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Mrs Rosemary Archer  
Director of Children's Services  
Leeds City Council  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor West Merrion House  
110 Merrion Centre  
Leeds  
LS2 8DT

Dear Mrs Archer

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Leeds City 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	2
Being healthy	2
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	2
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	2

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

## Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 2

Leeds City Council delivers services for children and young people that meet the minimum requirements for users overall. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services, is adequate. In recent years the council has a record of providing services that deliver above minimum requirements in most respects but during the last year some key weaknesses have emerged. Evidence from recent inspections has highlighted concerns in achieving economic well-being and staying safe and some health outcomes have shown little improvement during the last year. The council has been slow to respond to some areas for improvement highlighted in the 2007 APA. As a result, two outcome areas have fallen this year with being healthy and achieving economic well-being judged as adequate. Outcomes with regard to being healthy, which were good last year, are now only adequate, not least because of the council's failure to address the year on year increase in the number of teenage conceptions. A high proportion of young people are not in education, employment or training and the figure is not falling quickly enough although there are early signs of a reduction in the most recent data. The council does, however, continue to ensure good outcomes for its children and young people with regard to enjoying and achieving and making a positive contribution.

## Being healthy

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.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The proportion of schools achieving Healthy School status is improving well compared to the England average. The council achieved Beacon Status in 2007 for this area of work.</li><li>▪ A continuing high proportion of mothers' breast-feed.</li><li>▪ An effective multi-agency approach by child and adolescent mental health services ensure good access to services by vulnerable groups such as looked after children, adopted children and young people, and young offenders.</li></ul>
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The number of teenage conceptions remains high and the rate has not decreased since the baseline of 1998.</li><li>▪ Whilst there has been some improvement in the rate of dental checks over the past year, there has been a reduction in the number of looked after children receiving annual health checks. Performance remains much lower than in similar councils.</li></ul>

- Although the council and its partners have taken action and have agreed a new strategy, in 2004-06 the infant mortality rate is significantly higher than the national average.

## 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 are consistent with the evidence.

### Major strengths

- The council's adoption service is effective, with good decision-making leading to improvements in the time taken to place children and young people. Since the last APA the adoption service has been inspected and found to be good.
- The timeliness of initial assessments has improved and is now better than the average found nationally and in similar councils. The timeliness of core assessments has also improved and is now approaching the national levels and those in similar councils.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The council's fostering service has recently been judged inadequate.
- Actions taken to improve the quality of children's homes have yet to have a significant impact across the provision as a whole.
- The timeliness of reviews for looked after children has improved but remains significantly below the national average and that found in similar councils.

## 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 enjoying and achieving are consistent with evidence.

### Major strengths

- The quality of education in schools and early years settings is mostly good as shown by Ofsted inspections.
- Standards are rising in Key Stage 4 and closing the gap with the national averages.
- The provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is generally good. The great majority of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are educated successfully in mainstream settings and they have good opportunities to access cultural and leisure activities.

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

- Attendance rates are below those of similar councils despite a significant reduction in the number of persistent absentees.
- Despite marked improvements in the achievement of children of Black Caribbean and Black African heritage, the achievement of children from some other minority ethnic backgrounds remains low, particularly children of Kashmiri Pakistani origin.

### **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 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**

- There has been a continued and significant increase in the numbers of children and young people accessing youth services over the past year, which is now at 44%. This is far in excess of the national target of 25%.
- Preventative services and multi-agency partnerships have contributed to a marked drop in the number of children and young people entering the youth justice system for the first time, with the proportion significantly lower than found in similar councils or nationally. The re-offending rate has also reduced significantly and is now close to similar councils and nationally.
- Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have good opportunities to contribute to decision-making about their own lives, and influence the development of services that affect them.

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

- Despite continued improvement, the participation by looked after children in their reviews remains much lower than similar councils and nationally.
- The number of looked after children receiving final warnings or convictions over the past year is much higher than similar councils or the national average.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

**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 for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

### **Major strengths**

- There is a good range of 14–19 collaborative provision involving schools, colleges and work-based providers. The wide range of post-16 provision includes vocational pathways covering every sector subject area and providing for a wide range of ability levels.
- The proportion of young people who achieve a Level 2 qualification by the age of 19 is increasing and the gap between Leeds and similar councils is closing.
- A high proportion of care leavers are still in education and/or training at the age of 19 and many are at university. There is good support for looked after children as they make the transition to adulthood and the proportion of care leavers aged 19 living in suitable accommodation is high.

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

- There remain a high proportion of young people who are not in employment, education or training, especially from minority ethnic groups. Progress to improve this has been slow.
- The proportion of young people obtaining a Level 3 qualification by the age of 19 is lower than in similar councils and is not improving.

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

**Grade 2**

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is adequate and its management of these services is adequate. The council's self assessment of services for children is detailed and correctly identifies the strengths and some weaknesses in the service but some evaluations give too little regard to some weaknesses in service delivery. The joint area review in early 2008 indicated only adequate outcomes for safeguarding and looked after children. It is apparent that more recent inspections have identified some concern in the levels of service and care for some of the most vulnerable children and young people. However the council has taken action to address these issues and is seeking rapid improvements in service delivery.

### **Major strengths**

- The children and young people's plan is based on an extensive needs analysis that complements the Vision for Leeds.
- The joint commissioning strategy is promoting a more integrated approach, thus reducing duplication and leading to greater efficiency.

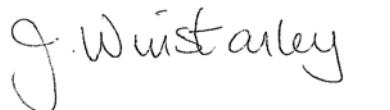
### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The percentage of unfilled posts for social care staff directly employed for children and families is high and there is too much reliance on temporary staff, with social care vacancy rates nearly twice those found in similar councils.
- High levels of investment in family support and preventative services are not yet leading to improved outcomes for many 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