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Ms Gill Rollings
Director of Children, Families and Learning
Middlesbrough Borough Council
PO Box 69
Vancouver House
Middlesbrough
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Dear Ms Rollings

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Middlesbrough 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.

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

Middlesbrough Borough Council makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people. The council’s capacity to improve is good. It has made good progress in responding to most of the recommendations made in the 2007 APA. The pace of progress has been particularly good in reducing the rate of teenage conceptions; improving the educational attainment of young people aged 11 and 16 and reducing the number of 16- to 18-year-olds not entering employment, education or training after they complete their statutory education. There are some areas where progress has been slower, such as the impact of actions taken to reduce the number of children who enter the looked after system and the understanding of agreed threshold arrangements in social care.

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"> ▪ Latest data show a good reduction in teenage conception rates, a better rate of reduction than for similar councils. The council has taken good action to target resources at areas of most need. ▪ The recent JAR judged the contribution of services to preventing substance misuse and improving outcomes for those currently misusing, with particular reference to vulnerable groups, as good. ▪ There has been good progress made towards achieving local targets for achieving Healthy School status with 93% of schools participating and 67% already achieved the Healthy Schools award. Good use is made of the Healthy Schools programme to tackle priorities such as emotional well-being and the prevention of substance misuse. ▪ 97% of looked after children have received annual health assessments and dental checks which exceeds the figures nationally and for similar councils.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The development of protocols for partnership working for young people with complex, persistent and severe behavioural and mental health needs has been limited.

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 places too much value on areas where progress has been made. The recent JAR

judged the contribution of services to help safeguard children and young people and services for looked after children to be adequate. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Well-managed, multi-agency protection plans for children identified as at risk of significant harm was identified as a strength in the recent joint area review. ▪ Very good multi-agency work has taken place to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies and protect vulnerable babies. ▪ The council continues to prioritise and achieve good placement stability for looked after children and provides strong support for them as they move towards independent living. ▪ All looked after children and children with child protection plans are allocated to qualified and named social workers.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Action taken to strengthen auditing of recruitment and selection procedures in outsourced provision is still at an early stage. ▪ Measures to strengthen preventative services and address the balance between thresholds for children in need and child protection, which were identified as areas for development in the 2007 annual performance assessment, are still in progress. ▪ The proportion of looked after children who are placed for adoption has fallen over the last two years and is significantly lower than that found in similar councils. ▪ Numbers of children with child protection plans have significantly increased as have numbers of looked after children.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. This is in line with the council's self-assessment. 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"> ▪ There is a good rate of improvement in children's performance in national tests and assessments at the end of the Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2. At Key Stage 2 this includes the good performance of looked after children, which is well above that of similar children nationally. ▪ There is a good trend of improvement in the number of 16-year-old students achieving at least five GCSEs grades A* to C. Improvement has been at a faster rate than that found nationally. The percentage of children achieving five GCSEs

including English and mathematics has improved well in recent years but currently the proportion is below in similar council areas.

- Actions taken to improve children's attendance and reduce the number of children permanently excluded from school have had a good impact. No children were permanently excluded from their primary school in the academic year 2007 to 2008. There has also been a good reduction in the number of students permanently excluded from secondary schools; from 34 in the school year 2006/2007 to 24 in 2007/2008; although this proportion remains higher than that found nationally.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- A high proportion of students in secondary schools are subject to fixed period exclusions.
- Secondary school absence rates are above those found in similar council areas.

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

- There has been good progress in supporting young people who have committed offences into employment, education and training opportunities. Numbers of young people in employment, education and training have steadily risen since January 2007 and performance has been better than that found in similar councils.
- The council has taken good action to support looked after children's participation in their reviews. All who have been able to or have wished to do so, have made their views known in the last year.
- The council has demonstrated a strong commitment to young people's involvement and participation in service planning and in decisions that affect their lives; there are varied opportunities for a range of young people, including those who are harder to engage, to express their views.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- There is insufficient focus on evaluating the impact of young people's involvement and participation in the development of services.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good partnership-working across the 14–19 sector is assuring high quality, appropriate post-16 provision which is attended by an increasing proportion of young people. ▪ The quality of provision has supported the good progress made in reducing the number of young people not in employment, education or training and enabled an increasing proportion of young people to achieve higher level qualifications by the age of 19. ▪ Good support for care leavers enables a high proportion to move into education, employment or training once they complete their statutory education at the age of 16. Additionally, all care leavers are provided with suitable accommodation when they move into independent living arrangements on leaving care.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Although improving, a lower than average proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities continue their education, or enter employment or training after the age of 16; a limited range of post-16 opportunities is available to them. ▪ The proportion of Year 11 students remaining in education is below similar council areas.

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 and its management of these services are good overall. The most recent Children and Young People’s Plan (CYPP) sets out a clear, strong and ambitious vision for children and young people in Middlesbrough. It provides a detailed and clear appraisal of current performance against its challenging ambitions. Partnership working, leadership of senior managers and elected members, and capacity to improve were judged to be good in the recent JAR of children’s services and continue to be so.

The council has a good track record of improving outcomes for children and young people. Despite the challenge it faces as one of the most deprived boroughs in the country, a number of outcomes are improving at a faster rate than that found nationally. The council takes effective action to tackle areas identified for improvement following external assessments and reviews. Most issues from the 2007 annual performance assessment and joint area review are being tackled effectively although the council is aware that some of the outcomes will take a longer time to improve to levels that are similar to the national average. For example, although there has been a good reduction in the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training, the council is aware that there is still much more to do to ensure that rates fall to a level at least similar to that found nationally. A number of developments are too new to be able to measure their impact.

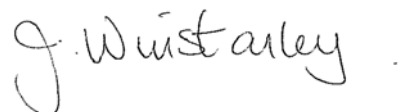
The council's self-evaluation of its work is adequate overall. Whilst the quality of evaluation of progress towards meeting the ambitions and priorities identified in the CYPP is good; the self-evaluation provided for the APA is weaker as it does not always focus sufficiently on the impact of actions taken in some key areas, for example staying safe. There is insufficient analysis of the reasons behind the increased numbers of looked after children or why fewer are placed for adoption.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The recent JAR judged capacity to improve to be good. ▪ The council has clear, strong and shared ambitions and priorities identified in the most recent CYPP. The CYPP is based on a detailed evaluation of current progress towards achievement of key targets and on the good involvement of partners with children and young people. It effectively identifies the high level of collective resources required to deliver priorities. This represents an improvement on the previous CYPP. ▪ The council's clear track record of sustained improvements in most outcomes for many young people is apparent especially in their enjoyment and achievements at school; their increasing abilities to achieve economic well-being, and their access to a range of opportunities enabling them to make a positive contribution in their schools and local communities. ▪ The council has responded promptly and appropriately to the majority of areas for improvement identified through inspections and reviews of services and there is evidence of some improved outcomes, particularly, for example, in the reduction in teenage conceptions.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some key strategies for improvement are still in the early stages of development and have yet to make an impact such as those for workforce reform and joint commissioning. Progress towards a comprehensive mental health service for children and young people has also been slow. ▪ Improvements in social care have not been as strong as in other outcome areas.

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 "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection