



York – Consideration of Green Flag Status for:

Integrated Services For Disabled Children

There are few more important challenges which face local government than ensuring the individualised needs of our most vulnerable citizens are fully met. The position of children with complex difficulties and disabilities has been the source of national concern and subsequent high profile programmes. York is significantly on the front foot of this agenda – driving real partnership improvement with genuine full parental engagement.

Ofsted judged our services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to be “**outstanding**” in 2008, and the drive for still further improvement has continued relentlessly. Meeting the needs of disabled children, young people and their families is a strategic priority for the city. This is clearly articulated in the Corporate Strategy for an Inclusive City, the Local Area Agreement and the Children & Young People’s Plan 2009 – 2012, The needs of disabled children and young people are intrinsically woven through all our planning.

A well-embedded understanding of the universal responsibility for inclusion underpins the drive of all our colleagues to further improve services for disabled children, young people and their carers. There is a strong multi-agency commitment to provide personalised services across the whole range of services within health, education and the voluntary sector. For example Young People Services, specialist teaching and social care services, a voluntary agency and the parent forum are working in partnership to provide a pioneering service of personalised mentoring support and increased access to leisure opportunities.

“Excellent multi-agency working is undertaken within strong working relationships and demonstrates a keen sense of responsibility across the agencies with regard to inclusion.” (Ofsted 2008)

The recently published, unique **City of York Charter for Disabled Children 2009-2012** and the accompanying “**Our Promise**” booklet demonstrates to parents the progress made in the city to-date, plans for the future and the difference this will make for them.

This extension and expansion of the “Every Disabled Child Matters Local Authority Charter”, written in consultation with parent/carers, young people and partner agencies, has been welcomed wholeheartedly by parent/carers across the city.

In early 2009, York gained the highest score in the country in the NI54 survey, which asked parents with disabled children to rate health, education, social care provision and support based on the Aiming High for Disabled Children Core Offer. Ahead of

the national recommendation to improve information and feedback to families, we launched the booklet “**You Said, We Did**”. This booklet ensures that parents know they are listened to and, as a result, services have been shaped and changed in order to meet their needs. It has been highlighted and nationally acclaimed by Kate Sturdy, Assistant Director for DCSF, with responsibility for Aiming High for Disabled Children as an example of good practice.

The strength of these services lies in the underpinning consultation and engagement with disabled children, young people and their parents. “Children with LDD have a clear voice in the services and activities which support them.” (Ofsted 2008). For example, disabled young people have completed accessibility surveys of leisure services and supported schools in writing their Disability Equality Schemes. Services have been responsive to this and have implemented the changes recommended.

Our well established parent forum, CANDI, (Children and Inclusion) is a dynamic group that has co-written, and jointly leads, two levels of unique disability equality training for all staff and universal providers. Recently showcased by “Together for Disabled Children”, CANDI supports participation of parents and young people at every level and has helped to ensure parent / carer representation at all of the strategic planning for a in the City.

Exemplary work is undertaken in the city to ensure the early identification of children and families’ and that they are supported through outstanding Early Support services and close multi-agency working. In 2008 “The efficiency with which statutory assessments of children and young people with LDD are made” (Audit Commission Survey of Schools’ Views of the Local Authority) was ranked first in the country.

Pupils make good progress at school and there are excellent arrangements to support them through points of transition. The new co-located multi-agency Transitions Team supports young people aged 14-25 through a seamless service, improving outcomes for young people and their families. A successful, innovative bid means that the team will shortly be moving to purpose built premises on the site of the only secondary special school in York. This nationally recognised team (designated as being in “Offer One” by the National Transitions Support Team – one of 24 in the country) includes independent travel training, children and adults social care support, participation support and provision of shared and independent housing.

In 2009, partners developed an innovative response to the needs of young people and parents for further information, advice and guidance about the options available to them when they leave school. The ground breaking Opportunities Fair of 2009 was hailed as a great success by young people, families and providers. Participants received one to one advice, face to face contact with providers and workshop taster activities, designed to raise young people’s aspirations and support them in making decisions about their future.

“I think it was brilliant because it gave me a chance to show what I can do...made me feel very proud of people and MYSELF” (young person)

In summary, outcomes for disabled children and young people have been judged to be outstanding, are consistently ahead of comparator authorities and continue to further improve. The 2009 Audit Commission Survey of School's Views of the Local Authority placed the City in the top quartile of performance with seven questions relating to children and young people with LDD being ranked first amongst our statistical neighbours. With high performance and low levels of funding, it can be said that York provides outstanding value for money in this area.

The achievement of Green Flag Status for our Integrated Services for Disabled Children will recognise, celebrate and further strengthen a set of arrangements, which have already delivered significant improvement in the lives of disabled children, young people and their families in York.

And if still not convinced we attach a human perspective – a letter received just last week which describes the experience of just one parent but which so passionately endorses our success in providing inclusive education and integrated support services to our disabled children and their families. *(not attached for public view privacy reasons)*.