
ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF DARLINGTON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Cyndi Hughes,
Children and Young People Portfolio**

Responsible Director – Murray Rose, Director of People

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report is update Cabinet

Summary

2. Each year, under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, Ofsted publish a summary of inspection judgements carried out in the preceding 12 months in each local authority area and provide a letter summarising the inspection judgements and other related data. This letter is attached, as **Appendix 1**.
3. The Ofsted summative judgement of services provided within Darlington is that services are performing well. This is an improvement in the assessment from 2010 which was performing adequately. This year's higher grade recognises the improvements made in the quality of provision, importantly the improved local authority adoption agency and the increased proportion of good and outstanding children's homes. Areas of strength and those identified for improvement remain largely the same as last year.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that :-
 - (a) Members note the Annual Assessment judgement of Children's Services for 2011, and
 - (b) Refer the assessment to the Chair of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee for their information and consideration

Reasons

5. The recommendations are supported to inform the current performance of Children's Services in Darlington.

Murray Rose
Director of People

Background Papers

Ofsted Annual Assessment of Children's Services Letter December 2011

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no specific Crime and Disorder issues contained within this report.
Health and Well Being	Improvements to the areas identified for development within the Annual Assessment will have a positive impact on Health & Well Being
Carbon Impact	There are no specific sustainability issues contained within this report.
Diversity	Improvements to the areas identified within the Annual Assessment will have a positive impact on children and young people from vulnerable groups.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	This does not represent a change to the Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a Key Decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Improvements to the areas identified within the Annual Assessment will have a positive impact on the Healthy and Supported and Educated and Skilled outcomes of the Sustainable Community Strategy.
Efficiency	There are no specific efficiency issues contained within this report.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

6. In December of each year, under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, Ofsted publish a summary of inspection judgements carried out in the preceding 12 months in each local authority area and provide a letter summarising the inspection judgements and other related data.
7. The list of inspected services includes those managed by the local authority and those run by private, voluntary and independent providers. The inspected services include education settings, childcare and arrangements for looked after children.
8. The additional information used by Ofsted in producing an assessment of a local authority area includes performance information, outcomes from any announced inspections of safeguarding and looked after children provision and unannounced inspections of safeguarding. The assessment also includes the judgements made about any serious case reviews which have been held and any validated data provided by the Department for Education.
9. In previous years, the annual assessment included a site visit by inspectors to the authority and the use of self-assessment information. In 2009 a new assessment arrangement was introduced, with no site visit and no provision of a separate local authority self-assessment. In 2010, a further change to the system saw the introduction of more inspection judgements of services delivered by private providers. The aim of this change was to capture the performance of all services in the local authority area and not just those of the services run the local authority.
10. The Ofsted summative judgement of services provided within Darlington is that services are performing well. This is an improvement in the assessment from 2010 which was performing adequately. This year's higher grade recognises the improvements made in the quality of provision, importantly the improved local authority adoption agency and the increased proportion of good and outstanding children's homes. Areas of strength and those identified for improvement remain largely the same as last year.
11. The Annual Performance Assessment by Ofsted continues in its current format pending a further review of regulation across the sector which was initiated by the Children's Minister, Tim Loughton in 2010. These changes may be brought forward in 2011-2012 subject to legislative timetables.
12. The overall judgement of performing well reflects the improvements made within the local authority area by partners delivering services for children, young people and their families. The individual judgements which come together to make the summative assessment shows that the local authority area has continued to improve services and outcomes for children and young people. The number of services assessed as outstanding have increased, which include improvements in residential establishments (local authority and private); worthy of mention is the improvements in the assessment of the Council's residential homes for young people where now only one is satisfactory, the others are all good or better. Other services showing improvements are improved school inspections; improved attainment at KS2 and KS4. Key strengths have been identified in a number of areas in the assessment and are listed below:-

- (a) Very good performance by nursery and primary schools for children under 5.
 - (b) Large majority of primary schools are good or outstanding in Ofsted inspections and progression in English is particularly strong.
 - (c) Provision of looked after children has continued to improve; one home is now outstanding, one good and two are satisfactory. (Although at the time of this report and outside of the scope of the assessment, the two satisfactory homes had also received good ratings from Ofsted in September and October 2011).
13. This continuing improvement in services includes those provided by the local authority, such as our nursery, primary, secondary and special schools as well as Academy schools and some provided by private or independent organisations such Darlington College, Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form and some childminders and childcare settings.
14. Some areas for further improvement are identified in the assessment. The report acknowledges the local authority pupil referral unit is making satisfactory progress although still inadequate. The areas for development identified in the 2010 Unannounced Inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment Arrangements for Children in Need have been taken promptly. The report does highlight that the processes around domestic abuse cases still requires action.
15. Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee has previously considered areas for development and improvement and continue to play a vital role in holding performance to account. It is recommended that the assessment is referred to the Chair of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee for their consideration for inclusion into the Committee's work programme.
16. In the forthcoming Announced Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after Children Services the inspection team will follow up on the findings of previous inspections, assessments and action plans.

Outcome of Consultation

17. There has been no consultation in respect of the Children's Services rating. This is an external judgement of Darlington's Children's Services, subject to national moderation and inspection processes.