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Mr Gordon Jeyes
Deputy Chief Executive for the Office of Children & Young People's Services
Cambridgeshire County Council
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Dear Mr Jeyes

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Cambridgeshire 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

Cambridgeshire County Council provides services for children and young people that are consistently above the minimum requirements. The council sustains good performance across the different areas of its work, with the exception of its contribution towards staying safe in which it is adequate. Progress has been made in responding to the recommendations of the 2007 JAR. Children and young people’s services have good capacity to improve further and the management of services is also good. Good use has been made of the views of children and young people in developing the strategic plan. The council evaluates most of its work well and takes generally effective steps to improve weaker areas. A successful approach is being taken to try to eliminate some of the inequalities that exist in different areas of the county. For example, actions have been effective in improving the health of those who live in targeted areas. Standards of education are good, and in no secondary school are there fewer than 30% of pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades. The council’s monitoring has not detected weaknesses in some children’s homes which led to them being judged inadequate when inspected. The proportion of young offenders who are in education, employment and training is too low and declining, although numbers are small.

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 proportion of looked after children who have had dental checks and an annual health check has shown good improvement and is now better than nationally and in similar councils. ▪ Effective actions have been taken to reduce teenage conceptions, smoking and childhood obesity (including adult weight management), with improved access to health services for all groups. These have been focussed where the need is greatest. Teenage conception rates are below those found in similar councils and nationally. ▪ Rates of breast-feeding initiation are good and better than similar councils and well above the national average.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Waiting times for speech and language therapy are too long, although they are now improving as a result of increased investment in recruitment. ▪ While progress is being made towards a comprehensive child and adolescent mental health service, there is scope for further improvement. Twenty-four hour specialist on-call arrangements are not always in place.

Staying safe

Grade 2

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

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a good level of investment in family support services and effective work with children at risk of becoming looked after. As a consequence there is a lower number of looked after children compared with similar councils and nationally. ▪ The number of looked after children who had three or more placements during the year is reducing and is better than the national average. ▪ The fostering and adoption services are both good. There has been an increase in the number of foster carers approved who are able to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Four out of seven of the council's children's homes have been judged inadequate. The council has not been effective enough in identifying and addressing poor performance, until recently. ▪ The proportion of looked after children without an allocated qualified social worker is, at 37%, considerably higher than in similar councils and nationally. The number of cases which are reviewed on time is below that for similar councils and nationally. ▪ Not all children with a child protection plan have an allocated qualified social worker.

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"> ▪ The overall effectiveness of the majority of nursery, primary, secondary and special schools and pupil referral units is good and some are outstanding. ▪ Standards are good, compared to national averages, at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in primary schools. ▪ In all secondary schools, the proportion of pupils obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C is above 30%. A higher proportion of looked after

children achieve one or more passes at GCSE, than in similar councils.

- Children and young people's attendance is in line with similar councils, but is increasing at a faster rate. Looked after children have the fourth lowest rate of absence in the country.
- Fixed term and permanent exclusions for both primary and secondary schools are lower than in similar councils and nationally.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades including English and mathematics is no longer significantly above that found nationally, though it remains in line with similar councils, and there has been a decline in the progress made by pupils at the end of Key Stage 4.
- The proportion of permanently excluded pupils who receive 20 hours or more of tuition is in the lowest quartile 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 first time entrants to the youth justice system has fallen and now compares favourably with similar councils.
- The proportion of looked after children who receive final warnings and convictions is consistently lower than in similar councils.
- Looked after children and those with a child protection plan are given the opportunity to express their views through independent visitors. An advocate is appointed to represent any child who makes a complaint.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The rates of re-offending are higher than in similar councils and nationally, though the severity of offences is much reduced.

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.

Major strengths

- There has been good progress in reducing the numbers of those who are not in education, employment and training from minority ethnic groups, those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or who are care leavers.
- A higher proportion of young people continue in learning after the age of 16 than in similar councils. The proportion of them who achieve Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications is above that found nationally and in line with similar councils.
- The proportion of care leavers who live in suitable accommodation is above that in similar councils.
- The quality of provision in the council's further education colleges and sixth form colleges is good.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Success rates in National Vocational Qualifications for work-based learners living in the council are in line with national averages but are increasing more slowly. Groups with the lowest success rates include those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- The proportion of young offenders who are in education, employment and training is lower than that found nationally and in similar councils.

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. Its management of these services is good, but there are insufficient appropriately qualified social workers and residential care workers. The organisation into locality teams is encouraging the use of pilot projects to introduce innovative approaches to issues. There is good communication between locality teams which allows the spread of successful practice. There is generally good evaluation of the council's work. The views of its users are taken into account. Self-assessment is largely accurate, but reported data about the review of looked after children's cases and the number of young people reached by publicly funded youth services are inaccurate. In some areas there is an overemphasis on the actions taken by the council, rather than on the impact of its work. Its ambition is good. The Children and Young People's Plan links well to national and local priorities, being based on a comprehensive analysis of need and extensive consultation. It is ambitious and challenging. Since the JAR of 2007 the council has made generally good progress in improving its work. For example, the management oversight of the work of unqualified social workers has been improved and child protection procedures have been amended. However, there has not yet been an improvement in the hours of tuition offered to excluded pupils.

Major strengths

- Priorities are based on thorough analyses of need and extensive consultation.
- Good financial and management systems are in place and effective actions are taken to improve areas of poor performance.
- The proportion of secondary schools with more than 25% surplus places is less than that found nationally and half that in similar councils.
- There has been a significant decrease in the proportion of unfilled teaching vacancies.

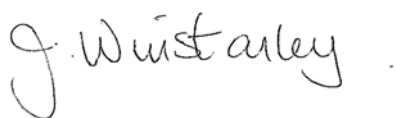
Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The number and proportion of appropriately qualified social workers and residential care workers, though increasing, is still too low.
- Data about looked after children's case reviews and about the numbers of young people reached by publicly funded youth services are inaccurately reported.
- The council has not always been accurate in its evaluation of the quality of provision in its children's homes.

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