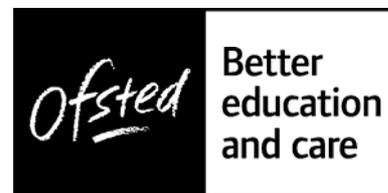




Making Social Care
Better for People



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Mr R Lockwood
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1 December 2005

Dear Mr Lockwood

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF WOLVERHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 27 June 2005 to assess the performance of the education and social care services within your authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Being healthy

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory overall with some clear strengths. A particular strength is the promotion of healthy lifestyles through the healthy schools initiative and participation in sport in primary schools. Several key services, such as those for child and adolescent mental health and behaviour support, are delivered well through a multi-agency approach. The rate of teenage pregnancies remains above the national average. However the local trend in the reduction of teenage conceptions shows that the local authority is well placed to achieve its target by 2010. The council is prioritising plans to improve the health of children and young people, particularly those from minority ethnic backgrounds, by establishing accurate baseline information in order to target resources appropriately.

However the effectiveness of action taken to promote the health of children and young people who are looked after is inconsistent. Health monitoring of this group has improved but levels of monitoring are still below the national average. Information gained from monitoring is not used consistently to develop appropriate plans for individual children. Looked after children placed outside the city are less likely to have speedy access to mental health services than those placed close to the city. To address this issue, the local authority has agreed an Integrated Placement Strategy to reduce the number of out-of-city placements of looked after children. Outcomes for young people who abuse substances are unclear, since information systems are not yet effective in establishing the extent of the problem.

Staying safe

Outcomes are satisfactory overall with some significant weaknesses. Safety for children has been improved by a comprehensive whole council approach to bullying. Pupils' care, welfare and safety were judged to be good or excellent in 75% of the schools inspected.

Outcomes for children in need have been improved by quicker referral systems and improved response times but initial assessments are not completed as quickly as in similar authorities. There has been a significant improvement in the timely completion of more detailed core assessments and performance is better than in similar authorities. There is a clearer understanding of thresholds for intervention between agencies, and this has contributed to a reduction in the number of referrals of children in need. All cases on the child protection register are reviewed within required time scales. Delays in transferring child protection cases between teams have led to some cases being unallocated for a time, though the Council states that delays in allocation have been short.

The children's services inspection found that there are weaknesses in the service to children with disabilities. Whilst health and social services staff are co-located, joint working remains limited. The Council is introducing a revised commissioning strategy for services to children with a learning disability in order to address these shortfalls.

The council carries out reviews of critical incidents appropriately although these have sometimes been delayed. A review of procedures is currently taking place.

There are significant weaknesses in ensuring that looked after children have safe and stable placements. The stability of placements for looked after children has improved and all have an allocated qualified social worker but inspections of children's homes and the fostering service show there are weaknesses in care planning and risk assessment for some looked after children. Revised risk assessment procedures are being introduced in the fostering service. Mechanisms to avoid children becoming looked after unnecessarily have not always been effective. The number or ability of local placements to meet the needs of children who are looked after are not always adequate to meet their challenging needs. A high proportion of the authority's looked after children are placed some distance away from home which makes the maintenance of links with family and friends more difficult and reduces the prospect of good outcomes. The authority's own residential care resources do not consistently meet national minimum standards and required improvements have not yet been implemented, however a placement strategy to address these issues is under development. Inspection evidence from October 2004 was that the fostering team was under-staffed. Foster carers did not have regular supervision and were not being given opportunities for annual review meetings. The inspection of July 2005 demonstrates improvements in staffing of the fostering service, and a plan is being implemented to carry out reviews of all carers.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good. Early years' provision is good and supports children well to meet the early learning goals. Results at the end of Key Stage 1 are in line with those of similar authorities and, although they remain below the national average, show an overall trend of improvement since 2001. Similarly, results at the end of Key Stage 2 show an overall rise since 2001 although they remain below the averages nationally and for similar authorities. Support provided by education services is well focused on clearly identified groups of pupils and teachers to improve achievement still further in 2006.

Standards at Key Stage 3 are improving and are in line with those of similar authorities although they remain below the national average. Results at GCSE continue to improve and are in line with the national average and better than those for similar authorities. Progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is below average. However, children and young people make the expected rate of progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 and good progress from Key Stage 3 to GCSE. The overall achievement of black and minority ethnic children and young people is improving in line with national figures. Girls outperform boys at Key Stage 2 and, although the performance of boys is improving, it is an area where education services are targeting further support. The percentage of looked after children achieving one or more GCSE has improved from a very low base and is now in line with the averages nationally and for similar authorities. However the proportion achieving five or more GCSE is low compared to the national average.

Attendance shows improvement and the authority is well placed to achieve its attendance targets for 2005-06. Attendance rates for looked after children show improvement but are still below average. Strategies to reduce the rate of exclusions have been successful and figures are now below the averages both nationally and for similar authorities.

Education services provide very good support for schools placed in formal categories of concern by Ofsted. This ensures that schools are removed from specific categories well within the specified timescales. Schools are monitored closely so that weaknesses are identified early and tackled effectively. This rigorous approach to intervention has resulted in none of the schools in Wolverhampton being identified as causing concern during inspections carried out in the current year.

Within the youth service, the achievement and progress of young people are satisfactory overall. Increasing numbers are achieving qualifications and gaining accreditation through its own award scheme. A wide range of accreditation is available to meet the individual curriculum needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. The authority has achieved Early Support Pathfinder Status

and is provides effective support for children and young people with complex needs and their families.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good overall. Children and young people are given good support in managing changes in their lives including a wide range of initiatives to support them as they move from primary to secondary school. Looked after children contribute to reviews of their own needs and provision. Good provision is made through the commissioning of a voluntary agency to provide advice and support to young carers. The rate of youth crime has fallen to below the national average. There are several projects in place that are beginning to be effective in reducing re-offending.

The authority provides a good range of well-co-ordinated opportunities to enable young people to voice their views on a variety of issues. These range from neighbourhood youth forums, school councils in primary and secondary schools and the Wolverhampton Youth Council. Children and young people are also involved in the evaluation of specific projects and a programme to obtain the views of very young children is due to be introduced into nursery and primary schools. Elected members of the Youth Council meet regularly with council members to raise issues and concerns and as a result influence council decision-making.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good with some notable strengths. The quality of education provided for 14 to 19 year olds is very good. The proportion of young people, including those who are looked after, progressing to higher education or training has risen significantly to above the national average and well above the average for similar authorities. The authority works well with a range of partners including the Learning Skills Council to plan and deliver post-16 education. The Excellence in Cities partnership has developed an enrichment activity programme linked to the gifted and talented and Aim Higher programmes. There is an effective partnership with a voluntary agency to provide support to care leavers. However children and young people with learning disabilities are not adequately supported to make the transition to independent adult life. The proportion of disabled children and carers who are benefiting from direct payments is well below the national average.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and young people, including participation in sport at primary level. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve the health services for looked after children.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> improvements in the stability of placements for looked after children and young people reduction of delays in completing assessments, particularly core assessments anti-bullying strategy. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the quality of planning for individual children the availability of sufficient good quality foster home and residential placements for looked after children the timeliness of initial assessments.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> quality of early years provision strategy to identify and support schools causing concern reduction in the number of exclusions. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> educational attainment of looked after children.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the reduction in offending by under 16s the good range of systems for consultation with children and young people. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> partnership in services, flexible education and training packages for children aged 14 – 19, including 14-19 pathfinder the number of looked after children in employment, education and training (EET). 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> proportion of disabled children and carers who are benefiting from direct payments transition planning with adult social services for children with a learning disability.

Service management

The authority has worked closely with a wide range of relevant partners, including the community, schools, children and young people, to complete a thorough needs analysis. This has produced a set of clear and appropriate priorities for development focused on improving the outcomes for children and young people.

The authority is making good progress in implementing the requirements of the Children Act to produce a single children and young people's plan from 2006. The process for developing this plan has identified any gaps in provision so that the authority is able to build upon and develop further the effective partnership working that is already well established. The authority is developing a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development, such as the need to improve in-house residential care and the whole authority response to inspections of children's social care and education services in the city. The education service has established an effective partnership with its schools, which has had a positive impact on raising standards, particularly in secondary schools. Performance management systems have been put in place during the last year and are beginning to be effective. Partnership and multi-agency working is well established and co-ordinated at a strategic level. In the last two years the Youth Service has successfully addressed its recruitment and retention difficulties. The authority is moving towards a commissioning model for delivering services for children and the commissioning and management capacity within social care has been enhanced.

Interim arrangements are in place so that the Director of Children's Services is now responsible for commissioning children's social care. It is intended that full and direct accountability for all children's services will be held by the Director of Children's Services by the end of 2005.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Action taken to promote children and young people's mental health:

- improve the health services for looked after children.

Staying safe

Looked after children live in safe environments and are protected from abuse and exploitation:

- care planning and risk assessment
- the capacity to provide comprehensively for the needs of all looked after children.

Enjoying and achieving

Children and young people who are looked after are helped to enjoy and achieve:

- the educational attainment of looked after children.

Making a positive contribution

Children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision making and in supporting the community:

- the use of the views of children and young people (including those with disabilities) to inform and make a difference to local authority strategies.

Achieving economic well-being

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to achieve economic well-being:

- proportion of disabled children and carers who are benefiting from direct payments
- transition planning in partnership with adult social services for children with a learning disability.

Final judgements

Please see your final annual performance assessment judgements attached at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY

Divisional Manager
Office for Standards in Education



JONATHAN PHILLIPS

Director – Quality, Performance and Methods
Commission for Social Care Inspection

APA final judgements 2005: Wolverhampton City Council

Areas for judgement	Final judgements ¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	2
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people	3

1

Grade	Service descriptors	Capacity to improve descriptors
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Very good
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good/promising
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate