

DfES Questions answered

Analysis and impact

Q: Do the priorities and actions achieve better outcomes need updating to reflect the strengths and weaknesses identified in the last APA, JAR, Priorities Meetings and other internal/external reviews?

A: The main reason for reviewing the Children and Young Peoples Plan is to ensure that it keeps pace with a constantly changing environment and that it reflects the current services needs for Children and Young People in Darlington.

The review reflects the changing priorities within Darlington, and although the top 7 priorities have remained, 2 more have been added.

Many actions have been completed and new ones added.

During the review of the plan, priorities and actions were checked against reviews, which have taken place within partner organisations, to show that all strengths had been identified and that any areas for improvement highlighted and actions put in place to address them, with a view to achieving even better outcomes.

The areas for improvement in the APA have been incorporated in the review and are detailed in "What we are doing" (Appendix 1)

Two new top priority areas have been identified: -

- Need to focus on "narrowing the Gap"
- Improve out comes for vulnerable groups

These two priorities have been identified as areas for further development to improve the outcomes for certain children and young people, to positively influence their future life chances.

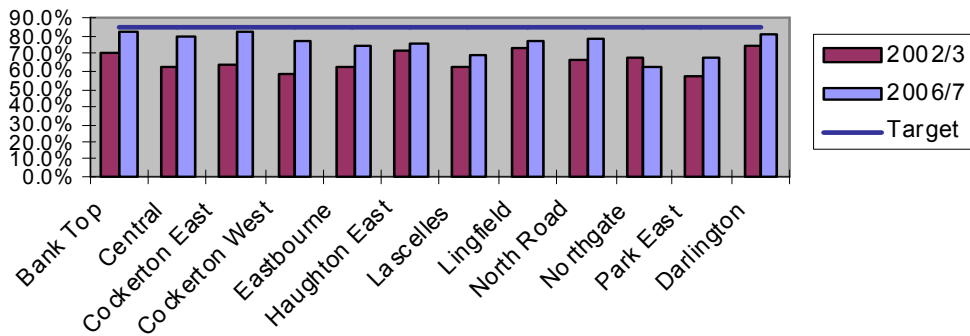
Q: Has the needs analysis been appropriately reviewed in the light of the underpinning data? Have priorities been suitably reviewed as a result? Are there any gaps that need further analysis - for example, on tackling child poverty and improving economic well-being?

A: Using existing information and data, the needs analysis has been thoroughly reviewed. Data, especially around performance at school key stages (see graphs below), confirms the disparity and gap in performance in Darlington between children living in the most deprived wards and those living in the rest of the borough, although there has been improvement

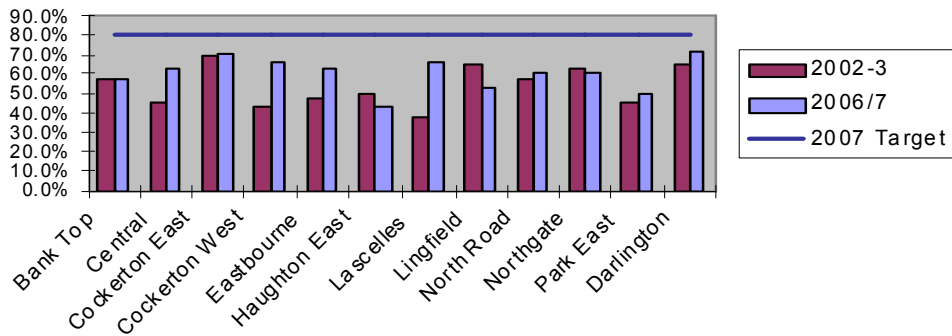
Disproportionate gaps in performance have also been identified for BME groups, including travellers.

These gaps have been identified as key areas for improvement and 2 additional top priorities: - Need to focus on "Narrowing the Gap" and Improving outcomes for vulnerable groups, have been introduced and appropriate actions developed to address this gap.

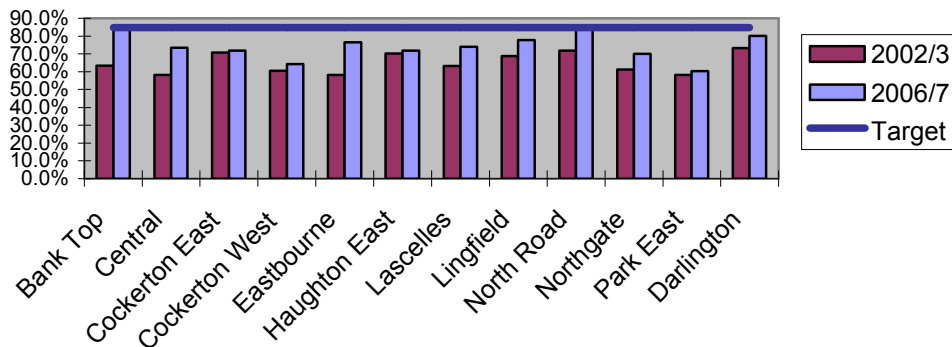
85% of 11 year olds achieve level 4 or above in English by 2006



80% of 14 year olds achieve level 5 or above in Science by 2007



85% of 11 year olds achieve level 4 or above in Maths by 2006



Q: Can you demonstrate evidence of impact and improvement? Are milestones, and is progress, towards statutory and local targets being achieved? If not, what steps are being taken to remedy the situation?

A: The review is able to evidence impact and improvement in some areas, although in others the timescale involved have been too short to demonstrate any reliable evidence of impact.

The information schedules attached show our progress against previous performance and the review document gives detailed evidence of impact and improvement in the section “Progress against our 7 top priorities” on page 30 and examples of impact such as the contribution of Skills + to the reduction in school absenteeism.

Director’s Commissions have also been established, as a means of delivering improvement to our key priorities, initially to focus on two areas, school attendance, and transition from primary to secondary schools and the dip in pupil performance in some parts of the borough.

Q: Have the strategies and actions in the CYPP been designed and implemented to secure equality of opportunity for all children and young people? How do you ensure that all services are active in promoting and respecting diversity?

A: The Children and Young People’s Plan is the key strategic plan for enabling **all** children and young people in Darlington to achieve their full potential. However within the review we have identified some under performing and disenfranchised vulnerable groups who we are continuing to prioritise through our existing top priorities and the inclusion of a further two additional priorities, mentioned in the review

In the section children and young people with additional needs we have demonstrated ongoing work with specific groups of children and young people to promote equality of opportunity for children and young people. This can be demonstrated through for example the development of Harewood House as a hub to provide inclusive and accessible services for disabled children and their families and the continuing development of Children’s Centres and Extended Schools.

Our vision of “A Champion for Every Child, Every Child Goes To School and A Place for every leaver” underpins our philosophy of equality of opportunity for all children and young people. Although we aim to deliver an inclusive service to a diverse group of service user we acknowledge achieving this can be challenging with some groups.

Q: Are the local authority's statutory targets for raising standards in schools embedded in the plan, and set in the context of a strategy that demonstrates a clear ambition for improvement and the actions for how this will be achieved?

A. Raising school standards is a top priority in Darlington. Children's Services and other relevant agencies are working closely with schools to ensure that strategies and actions are in place to deliver demonstrable improvement. The Director of Children's Services priorities paper "Delivering Schools Standards and Every Child matters in Darlington" which is contained in the information schedule, set out how we will achieve this.

Q: What improvements have there been in the provision and outcomes for vulnerable groups? Has there been enough improvement?

A. The accompanying information schedule contains details of Darlington's performance across a range of indicators. We can demonstrate improvement across a number of indicators including those for vulnerable groups. Within the sections Children and Young People with additional needs and Progress against our seven top priorities we demonstrate progress in areas such as participation of Looked After Children in their reviews and health checks. We have improved services for children with disabilities; with increased numbers accessing a service from the social care team. As evidenced in the graphs in response to a previous question above we have improved levels of academic achievement in the most deprived wards. We have had success-reengaging children in education.

Q: Does the plan adequately reflect the views of children, young people and families? How have these been taken forward to alter service delivery and how will this information be fed back to them?

A: Prior to the CYPP being produced extensive consultation was carried out. In the past twelve months we have continued to consult with children, young people and their families. This is detailed in the review section "Our approach to consultation and engagement" which gives information on how we consulted, for example on our Youth Offer and information on the Voice and Action group. One of our top Priorities is "Empowering children and young people to have a greater voice and influence over local decision making and the delivery of services". Darlington has recently produced a community Engagement Strategy [IS5 and IS6] "A bigger say and a better deal for our communities" which demonstrates a commitment to genuinely engage with local people to develop services that meet local needs and aspirations. The consultation, which we have carried out, although it has been extensive, tends to have been with targeted groups as oppose to the wider child population. This is an issue we intend to address and are currently looking at mechanisms for carrying out more robust consultation and engagement with young people and their families across all our communities.

Management of services and use of resources

Q: Where and why have you seen improvement in the delivery of services? What impact have new or joint approaches to service delivery and partnership working, such as Sure Start Children's Centres and Extended Schools, had on delivering the outcomes?

A: Partnership working is embedded into the way services for children and young people are delivered in Darlington. There are numerous example of Partnership working in the plan, which have further developed in the last 12 months. The development of Children's Centres is ongoing and they now offer a range of services form baby clinics and Stay and Play sessions to Morrison's into Work and Mobile Advice Co-operative surgeries. A range of both statutory and voluntary agencies delivers these services. The extended schools programme has continued to expand with the establishment of locality working in five cluster areas. Locality managers now having been appointed in all clusters to further develop locality working in partnership with all service providers. Case studies are contained in the section 'Children and Young People with Additional Needs' (page 13) which evidence the positive impact of Children's Centres.

Q: Do the performance indicators provide an appropriate measure of the desired impact?

Performance Indicators give a measure of performance across any set of indicators and contribute to the measurement of impact. However as many of the PIs contained in the plan and the review are new, it is not always possible or appropriate to use these as the sole evidence of impact. For Example in the Early Years settings many of these PI's are new and the baseline measurements, where they exist are not always robust, although this is being address through new planning and performance management systems and children's centre self evaluation.

It is also questionable that PIs where they exist are the most appropriate way to measure the Three Pillars of the Darlington philosophy of: - A champion for every child, Every child goes to school and A place for every leaver. Additional ways of measuring impact other than sole reliance on PIs will have to be developed.

Q: How well are you developing your workforce to manage change?

A: In order to realise Darlington's aim to secure a champion for every child we want a workforce that is flexible, and where every member is clear about his or her roles and responsibilities, is encouraged to be creative and works effectively in multi-agency teams in order to deliver the aspirations of the CYPP.

A workforce development team has been established to provide a strategic steer for workforce development and workforce reform across Children's Services and in partnership with internal and external partners. The existing children's

workforce strategy is under review and will be further developed to prioritise key objectives such as leadership and management and locality based integrated working to support common assessment and the lead professional role.

The process for identifying training and other development needs will be reviewed to ensure that teams understand and can be supported in responding effectively to new ways of working. The review will include the following:

- Building on effective practice from e.g. school workforce reform to develop and implement a methodology for change management
- Internal and external communication
- Formal and informal opportunities for staff to develop an understanding of roles and responsibilities of other sectors and to build up a network of good practice. This will include induction, common core and CPD pathways.
- Leadership and management.

The PCT's are committed to developing their workforce to manage change both from a commissioning and provider perspective. Commitment to develop the workforce is demonstrated in both the PCT's Local Delivery Plans and longer term strategies, in this way the workforce is developed in response to the changing needs of the organisation taking into account internal and external environments. By adopting this framework the PCT's ensure workforce development is aligned with the key business objectives of the PCT's and enable successful outcomes to be achieved.

Demonstrating effective leadership skills has a key role to play in managing change and the workforce at every level will be developed as leaders, and their level of performance will be reviewed through an effective appraisal system following the NHS Knowledge, and Skills Framework. The workforce will be developed to generic skills and competencies, as well as role specific ones, to ensure there is a flexible workforce available, fit for purpose to respond to organisational changing demands as and when required.

Q: Has expenditure on children and young people's services remained in line with the resources statement in the CYPP, and if not what action has been taken?

A: We did not include a resources statement in our CYPP. The review puts that right and demonstrates how we prioritise and use our funding. The strategy highlighted earlier in 'Delivering the vision' also provides an action plan for improvements and this action plan is rooted in what we know and what we can do. (see page 55 of the Review)

Q: Has there been any significant shift in expenditure to support priorities; what is the impact and what is the evidence that better planning is providing value for money?

A. Darlington Borough Council is an excellent authority, having maintained our 4 star rating in the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2006. We have a strong track record for managing our finances and providing value for money services, achieving 3 out of 4 for value for money (vfm), which means that only 6 authorities in the country achieve a higher vfm score.

For 2007/08 we have undertaken an extensive review of the Children and Young People's Plan and MTFP. This has involved the determination of priorities through the service planning process and linkage to required improvement in performance. This planning process has also involved partner agencies via the Children's Trust to ensure the most effective utilisation of resources to achieve common aims. Resources have been directed towards key improvement priorities where necessary.

As well as identifying areas for investment we also ensure services represent value for money. An essential part of our core business is to integrate the Gershon agenda to improve efficiency, deliver a budget within the proposed resource allocation, offset pressures and enable reallocation of resources to areas of increased demand. Children's Services has set savings targets of £389,000 for 2007/08 in addition to achieving savings of £427,000 in 2006/07. The development of the Children's Trust is a crucial vehicle in moving towards pooling budgets and closer integration of services. We have a variety of joint funding and integrated working models, which involve the pooling of financial and/or human resources to support priority areas, namely:

- Local Area Agreement
- CAMHS
- Children's Fund
- Children's Centres
- 14-19 Trust
- Disabled Children
- Extended Schools
- Substance Misuse
- Youth Offending