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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr Kim Bromley-Derry
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1 December 2005

Dear Mr Bromley-Derry

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SOUTH TYNESIDE METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 27 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

This is an area of good performance generally. Reduction in rates of teenage pregnancy is ahead of national target milestones having started from a very high baseline. However, recent increases in the numbers of teenage pregnancies mean that South Tyneside is still a priority area. Increased capacity of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) has meant speedier access to those services for many vulnerable young people. Social workers are fully involved at all levels of the service from general preventative work to teams providing specialist services.

Looked after children have, where necessary, access to a psychologist and psychology assistant within the dedicated looked after children health team. There has been significant progress made in schools' participation in the Healthy Schools Programme. School inspection reports indicate good or very good pupil participation in sport. The health needs of looked after children are met well through effective health screening and regular dental checks, although there has been a downward trend in performance over the last four years. This is attributed to the reluctance of older children to engage in a system involving local general practitioners. Initial health assessments are now done by the community paediatrician.

Staying safe

There is evidence of good performance in this outcome area, with many indicators at a very good level compared to those in similar authorities. For example, looked after children enjoy a very good level of placement stability and all have an allocated social worker. There is also good performance in respect of placing children for adoption and with foster carers. All children on the child protection register have an allocated social worker and are reviewed on time. There are no children under 10 years of age placed in residential care. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is to be launched in the autumn.

The Children's Services Inspection conducted in 2004 had been concerned about the arrangements for referrals and assessments but the responses from the council were speedy yet considered and are beginning to show some positive outcomes. The indications are that the duty and assessment system is more effectively managed and, despite the fact that there were some one-off circumstances leading to increases in core assessments, there has been improvement in the numbers of assessments completed on time. Inconsistency in the quality of assessments, identified in the inspection, is being addressed.

The authority's self assessment identified some specific weaknesses around some particular areas: the high numbers of children looked after; an over-reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) and the level of vacancies for qualified social workers. However, strategies are in place and have had a degree of success. There has been a successful recruitment campaign for foster carers which should begin to reduce the use of IFAs, and there has been an increase in social work capacity.

The large number of looked after children, however, remains an area of concern. There are also variations in the degree to which children from black and minority ethnic groups are represented among children in need, children looked after and children on the Child Protection Register (CPR). The actual numbers are small but it is an area that the authority may wish to explore further. The recruitment of foster carers from black and minority ethnic communities remains a continuing difficulty.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good. The overall quality of early years provision is very good. Results at Key Stages 1 and 2 are consistently above the national average and statistical neighbours. Standards at Key Stage 3 are above statistical neighbours but remained below the national average in 2004. Although pupils make reasonable progress between Key Stages 1 and 2, the progress between Key Stages 2 and 3 remains below the national average. The percentage of pupils achieving more than five A* to C grades at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) continues to improve in line with the rate of improvement seen nationally and with statistical neighbours. However, the percentage achieving one or more A* to G has fallen significantly in 2004 from a relatively high level to below average. Raising attainment continues to be seen as a priority in the council's strategic planning and specific actions

in key areas are already being taken. The project for looked after children's education is highly effective and has clearly been instrumental in ensuring that a high number of children leave care with qualifications although the level of achievement could still improve. Additionally, the average attainment of pupils from black and minority ethnic groups is higher than the local authority average. Early support for pupils whose first language is not English is seen as a significant factor in this.

Attainment strategies are well focused and convincing although outcomes in some areas such as the behaviour improvement programme and the analysis of the early years profile information would benefit from further development. There are good examples of consultation with, and involvement of, children and young people. With the Creative Arts Venue for Enjoyment, for instance, the chair and many of the management committee are young people. Support for extra curricular activities is judged as satisfactory or better in all school inspections.

Attendance overall is broadly in line with national figures although the attendance of looked after children is poor. The reintegration of excluded pupils into mainstream schools is not sufficiently high although an inclusion strategy is expected to lead to more positive outcomes. There are only two schools in formal categories of concern (underachieving primary settings). Support for one secondary school, which was formerly in special measures, has been swift and effective and support has also been recently judged by Ofsted, following monitoring visits, as 'effective' and 'well led' for the current underachieving schools.

Positive steps have been taken to develop an integrated service for children with disabilities which include a single assessment process and more integrated planning and reviewing of individual cases. There are good levels of achievement for pupils with special educational needs.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. A variety and range of methods exist to support vulnerable children and young people in managing change. For example, transfer learning mentors work with vulnerable children between primary and secondary school and the visually impaired services also offer support at critical transition times. The council is making considerable efforts to encourage the involvement of young people in decision-making with some degree of tangible success. Elected members are also taking an active role in ensuring that children and young people's opinions are being heard and acted upon. For example, a consultation process with young people in relation to recreation led to the development of skateboard parks.

Concerns about advocacy services for looked after children, raised in the Children’s Services Inspection in 2004 have been addressed, through a service level agreement with the National Youth Advocacy Service, jointly commissioned with another local authority. The advocacy service now meets the needs of the full range of vulnerable children supported by children’s social care. Schools councils are well developed.

The actions taken to prevent offending and reduce re-offending have been demonstrably successful but need to be maintained. Failure to meet the target of supervised young offenders progressing in education, training or employment has been recognised by the council and, again, a range of methods is being used to address these needs. There is good evidence of services working together, particularly in relation to youth offending and mental health services.

Achieving economic well-being

Performance against this outcome is the weakest of the five and whilst it reflects satisfactory performance, there are still some areas of shortfall. There have been some improvements in the number of 16 to 18 year olds remaining in education or training and a reduction in the number of older young people who are not in education, employment or training but performance still remains below the national average. The number of care leavers in education, training or employment which had been poor for some time has been addressed through a number of projects and has shown a significant improvement. The numbers of children with disabilities receiving a service is low compared to other authorities but the council has taken steps to address this with the successful launch of a register of children with disabilities, the Network. There is now an integrated team established for children with disabilities. The take up of Direct Payments among young people with disabilities and their carers is disappointing.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overall reduction in teenage pregnancies, despite recent increases • CAMHS access rates • dedicated health support for looked after children • all looked after children, placed out of borough, have a mental health assessment as part of their placement • significant progress in participation in the Healthy School programme. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teenage pregnancy rate is one of the highest in the country.

<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviews of children on Child Protection Register • placement stability for LAC • adoption performance • all children on CPR have allocated worker and are reviewed on time • high numbers of children under 10 placed with foster carers and placed for adoption and none in residential care • a greater number of foster carers are available through a successful recruitment campaign. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the difference in representation of children from black and minority ethnic groups among children on the CPR, children looked after and children in need • family placements for children from black and minority ethnic groups • the high number of children looked after • consistency in the quality of assessments.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • achievement in Key Stages 1 and 2 • low number of schools causing concern • quality of nursery education • low turnover of teaching staff • educational attainment of pupils with special educational needs • the proportion of children and young people under supervision of the Youth Offending Team who access education, training and employment. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 • GCSE performance • attendance at school of looked after children.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the work of the YOT and the preventative programme • the variety of options used to assist young people in contributing to policy and decision making • the use of Family Group Conferences. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluating the outcomes of some initiatives • the number of young offenders in education, training or employment.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number of care leavers in contact with the authority and in appropriate accommodation • the increase in childcare places. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the education, training and employment of care leavers • equitable access to services for children with disabilities • the take up of Direct Payments among young people with disabilities and their carers.

Service management

There is a strong corporate lead in this authority, with clear vision articulated in the Community Strategy which can be traced through a coherent planning system. There is clear evidence that the vision is based on a sound analysis of needs which has led to a number of initiatives and new developments. Nevertheless, in terms of delivery of services for children, there remain certain areas, such as the numbers of young people not in education, employment and training, attendance at secondary schools and school attendance among looked after children, which have been resistant to efforts to improve them and there is some doubt as to whether the authority has approached these, in all cases, in a focused way, based on clear evidence of what is most effective.

In terms of capacity, the progress in developing the Children and Young People's Alliance and a new Children's Directorate is noted and the response to the recommendations of the Children's Inspection last year has been pleasing. There is good staff retention within education but there are some risks arising from difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified social workers. There is a degree of concern that the number of changes of personnel in key senior positions may leave the new Director of Children's Services short of experienced local support at the highest level and about the potential impact that may have on maintaining momentum in the immediate future.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

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

- downward trend of performance in monitoring the health needs of children looked after.

Staying safe

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

- the over-representation of black and minority ethnic children on the child protection register
- choice in family placements for black and minority ethnic children
- the number of children looked after.

Enjoying and achieving

Children and young people are enabled and encouraged to attend and enjoy school and to achieve highly:

- progress made by pupils between Key Stages 2 and 3
- GCSE performance
- attendance at school of looked after children.

Making a positive contribution

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

- the number of young offenders in education, training or employment.

Achieving economic well-being

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to achieve economic well-being:

- the take up of direct payments by children with disabilities or their carers.

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
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Commission for Social Care Inspection

APA final judgements 2005: South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough 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

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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