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Dr. Paul Gray  
Interim Director of Children's Services  
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council  
Floor 2, The Council House  
College Road  
Doncaster  
DN1 1RN

Dear Dr Gray

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Doncaster Metropolitan 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.

<b>Assessment judgement area</b>	<b>APA grade</b>
Overall effectiveness of children's services	1
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	1
Enjoying and achieving	1
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	1
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	1

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

## Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 1

Doncaster Metropolitan Council delivers services for children and young people that do not meet minimum requirements and are inadequate. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services, is also inadequate.

Since the 2007 APA a number of changes in senior personnel have been introduced and the council has undertaken major restructuring. During this period the council has sustained a positive impact on being healthy and making positive contribution outcomes but there has been insufficiently rapid improvement and significant slippage in a number of key outcome indicators, including low attainment and high absenteeism among looked after children, slow progress in relation to a number of economic well being indicators as well as the council's acknowledgement that staying safe outcomes are now inadequate. In addition the council has been unable to effectively tackle a number of previously highlighted issues from the 2006 Joint Area Review (JAR) and last year's APA. The council is aware of significant shortcomings in safeguarding policy, procedures and practice including, a lack of staffing capacity to meet the volume of work. This has resulted in low numbers of initial and core assessments being completed within timescales, a sharp fall in the number of looked after children allocated to a social worker and a high number of child protection cases not allocated to a social worker. The council's contributions to improving enjoy and achieve and economic wellbeing have fallen markedly this year and are now inadequate. Despite some good improvements in performance at Key Stage 2 and 4 respectively too many vulnerable children and young people do not achieve their full potential.

The council has been successful in improving health outcomes and enabling children and young people to contribute more extensively to improvements in their local area. For example, there has been an impressive reduction in the rate of teenage conceptions and the proportion of supervised juveniles engaged in employment, education and training has improved considerably

The significant changes to council systems and structures recently implemented have yet to demonstrate a significant impact on outcomes.

## 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.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ A high rate of participation and good progress by schools in achieving the Healthy School Standard.</li><li>▪ A high number of young people access specialist treatment as a result of substance misuse.</li></ul>

- An impressive reduction in the rate of teenage conceptions since 1998 (-24%). This performance is better than achieved by statistical neighbours and found nationally.
- Good progress in ensuring a comprehensive mental health service is available for children and young people.

### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- A low proportion of mothers breastfeed and there is a rising infant mortality rate.
- Low rates of screening to tackle high rates of Chlamydia.

## **Staying safe**

## **Grade 1**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is inadequate. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<b>Major strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The impact of targeted services and the priority given to support families to tackle domestic violence and reduce the risk posed to children.</li> </ul>
<b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has not ensured the effective implementation of procedure and practice to support the management of child protection allegations and the number of new cases subject to a child protection plan and those on a plan is significantly higher than statistical neighbours and those found nationally.</li> <li>▪ The number of initial assessments and core assessments completed within timescale is low and significantly worse than statistical neighbours and those seen nationally.</li> <li>▪ One in four child protection cases is not allocated to a social worker. The number of looked after children with a named social worker who is appropriately qualified has reduced significantly this year with approximately 50 children unallocated. This performance is well below that found in similar council areas and nationally. The council acknowledges it has discovered weaknesses in the process and practice regarding staff training, the rigour of recording and in case allocation. The ability of the council to discharge its duties effectively in these areas is a serious concern.</li> <li>▪ Council procedure and practice for the safe recruitment of staff who work with children has not been implemented effectively as demonstrated in the council's recent fostering service inspection. This inspection judged the council's fostering service to be inadequate.</li> <li>▪ Standards in the councils own children's homes have deteriorated this year and</li> </ul>

most of the council's nine children's homes now do not meet National Minimum Standards.

- Despite an improvement in the long term stability of looked after children and young people's placements, performance on both long and short term placement stability remains below that found in similar council areas and nationally.
- The number of looked after children and young people has increased this year and this has made it more difficult for the council to complete reviews on time due to shortages in the number of social workers. Performance is below that found in similar council areas and the national average.
- The percentage of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disability having a transition plan to help them move to adult services has deteriorated significantly this year and is significantly worse than similar council areas and the national average.
- The recently developed anti bullying strategy is in draft format and awaiting consultation and services and support to tackle this have had a limited impact. In a recent national survey children and young people in the area indicated that bullying was an important concern for them.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

## **Grade 1**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is inadequate. 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 impact of good quality provision for children below the age of five years has narrowed the gap between the performance of local children and that found nationally. School inspections of Foundation Stage provision judge the vast majority of settings to be good, with none unsatisfactory.
- Performance at Key Stage 4 has improved well with the percentage of young people gaining five or more GCSE grades A\* to C now similar to statistical neighbours. Improvement in the rate of progress made by students in secondary schools now outstrips the national rate of improvement.
- Pupils' attainment at Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics exceeds that found in similar councils. Pupils' attainment in science at this key stage now exceeds similar councils and those nationally.

### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- The rate of exclusions is high. The percentage of permanent exclusions in primary schools is four times the national average, while the percentage of fixed term exclusions in secondary schools is higher than statistical neighbour and

national averages. Similarly, although falling, the percentage of permanent exclusions of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in relation to the number of pupils in special schools is more than double the national average.

- The percentage of permanently excluded pupils provided with full-time alternate provision and those receiving less than six hours tuition are now well below the performance found in similar councils and nationally. These issues were previously highlighted by the JAR in 2006 and the 2007 APA letter.
- The percentage of looked after children who missed more than 25 days schooling is high and well above statistical neighbour and national averages. This issue was also previously highlighted by the Jar report in 2006 and the 2007 APA letter.
- The percentage of secondary schools and pupil referral units placed in a notice to improve category since September 2005 is more than three times that found in similar council areas and nationally.
- The proportion of looked after children entered for, and gaining at least one GCSE or equivalent is much lower than that achieved by this group in similar councils and nationally. These issues were highlighted in 2007 APA letter.
- Attainment at Key Stage 1 has fallen, particularly in writing, and this decline outstrips the national figure. Pupils' attainment at Key Stage 3 in English and mathematics is lower than that found in similar councils and nationally.

## 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.

### Major strengths

- The number of young people who re-offend has fallen considerably since last year and is now much lower than similar areas.
- The proportion of supervised juveniles engaged in employment, education and training has improved considerably since last year and is much better than similar areas and the national average.
- Final warnings and convictions for looked after children and young people are lower than in similar areas and the national average.

### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- Despite a significant fall in the number of first time entrants into the criminal justice system this year the rate remains higher than in similar areas.

## **Achieving economic well-being**

**Grade 1**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is inadequate. 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**

- Prompt implementation of a coherent 14–19 strategy. There is a broad curriculum range which includes work related and vocational opportunities and provision that is increasingly personalised and has underpinned improvements in attainment at Key Stage 4. Rapid improvement in National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) success rates for work based learners aged under 19, and the timeliness of the success outstrip the national averages. The increase in the number of young people completing an apprenticeship outstrips the national average.
- Good reduction in the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds whose current activity is unknown, with figures now below statistical neighbours and national averages.
- The proportion of eligible, relevant and former relevant children that have pathway plans and have been allocated a personal advisor is high.

### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- The proportion of 19-year-olds achieving level 2 or level 3 qualifications is below that found in similar council areas and nationally. The percentage achieving level 3 qualifications has fallen further behind similar councils and the national figure over the past three years.
- Although improving, the proportion of young people aged 16+ who continue in learning is below those in similar councils and nationally.
- The proportion of looked after children in education, employment or training at 19 has deteriorated this year and is now less than half the figure found in similar council areas and nationally.
- The proportion of young mothers in education, employment or training is below similar council areas and nationally.
- Although the proportion of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities not in education, employment or training has fallen, it is still above national averages. This issue was highlighted in the 2007 APA letter.
- The proportion of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or

disabilities who have a transition plan to support their transfer to adult services has deteriorated significantly and is below similar councils.

- The proportion of care leavers living in suitable accommodation has deteriorated and is lower than that found in similar councils and nationally. This issue was highlighted in the JAR report and in the 2007 APA letter.

## Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

**Grade 1**

The capacity of the council to improve its services for children and young people is inadequate, and its management of these services is also inadequate. The council's self assessment and subsequent briefings are frank and acknowledge some serious issues and recent instability within the service. There is some evidence of overall improvement in the educational attainment for the majority of children and young people. However, the council has been unable to successfully tackle important previously identified weaknesses. It has acknowledged the seriousness of the situation by taking decisive action to improve social care practice by appointing an elected member to the cabinet as lead member for children and young people's services to oversee the implementation of the improvement strategy. There is, however, still much work to do to ensure that minimum standards are achieved in social care, following the identification of 103 specific actions to be undertaken by the safeguarding board project team.

The council has taken significant recent action to strengthen its capacity for the future. Importantly it has secured additional funding for social care and is beginning to respond to external feedback provided by the Government Office, Audit Commission and the results of a national survey of the views of children and young people. Extensive consultation and reviews of practice, continued restructuring, new strategic appointments, rationalisation of operating procedures and the appointment of a new interim director have resulted in what the council believe to be a more cohesive and coherent service. Children's Trust arrangements are developing and there are new joint commissioning arrangements. A number of these measures are on-going, while other developments are too recent to have had a measurable impact on outcomes. For example, despite concerted efforts to improve staff recruitment and retention there remain insufficient social work capacity to deal with the volume of work.

### Major strengths

- The council has acknowledged the seriousness of the current situation and has restructured management arrangements to address concerns.

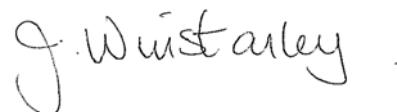
### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Poor track record of improvement, particularly for vulnerable groups.
- The effectiveness of safeguarding provision and practice. Standards in the council's nine children's homes have deteriorated this year and most do not meet National Minimum Standards. The council's fostering service is inadequate and only a low percentage of residential child care workers have obtained the NVQ Level 3 in Health and Social Care, which is lower than found in similar councils and nationally.
- Staff stability including recruitment and retention, particularly in social care is hindering the rate of progress.
- Council procedure and practice for the safe recruitment of staff who work with children has not been implemented effectively. For example, a number of files could not be provided for inspection purposes and concerns were identified as part of the LA fostering service inspection.
- Expenditure on services for children per capita, particularly for vulnerable groups has fallen below those found in similar council areas and national averages. Expenditure has not secured an adequate level of service quality and effectiveness for many 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 "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection