

26 November 2007

Mr Graham Foster
Corporate Director for Children and Young People
Telford and Wrekin Council
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Civic Offices
Telford
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Dear Mr Foster

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE BOROUGH OF TELFORD AND WREKIN

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment (APA) for your local authority. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the assessment.

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

Telford and Wrekin Borough Council provides a good level of service to children and young people. The council has improved its services for looked after children and young people this year and so outcomes for them have improved. Services for young children continue to be effective and multi-agency collaboration enables families to benefit from this integrated approach. The services offered through the council and their partner agencies are flexible, responsive and provided in a timely and efficient way. The council's capacity to improve is good, whereas last year it was outstanding; this reflects the council's own evaluation. This reduction in capacity is mainly due to the absence of the Director of Children's Services for much of the year.

Being healthy

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council makes a good contribution to improving the health of children and young people. Most outcomes are in line with similar authorities, and partners have identified outcomes which they need to improve. Parents are well supported to keep children healthy and this is evident in, for example, good immunisation rates and the

increased number of mothers who breast-feed. All children and young people have good access to a local dentist but standards of oral health remain low.

Teenage pregnancies are falling at a faster rate than in similar local authorities. Although partners are taking appropriate universal and targeted action to continue improvements, the number remains high. A delayed chlamydia screening programme is now in place and rapid progress is being made to reach targets.

Substance misuse services ensure that young people receive timely assessments and treatment. Effective support and treatment are provided to young people who offend and those who are looked after. A high proportion of looked after children and young people receive timely and good quality health assessments. They are well supported to take part in physical activity, and have good access to appropriate services.

School inspections report good and some outstanding work to keep children young people healthy. Although performance in achieving Healthy Schools' standards is below regional and national levels, concerted action has led to rapid progress. All schools are now participating and have been visited by a representative from the Healthy Schools Core Team. Detailed data on all schools is collected, monitored and reviewed on a monthly basis and there has been a rise in accreditations towards Healthy School status.

Partners work effectively to develop and deliver a comprehensive service for children and young people with mental health needs, with good progress being made. The good local multi-agency collaboration has resulted in the number of children young people being supported, at earlier stages, rising markedly and waiting times for children young people with more complex needs reducing significantly. Extensive consultation with parents, children and young people has improved the responsiveness of the service as a whole to meet local needs.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families are served well by an extensive range of support and activities. Partners have recognised the need to simplify the assessment systems currently used by different agencies and combine them into one process. A multi-agency team offers support where there are more complex needs and in some cases, parents take the lead in coordinating the packages of support for their child.

Areas for development

- Improve children's oral health.
- Reduce the number of teenage pregnancies.

Staying safe

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good.

There has been a reduction in the number of young people killed or seriously injured on the roads. Inspection reports of early years provision and schools are generally good, with some outstanding practice in keeping children safe. Schools report that the council provides very good advice, support and training on child protection issues.

The family support strategy is effective and delivered well by multi-agency teams in each of the council's five cluster areas. Action plans are detailed; good common assessment arrangements ensure that services are delivered at an early stage and that the needs of children and families are met promptly and effectively.

There are low rates of referrals and re-referrals to social care. Referrals are managed well and the number of initial assessments completed on time is good. Almost all core assessments meet timescales, a performance well above national averages. All children young people on the Child Protection Register are allocated to a social worker and almost all of their reviews are held on time. Action has been taken to address the rise in children young people being re-registered last year and the figure has since fallen to an acceptable level. Work with the police service is delivered in the five cluster areas and this is helping to provide a safer environment for children and young people. However, joint work with the police to identify domestic violence referrals involving children young people is not yet as effective as it should be.

The work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board is supported well and it drives improvements effectively. A delayed audit of services by individual agencies has now been completed and is being used to tighten scrutiny arrangements of their performance. A regular, independently chaired sub-group, monitors action plans from serious case reviews and management reviews. The Local Safeguarding Children Board takes appropriate action to ensure that secure recruitment practices are in place across the wide range of voluntary organisations. Statutory partners have robust recruitment processes in place. The council undertake criminal record bureau checks for schools and are thus able to monitor and advise them.

Agencies monitor the whereabouts of children young people who miss school. This activity has not been underpinned by formalised arrangements but a protocol has been agreed, along with plans to implement it in the near future.

Appropriate action is taken when looked after children young people go missing. A comprehensive missing children protocol has recently been implemented which will provide a useful framework and guidance to build on the work already taking place. However, its introduction is too recent to have had an impact.

Outcomes for looked after children young people are generally good with some above national averages. Most of the children are in stable placements; the number placed with relatives and friends is in line with similar authorities and all reviews are on time. Action to place children young people for adoption is effective. Good action has ensured that nearly all looked after children young people are now allocated to a qualified social worker. Most care leavers have a pathway plan and all have personal advisors.

Areas for development

- Ensure that the police identify any child protection issues in referrals relating to domestic violence.
- Ensure arrangements are effective in monitoring and responding to all missing children young people.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good.

The council provides effective support to its diverse array of educational settings and has good procedures in place to help parents and carers share in the education of their children young people. The role of the 'parents' champion' is developing and work with parents, through such avenues as family literacy programmes, is targeted well.

Young children get off to a good start. Inspections of provision for children in the Foundation Stage report good outcomes, with some outstanding practice across a range of providers. The local authority has been successful in helping settings to improve the tracking of children's progress and the careful moderation of the Foundation Stage Profile gives robust data from which further action can be planned.

Pupils make good progress through Key Stage 1. Test results continue to improve and are above average. The local authority's challenge and support to schools has shown fruition at Key Stage 2 where national test results over the last few years have been among the most improved in the country. In English and science they are now in line with the national averages. This is a good outcome, since the cohort of children and young people eligible for assessment in 2006 contained an appreciably higher than average proportion of children young people with significant learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Results in mathematics are in line with similar authorities, but are below the national average.

Progress in the secondary phase has not been as rapid as in other phases. At Key Stage 3, standards are in line with the national average, but the trend in improvement is starting to lag behind that seen nationally. GCSE results continue to improve and are in line with the national average. However, the local authority has not been as effective this year at ensuring that young people gain good grades in English and mathematics at GCSE.

In all phases of education, the local authority gives very good support to children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, so that they often make better progress than their peers. The attainment and progress of boys, an issue last year, has clearly improved as a result of well-targeted action. The attainment of looked after children at Key Stage 2 has improved, markedly so in

English, and the percentage of them who gain at least one GCSE is good. The effectiveness of the local authority in supporting children and young people with English as an additional language and in meeting the needs of those from Black and minority ethnic groups, refugee families and traveller communities is regarded by schools as very good.

Almost all schools are providing effectively to meet the needs of learners. Currently, there is only one school with a notice to improve and none in special measures, a much lower percentage than nationally. The local authority has good quality control systems in place to identify weaker schools and is swift to respond with effective action when the need arises.

Attitudes and behaviour in schools are usually good and in almost half of the schools inspected this year behaviour was outstanding. The establishment of inclusion centres has resulted in a significant reduction in both permanent and fixed term exclusions and re-integration rates have doubled. Although most children and young people enjoy school and are proud of their achievements, the Tellus2 survey revealed that the proportion of boys who do not enjoy school is higher than average.

Attendance at primary schools is satisfactory and the rate of unauthorised absence is below the national average and that of similar local authorities. The picture in the secondary phase is not as good. Attendance overall is below average and has dropped from last year. Although unauthorised absence is below the national average and that of similar local authorities, there has been a small rise from last year.

Areas for development

- Ensure that provision in the secondary phase enables students to achieve well in English and mathematics.
- Improve attendance in the secondary phase.
- Improve boys' enjoyment of school.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council's contribution to this aspect of children's services is good. All schools have a school council and these are provided with helpful information and training, such as 'How to chair a meeting,' so that young people are becoming aware of their rights and responsibilities. Inspection reports judge that schools offer good opportunities for children and young people to make a contribution to their communities and that they are eager to take on these responsibilities.

The council is committed to the principle of listening and responding to the voice of the child. A range of opportunities is available to children and young people from a variety of backgrounds so that they can air their views and have their ideas

considered. The Young People's Forum has grown in strength and is appropriately involved in the construction and review of the Children and Young People's Plan. Young carers are involved very well in the service that supports them. This service offers appropriate activities through one to one meetings and group support and has strong links with other services within the council to help young carers face their individual challenges.

The council is successful in encouraging law abiding behaviour and this year has seen a reduction in the first time entrants to the criminal justice system. The percentage of looked after children young people who were given a warning, or who have committed an offence, has dropped significantly and is now below the national average and that of similar local authorities. Almost all looked after children young people participate in reviews; this year the proportion has increased significantly and is higher than average. There are opportunities for children and young people with complex difficulties to engage in leisure facilities in the summer months but there are not enough opportunities for this at other times of the year.

The council has continued to increase its youth workers and although there has been a dramatic rise in the percentage of young people reached by the Youth Service, the figure is still below the national average.

Areas for development

- Widen opportunities for young people with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities to access leisure facilities.
- Increase the percentage of young people reached by the Youth Service.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council is effective in helping young people prepare for working life and has a good record of consultation with local employers. The strong education and business partnership offers a wide range of appropriate activities to raise awareness about careers in different industries and raise the aspirations of young people. The Strategic Partnership Board has formalised links with partner organisations and is now working more strongly as a result. The work of Connexions for Youth is well coordinated and offers young people clear guidance in the prospectus so that they can make informed choices about their options. The council has the lowest percentage of 16 to 18-year-olds for whom there is no current destination amongst similar councils and is amongst the best in England. The council collects robust data about performance and participation of young people from different ethnic heritages. This data shows that young people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds are not disadvantaged.

The 14–19 strategy is planned and delivered in a coordinated way and this helps to ensure that education and training is of good quality. The curriculum offered in Key

Stage 4 has been broadened and pathways are in place enabling students to progress from one level to the next. Colleges offer a wide range of Level 1–3 courses and performance in these has improved more rapidly than nationally and in similar local authorities. Post-16 education and training is good and results at GCSE/VCE/AS levels are well above the national average. The overall success rate for all work-based learners engaged in NVQs has continued to rise and is above the national average.

Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are served well by the council. These young people are more likely to engage in education, employment or training than others nationally or in similar councils. The established transition policy between the Disabled Children's Team and the Adults with Learning Disability Team facilitates ease of use and integrated support at key points for those involved.

Looked after children and young people are helped to achieve economic well-being. During the past five years, there have been steady improvements in educational outcomes, health, accommodation options and the proportion of care leavers who have been helped to secure education, employment or training. Funding has been used well to support looked after children after they have reached the age of 16 and has resulted in improved staying-on rates. The council has robust data to support its corporate parenting duties and current destinations of all 19-year-old care leavers are known. The percentage of care leavers at the age of 19 who are living in suitable accommodation has continued to rise and now stands at 100%.

Despite the positive impact of targeted activities on some categories of young people who are not engaged in education, employment or training, the local authority has not been as successful as it anticipated in this aspect overall. The percentage of young people in the not in education, employment or training category has increased and is marginally above the national average. The percentage of these young people who are not actively seeking employment, education or training is also higher than average.

Area for development

- Reduce the number of young people in the not in education, employment or training category.

Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council currently has a vacancy for the Director of Children's Services. Nevertheless, effective partnership shared between senior officers has provided the continuity of leadership required and enabled the council to manage its services well. The council has a good track record in responding to change and has made good progress in almost all areas identified for improvement last year.

Clear common objectives underpin the Children and Young People's Plan and these are reflected very well in the work of the council. There is a strong sense of teamwork and a high commitment to partnership working. The council has nurtured a culture of openness and constructive challenge within the organisation and more widely across its range of services. For example, the Fair Access Panel, originally initiated by the local authority, is now a self-sustaining group which makes decisions about the future of hard to place young people. Schools' views of the local authority are positive, particularly in aspects regarding work with vulnerable children and young people, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The local authority reviews and evaluates its work effectively and takes proper account of the views of its service users. The numerous avenues for feedback to the LA promote a range of responses which are taken into account when setting priorities. Priorities clearly reflect local needs, equality and diversity issues and are adjusted well to take account of national targets. They are shared with key partners and revisited regularly at team meetings and with schools. Decision making is transparent and includes a broad range of service users. Budgets are used properly and a tight rein is kept on funding streams. The local authority continues to be successful in attracting funding for various projects, for identified priorities.

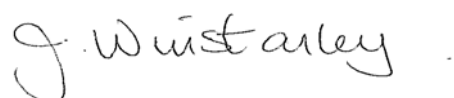
The local authority has improved its position in retaining teachers and is in a stronger position than similar local authorities and others nationally. However, there have been a few issues regarding the capacity of the centrally based workforce which have beset the LA during the past year. This has led to a little loss of momentum particularly in the analysis of data to identify attendance patterns and in providing specialist advice to secondary schools. Although effective work is clearly apparent in a range of ways to coordinate services for children and young people, there is still further work to be done to ensure that this is targeted effectively at hard-to-reach families.

Areas for development

- Improve outcomes for hard-to-reach families.
- Ensure that attendance data is analysed and used effectively.

The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment to be published by the Audit Commission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection