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Making Social Care  
Better for People



Mr K Bromley-Derry  
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**1 November 2006**

Dear Mr Bromley-Derry

**2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOUTH TYNESIDE METROPOLITAN BOROUGH 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 <sup>1</sup>
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	3
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

South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council delivers consistently good overall provision for children and young people and is outstanding in the area of being healthy. Partnership working between agencies and with children, young people and their families is effective. Local needs have been accurately assessed following wide ranging consultation and self-assessment. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) is clear, detailed and securely located in the audit of area needs. Good progress is evident against most issues identified in the 2005 APA. The Children's Services Department, which was established in 2005, has good capacity to deliver its core aims and improve both provision and outcomes for all children and young people in the area.

## **Being healthy**

The contribution of the council in helping children to be healthy is outstanding. The lead responsibility for promoting health lies with the Director of Public Health which is a joint appointment between the council and the Primary Care Trust (PCT).

There are highly effective and dedicated services providing advice on contraception and sexual health. The rate of teenage conception, which was an area for improvement in the last APA letter, has fallen to a level which is below that of other similar councils and at a rate faster than the national average. This is the result of successful coordinated working between the Youth Service, PCT services and schools. Furthermore, information and education programmes delivered through children's centres have led to improved rates of breast feeding.

Healthy eating initiatives, including the redesign of school meal menus and the introduction of a healthy eating reward policy, have been very successful, resulting in an increase in the take up of school meals. One secondary school introduced a new cashless payment system and a deli-style eating bar. This led to a 64% increase in the take up of school meals and more pupils choosing the healthy eating counter than the traditional one. Inspection evidence from 11 schools highlights that schools are mainly good in enabling learners to be healthy, although there is evidence of outstanding practice.

The council's monitoring of the health of children looked after is excellent. There is a dedicated nurse in post with lead responsibility for ensuring that they all have appropriate health checks. Foster carers ensure that looked after children are registered with doctors and dentists.

The participation of young people in sport and leisure activities has increased substantially through initiatives such as the use of free junior membership cards.

Young offenders who manifest acute or non-acute mental health concerns are referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Their assessments and treatment begin within target deadlines. Similarly, almost all young offenders who misuse substances receive specialist assessment and treatment on time.

The council has also addressed the use of alcohol among teenagers and the 'Think Drink' programme is one of the Department of Health pilot schemes focusing on sexual health

and substance misuse. The South Tyneside Drug Action Team (DAT) was one of only four in the country selected by the Home Office to promote best practice in drug action work.

Very effective research has highlighted the extent of childhood obesity. Among reception year pupils, in 2005, the combined rate of children overweight and obese was 23% (12% overweight and 11% obese). The authority, in response to this research, has targeted improvements appropriately as a key strand within the CYPP.

## **Staying safe**

The authority makes a good contribution to helping children keep themselves safe and this is endorsed by a range of evidence.

In children's homes, foster homes and in schools, children and young people are provided with a safe environment. Inspection of the fostering service found that all nine assessed standards for securing and promoting welfare were met and that safe caring guidelines are agreed with each foster carer. In children's homes, inspectors found arrangements were handled well to ensure that children were kept physically safe and secure, including the arrangements for the vetting of staff. Section 5 inspections of 11 schools found that 8 were good and 1 outstanding in ensuring learners stay safe. An anti-bullying strategy has been launched in schools and the council has nominated an anti-bullying champion. All schools have anti-racist policies and procedures to record race related incidents.

Evidence indicates a well managed child protection system. The number of children on the Child Protection Register (CPR) has fallen to levels in line with those of similar authorities, following a fall in the numbers of registrations and an increase in the number of children taken off the register. Children remain on the register only as long as they need to and all of them have an allocated qualified social worker.

The system of referral and assessment of children in need is generally good with a robust screening process in place. This ensures that families are directed to other services where their needs can be better met, and that referrals are dealt with in the most appropriate way. Where assessments of need are undertaken in complex situations, they are almost all completed in good time. However, the number of initial assessments finished within timescales is low, reflecting some mid-year staffing difficulties, and an improved target has been set by the council.

Children looked after by the council enjoy a very good level of stability in their placements, particularly in the short term. Children in long-term care have also seen an improvement in the stability of their placements. Arrangements for reviewing the progress of children looked after by the council are very good and all of the children have an allocated social worker.

The number of children looked after by the council has fallen from last year but remains high. The council recognises this and is taking steps to reduce the number further, without compromising the safety of children. The use of family support is growing and a good number of children looked after are placed with adoptive parents.

The council has reduced the number of children placed outside of the borough and in independent fostering agencies. The regional 'Sahara' project to recruit foster carers from Black and minority ethnic groups is beginning to show results, with a number of carers entering training. Children from Black and minority ethnic groups are over represented on the CPR, but the council knows that the reason for this is the impact of a large sibling group.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

The contribution of the council's services to help children and young people enjoy and achieve is good. Early years provision is of good quality. Priority for places is given to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and vulnerable pupils. Early years' settings are located appropriately across the borough, providing accessible facilities for young children and adults. All staff training targets have been met and this ensures that their skills and expertise match the needs of all children.

Standards at Key Stages 1 and 2 remain above those of similar authorities and above national averages except in English where more able 11 year olds do not achieve as well as they should. At Key Stage 3, pupils attained the highest rate of Level 5 and above passes so far achieved in the borough. Mathematics and science results are now above those achieved nationally. English results, whilst improving, are still well below national rates but are above those achieved by similar authorities. Standards at Key Stage 4 also improved markedly in 2005. The proportion of pupils achieving five A\* to C grades improved at a much higher rate than that seen nationally and, whilst overall results remain below national averages, the gap has closed significantly. The proportion of pupils achieving at least one A\* to G grade improved and is now in line with similar authorities, although still below the national average. The progress which pupils make between Key Stage 1 and 2 is just above national average. However, the rate at which pupils' progress remains below national average between the other key stages, although the gap is closing. Much targeted work, for example, on transitional arrangements, is being undertaken in this area to improve matters and with some success. The local authority has identified this area appropriately as a major improvement priority within the CYPP.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive increasingly good support. Arrangements to assess the needs of pre-school pupils are very effective and ensure that pupils' needs on entry to school are well understood and catered for. The authority has a significantly higher proportion of pupils in special schools than nationally. Increasingly, however, pupils with statements of special educational needs are being supported in mainstream schools. Special school staff provide effective advice to mainstream school colleagues in support of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Training opportunities for learning difficulties and/or disabilities coordinators support this work and are both timely and appropriate. Significantly, a review of learning difficulties and/or disabilities provision in the borough is currently taking place which includes ambitious plans to achieve improved integration of learning difficulties and/or disabilities provision within the new school building programme.

The authority has an accurate knowledge of the performance of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Their progress is tracked effectively by a dedicated team. A

peripatetic service provides suitable support to schools and this ensures that achievement and progress of these pupils are comparable to the general school population in the borough. As numbers of minority ethnic pupils within the authority are relatively small, their progress is monitored and compared regularly to similar groups in neighbouring authorities.

The proportion of looked after children who achieved one GCSE A\* to G grade continues to be above the national average and above that of similar authorities. However, the proportion of pupils achieving five GCSE A\* to C grades is very low. The poor attendance rate of some pupils within this group continues to adversely affect their educational attainment, particularly the most able.

The authority's record of challenging and supporting schools to improve is good. Few schools have become subject to Ofsted categories following inspection. On the few occasions where this has occurred, action has been swift and effective. Work is underway to increase the authority's school improvement capacity and maintain its effectiveness. Significantly, this includes the early appointment of experienced secondary head teachers from a neighbouring authority as school improvement partners.

Primary school attendance is broadly in line with national averages; however, in secondary schools, despite recent improvements, absence rates are too high. Authorised absence in particular amongst secondary age pupils is well above the national average. The authority is exerting significant effort to improve matters and, in the most recent three months, truancy levels have reduced substantially. The number of permanent and fixed term exclusions in secondary schools remains high. Initiatives, such as the agreement with schools about the placement of hard to place pupils and targeted work through the Behaviour Improvement Project, are beginning to have a positive impact on the rate of exclusions.

### **Making a positive contribution**

The council's performance in helping young people to make a positive contribution is good. The Youth Service offers a range of opportunities for children and young people to develop socially and emotionally. It achieved more than 5,000 contacts in the year, above its target, with almost 800 accredited outcomes for young people; these results are in line with similar authorities. The service is also making stronger links with young people from the black and minority ethnic communities in South Tyneside, particularly among the Bangladeshi population.

Inspections in 11 schools judged all as at least satisfactory; seven as good and two as outstanding for the extent to which learners made a positive contribution. There are increasing opportunities for young people to engage in the development of strategies and services. There is an established Youth Parliament and a secondary schools' council, although not all schools have their own council. There is also a young carers' group and a dedicated children with disabilities consultation group. One of the council's key priorities, as expressed within the CYPP, is to increase young people's engagement and participation, and the plan itself reflects a large range of consultation with young people.

Fewer children in the borough are becoming involved in the youth justice system and more are being diverted from prosecution as a result of some innovative work by the Youth Offending Service (YOS). However, the number of children looked after by the council who have had final warnings, reprimands or convictions has risen significantly since last year. Additionally, despite a participation strategy aimed specifically at looked after children, the number of those children who participated in their reviews has fallen to a low level. The council recognises this and has set a challenging target for improvement.

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

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is good overall. The 14 to 19 partnership is increasingly effective in bringing about improvements. For example, there has been a significant expansion in the range of vocational courses available and a substantial increase in the number of students accessing this provision. A thorough curriculum audit, labour market analysis and survey of student preferences have ensured that provision is increasingly meeting the needs of learners and local circumstances. The partnership has produced borough-wide minimum standards protocols with regard to teaching and learning. This provides a baseline for more robust monitoring procedures. Increasingly, the views of learners are considered and matched to evidence collated from observations of teaching and learning. Inspections of secondary schools demonstrate that supporting pupils to achieve economic well-being is good, but standards in GCSE and vocational subjects remain below both the national average and those of similar authorities. This remains a significant issue for the council to address.

Actions by the authority have resulted in a substantial improvement in the proportion of young people in education, training and employment to above national average. Similarly, the number of care leavers in this category has also improved significantly. The council's youth choice programme, which includes the Teenager to Work scheme and other related projects, is now being successful in promoting access for young people. All looked after children aged 16 and over, for example, are offered work experience placements, supported by assistance with transport. In addition, the council is currently supporting over 100 apprenticeships for young people and has a good record of securing long term employment following this period of training. Nonetheless, the proportion of pupils not in education, training or employment remains too high.

The rate of young offenders entering education, training and employment continues to be relatively low and well below target, although there have been recent signs of improvement as a consequence of coordinated multi-agency work and consultancy from the Youth Justice Board.

Evidence from the inspection of the Fostering Service and from inspections conducted in children's homes conclude that individual pupil support arrangements are good and that their educational needs are actively promoted. Children themselves are positive about the support which they receive and appreciate their achievements being acknowledged through, for example, the awards ceremonies and the specialist support which they receive from The Place educational project. A high proportion of care leavers live in suitable accommodation and none are in bed and breakfasts. Direct Payments are a

mechanism to allow children with disabilities and their parents to exercise more choice in obtaining services to meet their needs, but there continues to be a very low take up rate in South Tyneside. The authority believes that to be a reflection of the limited range of independently provided services and it is seeking to stimulate that provision.

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

The council has a three star comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) rating, and the Audit Commission's Direction of Travel statement assessed the council as 'improving well'.

Partnership working in South Tyneside is underpinned by a strong culture of cooperation across all agencies which include the voluntary, private and independent sectors. All partners have invested substantial time and energy in consultation in order to ascertain the community's views and aspirations for the future of the borough, although there is insufficient evidence yet that the views of parents and carers have been adequately considered. The outcomes of these activities are reflected in all key strategic documents, including the CYPP, and form the basis of priorities for targeted action planning. The future agenda for the Children and Young People's Alliance is set out clearly in the CYPP. This reflects the high degree of ambition within the council and the alliance, and is realistic in determining key outcomes matched to the resources available. Furthermore, it is innovative in the scope which it offers for new ways of working and, in particular, the manner in which it embraces opportunities for new ways of commissioning services. There are already effective contractual arrangements in place which underpin multi-agency working, but there is significant future ambition to strengthen commissioning arrangements through the use of base budgets.

The council has developed a detailed understanding of where needs are most acute through the use of detailed mapping. This, for example, has been used effectively to determine the location of children's centres and the allocation of resources towards vulnerable groups of young people. Furthermore, a wide range of successful activities to engage minority communities is being provided.

The council is proactive in targeting early intervention to meet the needs of children and young people and their families. For example, there is effective work being undertaken with teenage parents; in reducing teenage pregnancy rates; and in the use of the community family support team to reduce the number of looked after children. Innovative work is also about to begin through the emotional resilience programme which aims to meet the identified emotional needs of young people.

The Children's Services Department was established in 2005, and the responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and lead member are appropriately discharged. The South Tyneside Children and Young People's Alliance has devolved decision-making powers through governance arrangements between its partners. Corporate parenting arrangements are working well and are making a difference. The Safeguarding Children Board was established in February 2006 and is taking a proactive approach to improving outcomes for children.

The monitoring of council performance is robust, securely in place and extends to the work of the alliance. Council officers are held accountable for the performance of their departments through regular and routine scrutiny. Identified underperformance receives due attention and increased monitoring to ensure that progress is being achieved and weaknesses overcome. This is a key reason for the sustained improvement in most areas of the council's work.

The council recognises the adverse impact of staff vacancies on certain areas of social care. There is a high commitment to training and a range of creative strategies in place to recruit new social workers. Nonetheless, this remains an issue for the council to address.

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the successful coordinated work in reducing teenage pregnancy rates</li> <li>substantial increase in participation rates of young people in leisure activities</li> <li>response of CAMHS to referrals of young offenders.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the high incidence of childhood obesity as identified by the council.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>well managed child protection system</li> <li>support for care leavers</li> <li>stability of placements for looked after children.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the relatively high number of looked after children</li> <li>proportion of initial assessments completed within deadlines.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>high quality of early years provision</li> <li>improved attainment at Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4</li> <li>proportion of looked after pupils attaining one A* to G grade at GCSE.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>percentage of surplus places</li> <li>high level of exclusions in secondary schools.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the success of the South Tyneside Early Prevention Panel in diverting young people from prosecution.</li> <li>quality of school provision</li> <li>engagement and influence of Youth Parliament.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the participation of looked after children in their reviews</li> <li>increased offending rates of looked after children and young people.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>percentage of 16 to 18 year olds in education, employment and training</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>standards post-16</li> <li>low take up of Direct Payments by</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>percentage of care leavers entering employment, education and training</li> <li>breadth of the 14 to 19 provision.</li> </ul>	<p>children with disabilities.</p>
<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>quality and breadth of consultation in construction of the CYPP</li> <li>clarity and relevance of local authority's strategic priorities</li> <li>rigour and effectiveness of local authority's performance management system</li> <li>the scope of emergent commissioning framework.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social worker vacancy rates.</li> </ul>

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

- Progress on the reduction in numbers of looked after children and young people.
- Participation of looked after children and young people in their reviews.
- Low take up of Direct Payments by children with disabilities.
- Standards post-16.
- Achievement of pupils at each key stage.

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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