



Making Social Care  
Better for People

**CSCI**

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Mrs M Asquith  
Director of Social Services  
Darlington Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Darlington  
County Durham  
DL1 5QT

31 August 2004

Ref: CSCI/LR/HM

## **RE Annual Review of Performance**

Dear Mrs Asquith

Thank you for arranging our recent annual review meeting. This letter and report set out the Commission for Social Care Inspection's (CSCI) view of the performance of social services in your area during the last year, and comment on improvements for the year ahead.

The report is intended to help the council improve outcomes and the quality of service to service-users and carers. It is also intended to improve the prospects for improved performance ratings in the future.

In assessing performance, the CSCI reaches judgements about performance against a set of standards and criteria, drawing on evidence from a number of standard sources. These include:

- the published PAF performance indicators and other statistical data up to 2003-04, plus data supporting planned targets for 2004-05;
- evidence agreed in the course of our monitoring meetings that have been formally recorded;
- monitoring information from the Delivery and Improvement Statements completed in October 2003 and May 2004;
- the report of an inspection of social care services for disabled people published in July 2004.

Details of the standards and criteria have been published, and are available from CSCI, or may be seen on the CSCI's performance website. A summary of the evidence used has also been sent to you separately. You have challenged the accuracy of some of this information, and your concerns have been raised with the appropriate Business Director in the Commission.

The report is in two parts. The first is a summary of improvement recommendations that highlights the strategic issues for the council. The second part summarises the strengths of performance over the last year, and the priorities for improvement in the year ahead.

These are organised around six standards against which the council is assessed. The annual review does not attempt to review all aspects of performance, but focuses on the main performance issues for which CSCI has current information.

This report will form part of the performance record for the council, and will be published on the CSCI website in November. You are asked to:

- present it to an open meeting of the relevant executive committee of the council, within two months of the date of this letter, and to inform me of the date on which this will take place;
- make the report available to members of the public at the same time; and
- copy this letter and report to the council's appointed auditor, and to NHS and education partners.

Progress will continue to be monitored during the year through our usual processes, and a further annual review meeting will take place during 2005-06.

Performance (Star) Ratings will be confirmed in November, based on an assessment of overall performance using all admissible evidence.

The evidence summarised in this letter will be used to help arrive at the rating, but may be updated where further evidence becomes available.

Yours sincerely

Linda Robinson  
Business Relationship Manager

Copy: Mr Barry Keel, Chief Executive, Darlington Council



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## Performance Review Report for Darlington Social Services: 2004

### *Summary of improvement recommendations*

The review of social services in Darlington has highlighted the following performance issues that need to be addressed over the next 12 months. Further information about the standards against which social services are assessed is contained in the detailed report.

#### **Child and family services**

- The council should continue to build on its partnership working between social services and education, and with other agencies. The effectiveness of these partnerships should be demonstrated through improved educational outcomes, which indicate that all looked after children are meeting their full potential for academic success. Young people should be helped to make a smooth transition into education, training and employment after leaving school
- The council must show that its permanence policy ensures that there is a minimum of delay in the process experienced by those children who are placed for adoption.
- The council should continue to improve the long term stability of foster placements for those children who have been looked after continuously for four years.
- The council should improve the proportion of initial assessments undertaken within seven working days of referral.

## **Services for adults and older people**

- The council and its partners need to demonstrate that the development of a range of new services for older people continues to increase the number who are helped to live in their own homes, and improves their experience.
- The council should continue to reduce the length of time that people have to wait for Occupational Therapy assessments.
- The council must reduce the length of time taken to start and complete assessments of older people, as set out in the government's target.
- The council should further improve the percentage of people who receive a statement of their needs and how they will be met



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## **Performance Review Report 2004**

### **Darlington Borough Council**

#### **SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

Changes to the management structure within Children's services have improved the focus on key priorities, and there is robust monitoring of performance. The number of looked after children has reduced and there is an accommodation strategy in place. A joint strategy with the education department has been launched and this area should remain a key priority for the year ahead. Consultation with young people continues to be a strength. The relatively small size of the population in Darlington means that some performance indicators are significantly affected by activity relating to a very small number of children and young people, and therefore have to be interpreted with caution.

#### **National priorities and strategic objectives**

##### **Improvements observed since the previous annual review**

- A Care Trust for disabled children is being developed, which should improve the experience and outcomes for disabled children and their families. This work has included the establishment for the first time of a Parents' Forum.
- The action plan following the Climbie audit has been vigorously followed up and implemented.
- Structural and management changes in children's services have improved the focus on key priorities.
- A joint Social Services and Education strategy for looked after children has been launched.

- An accommodation strategy has been put in place to increase placement choice, improve stability and reduce the number of out of Borough placements.
- The council's action plan responding to the SSI Inspection of Children's Services, published in July 2003, has been implemented.
- The council is in the second year of Beacon Status for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Half the young people leaving care gained at least 1 GCSE, but none achieved five GCSEs A\* to C. These figures relate to a small number of children, but performance needs to improve to meet government targets.
- Only 35.8% of young people who were looked after when they were 16 were engaged in education, training or employment at the age of 19. This disappointing figure again relates to a small number of children, but the council should ensure that whenever possible young people are helped to make a smooth transition into education, training and employment after leaving school.
- Over the past two years, the percentage of children looked after for six months or more who were adopted during the year has declined. The council understands the reason why only half the anticipated target was met, and has re-launched its permanence policy and continues to track the progress of each child.

### **Cost and efficiency**

#### **Improvements observed since the previous annual review**

- The unit costs for looked after children and for children's residential care continue to show good performance.
- The Children's accommodation strategy has reduced the number of children looked from 70.6 to 65.3 per 10,000, and has also reduced the number of children who are placed outside the Borough.

- A new information system was implemented in June 2004, and this should improve the council's ability to track and manage activity in future.

### **Areas for improvement**

- The average gross weekly expenditure for each looked after child in foster care appears high, although this is in line with the expenditure of other similar councils.

### **Effectiveness of service delivery and service outcomes**

#### **Improvements observed since the previous annual review**

- The Social Services and Education departments meet regularly to discuss and manage school exclusions and absences of looked after children, and the percentage of those children who miss 25 days or more schooling during the year remains good.
- The percentage of looked after children who had an appropriate health assessment is excellent.
- The number of approved foster carers has risen substantially over the last two years to 79, ensuring that a wider range of placements is available.
- The NCSC fostering inspection (February 2004) identified significant progress towards meeting national minimum standards.
- The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service pooled budget has been agreed and investment has increased. The council reports that there has been a 100% increase in access by young people.
- The number of children on the child protection register reduced from 80 to 50, and child protection indicators are good. There were a low number of repeat referrals to the child protection register, supported by a well established system of family group conferencing.
- 34 children are involved in the young carers' group, which is supported by the council.



## **Areas for improvement**

- The percentage of looked after children who had 3 or more placements during the year has been maintained at an excellent level. Last year, the long term stability of looked after children measured by the percentage who had been looked after for four years and who had been in their current foster placement for two years, was poor. This has improved significantly, in line with the council's plan, but needs to improve further. The council has investigated its performance in this area and concluded that there are a number of unrelated reasons for the level of current performance, which remains slightly below the average of similar councils.

## **Quality of services for users and carers**

### **Improvements observed since the previous annual review**

- The council has successfully achieved a 14% improvement from last year in the percentage of core assessments completed within 35 working days, and this is now is 71.1%.
- The council has implemented a quality assurance system and a consultation strategy in order to improve the experience of children and their families.
- An improved focus on listening to children has resulted in 96.7% of looked after children communicating their views to a review. Looked after children are also able to contact their social workers by email.
- Senior Practitioners have been introduced, and this will increase the capacity for staff supervision.

### **Area for improvement**

- The council is investigating the way it measures the number of initial assessments completed within the national target timescale of seven working days to identify why performance has reduced slightly in the last year to 50%.

## **Fair access**

### **Improvements observed since the previous annual review**

- Eligibility criteria have been clarified with partner agencies, to ensure that appropriate referrals are made to social services. The council reports that the number of referrals identifying child protection as the primary concern has reduced.
- A Sure Start scheme located in an area with a number of residents from a minority ethnic community is providing services designed to meet the needs of parents and families in the most appropriate way.
- Race equality training has been introduced across the department.

### **Areas for improvement**

- An audit of the needs of black minority ethnic communities has been undertaken, and this identified the need for increased involvement and communication with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Support for family placements is available during the evenings and weekends. Although this is not a 24 hour service, the council considers it is currently adequate to meet local needs and is available in addition to the Emergency Duty Team service.

### **Capacity for improvement**

#### **Improvements observed since the previous annual review**

- A corporate parenting and child protection panel has been established. This is chaired by the Chief Executive and includes elected members.
- The Care First computerised information system was implemented in June 2004 and this will improve the council's ability to use data for planning and monitoring purposes.
- The corporate purchase of a system which links performance to service plans, departmental and corporate strategies reflects the strong corporate ownership of departmental performance. A business planning process is in place, linked to corporate and community plans, with clear operational targets for teams.

## **Areas for improvement**

- The council's delivery and improvement statement contained two errors. One related to the number of staff working with children in need who are suitable skilled and experienced, which was reported as 55% but was confirmed in the Annual Review Meeting as 100%. The other area relating to the turnover of staff, reported as 22% across the department, was confirmed in the meeting as 6.43% in children's services. These errors arose because the Director has a portfolio of responsibilities broader than Social Services alone, and other activity had been included in the figure. It is reported that the systems for recording and monitoring workforce information have now been amended.

## **SERVICES FOR ADULTS AND OLDER PEOPLE**

The council is working with partners across Darlington to develop methods of delivering services in a more integrated way, and this is leading to significant change. The council also continues to review its management and service delivery structures to ensure it is able to meet national priorities and local needs. It has successfully implemented a strategy to reduce the previously high level of delayed transfers of care from hospital and to stabilise the residential care market. The council should continue to show improvement on the government priority of promoting independence for older people, and is giving immediate attention to the unacceptably long time that people have to wait for some services. There are good links both corporately and departmentally between service plans, the community strategy and consultation arrangements.

### **National priorities and strategic objectives**

#### **Improvements observed since the previous annual review**

- Significant progress has been made in reducing the historically high level of delayed transfers of care to a minimal level. The residential care market has been stabilised through a three year quality standard and fees agreement, and the commissioning of appropriate new residential and community provision. There are 15 intermediate care beds and nine transitional beds in the area.
- The range of support services for people living in the community will be further extended when changes are introduced to arrangements for providing domiciliary care.
- The modernisation of day services for people with learning disabilities has been agreed, and a three year programme, supported by capital investment, is to be implemented.
- A Mental Health Partnership Board was established in 2003 and there has been progress on a number of the National Service Framework targets.
- The inspection of social care services for disabled people found that strategic partnerships are strong and there is also strong evidence of service user involvement in planning.

- The council is continuing to modernise service delivery arrangements, to ensure that older people can be supported within their own homes for as long as possible.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Work needs to continue with partners to meet the targets in the Mental Health National Service Framework for the development of new services. Four areas in the Framework have particular significance for social care, and further progress is needed. These are service user and carer influence on service development, support and breaks for carers, funding for voluntary sector engagement, and services for people from black and minority ethnic communities.

### **Cost and efficiency**

#### **Improvements observed since the previous annual review**

- The budget has been rebuilt based on service requirements and targets, and five partnerships have been agreed and notified using Health Act flexibilities. Performance on the unit cost of services remains good.
- A three year agreement has been reached on residential care fees and "premium rate" payments are available for homes which meet a range of quality standards.
- A service mapping exercise has been completed for people aged 50 and over, and for older people with mental health problems. This has resulted in the commissioning of a range of services which should improve the options for supporting people within the community.
- The council reports that it has improved duty arrangements and this is impacting upon waiting times for assessment and the provision of care packages.
- Darlington council is taking a lead across the Tees Valley and Durham area in establishing an interpreting service for people with hearing impairment.
- The SSI inspection of social care services for disabled people concluded that there is effective budget planning and financial management. It identified a good knowledge of the social care market.

## **Effectiveness of service delivery and service outcomes**

### **Improvements observed since the previous annual review**

- The council's performance indicators for a number of areas of service remain good. This includes the provision of intensive home care of a percentage of intensive home care and residential care. The number of supported admissions of older people to permanent residential and nursing care per 10,000 population aged 65 and over remain good. There has also been good performance on the number of younger adults helped to live at home.
- The number of adults and older people receiving Direct Payments increased to 43 per 100,000 population, but needs to improve further during the coming year.
- Performance on waiting times for minor and major adaptations is significantly better than in similar councils.
- A new sensory impairment resource centre has been opened.
- The inspection of services for disabled people identified some good examples of support for carers starting or continuing in employment.

### **Areas for improvement**

- The number of older people helped to live at home has improved year on year and in 2003/04 increased from 70.6 to 75.5 per 1000 population aged 65 and over. However this remains poorer performance than in similar councils. The council recognises the need to continue to improve services, and reports that a range of new services have been introduced in the current year. These provide different types of support within people's own homes, in day care provision, and in extra care housing.
- The SSI inspection of social care services for people with disabilities found that the waiting list for Occupational Therapy was unacceptably long, at 25 months. The council has revised its staffing establishment and engaged a locum OT, and is confident that the waiting list will be eliminated during the course of the current performance year.
- The inspection also identified some gaps in service. This included the provision of appropriate short stay and respite provision for younger adults. These shortfalls had been

recognised by the council, which has entered discussions with potential service providers.

### **Quality of services for users and carers**

#### **Improvements observed since the previous annual review**

- Good progress is being made with partners in developing the single assessment process, although at present this remains a paper system only.
- The SSI inspection of social care services for people with disabilities found that the council is monitoring the performance of commissioned services and challenging those of poor quality.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- The waiting time for older people's assessments is unacceptable. This is a new performance indicator and the council has reviewed and re-organised the way it works in this area. It reports that staff are now able to undertake the assessment process in a more measured way and is forecasting improved performance in 2004/05.
- The percentage of adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met should increase from 87.7%. The council reports that a plan is in place to improve this target during the current year.
- The SSI inspection of social care services for disabled people confirmed there is a clear interagency strategy on providing joint information to the public. However deaf people reported problems in using information due to literacy difficulties. The council has since appointed a profoundly deaf worker and anticipates this will accelerate the pace of development.
- The inspection also found that the quality and depth of assessments and care plans are varied, and that practices need to change in relation to the reviews of people placed outside the Borough, as these are not adequate. These issues have been addressed through the council's action plan responding to the inspection.
- A quality assurance system has yet to be introduced, and this will improve the management and recording of activity

## **Fair access**

### **Improvements observed since previous Annual Review**

- In mental health services, work is underway with a Sure Start scheme to recruit workers from black and minority ethnic communities to support service users from diverse backgrounds.
- Equal opportunity and diversity training has been introduced, and an action plan has been developed to increase the number of employees from minority ethnic communities.
- The SSI inspection of social care services for disabled people found that eligibility criteria are produced in a user friendly format.
- The council has committed a high level of expenditure to advocacy services for people with a learning disability.

### **Areas for improvement**

- The SSI inspection of social care services for disabled people concluded that more work was required to understand the needs of Darlington's small ethnic minority population. The percentage of older service users from a black and ethnic minority background receiving an assessment is half the number that would be expected in Darlington.
- 75.9% of physically disabled and sensory impaired service users responding to a recent survey said that they could contact social services easily. This is lower than in similar councils.
- Although there is a well established complaints process, the recent inspection suggested that access could be improved by offering different formats for those service users who need them, and that service users and care managers should be given consistent information about the outcome of investigations.



## **Capacity for improvement**

### **Improvements observed since the previous annual review**

- The Care First computerised information system was implemented in June 2004, and this will improve the council's ability to use data for planning and monitoring purposes.
- Strong partnership working has produced significant change in the provision of services for older people, and a wider range of community support schemes is being introduced. Strategies have been successfully implemented to stabilise the residential care market, and the number of delayed transfers of care has been substantially reduced.
- The capacity to support people receiving Direct Payments has been increased so that 100 people could now be supported.
- The inspection of social care services for disabled people found that staff were regularly supervised and appraised, and they felt well supported. Service users are involved in delivering training to staff.
- A strategy to reduce the high level of long term sickness absence has been successfully implemented, and the council is now concentrating on reducing frequent short term sickness absence.

### **Areas for improvement**

- The inspection of social care services for disabled people concluded that the workforce plan, produced in 2001, needed to be reviewed in order to reflect the current organisational structure and future human resource intentions.
- The council's delivery and improvement statement contained an error about staff turnover, which was reported as 22% across social services. This correct information was identified and agreed at the annual review meeting as 4.56% in adult and older people's services. This error arose because the Director has a portfolio of responsibilities broader than Social Services alone, and other activity had been included in the figure. It is reported that the systems for recording and monitoring workforce information have now been amended.

Linda Robinson  
Business Relationship Manager  
31 August 2004