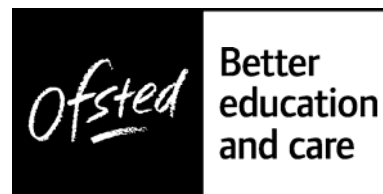


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Making Social Care  
Better for People



Ms Jo Davidson  
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**1 December 2005**

Dear Ms Davidson

## **ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005**

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 6 July 2005 to assess the performance of the education and social care services within your authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

### **Being healthy**

Outcomes in this area are good. Healthy lifestyles are effectively promoted in early years settings and through good sports provision in schools. The rate of teenage pregnancy is declining at a rate faster than the national trend and the authority is appropriately targeting certain localities within the county for more intensive work. Most schools are participating in the National Healthy Schools Standard and the authority is providing good support to them. The council is confident that 50% of schools will have achieved the required standard by 2006 and that all schools will have achieved it in line with the national targets for 2009.

All young people who offend and have mental health needs are referred to the Child and Adolescent Health Service (CAMHS) team. However, access to CAMHS is not yet consistently focused on all the most vulnerable groups. The council and its partners intend to implement the recommendations of an existing joint document 'Planning a Comprehensive CAMHS by 2006'. The council has improved access to drugs advice for an increasing number of young people.

There has been some good improvement in meeting the physical health needs of looked after children. There are plans for an 'Every Child Matters' planning group in each District Council area and it is intended that these should discuss the inclusion of vulnerable children in universal sporting and leisure activities with a view to improve access.

## **Staying safe**

Outcomes are satisfactory overall. Children and young people are provided with the safe environment to which they are entitled. The council is prompt to notify the regulator of critical incidents and these are followed up appropriately.

Although the percentage of under 18's on the child protection register has more than doubled in the past two years, it is still below the average for comparator councils. This rise in numbers is a result of Gloucestershire's general strategy to shift the emphasis to support more children with their families and to reduce the numbers of children looked after. These numbers have been steadily decreasing since 2000/01. Re-registrations on the child protection register have increased sharply. All child protection register cases are now reviewed within prescribed timescales, a great improvement on the situation eighteen months ago.

The proportion of initial assessments completed within the required timescale has been well below the national average in the last performance year. The total number of referrals has doubled in the last three years and this has had an impact on the service's ability to improve on the timescales.

Not all looked after children are allocated to a named qualified social worker. Over both the short term and the long term, looked after children benefit from good stability of placement. The adoption rate has been low this year. The plan is to quadruple the staffing in the Education Support Team for looked after children, by September 2005 to improve an already satisfactory service.

A key priority is the coordination and development of inter-agency arrangements for disabled children, including the use of Direct Payments and effective transitions to adult care services. A multi-agency review has identified a number of improvement areas and an outline joint commissioning strategy is planned for December 2005. Commendably, there is a three year strategy to meet the national standards for private foster care; a coordinator is in post for the carers and an additional post is planned to meet the needs of privately fostered children. Pathway plans are not in place for a small number of care leavers.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

Outcomes in this area are good for the majority of children and young people. The quality of early years' provision is very good and supports children effectively to meet their early learning goals. Results at the end of Key Stage 1 are high in relation to both national averages and those in similar authorities. Good use has been made of the national strategies in providing support to schools. The council is prioritising Key Stage 2 and in particular, boys reading, as an area for improvement.

Standards at Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 are high. Performance at Key Stage 3 is better than that of statistical neighbours and the proportion of young people achieving GCSE A\* - C places the council in the top quartile nationally. Progress between all key stages is very good.

Although the proportion of looked after children achieving one or more GCSEs is above the national average, this is still below that of the majority of young people in the county. However, the council compares well with similar councils. All looked after children have personal education plans but their attendance is not yet good enough. In general, there is some under achievement by pupils of Black Caribbean heritage. There has been an improvement in the number of statements of special educational needs which are completed in the required timescales.

The proportion of schools placed in formal Ofsted categories is lower than that nationally and the support for them provided by the local authority is good. Attendance continues to be good but there has been a rise in exclusions and 92% of the pupils who are excluded have special educational needs. In recognition of this the authority is developing a multi-agency approach to improving behaviour in schools and there is a multi agency project to address the under achievement of vulnerable groups.

Just over 3% of young people leave school without any GCSEs or equivalent qualifications and this figure has not reduced in recent years. This does not compare well with similar councils. The authority has prioritised action to narrow the gap between the majority of children and young people who achieve highly and those who gain no qualifications.

### **Making a positive contribution**

Outcomes in this area are good.

There is a wide range of opportunities for children and young people to participate in decision making. This has included being involved in the appointment of some senior officers and taking part in elections for a youth parliament. Within social care, a Listening to Children Reference Group for looked after children has met regularly with senior managers and councillors to give feedback on services. However, there is not yet a strategy to draw together these separate strands of activity. The Youth Service will lead in the coordination of children and young people's involvement in preparing the Children and Young People's Plan by April 2006. There is scope for further improvement in children looked after becoming involved in contributing to decisions about their future, where in 2004/05 Gloucestershire's performance in this regard compared unfavourably to that of other similar councils.

Although the numbers of young people who offend and who are in education, employment and training has increased, the authority is working to improve this still

further. The reduction in re-offending rates is good. However, the numbers of first time offenders is not decreasing in line with national trends and work to prevent youth offending is not meeting national targets. The authority is seeking to improve the identification of those at risk of committing crime by improving partnerships with voluntary groups and developing a community strategy. For looked after children, offending behaviour has been successfully reduced and performance in this regard is near the top of the comparator group of councils.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory.

The proportion of young people not in education, training and employment is well below the national average and below that of similar authorities. However, there are variations across the area and the authority is targeting action to improve performance in certain parts of the county. In addition, council services have had unsatisfactory methods of staying in contact with care leavers. There has been some improvement in the percentage of care leavers in employment, education and training but the council is still well behind national targets. A two year partnership contract has been signed with the Rainer Foundation in order to improve future employment prospects for this group.

The attainment of students in sixth forms is better than that found nationally. The authority has completed an evaluation of sixth forms which has resulted in a decision to rationalise the provision in order to achieve better value. This development underpinned the work on the 14-19 strategy. In developing this the authority consulted with young people and it has paid careful attention to their views in developing the strategic plan.

### **SUMMARY**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Areas for improvement</b>
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the promotion of healthy life styles for most children and young people.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the promotion of children and young people's mental health.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>children on the child protection register are now reviewed on time</li> <li>stability of placements for looked after children</li> <li>the strategy for private foster care.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>timely initial assessment of referrals of children in need</li> <li>the allocation of looked after children to qualified social workers</li> <li>the development and co-ordination of inter-agency arrangements for disabled children.</li> </ul>

<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• early years provision</li> <li>• attainment and progress between all key stages.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• underachievement by pupils of Black Caribbean heritage</li> <li>• the exclusion rate for pupils with special educational needs.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• many opportunities for children and young people to participate in decision making</li> <li>• offending behaviour by looked after children has been successfully reduced</li> <li>• there is good reduction in re-offending rates.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a strategy to incorporate all the separate strands of activity around participation</li> <li>• work to prevent youth offending, particularly by first time offenders</li> <li>• increasing the numbers of looked after children communicating their views to their statutory reviews.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the number of young people not in employment, education or training is below the national average</li> <li>• the involvement of young people in developing the 14-19 strategy.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the percentage of care leavers in education, employment and training.</li> </ul>

## Service management

The council has demonstrated good self awareness in its self assessment and in setting challenging targets for improvement in its service plan. The council has recognised the need to improve the ways in which the views of parents, children and carers have been taken into account in establishing the priorities for action. Partnership working is generally effective. The major issue for Gloucestershire is in closing the gap between general achievement and the achievement of more vulnerable children.

Recruitment, training and retention in social care are satisfactory. Good progress has been made on the 'change for children' agenda, including the appointment of a Director of Children's Services. The safety of children is satisfactory and most looked after children are in stable placements. In education, the overall achievement of children, including those in sixth forms, and support for schools, is good.

Significant progress is being made towards the production of a single Children and Young People's Plan for 2006. Currently there are seven major objectives in the current service plan which is not configured to match the five outcomes of 'Every Child Matters'. Current priorities are clear but do not sufficiently focus on the weaker areas that have been identified. Further negotiations need to occur with partners to align the objectives of all organisations.

The council has excellent capacity to improve further.

## **Areas for exploration in the joint area review**

### **Being healthy**

*Action is taken to promote children and young people's mental health:*

- the development of a comprehensive CAMHS service.

### **Staying safe**

*The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:*

- improving the proportion of initial assessments that are completed within the required timescale.

*Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities live in safe environments and are protected from abuse and exploitation:*

- the coordination and development of inter-agency arrangements for disabled children.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

*Children and young people are enabled and encouraged to attend and enjoy school and to achieve highly:*

- closing the attainment gap between the majority of children and young people and those from vulnerable groups such as looked after children
- reducing the numbers of children with special educational needs that are excluded.

### **Making a positive contribution**

*Action is taken to prevent offending and reduce re-offending by children and young people:*

- improving the range and effectiveness of activities and support to enable young people to lead law abiding and constructive lives.

## **Achieving economic well-being**

*Children and young people who are looked after are helped to achieve economic well-being:*

- evaluating the impact of new arrangements to improve the prospects for employment of care leavers.

## **Final judgements**

Please see your final annual performance assessment judgements attached at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely



**FLO HADLEY**

Divisional Manager  
Office for Standards in Education



**JONATHAN PHILLIPS**

Director – Quality, Performance and  
Methods  
Commission for Social Care Inspection

## APA final judgements 2005: Gloucestershire County Council

Areas for judgement	Final judgements <sup>1</sup>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	<b>3</b>
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	<b>3</b>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	<b>3</b>
The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people	<b>4</b>

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### 1

Grade	Service descriptors	Capacity to improve descriptors
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Very good
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good/promising
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate