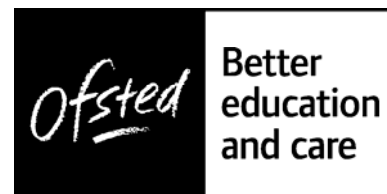


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Making Social Care  
Better for People



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**1 December 2005**

Dear Colleagues

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 30 June 2005 to assess the performance of the education and social care services within your authority. We are grateful for the information that you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

**Being healthy**

Outcomes for children and young people in this area are satisfactory overall. Schools are engaging positively with the national agenda for promoting the health of children in all areas and levels of participation in sport are good.

Targeted nurse and educational psychologist support has led to an increase in the numbers of looked after children receiving an annual dental and health assessment. The council needs to work together with the primary care trust in order to ensure that the shortage of dentists in some areas of Cumbria does not jeopardise this improvement.

Increased financial investment in child and adolescent mental health services has resulted in a strengthening of the multi-disciplinary teams that offer support to looked after children who have mental health difficulties or learning disabilities. However, the council needs to promote further urgent action together with strategic partners in order to reduce waiting times for young people with acute mental health problems referred to child and adolescent mental health services by the Youth Offending Teams and to

ensure that children and young people especially those looked-after are able to receive appropriate specialised mental health treatment and support in their local area.

Some drug services for children and young people are improving, with good education projects in schools making an effective contribution. Partnership working, however, is weakened by a lack of joint planning and the needs of children are not specifically addressed in service plans. Poor coordination of interventions by individual agencies can confuse drug users and their families and does not encourage full participation and engagement.

The council is on track to meet its target for reducing teenage pregnancies across five out of six districts and is planning a targeted strategy to improve performance in Carlisle. This performance is better than the average rates of decrease for England.

### **Staying safe**

Outcomes for children and young people in this area are satisfactory overall. There has been significant improvement in the council's performance in the last 12 months, albeit from a low base. The Social Services Inspectorate carried out an inspection in October 2003, which identified that the operation of the referral assessment and initial response services was flawed, unsystematic and did not provide a reliable safeguard for children. The inspectors found a longstanding breach of placement regulations and demonstrably unsafe practice. However, the follow-up inspection of 2004 concluded that these unsafe practices had been largely rectified.

Reviews of children on the child protection register are now carried out in a timely manner. It remains a matter of concern that little more than two-thirds of looked after children have a named social worker, the remainder being supported by family support workers. The timescales for initial and core assessments remain poor but they are being undertaken thoroughly and systematically and the problem has been identified by external consultants as one of weak administration rather than poor social work practice. The numbers of re-registrations on the child protection register are high which indicates a need both to examine carefully the thresholds for initial registration and also to ensure consistency of application of the thresholds across the county.

The 2004 follow-up inspection also noted that the council had increased resources for disabled children specifically to improve joint commissioning between social services, education and the primary care trusts but deduced that it was too soon to see improved outcomes as a result of this investment. More recent information has shown that assessment of children in need from black and minority ethnic groups has increased significantly and now more closely reflects the ratio of these groups in the population in Cumbria.

The council has increased the number of adoption and fostering placements and conversely reduced the number of residential placements. Children experience relatively few moves in their placements, which has a positive knock-on effect on their opportunity to enjoy and achieve.

The 2004 follow-up inspection acknowledged the work the council had done to improve the effectiveness of the Area Child Protection Committee but was not satisfied with the rate of progress. In response to this criticism, the council set a target date of 1 September 2005 to establish a Local Safeguarding Board modelled on government requirements in order to ensure the promotion of safeguards for children countywide. The council is on track to meet this target.

The council has been assisted by an external support team commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) during the last 12 months. Progress has been monitored through a bi-monthly programme board chaired by The Commission's Regional Director and satisfaction has been expressed with the progress that the council has made in all areas, most notably in more effective safeguarding of children.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. The overall quality of early years and school provision is in line with similar authorities, though a high proportion of actions are required of early years' providers following initial inspections. The levels of attainment of children and young people from Key Stages 1 to 4 are also generally in line with the performance in similar authorities. However the progress made between key stages varies very widely between secondary schools. Boys under-perform at all key stages, especially in English. The youth service provision is inadequate. A very low priority has been given to this service until recently. The council has recognised the need to improve youth services and a strategic decision has now been made to give it greater priority. However, the council is at a very early stage of implementation. A high-level partnership board has been established to build a new youth service to ensure that access to a broad range of recreational and voluntary learning activities is available to all young people.

The attainment of looked after children by the age of 16 is low but above the very low national levels. Their levels of absence from school are high but there has been some recent improvement. A significant number of looked after children are not currently provided with full-time education and this requires very urgent attention. There are low levels of permanent exclusion generally and young people requiring alternative education are promptly placed.

The quality of education in special schools inspected is good. The council prides itself on the high level of inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. The council has recognised that action is needed to improve the effectiveness

of practice in transition planning for pupils with special educational needs. A new inter-agency protocol has been developed but not yet implemented.

### **Making a positive contribution**

Outcomes in this area are generally satisfactory. There have been some significant recent improvements in the way the council approaches the involvement of young people in decisions affecting them but much remains to be done. The significant new approach has been exemplified by the involvement of over 250 young people to build a profile of how the new children's service should look; and the substantial involvement of children with special needs in the recent appointment of a specialist education officer in that field. As part of a recently introduced social services participation strategy, two new participation workers have also recently been appointed. However much of the impact of such steps in improving services remain unproven. Young people have long been involved in a large number of school councils and neighbourhood forums, but the involvement of young people in the governance and management of youth service provision is significantly underdeveloped.

Insufficient support is provided to children and young people to manage changes in their lives. Regulatory reports indicate that looked after children participate well in a broad range of decisions affecting them within children's homes. However the proportion taking part in statutory reviews is well below that in similar areas. A protocol for planning the transition of young people with disabilities into adult social services at the age of 14, designed to address acknowledged shortcomings, has been implemented too slowly by the council and its partners. A young carers' strategy was developed in 2003 between social services, health and the voluntary sector. However, its impact was not properly evaluated and it is now being reviewed.

There is a broad range of activities to reduce the number of young people offending for the first time and to combat re-offending. A recent inspection found that the youth offending service had developed into a service that was meeting the basic requirements of children and young people who had offended and those at risk of offending. Whilst the re-offending rate of those who had been in custody has fallen, the overall rate has been rising.

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

Outcomes in this area are good. A high proportion of young people remain in learning after the age of 16. The quality of provision in all sixth forms is at least satisfactory. Good partnership working between the council, Connexions Cumbria and other partners has helped to improve the proportion of young people in learning or employment up to the age of 19. Only 6.7% of 16 to 19 year olds were not in education, employment or training in 2005, which is better than the national position and represents a steady improvement. Collaboration in the planning and delivery of

post-16 education and training has been developing well. The council has worked closely with the local Learning and Skills Council to lead a 14 to 19 Pathfinder initiative. This has involved, among other activities, the development of local planning groups in the very distinct and diverse areas of the county, to respond more effectively to learners' needs. Its full impact on opportunities for young people cannot yet be determined.

The council and Connexions Cumbria have been successful in promoting the participation of a high proportion of care leavers and young mothers in post-16 learning at rates well above national levels. They recognise that more progress is needed to improve participation of all young people in a number of more isolated or deprived areas.

## SUMMARY

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Areas for improvement</b>
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high immunisation rates</li> <li>• involvement in healthy schools initiative</li> <li>• levels of participation in school sports</li> <li>• reducing teenage pregnancies in line with local public service agreement</li> <li>• improving health outcomes for looked after children</li> <li>• implementation of promising initiatives: an integrated paediatric occupational therapy service for children with a disability; young men's community health workers; children looked after nurses; primary mental health care workers.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <p>Promotion of effective strategic partnerships to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rectify the shortage of dentists</li> <li>• to improve child and adolescent mental health services for young people with serious mental health problems especially those looked-after</li> <li>• improve drug services.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• numbers of looked after children adopted and fostered</li> <li>• stability of placements</li> <li>• reviews of child protection cases</li> <li>• improving numbers of children in need from black and minority ethnic groups who have been assessed</li> <li>• priority being given to putting local safeguarding board in place.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase the numbers of looked after children with a named social worker</li> <li>• improve access to services for disabled children</li> <li>• improve poor timescales for initial and core assessments</li> <li>• reduce very high levels of re-registrations on child protection register.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consistent quality of most education and care provision to satisfactory standards</li> <li>• levels of achievement in line with similar authorities</li> <li>• low levels of permanent exclusions and alternative provision available quickly.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provision of youth services to deliver recreational and voluntary learning activities</li> <li>• improve the attendance of looked after children in educational provision and their access to learning programmes.</li> </ul>

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Areas for improvement</b>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• involvement of young people with profound or complex learning difficulties in decisions which affect them</li> <li>• consultation with young people in the process of creating new children's service structure</li> <li>• involvement of young people in children's homes in decisions which affect their daily lives.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase the numbers of looked after children contributing to their statutory review</li> <li>• increase the involvement of children and young people in the governance and management of the youth service</li> <li>• improve the rate of recidivism and participation in full time education and training of young offenders under supervision.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the levels of participation in education, employment and training when leaving Year 11</li> <li>• the high levels of teenage mothers participating in education, employment and training</li> <li>• progress in collaboration through the 14 to 19 Pathfinder</li> <li>• participation of looked after children at 19 in education, employment and training.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve the participation of young people in post-16 learning in more deprived or isolated areas.</li> </ul>

## **Service management**

The authority has adequate capacity to improve further. It has a challenging agenda to modernise service delivery and performance management. There has been all party support for the children's social care improvement agenda but corporate parenting needs to be developed further to ensure positive and improving outcomes for children and young people.

The council has also supported the improvement agenda for children's services through the bi-monthly Performance Improvement Advisory Board which is chaired by the leader of the council. The council portfolio lead for social services has been the chairman of the Children and Young Persons Strategic Partnership and has attended all monthly business meetings with the Commission. A new portfolio holder for children's services has been appointed since the May elections and likewise has attended all relevant Commission meetings.

A quarterly business review process is now well embedded in social services. Officers are now much better able to describe their current performance accurately and with confidence

The self-assessment was a useful document, which identified clearly many issues that the council has recognised as priorities for action. However too much weight was given to actions already initiated but not yet providing improved outcomes for children and young people. In much of the analysis of the contribution of the education service there was too little focus on rigorous comparison of performance with similar areas.

Currently the authority is increasing collaborative work between agencies and this has had a positive impact, for example in improving the health of looked after children.

The authority continues to have difficulties in the recruitment, retention and training of social care staff and this has had an impact on policy implementation in some areas, for example the allocation of a named social worker to all looked after children. The authority needs to improve its performance to ensure it significantly increases the percentage of residential childcare workers achieving national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 3 in 'caring for children and young people' in order to comply with the national minimum standard. The percentage of social workers and residential managers achieving the Post Qualifying 1 award in childcare is also too low and is half that of similar authorities.

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

### **Being healthy**

*Looked after children's health needs are addressed:*

- services for looked after children with serious mental health problems.

### **Staying safe**

*Agencies collaborate to safeguard children according to the requirements of current government guidance:*

- evaluation of the effectiveness of the new local safeguarding board.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

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

- do all looked after children have access to an appropriate programme of learning which meets their needs?



*All children and young people can access a range of recreational and voluntary learning provision:*

- youth service provision.

### **Making a positive contribution**

*Children and young people who are looked after are helped to make a positive contribution:*

- evaluation of progress on looked after children's contribution to their statutory reviews.

### **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: Cumbria 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	2
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	2
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	2
The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people	2

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### 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