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Mr Roy Lockwood
Director for Children and Young People
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Dear Mr Lockwood

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This performance profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the local authority has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of all inspected and regulated services for children and young people, arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against national measures. More weight has been given to the outcomes of Ofsted's inspections and regulatory visits (Blocks A and B in the performance profile).

The annual assessment derives from a four point scale:

| | | |
|---|----------------------|---|
| 4 | Performs excellently | An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements |
| 3 | Performs well | An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements |
| 2 | Performs adequately | An organisation that meets only minimum requirements |
| 1 | Performs poorly | An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements |

Within each level there will be differing standards of provision. For example, an assessment of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, an assessment of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects. As in 2009, while the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's assessment, meeting or not meeting the minimum requirements alone does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

Wolverhampton City Council children's services assessment 2010

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Children's services assessment | Performs well (3) |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|

Children's services in Wolverhampton City Council perform well.

The majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The majority of early years settings are good, with one inadequate childminder setting. Provision in secondary schools is good overall, although provision in primary schools is more variable, with only just over half judged to be good or better. The seven local authority special schools were judged to be good or outstanding at their most recent inspection. Three of the four pupil referral units are good and one inadequate. While provision for 16- to 19-year-olds is good in the further education college and in special schools, it is more variable in secondary school sixth forms, where a significant minority are satisfactory and one is inadequate. The local authority fostering agency was judged to be good at its most recent inspection and the adoption agency adequate. Three local authority children's homes are good and one is outstanding.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found some areas for development and no areas for priority action. Private fostering arrangements are satisfactory.

National performance measures show the very large majority of outcomes are in line with the averages for England or for similar areas. Results in national tests of educational performance are in line with similar areas at ages 11 and 16. The number of permanent exclusions from school is lower than in similar areas and the proportion of 17-year-olds who stay in education or training has continued to rise and is higher than in similar areas. Performance on indicators for children in care is less good than nationally, including the number of times children have to change placements, the length of time that they stay in placements and how promptly meetings to review plans for children in care are held. Obesity levels for 11-year-olds remain above average compared to similar areas.

Key areas for further development

- Improve the number of good and better primary schools.
- Improve the stability of placements and timeliness of reviews for children in care.
- Increase the proportion of young offenders and care leavers continuing in education, training or work.

Outcomes for children and young people

Provision to support children and young people in living healthy lives is good or better in the very large majority of settings and services. This is a priority area for the local authority and its partners. However, the proportion of children who are obese by the age of 11 is higher than in similar areas and across England.

Investment by the primary care trust, the local authority and partners is supporting a number of initiatives to tackle obesity and to encourage children to be more active, for example, an extended mind exercise, nutrition, and do it (MEND) programme targeted at children aged 7 – 15 and a Food Dudes programme that won the Chief Medical Officer Gold Award. Although there has been an improvement in the number of children who take part in two hours a week of physical exercise and sport, the council has not kept pace with curriculum sports participation in schools when compared with similar parts of the country. However, the local authority reports that participation in out of hours school sport is above the national average and community sports participation is in line with the national average.

The very large majority of individual services or settings make a good contribution to keeping children and young people safe. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services identified a number of strengths and improvements since the previous inspection in 2009. These include the effectiveness of case transfer systems in ensuring continuity for children and young people, recognition of the diversity of the population in assessments, taking children's views into account, good management supervision and effective arrangements for disabled children. Areas for development include: the quality and storage of some reports; high pressure on some managers, which impact on how quickly assessments take place; and delays in the implementation of the training programme for social workers. The number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents has reduced and is broadly in line with that nationally. The proportion of children who are admitted to hospital because they are injured either accidentally or deliberately was similar to that across the country in the period 2006/2008. Provisional recent data show that the figure has fallen to below the national average.

The very large majority of inspected services are good or better in helping children to enjoy and achieve. At the end of the Reception year, children's attainment is slightly lower than in similar areas, and by their last year in primary school their attainment has improved to the average for similar areas. Results for 16-year-olds are also in line with the average for similar local authorities. The number of primary and secondary schools which do not meet minimum standards for educational attainment has fallen steadily over the last four years. During the academic year 2009/2010, one secondary school and three primary schools were judged to be inadequate, while in the same period, three primary schools were removed from an Ofsted category of concern. The local authority has identified the need to narrow the attainment gap by tackling underachievement for groups whose circumstances have made them vulnerable, including boys and children with learning difficulties. Behaviour and persistent absence rates in secondary schools are in line with similar areas. The

number of children permanently excluded from school has fallen to below the average for similar areas and is among the lowest nationally.

The local authority involves children and young people, including those from groups whose circumstances have made them vulnerable, in making decisions about services; for example, through political speed-dating and the '11 million take-over day' with the Children and Young People Strategic Partnership Board. Children and young people feel very positive about the way that their schools take account of their views. The rate of reduction in the conception rate for young women under the age of 18 has slowed, and remains overall in line with the England average. The local area has introduced a number of initiatives, including 'Clinic in a Box' outreach services and a focus on the reduction of second and subsequent teenage pregnancies. The local authority has identified through its own survey that substance misuse among young people in Wolverhampton is too high; a young people's substance misuse strategy has been introduced, supported by a variety of local agencies. The rate of proven re-offending by young people is close to the average for similar areas. Whilst the proportion of young black people in the youth offending cohort is nearly commensurate with the overall youth population, it is recognised that there are continuing challenges in addressing the population of young black people committing serious offences that result in custodial outcomes.

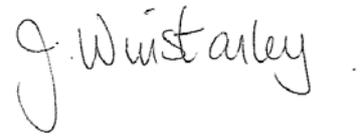
Young people get overall good support to do well in adult life. The local authority is making progress in implementing the 14-19 reforms through a city-wide approach and an area-wide curriculum framework. Students' response to new courses is positive, resulting in good motivation and attendance, and a reduction in the percentage of 16- to 18-year-olds who are not in education, training or work. The percentage of young people at the age of 17 in education or training continues to increase steadily and is above that in similar areas. However, this is not the case for some young people whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. In 2009 a lower proportion of young offenders and care leavers continued into education, training or work than in similar areas. The need to track these groups whose circumstances have made them vulnerable has been identified as a priority for the local area. The number of young people achieving good qualifications by the age of 19 is improving and is in line with similar areas. Latest figures show that all care leavers are housed in suitable accommodation and that the vast majority of young offenders have access to suitable accommodation.

Prospects for improvement

Many outcomes for children and young people in Wolverhampton are improving. The Children and Young People's Plan sets clear priorities and specific cross-agency actions targeted at areas of weaker performance, such as safeguarding, teenage conceptions and underperforming schools. The number of services and settings judged to be good in inspection remains similar to 2009. Significantly fewer schools achieve below minimum standards than four years ago, although too many primary schools are only satisfactory. All four local authority children's homes are now good or outstanding, although the adoption service remains satisfactory.

This children's services assessment is provided in accordance with section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment