

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr Roy Lockwood
Director for Children and Young People
Wolverhampton City Council
Civic Centre
St Peter's Square
Wolverhampton
WV1 1RR

1 November 2006

Dear Mr Lockwood

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WOLVERHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment process for your local 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.

Summary

Areas for judgement	Grade awarded¹
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 <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people	3
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	2

1

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

Wolverhampton City Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements for children and young people. All services can demonstrate how they are improving the achievement and well-being of children and young people. There are significant strengths in nearly all areas, especially in the authority's children's services. Early years provision is good, educational achievement at 16 has risen strongly and there are no schools requiring special measures. However, some aspects of social care provision for looked after children, particularly with regard to in-house residential placements, are only adequate. The authority has strong leadership and an ambitious vision. Collaboration with strategic partners is effective. Although elements of self-assessment need to be sharper, there are challenging targets for improvement in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and the authority's performance management framework is good. Its monitoring of schools' performance is robust and very effective and it has demonstrated a strong track record in supporting improvement and in pursuing groundbreaking initiatives to develop interagency and partnership work. Appropriate action is being taken to improve social care information systems which have not always provided timely data. The council has a good capacity to improve its services further.

Being healthy

The contribution that the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area is satisfactory, with some clear strengths.

The authority has a good record in helping schools to promote healthy lifestyles, and is pursuing a wide range of initiatives. The target for achieving Healthy Schools Status is likely to be achieved and there has been progress in ensuring that children participate in exercise at school.

Significant progress has been made on improving outcomes for young babies by improving the proportion of mothers who breastfeed and by reducing the number of mothers-to-be who smoke during pregnancy. Latest data shows that progress on reducing teenage pregnancies has not been maintained, and the rate of reduction has fallen below similar councils. The authority and its partners are reviewing how resources might be better targeted to improve outcomes further in this area.

The authority has not maintained the level of monitoring of the health of looked after children that was achieved last year and performance is below comparative councils. A multi-agency group has been established to focus on the health of this group.

The authority is working with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) to better understand the health issues affecting an ethnically diverse population, however that analysis has not yet been concluded.

There has been progress in improving the screening for substance misuse of young people who are in contact with the Youth Offending Team however the same level of monitoring is not yet available for looked after children. Young people who receive help are likely to get that help from an appropriate child centred service, though the proportion of persons

receiving help for substance misuse that are under 18 is lower than in the region as a whole.

Staying safe

The contribution that the council's services make to improving outcomes in this area is satisfactory but important areas require improvement.

Inspections of schools report that all schools are at least satisfactory in the extent to which they ensure that learners stay safe and most are graded good or better.

The 2004–05 annual performance assessment found that there had been a reduction in referrals of children in need, which was thought to be due to a better understanding of thresholds by partner agencies. This year the number of referrals has risen. The authority has been unable to improve the proportion of these referrals that receive a quick initial assessment, however where a more detailed core assessment is required there has been improvement, and 79% of these were completed within the 35 day target. The high proportion of temporary and agency staff has made performance management more difficult. The authority is conducting a review of intake arrangements in children's social care. The Common Assessment Framework has not yet been introduced, but a multi-agency working group is making progress on this.

The authority has ensured that, since October, all children on the Children Protection Register (CPR) are allocated to a qualified social worker. This measure is reported monthly. There has been a specific difficulty in ensuring that children on the CPR are reviewed within timescales. The authority states this was due to a misunderstanding regarding the setting of dates, and that action has been taken to ensure this does not happen again.

The 2004–2005 annual performance assessment identified that there were weaknesses in ensuring that looked after children have stable and safe placements. In 2005–2006 there has been progress in ensuring that reviews of arrangements for looked after children take place in a timely manner and that children and young people are enabled to contribute their views. The authority has also ensured that more long-term placements of children in foster homes are stable, however the proportion of looked after children that had three or more placement moves in the year has increased from 10% to 15%.

The authority has made some progress in implementing an integrated placement strategy to address weaknesses in the availability of appropriate placements, however a number of developments in the pipeline will take more time before they deliver better outcomes. The review work undertaken in connection with the strategy has led to greater effort to recruit carers who reflect the ethnic diversity of looked after children and to a review of the support available to children that are in transracial placements.

There remain some significant concerns regarding the authority's existing in-house residential child care provision. Whilst recent inspections show progress has been made, further effort is required by management and staff to ensure that they provide a

consistently safe environment for young people until more appropriate provision is available.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board was established, as required, by 1 April 2006, though the work programme for the year has yet to be finalised.

A serious case review has been undertaken, however the process of agreeing the report has been subject to lengthy delay. The agreement and implementation of an action plan, arising from the recommendations of the review, is now urgent.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution the authority makes to ensuring children and young people achieve at schools and enjoy their education is good. Outcomes for pupils as a whole and for those most at risk of underachieving are at least as good as those in comparable authorities and continue to improve.

Early years provision remains a strength and children make a good start to their education, often from a low base. There is a well trained workforce and a clear vision of how the service should develop. The number of children's centres in disadvantaged areas has recently grown to 10 and further expansion is planned.

At Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, the pupils make satisfactory progress and attainment is broadly similar to statistical neighbours but below the national average. There has been year on year improvement in standards at primary schools and in Key Stage 3 but the gap between national performance and that of the local authority has not narrowed because achievement in too many schools is satisfactory rather than good. Nevertheless, results in English at Key Stage 2 and in English and mathematics at Key Stage 3 improved significantly in 2005. The authority responded suitably to a decline in science at Key Stage 3 by appointing a consultant to work with schools at this key stage.

Pupils make good progress at Key Stage 4 and attainment has, again, risen significantly. The proportion of pupils gaining five grades at A* to C in GCSE or equivalent examinations lifted by six percentage points to 55.8%. This performance is in line with the national average and considerably better than that of the authority's statistical neighbours. The proportion of pupils passing English and mathematics at grade C or above has also risen but not at the same pace and remains a priority, reflected in the authority's focus on improving literacy and numeracy across all ages groups. All secondary schools are above the DfES's floor targets of 30% of pupils gaining five A* to C grades by 2006.

A higher proportion of looked after children left school with one GCSE at grade A to G, and there has been a significant improvement in the percentage who gained five or more GCSEs at grades A to C, which was an area for development from the 2005 APA. Attainment by pupils with hearing or visual impairment is good.

The outcomes of inspections have generally been very positive and, in nearly all cases, have found the pupils' behaviour and enjoyment of education to be good or better. No schools have required special measures since 2003. The authority has sustained the improvement of schools which were in categories of concern before this date and several have now been judged to be good. Good knowledge of its schools has enabled the authority to identify and intervene effectively where other schools are in danger of declining. A small number of schools have been given a Notice to Improve since September but the authority had identified the concerns before the inspections and had been working proactively to eradicate weaknesses.

Effective coordination of a range of interagency programmes to reduce absence has resulted in improved attendance at both key stages. It is broadly in line with statistical neighbours. The attendance of looked after children has also continued to improve and is better than similar authorities and the national picture. The number of permanent exclusions from secondary schools is low and compares extremely favourably with other authorities.

Making a positive contribution

The contribution the authority makes to ensuring that young people make a positive contribution is good. Schools and early years settings offer a good environment for children and young people to make a positive contribution. The rate of youth offending is low, and reducing, as is the rate of recidivism. Services appear to be working effectively to support the young people most likely to offend. Importantly, the Youth Offending Team, Youth Inclusion and Support Panel and Youth Justice Board have worked together effectively to reduce anti-social behaviour through commissioning and running a series of successful projects.

The number of looked after children communicating their views to statutory reviews has risen slightly from what was already good performance. Transition arrangements enable vulnerable children and young people to manage change in their lives effectively. A wide range of initiatives, such as The Positive Engagement Group, Just The Same Group and Positive Activities for Young People contribute well to Wolverhampton's efforts to ensure that there is a strong voice for children and young people in the decisions that affect them.

The views of young people are gathered in a variety of ways and are influential; for example, a skate park and skating strategy have been produced as a direct result of consultation with young people. The youth service helps young people develop civic awareness through participation in meetings and campaigning on local issues. Young people are involved well in consultations, planning and decision making. Many schools have a school council, with some schools involved in conferences and other events organised by children and young people themselves. However, the council has identified that it does not gather sufficient evidence to evaluate the impact of its work in these areas.

Achieving economic well-being

The authority makes a good contribution to its young people's economic well-being. Wolverhampton is a leading player in the national drive to bring coherence to 14 to 19 partnerships and has achieved success on many fronts. Its pathfinder status has secured very effective links between all relevant agencies and there is a range of highly sophisticated electronic systems for organising the extended range of curricular opportunities available to all. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of young people moving into higher education and training and the number staying in learning after 16 has increased to 83.4%, which is above the national average. Although the overall figure for those not in education, employment or training up to the age of 19 is above average, improvements in the proportion of looked after children in employment, education or training have been marked, and it is now better than the national picture.

Consortium arrangements to broaden choices for pupils and young people, including hard to reach and vulnerable groups are developing well. The City of Wolverhampton College offers a range of vocational pathways for 14-16 year olds and achievement rates are very high.

The authority has responded effectively to an area for development identified in the 2005 APA. A joint health and social services transition worker has been appointed to improve support for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities moving into adult life. The proportion of pupils with transition plans has increased significantly.

The average points score for attainment at post-16 is below the authority's statistical neighbours and performance at Advanced Level GCSE is below average, possibly indicating that students are not taking suitable courses.

The council's management of its services for children and young people, including its capacity to improve them further

The authority has strong leadership and has collaborated with strategic partners to analyse needs and set appropriate and challenging targets for improvement in the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). The vision for Wolverhampton is ambitious. The involvement of young people, parents and carers, as well as statutory agencies and the voluntary sector, is evident. Wolverhampton City Council is close to concluding a restructuring of the new Children and Young Person's Directorate that makes appropriate linkages across services and outcome areas. Its response to the areas for development from last year's APA has been generally good.

The authority completed the CYPP on time, and the document provides an analysis of need that has been developed with the involvement of young people, parents and partner agencies. The authority acknowledges, however, that the plan makes assumptions of a detailed local knowledge of Wolverhampton, and thus does not, for example, identify neighbourhoods of high need. There is also insufficient attention to the very diverse population of children and young people, 27% of whom are known to be from an ethnic minority background. The authority is working with partners on further analysis of need,

and is intending to improve this aspect of the plan when it is reviewed in 2007. The plan has an appropriate focus on outcomes for children and young people, and includes a draft work programme aimed to deliver these. However, it does not state clearly enough the success criteria and who will take responsibility for the tasks. The authority's own performance management framework is good, and links are made between individual and team objectives and performance information. Social care information systems have not enabled staff to identify issues early enough for action to be taken this year, but the authority is commissioning a new database which is intended to further improve performance management. In contrast, its monitoring of schools' performance is robust and very effective, enabling it to challenge underperformance. It has demonstrated a strong track record in supporting improvement and in pursuing groundbreaking initiatives to develop interagency and partnership work.

The authority has taken an inclusive approach to the self-assessment, by asking partners to identify needs and outcomes for children related to their agency or project's specific area of work. This has led to a self-assessment which lists activities rather than robustly identifying strengths and weaknesses. The evaluation in the CYPP is more effective, however the authority has not taken the opportunity to use this analysis in the self-assessment, by appropriate cross-referencing, either to the plan or to other significant documents such as the Local Area Agreement.

There have been challenges for the authority in maintaining the children's workforce during the year, particularly in children's social care. Whilst vacancies have not been left unfilled, the extensive use of temporary and agency staff has led to difficulties in managing performance and in providing a consistent level of service. The authority's recruitment and retention strategy has had an impact at team manager level, however further work is required to improve the retention of front line social work staff.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • healthy schools • involvement of children in sport • increase in breastfeeding in hospitals • decrease in mothers-to-be smoking in pregnancy. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitoring of health of looked after children • substance misuse screening with children looked after • analysis of health inequalities • further reductions in teenage pregnancy.

<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • safe care in schools • core assessments within 35 days allocation of children on CPR. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • achievement of time targets on initial assessments • introduction of Common Assessment Framework • performance on PAF CF/C20 Reviews of children on CPR • placement stability • the quality of care in the council's own residential care provision • arrangements for serious case reviews.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • early years provision • achievement and standards are at least in line with statistical neighbours at all key stages • performance at KS4 • improvement in looked after children's attainment • behaviour and enjoyment of pupils in schools • impact of school improvement service • attendance at school • reduction in exclusions. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • satisfactory rather than good achievement in too many schools • standards of literacy and numeracy
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rate of youth offending • transition arrangements for young people in transition • strength of the young persons' voice • civic awareness of young people. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluating the impact of services provided.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14–19 partnerships • improvements in the proportion of young people going into higher education and training. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEET figure • academic attainment post-16.
<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong leadership • ambitious vision • involvement of wide range of partners • support and challenge for schools. 	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self assessment • further development of information and performance management systems • building workforce capacity.

Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA

- The multi-agency arrangements for assessing children in need.
- Safeguarding procedures.
- Improving achievement in literacy and numeracy.
- Impact of post-16 academic guidance.

We confirm that the children's services grade will provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) and will be published to the Audit Commission. The social care judgement is for CSCI information only.

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY

Divisional Manager
Office for Standards in Education



JONATHAN PHILLIPS

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