



Joint Area Review

Self Assessment

Capacity to Improve

## Overarching Statement

From a slow start, our Partnership is making rapid progress in all the key areas of integration. The Partnership is under new leadership, which is building a shared vision of success, underpinned by accurate self review and priority setting. There are clear examples of where improvements to services are linked to improved outcomes and we have a clear understanding of where to target our resources and how we will manage our performance.

We have many areas of strength and we are confident that our drive and commitment to the integration of services and the Every Child Matters agenda will ensure that we address our weaknesses and improve outcomes. We believe that we have entered a new era in our services for children and young people and we are confident that we will succeed.

Above all, we are ambitious for our children and young people and for our Partnership.

**For this aspect of our work we assess our performance to be at GRADE 3**

## Executive Summary

This self assessment sets out the Partnership's view of its capacity to improve. In doing so, it is generally positive, balancing the recent acceleration of the pace of change (resulting from new leadership) with the developments made since the inception of the Partnership. This optimism is tempered by recognition that there are areas for improvement – these are also included in the self assessment. We believe that we are building from a strong base and now have a clear, shared understanding of the next steps we must take to improve outcomes.

## Introduction

In Nottinghamshire, we are ambitious for our children and young people. We have a clear vision which states that we will work together to provide integrated services for all children and young people in Nottinghamshire aged 0-19 to improve their life chances and to help them maximise their potential.

Our Partnership is now under new leadership in that the County Council has appointed a new Acting Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services. His most immediate priorities, working in conjunction with the Children and Young People's Services department leadership team and the wider Partnership, are to respond positively and quickly to our recent APA judgement and to accelerate the pace of change across the Partnership, with a particular emphasis on developing integrated services to ensure that outcomes for children and young people are, where necessary, measurably improved.

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Arrangements have been made to ensure that the Children and Young People's Services department leadership team, comprising the Acting Strategic Director and his four Service Directors, work in a more collegiate and systematic way, supported by new terms of reference, with a particular focus on driving up performance and encouraging innovation across the Partnership.

These new leadership arrangements have been accompanied by an injection of energy, action and enthusiasm. This renewed drive and increased pace of change has been felt across the Partnership, with colleagues from all areas recognising that we are determined to tackle the challenges we face and improve outcomes. A critical part of this process is the identification of the areas where we must make a particular effort. We recognise that there are two significant factors in this process:

- the review of the Children and Young People's Plan; and
- the preparation for and the outcomes arising from the Joint Area Review.

*This self assessment has links to all other self assessments but particularly service management.*

## Context

We work in an increasingly complex environment. We are working hard as a partnership to analyse this environment so that we make the correct decisions and that these decisions are driven by reliable evidence, and especially by the views of children, young people and their families. Over the past few months we have made progress in this respect, drawing together our first joint strategic needs assessment, a comprehensive review of our Children and Young People's Plan and a rigorous self examination of our services, ahead of the JAR. We seek to gain a full understand of the needs of children and young people by working with them through our participation strategy so that we have the full picture of what life is like for them and their families. We are now bringing all this information together into a strategic approach to needs assessment, planning and commissioning of services. We live in a changing world and our services must keep pace: we know that we must ensure the delivery of a range of high quality, accessible services which children, young people and families both want and need. In doing so, we strive to use innovation and a balance of support and challenge to shift out-dated models of service delivery and cultures.

We believe that we have sufficient overall resources but we are aware that they require reconfiguration in certain areas to adapt to the demands of the Every Child Matters agenda. Likewise, we feel we have excellent staff across our Partnership but we know that the way in which they work (particularly in partnership) is critical to our success. In order to ensure that we embrace new ways of working and a new culture, we recognise the need for a coherent programme of workforce development.

Other self assessments demonstrate that we have many excellent examples of providing services in an integrated way and we are determined to build upon these. In doing so, we are aware that Nottinghamshire is a large and diverse County (the County Council is the 11<sup>th</sup> largest council in the country), with areas of significant deprivation (mostly in the West and North) contrasted with areas of wealth. We work in partnership with two Primary Care Trusts and with seven District/Borough Councils. This diversity of public sector arrangements is matched by the diversity of our communities and demography.

Against this backdrop of diversity and relative social and economic inequalities, we endeavour to target our services to those that we judge require them most. Our commitment and track record for inclusion is recognised nationally and we are proud that we educate and care for the vast majority of children and young people with additional needs in Nottinghamshire.

At the same time, we respect that all children and young people are entitled to an appropriate level of high quality services which are accessible and reflect the fact that growing up is a long process with many distinct stages, all of which have different challenges.

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## Methodology

At a strategic level, as previously explained, we have changed our leadership and embarked on a concerted programme of activity to promote our shared vision and renew our commitment to our partners. In doing so, we have re-launched the Children and Young People's Partnership (our Children's Trust), with revised terms of reference and membership. The Partnership Board, chaired by the County Council's Lead Member for Children and Young People, has now met on two occasions. It includes a wide range of membership, including all the "relevant partners" prescribed by the Children Act. It has a clear governance structure aimed at delivering the Partnership vision within the context of achieving improved outcomes for the children and young people of Nottinghamshire.

Leadership is now more visible: we have completed a comprehensive programme of briefings for staff and partners, with over 1,400 people attending to hear key messages about our shared vision, our plans and priorities and the Joint Area Review.

We have identified the key stakeholders who we need to target. For example, we recognised that our relationship with schools needed to be reinvigorated -so we have launched our New Relationship with Schools, which provides a balance of challenge and support. This has been supported by two key meetings with secondary heads, which will be reinforced by the Acting Strategic Director speaking at both secondary and primary head teacher conferences in the summer. In addition, we are now working with a group a core group of secondary and primary heads to ensure that this new relationship is sustained.

At the same time, the Acting Strategic Director and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services have been meeting all Cabinet Members to ensure that the links between the various political portfolios are secure and that joint working is encouraged at the most senior political level. The Acting Strategic Director has also met with other key partners where the relationship required attention, such as the Learning and Skills Council.

We have also begun a programme of thematic service reviews, designed to complement the overall planning arrangements and our medium term financial strategy. Examples of these include the review of SEN and Inclusion<sup>1</sup> (see self assessment for LDD), a review of Work Based Learning (leading to new arrangements in this area) and a review of Outdoor, Adventurous and Environmental Education. We have also been reviewing our Short Breaks arrangements, which has led to our recent successful Pathfinder bid. Lastly, we are reviewing the terms of reference, funding and admissions arrangements for the Nottinghamshire Learning Centre (our confederated arrangements for our Pupil Referral Units).

Where we are making improvements in outcomes, we believe that these are related to improvements in our services and our models of delivery. For example, we have made an additional investment of £1million in our Key Stage 4 school improvement programmes and we have achieved a rate of improvement of more than twice the national average. This has been a long standing, intractable problem for us and we have indications that the improvement will be sustained for a third year. At the same time, our latest tracking indicates that we will have fewer schools below the floor target for GCSE next year, potentially reducing the number from 12 to 6. Another example would be our improved performance in the re-registration of children who have previously been on the Child Protection register, which has moved from 19.2% to 16.4%, placing us in the "Good" category for this indicator. This has resulted from a series of robust management interventions (see self assessment for safeguarding).

These improvements are being informed with better self assessment and awareness across the Partnership of the key priorities. We have been working with a range of external advisers to increase our self awareness and capacity to improve. Specifically, we have been working with advisers in relation to social care, the Youth Offending Service, integrated youth support, school improvement and commissioning. This advice and support has been brokered with our Government Office Children's Services Adviser and we are working currently to engage further external support for workforce development.

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<sup>1</sup> We are a Hub of Effective Practice for SEN and we feature in the Audit Commission guidance on the management of SEN finances.

To further support the implementation of our plans, we have developed two key documents:

- **A draft Medium Term Financial Strategy** which sets out our plans to ensure that our resources are deployed according to our priorities and that we are effective and efficient in our use of resources;
- **A draft Performance Management Framework** which sets out a consolidated approach to the management of performance at all levels. This framework is complemented by a new set of arrangements for financial monitoring.

Our developing self-awareness and clarity of priorities has enabled us to target additional resources to areas where they are most needed. In response to our Annual Performance Assessment in 2007 and as part of an ongoing commitment to the integration of services, the Council has invested an additional £1.3 million in children and young people's services from April 2008. This is permanent investment and will be dedicated to three broad areas:

- **Early intervention**
- **Integrated and Targeted Youth Support**
- **To support the implementation of Care Matters**

Details of how this investment fits with our overall financial planning can be found in the self assessment of service management and our draft medium term financial strategy. This investment will supplement additional resources already received for Key Stage 4 developments and preparation for Building Schools for the Future.

To complement our approach to needs assessment and planning, we have agreed a joint commissioning strategy based on the East Midlands Region Pilot. This has been adopted by our Partnership and there are some good examples of where it is being used to drive procurement and meet identified need. These can be found in the self assessments for service management and commissioning, and include the new arrangements for Information, Advice and Guidance and capacity building in the voluntary sector, and a more joined up approach to commissioning for children and young people with complex needs, which includes the use of private and voluntary providers as appropriate.

Our Partnership is a key player in the Local Area Agreement and has been the lead for all issues related to children and young people. This has resulted in a range of priorities which complement our Children and Young People's Plan (and the review of the Plan). Recently, we have strengthened our engagement with the LAA further, with the Acting Strategic Director joining the Management Group. In addition, the Acting Strategic Director has also joined the Joint Executive Commissioning Group with the Strategic Director for Adult Social Care and Health and the Chief Executives of the Primary Care Trusts. This has enabled joint planning to take place in areas such as the future arrangements for Provider Services. The pooling of budgets, however, currently takes place on a relatively limited basis and is an area for further development.

We have used the 2007 APA to drive improvement. Our new Integrated Youth Support Board, our new Partnership arrangements, our new Corporate Parenting Panel and Children in Care Council are just some examples of this – there are many more spread across the other self assessments. We are particularly proud of our track record of involving children and young people in decision making (see self assessment for participation) and we believe that our decision to establish a senior post dedicated to the strategic development of this area of work is an appropriate enhancement to an already excellent network of support. In support of this, and ahead of establishing the post of lead manager for the strategic development of participation, we have increased our commitment on a temporary basis - this has been instrumental in many of the recent initiatives, which have responded to the APA and taken our strategy for participation to the next level. Of crucial significance here is the work we are doing in joining together the structures for participation, workforce development and linking participation activity to impact.

During the transition into our new department, we brought together staff groups from three former departments of the Council. This presented us with significant structural and cultural challenges. We have an excellent workforce, with all the key posts filled. We are however adding to our strategic capacity currently in recognition that we still

have much to do in terms of workforce development. There are many examples of where we are working to integrate our workforce (the Joint Access Teams, for example) but we recognise that this area is a priority. As a result, we are currently seeking to engage external support to provide us with options for a new set of arrangements for workforce development, bringing together all the resources in the department into a more coherent structure.

## Conclusions

Our Partnership has come a long way in a short time. The transition into the new children's and young people's services arrangements presented significant challenges in terms of organisational and change management. During the transition period, the pace of change towards integrated services slowed to an unacceptable level. This led to our reduced APA judgement in 2007. Since then, we believe we have made swift and decisive changes which have refocused our attention and are leading to improvements. This must be set against a comprehensive pattern of service delivery across the Partnership, much of which has a long-standing track record of success. Our renewed energy and commitment is being supported by a shared vision, underpinned by clear, multi-agency plans and innovative solutions to problems. We are confident that we are back on track and that we will achieve improved outcomes.

## Next steps

Our review of the Children and Young People's Plan sets out our priorities for the future. These are reinforced by the self assessment we have undertaken ahead of the JAR. Set out below are the most important strategic priorities for our Partnership.

### We must:

- ensure that the review of our existing Children and Young People's Plan reflects the most important priorities for our Partnership over the next year
- prioritise the development of our new Children and Young People's Plan so that it reflects the views of our partners and is driven by the views of children, young people and their families
- ensure that the new partnership arrangements are understood and working effectively, so that our priorities reflect the current progress we have made in developing a shared needs assessment, planning and commissioning
- ensure that our shared vision continues to be promoted across the Partnership and that we continue to engage with all our partners (we have a large Partnership conference planned for the autumn of 2008)
- implement our draft performance management framework and medium term financial strategy by September 2008
- ensure that the improvements we are seeing in critical areas such as Key Stage 4 are maintained
- embed our New Relationship with Schools so that it reflects an appropriate mix of support and challenge and acts as the key transformational vehicle for BSF
- prioritise workforce development and implement our preferred structural option from April 2009.