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Making Social Care  
Better for People



Miss W Woodcock  
Corporate Head of Children's Services  
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**1 November 2006**

Dear Miss Woodcock

**2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WOKINGHAM**

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

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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

Wokingham Unitary Authority overall makes only an adequate contribution to maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people and the council's capacity to improve is adequate.

The Children's and Young People's Plan has been firmly established and based on effective partnership work undertaken via the Children's Trust Board, established in August 2003. The plan is clear and addresses the key targets to be achieved by the council. The majority of the areas identified in last year's APA have been targeted and many are showing signs of improvement.

However, the council's leadership needs to focus more effectively on improving the outcomes for looked after children and improving the gateway to social services by making assessments more timely. The council's under performance in these areas has led us to conclude that the council needs to be more thorough in its approach to the *Every Child Matters* national policy so as to ensure, that the small but vulnerable number of children who deserve a better social care response, receive it. These issues have effected all three judgements in this APA letter.

## **Being healthy**

The council makes a good contribution to outcomes in this area.

The council is continuing to build on its record of positive partnership working with health providers and has seconded a senior health manager to the Children's Trust Change team. As a result, benefits have been experienced at both strategic and operational levels. Healthy lifestyles continue to be effectively promoted through the Healthy Schools Programme. This is in line with the Government's 2006 target. Parents and young people have been consulted on the promotion of healthy diets in schools, including greater availability of fresh fruit and vegetables.

The implementation of the teenage pregnancy strategy has resulted in a continued decline in numbers of teenage conceptions and there are plans to extend the sex and relationship education services. The strategy has been revised to include the return to education, employment or training for teenage parents. All teenage and young parents up to the age of 25 years may obtain good support from the "Time Out" project that provides overnight care for their children.

The Youth Offending Team partnership in Wokingham and Reading Councils has included the employment of a joint drugs worker to raise awareness and support the substance misuse strategy 'Source'. Preventative work has appropriately involved the voluntary and faith sectors. Wokingham has made it a high priority to screen all young offenders for drugs/substance misuse in order to provide earlier and appropriate intervention.

Wokingham is well on the way to providing good comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and is in a more advanced position than its comparator authorities. The local council aims to embed this service further and has in place a CAMHS recruitment strategy to overcome staffing difficulties. The appointment of a psychologist to

the CAMHS team has added strength and provides direct support and consultancy for social workers and foster carers. In addition, the council has developed an innovative strategy for Autistic Spectrum Service Information and Training (ASSIST) offering valuable advice and support to children, young people and their families.

There are dedicated health care professionals to support the needs of looked after children effectively. The council and the Primary Care Trust (PCT) are taking steps to make sure health care assessments for looked after children are met in time and to the quality required. However, the council has not successfully managed the necessary number of health care checks within the required timescale for looked after children. Its performance is below that of the previous year and less than the average of comparator councils. Wokingham reports that workforce changes have impacted adversely on this outcome over the past year but these are now resolved.

## **Staying safe**

The council makes an adequate contribution to outcomes in this area.

Wokingham has provided a comprehensive Children's and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and their self-assessment links well with this plan. Children and young people made a significant contribution to this plan, visibly shaping the priorities and identified key targets. Parents and children welcome the initiatives against crime and bullying and the promotion of safer environments. This involves effective procedures for dealing with racial abuse and good support of Black and minority ethnic groups.

The council conducts enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks on all staff working in schools and with young people in alternative settings and rigorously records the outcomes. The local authority has made available child protection training for a wider range of staff; a named doctor and nurse are supplied and child protection training is also widely available for health professionals. Wokingham Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has made significant progress through an agreement to provide a management post ensuring that safeguarding is central to policy and strategic development.

The council states it is committed to providing a good service to children in Wokingham and this is set out in the CYPP. All looked after children are provided with a named, qualified social worker and there is an excellent local respite residential and day care resource for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) providing good support to families. Foster carers now have better support through a day and night telephone helpline operated by Family Support teams who know the children and the foster carers. However, there are some important areas requiring further improvement including the development of a better Foster Carer Strategy including kinship care. The stability of placements for looked after children in short-term care remains problematic, although long-term stability is slightly better. A significant improvement is needed in initial and core assessments, leading to early intervention and services. Improved performance should be achieved in planning and commissioning local services for looked after children. There are a relatively small number of looked after children but compared to other councils a disproportionately high number are placed away from the council area. Some of the children recently placed outside the borough include two sibling groups, this has

resulted in a higher than average performance figure for this indicator. As a result, looked after children are unable to access good overall local services.

The local authority report that cohorts are small and decisions for these children have been assessed and have been found to be in the best interests of each looked after child, especially for those children who require specialist services that cannot be found in the local borough. The council needs to consider what it should do to plan for, and commission, more local services for looked after children.

Staff changes have resulted in a dip in the number of initial assessments undertaken within required timescales. The performance in relation to core assessment is better and has improved since last year. Wokingham is urgently investigating the performance management of data collection and the Local Safeguarding Board quality committee have commissioned a review into these areas including thresholds.

Within the formal child protection arrangements there is very good performance in holding conferences on time, allocating cases to qualified social workers and good performance for children not staying on the register too long. There is also good use of family conferencing in child protection referrals.

The council uses monitoring systems to improve its awareness of the whereabouts of all children and young people and monitors all looked after children absent from school. Children, young people and their families have access to integrated services providing information and advice from multi-disciplinary teams.

Wokingham District Council's corporate parenting strategy requires reviewing in order to guarantee that measures are in place to ensure equitable life chances for looked after children in keeping with those provided for all children. In particular, to ensure that there is better quality of care for looked after children, especially those children with complex needs that may be placed in another local authority area.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

The council makes a good contribution to outcomes in this area.

Standards and achievement are very high in Key Stages 1 to 4 and have continued to be well above the national average and above statistical neighbours in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. Only four schools are below floor targets in either English or mathematics in the primary sector and these are all showing an early indication of improvement for 2006. These schools are receiving robust support based on detailed analysis of Performance and Data Analysis (PANDA) and local authority data in order to secure further improvements. Overall, the local authority is in the top quartile nationally. Key Stage 3 results have shown an improvement on previous years and no schools are below floor targets in this Key Stage. Standards in science at Key Stage 3 are above national average but lower than the very high standards in English and mathematics. Although Key Stage 4 results are above the national average, they are in line with statistical neighbours but do not show the significant improvement reflected in Key Stages 1 to 3. Appropriate support is being provided for those secondary departments where standards are insufficiently high.

Foundation Stage outcomes are in line with national expectations and effective moderation is in place across all private, voluntary and school settings. Good progress has been made in relation to training and the use of the Wokingham Early Years Evaluation System to ensure high quality provision.

Attendance overall is in line with targets set and is well above national average in the primary sector with very low authorised and unauthorised absence. In the secondary sector, attendance is broadly in line with national averages. The number of permanent exclusions from secondary schools is relatively high. Appropriate support from secondary consultants has been put in place and agreement reached with head teachers concerning 'managed moves' of pupils.

One primary school was issued with a notice to improve in autumn 2005 and, with significant local authority input, improvements have already been made. In one secondary school pupils' behaviour is an issue and has been subject to monitoring visits by inspectors; on their last visit, improvements were noted.

Attendance at school by looked after children is low; it is well below average of other comparator councils. The local authority report that this is being carefully monitored by the looked after children's panel and responded to with a multi agency approach. There are no looked after children excluded from school. Improvements have been made through school support and specific foster care training and support via the newly extended helpline. Additional teaching resources are available to provide extra tuition. Overall, looked after children continue to do well in GCSE examinations. Although there was a slight fall from the previous year, results are still higher than the national average for those leaving education.

## **Making a positive contribution**

The council makes a good contribution to outcomes in this area.

The council launched the 'Listen Up' and 'Speak Easy' conferences to promote and facilitate good consultation in the planning of children services. Communication is fostered through schools' councils and the involvement of head teachers in briefings and school conferences. These processes assist in feeding back information to children and young people at schools, community groups and youth centres and help to obtain their views in the formulation of the CYPP.

Looked after children are helped to make a positive contribution as most participate in their own reviews and the authority plans to ensure that there is an increase in the number taking part in the coming year. Children and young people with LDD are assisted to make a positive contribution through the effective use of direct payments. In this way, an increased number are enabled to access and make better use of leisure and recreational facilities. The respite day and residential unit operated by Wokingham for young people and their families is a high quality service that has repeatedly achieved the Quality Charter Mark. An element of this award is to actively engage with others and continuously develop and improve services. This care service provides an exceptional and

valuable resource to support children and young people with complex disabilities and their families, helping them to remain at home.

A Wokingham team manager is the 'transition champion' for children with special needs, ensuring better transition between children's and adult services. This development is still in the early stages; however, Wokingham is actively pursuing improvement to develop further person centred pathway plans.

Wokingham, together with Reading, has a combined Youth Offending Team. To address the increased number of offenders under the age of 13, the local authority is setting up an early intervention Youth Inclusion Support Panel (YISP) with additional funding for all young people. The numbers of final warnings, reprimands and convictions for looked after children is too high and, in terms of older looked after young people, there has been persistent re-offending, leading to placement in secure accommodation. The result is a higher percentage of final warnings and convictions for looked after children than in comparator councils. To address these problems the Youth Offending Team is now represented on the looked after children's panel to provide relevant expertise in this area.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

The council makes a good contribution to outcomes in this area.

There has been an increase in the numbers of students being entered for the general certificate of education/vocational certificate of education (GCE/VCE), advanced and advanced supplementary (A/AS) level courses. Against national benchmarks, the authority is now in the upper quartile. There has been a slight rise in sixth form examination results over the last year, aided by the BTEC sports qualification. The Connexions service makes a positive impact and, with its new contract, it will focus on helping schools to achieve the Investor in Careers Award.

The council has agreed with schools a new 14-19 strategy and progress has been made in improving the flexibility of provision for post-16 education. Collaboration between schools is good and shared courses across all post-16 provision will be in place by September 2007, considerably improving its cost-effectiveness. At present, there are still insufficient Level 2 courses available for students. The authority has been innovative in seeking to be a gateway authority offering specialised diplomas. Further innovations include video conferencing to support modern foreign language courses and shared provision for further mathematics courses with a school in Reading.

The council has a good focus on its accommodation strategy for vulnerable groups of young people, in particular for homeless 16-17 year olds, care leavers and teenage parents. Joint assessments by housing associations and the supported lodging co-ordinator have had a significant impact on improving the outcomes for these groups. The percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation has increased from 78% to 100%. The local authority has a very good performance in assisting care leavers to become engaged in employment, education or training, achieving 20% more than their target. A new scheme 'Pathways 2 Employment' has further improved work placements.

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

Overall, Wokingham District Council has adequate capacity to make further improvements to its services for children and young people. The council has rightly identified the areas for improvement in their CYPP. More effective leadership to address the needs of looked after children and the council's social services assessment arrangements for children and families is key to what the council's leaders need to focus on in future.

The council has responded well to some important areas for improvement highlighted in the 2005 annual performance assessment. For example, the Council has improved the Teenage Parent Support Strategy across the *Every Child Matters* agenda; reduced teenage conceptions to the lowest in the country and informed the CYPP further with additional needs analysis for children and young people. This now covers some minority groups, such as young people involved with drugs and substance abuse, transient/missing children and refugees/asylum seekers. The council is responding to all other areas previously identified for improvement.

The past year has seen changes at senior level, whilst the Chief Executive has ably held the Director of Children's Services responsibilities. The appointment of the new Director of Children's Services has a significant part to play in the management of future services and in key areas for further development. The reorganised directorate intends to provide for the full integration of children's services in line with the policies and expectations of the *Every Child Matters* agenda. There is evidence that the authority has achieved improvements in a number of areas over the last year and addressed some of the shortfalls in the provision to improve services for looked after children. There are, however, a number of areas that still require significant improvement, particularly the number of looked after children placed outside the borough and their outcomes.

The conclusion of the Children's Trust pilot has resulted in positive partnerships being forged, whilst governance and accountability arrangements have proved successful.

Wokingham Children's Services are in the final stages of implementing a corporate performance management system ('Work Together') putting key systems and indicators in place. The council maintain a high focus on the local authority workforce strategy, developing areas to support fully the CYPP.

Wokingham's planned expenditure during 2005/2006 identified that less is spent than its comparative authorities. However, from previous practise it is clear that the council has the financial capacity to manage innovation and respond appropriately to future needs.

## Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• proportion of schools achieving Healthy Schools status</li> <li>• support for teenage parents, 'Time Out' project and numbers returning to employment education and training</li> <li>• CAMHS and Autistic Spectrum Strategy (ASSIST).</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitoring health and well-being of looked after children living away from Wokingham.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safeguarding Board has made significant progress and an active business plan is in place</li> <li>• consultation with children and young people and their carers on the priorities contained in the CYPP</li> <li>• all looked after children have a qualified and named social worker</li> <li>• 100% child protection cases are reviewed on time.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improvement to short and long-term stability of looked after children</li> <li>• the number of looked after children and those newly placed at a considerable distance from home</li> <li>• improvement to the timing and completion of initial and core assessments.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good and improving standards at Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4, well above national averages</li> <li>• additional teaching resources for looked after children have resulted in a higher number achieving at least one GCSE this year</li> <li>• no looked after children excluded from school</li> <li>• robust support and challenge for underperforming schools.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• careful monitoring of absences of looked after children from school</li> <li>• raising standards in the few remaining schools that are below floor targets</li> <li>• reducing secondary permanent exclusions.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• children and young people with LDD are helped to access leisure and recreation facilities</li> <li>• respite care residential unit supporting young people with LDD and their families offers a high quality service.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduction in numbers of final warnings reprimands and criminalisation of looked after children</li> <li>• reduction in re-offending rates.</li> </ul>

<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• continued progress of the federation of post-16 education</li> <li>• 100% of care leavers in suitable accommodation</li> <li>• employment, education or training for a large number of care leavers and young people with LDD.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• breadth of provision for Level 2 courses post-16.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support and challenge for school improvement in proportion to need from advisers and consultants</li> <li>• good progress with the change for children programme, including development of extended schools</li> <li>• pilot of Children's Trust and using the outcomes positively to develop the seven neighbourhood centres.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• re-evaluation of corporate parenting and its effectiveness for looked after children and their life chances</li> <li>• success at recruiting local fostering opportunities.</li> </ul>

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

- More effective leadership to address the needs of looked after children.
- More timely social services assessment arrangements for children and families.
- Corporate parenting re-evaluation including placement out of area.
- Transition from children to adult services.
- Stability of placements and recruitment strategy for local foster carers.
- Schools remaining below floor targets.
- Reduction in the levels of secondary exclusions.

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**

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**JONATHAN PHILLIPS**

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