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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Mr Brown

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WALSALL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment (APA) process for your local authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Summary

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

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

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council's children's services deliver good outcomes for children and young people. The council's services make a good contribution in helping children and young people to be healthy. Young people are well supported in making a positive contribution and are well engaged in the democratic process. Partnership working with other organisations has improved during the last year and is now good. Brisk action taken by the council and their strategic partners has brought about rapidly improving outcomes for children and young people and ensuring that their well being is now good. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP), through consultation with a representative range of groups and organisations, is based upon a detailed and accurate evaluation of need. It is effective in coordinating multi-agency working. Progress in implementing the plan is rigorously monitored. As a consequence, services for children and young people continue to improve. The council's self-assessment recognises there is still much to do. Although attainment remains generally below average, particularly post-14, there have been sustained improvements over the last three years, especially across primary schools. The number of students applying to higher education remains low. The council recognises that consolidating the progress made is a priority in ensuring the overall performance of services continues to improve. The council is now judged to have a good capacity to do this. The contribution of the council's social care service has demonstrated good progress and continues to be good.

Being healthy

The council's contribution to outcomes in this area for children and young people is good. There is strong evidence of partnerships working which is effective across the borough in promoting the health and well being of children and young people.

There has been progress on improving access to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) by reducing the waiting times, and the health care needs of looked after children continues to be very good with a designated doctor and nurse specifically focusing on looked after children. Additional support is provided for looked after children who need access to CAMHS. Support groups for foster carers offer guidance, consultation and practical ways of managing children and young people with mental health needs in order to maintain children in their placements. Walsall has further plans to improve access waiting times to the CAMHS service as identified in their plans. Whilst the timeliness of the initial health assessments of looked after children is improving it remains one of the priorities for the council.

Walsall have a range of healthy living initiatives which is evident in all schools but particularly in primary schools. Inspection evidence shows this to be generally good. The opening of three children's gyms is linked to the strategy to reduce obesity particularly amongst the four to 11 age range which is one example of good partnership working. The promotion of health awareness amongst children and young people at risk of substance misuse is positive and improvements in these services have reduced the waiting times for initial referrals and subsequent treatments to five days and ten days respectively.

Teenage pregnancy continues to decline with support provided as necessary. The strategy to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies successfully involves schools, youth service

and health professionals. An award winning Sex, Lies and Love Programme from the youth offending team (YOT) provides an art and drama based intervention for girls at risk of sexual exploitation. These developments and measures have impacted positively on the current reduction in teenage pregnancies and have improved awareness of sexual health.

Staying safe

The council's contribution to outcomes for children and young people in this area is good. A local safeguarding board has been established and has strong support from all agencies.

There is an increasing amount of joint working which is evident in the multi-agency support panel for children and young people who might otherwise become looked after. The CYPP shows strong support and commitment to improving this outcome for all Walsall children.

Social care has contributed to improving this outcome, particularly through the increased number of children looked after in foster placements or placed for adoption. As a result of concerted action and a preventative strategy, the number of core assessments has reduced although it remains higher than IPF and national averages. This is an area that will require further input to make a difference. The stability of placements for children remains very good although the long-term stability of children has only marginally improved.

The extent to which schools keep their pupils safe is good. Child protection in schools is generally secure and training up to date for staff. The local authority evaluates the impact of this training thoroughly. In particular improvements in the support offered to looked after children are good. Although the numbers of children and young people on the Child Protection Register (CPR) remains above national average there has been a decrease in the number of children and young people placed on the register in Walsall. A high number of children and young people were deregistered from the CPR over the past year in Walsall and whilst the number of repeat referrals has not risen significantly and is similar to other councils, these indicators need to be closely monitored to provide an understanding of why the numbers are changing with appropriate action taken to deal with emerging issues. The establishment of a children's board has helped involve young people in the broader staying safe agenda. The contribution of community groups is described as 'good' and features in several plans.

Concerted action is ongoing to bring child protection indicators nearer to IPF figures. A growing range of preventative services underpins this area of work and is improving outcomes for children and young people, including children who have disabilities.

Enjoying and achieving

The council's contribution to outcomes in this area is good overall, however, standards of attainment remain below national averages at all key stages. This makes significant improvement in some areas, notably Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 where the progress

pupils make has improved to close to national levels. Progress made from Key Stage 1 to 2 was slightly above national averages for the first time in 2005.

The local authority has made significant changes to the way they manage early years provision since 2005 and as a result some of the plans and actions are in the early stages of development. However, there are early signs of promise, in particular the way provision is more closely integrated with other plans. An example of this improved management has been a reduction in the number of actions issued to childcare providers at registration and inspections show that most providers are now judged to be satisfactory or good. This is an improving picture. There are improved links between voluntary and maintained providers and the authority has identified the need for a full audit of the range and quality of provision to be completed in the autumn. Access to child care is good.

Whilst standards of attainment remain below average in all key stages, this is especially so at Key Stage 4. The local authority recognises this and has completed an audit of which aspects of school performance need to be improved to change this. The results of this audit have featured in several strategic plans but have yet to produce significant positive outcomes. In the primary phase although standards are below national averages they have improved in comparison to similar authorities and the progress pupils make is generally in line with national levels. There remain too many schools that fail to achieve more than 64% level 4 in mathematics by age 11 although this picture has improved in English. Although standards of attainment generally have improved in recent years they have matched national improvements and the gap between local and national levels has remained consistent. In particular the attainment of boys, some minority ethnic groups and the more able remain as priorities.

The number of students who attain at least five A*- C grades at GCSE is low and too few looked after children manage this. Similarly the number staying on to further study at age 16 is low and the authority has rightly identified performance in this area as a priority. However, a recently completed 14-19 Strategy plan and a growing range of vocational opportunities in partnership with other providers has started to show signs of improvement. There is an ambitious plan to establish a 14-19 college which will help increase the provision further and raise the numbers of students going on to higher education, which at present remains low. The planning at this stage is impressive and detailed and includes a wide range of partners. For example, the leadership development programme is a thoughtful response to identified need, both in improving provision but also helping recruitment difficulties at this level. Similarly there is an increasing use of expertise, including specialist colleges to support areas of need and innovation.

The strategic partnership between Walsall Council and Education Walsall is developing well and is now a genuine strength. The quality of the school improvement support on offer to schools is very effective and has helped to provide both support and challenge where appropriate. In particular the successful use of various intervention strategies and an innovative approach to long-term problems has significantly raised levels of progress. This support increasingly uses a wide range of partners from across the service and is both rigorous and responsive in identifying need. The Excellence in Walsall Education Plan is a detailed and evaluative document that rests on an accurate view of local priorities and

which drives the allocation of resources well. This has led to significant improvements, for example, in provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The number of schools in categories of concern has risen slightly since September 2005 but remains low overall. This represents significant improvement and Education Walsall has a record of providing good and decisive intervention to improve these schools quickly. The balance of support and challenge, coupled with regular and detailed monitoring has helped provide an accurate view of trends in performance although inspection outcomes tend to cluster around the satisfactory to good with few outstanding. The increasing use of pupil level data to track progress is impressive. Attendance has improved considerably since 2005 although it is better in secondary schools than primary.

There are improved opportunities for young people to socialise and achieve accredited outcomes through the youth service centres and the support offered to those who return from out of area placements is significantly improved.

Making a positive contribution

The council's contribution to outcomes in this area is good. This is demonstrated in the drive to engage with children and young people. The range and number of projects and initiatives have furthered the agenda so that all children and young people including those from vulnerable groups have an opportunity to become involved in contributing to the work that is ongoing.

The local authority has made concerted efforts and has involved young people (including those with disabilities and looked after children) in the development of an impressive range of initiatives including: peer mentoring, Sex Lies and Love programme, Walsall's Youth Opinions Unite (YOU) consultation and participation forum and Ready Steady Summer. Ready Steady Summer is a multi-agency project to which the local authority and other significant partners contributes to a mixed agenda of initiatives, making a positive difference to a range of issues including a reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour and a mentoring scheme for young people by young people. As a result, a wider group of young people now make a positive contribution to their future. A high proportion of looked after children and vulnerable young people are involved in and contribute to their review and personal education plan and they are actively encouraged to take responsibility to monitor their own health care needs. Whilst there is strong involvement of other partners (e.g. youth offending team) in addressing the offending and preventative agenda the numbers of final warnings, reprimands and convictions of children looked after remains high and the local authority now needs to take action to reduce this number in a concerted and sustainable way. Inspections indicate a growing involvement of school councils ensuring that the pupils' voice is heard and responded; the personal development and well being of children and young people is often judged as good.

Achieving economic well-being

The council's contribution to outcomes in this area is now good. There is increasing access to child care and the quality of that care is improving. This is linked to the needs of local communities more effectively. The plans to host children's centres in local neighbourhood partnerships are ambitious and appropriate although the monitoring of this provision is unclear at present and it remains a priority to develop.

The local authority has successfully reduced the number of young people not in education, employment or training, especially for those leaving care. This reduction is impressive. There is an increasing range of partnership working and multi-agency planning which has helped ease the transition of vulnerable young people from one phase to the next and this has helped secure improvements in the support offered to teenage mothers and those with disabilities.

The educational attainment of looked after children has improved although few achieve five A*- C at GCSE level. There is also an increasing range of links evident between schools and enterprise partners, such as the education business partnership that has helped improve the quality of placements and competitions available to young people. Opportunities available for vocational pathways have improved but remain a priority for the authority.

The breadth and quality of the support on offer at Year 9 transition reviews have helped vulnerable young people with career planning and the links with the Learning and Skills Council and Connexion service are strong and reflected in the 14-19 Strategy planning document. However, attainment levels at age 16 and retention rates remain low. There are examples of innovation designed to improve this, including an embryonic use of ICT based routes to vocational training. The plans to widen the range of higher education institutions as destinations for school and care leavers have yet to significantly improve outcomes. The range and type of accommodation available to care leavers has improved with support offered to maintain independence.

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

The capacity to improve is good and developing.

There is effective leadership and direction from senior officers and elected members resulting in an increasingly shared vision and focused priorities and targets, which are then shared with children and young people. Children and young people are increasingly engaged in strategic planning and make a difference in key areas. The vision and priorities are supported well by a range of detailed and specific planning. Financial plans are in place to deliver the plans and improve the quality mainstream services. The local authority have conducted a detailed needs analysis across all services and are using this to inform future planning and distribution of resources.

The retention and recruitment strategies have been reviewed and a single strategy is now in place across health, social care and education services with the exception of the Early Years department. The importance of this area in securing continued improvements is recognised by the council and although the numbers of vacancies has decreased over the past year the rate of vacancies remains above national average.

The self-evaluation completed was a detailed, thoughtful and comprehensive assessment demonstrating a clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses. However, some elements within it remain descriptive rather than evaluative and there were few targets that related to expected outcomes. In particular the voice of the child was not represented as clearly as some of the respective plans suggest.

Priorities are supported by coordinated multi-agency plans. However, the targets set particularly in well performing areas are cautious and un-ambitious. Strong partnerships both in planning and in practice are evident and are working well. The capacity to improve the management of services is good. Managers have taken robust and rigorous actions to secure improvements in target areas such as young people not in education, training or employment (NEET), looked after children and some schools. In particular the management and approach to health care is very good. One good example of where the authority having identified an underperforming area took robust action is in establishing a service tailored to meet the needs of Walsall travellers. This is an indication of an increasingly proactive approach to solving long-term problems utilising strengths already available within the area.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • healthy schools initiatives • obesity plan • teenage pregnancies • CAMHS • health of looked after children • substance misuse. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAMHS – reduce access waiting times • the timeliness of initial health assessments of looked after children.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • safeguarding board – multi-agency ownership • fostering/adoption • road safety • child protection in schools • preventative services. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • core assessments remain high • management of Child Protection Register.

<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the 14-19 plan • improvements in attendance and provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities • school improvement services • the coherence and consistency between plans. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve levels of attainment especially at Key Stage 4 • increase the vocational offer in secondary schools • increase the levels of attainment of looked after children • close the gap with national levels of attainment for vulnerable groups including boys, minority ethnic groups and more able.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • schools councils • participation of looked after children and children with disabilities • reducing NEET particularly amongst vulnerable groups • personal education plans for target groups. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce final warnings and cautions given to looked after children.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reductions in the number of those not in employment, education and training. • business partnership links. • the breadth and depth of partnerships established for 14-19 developments • support for vulnerable young people at key transition points • an improving vocational offer post-14. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase the number of young people applying to higher education • improve economic awareness in primary schools • monitor the impact of the children's centre provision.
<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear strategic vision from senior leaders • detailed needs analysis • effective partnership working • performance management linked to plans • corporate parenting child focused. 	<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some targets lack ambition • monitor the effectiveness & impact of recruitment and retention of key staff.

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

Being Healthy

- The impact of measures to reduce waiting times for CAMHS.
- The timeliness of initial health assessments for looked after children.

Staying Safe

- The management of referrals and repeat referrals to the CPR.
- Effectiveness of measures taken to reduce the number of core assessments.

Enjoying and achieving

- The achievements and attainments of all pupils, especially boys, those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, looked after children & more able pupils.
- The implementation of the 14 to 19 Strategy.

Making a positive contribution

- Final warnings and cautions given to looked after children.

Achieving economic well being

- Vocational opportunities for young people.
- Children centre provision.
- Plans for those not in employment, education and training.

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

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY

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