

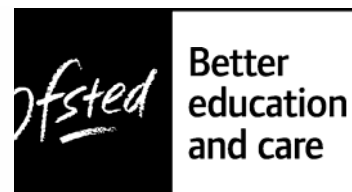
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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr T Doughty
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1 December 2005

Dear Mr Doughty

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on Monday 18 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, however, the council should ensure that they provide clearer evidence of outcomes to demonstrate the impact of policies and investment. The council is committed to partnership working and the Family and Children's Trust (FACT) Board includes non-statutory agencies.

There is good promotion of healthy lifestyles through a range of school programmes, a number accredited against national standards, such as the Healthy Schools Programme. The Northumberland sex education forum has received national recognition. The rate of teenage conceptions is lower than the national average and has dropped by 8.8% since 2000. The health of looked after children has improved significantly supported by improvements in information and access to services. A multi-agency Looked After Partnership provides a forum for service improvement.

Within early years there is a focus on working with parents on the emotional development of their children. First and second tier services are being developed, although it is too early to assess their impact. There are gaps in the Children and Mental Health Services (CAMHS) across the county but health investment plans for 2005/06 may improve service access and availability.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are good. Positive action is taken in schools to reduce discrimination and harassment. The monitoring of schools' anti-bullying policies is being strengthened and the evaluation of their impact on the safety and well-being of children and young people forms part of the visits made by council officers to monitor schools' performance. The development of the FACT has provided an opportunity to improve coordination, management and support of early years services to ensure consistency of good practice. The council has worked with the Children's Fund to develop services for travellers.

The council has a high number of social services referrals and officers should continue to review this area and explore issues of thresholds with partner agencies.

The council has a relatively high number of children on the child protection register (CPR) but is effectively working to reduce registrations through the development of family support services. There is good performance in a range of indicators for child protection reviews, re-registrations and length of time on the register.

The consultation and development of the FACT has engaged multi-agency partners in increasing service collaboration. A Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LCSB) is being developed and will continue to deliver the Northumberland Child Protection Committee (NCPC) programme of multi-agency training. Although child protection training is offered to schools, additional resources have been identified to monitor the relatively low level of take-up by schools of these training opportunities.

Numbers of looked after children remain high and strategies to address this issue are a key priority for the council. Children placed out of the area are well supported by good systems to ensure their safety including pro-active linking by the children's advocacy officer. The safeguarding of looked after children has been supported by improved monitoring of criminal record bureau processes in the council. The council is developing specialist placement services to respond to the needs of looked after children with complex needs, including a treatment foster care service. The long-term stability of looked after children remains low. The council's local public service agreement (LPSA) has supported increased provision of short-term breaks for children with disabilities.

Protocols have been established between relevant agencies to ensure comprehensive information exchange in respect of the progress of pupils with special educational needs and their safety at school. Monitoring visits are made to out-of-county special schools to ensure that they provide a safe environment and meet the specific needs of all pupils with learning or physical needs.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory overall. Weaknesses are acknowledged by the council and ambitious plans, in particular the Putting Learner First (PLF) project, are in place to improve provision.

Early years provision is good and supports children well in enabling them to meet the early learning goals. There are effective support mechanisms in place to address weaknesses where they exist and the quality of provision is rigorously monitored.

Results at the end of Key Stage 1 are very good. They are above the national average in mathematics and well above in reading and writing. Results are consistently above the average of similar authorities. The main weakness is found at Key Stage 2 because, although results overall are in line with the national and statistical neighbours averages, too many schools do not add sufficient value to pupils' existing levels of attainment and progress made over that key stage is unsatisfactory.

Results at Key Stage 3 are above the national average in mathematics and science and in line in English. They are in line with those of similar authorities in all three subjects. Results at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) show significant improvement in the percentage of young people achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, with results rising to be above the national average in 2004. Overall GCSE results are in line with the average of similar authorities. The progress made between Key Stages 3 and 4 is satisfactory.

The support provided by the education service in implementing the national strategies is rightly focused on improving the achievement of underachieving groups and vulnerable children. The authority has strengthened its school improvement strategy and is taking energetic action to address variability in performance between schools, particularly where schools do not achieve agreed targets. All secondary schools currently meet the government's floor targets. Partnerships are being developed to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils by providing a wider range of pathways to supplement GCSE courses, such as quality work-based learning and training opportunities. The project in partnership with Northumberland College provides a relevant programme of vocational pathways, including work placements, for groups of young people for whom a full GCSE course is not suitable. The Choysez Project, run by a voluntary sector alternative provision, aims to build pupils' self esteem and develop their personal skills. Pupils with special educational needs receive good support to access relevant courses. Their progress is monitored through their individual educational plans to ensure that they achieve in line with predicted targets. The progress of pupils from minority ethnic groups is monitored effectively with better use of pupil level data to raise achievement of all groups. The proportion of looked after children gaining one or more GCSE at grades A* to G is below the national average and that of similar authorities, however, results at five or more grades A* to C have improved and are now just above the national average.

Attendance is good overall and unauthorised absence is below average. There is erratic performance in relation to the attendance levels of looked after children, however, the authority demonstrates improvement in its 2004/05 performance with a return to acceptable levels of attendance of looked after children in that year. Trends are monitored effectively, with relevant plans in place for alternative provision and specialist support to improve attendance and behaviour in schools. Rates of exclusion are low, although levels of reintegration into school are below the national and statistical neighbours' figures.

There are currently no schools placed in a formal category of concern by Ofsted. Monitoring of schools has improved since the inspection of the local authority in 2003. The school improvement strategy is now more rigorous and effective intervention ensures that schools are supported well before intervention is necessary with fewer schools being identified as causing serious concern.

The council's provision of youth and community facilities is satisfactory overall, although patchy. The authority is seeking to increase the involvement of young people, particularly those with special educational needs or disabilities, through the County Sport Partnership, holiday schemes and other recreational and voluntary learning opportunities. The local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Training Agency offer a large number of modern apprenticeships for young people aged 16 to 19. The access to leisure and socialising opportunities for looked after children is monitored effectively as part of their reviews and work experience seeks to build on their particular skills or their preferred leisure activities.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. Northumberland has an extensive range of childcare provision, weaknesses are known and support provided to ensure that all settings become good, particularly in the way they engage parents and provide equality of opportunities. Schools contribute well to pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development and actively promote freedom from bullying and harassment. Pupils are encouraged to express their views through school councils and there are good examples of children and young people influencing decisions which affect their learning and their school's environment.

The council has reported very high levels (99%) of looked after children who contributed their opinions at reviews and this represents a significant improvement and positive engagement of looked after children. There are effective strategies to help all children and young people manage the transition between specific phases in their life. Young people aged 13 to 19 have access to a named Connexions personal adviser, who provides good support to prepare young people with disabilities or special educational needs for independence and adult life.

The council has established a number of ways to elicit the views of children and young people and recognise the need to bring all this information together, including the

views of young people from minority ethnic groups, in order to inform service development and improve further the engagement of hard to reach groups.

A good range of programmes are in place to tackle offending and anti-social behaviour. The Prevention Team specifically targets excluded, disadvantaged and challenging young people with the aim of preventing offending, re-offending, anti-social behaviour, truanting and school exclusion. The number of offences committed by young people reduced in 2003/04, but the overall rate of re-offending increased and the LPSA has set a target to reduce re-offending by 7% by 2006. Currently, only 75% of young offenders are in education, training or employment at age 16 and over. This figure is in line with the national average, but well below the national target of 90%. The council recognises the need to improve this outcome and the 2004/05 Youth Justice Plan indicates clearly how improvement will be achieved.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good. The percentage of 16 to 18 year olds in education, employment or training (85%) shows improvement, although there has been a slight deterioration in the percentage engaged in learning, now at 73%. The achievement of looked after children is supported by the council's LPSA and there has been an excellent improvement in performance this year with good links established with employment and training agencies. The council is aware of variability and weaknesses in the quality of some pathway plans. Training needs have been identified to ensure that all looked after children have a pathway plan which contributes positively to planning their future.

The commitment to raising young people's awareness of the world of learning and the world of work is strong. Collaboration and planning with a range of partners, particularly the local LSC to develop a 14 to 19 learning strategy, are good. The council is working to broaden provision to meet a range of educational needs. Partnership working is increasing flexibility and enabling access to relevant courses, particularly in the context of a large rural county, such as provision at Tynedale Virtual College. Some 84% of Year 12 and 80% of Year 13 leavers continued in full-time education. While advanced level or their equivalent examination results are improving and are now in line with the national average, further progress is still required relative to Northumberland's statistical neighbours' results. The authority has identified the need to raise attainment at age 18, particularly of boys.

The support given to children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The *Choice Special* publication outlines the transition process. The Connexions service provides effective support in assessing needs, identifying barriers to progress and in commissioning employment, training and appropriate personal development opportunities for vulnerable young people. Person Centred Plans are being piloted to engage young people fully and ease their transition to adult life and economic independence. Awareness of equality issues, including race, has been raised.

Summary

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the level of health assessments for looked after children partnership working in planning and delivery of services work of health coordinators in residential units programmes to promote healthy lifestyles in schools. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitoring of performance to inform priorities and demonstrate effectiveness of investment working with partners to address shortfalls in CAMHS.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Offending Team preventative work and work with looked after children sustained improvement in placement indicators for looked after children improved child protection performance recent review of NCPC procedures good multi-agency working provision in schools to promote safe behaviour and take action to reduce discrimination and harassment. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> commissioning arrangements to reduce out of area placements, support long term stability and address the balance of placements reduce numbers of looked after children and those on CPR.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> early years provision results at Key Stage 1 improving results at Key Stage 3 and GCSE improved school improvement strategy to target underachievement increasing range of relevant courses 14 to 16 no schools in Ofsted categories and reducing number of schools causing concerns. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> achievement and attendance of looked after children results at Key Stage 2 consistency in access to youth service provision of high quality.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> range of childcare provision schools' contribution to pupils personal development contribution of looked after children to their reviews opportunities for young people to express their views. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> use of young people's views to inform service development percentage of young offenders in education, training or employment.

<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partnership working to implement the 14 to 19 strategy • links with Connexions services • support for vulnerable pupils at key transition time • support systems for care leavers with increased involvement in education, training and employment. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitoring of the quality of all provisions 14 to 19 • improving the quality of pathway plans for care leavers.
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Service management

Service management is good. Collaboration with relevant partners is a major strength. Parents, carers, children and young people are consulted and, although still requiring consolidation, their views are taken into account in establishing priorities for development.

Substantial progress has been made in moving towards the production of a single children and young people's plan from 2006. The council recognises the need to strengthen its analysis of need further and makes good use of external reviews to aid this process. Energetic action is taken in response to external evaluation, such as the 2003 inspection of the local authority. An action plan is being implemented following the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) inspection of children's services. Priorities are clear with good focus on performance and outcomes. The development of the FACT and PLF has established a number of relevant groups to ensure the effective implementation of the Children's Trust. The education service has an accurate knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses with a good framework to assess the impact of strategies and policies.

The council is embarking on a major review of school organisation and school places with substantial capital investment to improve the condition of school buildings. It is too early to comment on the impact of this initiative but planning and consultation processes are clearly seeking to engage all partners, particularly schools, in meeting the challenges of the PLF programme.

The council is aware of the risk and challenges ahead. There is commitment to develop pooled budgets further to capitalise on all existing resources. The council needs to develop a commissioning strategy to reduce the numbers of children placed out of the area with consequent high costs. There are many examples of services working together well, in particular to improve provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those living in isolated rural areas.

Performance management is rigorous in social services and this good practice is being extended to other areas of the directorate. The council manages the challenges of staff recruitment and retention effectively. The workforce is fairly stable. A workforce plan

has now been piloted and is due to be rolled out, however, at a time of significant transition, the council is reducing what is already a low level of spend on training. The implementation of the PLF programme requires a wide range of new and existing training opportunities and officers have rightly prioritised the training of staff affected by the first wave of PLF reorganisation in the Cramlington Partnership.

The council has good capacity to improve further.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review:

Being healthy

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

- consider the implementation of FACT and its framework in providing good universal services that are accessible for all.

Action is taken to promote children and young people's mental health:

- consider the development of CAMHS.

Staying safe

Children and young people are provided with a safe environment:

- consider the impact of FACT in supporting families and reducing numbers of looked after children
- improved commissioning to reduce the number of out of the area placements.

Enjoying and achieving

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to enjoy and achieve

- consider the impact of the PLF programme and of the special educational needs strategy on the inclusion and achievement of all groups of young people.

Making a positive contribution

Children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision making and in supporting the community

- progress on county-wide participation and young carers' strategies.

Achieving economic well-being

Children and young people who are looked after are helped to achieve economic well-being

Action is taken to ensure that 14-19 education and training is planned and delivered in a coordinated way, and to ensure that education and training (16-19) is of good quality

- pathway plans of quality for all care leavers
- impact of the 14 to 19 strategy.

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: Northumberland County 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