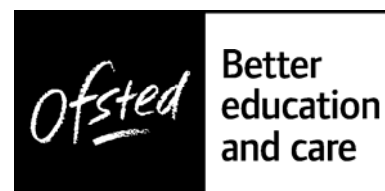


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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Dr Garnett

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY 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 your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Summary

Areas for judgement	Grade awarded¹
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

Nottinghamshire County Council delivers good services for children and young people. There are strengths across all outcomes due to a clear vision and a rigorous, strategic planning approach at a corporate level. This is backed up by quality assurance systems and robust performance management clearly linked to business plans. Most of the issues from the last APA have been addressed, although there is more work to be done in terms of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and the attainment and engagement of older students. Performance in aspects of social care has shown particularly good improvement. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) is based on a thorough needs analysis and extensive consultation. The self-assessment shows that the authority has a clear sense of its strengths and areas for development. It has clear priorities for action and is targeting financial and human resources to these developments. Partnership working is embedded as a culture within the authority. Nottinghamshire has good capacity to improve its services further and maintain current strengths.

Being healthy

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area is good. Improved outcomes have been achieved in meeting the mental health needs of first time young offenders and accessing drugs treatment services. Good performance has been sustained in the provision of specialist CAMHS (at tiers 3 & 4 which are the more specialist services provided at secondary health care levels) and the health care of looked after children has improved to a very good rating this year. Teenage pregnancies continue to fall in number as a result of focused attention to the areas with the highest rates of teenage pregnancy, with the development of peer mentoring, and integrated approaches to education through youth services and for looked after children. The profile of drug use has been reported as changing with a reduction in the use of hard drugs and a clear identification of issues around the use of alcohol by young people. The council is developing services to address this through education programmes.

The local authority demonstrates a strong partnership approach in defining priorities for improvement and uses a number of approaches and resources to develop initiatives which address obesity, levels of physical activity and the promotion of emotional well-being. A needs analysis relevant to all five outcomes clearly identifies specific communities which are identified as priority areas for developments in this outcome area. The approach draws on the capacity of Sure Start and children's centres, youth services, cultural services and Healthy Schools programme amongst others. Having recognised the special needs of vulnerable groups the local authority is demonstrating a high level of inclusiveness by adopting specific actions to meet the needs of children and young people with complex disabilities and looked after children although it should address the specific needs of the black and minority ethnic (BME) community more actively.

The pace of accreditation of healthy schools is slower than others in the region but the process is supported by ten designated staff which is an ongoing commitment of resources. An amended approach to accreditation building on the self-assessments by schools is planned to deliver the target percentage by the end of this calendar year, this addresses the issue of the length of time taken previously to accredit schools. Necessary

developments in CAMHS have been identified but have been impeded by the lack of resource to commit and capacity to contribute to the process within the NHS community. The local authority has taken steps to address the delay by establishing pilot schemes on school sites within the more deprived areas of the county. This has begun on one site and represents progress in removing organisational obstacles to investment and maximising the use of resources

Staying safe

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area is good. The child protection service builds on established good practice that is subject to routine audit and review. Reviews of children on the Child Protection Register meet national targets and cases are allocated to appropriately qualified staff. A rise in the number of re-registrations has resulted from operational pressures that caused some inconsistencies and weaker practice. These have been addressed and management actions put in place to ensure that the level of re-registration is kept under review and de-registered cases continue to receive a service for a minimum period.

Two recently completed serious case review reports indicate concerns about the levels of awareness of the interplay between child protection and mental health and substance misuse issues in parents or carers. There are some indications of poor compliance with established joint processes and the authority report that there are particular issues around the levels of awareness and skills in the drugs services teams. These are being addressed through training programmes.

Previously very good performance on the completion of assessments has been affected by the introduction of the electronic social care record (ESCR) in January 2005 which impacted upon reporting capacity. The process of introduction of ESCR has required major investment and ongoing monitoring without the capacity to run duplicate systems in all respects. The authority advised of the likely impact at the time and has taken steps to address it. Issues have been addressed through the resolution of technical problems and additional training and support for staff. It is reported by the authority that performance is now recovered.

Regulatory failures in the vetting of visitors and staff have been addressed. The revised corporate parenting strategy will contribute to improving outcomes relating to staying safe. Ofsted judgements confirm that there are no concerns relating to safeguarding in the schools inspected.

Early years services contribute significantly to the provision of safe environments and prevention approaches. These include wide use of the Sure Start schemes and developing children's centre projects to provide support to parents and early learning opportunities for children; the authority has in place a suite of model policies for early years providers supported by a close monitoring of inspection outcomes to ensure that quality issues are addressed and improvements are maintained. The sustainability of provision and progress on the development of children's centres is very positive.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area is adequate. Although the authority has continued to make progress in most areas, aspects of 2005 GCSE performance have declined or have failed to improve at the rate seen nationally.

The authority has ambitious targets for early learning, particularly in terms of planned children's centre provision. At present, however, Early Years performance shows few outcomes significantly different from those found nationally. Key Stage 1 attainment is above the national average in 2005 but below that of statistical neighbours. Standards at Key Stage 2 remain in line with statistical neighbours although the total points score is the highest ever achieved. However, the pupils' progress between Key stages 1 and 2 is in the bottom 25% when compared with pupils from similar backgrounds and with similar starting points.

Despite steady improvement, performance at Key Stage 3 is still below that of statistical neighbours and the national average. The Key Stage 3 Strategy is well established and the quality of support has been recognised nationally, has made an impact at Key Stage 3 and has already moved in focus to Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 4, performance has dipped in 2005 at the key indicators of five or more A* to C grades and average points score to a level that is below that of national figures and well below that of statistical neighbours. The authority has recognised this relatively weak performance and it is a key focus of consultant and link adviser work, with funding secured to target improvement activity.

There continues to be good support for specific groups, with looked after children and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities making expected progress. The progress of minority ethnic groups is carefully tracked and action is being taken to address BME underachievement at Key Stage 4 through the CYPP priorities and the appointment of a consultant in the area.

Attendance is generally in line with national averages and is improving in secondary schools at a faster rate than nationally. However, unauthorised absence remains a focus of improvement activity and is still higher than found nationally. Exclusions are broadly in line with national averages. The authority has a good record for having relatively few students out of school and there is targeted, multi-agency work with those at risk of exclusion and good reintegration to mainstream schooling.

Support for schools has been sustained through the recruitment of school improvement partners (SIP), training and induction with targeted challenge at Key Stage 4 at its centre. The authority has worked effectively to remove most schools from special measures, and decisive action is now being taken to resolve the position of the remaining secondary school in this category.

There are good opportunities for extension learning through arts, sports, adventure and environmental education services, with a good level of inclusion for all vulnerable groups. As an example, all looked after children participate in at least one out of school activity per week.

The needs of looked after children in terms of support for achievement are well recognised and addressed through a number of mechanisms. These include good support to carers, high levels of access to personal computers and youth service designated support workers linked to residential units. Performance is at an acceptable level.

Making a positive contribution

The local authority has engaged in a number of activities in this outcome area to draw together into a coherent framework the variety of approaches to consultation and engagement. Resources to support the appointment of a coordinator of anti-bullying and emotional well-being approaches have been identified following wide ranging consultation and survey activities. A participation strategy has been developed and adopted by partners for which an implementation plan is being actioned. Surveys of young people show an increased perception of bullying and racism as the work being undertaken raises awareness of the issues. This reflects the broader reach to children and young people. Issues around racism and an inclusive approach to BME are areas for further development.

The authority has achieved some considerable success in reducing the rate of offending and recidivism and there is similar progress in addressing some of the issues of drug misuse. The rate of offending by looked after children has remained relatively static with a percentage point increase in the performance measure in the year under review. Programmes targeting the involvement of looked after children in activities, the provision of specific education and advice services relating to substance misuse and relationships provide a more positive context in which reduced offending behaviour should be achieved. Consultation with and engagement of children and young people in individual service planning has progressed well. Participation in reviews by looked after children has increased to a very good level and engagement with wider service planning has progressed well. There are examples of children and young people contributing to recruitment of staff, the inspection and quality assurance of Youth Services and the promotion of E2E schemes. These activities are contributing to an overall cultural shift across the authority's services and those of partner agencies and provide routes for the young people involved to acquire accredited skills.

The Children's Information Service (CIS) provided by Early Years is working effectively and the authority believes that it provides a basis for a wider information service for the public to use across the range of children's services. There is a separate information service run by the voluntary sector to provide information to parents of children with disabilities.

Achieving economic well-being

Partnership working is well established in the authority and has led to improved provision and progression routes for young people. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Connexions are fully engaged in developing wider 14 to 19 strategies. Area strategy groups use baseline data, and careers and guidance information to set area-based targets, particularly where young people not in education, employment or training figures are high. As a result there is a development of courses as alternatives to GCSE. There is on-line access to course information. The majority of schools in ex-coalfield areas offer adult

literacy and numeracy programmes; are developing multi-agency extended services on site; and can access aim higher personal advisers.

The proportion of young people in education, employment or training remains good, and is particularly good for young offenders, BME students and those with disabilities. Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes have been recognised as good practice by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and work-based apprenticeships are increasing at a faster rate than found nationally. There is good support, information and advice to care leavers. The provision of Early Years and childcare services, working in liaison with regeneration teams has secured a high degree of sustainability.

The performance of schools with sixth forms is below national averages but satisfactory overall. The authority is actively seeking opportunities to rationalise post-16 provision where it can be better targeted to the needs of young people. An innovative approach that could become a model for further development can be seen in the Bassetlaw area. A joint public finance initiative (PFI) has renewed facilities and rationalised school and college provision into two post-16 centres offering a wide range of courses. This has led to an innovative pooling of resources and delivery by school based teachers and lecturing staff coordinated with the LSC.

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

The authority has a CYPP in place together with an initial one year operational plan pending the arrival of the recently appointed Director of Children's Services by September 2006. This plan has been drawn up following wide consultation that is described in a linked research report. The plan is based on a clear analysis of need and use of supporting data and information. It has ambitious targets for further improving outcomes and is underpinned by clear financial and resource planning. It is a feature of the authority that there is a suite of coherent strategic plans which link from corporate priorities, directorate business plans and policy initiatives. These are supported by monitoring and performance management systems.

A key thread running through the plan is a commitment to and identification of opportunities for partnership working. There are clear working principles adopted by the authority to support partnership development. Partnerships are kept under review and priorities are closely linked to performance management objectives and business plans. The strategic capacity of partnerships is fully reflected in the development of the authority's local area agreement and the adoption by the authority and its partners of working principles, for example relating to consultation. There are examples where the strategic strength is not fully reflected in operational performance as with the serious case review evidence but these are identified and addressed in a joint fashion.

A Pathfinder Children's Trust is in place and has been commended by the Department for Education and Skills as a model of good practice in the context of commissioning; Children's Services are firmly at the forefront of corporate planning and objectives. There is currently a wide-ranging review of services for children with disabilities being undertaken jointly with NHS partners in response to an indication from one health

community of the need to reduce funding. A jointly scoped and managed review has been devised to deal with this in a truly collaborative fashion. The review is likely to generate some new models of working in this area.

A commitment to inclusion and the equality and diversity agenda is evident and care for targeted groups is balanced carefully with universal services improving outcomes for all children and young people. At the same time there is innovative practice as seen in extended schools provision, inter-service and partnership working in disadvantaged communities. Pilot activities include the concept of the 'team around the child'. This provides flexible and individually designed packages of care and new approaches to engagement and consultation. The authority is on track to achieve its challenging targets for the development of children's centres by building on its approach to Sure Start and wide engagement with voluntary and private sectors.

The authority is undergoing an intensive period of change, but is handling the change process carefully. There is evidence of continuity of policy and practice throughout significant changes in personnel and the maintenance of a strong sense of direction. At a time of budgetary reduction the Council has made strong commitments to children's services and particularly to the priorities of raising attainment at Key Stage 4 and improving outcomes in less advantaged communities. Specific budget pressures in social services presented both adult and children's social care with challenging targets. The services were successful in bringing in not only a balanced budget but in achieving an underspend and securing a children's services reserve fund. Human resource issues are well managed with no particular concerns about recruitment.

As services are reviewed and developments planned, service models are evolving and these are audited against value for money principles endorsed by a member working group. For example, there is recognition of high unit cost associated with children's commissioning. The authority keeps under review the high unit cost of care services for looked after children, but cites the successful reduction of numbers in care and better investment in preventative services as justification for investment in high quality provision.

The authority has, through the strengths outlined, maintained a good capacity to improve further.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teenage pregnancy • drugs services • broad range of different types of provision and activity operating under a joined up strategy. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAHMS in the wider context of emotional well-being.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • established coherent system of protection with strong leadership. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the functionality of the safeguarding board given the size of the board and its outline work programme • ensuring the system is sensitive to the needs of minority ethnic communities and responsive to the issues of bullying.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continuing improvement from Early Years to Key Stage 3, in line with national averages and statistical neighbours • support for the achievement of specific groups. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Stage 4 performance, particularly at five A*-C and average points score. • attainment in identified socio-economically disadvantaged communities.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • imaginative approach to consultation and engagement • improved performance on reviews of looked after children. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitoring impact on outcomes to establish more clearly the results of development work in this outcome area • developing means of engaging more fully with the needs of BME communities.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partnership working to extend the curriculum offer and choice for 14-19 year olds • the high numbers of young people in education, employment or training. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing participation and further improving performance in the 14-19 age group.

<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a strong sense of vision allied to good planning processes • partnership working • a commitment to inclusion, equality and diversity. 	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sustaining existing strengths through an extensive period of change.
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Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA

Being healthy:

- CAHMS in the wider context of emotional well-being (Levels 1 and 2)

Staying safe:

- The functionality of the safeguarding board: effective operation of a large safeguarding board in providing leadership across the community across a wide range of workstreams and issues, already identified.
- Delivery of improved outcomes in dealing with racism and bullying

Enjoying and achieving:

- Key Stage 4 performance, particularly at five A* to C and average points score.
- Attainment in identified communities

Achieving economic well-being:

- Participation and performance in the 14-19 age group

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 and will be published to the Audit Commission. The social care judgement is for CSCI information only.

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY

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