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Ms Linda Uren  
Director of Children's Services  
Gloucestershire County Council  
Shire Hall, Westgate Street  
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Gloucestershire  
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Dear Ms Uren

## Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in April 2011 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services for children and young people in each local area. This performance profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the local authority has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with other published data.

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of inspection outcomes including the arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against similar authorities and/or national measures. More weight has been given to the outcomes of Ofsted's inspections and regulatory visits (Blocks A and B in the performance profile).

The annual assessment derives from a four point scale:

|   |                      |   |
|---|----------------------|---|
| 4 | Performs excellently | An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements |
| 3 | Performs well        | An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements               |
| 2 | Performs adequately  | An organisation that meets only minimum requirements            |
| 1 | Performs poorly      | An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements         |

Within each level there will be differing standards of provision. For example, an assessment of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, an assessment of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects. As in 2010, while the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's assessment, meeting or not meeting the minimum requirements alone does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

## Gloucestershire County Council children's services assessment 2011

|                                |                     |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Children's services assessment | Performs poorly (1) |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|

Children's services in Gloucestershire County Council perform poorly. In 2010, services were performing well. However, a full inspection of safeguarding arrangements and services for looked after children, published in January 2011, judged safeguarding to be inadequate. Services for looked after children are adequate overall, but some outcomes are also inadequate. In August 2011, an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection identified areas of practice that met requirements and a number of areas for development. There were no priority actions requiring urgent attention. The previous priority action, regarding poor quality of assessments, and the nine areas for development identified in the earlier unannounced inspection, in January 2010, have been addressed. Nevertheless, without the evidence from a full re-inspection of safeguarding, the judgement remains that children's services overall perform poorly.

In other key respects, the strengths and areas for improvement across children's services overall remain much the same as in 2010. This means that the large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and the very large majority of provision helps children and young people learn well and stay safe. A number of schools have become academies in the last year and almost all of them were judged to be good or better at their last inspection as local authority schools. These inspection findings have been taken into account in the 2011 assessment.

### Strengths

- The proportion of childminding and childcare provision that is good or better has increased and the large majority is now good or better. This was an area for development in 2010 and clear progress has been made. There are more childminders than last year and they are all at least satisfactory. The very large majority of provision for children under five in nurseries and primary schools remains good or better, with more good and outstanding providers than before. Standards in the Early Years Foundation Stage are in line with similar areas and the national average.
- The large majority of primary schools remain good or better and the number of outstanding schools has increased. The attainment gap between five-year-olds from low-income families and the majority of the same age in Gloucestershire is closing. Children make better than average progress in English between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. National test results for 11-year-olds are above similar areas and the national average and are improving broadly in line with the national trend.

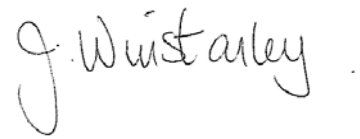
- The large majority of secondary schools are good or better and the proportion of young people achieving five or more good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is in line with similar areas and the national average. Young people from low-income backgrounds do better than the average for their counterparts nationally and the attainment gap between this group and the majority of 16-year-olds locally is closing.
- The local authority provides good support to schools in Ofsted categories of concern. This is enabling them to make satisfactory or better progress in tackling significant weaknesses and demonstrating stronger capacity to improve.
- The large majority of post-16 education and training provision remains good or better. Achievement of level 2 and level 3 qualifications at the age of 19 is in line with similar areas and the national average and improving. The proportion of young people in education, training or work is consistently above the average for similar areas.
- The large majority of specialist education provision remains good or better. Three of four pupil referral units are good. Six of the twelve special schools are now outstanding, but one has deteriorated to inadequate.

### **Areas for further improvement**

- Safeguarding arrangements are inadequate, with significant weaknesses in the quality of provision, performance management and quality assurance. The contribution of health partners is good and the area's overall capacity to improve is adequate. Local plans are sharply focused on bringing about improvement.
- Services for looked after children and capacity to improve are adequate. However, the contribution of services to help children in care live healthy lifestyles and prepare for work and independence is inadequate. As in 2010, the local authority fostering service is satisfactory and the adoption service remains inadequate. Although the local authority children's home is outstanding, almost half the places commissioned in children's homes elsewhere are satisfactory. The large majority of independent fostering and adoption agencies used by the local authority are good or better.
- The local authority is having mixed success in tackling under performance amongst some groups of 16- and 19-year-olds. Examination results for Black young people are consistently below the average for their counterparts nationally and well below the average for Gloucestershire as a whole. Sixteen-year-olds with special educational needs and 19-year-olds from low-income backgrounds attain below the average for such groups elsewhere. Attainment gaps at the age of 19 are not closing and this remains a key area for development, as it was in 2010.

This children's services assessment is provided in accordance with section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment