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Mrs Maggie Atkinson
Director of Children's Services
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
Civic Centre
Regent Street
Gateshead
NE8 1HH

Dear Mrs Atkinson

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Gateshead 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	4
Being healthy	4
Staying safe	4
Enjoying and achieving	4
Making a positive contribution	4
Achieving economic well-being	4
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	4

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale
4: outstanding/excellent; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate*

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 4

Gateshead Council continues to deliver services for children and young people that are of outstanding quality overall. The council has responded very positively to the points for improvement that were identified in the 2007 APA and figures show that the measures introduced have been effective. In 2008 the Audit Commission judged the current level of performance of the council as 'four-star', with all services rated as good or excellent. Gateshead has one of the best levels of improvement in England across a wide range of service areas. Well developed strategic partnerships and Children's Trust arrangements, with clear leadership by Children's Services, continue to develop highly effective area partnerships and multi-agency working. This excellent coordination with strategic partners has led to coherent services that are in tune with the council's strategic plans, including the very effective integration of the council's priorities for Children's Services and for children and young people into the Local Area Agreement.

High standards have, on the whole, been maintained and enhanced across a range of services. Child protection processes are strong and very effective, resulting in rates of repeat referrals being well below those in similar councils. The provision of user-friendly services has successfully increased the engagement of harder-to-reach groups. The council continues to be effective in its priority of improving the life chances of young people and to ensure their future economic well-being. Educational attainment in the 16 to 19 age range is above that in similar council areas and high proportions of young people in care and with learning difficulties and/or disabilities continue in appropriate forms of education, employment or training at age 17. The proportion of 16- to 19-year-olds not in employment, education or training continues to fall but remains above the national average.

A high proportion of schools are judged to be good or better and educational attainment remains on an upward trend. Given their starting points, children make good progress during their time in full time education. Results at Key Stage 3 continue to exceed those in similar councils and are improving at an impressive rate. High standards have been maintained at GCSE.

Being healthy

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for being healthy are consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Healthy Schools programme is very well developed leading to a significant impact on healthy lifestyles, particularly obesity.▪ Child and adolescent mental health services are multi-agency, easily accessible and offer a good range of support leading to demonstrably improved outcomes.▪ Looked after children receive the necessary health assessments and checks, and their health outcomes are improving strongly.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The previously good rate of reduction in the number of conceptions among 15 to 17-year-old girls over time was not sustained in the last recorded year. However, performance remains good overall. |
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Staying safe

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The strong impact of interventions to reduce risk to children in domestic abuse situations ▪ Child protection assessments and reviews are timely and highly effective and there is a sustained trend of improvement. ▪ A high rate of looked after children benefit from stable family placements, including, where appropriate, adoption. |
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Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One council children's home does not meet all the National Minimum Standards. However, in most areas it is judged good or better. |
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Enjoying and achieving

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A high proportion of schools are judged good or better. ▪ Learners make good progress in their learning during Key Stages 3 and 4. ▪ Learners' performance in national tests at Key Stage 3 has improved faster than nationally and in similar areas. ▪ The high proportion of pupils gaining five A* to C passes at GCSE has been maintained. ▪ There are low exclusion rates from both mainstream and special schools for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. |
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Important weaknesses and areas for development

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mechanisms for consulting with children and young people are embedded in practice. As a result, all children and young people, including those from vulnerable groups, have a voice in changes that affect them. ▪ The low rate of looked after children who receive a final warning, reprimand or conviction. ▪ The high rate of young offenders engaged in employment, education or training.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Although there is some improvement in the level of re-offending, it is still high at 51% against statistical neighbours at 37%. The rate of improvement needs to be faster.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong and effective partnership working resulting in steadily increasing participation in employment, education and training and improving the proportion of 17-year-olds continuing in education. ▪ Very good 14–19 curriculum in schools and colleges, identified as good practice nationally. ▪ Effective review and coordination of new requirements for information, advice and guidance to young people on their future careers and related employment, education or training.

<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of 16- to 19-year-olds not in education, employment or training, though reducing, remains slightly above statistical neighbours and national averages. |
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Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

Grade 4

The capacity of the council to improve services for children and young people remains outstanding and its management of these services continues to be very strong. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p>Major strengths</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuing strengths in overall service management, strategic planning and partnership working to sustain performance in almost all aspects and services, with one of the best levels of improvement in England, including steady improvements in all of the council's identified priorities. ▪ Well developed strategic partnership and Children's Trust arrangements, with effective coordination across the priorities and strategic plans of the council and its partners. ▪ A strong and highly effective evaluation and performance management framework across the council and the Children and Young People's Partnership, with enhanced focus on each Every Child Matters outcome. |
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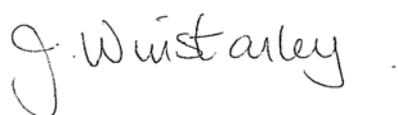
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improvement in the rate of reduction in re-offending by young people is not as rapid as in similar council areas. |
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The 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



Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection