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Making Social Care  
Better for People



Mark Lloyd  
Chief Executive  
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County Hall  
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**1 December 2005**

Dear Mr Lloyd

**ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF DURHAM CITY COUNCIL'S  
EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005**

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 29 June 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 excellent. Key agencies work well together to promote healthy lifestyles and to improve access to health services for children and young people. Healthy lifestyles are promoted through close partnership working between education and the Primary Care Trusts to ensure that target schools achieve the healthy schools standard by 2006 and that advice on drugs, and sex and relationships is available. An effective multi-agency strategy to reduce levels of teenage pregnancy is in place; the under-18 conception rate was below the regional average in 2003. A young men's sexual health worker works alongside nurses to promote awareness of sexual health issues among young men. The proportion of schools achieving Activemark and Sportsmark awards are high and inspection of schools by Ofsted shows that participation in sport is good. The health needs of looked after children are met effectively.

Effective action to improve access to mental health services for children and young people has been taken and the continued development of partnership working is planned to ensure that there is appropriate access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for young people referred by County Durham Youth Engagement Services (CDYES). The number of social workers in CAMHS is increasing and high and CDYES has recently appointed a part-time CAMHS nurse and three

community nurses to offer a health assessment to all the young people who are supervised by the service.

## **Staying safe**

Outcomes in this area are good overall. Children and young people are provided with a safe environment and child protection arrangements are robust. The number of children on the child protection register has reduced significantly, with the removal of looked after children where appropriate.

Placement stability within the year for looked after children is very good, and longer-term stability in foster placements for those children looked after for four or more years remains acceptable and in line with similar councils. A high number of looked after children were placed for adoption during the year.

Less than half of initial assessments were undertaken within the seven-day target timescale during 2004/05, although performance against core assessment timescales remains better than in similar councils. A cross-county initial assessment team was introduced in March 2005 and the council is confident that 2005/06 data will indicate that initial assessment timescales are now being met.

The children's services inspection carried out early in 2005 expressed concerns about the quality and consistency of some of the assessment, care planning and court work it examined. It also concluded that a review should be undertaken to ensure that services across the county are meeting needs in all geographical areas. Appropriate arrangements have now been put in place through the inspection action plan to address these areas of weakness.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

Outcomes in this area are good overall, although there are some weaknesses.

The quality of early years provision is good. There is an established and effective early years and childcare partnership. The quality of child care provision inspected by Ofsted was mostly very good and all parents of 3 and 4 year olds who want a nursery place for their child are offered one. Most children secure a place at their school of first choice.

Standards at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 have improved at the same rate as that seen nationally and overall performance is in line with that of statistical neighbours and national averages. At Key Stage 4, the authority's strategy *Beyond Expectations* is having a positive impact on standards at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE). The rate of improvement in results in 2004 was twice that seen nationally. The proportion of pupils achieving five A\* to C grades at GCSE or general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) in 2001 was 41.85%. In 2004, the proportion achieving five A\* to C grades at GCSE or equivalent qualification was 47.89%. Although figures in 2004 are in line with statistical neighbours, they remain below the national average.

Rates of improvement vary across the schools in the county. Collaboration between schools and colleges has been used to broaden the curriculum available for pupils aged 14 to 16 to include vocational options.

Boys underachieve at Key Stages 2 and 3 and in the proportion of GCSEs at grades A\* to C that they achieve. Half the young people leaving care achieved one GCSE, which is good performance and comparable to that found in similar councils. However, only 3% of care leavers achieved five GCSEs at grades A\* to C. The authority is aware of these issues and actions to monitor and review improvement strategies are in place.

Support for schools placed in formal categories of concern by Ofsted is effective. The number of schools placed in a specific category and the speed of removal are better than the national averages. Strategies designed to improve school attendance and behaviour of children and young people have also been effective. Good links between the travelling community and traveller education services have been very effective in improving attendance of these children. The authority has met statutory targets to reduce levels of exclusions from primary and secondary schools; these are now in line with national averages. The proportion of pupils receiving alternative tuition is also in line with national averages and the numbers who are reintegrated back into school is good. Actions to reduce levels of surplus places in schools have been effective.

### **Making a positive contribution**

Outcomes in this area are good. Mechanisms for consulting with and engaging children and young people in decision-making processes are a particular strength. The County Durham Participation Network promotes the involvement of young people in making decisions, and a significant number of social care services and schools have achieved membership of Investing in Children, an organisation that promotes the engagement of children and young people. Consultation with looked after children and with travellers has led to a number of changes in services. Young people are encouraged to take part in voluntary activities supported by youth workers and the Connexions Youth Forum has been involved in the development of services for young people. Looked after children have taken part in recruitment and training of staff and carers and the majority contributed their opinions to their statutory reviews.

Key agencies work together on a range of initiatives designed to improve social inclusion. The Primary Inclusion Project is a multi-profession approach to addressing the interface between children's well-being and academic performance. County Durham Youth Engagement Service, working with other agencies, has made good progress in reducing the number of young people admitting to or being committed of an offence and in reducing the number of first timers in the youth justice system. However, levels of recidivism are high. The levels of final warnings and convictions of looked after children have fallen this year.

The majority of children and young people are given adequate support in managing changes in their lives. Effective transition arrangements are in place for young people moving from children's to adults' social care services. Arrangements are also in place to help children to make the transition from primary to secondary schools. However, not all young people are provided with sufficient information about the full range of post-16 options for further education that are open to them.

## **Achieving economic well-being**

Overall outcomes in this area are satisfactory. Progress in producing a joint 14 to 19 strategy for education and training has been slow but clear and coherent structures for implementation are now in place at both county and area levels. Partnership between key agencies has improved and there is willingness to collaborate to improve access to a coherent 14 to 19 curriculum for young people from across the county. Although there have been improvements in the coherence and range of curriculum options available in the east of the county, the lack of a comprehensive and reliable audit of provision across the county has impeded curriculum planning at a strategic level.

Participation in post-16 education and training has improved since the time of the last inspection of the local authority when it was amongst the lowest in the country. However, the proportion of young people not in education, employment and training and those whose destinations are unknown is still unacceptably high at around 20%. The proportion of care leavers in employment, education or training at age 19 is very good, and is close to the level in similar councils. Arrangements to support children and young people with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities are good for those aged 14 to 16, but are underdeveloped for those who wish to continue in education and training beyond the age of 16.

Standards of achievement are improving at all levels. Overall attainment at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A-level) is improving faster than that seen nationally. However, there is considerable variation in GCE A-level performance between schools. There are a number of schools with small sixth forms where the average point score and value added results are lower than in other schools.

The Young Peoples Service (YPS), established in April 2004, has been effective in responding to needs of young people aged 15 to 21 leaving care and, in the future, it will also provide services for young people aged 16 and 17 who are in need. The YPS is a multi-agency partnership involving Connexions and the voluntary sector, which ensures that services are accessible and responsive to young peoples needs.

## Summary

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• levels of teenage pregnancy are reducing</li> <li>• partnership activities to promote healthy lifestyles are effective</li> <li>• looked after children's access to health services have improved.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to CAMHS for young people referred by CDYES.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• child protection arrangements are robust</li> <li>• the number of children on the child protection register has reduced</li> <li>• children and young people are provided with a safe environment.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the low proportion of initial assessments completed within seven days</li> <li>• the quality and consistency of assessment and care planning work</li> <li>• equality of services across geographical areas.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the quality of early years provision is good</li> <li>• improving standards at Key Stages 1,2 and 3</li> <li>• good overall improvements in GCSE results in 2004</li> <li>• effective support to improve attendance of children from traveller families.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• standards at Key Stage 4</li> <li>• low achievement of looked after children with regard to attainment of five GCSEs at A* to C</li> <li>• underachievement of boys.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mechanisms for consulting with children and young people</li> <li>• reduction in numbers of young people in contact with the youth justice system</li> <li>• reductions in final warnings and convictions of looked after children.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high levels of recidivism</li> <li>• uneven access to information advice and guidance about post-16 options and 14 to 19 pathways.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good progress in implementing 14 to 19 strategies</li> <li>• improving partnership and collaboration between key agencies.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• low post-16 participation in education and training</li> <li>• lower achievement in small sixth forms in schools</li> <li>• underdeveloped 14 to 19 curriculum planning and coherence.</li> </ul>

## Service management

Strong support, backed by resources, is provided by elected members and senior officers in taking forward the children's services agenda. The Children and Young Peoples Partnership has been in operation for some years and is well established as the overarching strategic body. The lead member for children's services has been designated and the appointment of a Director of Children's Services and the related structure are under discussion by the authority.

The authority's ambitions and priorities are clear and most outcomes for children and young people are improving. The production of a single children and young people's plan is scheduled for April 2006. In education, plans are well focused on the standards agenda. There is a robust strategy to deliver priorities in the Single Education Plan and the Key Stage 4 improvement project, *Beyond Expectations*, which is backed by financial resources, is beginning to have a positive impact. In social care, there remains a long-term focus on a number of priorities, including the reduction in the number of looked after children and the more effective use of placements.

The authority has worked with relevant partners, including service users, to analyse need and set clear and appropriate priorities and strategies for change. Collaborative work with external partners has extended the curriculum at Key Stage 4 and partnership working over the development of 14 to 19 provision is improving. Further work needs to be done to develop and implement a coherent curriculum framework for young people in this age range. Partnership working is a particular strength in social care.

The self-assessment report focuses upon strengths in relation to current outcomes and the processes already in place or planned. It is not always clear whether there is equal access to services across geographical areas in the county, whether initiatives are equally successful in every area, and whether partnership working is strong in all areas or only in some. There is insufficient information on how and when strategies will be changed to address areas of underperformance.

There is a good performance management framework in place, although this needs to be embedded across the whole staff group so that managers can be confident that their quality assurance system is reliable.

There are some skill shortfalls in social care, which led to the inconsistencies in practice identified in the children's services inspection.

## **Areas for exploration in the joint area review:**

### **Being healthy**

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

- access to CAMHS for young people referred by CDYES.

### **Staying safe**

*The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:*

- quality of assessment, planning and court work.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

*Action is taken to ensure that educational provision 5-16 is of good quality:*

- the impact of strategies to raise standards at Key Stage 4
- the five A\* to C GCSE achievement of looked after children
- the achievement of boys.

### **Achieving 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:*

- progress in addressing issues identified in the 14-19 area inspection.

## 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

CC: Gail Hopper - Director of Children's Services



## APA final judgements 2005: Durham County Council

Areas for judgement	Final judgements <sup>1</sup>
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