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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Dr Paterson

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SUNDERLAND CITY 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	3
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

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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

Sunderland City Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements for children and young people. It has established strong partnerships, within the framework of the Children's Trust, which have clearly set out its vision and priorities for the future in its Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). It has made a good contribution to helping children and their families achieve good outcomes across all areas, especially in relation to being healthy. Following last year's APA, the authority has demonstrated that, in most cases, it has successfully addressed the areas for improvement that were identified. There has been a particular improvement in educational standards at Key Stages 3 and 4. There remain some areas where improvement still needs to occur, but the authority has recognised these and is putting steps in place to tackle them. The authority has a clear vision, knows itself well, is organised effectively and has an excellent capacity to improve in the future.

Being healthy

The authority makes an excellent contribution towards helping children and young people to be healthy. It works effectively with its partners to promote and improve the health of children and young people, in line with priorities identified by the Children's Trust and set out in the CYPP. Work is focused on particular groups and geographical areas and is delivered through primary care services, schools, voluntary organisations, as well as through council services.

Health outcomes for almost all children, young people and their families are improving as indicated by a range of measures. There is a dedicated smoking cessation service, delivered through children's centres, and in the seven Sure Start areas, the Community Midwife and Health Visiting team has undertaken work to promote breastfeeding. There has been a reduction in the proportion of expectant mothers smoking, although the proportion of babies with low birth weight is still higher than the national average and breastfeeding rates remain low. Vaccination and immunisation rates are rising and the rate for teenage conceptions is falling, which shows a significant improvement on the previous year and reverses the upward trend of the previous two years. This was an area identified for improvement in last year's APA.

Progress towards the development of a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is on track to meet targets by the end of the year. The CAMHS provides speedy access to acute and non-acute services for young people involved with the youth offending team (YOT) and there is effective working between the services, helped by secondment arrangements.

Following inspection, all schools were judged as satisfactory or better in enabling learners to be healthy and the authority gained awards in the National Healthy Schools Scheme.

The health needs of children looked after by the local authority continue to be met to a high standard. A dedicated health team has ensured that almost all looked after children have an annual health assessment and attention is now focused on engaging with harder to reach young people. The council also provides free access to leisure services for children looked after.

Services for young offenders with identified substance misuse needs produce excellent results. All such young people have their needs assessed quickly and receive timely treatment, almost always through a dedicated young people's substance misuse service.

Staying safe

The authority makes a good contribution to helping children keep themselves safe, although there are some particular areas where improvements are necessary.

One of the key strengths of the authority is the arrangements in place to ensure that children live in a home where they are physically safe and secure. Children who are looked after enjoy a high level of stability in their placements and the authority has improved its performance in ensuring that those children who are looked after on a long term basis continue in stable placements. Almost all are in foster or adoptive placements. Care leavers enjoy very good levels of support through having personal advisers and clear plans for their future. All children looked after and on the Child Protection Register (CPR) have an allocated social worker.

The number of children who are looked after, even though it has dropped this year, is still higher than the authority would like and a reduction in that figure is planned. There are also more children on the CPR in Sunderland than there are in other comparable authorities.

The council is analysing the data in order to understand the figures better. At the same time, as part of a strategy to reduce registrations on the CPR, it is engaging with key partners to ensure that all referrals to the child protection system are entirely appropriate.

The number of child protection reviews held on time has deteriorated. Furthermore, a high number of reviews for looked after children were also not held on time. The council identified that staffing difficulties were contributing to this situation and has taken effective steps to overcome these. It is confident that performance will improve. The council had a good track record in this area for a number of years prior to last year.

In other areas the authority performed well; for example, in ensuring that re-registrations to the CPR were low. It also succeeded in making sure that children neither stayed on the register too long nor were taken off too early. Performance in completing initial and core assessments was also very good.

Evidence from section 5 school inspections indicated that schools achieved higher than average ratings in pupils' care and welfare, health and safety and in their freedom from bullying, racism and other forms of harassment.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution of the authority is good in helping children enjoy and achieve: outcomes for children and young people are good and improving.

There is good provision for early years. It has expanded appropriately, with a significant increase in child minders; take up of places has increased, more parents are entering the workforce and there are well designed systems to assure the quality of new providers. The quality of what is provided is satisfactory overall, based on inspection.

The quality of education for 5 to 16 year-olds has seen ongoing improvement and especially so in 2005. Results at Key Stage 1 are very close to the national average and in line with those of comparable authorities. Standards at Key Stage 2 in English, mathematics and science have continued an upward trend, and are in line with national standards and with those in comparable authorities.

At Key Stage 3, there has been a significant improvement in results in the core subjects and at a faster rate than that found nationally. Although results are still below the national average, the gap has narrowed. At Key Stage 4, GCSE results have shown continued and marked improvement, with the best results for several years in 2005; they are below the national average but close to it. The authority has rightly identified that it should seek to raise standards consistently to the national average in Key Stages 3 and 4.

There are well organised systems to monitor and improve attendance, which is in line with the national average in primary and secondary schools. There is very little permanent exclusion. Participation amongst young people in post-16 education has risen significantly across the years: the standards they achieve in advanced level and vocational courses are in line with those found nationally. More schools are graded in their Ofsted inspections as good or better in all aspects of their work than is the case nationally and in comparable authorities.

The authority has also taken care to challenge and support those schools which are performing less well when compared with other schools in the authority. The authority has only two schools in categories of concern. For children and young people not attending school, alternative arrangements are good.

There has been significant improvement in the educational attainment of care leavers. A greater proportion took GCSE examinations and the number who gained at least one GCSE at grade A* to G is good. The percentage who gained five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C more than doubled from the previous year.

The range of play areas has expanded, directed to areas of need but also across the authority. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have escorted transport to locations for youth work. Minority ethnic group achievement has improved consistently and in youth work there is a specific Asian provider for the minority ethnic community.

The capacity of the council to continue to improve is very strong. It has a clear understanding of what it needs to do to address areas which need to be improved. It works closely with its schools and other partners to bring about improvement.

Making a positive contribution

The council's performance in encouraging children and young people to make a positive contribution is good. Outcomes for children and young people are generally good, particularly in the area of Youth Justice.

Almost all young offenders in rehabilitation and aftercare programmes run by the YOT were engaged in employment, education or training and there was a fall in the number of looked after children who were convicted or received final warnings or reprimands. There were 60 young people diverted from prosecution by engaging in the restorative justice system. Overall, the reduction in the number of young people who re-offended was well below the government target but significantly, among those who had been involved with the YOT, the reduction was much higher. Two members of staff in children's services have been appointed to use the YOT model of support and diversion with looked after children.

School councils are important contributors to decision making in schools and half of schools received school council training based on national guidelines. There are 'buddying' schemes in place to support children through transitions. All asylum seeking children receive a visit from an inclusion officer usually within a week of their arrival into the city. Support includes information about educational rights, assistance with appeals and help with interpreters, where needed. All such children are accompanied by the inclusion officer on their first visit to school. The Children's Trust Board has two young people as representatives on it and they have been supported in using that role effectively. A number of young people were also trained as researchers to research play parks in one area of the city and their findings informed the Urban Play Strategy.

However, the number of looked after children and young people who made contributions to their reviews went down from last year to a level well below other comparative councils. High staff vacancies in children's social care services were judged to have an impact on that issue but the situation has been addressed. There are 14 social workers who have been appointed and the operation of the independent reviewing system is also under review to ensure that more effective support is offered to children and young people in participating in reviews.

All children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have appropriate transition plans.

Sunderland YOT was assessed by the regional Youth Justice Board Manager as performing at a high level, with effective systems in place for continued practice and performance developments and for sustaining performance at an exceptionally high level.

Achieving economic well-being

The contribution of the council in improving this outcome is good. It has contributed significantly to the effective collaboration between schools and the college, providing a wide range of 14 to 16 vocational courses, in which the schools are fully involved as centres of particular vocational subjects, and in the varied provision of 14 to 19 vocational and advanced courses provided in collaboration with the college.

The outcomes for children and young people include significant increased participation in education post-16: the proportion of young people continuing their education beyond 16 has risen as a trend and is now significantly higher, at 75%, than it was a few years ago. The results in vocational and advanced courses are in line with those found nationally. The number of young people engaged in education, employment and training has increased significantly to 90%, and the destinations of nearly all young people are known. Furthermore, there has been an increase in the number of care leavers in education, employment and training. Young people are prepared carefully for working life through the provision of enterprise activities in schools and through increased vocational opportunities in Key Stage 4, and post-16.

Increased numbers of children looked after have benefited from the Teenagers To Work scheme. Direct Payments are a mechanism to allow children with disabilities and their parents to exercise more choice in obtaining services to meet their needs and there has been an increase in the number of families using that facility. Young people going through transition are involved in person-centred planning, which is a particular approach aimed at putting young people at the centre of the planning process. It is too early to measure the impact on outcomes for young people but the authority's target is for all children looked after, aged 16 and over, to have Person Centred Plans by March 2007.

The capacity of the council to continue to improve is very strong. It has responded very effectively in developing an innovative and well organised provision for 14 to 16 and for 14 to 19 year-olds, working closely with the local Learning and Skills Council and its other partners in the college and the schools. The provision it has constructed is varied, there is an appropriate curriculum, and standards are in line with those found nationally in advanced and vocational education. This represents a significant and worthwhile development in provision.

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

Under the auspices of the Children's Trust, which involves upwards of 19 partner agencies, Sunderland has produced a CYPP. Within that plan, there is the Trust's vision for all children and young people in Sunderland, reflecting the results of a comprehensive analysis of needs which included the participation of children and carers. The plan accurately identifies strengths and areas for development and translates those into a clear set of priorities. Those priorities are also reflected in the key plans and strategies of the partner agencies; for example, in the Community Strategy, the Local Area Agreement, the Council's Corporate Plan and the Primary Care Trust's Local Delivery Plan. Implementation

of the plan is being pursued with energy, driven within the directorate by a committed senior management team, who are working well together.

The CYPP is also supported by a comprehensive risk management plan and a statement of how new technologies will be used in the most effective way. There is extensive evidence of a number of new and joint approaches to improving outcomes for children and young people, particularly around health promotion programmes and in the Youth Justice arena. Other links have been established, for example with Sunderland University, to improve the economic well-being of young people. The authority has a strong track record of performance management and this is being translated to an inter-agency approach to monitor performance in the Trust. This involves the use of exception reports against a suite of 'Top 40' performance indicators drawn from the Trust partners' key plans. Information can also be broken down to a geographical level to monitor variations in provision across areas.

There is a clear commitment to workforce development and management. Recruitment strategies have been successful after a difficult period and indicators point clearly to a commitment and investment in training and practice development. Across the Trust, there is a multi-agency Workforce Development Group, which is appropriate as the increasing integration of services generates demand for a range of new skills.

Resource allocation is in line with identified priorities and areas of need. The authority, because of its high levels of deprivation, attracts significant funds, for example through Sure Start and the Children's Fund. A number of joint and multi-agency initiatives are supported successfully by increasingly integrated and flexible approaches to managing resources. At the moment, those initiatives are not embodied formally in an agreed joint commissioning framework, which the council recognises as an important area for further development.

Care has been taken to manage the reduction in surplus places in schools effectively, and an underspend in this year's budget has been managed in anticipation of pressures in next year's education budget to address staff reductions.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduction in teenage pregnancies • increased rates of smoking cessation among young mothers • dedicated health team for looked after children • free access to leisure services for looked after children • CAMHS provision for young offenders. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stability of placements for looked after children • all looked after children and those on the CPR have an allocated social worker • the council's performance in completing initial and core assessments • welfare of pupils in school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • timeliness of child protection and looked after reviews • further scrutiny of the number of children who are looked after.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improvement in standards at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 • very low rate of permanent exclusions • improvements in the qualifications of care leavers. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raise standards to the national average where this is not the case • ensure there is a greater proportion of good quality early years outcomes.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number of young offenders engaged in employment, education and training • all children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have appropriate transition plans. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation of children in looked after reviews.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • well organised and effective provision for 14 to 19 year-olds • greater choice for families of children with disabilities through an increase in take up of Direct Payments. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitoring the impact of Person Centred Planning on outcomes for young people in transition.
<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coherent joint planning processes • robust performance management systems • commitment to staff development. 	<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development of joint commissioning.

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

- How effectively child protection reviews and looked after reviews are managed to ensure compliance with deadlines and positive outcomes for children and young people.
- How well children looked after are supported in participating in reviews.
- How well the authority has addressed the high numbers of children who are looked after.
- The progress made in achieving national standards at all key stages.

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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