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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Mr Diamond

**ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL
EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005**

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 5 July 2005 to assess the performance of the education and social care services within your 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.

Being healthy

Outcomes in this area are good overall reflecting effective partnership work between key services to promote healthy life-styles. There is an increasingly pro-active approach through the development of children's centres and a healthy living centre. Schools promote healthy life-styles through their sports programmes and the youth service provides a variety of recreational and leisure provision. The monitoring of the health needs of looked-after children and young people continues to be good and is in the top band for performance.

Time-scales of referrals resulting in a service from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have significantly improved following reorganisation and a recent waiting list initiative. Closer working relationships between social services and CAMHS and increasing the number of qualified social workers in CAMHS teams have been a priority. The council acknowledges that the current approach to investment in mental health worker posts and in other multi-agency strategies for adolescent mental health have resulted in the number of qualified social workers working in CAMHS teams being below the national average and comparator group. The effectiveness of this strategy will require close monitoring.

The identification and mapping of need is currently under way to improve the targeting of services for vulnerable groups, such as those involved in domestic violence.

The council and partner organisations recognise that the high rate of teenage pregnancy, where the trend continues to be well above the national average, must be addressed. This is an area identified as a priority within the council's corporate plan and draft strategic plan for children and young people. An approach that enables services to be flexible and focuses on geographical hot spots is being developed. Close monitoring will be essential to assess the effectiveness of such a strategy.

The council is developing a number of approaches to ensure children and young people with disabilities and their parents receive a responsive and supportive service. The number of disabled children in the local community compares well with like authorities. However, services for this group require further development. A threshold for eligibility criteria and a new approach to prioritising cases has been introduced alongside an increase in funding. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership has prioritised the early integration of this service.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are generally good. The council's policies are developing in line with what constitutes to be a safe environment, particularly in relation to a more robust approach in achieving early permanency for looked-after children through adoption and support to residence orders.

The current trend in the reduction of the looked-after population reflects improved gate-keeping processes and signals the growing impact of preventative strategies. A recent review of thresholds in relation to referral processes and more effective sign-posting at the initial contact stage with potential service users has helped to increase capacity and ensure good performance in the timeliness of completing initial and core assessments.

Performance management and quality assurance processes are well established and are particularly effective in assisting front-line staff and managers in addressing the needs of their looked-after population and ensuring those placed on the child protection register have an allocated social worker. Child protection plans are reviewed regularly and within permitted timescales.

Partnership work, particularly with the primary care trust, Connexions and Barnardo's, is good and being developed further to encompass more involvement with other voluntary organisations. Multi-agency case auditing is well established through the area child protection committee. Partnership work has also assisted in enabling agencies to have a clearer understanding of social services intervention, which in turn has helped

to increase in their contribution, for example, through learning support systems in schools.

Placement stability of some looked-after children, particularly teenagers with behavioural difficulties who have been in the care system for several years or are recent entrants, continues to be an area of poor performance. The council has reviewed the need for residential care and concluded that a local residential service would be unable to meet the collective requirements of this group at the same time as providing value for money. This means that some young people are placed within a fostering service that is still under-developed in terms of meeting their particular needs and is prone to higher levels of placement disruption. The council is responding by increasing funding and prioritising the recruitment and development of high-calibre adolescent foster carers. This approach is still very much in the early stages and the council has had to increase the use of private fostering agency placements to meet current demand. Close monitoring will be required to ensure that the recruitment of new foster carers is viable in the light of competition from private foster care agencies. Previous poor performance in reviewing foster carers within permitted time-scales is being addressed by increasing the number of fostering panels, reviewing processes and paperwork and improving staff support and training. All outstanding reviews were completed by the end of July 2005.

A number of effective strategies have been developed to reduce concerns expressed by pupils in secondary schools about bullying, as part of the healthy schools programme.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good. There has been a substantial increase in early years and childcare places in response to the growing population of young families in the area. The council offers good support for new providers and much provision is effective in helping children meet early learning goals. Improvements in quality assurance processes are beginning to address inconsistencies in standards in a few settings.

At the end of Key Stage 1, results are generally in line with national averages and similar authorities. Standards in writing are improving, but remain a priority area for the council. Standards at Key Stage 2 are also broadly similar to statistical neighbours, above national averages and show steady improvement. Generally good progress is made in the primary phase. Key Stage 3 results are similar to statistical neighbours with an improving picture in all subjects at level 5. Results at Key Stage 4 are similar to the national picture, although overall GCSE results show less improvement than other areas. Progress has been made in tackling gender differences in performance and the council continues to identify this as an area for further improvement.

There is effective provision and support for children and young people with special education needs (SEN). Performance indicators in this area are good and achievement

by pupils with SEN is improving at all key stages. GCSE results for this group compared very favourably with the national average in 2004.

Significant progress has been made since the inspection of the local education authority in 2002. Partnerships with schools are now good and schools rate many central services as effective and/or improving. No secondary schools are below national floor targets and all schools inspected in the last 12 months were judged to be at least satisfactory. With the early removal of one school from special measures, there are now no schools in this category. The council is making more effective use of data to support and challenge the performance of schools and monitor groups of children and young people at risk of under-achievement, for example those from black and minority ethnic groups. Despite this overall positive picture, there are, however, relatively few examples of good and very good standards and addressing variations between schools remains a key priority. The recent merger of the inclusion and the school improvement teams puts the education service in a strong position to move forward.

Permanent exclusions significantly reduced last year and are low overall. The range of measures to identify at-risk groups is proving effective in keeping them in mainstream education. However, compared to similar authorities, the re-integration rate of excluded pupils is very slow. The council has identified that this is mainly because a significant number of young people in this group are in their final year of school and re-inclusion has not been considered appropriate or in their best interests. However, it is still acknowledged as an area for improvement.

Strategies to improve attendance are having a positive impact and absences are low overall. The council continues to monitor and challenge schools where, for example, levels of authorised absence are above average. Looked-after children attend school regularly and effective support ensures they remain engaged. However, their achievement at GCSE level did not meet the local target set last year. The provision of and support for personal education plans for all looked-after children is a key area for improvement and appropriate targets have been set for 2005.

Children and young people have access to a good range of enrichment opportunities. Learning out-of-school is promoted well through the youth service and play schemes. The council is taking positive steps, for instance through the introduction of the young persons' 'leisure key', to respond to requests for a wider range of affordable recreation. Access remains a challenge for young people living in the more remote areas where public transport can be poor.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. The council works closely with key partners to support young people in the challenges they face at key times of transition. A young carer's project, for example, provides opportunities to meet and take part in activities. A wide

range of consultation and participation events enable children and young people to shape new and existing services. However, more co-ordination of this work is required to avoid duplication and to make the most of the lessons learned from young people's involvement to date. The council actively supports young people through the national youth parliament and a variety of youth and school councils encourage them to voice their opinions with confidence. A high proportion of looked-after children play an active part in their reviews and many children contribute to child protection conferences. The council also seeks to involve parents in decision-making, for example, in relation to services for those with disabilities.

There are effective working arrangements between the council and its partners to reduce offending and to prevent anti-social behaviour. The youth offending team performs well in relation to national performance indicators. The number of young people involved in offending is low overall, however, data are subject to large fluctuations. The rate of re-offending is reducing but the overall number of first-time offences has not reduced in the past 12 months and remains an area for improvement. Offending by looked-after children, as well as the number of final warnings, is an area for concern, although there have been improvements between 2003 and 2004 and further improvements forecast for 2005.

A high proportion of young people continue successfully in education, employment or training when they leave local authority care. The number of supervised juveniles in education, employment and training is also high compared to the national picture but falls short of the target currently set by the youth justice board.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good. A 14 – 19 strategy is in place and is being updated to take account of findings from a recent area review. Collaboration in the planning and development of 14 – 19 provision is at a relatively early stage but there are promising developments, for example, in sharing good practice and joint bids for funding. Compared to similar areas, a high percentage of 16 – 19 year olds are in employment, education and training. There is improving participation in further and higher education across the area as a whole. Work to promote awareness of educational maintenance allowances has led to high levels of take-up. Young people's achievement at advanced level is above the national average and the average point score is high. Schools with sixth forms generally perform well. The council rightly recognises however, this overall picture masks patterns of low aspiration and under-achievement by particular groups of young people and in more disadvantaged areas.

The youth services provides a good range of support for young people's social and personal development although its funding levels are modest compared to the national average. Progression into further education is lower in the Weston-super-Mare area than elsewhere and there are fewer opportunities for young people to follow

programmes at pre-entry level. The council is working with the local Learning and Skills Council and Connexions to investigate ways to tackle the shortage. Care leavers, young parents and young offenders are still over-represented in the group outside of employment, education and training. At times, there can be insufficient suitable accommodation for looked after children leaving care. A detailed protocol agreed by the council, health and Connexions supports transition planning for children and young people with disabilities, however more needs to be done to ensure that advocacy services and direct payments are used by all those who need them.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effective partnership work to promote healthy life-styles • proactive approach to preventative strategies through children's centres and health living centre • good health monitoring of looked after children. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teenage pregnancy rates • close monitoring and evaluation of current CAMHS strategy • development of services for children and young people with disabilities.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preventive strategies reducing the looked-after population • good performance maintained in providing early permanency for looked-after children • timeliness of assessing needs. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • placement stability of older looked-after children • closer monitoring to ensure reviews of foster carers occur in permitted timescales • further development in recruitment of specialist adolescent foster carers.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expansion of early years places and the quality of provision • good range of enrichment, leisure and recreational opportunities • low rates of exclusion • good attendance including looked-after children. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCSE outcomes for looked-after children • re-integration rates for those excluded • variation in standards between schools and the proportion of good and very good standards.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effective involvement in decision-making, including youth and schools' councils • high level of participation in child protection conferences and looked-after children's reviews. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rate of first-time offences for all young people and overall offending by looked-after children.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good partnerships supporting a broader 14 – 19 curriculum • high proportion of care leavers in education, employment and training. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion and use of advocacy services and direct payment for young people with disabilities • range of progression routes at all levels, particularly for post-16 year olds.

Service management

The council has clear ambition and a strong vision for improving outcomes for all children and young people in North Somerset. Priorities have been established within the council's corporate plan. A children's champion group, consisting of eight council members, helps to ensure that these priorities remain at the forefront of the council's planning and commissioning arrangements, an area which was noted for improvement from the last year's CSCI children's inspection.

The recent appointment of a Director of Children's Services designate, operational from September 2005, will provide the strategic lead in work with key agencies to agree priorities based on the five outcomes. There are good partnerships with schools and increasing capacity through the pooling of budgets and resources, such as the secondment of staff to the youth offending team and Sure Start programmes. The development of a children's trust reflecting greater integration of services will help to increase capacity further and improve value for money, although the council acknowledges the time-scale for completion of this work is now very tight.

Performance management is well established and there is evidence that this is positively impacting on service delivery. The children's service workforce continues to be developed and previous recruitment problems have been addressed.

The development of services to address the specific needs of local communities, particularly minority groups, is at a relatively early stage and is a corporate priority. A number of strategies to identify un-met need are being put in place. The development of processes to measure the impact of services will assist the council in assessing value for money.

The council has good capacity to further improve its services for children and young people.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Healthy life-styles are promoted for children and young people:

- strategies to reduce teenage pregnancy.

Staying safe

Looked-after children live in safe environment and are protected from abuse and exploitation:

- placement stability of looked-after teenagers with behavioural difficulties.

Enjoying and achieving

Children and young people who are looked after are helped to enjoy and achieve:

- the effectiveness of action taken to raise aspirations and improve educational outcomes for looked-after children, particularly at GCSE level.

Making a positive contribution

Action is taken to prevent offending and reduce re-offending by children and young people:

- the impact of action to reduce first-time offending overall, and all patterns of offending by looked-after children.

Achieving economic well-being

Action is taken to ensure that 14 – 19 education and training is planned and delivered in a co-ordinated way, and to ensure that education and training 16 – 19 is of good quality:

- the effectiveness of partnership in ensuring clear progression routes at appropriate levels for all 14 – 19 year olds.

Final judgements

Please see your final annual performance assessment judgements attached at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY

Divisional Manager
Office for Standards in Education



JONATHAN PHILLIPS

Director – Quality, Performance and
Methods
Commission for Social Care Inspection

APA final judgements 2005: North Somerset District Council

Areas for judgement	Final judgements ¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	3
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
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 capacity to improve its services 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	Very good
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good/promising
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate