment (APA) 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 you and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Summary

Areas for judgement	Grade awarded¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	4
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	4

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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

Gloucestershire County Council's contribution to delivering outcomes for children and young people is at least good in almost all services across the five outcome areas. Outcomes are outstanding in aspects of the core functions of education and social care; creative connections are being made between the two services. Consultation with children and young people is good. Service management is good and the capacity to improve is excellent across children's services.

The authority recognises that, in partnership with other agencies, it needs to continue a programme of improvement for services to disabled children, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Youth Offending Team and the Young People's Substance Misuse Service.

There has been effective action to remedy many of the weaker areas identified in last year's APA. These include the allocation of looked after children to a named social worker, increasing the adoption rate, increasing the educational attainment of vulnerable groups and reducing exclusion from school. Work is in hand to raise the numbers of children contributing to their statutory reviews and to ensure these take place on time.

Being healthy

The authority makes a good contribution to the promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and young people.

A Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Board was established five years ago and is a model of good practice. Gloucester city has had a high level of teenage conceptions. Nevertheless, there has been a significant, and marked, reduction in the city between 1998 and 2003, the latest year for which figures are available. The challenging targets set within a local public service agreement have been met.

The particular health needs of looked after children are being met to a high level. It is in dental checks that the most progress has been made. There is now a better scheme for those older children who have been reluctant participants, to be offered a health and well-being assessment.

The partnership between agencies working in CAMHS is good and a draft strategy is in place for its development. This is one of seven priority areas in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). There are three sensible strands to the strategy: parenting; the provision of therapies and behaviour management, especially in schools and for looked after children. Looked after children and adopted children are placed in priority categories when referred. As part of improvements to services, the National Health Service plans to fund six primary health workers at tier two to provide consultation to front-line staff and a triage service to reduce inappropriate referrals to CAMHS.

Over the period of this assessment, and for a number of years before, the Young People's Substance Misuse Service has not performed well. There has been a thorough review with the aim to improving coordination.

There is good promotion of health issues in the early years service. The eight children's centres have had a positive impact on ante-natal support which has helped lower the rates of smoking amongst young pregnant women. The authority has implemented two innovative pilot projects to improve the social and emotional behaviour of children and young people. The participating schools are experiencing positive outcomes in the reduction of incidents of bullying, behavioural difficulties and exclusions.

Schools play an active part in promoting healthy lifestyles. A high number of schools have achieved the Healthy Schools standard and since the authority has already exceeded the government's December 2006 target for the number of validated healthy schools, it now intends to seek Beacon status for its programme. There is good, and appropriate, access to sporting activities for children and young people. The majority of schools are giving more time to physical education and widening curricular and extra-curricular provision.

Staying safe

The authority is making an excellent contribution towards safeguarding children and young people.

There are low numbers on the Child Protection Register and all these children are allocated to a qualified social worker. Children and their families are actively worked with. All cases of children on the register are reviewed on time. Serious case reviews are very well conducted and safeguards for children are good.

The proportion of re-referrals to social care is low alongside comparable councils. Social care services have made a marked improvement in completing core assessments within the prescribed 35 day timescale. There has been a consistent trend of improvement in the timeliness of initial assessments since 2002, although performance is still a little below that of comparable councils. A commendable proportion of staff, from a range of agencies, have been trained in common assessment processes. Following such assessments of children within schools, extended school provision has often been an appropriate part of the care package.

Children and young people were responsible for the inclusion of personal safety as a priority in the CYPP. In a lifestyle survey, a significant number of pupils reported incidents of bullying. The authority is taking this seriously. It has issued clear guidelines about prevention and managing incidents in schools and social care settings and good quality training events have been held.

Gloucestershire is providing an equitable service to children from Black and minority ethnic communities who are in need or need protection. The number of looked after children has continued its falling trend and savings have been invested in improvements to services for this group. Services continue to grow in their effectiveness and are now very good. Children are in stable placements, particularly in foster care, where approximately one in five is placed with relatives or friends who have been formally approved as carers. Few looked after children live more than 20 miles from home and almost all are now allocated to a social worker.

Additional investment in adoption has helped to produce an excellent service. This has enabled over 9% of the looked after population to be adopted in 2005-2006, which is an outstanding achievement. Of those placed for adoption, 81% were placed within 12 months of the decision being made that this was in their best interest. The time taken to approve potential adopters has been reduced from eighteen months to eight. It is clear that the authority is running a very efficient service.

Inter-agency services to disabled children are one of the seven priority areas for improvement in the CYPP. A project manager has been appointed to plan for the provision of more integrated services and the pace of change is satisfactory. However, connections to other services have been inadequate, for example, less than half the children have had a transition plan to adult services at age 14.

Enjoying and achieving

The authority is making an outstanding contribution to this area. The number of young people remaining in school continues to be high. Most children and young people make good or very good progress and achieve well during their time at school.

The quality of early years provision is very good; children are supported well and make good progress towards the early learning goals. A high number of early years settings receive at least a 'good' grade in Ofsted inspections.

Results at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 are above, or well, above the national averages and those in similar authorities. Looked after children are making good progress in all the core subjects because there is well coordinated support across all agencies. Good use has been made of the national strategies in providing support to schools to tackle underachievement. The authority is taking appropriate action to raise standards in mathematics further.

At Key Stage 4, the proportion of young people achieving five GCSE passes at grades A*-C is well above that nationally and in similar authorities; the county remains comfortably in the top twenty nationally. The attainment of Black and Black African heritage young people at GCSE has doubled as a result of successful intervention schemes. Although the proportion of looked after children achieving one or more GCSEs is above the national average and has increased, more needs to be done to ensure these young people take

appropriate examinations to meet their needs. The authority, quite rightly, has prioritised reducing the attainment gap between the majority of young people and more vulnerable groups.

Attendance continues to be good. The authority is not complacent in challenging schools that should be doing better and it has put in place an effective range of strategies. The proportion of looked after children missing 25 days or more schooling has fallen steeply as has the number of exclusions. Personal education plans are completed for all looked after children and there is a policy on priority admission to schools for these children and other vulnerable groups. Exclusions remain low; the number of exclusions for pupils with special educational needs has fallen. Appropriate intervention systems are in place to continue to tackle this continuing problem.

Most schools are achieving positive outcomes from recent inspections; a significant proportion of secondary and special schools have been judged to be outstanding. There are low numbers of schools in categories of concern and the authority has responded swiftly to address the underperformance of several primary schools. It has a good knowledge of the effectiveness of its schools and provides them with appropriate support.

Making a positive contribution

The authority is making a good contribution to this area.

Children and young people were appropriately consulted about the CYPP. A good variety of ways exist to give children and young people a 'voice' in decision making and the authority is thoughtfully bringing coherence to the wide range of existing networks to encourage participation. A significant number of schools have school councils or other consultative forums. A participation sub-group is committed to coordinating all the initiatives.

The authority's youth service has been assessed by the National Youth Agency as a 'high performing' service. The 'Hear by Right' initiative is a key feature of its strategy to involve area and neighbourhood youth forums and this is working successfully.

The youth offending team is currently being re-organised to address concerns about management and governance and, quite rightly, the authority has identified the reduction of the number of first-time offenders as an area for improvement. Offending by looked after children has risen in the last year. The authority has identified that the issues have arisen largely in foster care. The Crown Prosecution Service's best practice guidelines are being applied to these incidents. Gloucestershire is beginning to tackle the issues more effectively.

The timeliness of reviews for looked after children has improved and more challenging targets have been set. Children and young people are now being encouraged to contribute their views within the review process.

Achieving economic well-being

The authority makes a good contribution to the economic well being of young people.

The Gloucestershire Children's Information Service provides good information and guidance on child care and family support services. It won the National Customer Service Award for 'front line services team of the year' in 2006.

The proportion of young people who are not in employment, education or training is the sixth lowest in England. Education and training are planned and delivered in a coordinated way and there has been good progress in improving provision. Secondary schools and further education colleges work together effectively within area groups. Most offer a wide range of vocational courses. A high number of young people leave school with GCSE qualifications.

There has been a rapid improvement in the proportion of care leavers living in suitable accommodation. All care leavers have a personal advisor and almost all have a 'pathway plan'. The great majority live within the county boundary, which enables them to have access to local services. The authority has improved the number of young care leavers in employment, education and training. The Rainer Foundation has funded an innovative initiative to encourage care leavers to take up the opportunities available.

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

Overall, the leadership and management of the authority's services for children and young people are outstanding. A dynamic, able management group is now in post and is strongly committed to integrated working. This is being done successfully with an impressive team spirit.

The CYPP and its associated business plan are excellent. The CYPP has a clear strategic vision; it is well written in plain English. The business plan has been thoughtfully constructed to reflect the key priorities identified through the authority's rigorous self-assessment procedures. Understandably, some of these have been carried over from the previous year. The plan is focused on clear performance indicators and outcomes for young people within a context of support and challenge. It is fully integrated, performance driven and rooted in a planning process which includes all key partners including children and young people. Careful steps have been taken to identify the longer term, sustainable outcomes that can be realistically achieved to make a difference, for the better, to the lives of the children and young people in Gloucestershire.

The authority's capacity to improve continues to be excellent. Corporate planning processes benefit greatly from effective analysis of needs. Most core services in education and social care are very good. There is a relatively stable work force. The authority has a strong performance management framework with clear links between strategic plans,

service plans and individual performance. The areas for further improvement, identified by external inspection and regulation, are mainly in accord with the authority's own evaluation.

Effective use is made of mechanisms for engaging the community and there are good inter agency processes for planning and reviewing the provision for children and young people. Priority is sensibly given to providing a wide range of high quality preventive services to address problems before they become intractable. Gloucestershire is making good progress with its Children's Centres, the development of a common assessment framework and a network of lead professionals across all agencies.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and young people good sports provision in many schools health of looked after children positive impact of the children's centres good progress on reducing teenage conceptions. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAMHS development young people's substance misuse service.
<p><i>Staying safe</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> good safeguarding services high adoption rate and good placement stability. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> inter agency services for children with disabilities.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> early years provision attainment and progress between all key stages generally positive inspection outcomes, particularly for secondary schools attendance and intervention strategies school improvement services support for schools causing concern. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good consultation about the CYPP • the youth service. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YOT: reduce numbers of first time offenders, particularly those in foster care • meeting higher targets for holding reviews for looked after children on time and increasing their rate of contribution to these.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good information and guidance on child care and family support services • 14-19 education and training. • improved numbers of care leavers in employment, education and training. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None.
<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • visionary leadership and management • CYPP and associated business plan • clear priorities • good integrated structure for the delivery of integrated children's services • strong performance management framework 	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None.

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

How well the outcomes for the following groups of children and young people are improved by the actions of the services in the local area:

- Inter agency work with children with disabilities
- children and young people with mental health problems
- children and young people misusing substances
- young people who offend, particularly first time offenders and those in foster care.

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



FLO HADLEY

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JONATHAN PHILLIPS

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Commission for Social Care Inspection