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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
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CONTENTS	PARAGRAPHS
INTRODUCTION	1 - 3
COMMENTARY	4 - 12
SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Context	13 - 15
Performance	16
Funding	17 - 21
Council Structure	22 - 24
The Education Development Plan	25 - 34
The Allocation of Resources to Priorities	35 - 39
Recommendations	
SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Implications of other functions	40 - 43
Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention	44 - 50
Collection and Analysis of Data	51 - 53
Support for Literacy	54 - 57
Support for Numeracy	58 - 61
Support for ICT	62 - 66
Support for Schools Causing Concern	67 - 71
Support for Governors	72 - 74
Support for School Management	75 - 78
Other areas	79 - 81
Recommendations	
SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	
Corporate Planning	82 - 93
Management Services	94 - 100
Summary and Evaluation	101
Recommendations	
SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION	
Strategy	102 - 107
Statutory Obligations	108
Allocation and Management of Resources	109 - 110
Recommendations	

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The Supply of School Places and Admissions	111
Asset Management Plans and Property Services	112 - 114
School Meals	115
Attendance	116 - 119
Behaviour Support and Exclusions	120 - 125
Provision of Education Otherwise Than At School	126 - 127
Looked-After Children	128
Health, Safety, Welfare, Child Protection	129
Ethnic Minority Children	130 - 131
Social Exclusion	132
Recommendations	

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (July 1999)* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.

2. The inspection was based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, focus groups of headteachers and governors, staff in the education department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 53 schools. The response rate was 67 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one nursery, ten primary, five secondary and one special school. A further eight schools were visited as part of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy monitoring. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. As the centre of one of the world's great cities, Westminster is a magnet for rich and poor alike. It is home to a highly mobile and ethnically diverse population, to many thriving businesses and to some areas of multiple deprivation. Its primary schools are small, well resourced and generally well regarded by parents, although the evidence suggests that some may be underperforming. With the exception of the girls' schools, the secondary sector has a less enviable reputation. Indeed it has recently been the stage upon which some of the major national educational dramas, in particular the murder of a respected headteacher, have been played out. Education has not always been at the forefront of the Council's concerns. In 1993 it reduced its education department to an absolute minimum. Since 1996 there has been a slow and gradual process of rebuilding which accelerated in 1999 with the re-establishment of an education department headed by a director.

5. Under the thoughtful and effective educational leadership of the director, who has built a consensus of overwhelming support, there has been considerable progress which has accelerated in the last eight months. However, the LEA is not yet as effective as it needs to be in order to tackle all its problems and, in particular, to turn the secondary sector around.

6. The LEA performs well in the following areas:

- the exercise of its Special Educational Needs functions;
- the provision of data to schools;
- the work of the school improvement team;
- English as an Additional Language support for pupils;
- education otherwise than at school;
- governor support;
- personnel; and
- school meals.

7. In the following areas it is not performing adequately:

- the allocation of resources to priorities;
- support for secondary schools causing concern;
- shared understanding and implementation of the Code of Practice for LEA – School relationships;
- looked-after children;
- the Education Development Plan;
- support for headteachers and management in schools;
- behaviour and exclusions;
- support for attendance in the secondary sector;
- preparation for fair funding;
- arrangements for dealing with schools with deficits;
- payroll and property services;
- the Local Management in Schools (LMS) formula;
- curriculum Information Communication Technology;
- combating racism;
- the provision of education welfare; and
- support for schools in deficit.

8. Despite recent improvement, the LEA is in many respects several years behind comparable London authorities and is now running to catch up. Secondary schools, in particular, languished during the days when education was low on elected members' list of priorities. The heritage of the years of neglect is particularly apparent in very poor attendance and unacceptably high levels of exclusion. Although there has been a great leap forward both in knowledge of schools and in supply and analysis of data, the challenging of underachievement is not yet fully embedded across the LEA.

9. The Council's commendable concern for efficiency and economy in the delivery of services has led it to adopt structures and processes that work well for many of its functions, but not for education. A corporate culture of accountability and measuring the measurable has led to a preoccupation with processes and a failure to evaluate. In education this has led to a frustrating fragmentation and a failure to make explicit intended outcomes for pupils' learning. A simplification of structures is now needed to make them fit for purpose, and to ensure that the currently fragmented elements of school improvement are brought together into a coherent whole. The newly emergent culture of evaluation needs to be strengthened and focused so that all that the education department does is judged in terms of its contribution to school improvement.

10. High spending though it is on education, there is a lack of transparency in the council's financial arrangements, in particular for school improvement, tenuous links between priorities and resources, and, until recently, an apparent reluctance to delegate to schools. There is no long term commitment to the stable funding of key services to support school improvement and social inclusion, such as the behaviour support team.

11. The Council's principal preoccupation is with the delivery of services. In concentrating exclusively on that, it has failed to formulate a vision which encompasses the needs of all elements in the community. Hence its ineffectiveness in fulfilling its educational responsibilities in respect of social exclusion. Its failure as corporate parent to fulfil its educational responsibilities to looked-after children is of particular concern.

12. It is clear that the climate has changed and is still changing. Although weaknesses currently outweigh strengths in this LEA it is certainly set on an upward trajectory. There is measurable improvement in the performance of many functions, but it is fragile. Both the new director and the new chair of education have the confidence of schools and others, an essential prerequisite for progress. Within the department, there is now a vision for education which is fully endorsed by the schools. Education in Westminster now needs the unequivocal support of both the new chief executive and members to become fully effective in promoting school improvement. If that is forthcoming, the authority will have the capacity both to realise its vision and to implement the recommendations of this report. A return inspection will be needed to ensure that improvement continues.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

13. Westminster is a borough of sharp contrasts between great wealth and extreme poverty. Home of Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament, it also covers Paddington Station and surrounding areas full of bed and breakfast hotels and hostels for homeless families and refugees. A number of wards containing sprawling estates suffer acute disadvantage including severe drug problems, whilst elsewhere leafy streets house some of the most expensive property in London.

14. About 28 per cent of borough residents are of minority ethnic origin, these range from diplomatic personnel and the wealthy to homeless refugees and asylum seekers. In January 1999, 677 Westminster pupils were classified as homeless and approximately 2000 as refugees or asylum seekers. Pupil mobility is high with, 10 per cent or more of the pupil roll changing annually. Fifty nine per cent of children in Westminster schools are of minority ethnic origin of whom 52 per cent have English as an additional language (EAL). Forty two per cent of primary pupils and 38 per cent of secondary pupils are eligible for free school meals compared with 22 per cent and 18 per cent nationally. As many as 25 per cent of resident children are educated in the non-maintained sector and at secondary level only between 40 and 43 per cent of pupils are borough residents. The percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN) is around the national level as calculated by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) at three per cent.

15. Westminster has 53 schools. There are three nurseries, 40 primary schools, two special schools and eight secondary. Three of the primary schools are infant, two are junior and the remainder are combined infant and junior schools. A high proportion of these are church schools. Nursery units are attached to 28 schools and there are part time early years places for all resident four-year-olds. Primary schools are mostly small, with over half being one form entry only. All bar one of the eight comprehensive secondary schools have sixth forms. Three of these are single sex church schools, one for boys and two for girls. Thus there is a preponderance of boys in the mixed comprehensive schools.

Performance

16. A detailed analysis of the performance of schools in Westminster has been supplied to the LEA by OFSTED. The following information has been identified from the statistical profile as well as from information made available directly by the LEA.

- Pupils entering Westminster schools at the age of 5, in Autumn 1999, showed a profile above the national average. This finding is in line with the 1998 assessment.
- At Key Stage 1 pupils attain below the national average in all aspects of English and in mathematics, although above similar authorities in English.
- At Key Stage 2 attainment is broadly in line with national averages and above similar authorities. The rate of improvement is below the national rate across all subjects.

- Although there has been some narrowing of the gap between the national averages and Westminster's attainment in Key Stage 3 since 1997, results in 1999 still show a picture of below national average results.
- This pattern of below national average results in Westminster continues into GCSE and A level. However, in 1999 Advanced GNVQ results were comparable to those achieved nationally and at intermediate level the results were well above average national results.
- Currently one secondary school in Westminster is subject to special measures and three, two secondary and one primary, have been judged by OFSTED to have serious weaknesses. The LEA has identified a further five schools, one secondary and four primary, as causing concern.
- OFSTED inspections show more primary schools in Westminster obtaining good, or better, judgements on quality of education and on efficiency than there are nationally or in statistical neighbours. Only a very small percentage of secondary schools have obtained good, or better, judgements on any of the indicators.
- Permanent exclusions of pupils in primary schools are above the national average although, less than the average in similar LEAs. In secondary schools the number is well above the number of pupils permanently excluded nationally and above that in statistical neighbours.
- Rates of attendance in 1999, in both primary and secondary schools, are well below national rates as well as below the rates of attendance in similar LEAs.

Funding

17. The Local School Budget (LSB) per pupil for Westminster City Council in the 1999/00 estimates is £3806, the third highest for inner London LEAs. The LEA has consistently spent above Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) on education services. Spending has fallen from 13 per cent to 9 per cent above since 1998/99 as a result of financial constraints placed on the Council by cuts in government support and the imperative given to low Council Tax. As a consequence the LEA will not be passporting a 6 per cent increase in SSA through to the education budget, which will rise by only 4.5 per cent. This could result in the loss of £675,000 for 2000/01. There will be continuing pressure to drive down expenditure.

18. For the financial year 1999/00, the LEA delegated only 75.1 per cent of its education budget to schools. From 1996/97, the level of delegation fell year on year and was consistently lower than the average for inner London LEAs. Until 2000/01 the LEA traded few services to schools and offered them limited financial autonomy. It also increased expenditure centrally mainly on provision for special education needs and school improvement. For the financial year 2000/01 the LEA has increased the level of delegation to 80 per cent, in line with DfEE requirements.

19. Both the primary and secondary local school budget per pupil exceeds the average for inner London. That for primary pupils is the second highest within inner London LEAs while that for secondary pupils is the fourth highest. Primary schools are generally better resourced than secondary schools and tend to be in surplus, whereas half the secondary schools are carrying substantial deficits.

20. The current Local Management of Schools (LMS) formula is simple and relatively transparent. However, it needs reviewing to redress an apparent bias towards the primary phase and, more importantly, to provide a rational basis for financial management following the implementation of Fair Funding.

The spending per pupil for the Fair Funding categories for 1999/00 for the LEA is:

	Westminster City Council (£ per pupil)	Average for Inner London Local Education Authorities (£ per pupil)	Average for All English Local Education Authorities (£ per pupil)
Strategic Management	86	140	97
Special Education	316	247	152
School Improvement	141	51	22
Access	208	158	82
Home to School Transport	114	74	69
Non-devolved specific grants	79	77	41

21. The spending per pupil on school improvement and home to school transport is the highest for all LEAs, and that for special education is the second highest. This, in part, reflects the relatively low level of delegation of the education budget and high cost related to pupils with special education needs. However, while the LEA has made a conscious decision to allocate resources to school improvement, some 40 per cent of the expenditure under this head is a result of tightening of the definitions of the costs included under strategic management for 1999/2000 compared with previous years. This has had the effect of shifting around £1m of overheads from the strategic management heads to other Fair Funding categories, notably to school improvement. These changes have been prompted by the need to reduce the per pupil spending on strategic management to within government targets rather than to reflect the allocation of resources to LEA priorities. The effect has been to reduce the transparency and openness of the figures used to reflect the cost of LEA activity.

Council Structure

22. Westminster Council consists of 60 members, 47 Conservative and 13 Labour. The Council retains a traditional structure. Since 1995, a scrutiny panel has been nominally attached to the policy and resources committee (P&R) but it has never met. An education committee including diocesan representatives is responsible for policy and strategy and an education operational sub-committee, also including diocesan representatives, is responsible for implementation and monitoring. This structure separates strategic policy formulation from implementation and monitoring, allowing members of the education committee to focus clearly on policy issues. There is also a school performance forum composed of members of the education committee. Set up in 1997, this group reviews the progress of schools in turn. These arrangements are satisfactory and ensure that members and officers are clear about their respective roles.

23. Education in Westminster Council has undergone a series of reorganisations since it was inherited from ILEA in 1990. Cut back dramatically in 1993, it survived in a minimal form as part of a joint department until 1996 when an education specialist was appointed as assistant director and subsequently as chief education officer. Reorganisation in 1999 created a free-standing education department with the former chief education officer appointed to the role of director and reporting directly to the chief executive. The new structure includes two assistant directors (AD), one for schools and one for lifetime learning. The AD schools had just taken up post at the time of the inspection.

24. Westminster council has a longstanding commitment to what it calls an 'enabling model'. This is characterised by a client/provider split, market testing and contracting out of services accompanied by strong monitoring mechanisms. The inspection team was not able to identify any major benefits to schools from these complicated structures. The overwhelming view of headteachers is that they are dysfunctional, inefficient and confusing. Indeed, six of the schools visited cited specific instances where their complexity resulted in duplication of administrative tasks. Others felt that they "did not facilitate effective co-ordination of key work" and complained of fragmentation and compartmentalisation.

The Education Development Plan

25. The EDP was approved by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for the full three years on specific conditions (as well as the general conditions applicable to all LEAs). Those were:

- that the LEA set out an improved strategy for supporting schools causing concern;
- that routine monitoring visits to schools are reduced to a maximum of three per school per year; and
- that activities which should be funded through delegation to schools should be removed.

26. The EDP sets eight priorities to:

1. invest in quality early years education;
2. support primary schools with a focus on literacy and numeracy;
3. improve the quality of education in secondary schools;
4. enhance learning skills through information and communications technology;
5. promote inclusive education;
6. boost achievement by pupils from minority ethnic groups;
7. extend the community and business contribution to educational achievement; and
8. improve LEA support for school self-improvement.

27. These priorities are related to an insufficiently detailed audit of needs which has impaired the LEA's ability to prioritise. The consultation on the plan is very clearly worked out and appropriate. The school survey suggests that it succeeded on the whole in securing the commitment of schools and this was confirmed, with some reservations, on visits to schools.

28. The main issue raised by the plan is one of feasibility. The Secretary of State's conditions raise the related question of cost. Each priority is analysed into up to six activities, with further sub-division into many specific actions. The number of actions proposed raises serious questions about whether all can, or should, be completed.

29. In addition, the plan lacks strategic and operational coherence. Priority 8 sets out an aspiration to support school self-improvement, a strategy that needs to be broadened to include rather more than the use of management information. However, the highly specific and multiple nature of the tasks the LEA is proposing to attempt under the other seven priorities risks creating something of a dependency culture. There are some opaque references to raising awareness and some areas – for example, priority 5, activity 6: “improve attendance and reduce number of exclusions” where the actions proposed are so inadequate as to suggest that the LEA is simply at a loss. The link between actions, priorities and targets is, however, usually clear. Nevertheless, success criteria generally lack precision and are not quantified. Many establish no more than the completion of a task, with no clear connection to outcomes. Where outcomes are specified, they frequently refer to improvement – but not by how much.

30. The data used to set targets were limited. Where school targets have been insufficiently challenging, more recently discussion seems to have focused appropriately on the action to be taken to raise the school's sight above the level of extrapolation and to hit the revised targets. The LEA has chosen not to identify those schools whose targets were insufficiently challenging – a questionable, but common practice.

31. As set out in the EDP, planning for schools causing concern is inadequate. The criteria for identifying such schools are set out at considerable length, but the plan is very short on any corresponding detail on what is to be done to raise the performance of the schools.

32. When the EDP was produced, the LEA was at a very early stage of development in the area of ethnic monitoring of attainment. The EDP states that “schools causing concern within Westminster have significant issues relating to the achievement of pupils from minority ethnic groups”. It pledges that the authority will establish a baseline of accurate information about minority ethnic achievement and this has been done. The LEA needs to use the data in order to establish what the ‘significant issues’ are and decide what it is going to do about them. This is a matter of particular urgency in the secondary sector.

33. Overall, the plan has too many weaknesses to be helpful as a working document. It is vast in scale, excessively ambitious with regard to what the LEA proposes to do, and excessively pessimistic about what schools can and should do for themselves. However, in the light of conditions of approval laid down by the DfEE and its own monitoring of progress the LEA has now acknowledged some of these weaknesses and proposed sensible revisions. Routine monitoring visits are reduced to three per annum and it rightly proposes to replace priority 7 with a new priority to “support and challenge schools causing concern”.

34. Although schools express broad approval for the plan and its priorities, it has had very limited impact on their planning and practice. Nonetheless, progress has been made in moving towards the targets set for Key Stage 2, although more in mathematics than in English. In 1999, 70 per cent reached level 4 in English, an

increase of one per cent and 71 reached it in mathematics, an increase of nine per cent. There has been progress in reducing exclusions but none in reducing unauthorised absence.

The Allocation of Resources to Priorities

35. Despite the commitment shown by Westminster to maintaining the education budget above SSA, the corporate priorities as set out in the draft best value performance plan of the Council do not include raising achievement in schools. The processes by which resources are allocated to priorities are not well linked through a clear set of activities to educational outcomes. While the LEA's business planning process has contributed to tight control of the education budget, it does not provide an open and transparent mechanism for the allocation of resources to education priorities. The Council is not well placed to deliver best value in relation to its education services.

36. The LEA is late in preparing for delegation of financial responsibility to schools. As a consequence it needs to secure an increase in delegation to schools of almost five per cent of its education budget from 1 April 2000. Furthermore, the arrangements for financial accountability to schools across central LEA departments are underdeveloped. Few departments are prepared for trading services effectively with schools.

37. The LEA is working to catch up and respond belatedly to the government agenda but its capacity to do so has only been established during the past six months with the appointment of the assistant director of schools and the head of development. An immediate priority is to comply with the delegation requirements under the fair funding regime. Consultation should have commenced in autumn 1998. Apart from building maintenance expenditure, which was delegated from 1 April 1999, consultation did not commence until Summer 1999. A series of options for packaging services subject to delegation was developed in the autumn of 1999. But neither the LEA nor the schools were sufficiently prepared for Fair Funding. The LEA sought the agreement of schools to 100 per cent buy back of delegated services for 2000/01. While all primary schools have agreed to this, secondary schools have been more reluctant and some have exercised the right to opt out of services selectively.

38. Work has now commenced in earnest on preparation of schools and services. Service specifications have been drafted in consultation with schools; service costs have been disaggregated and analysed to enable schools to draw up their budgets for 2000/01. The vehicle for developing the new relationship between schools and the LEA, is a new 'services to schools' board. At the time of the inspection the board was being established and details of how it would be constituted were being developed in partnership with schools.

39. The LEA and schools are clearly in an unsatisfactory state of preparation to implement such a large scale delegation. Faced with a range of problems in relation to the belated implementation of Fair Funding, the LEA strategy is of the appropriate urgency. However, too much of the focus to date has been on preparing the service providers for change. Too little attention has been given to preparing schools and to the consultation needed to tailor services to meet schools needs.

Recommendations

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement, the LEA should:

- simplify central structures to make them fit for the purpose of supporting school improvement;
- use data on minority ethnic achievement as a basis for action on significant issues in schools;
- produce a clear framework of principles and practices for the allocation of resources to education;
- set out medium term commitments to levels of education funding;
- scrutinise central department allocated overheads to ensure that they are fair and represent good value for money;
- review the current performance management and quality assurance systems to ensure that they meet the demands of the Best Value regime;
- commence a fundamental review of the LMS formula to provide a more objective and fair allocation of resources to schools following the implementation of Fair Funding.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

40. Progress towards getting school improvement firmly on the LEA agenda in Westminster has increased apace over the past year. An understanding of the implications of this clear change of focus, however, is not uniform and school improvement is not yet embedded in all of the authority's work.

41. The school improvement and planning group, sited in schools division, is at the forefront of the change of focus, and the EDP is regarded as the main driver of school improvement. There is an increasing recognition that school improvement is a departmental responsibility and good links that are impacting positively are being established, for example with pupils' services and libraries and archives.

42. An inhibitor to development is the relatively few staff available to support key school improvement activities, whether employed by the LEA or commissioned externally. In many cases these activities are the result of statutory requirements or clear government expectations, for example in early years and in ICT. The unwillingness to delegate monies to schools has compounded the situation. The costs currently attributed to the school improvement function in the LEA would suggest a different picture, as they are considerably higher than in any other authority. This lack of transparency prevents the making of a clear judgement on whether the level, nature and impact of the activity on school improvement is value for money. Standards achieved and the level of support seen on the ground raise the transparency of funding for school improvement as an issue that needs to be addressed urgently.

43. There are a number of services within the department that are contributing significantly to school improvement. These services include research and planning, personnel, and Special Educational Needs.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

44. Arrangements for the authority to carry out its monitoring, challenge, intervention and support function vary between sectors. In primary schools a team of three school development officers (SDOs), located in the school improvement and planning group, are allocated to a complement of approximately fifteen primary or nursery schools each. A recently appointed curriculum development officer, sited in Pupil Services, works with the two special schools and mainstream schools. Three part time attached consultants from a private company have been allocated to the eight secondary schools.

45. Overall responsibility rests with the Head of School Improvement and Planning, who has worked hard and effectively since establishing her team, just over 18 months ago, to overcome the inheritance of the past. She and her team of SDOs are highly effective where their remit runs: but, as described above, it is a partial remit. They are highly regarded by schools and have gone a long way towards rebuilding trust in, and professional respect for, the authority.

46. Currently primary schools have an entitlement of six days a year from SDOs, three days for monitoring and three for support. Additional time is allocated to any school that is identified by the LEA or OFSTED as a cause for concern. There is

ample evidence of the effective work done by the SDOs in primary schools and of its contribution to school improvement.

47. The school improvement function in secondary schools rests with a private contractor. The three year contract was actioned in June 1999 and provides for each secondary school to have ten days of support, challenge and monitoring including access to specialist expertise. Support and development for middle managers is also provided through the curriculum development project. The work is carefully monitored through regular meetings, often weekly, between the project manager and the head of school improvement and planning. There are half termly written monitoring reports and review meetings with headteachers.

48. Some aspects of monitoring and challenge, relating for example to the use of data to set targets and raise expectations, are being delivered appropriately and effectively in secondary schools. However, when a problem is beginning to emerge there are some difficulties in relation to challenge and intervention. Schools express a concern that roles and responsibilities are neither defined or agreed. While they have received some good support, they are less confident about the appropriateness of intervention by external consultants. There is a lack of clarity as to who is the client for different parts of the work, especially as some of the schools are beginning to buy additional services from the contractor themselves; there is a potential for a conflict of interests. Similar concerns are expressed by the representatives from the two dioceses. The overall situation is unclear.

49. While progress is being made towards meeting the requirements of the Code of Practice, this aspect of the LEA's work is not yet secure for a number of reasons. First, the arrangements with schools operate in almost complete isolation from each other and get in the way of the provision of a coherent, consistent, co-ordinated service that can deliver what is required in order to raise standards. Second, the level of resource allocated to monitoring, challenge, intervention and support, in the light of the task that has to be done to redress past neglect, is inadequate to enable the authority to work effectively with all but the most obviously needy of schools or to deliver each of the four requirements effectively. The lean staffing means that often difficulties in schools are not spotted early enough to avert a crisis and results in the very staff who are charged with 'knowing' schools, and putting into place systems and structures that will ensure that schools maintain their progress and avoid problems, being pulled off key monitoring and preventative work to deal with the crisis. There is evidence, for example, of schools in both sectors that were making good progress while they were under the spotlight and money and support was pouring in, that have begun to regress as the support has been refocused elsewhere too soon. Lack of any slack in the system also means that staffing gaps cause further difficulties as priorities are re-ordered to enable the LEA to deal with the short term at the expense of the long term. An example of this is the recent allocation of ICT to an SDO to cover a vacated post.

50. Third, within the department, in individual teams and most crucially in schools, there is a lack of understanding of exactly what is meant by the terms monitoring, challenge, intervention and support. While a number of documents make reference to these activities, there is no clear and unequivocal statement about what they mean; where respective responsibilities lie; how much time is available for what; or about how other key players, such as the diocese, are involved. Confusion relating to the designation of schools has led to some serious misunderstandings between the LEA and schools and there are examples of unnecessary difficulties being

caused because procedures have not been clear. Fourth, there are few occasions when all the respective teams come together to share good practice, agree common systems, influence policy and practice and ensure that their learning is integrated into each others' thinking. Not only is this inefficient and not cost effective it also risks different practices and messages being conveyed to schools in different phases.

Collection and Analysis of Data

51. Following the appointment of a research and development planning officer in June 1998, effective systems have been put in place to enable the authority to collect information and establish a solid data base to inform decision making. Schools welcome the different kinds of information that are now available, which include trend and comparative data across the key stage results. The training and support provided across all schools has been relevant and immediately useful. The service is now at least satisfactory and has a number of very good elements.

52. While there is still insecurity in some schools about how to use the information most productively, one to one discussions with the LEA are making the use of data a much more familiar and essential activity and helping to cement the new relationship with the LEA. There is recognition, for example, that target setting is a meaningless activity without adequate data and its successful completion comes about through joint analysis of appropriate information. School visits confirm that targets are now being discussed and challenged by the LEA and, in some cases, this has led to an increase in targets. Schools report that they welcome the challenge and are also very positive about collaborative activities such as those undertaken by the primary and secondary data liaison groups, which enable practitioners' views to be heard.

53. While a great deal of progress has been made in collecting data that enables the authority to monitor performance, particularly at an individual pupil level, not enough consideration has yet been given to its use in overall evaluation of LEA and individual school effectiveness in terms of school improvement. Often separate data are looked at in isolation and key connections are not made between different phases, different groups, different contexts and the information available from other sources.

Support for Literacy

54. Support for literacy is satisfactory overall in the majority of primary, secondary and special schools and good in four of the primary schools visited on the inspection. The authority has supported literacy for a considerable number of years through a variety of targeted projects. Four schools visited said that involvement in earlier projects had helped them move smoothly into the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) and one still involved in Reading Recovery spoke highly of the responsiveness that had been shown in providing support for specific difficulties. The majority of the LEA's efforts are now focused on NLS although there is evidence of some support in secondary schools, particularly where a school is involved in developments such as Excellence in Cities and literacy summer schools.

55. In spite of this early focus on literacy, standards in English show considerable variation across the key stages and only reach a level that is in line with the national average at Key Stage 2. At Key Stage 1 all aspects of English are below the national average although above the results obtained by similar authorities. The lack

of detailed information available on past performance and progress achieved, has made it difficult for the authority to set its targets for Key Stage 2 with confidence, or to be certain that it had selected the most appropriate schools for intensive or additional support. Over the last year more detailed data, including comparative data, have become available in the authority and this has enabled the processes of target setting and targeting schools for additional help, to be reviewed. Expectations of what can be achieved have been raised in some schools and this has led to a raising of their targets. While the authority is expecting to meet its 2002 target of 77 per cent, the expected level of progress has not been sustained. In 1999 the one per cent increase in results was below the LEA's own target by three per cent and below the national increase of four per cent. There was also a clear difference in the attainment between the sexes with boys' results being relatively better than those nationally while girls' results were at or below national levels. The need to focus more sharply on writing, including spelling, has been identified by the authority as a priority as has support for monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

56. Literacy support is contracted from one of the LEA's trading units, the language, achievement and basic skills service, by the school improvement and planning group. This separation out of the service does not seem to serve any obviously useful purpose as all resources for literacy are held at the centre. There is also evidence that: the separation leads to duplication of effort, prevents early identification of problems and/or training needs in schools not receiving regular support, and gets in the way of the LEA being able to provide a coherent and consistent service that is locked firmly into its school improvement processes across all schools. Failure to embed the literacy strategy securely in school improvement is also reflected in the EDP, where the implementation of the NLS is identified in priority 2 alongside seven other major activities to support primary schools and only referred to in general terms, in relation to overall attainment, in the audit for priority 3 - improving the quality of education in secondary schools.

57. Some good partnerships have been forged to add value to the literacy support that is available from the unit. Some examples of these partnerships are: the school library service, which is approachable and offers good value; the accessing of business mentors to listen to pupils read; work with Westminster adult education service to link in to family literacy schemes. Overall the LEA's work is effective in supporting improvement in literacy.

Support for Numeracy

58. The LEA's strategy for supporting numeracy is satisfactory. However, as in literacy, it is buried in priorities 2 and 3 of the EDP and only written of in very general terms. Also in common with literacy, the support for numeracy is contracted from the language, achievement and basic skills service and suffers from the same difficulties.

59. Standards in mathematics are below the national average across the key stages with the exception of Key Stage 2, where they are slightly above the national average and above statistical neighbours. At Key Stage 3, standards of attainment are well adrift of national standards but in line with statistical neighbours. Results at key stages 1 and 2 in 1999 demonstrated that progress is being made with a narrowing of the gap between Westminster results and national results. At Key Stage 2 this progress was quite significant with an improvement of nine percentage points while still one per cent behind the progress shown nationally. The level of

progress achieved was not predicted by the authority and, consequently, it is now ahead of the target it set itself. Its view is probably rightly, that it is still on track to meet, not exceed, the predicted 2002 target of 75 per cent.

60. Primary schools are positive about the level of support that is available from the LEA for the introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS). The training and consultancy support are regarded as good quality and one school, that has almost doubled its results this year, praised the joint work of the consultant and the SDO who offered support, advice and challenge. Good use is being made of leading mathematics teachers across the authority and there are appropriate links to other initiatives such as family numeracy. The majority of schools appear to have received at least some level of support. However, there is some indication that monitoring of progress, in order to target early intervention, is not as secure as it should be. One school, whose results dropped in 1999, reported a lack of response to a number of calls for help.

61. Secondary schools are far less positive about LEA support than primary schools, with only 50 per cent of those responding to the school survey identifying support as satisfactory. This picture is confirmed by the school visits. Where support is satisfactory in the secondary sector it is being provided within a project context. Although it is early days, there is evidence of some success in bringing together primary and secondary schools to work on developing positive strategies to tackle the transition dip in attainment between Key Stages 2 and 3.

Support for ICT

62. The history of support for ICT in Westminster over the past few years is poor. A clear vision, aims and strategy for developing ICT have been lacking. While there is evidence of increasingly satisfactory support for the technical aspects of ICT, provision for pupils in schools, and especially support for the curriculum, remains unsatisfactory. The lack of adequate ICT education expertise in the borough has resulted in the authority being unable to take advantage of national developments early enough to support schools appropriately. This has been compounded by the LEA's failure to work in partnership with schools to analyse progress, to identify staff and pupil need and to develop a strategy that will deliver.

63. The inheritance of this lack of support is reflected in more recent OFSTED inspection reports which show that right through Key Stages 1 – 3 progress in Information Technology is below that nationally and of the authority's statistical neighbours. The situation is particularly poor at Key Stage 3. For pupils aged 16 there is evidence of improvement, although no schools were reported as demonstrating good progress in comparison to schools nationally. The school survey and visits complete the picture, with the vast majority of schools responding negatively to questions relating to support from the LEA for ICT.

64. That there is need for urgent action is recognised in the LEA. The establishment of the Westminster Grid for Learning (WGfL) has got off to a slow start, as has the training for teachers supported through National Lottery monies. LEA structures and requirements have not always been helpful and the failure to co-ordinate available facilities and expertise has impeded the sharing of good practice. There has not as yet, for example, been a bringing together of school based ICT co-ordinators, or effective planning by the LEA for the more extensive use of the well equipped ICT suites set up in two primary schools to offer training for teachers.

65. There are signs that improvement in support is on its way. Responsibility for ICT has recently been assigned to an SDO who has undertaken a helpful analysis of the state of play; set in motion a full school audit of infrastructure, strategy plans and teachers' training needs; removed some log jams; got some very practical tasks underway and begun to work with schools to develop an effective short term and long term strategy for ICT. All this is positive but the task may be too big for one individual to manage, particularly when the SDOs already carry considerable responsibilities. A number of partnerships have been forged, for example, with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea to develop a joint city learning centre through Excellence in Cities and with the Westminster library to make wider links to the national library network available to schools.

Support for Schools Causing Concern

67. Currently one secondary school is subject to special measures. Three schools, two secondary and one primary, have serious weaknesses. Three schools, one secondary and two primary, were formerly subject to special measures but improved sufficiently to be removed from this category. One secondary school formerly judged to have serious weaknesses when re-inspected was judged to no longer have serious weaknesses; another, however, still had serious weaknesses when reinspected early in 2000.

68. Support for primary schools causing concern has improved and is now satisfactory although there are still some inconsistencies. It is not satisfactory in the secondary phase, although it is improving. Arrangements for identifying schools causing concern are now satisfactory although the communication to the school of the reasons for and implications of the categorisation is sometimes ineffective. Since April 1999, the LEA's knowledge of its schools has improved, and those which are causing concern now receive more extensive and focused support. The EDP for 2000/01 has been revised and support for schools causing concern is now rightly identified as a priority. However, while the support has become more effective and better related to need, the LEA's strategies are still evolving and are not yet sufficiently clear, developed or coherent.

69. For primary schools, the LEA's school development officers (SDOs) play key roles in helping to identify schools causing concern and in providing monitoring and support. Their work has been very effective in securing improvement and is well regarded by the schools, who see them as well informed and authoritative. Although the distinctions between their monitoring and support roles are increasingly understood, the strategic context within which they operate is still insufficiently clear. Also, there is little evidence of a clear LEA exit strategy for reducing support as the schools become more effective. However, satisfactory support has been provided for the schools' governing bodies, and there are instances of the successful appointment of additional governors. Action has been taken to improve the leadership and management of schools. Assistance from the LEA has helped schools to resolve some personnel issues; notably in the school recently removed from special measures where withdrawal of delegation enabled the LEA to help the school restructure its staffing and achieve, in effect, an internal fresh start.

70. Monitoring and support for the secondary schools causing concern is provided by a private contractor. In some situations, this support has been effective; for example in the secondary school removed from special measures in July 1999. In

the secondary school currently subject to special measures, the contractor identified an acting headteacher and two deputies at short notice in order to stabilise the school following the departure of the previous headteacher; however, its support for that headteacher had been ineffective. A more general concern is that there is a lack of clarity about the respective roles and responsibilities of the LEA and the contractor in relation to the secondary schools causing concern, and this means that the schools are unclear about whom they are accountable to for what. For instance, it is not clear whether the contractor has the legitimacy to challenge schools and intervene. The LEA has itself intervened directly in secondary schools, for example when identifying concerns and in order to facilitate changes in their leadership and management. In some cases this action has achieved some success but in others the LEA's interventions and support have been poorly co-ordinated.

71. The LEA judges the effectiveness of its action in general terms in relation to the schools' progress in eliminating their weaknesses and the causes of concern. However, there is no systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of particular strategies in relation to their costs.

Support for Governors

72. The governor support service is good in primary schools and at least satisfactory in the secondary sector. The service has made considerable progress over the last year in providing the appropriate support to ensure that statutory requirements are met by the LEA and governing bodies, and in disseminating information. In addition, a successful recruitment campaign has boosted the number of governors available.

73. Less progress has been made on developing a coherent and longer term strategy that focuses on the governors' role in helping to secure school improvement. A further weakness is the lack of a systematic or co-ordinated mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of governing bodies. The good links established between the governor development co-ordinator and other LEA staff, such as the SDOs, together with an increasing confidence in the service by governors, provide a good base for the development of a school improvement focus.

74. There are satisfactory procedures for identifying governors' training and support needs. Customised training for individual whole governing bodies has been undertaken in approximately half the schools and a useful induction programme and pack have been produced. Communication of information to governing bodies is good and a successful governors' conference, held last year, is being built on this year. Other support from the LEA to governors is good overall although there are some variations between services.

Support for School Management

75. Support for school management is unsatisfactory overall. Although a national priority, the development of leadership and management, while present, is not writ large in the authority's school improvement strategy. The EDP fails to include in its audit any thorough analysis of leadership and management in the borough and its impact on standards or quality.

76. Support has been limited and piecemeal until recently. Most heads have relied on their own networks for both support and advice and within the secondary sector this is still the case. Induction for new heads, where it has happened, has been limited in scope and primarily concerned with the sharing of factual information about the authority. The LEA has recognised that this neglect of such a key group of people, in terms of school improvement, must be remedied and has made a start. Discussions with headteachers about induction support and some opportunities for mentoring are underway although there is still no shared overall strategy or clarity about exactly what needs to be supported to secure improvement and why.

77. In the primary sector the appointment of the school development officers, and their running of a well regarded and clearly focused school self evaluation course, is already having an impact on senior management thinking and practice. The appointment of an external contractor to strengthen the LEA's support for management within secondary schools is not yet being seen by secondary heads as of sufficient weight to make a difference. The extension of the self evaluation course to secondary senior managers later this term is being welcomed, as is the introduction of strategic conferences by the director. The conferences, although still in their infancy, have the potential for impacting positively on the support provided by the LEA for school management.

78. At middle management level there is also some progress. For example, the advanced skills teachers (ASTs) project and the curriculum development manager initiative in the secondary sector, both recently commissioned from the private contractor, are designed to drive up standards by targeting key curriculum leaders for staff development and contributing to the building of a good practice network. A number of secondary heads have reported that they have been able to access some good quality support, for example in science.

Newly Qualified Teachers

79. The LEA has met its statutory responsibilities and ensured that schools understand the requirements relating to newly qualified teachers (NQTs). However, LEA support for NQTs suffers from the lack of a coherent and consistent joint school-LEA strategy that extends across the phases. Support in primary schools is just satisfactory, but it is poor in secondary schools. Primary schools note an improvement this year with the establishment of a jointly planned central programme delivered by LEA officers. This programme has been judged useful by primary schools but not by secondary schools, most of whom make their own support arrangements. Training has been provided for induction tutors in primary schools but not yet in secondary schools.

Early Years

80. Early childhood services, in the schools division of the education department, has primary responsibility for early years education. The service has established an early years development and childcare partnership and ensured that the borough is aware of, and meets, its statutory responsibilities. The service has made a good start in bringing together a range of statutory, private and voluntary providers to secure the writing of the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan. Most of the partnership's efforts to date have focused on the development of policy and strategy rather than practice, and there is little evidence of any evaluation of the impact provision is having on the raising of standards. Difficulties in making additional

appointments through the partnership, to ensure that there is an adequate number of staff to undertake all the responsibilities required, have not helped in a situation where the service is stretched already.

81. The importance of early years education is recognised by the borough and is reflected in the level of investment in nursery education, in the writing of an early years priority in the Education Development Plan and in the high quality early years provision offered in a number of settings, including the early years excellence centre. Government targets to provide free places for all four-year-olds and 66 per cent of three-years-olds have been met ahead of the timescales required, although there is still some work to do to ensure that there are enough places in the right location. However, the lack of: the involvement and co-ordination of the work of all key personnel, such as the SDOs, in the development of policy and strategy; regular and consistent collection and use of data to assess outcomes; a detailed analysis and targeted use of inspection information; and the creation of a more systematic way of sharing and spreading good practice, is hampering the borough's investment being fully realised in terms of the raising of standards.

Recommendations

In order to make school improvements more effective, the LEA should:

- in partnership with schools and other key players, review the LEA arrangements for meeting the requirements of the Code of Practice by:
 - clarifying processes, procedures and roles and responsibilities in particular to schools causing concern;
 - developing a coherent and consistent approach across all sectors, including nursery;
 - building on good work, for example in early years, and with leading Mathematics Teachers to promote good practice;
 - developing a proactive and rigorous approach to evaluation;
- review the literacy and numeracy commissioning arrangements;
- implement effective arrangements for the development and support for curriculum ICT;
- work in partnership with heads to draw up an appropriate action plan for supporting school management.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate Planning

82. The core corporate priority of Westminster Council is 'to provide quality services at an affordable cost'. Corporate core values are: enabling, meeting needs, environmental sustainability, partnership and commitment to staff.

83. The education department is required to plan and work within this framework. Thus, although it has its own business plan with the aims of raising educational achievement, creating and developing a learning community and facilitating access to knowledge, information and services, as usual, this plan has to operate within the broader corporate framework of the council and its general monitoring procedures. Hence the education department finds itself in some respects required to work through mechanisms, such as the client/provider split, and to values (described in paragraph 24) that do not necessarily reflect its own aims, tasks or commitments but those of the council as a whole.

84. The LEA allocates resources and secures value for money through the business planning process and the enabling programme. These mechanisms have substantial strengths. They are very clear and provide a consistent framework for managers to work within across all areas of Council activity. They have provided a robust system of financial control, a secure basis for corporate financial planning and a structured mechanism for identifying savings and additional resources.

85. Although the planning process works well when the departmental processes provide a clear link between resources allocated, activity and clearly measurable outputs, it is not so effective in addressing the qualitative outcome of departmental activity. Within education the link between the education department activity and outcomes in terms of attainment or attendance is complex and difficult to assess. It is therefore not surprising that the way in which the business planning process has been applied includes targets and outputs which are easily measurable and reflect services provided to schools rather than the impact of education department activity on educational outcomes. It also explains why the Educational Development Plan (which has at its heart improving educational outcomes) is peripheral rather than central to LEA planning.

86. Moreover, the business planning process has failed completely to take account of the implications of the delegation of financial responsibility to schools under the Local Management in Schools legislation, in particular the increasing pressure for more delegation to schools and for the LEA to be accountable to schools for the resources it uses on the schools' behalf. The enabling programme, which has been effective elsewhere within the Council in challenging services to compete against the private sector, would have been useful in preparing LEA services for the rigour of fair funding. Curiously this did not happen and the opportunity has effectively been missed.

87. The corporate context gives very high priority to keeping council tax levels low. The corporate core values and priorities make no reference to education. Hence the dominant view in schools is that the Council's stance in respect of education has been one of political indifference. The corporate commitment to 'quality services' begs questions about access and disadvantage issues that the education

department is now addressing and will increasingly have to address, if it is to successfully support school improvement.

88. There are signs that this may be changing. The able and pragmatic current chair of education who took up post in June is well regarded by schools and has made it his business to visit them and listen carefully to what they are saying. In addition, the most recent leader's speech refers to "a strong commitment to improving standards of education in Westminster". The director worked hard in his previous position to keep members informed about educational matters. Building on those foundations and working in concert with the new chair, he has now set out an educational vision for the borough. This vision and his leadership are enthusiastically endorsed by the schools and there is considerable evidence of substantial improvement flowing from its implementation.

89. Although partnership is a corporate core value of the council, experience of it in action is mixed. Two education based partnerships have secured substantial Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and other external funding for work in schools and the community. Although schools value the contribution of the learning partnership, for instance in the provision of literacy volunteers in schools, there is little if any evidence of impact on the development of the post-16 vocational curriculum. Schools themselves have largely powered this successful developmental work. A substantial strand of the community partnerships work is intended to "promote initiatives of benefit to ethnic minorities". Some primary schools point to improvement in parental support for their work as a result of parental attendance at EAL or ICT classes as well as knock on effects on children's learning. There has however been little systematic evaluation of this work.

90. Partnerships with the police are very well established and particularly effective. Truancy patrols, an extensive schools' involvement programme and work relating to the implementation of the report into the death of Stephen Lawrence (described in Section 5 of this report) are much valued in schools. The director chairs the drugs action team and there is very close joint working on drug issues between the police, the LEA and the health authority. Communication with the health authority is improving. Extensive partnership working led to the successful establishment of the LEA initiated Education Action Zone. The diocesan authorities have good professional working relationships with the education department and particularly with the director, whose contribution they rate highly. Relations with members are mostly cordial although there are concerns that they do not fully understand the division of responsibilities between themselves and the dioceses.

91. Relations with the Westminster race equality council have not been good in the past. From a low base there is now some improvement but there is no culture of working with communities or consulting them. Given that the majority of children in the schools are of minority ethnic origin, a closer relationship with communities could enhance the LEA's knowledge and understanding and extend the range of expertise on which they are able to draw in confronting issues that impact substantially on achievement, such as extended visits to the sub-continent during term time.

92. Although communication with social services is good at the strategic level and in some operational areas, in others, such as looked-after children, it is weak. Communication between the education department and headteachers is now generally satisfactory and in some cases good. Where the LEA falls down is in communicating with teachers and parents. Consultation has improved since the

appointment of the director and this has generated some goodwill, but general communication between the LEA and teachers is poor.

93. The LEA has been effective in increasing the level of external funding, in particular in securing Excellence in Cities funding jointly with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea for relevant work. However, LEA officers need to establish clearer and more efficient mechanisms for co-ordinating activity relating to external funding in order to reduce the administrative burden on schools.

Management Services

94. Monitoring Schools' Finances: the accuracy, clarity and timeliness of financial information provided to schools have been satisfactory. However, delegated budgets will put demands on the LEA for additional and more timely information and this will require a higher level of performance than in the past. The late delivery of financial information has delayed budget preparations for 2000/01. There is an acute problem relating to deficits in secondary schools and the response of the LEA to this problem has been of limited effectiveness. Where schools have succeeded in getting out of deficit it has generally been due to their own efforts. The LEA has inadequate capacity to support schools, particularly in the secondary phase, in the administration of finances and is not firm enough in its monitoring of the financial performance of schools.

96. Finance Services: the focus of the service is narrow and appears to be restricted to providing schools with up to date financial information, monitoring and intervention when schools are in deficit. It has limited mechanisms for identifying the needs of schools or evaluating the quality of the service provided.

97. Personnel: the personnel service provides an effective and valued service to schools. Located within the education department, it has developed a service planning process focused on responding to school needs. The main school concern is that the proposed transfer of the service to the corporate department will lead to a poorer school orientation.

98. Payroll: an external contractor provides payroll services for all Council employees, including schools staff. The responses from the school survey and on visits indicate that the service is held in very low regard. It is poorly organised to deliver a payroll service to schools. There is some evidence of improvement. Nevertheless, the LEA must do more to support schools in securing an adequate service.

99. ICT: the ICT support for schools administration is located within the schools division of the education department. The service is constituted as the client for contracted IT services. It has a well developed ICT development plan which provides a coherent description of the developments for which the LEA has responsibility and the ways in which the needs of schools have been identified. However, the service is still very reactive and there is little evidence of serious service evaluation or meaningful performance monitoring.

100. The school survey responses in relation to ICT services were mixed. Advice and support on improving hardware and software received a generally poor rating. This was largely attributed to the restrictions placed on school choice by corporate contracts and the late and hurried implementation of the National Grid for Learning

(NGfL) by the LEA. Within the secondary phase, the implementation of the NGfL has led to a school ICT environment whereby the schools have or will soon need to establish their own in-house IT support. The kind of support that the ICT service currently offers to secondary schools will therefore become increasingly irrelevant.

Summary and Evaluation

101. Overall, the quality of services varies from good to unsatisfactory. There is little evidence of efforts to develop school autonomy or support schools in making their own choices about service procurement. All management support services are ill-prepared for the delegation of service budgets to schools from April 2000. Service level agreements have only recently been prepared with little involvement of schools. Much more needs to be done to prepare the services to improve the weaknesses in their management arrangements.

Recommendations

To improve communication and consultation with teachers, parents and the wider community, the LEA should:

- enhance the effectiveness of business planning processes by:
 - setting out more clearly within the financial summary a three year projection of the education budget;
 - providing a clearer link between the priorities and activities in the Education Development Plan and those in the business plan;
 - ensuring that planning focuses on the raising of educational achievement;
- include the successful implementation of Fair Funding within corporate priorities;
- analyse the impact of the implementation of Fair Funding on the role of the LEA and of schools, and ascertain the skills and competencies needed within schools;
- provide schools with more choice in the procurement of services;
- improve communication between providers of LEA services so that intelligence of school needs is pooled;
- move from a reactive pattern of service delivery, and better customise services to the needs of schools;
- review payroll services to improve performance.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

102. The LEA has a sound strategy for special education provision, of which schools and governors are aware and are generally supportive. This includes supporting pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools, wherever possible. To date, the strategy has focused mainly on those pupils who are the subject of a statement of Special Educational Need and has relied heavily on the retention by the LEA of funding to meet those pupils' needs. This has been mainly through the provision of teaching and learning support assistants from the learning support service and other services, to support the pupils' continued attendance in mainstream primary and secondary schools, with just over half of the pupils who are the subject of a statement continuing to attend mainstream schools. In addition, the LEA maintains two special schools and places pupils in other LEAs' special schools, where this is appropriate.

103. Schools and governors are less clear about their responsibility to meet the needs of pupils at Stages 1, 2 and 3 on the SEN register from within the resources normally allocated to schools. This is because since the element of the schools' budgets for special educational needs is not clearly identified as such within the delegation scheme, and the LEA does not yet have a system by which it can differentially distribute funding to schools in relation to the incidence of pupils with special educational needs. It is significantly behind most other LEAs in relation to the development of a means of clearly targeting funding for special educational needs to schools. The strategy is having to change, with the impending introduction of the requirements of Fair Funding, and the LEA is currently consulting on a revision. In preparation for this, the LEA has devolved an identified amount of funding to be used for pupils at Stage 3 of the SEN Register. Schools have found this helpful and there are some early indications that it is leading to a reduction in the number of pupils for whom a statutory assessment is being requested.

104. The LEA is in the process of re-structuring the learning support service and other services, including the educational psychology service (EPS), education welfare (EW) and the behaviour support team (BST), into an inclusive education service. Funding will be devolved to schools, with an agreement, for the initial year, that schools will buy back the services. There is confusion in some schools about the stage that this re-structuring has reached. In practice it will not be operational until September 2000, as some senior appointments to the re-structured service have yet to be made.

105. The statutory obligations in relation to the assessment and provision for pupils with special educational needs are effectively discharged by the SEN Section of the LEA. The LEA sets clear targets for the issuing of draft statements, has achieved 100 per cent of those where there are not exceptional circumstances within the 18-week period set by the SEN code of practice, and has set targets to improve those where there are exceptional circumstances. The casework files are well-organised and show clear evidence of effective consultation and work with parents and other agencies. All initial referrals for assessment and for decisions during the assessment process are considered by a joint co-ordinating group, which meets weekly and includes representatives from education services and social services.

106. Schools appreciate being able to present cases for consideration by the group and feel that the process is open and effective. Officers from the SEN section also attend the majority of the annual review meetings and the responses of the LEA to such meetings are prompt. Several schools compared the process and the responses in the LEA favourably to those in other LEAs with which they had to deal. This is reflected in the low number of cases which are the subject of an appeal to the special needs tribunal and, of those which have been the subject of an appeal, the tribunal has ruled in agreement with the LEA's proposals in the majority of cases.

107. The LEA has provided clear guidance and in-service training to schools on the identification of pupils with special educational needs, on the implementation of the SEN code of practice, including the writing of individual education plans for pupils on Stages 2 to 5 of the SEN register. The recent appointment of an SEN curriculum development officer, with responsibility for the two special schools and for special educational needs in all other schools, has provided additional support to schools in the improvement of special educational needs provision, although the demands on the postholder are considerable. Other services, particularly the EPS, have provided support and guidance to schools, although it is not always clear how such support is co-ordinated into the wider work of school improvement, particularly where there are implications for such whole-school issues as differentiation and teaching methodology. The provision of additional support to pupils with special educational needs is clearly monitored, but there is much less evidence of the evaluation of the effectiveness of such support and, currently, of the value for money being provided. A recent survey by the learning support service shows the early development of such evaluation of effectiveness and value, rather than the more limited monitoring of hours of support provided which had been undertaken previously. This is an area which the LEA needs to develop further if it is to be clear that it is achieving the best use of resources.

Statutory Obligations

108. All statutory obligations are effectively discharged in relation to SEN.

Allocation and Management of Resources

109. The LEA has the second highest central spending per pupil on special education needs in the country as a result of relatively high funding and low delegation. The service is well managed and systems have been developed which allow activity and costs to be monitored and controlled. Nonetheless, expenditure on Special Education Needs rose by over 40 per cent between 1996/97 and 1998/99. It is continuing to rise but at a lower rate as a result of LEA action to monitor and constrain it, including the devolution of £150,000 to schools in 1999/00 to provide them with additional resources to support pupils assessed at Stage 3.

110. The inclusive education service is located within the trading wing of the LEA. Services are commissioned by pupil services within the education department. The discipline of operating a trading account has required the development of systems to price and monitor the cost of services to ensure costs are recovered. These systems are beginning to provide a sound basis for monitoring the value for money of special education needs support. Special education needs funding is one of the areas that will be the subject of delegation. While the inclusive education service has developed many of the systems and monitoring arrangements that will enable it to be effective as a service provider to schools, more needs to be done to prepare

schools before taking on the additional responsibilities of delegated SEN funding. For example, part of the social factors element of their current LMS funding is intended to provide for in-school special education needs support but three of the schools visited during the inspection were unaware of this. Very little guidance is available to assist schools to manage this element of their finances.

Recommendations

In order to improve provision for special educational needs pupils, the LEA should:

- devise a clear method of allocating funding for pupils with special educational needs to schools, and targeting and moderating this to schools in relation to the needs of their pupils;
- develop effective means of evaluating support provided to pupils with special educational needs including those at Stages 1-3 of the code of practice;
- ensure that work done with schools by the curriculum development officer, educational psychologists, and other staff of the restructured inclusive education service is effectively co-ordinated as part of the wider work of supporting school improvement.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The Supply of School Places and Admissions

111. The LEA external auditor has recently confirmed that generally satisfactory progress is being made on implementing new statutory requirements relating to school places and admissions. However, there is a rapidly emerging shortage of secondary school places. The surplus places that do exist are concentrated in two schools struggling to improve from a low base; half of the secondary schools are significantly overcrowded. Currently only 40 per cent of secondary pupils are Westminster resident. The structure of secondary provision with five church schools is increasingly incompatible with the religious and ethnic diversity of the population of Westminster, particularly in the north of the borough. The School Organisation Plan identifies this concern and recommends an urgent review of secondary provision. The scope of this review needs to be clarified and expanded to include the identification of options for increasing the proportion of Westminster residents in LEA schools, and for better addressing the diversity of the population.

Asset Management Plans and Property Services

112. The LEA is on target in the preparation of its asset management plan (AMP). Despite expenditure of £12 million on capital works since 1997/98 the standard of school buildings is inconsistent. Maintenance and refurbishment work does not always appear to be targeted where the need is greatest. The LEA intends to use the comprehensive building condition survey to create a maintenance database as the foundation for an improved preventative maintenance service.

113. Property services are provided to all parts of the Council by the corporate property services division. The priorities of the service are driven largely by corporate imperatives but it is clear that the AMP process and Fair Funding requirements are beginning to have a profound impact on the relationships with schools. To date, the service has not been schools focused, nor has it been evaluated. Customer satisfaction surveys are just being introduced. Both school staff and governors are confused about roles and responsibilities in property management, in particular the LEA's responsibilities as landlord. Current arrangements are inadequate for the new client role of schools: they lack the skills to take on property management responsibilities and have been given little help in procuring services from alternative providers.

114. The various proposals to either refurbish or replace Pimlico school, to be funded by a private finance initiative deal, have been amongst the most high profile and controversial issues faced by the LEA over the past three years. Currently progress on reaching an agreement on the way ahead has stalled, as there are still major disagreements within the governing body. What was clear from the visit to the school was that the stalemate cannot be allowed to continue for much longer as the condition of the building is declining. Furthermore, the existing design of the building has major shortcomings. Amongst these are the inflexibility and unsuitability of the interior space and the virtual impossibility of securing the site. The LEA has worked assiduously and patiently with the various parties involved with the proposals for replacement or refurbishment. However, there are areas where the LEA's approach to supporting the school needs to be improved. Firstly, much of the burden for developing the replacement or refurbishment proposals has fallen on a senior staff member at the school. The LEA needs to do more to assist this individual in

developing the educational specification of any new design. Secondly, the process has been a major distraction for senior staff and governors at the school and the LEA needs to ensure that the management and teaching aspects are not neglected. Thirdly, the co-ordination of the involvement of the various parts of the Council tackling the development proposals needs improvement.

School Meals

115. The school meals service is provided by an external contractor. The service liaises extensively with schools and, in general, both the school meals service and the contract monitoring arrangements are held in high regard by schools. The service is continually being developed to meet the increasing diversity of the school population. Furthermore, the contract managers frequently work with officers within the school improvement division to improve the provision of the school meals service as part of a coherent programme of school improvement. The service is currently the subject of a Best Value review.

Attendance

116. Levels of attendance in Westminster compare poorly with national averages and are not improving sufficiently. Although attendance in primary schools has shown some signs of improvement over the last four years, and is stable in secondary schools, it is still significantly below the national average and in comparison with similar LEAs. In both primary and secondary schools, unauthorised absence has increased substantially and is now the highest for any LEA.

117. Until recently, there was no LEA policy on school attendance and no substantial guidance to schools, nor had there been a detailed study of attendance patterns, such as the impact of extended holidays to countries of origin, or any evaluation of the effectiveness of the education welfare service (EWS). The LEA has now published a draft attendance statement and detailed guidance for schools. It has also set rigorous and challenging targets for schools to reduce authorised and unauthorised absence. The research and information team now provides comprehensive data to identify schools with on-going problems, but the LEA has only recently begun to target available resources to support the schools in greatest need. There are signs of improvement in some schools but more work is needed to involve parents and the wider community to explain the impact of good attendance on pupils' attainment and progress.

118. Support on attendance is satisfactory for primary schools, and poor in secondary schools. Attendance in the primary schools visited is in most cases improving and schools policies and practices are sound. The work of the EWS in primary schools is generally satisfactory and support is mostly adequate. In two secondary schools visited, where Section 10 OFSTED inspection reports identified attendance and punctuality as key issues for action, the quality of EWS support was seen as frustrating, inadequate and ineffective. Some schools expressed concerns at the lack of understanding by EWS of cross-borough issues and the lack of knowledge of the communities which the schools serve. High levels of mobility frustrate their efforts to track absent pupils.

119. In recent years, the EWS has experienced some difficulties at senior management level, having had four principal education welfare officers in post since January 1998. The effect of these management difficulties is a lack of vision, service

instability, inadequate quality assurance and evaluation systems and poor value for money. From April 2000, the service is being restructured to facilitate greater coordination of expertise to meet the new requirements. It is important that the schools are informed about the revised structure and the resulting service level agreements between the EWS and schools to improve the quality and effectiveness of the service. In 1999/00 District Audit reviewed school attendance and exclusion, and made a number of valuable recommendations which need to be reflected in the revised policies and practices.

Behaviour Support and Exclusions

120. The LEA's support for behaviour management in primary schools is effective. Support for improving behaviour in secondary schools is poor. The behaviour support plan (BSP) lacks specificity, there is insufficient support in the LEA for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and what exists is poor. The strategic coordination of the total provision is weak. The LEA has no agreed policy on exclusions. The provision for alternative education is generally well organised. On average, pupils wait four weeks to find an alternative place.

121. One of the LEA's priorities in its EDP and in its BSP is to promote social inclusion. Established as part of the action plan linked to the BSP and co-ordinated by pupil services, the behaviour support team has a major responsibility for action, support, monitoring and challenge on behaviour management and exclusions. Planning for the service does not locate it within the context of an overall continuum of planned intervention. Most obviously its relationship to the educational psychology service and educational welfare service is not specified; nor it is clear how the service links to education otherwise than at school, or to procedures for the reintegration of excluded pupils into mainstream. In addition support services such as the learning support service, Marlborough education unit, youth offending team, home school liaison and service coordinator for looked-after children need greater coordination in the interest of the efficiency and effectiveness of the provision for disaffected pupils.

122. Although the research and information team can provide much useful data on exclusions, the LEA has not yet used the information to inform strategic development and target resources for more effective support. The number of permanent exclusions have varied. Overall the trend is declining, though the figures are still well above both national averages and those for inner London boroughs. Fixed term exclusions are very high. There were 948 fixed term exclusions in 1998/99 including 49 from primary schools. The EDP analyses permanent exclusions by gender and ethnic origin, revealing wide variations. The number of exclusions of black pupils of Afro-Caribbean heritage and pupils' with special educational needs is significantly high. The LEA has included in the revised EDP targets to reduce the number of fixed term exclusions. However, recent data provided by the LEA indicate continuing very high levels of fixed term exclusions in half the secondary schools and five primary schools. In one secondary school there were 217 fixed and 10 permanent exclusions between September 1999 and January 2000. There are some worrying trends in a few primary schools where very young children in nursery, reception and Year 1 classes are being excluded and visits to schools noted pupils being excluded from lessons. The LEA has not sufficiently challenged exclusion rates, even where rates of individual schools are very high.

123. The BSP clearly defines action points to achieve DfEE targets for a reduction in levels of pupils' exclusions. The plan outlines procedures for referral, permanent exclusions and re-integration or alternative full-time education, but acknowledges that there is a lack of specialist support to schools to assist with reintegration and in preventing exclusion. The BSP lacks clarity in respect of cross-LEA mobility and its impact on tracking pupils at risk. Monitoring information is not used effectively to advise, support and challenge schools with high levels of exclusions, especially those of minority ethnic pupils. Following the publication of DfEE Circulars 10/99 and 11/99 on pupil support and social inclusion the LEA has issued detailed and helpful guidance for school governors which could form the basis for a policy on exclusion. It has set targets for reducing permanent and fixed term exclusions but these are *ad hoc* and not based on an objective evaluation of past performances.

124. The most recent statistics for fixed term exclusions indicate a very high degree of need. Some secondary school visits gave evidence that the team is beginning to have a positive impact, but there is a real risk of overloading this small service. All schools visited were investing a good deal of time to revise policies and procedures and there were examples of rigorous analysis of behaviour patterns. Most schools have responded to the LEA's expectation to maintain accurate records of all exclusions. Some schools expressed concern about the lack of practical support to improve their curricular provision for EBD pupils. The LEA's support in individual schools has been patchy, uncoordinated and not based on identified needs. There is evidence of action by a range of agencies to support pupils at risk of exclusions. The behaviour support team (BST) has begun to assess schools' needs for behaviour management, policy development, whole school initiatives, staff training and individual support for pupils. In one secondary school, with a high level of exclusion, the BST worked with Years 7 and 9 to challenge pupils potentially at risk of exclusion. Two of the primary school visits highlighted the effective use of the BST hotline/helpline to challenge behaviour of individual pupils who have been rescued from the brink of being excluded. However, some schools were rightly concerned about proposed reductions in the BST and its future role.

125. The educational psychology service (EPS) is involved in a number of initiatives that support schools effectively in challenging unacceptable pupil behaviour. Various other services of the LEA have supported schools in effectively managing challenging behaviour without recourse to exclusion. The Marlborough education unit offers a range of services to children, including a few who have had fixed term exclusions, with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school-home liaison project, administered by the London Diocesan Board, has provided the support necessary for early intervention. However, not all schools know of the various services provided by the LEA. This limits their effectiveness. Support is *ad hoc* and the LEA has not had the organisation and capacity to support effectively all its secondary schools or inform them of effective strategies to support pupils at risk. The LEA needs to carry out an audit of the level of support available and evaluate the impact of various initiatives, in order to target resources to schools where exclusions continue to remain stubbornly high.

Education Otherwise

126. The LEA's provision of education otherwise than at school is good and gives value for money. A range of provision is available but at present 60 percent of pupils receive full-time education from City of Westminster College which won the contract for 45 pupils in Key Stage 4 from the City Council. At the time of inspection 24 pupils

were receiving an alternative full-time education programme aimed at raising their level of achievement in core skills and preparing them for further education. The college was able to demonstrate considerable success both in pupils' attainment and in excluded pupils pursuing post-16 courses. Some excluded pupils are adequately supported through the Bridge Project and five were being supported by specialist teachers at the interim unit. The average time for excluded pupils to find full time education is four weeks. An exclusion panel considers the reintegration of pupils judged suitable. The 'dowry' grant of £5000 is not always seen as a good incentive as many schools visited feel that there is little support for reintegrating excluded pupils.

127. The hospital and home tuition service provides specialist teaching to young people with medical conditions which prevent them attending their normal school. The LEA provides useful information for parents which outlines their responsibilities if they choose to educate their children other than at school. At the time of inspection, six pupils were withdrawn by parents for disaffection, bullying or lack of challenge and were being educated at home. The LEA has issued appropriate guidance and there are systematic and efficient arrangements in place to ensure that education provided at home is efficient and suitable for the age, ability and aptitude of the children.

Looked-After Children

128. The LEA is not fulfilling its responsibilities with regard to looked-after children. Although information systems to monitor their educational attainment are developing, they are not yet secure and the strategy for improvement of their educational attainment needs further development. In principle, the social services department (SSD) and education departments collaborate on looked after children and they have developed a joint strategy. Although there is an agreed policy on care and education, the lack of a common data base hampers liaison between the two departments. The Quality Protects action plan places great emphasis on improving the educational attainment of looked-after children. However, information on the seventy per cent of looked-after children who are placed out of the borough is inadequate and a number of children were unaccounted for at the time of the inspection. The LEA is in the process of collecting data which once completed should provide much needed information on the education of looked-after children. The cost effectiveness and educational value of these placements are not evaluated.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

129. The LEA works effectively in partnership with the SSD and other departments to fulfil its child protection responsibilities well.

Ethnic Minority Children

130. The EAL dimension of support for ethnic minority children is highly effective and represents good value for money. Other aspects of support are satisfactory at primary level, but underdeveloped at secondary level. EAL support was devolved to schools in 1992 under Section 11 and they have developed appropriate systems for ensuring that children rapidly acquire language fluency. There are good arrangements for central monitoring and co-ordination of this work, for the training of mainstream teachers, for liaison between EAL work and literacy and for the provision of bilingual support assistants.

131. The LEA is, however, behind with its arrangements for addressing other aspects of minority ethnic achievement. An ethnic minority achievement working group of heads, together with the responsible school development officers, has been set up, and is looking at, developing both policy, and a new formula, for the allocation of Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) resources that will take account not only of EAL but also of factors such as free school meals (FSM) and mobility. Following consultation, these proposals as well as the creation of a centrally held ethnic minority achievement fund, have been agreed. Until recently lack of reliable hard data on the relative achievement and progress of minority ethnic groups resulted in a blanket correlation of ethnicity with disadvantage and under-achievement, for instance in the EDP, and a corresponding failure to correctly identify and address actual issues of minority ethnic under achievement. With smaller populations, the primary schools have been better placed to make their own diagnoses and cement their own links with the various local communities. In so doing they have drawn successfully on such sources of LEA support as EAL classes for parents or the work on black history in the borough developed by the Westminster archive centre together with the SDO responsible for EMAG. Although some of the secondary schools have developed their own effective strategies for identifying and responding to these issues, lack of awareness of them at LEA level has resulted in little or no support. Furthermore ethnic minority groups are under-represented on governing bodies and in the senior management of the LEA and schools.

Social Exclusion

132. Some aspects of social exclusion will be addressed by the newly created Excellence in Cities (EiC) arrangements. The four school focused local partnerships involving the police and funded through the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) are helpful to schools. The Black Police Officers Group are involved in work in schools to improve communication with young people. In addition, sixth formers of minority ethnic heritage from Westminster schools are assisting with post-Macpherson awareness training for police officers. In January 2000 the LEA set up a project to develop a cross-departmental response to the Macpherson report. Implementation is scheduled for October 2000. In the meantime there is no LEA policy or procedures for dealing with or reporting on racial harassment or racist incidents in schools. Urgent action is now needed.

Recommendations

In order to improve pupil's access to education, the LEA should:

- agree realistic and challenging attendance targets with the schools concerned;
- involve parents and the wider community in initiatives to improve attendance;
- match the Educational Welfare Service (EWS) support more closely to the needs of the schools, particularly secondary;
- review the behaviour support plan, to remove anomalies and make changes in the light of experience;

- ensure strategic coordination of the total provision;
- work more closely with and challenge those schools which have high exclusion rates;
- provide more support within the LEA for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties;
- evaluate and monitor closely the financial costs and educational value of out-of-borough placements;
- improve educational provision for looked-after children in line with DfEE guidance by establishing a secure database to monitor pupils' educational attainment;
- analyse data on minority ethnic achievement in order to identify specific issues and develop strategies for addressing them in particular in the secondary sector;
- address its response to the recommendations of the Macpherson report as a matter of urgency;
- extend the remit of the proposed review of secondary school provision to include the extent to which secondary provision is able to accommodate the demands of a diverse population;
- review and reconstitute the arrangements for the provision of property services in line with the code of practice and Fair Funding.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

The LEA Strategy For School Improvement

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement, the LEA should:

- simplify central structures to make them fit for the purpose of supporting educational attainment;
- use data on minority ethnic achievement as a basis for action on significant issues in schools;
- produce a clear framework of principles and practices for the allocation of resources to education;
- set out medium term commitments to levels of education funding;
- scrutinise central department allocated overheads to ensure that they are fair and represent good value for money;
- review the current performance management and quality assurance systems to ensure that they meet the demands of the Best Value regime;
- commence a fundamental review of the LMS formula to provide a more objective and fair allocation of resources to schools following the implementation of fair funding.

School Improvement

In order to make school improvement more effective, the LEA should:

- In partnership with schools and other key players, review the LEA arrangements for meeting the requirements of the Code of Practice by:
 - clarifying processes, procedures and roles and responsibilities particular to schools causing concern;
 - developing a coherent and consistent approach across all sectors, including nursery;
 - building on good work, for example in early years, and with leading mathematics teachers to promote good practice;
 - developing a proactive and rigorous approach to evaluation;
- review the literacy and numeracy commissioning arrangements;
- implement effective arrangements for the development and support for curriculum ICT;
- work in partnership with heads to draw up an appropriate action plan for supporting school management.

Strategic Management

To improve communication and consultation with teachers, parents and the wider community, the LEA should:

- Enhance the effectiveness of business planning processes by:
 - setting out more clearly within the financial summary a three year projection of the education budget;
 - providing a clearer link between the priorities and activities in the Education Development Plan and those in the business plan;
 - ensuring that planning focuses on the raising of educational achievement;
- include the successful implementation of fair funding within corporate priorities;
- analyse the impact of the implementation of fair funding on the role of the LEA and of schools, and ascertain the skills and competencies needed within schools;
- provide schools with more choice in the procurement of services;
- improve communication between providers of LEA services so that intelligence of school needs is pooled;
- move from a reactive pattern of service delivery, and better customise services to the needs of schools;
- review payroll services to improve performance.

Special Educational Provision

In order to improve the provision for special educational needs pupils, the LEA should:

- devise a clear method of allocating funding for pupils with special educational needs to schools, and targeting and moderating this to schools in relation to the needs of their pupils;
- develop effective means of evaluating support provided to pupils with special educational needs including those at Stages 1-3 of the code of practice;
- ensure that work done with schools by the curriculum development officer, educational psychologists, and other staff of the restructured Inclusive Education Service is effectively co-ordinated as part of the wider work of supporting school improvement.

Access

In order to improve pupil's access to education, the LEA should:

- agree realistic and challenging attendance targets with the schools concerned;
- involve parents and the wider community in initiatives to improve attendance;
- match the EWS support more closely to the needs of the schools, particularly secondary;

- review the behaviour support plan, to remove anomalies and make changes in the light of experience;
- ensure strategic coordination of the total provision;
- work more closely with and challenge those schools which have high exclusion rates;
- provide more support within the LEA for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties;
- evaluate and monitor closely the financial costs and educational value of out-of-borough placements;
- improve educational provision for looked-after children in line with DfEE guidance by establishing a secure database to monitor pupils' educational attainment;
- analyse data on minority ethnic achievement in order to identify specific issues and develop strategies for addressing them in particular in the secondary sector;
- address its response to the recommendations of the Macpherson report as a matter of urgency;
- extend the remit of the proposed review of secondary school provision to include the extent to which secondary provision is able to accommodate the demands of a diverse population;
- review and reconstitute the arrangements for the provision of property services in line with the code of practice and Fair Funding.

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