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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Mr Scott

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CITY OF YORK COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment (APA) process for your local authority. We are grateful for the information, which you provided to support this process, and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Summary

Areas for judgement	Grade awarded ¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	4
The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people	4
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	3

¹

Grade	Service descriptors	Capacity to improve descriptors
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Excellent / outstanding
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate

Overall, the City of York Council delivers outstanding outcomes for children and young people. The council has worked hard, and with success to integrate its own services. The Children's Trust (YorOK) has built on established patterns of partnership working with other agencies to good effect. This is reflected in the recent award of Beacon status for Early Intervention. A good shared understanding of local needs is reflected in the Children and Young People's Plan, which was produced well in advance of the required date, and in targeted services that address the needs of vulnerable groups. Good progress has been made to address most, but not all, of the issues identified in the 2005 APA. The council is operating under tight fiscal constraints and some significant financial and organisational uncertainties amongst other agencies. Nevertheless, the council provides excellent value for money. Within the resources available to the council, York has excellent capacity to continue to reshape services and to further improve outcomes for children and young people in the area.

Being healthy

The council makes a good contribution to improving the health of children and young people in the area, and outcomes are increasingly positive. The council, with its partners, targets scarce resources and is currently able to fund initiatives and posts from external grants. There is a broad range of specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), with targeted schools' health initiatives. Access to CAMHS by the Youth Offending Team (YOT) exceeds national targets. The council's Youth Services have taken the lead on smoking cessation services for young people.

There are some innovative school based initiatives, with council staff supporting schools to help learners adopt healthy lifestyles. The achievement of the healthy standard in schools is on track and sex and relationships education is well established. The reduction in the number of teenage conceptions has plateaued and the council and its partners need to review the approach and impact of the teenage pregnancy prevention strategy to further improve performance to meet the 2010 national target for reductions. Provision and opportunities in school sport have improved.

The health of looked after children has improved significantly and is now ahead of national performance. A dedicated nurse post and named community paediatrician for looked after children have supported this progress.

The capacity of the council to further improve performance for this outcome will be subject to any future capacity issues in the Primary Care Trust (PCT).

Staying safe

The council makes a good contribution to assuring the safety and welfare of children and young people and identifies priorities through consultation with stakeholders to inform planning and service delivery. The council's performance in child protection is very good, and this is reflected in school inspection findings and in the smooth transition to the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). Levels of registration and the numbers of children whose names are included on the Child Protection Register have fallen below those of

similar councils. Levels of re-registration are similarly very good and there have been no serious case reviews during the year. Performance for the duration of registration is good and whilst the number of deregistrations is low, this reflects considered multi-agency planning to secure children's safety and well-being. The number and timing of initial child protection conferences exceed national averages, and all children whose names are included on the register have an allocated social worker. Information sharing across agencies to access the child index is in place as part of YorOK, and the council and its partners have considered the necessary approval arrangements required for secure safeguarding.

The number of looked after children has reduced by 10%, an indication of the success of the multi-agency early intervention strategy and of multi-agency approaches to securing satisfactory alternatives. All looked after children have a named qualified social worker.

The council introduced an innovative approach to ascertaining children's wishes, feelings and experiences through the 'One in a Hundred' initiative. The response through schools was impressive and most children and young people responding reported feeling safe. There has been success in addressing the incidence of bullying in schools and, following consultation with children and young people, the council and its partners are to follow this up further. Regulatory inspections show good arrangements to secure children's safety in schools, residential care and fostering settings.

The council is working actively and successfully with other agencies to develop targeted services for children at risk and those most likely to benefit from intervention. The early intervention approach is now reaching significant numbers of children. Children in Need referral levels have reduced further and the council believes this reflects the success of the application at local level of multi-agency preventative strategies. However, re-referral rates have increased slightly suggesting decision making and the application of response thresholds require further examination by the council. The council prefers to achieve the desired quality in completion of core assessments rather than seeking to meet national time targets. However, despite close internal examination and adjustments to the National Integrated Children's System being piloted by York, performance in this area remains poor for the second successive year. As a matter of priority, the council should now examine further its staffing levels and skills and take steps to improve performance in this area of work.

The council has successfully recruited significantly more foster carers and reduced reliance on independent agencies. A professional foster care scheme is now in place to address the needs of children and young people who might otherwise be placed outside the area. Fewer looked after children are placed out of the area, and the placement strategy is paying dividends with a reduced proportion living locally in residential accommodation. This has enabled the council to reinvest resources in additional services for children in need. The council met the key threshold for the stability of placements and its performance is in the upper quartile of councils for the new Public Service Agreement target. However, although there has been a slight year-on-year improvement, the council must examine and improve continuing poor performance in the stability of longer-term foster care placements.

The council has sustained its good performance for the adoption of looked after children despite reduced numbers that reflect challenges amongst the particular cohort.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution of the council to improving the educational achievement of children and young people is excellent. For several years, the council has maintained high standards overall across its schools. Working together, the council and school leaders have further improved standards and opportunities for children and young people. Parents and carers are key partners in this. The council has addressed particularly well the action points from the APA 2005 letter. For example, attainment in science and the quality of Early Years provision are now good or better. Only one school does not meet requirements and national floor targets are met in all but one school. The council takes swift and effective action in response to identified weakness or areas for development: the one school previously requiring special measures now no longer does. Only one school has a notice to improve.

The majority of pupils achieve very well at school, reaching above average standards at most stages and achieving highly at sixth form level. At Key Stage 1, following intervention by the local authority, standards are better and are now in line with national figures, though pupils still do less well in writing and mathematics than in reading. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The council has achieved the national target for these pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 and has effected improvement in rates of progress at other key stages.

School attendance has improved and is now better than average. The attendance of looked after children has also improved. However, there are a few schools where attendance is inadequate. There are very few exclusions. The number of fixed-term exclusions has risen recently, as part of a planned behaviour management strategy aimed at facilitating the reintegration of young people at risk and better meeting their longer-term educational needs.

School inspections in the first part of the year showed above average effectiveness. Pupils enjoy school and behave well. Teaching in schools is good and they are generally well led. Care, guidance and support are strong. Recent inspection reports on the new framework, though few in number, are more mixed. The quality of education is often good, but sometimes only satisfactory. The council is aware that in some schools the rate of individual pupils' progress could be faster and is tackling this through a concerted approach in developing leadership and management and also through sharing best practice in teaching.

Making a positive contribution

The council makes excellent provision for encouraging children and young people to have a real say in the decisions which affect their lives. Excellent procedures and systems operate, which include two young people's development workers, the involvement of a city

councillor and a children's champion, elected by school councils. There are highly effective channels for children and young people to have a direct input into planning at all levels and high numbers of them do so.

The council has considerable strength in targeting consultation on particular groups of young people, for example, learners from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, children with disabilities, teenage parents and care leavers. It is successful in getting hard-to-reach children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities involved in decision making processes. A very high proportion of looked after children attend reviews, compared to similar local authorities. The council has begun some adjustments to the process with a view to more timely reviews.

Section 5 inspections show that in nearly all schools children and young people get actively involved in activities which relate to their local communities or to areas and countries further afield, for example, through community projects, school links or charity fundraising. Through school councils, pupils have excellent opportunities to express their views and to see these have impact on opportunities or facilities provided. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural education (SMSC) is promoted well in schools. Pupils' behaviour is good and sometimes outstanding. Partnership provision has led to an improved range of recreational activities and to greater engagement of young people in leisure and sport. There are more opportunities for voluntary learning, for example, through arts and cultural events. Some of this provision has been targeted specifically at looked after children or at those with particular talent.

The inspection of the YOT was positive: work targeting potential re-offenders, such as the work of the Youth Inclusion Support panel, is very successful. However, the percentage of young people who offend that are engaged in full-time education remains below the national average. The council has introduced some highly effective initiatives aimed at tackling this, such as the Youth Service programme, which is successfully engaging and retaining the interest of young people in specific targeted areas of the city who are felt to be most at risk. Re-offending rates amongst looked after children have reduced dramatically.

Achieving economic well-being

The contribution of the council to helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is excellent. Its integrated provision and the effectiveness of its early intervention strategies have been recognised by national awards. Provision is highly concentrated on the most vulnerable groups of children and young people. The council has successfully addressed the issues from the APA letter of 2005.

Inspection findings show schools are good at helping learners develop workplace and other skills which contribute to their future economic well-being. Pupils are much better prepared for the next stages of education or employment than in similar schools or nationally. A high proportion of pupils gain good qualifications at school.

Through thorough self-assessment and review, the council ensures it keeps up to date with the opinions and requirements of young people and shows willingness to respond. For example, the curriculum is much improved because of the considerable developments in provision for pupils aged 14–19, which now better meets the range of needs. All schools now have a vocational offer, often provided in conjunction with colleges, and the numbers of pupils who take up this opportunity has grown significantly. This improvement is a good example of the strength of partnership working in this local authority and with the Learning and Skills Council. There has been significant improvement in the proportion of young people gaining qualifications at colleges, particularly at Levels 1 and 2. Inspection reports show that provision in the two colleges is good. A very high proportion of young people remains in further education, employment or training compared to national figures.

Good work in supporting care leavers has been sustained, enhanced by the appointment of an additional personal adviser to concentrate on addressing the needs of those over 16 years of age. The council is aware that it needs to take further action with partners on homelessness amongst young people in York, though these are few in number.

School inspection reports judge that induction arrangements for pupils are excellent. The council has taken strong steps to support the education of looked after children, creating a new post centrally to lead on this. It monitors the progress of this very small group of pupils carefully and intervenes to take decisions in an individual's best interests, such as when to sit examinations. Whilst this has led to an apparent decline in their examination performance, the proportion of higher grade passes achieved by these pupils has risen.

The council's management of its services for children and young people, including its capacity to improve them further

The council has continued to demonstrate its ability to improve the outcomes in all five areas, despite challenging budget pressures. It has made good progress in a number of areas identified in the 2005 APA letter, especially educational performance, looked after children's services and in engaging young people's views. This has been achieved by highly effective partnership arrangements, building on the strength of the Children's Trust and drawing on a clear plan specifying priorities and actions. There is very good understanding of need and the council targets its limited resources effectively where most needed. There is shared understanding amongst partners and users about the council's role and contributions. The council has shown good early initiative in building on the existing Children's and Young People's Plan through the development of the Children's Services Plan. The council has effected significant savings and reinvests its resources wisely to target need. The council is self-aware, building on strong foundations of very effective performance management, identifying issues and addressing these in a timely manner. Whilst standards in schools remain above average and continue to rise, the council has shown it can and will intervene decisively to effect improvement, where necessary. Change in introducing an integrated directorate has been well managed, confirmed by staff views. The council's good work has been recognised by the Award of Beacon Status for Early Intervention.

The council recognises the range of risks and is adopting an integrated approach to committing its resources in a targeted and effective way. Despite financial constraints, it has continued to fund innovative initiatives initially supported by short-term grants. The council has so far been able to maintain good levels of performance and to build on these. However, the rate and scope of further improvement will be determined by available resources. A question remains of sustainability of some initiatives in the longer term, potentially affected in particular by PCT capacity, and of whether there is scope to continue and extend services beyond the identified target groups and priorities.

Despite this, given the quality of leadership and management in Children's Services and the impact achieved by integration, the council has demonstrated the experience and determination to succeed and has excellent capacity to improve further within the resources that are available.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> meeting the health needs of looked after children provision for sport, sex and relationships education in schools. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> impact of approaches to reducing teenage conceptions.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> established child protection procedures adoption performance numbers of looked after children and more local placements. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> timeliness of assessments for children in need longer term stability of placements for looked after children.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> levels of achievement at almost all key stages provision and achievement of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enjoyment and behaviour of pupils attendance in schools. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the proportion of schools where overall effectiveness of education is good or better Key Stage 1 standards.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion of SMSC • opportunities for recreational and voluntary learning • levels of recidivism by looked after children and successful targeting of potential re-offending • opportunities across all groups for children's views to be considered. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sustain levels of looked after children participating in reviews.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • basic skills development in schools • proportion of young people not in education, training or employment • implementation of 14–19 strategy and 14–19 curriculum meeting a wider range of young people's needs. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proportion of young people who offend who are in full-time education or training.
<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality of leadership • impact on all outcomes for children and young people • integration of services • value for money • consultation and commitment to partnership working • performance management • proactive, early preventative strategies, targeted at most vulnerable • management of risk. 	<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sustainability of current service quality • expansion of the range and scope of services to increase the reach.

Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA

- Impact of strategies to improve the effectiveness of all schools.
- Improvements in the timeliness of assessments for children in need.
- The continuation of current service quality and potential expansions to meet the need in the light of financial constraints.

We confirm that the children's services grade will provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) and will be published to the Audit Commission. The social care judgement is for CSCI information only.

Yours sincerely



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