

17 December 2008

Mr Roy Lockwood  
Director for Children and Young People  
Wolverhampton City Council  
Civic Centre  
St Peter's Square  
Wolverhampton  
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Dear Mr Lockwood

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Wolverhampton City Council 2008**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2008 annual performance assessment (APA) for your council. The evaluations and judgements in the letter draw on a range of data and information which covers the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. As you know, the APA is not based on an inspection of your services and, therefore, can only provide a snapshot based on the evidence considered. As such, I am grateful to you for assuring the quality of the data provided.<sup>1</sup>

Performance is judged on a four point scale as detailed in the handbook.

I should emphasise that the grades awarded are based on an overall 'best fit' model. For instance, an outstanding judgement of Grade 4 reflects that overall most aspects, but not necessarily all, of the services in the area are working very well. We know that one of the features of outstanding provision is the drive for greater improvement and no council would suggest, and nor would Ofsted, that a judgement of outstanding indicates that everything is perfect. Similarly within a judgement of inadequate overall, Grade 1, there could be some aspects of the overall service that are adequate or even good. Judgements are made in a rounded way, balancing all of the evidence and giving due consideration to outcomes, local and national contexts, priorities and decision-making.

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<sup>1</sup> Data yet to be confirmed



The following table sets out the grades awarded for performance in 2008.

<b>Assessment judgement area</b>	<b>APA grade</b>
Overall effectiveness of children's services	2
Being healthy	2
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	4
Achieving economic well-being	2
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	2

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale  
4: outstanding/excellent; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate*

## Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 2

Wolverhampton City Council delivers services for children and young people that meet minimum requirements. The council's capacity to improve, including service management, is adequate. The council's self-assessment is not always accurate in assessing the quality of its services. This is because, in some outcome areas, a number of important weaknesses have been underestimated and, on occasion, there has been an overvaluing of the areas where progress has been made.

Outcomes relating to being healthy were judged good in the 2007 joint area review (JAR). They are now adequate. Schools promote healthy lifestyles well but the rates of teenage pregnancy are higher than in similar councils. Staying safe outcomes remain adequate. Safety on the roads is improving but the number of children who receive an initial assessment within seven working days is low in comparison to similar councils. Enjoying and achieving outcomes are good. The high priority given to this area is narrowing the gap between the performance of children and young people in Wolverhampton and the national average. The overall trend of improvement for educational standards achieved at ages 11 and 16 exceeds that in similar councils and the national trend. The area of making a positive contribution remains outstanding, with increasing involvement of children and young people in the decision-making process and lower rates of crime than in similar areas. Opportunities for achieving economic well-being continue to be adequate. There has been excellent progress in implementing the 14–19 reforms but many performance indicators in this area are in line with or below similar councils. For example, the average point score of 16- to 18-year-old young people entered for GCE/VCE/A/AS is below similar councils and the national average.

The council provides adequate leadership for children's services. Working closely with a range of partners, it demonstrates appropriate ambition to improve the life chances of children and young people.

## Being healthy

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimates a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Young people have directly shaped services that are beginning to improve a range of health inequalities, such as in the development of the peer mentoring scheme to sustain breast-feeding.</li><li>▪ There are more schools participating in the Healthy Schools Programme than regionally, nationally, or in similar council areas.</li></ul>

- There is a strong, shared strategic priority about reducing health inequalities for children and young people.
- The appointment of a nurse for looked after children and the strength of the partnership between the council and the Primary Care Trust are beginning to accelerate progress on health and dental checks, and the well-being of looked after children.

#### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- There are greater health inequalities for children than in similar councils. The impact of agreed improvement strategies, for example for teenage conception rates and initiating breast-feeding, are at an early stage.
- Progress towards comprehensive child and adolescent mental health services is slower than in similar councils.

## **Staying safe**

**Grade 2**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimate a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

#### **Major strengths**

- The incidence of death or serious injury of children aged 0 to 15 on the city's roads has reduced significantly and is already some way in advance of the 2010 target.
- The stability of placements for looked after children is good and provides a secure environment for those children and young people to develop their full potential.
- Clear thresholds for intervention by social care are agreed and used by local safeguarding organisations.

#### **Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- Initial assessments are not always completed in a timely manner. The number of children who receive a core assessment is low in comparison to similar councils.
- Fewer young people aged 14 years or older than in similar councils, who receive a social care service, have a transition plan to ensure their safe and satisfactory entry into early adulthood.
- The proportion of placements found with family and friends for looked after children is lower than in similar councils.
- The rate of improvement on staying safe outcomes is weaker than similar councils. For example, the rates of initial child protection conferences have been inconsistent for the last four years and are lower than in similar councils.

## Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. This is in line with the council's self-assessment. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

### Major strengths

- Key Stage 2 standards have improved at a faster rate than in similar councils and nationally. Value added in Key Stage 4 is well above average and the proportion of young people who achieve five A\* to C GCSEs is above the national average. All schools achieve the Key Stage 4 floor target.
- Wolverhampton's exclusion rates are amongst the lowest both locally and nationally. The rate of permanent exclusion from secondary schools is well below the national average.
- Attendance in secondary schools has improved and is now above that in similar councils and closer to the national average. The attendance rates of looked after children are much better than the rates in similar councils and nationally.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Standards are declining at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are now below the national average and, in all but mathematical development, below the average for statistical neighbours. The percentage inequality gap remains greater than the local target and the national figure.

## Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

### Major strengths

- The council fully involves children and young people, including those in vulnerable groups, in making decisions about services. The proportion of young people who feel their views about the running of their schools are acted upon is much higher than the national average.
- The percentage of young people in Wolverhampton who gain accreditation for their youth work activity is the ninth highest in the country.
- The number of first time entrants to the youth justice system is much lower than statistical neighbours. Rates of re-offending have improved over the past two years and remain lower than in similar councils. Looked after children are much less likely to be involved in criminal activity than nationally.

<b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b>

## Achieving economic well-being

**Grade 2**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimates a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<b>Major strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Wolverhampton is a lead council for the national 14–19 reform programme. Progress in planning for the development and delivery of provision for the specialist diploma has been extremely strong and the council is one of the country's leaders in this area.</li> <li>▪ 100% of care leavers at the age of 19 live in suitable accommodation.</li> <li>▪ The support for care leavers is good. The proportion of care leavers who have pathway plans has improved substantially and is now above that in similar councils.</li> </ul>
<b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The average point score of 16- to 18-year-old young people entered for GCE/VCE/A/AS is below similar councils and the national average. The gap increased between 2006 and 2007.</li> <li>▪ The success rate of young people engaged in NVQ work-based learning is below the national average. The gap widened in 2006 to 07. The success rate of males on these courses is well below this group's performance nationally.</li> <li>▪ The proportion of work based learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average.</li> <li>▪ The proportion of young people aged 16 to 18 who are not in employment, education or training and the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds whose activity is currently not known, is greater than similar councils.</li> </ul>






## Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

**Grade 2**

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people, including its management of these services, is adequate. Since the joint area review, the council has made progress against a number of the recommendations. For example, timely and appropriate full-time provision is made for every permanently excluded child or young person and suitable accommodation is available for care leavers at the age of 19. Evidence of strong leadership is also highlighted in the

national recognition of the council's leading role in reforming the 14–19 curriculum and in the improving outcomes for enjoying and achieving. The low rates of first time entrants to the youth justice system and the high proportion of young people involved in youth work activity highlight the continuing outstanding services provided to enable young people to make a positive contribution.

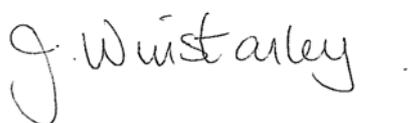
The self-assessment of the children and young people's plan focuses clearly on meeting the needs of children and young people, including the needs of vulnerable groups in all five outcomes. As a result of continuous self-review and regular consultation with children, young people and the voluntary and community sector, priorities are clear, ambitious and reflect local needs. However, self-evaluation is over generous and the grades in respect of being healthy, staying safe and achieving economic well-being are not consistent with the evidence. The evaluations for these outcomes do not always make full use of the information available to accurate assessment of the impact of council's services on young people and how performance in these outcomes compares with similar councils. For example, in the assessment of being healthy, there are appropriate plans in place and actions being implemented to improve outcomes but, at present, there are greater health inequalities for children than in similar councils.

<b>Major strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Very strong partnership working.</li> <li>▪ A clear focus on planning on improving outcomes for all and reducing inequalities.</li> <li>▪ Young people being consistently at the heart of planning and development of services.</li> </ul>
<b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In some areas, performance remains below similar council comparators.</li> </ul>

The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment to be published by the Audit Commission.

We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the assessment.

Yours sincerely



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