



Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Ms Goldie

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WEST BERKSHIRE

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 awarded¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people.	4
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

West Berkshire Council provides well for children and young people. The Directorate of Children's Services was set up sooner than required. It has evolved very effectively and in a thoroughly integrated way. The high quality Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP), evaluations of progress, exceptional levels of collaborative working within and across services, and with other partners, demonstrate an outstanding capacity for further improvement. There are signs of progress in many outcomes over the last year and most of the items identified for improvement in the 2005 APA have been dealt with successfully. Whilst primary school performance has improved slightly and secondary school exclusions reduced, more remains to be done here. Much good work has taken place to strengthen provision and outcomes for vulnerable groups, particularly looked after children.

Being healthy

The contribution made by the authority to the outcomes in this area is good. The CYPP demonstrates partnerships that are well developed to support the health of young people. The plan includes a preventative strategy with an emphasis on early intervention. The local authority continues to build on its record of positive multi-agency working and there is extensive evidence of very good collaboration across agencies to ensure the best possible outcomes.

Healthy lifestyles continue to be effectively promoted through the Healthy Schools programme and the level of awards to schools has increased. The School Nutritional Action Group (SNAG) includes parent membership and information is disseminated through schools to parents.

The Youth Offending Team (YOT) provides sexual health advice services and assists young people through sign posting to appropriate services, such as the West Berkshire Community Hospital which has a twice weekly young people's clinic. The YOT's multi-agency approach has been praised in the National Children's Bureau publication *Tell them not to forget about us*. The local authority has introduced a drop-in breastfeeding clinic for teenage parents offering advice from health visitors and specialists. The number of teenage conceptions has increased slightly this year but the figure is still very low compared to most other authorities.

Virtually all schools have a drugs policy, and their work is supported by a school drugs consultant. The local authority has promoted a smoking cessation policy and programme, and supported this with the employment of an adviser. Of the young people enrolling on the cessation programme, an increased percentage has given up smoking over the last year. Physical health is promoted and priorities include tackling obesity. There is also a schools sports coordinator programme, which has increased the percentage of school children who spend time on high quality physical activity. The local authority aims to build on this work by setting new targets for post-16 participation in sport.

The percentage of looked after children who receive medical and dental checks is good. Some minor improvements could be made in the checking on the quality of health care for all looked after children placed out of the authority.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have been extended since the 2005 APA to include parenting support to promote children's social care and improve behavioural problems. For the CAMHS, protocols and plans are in place for all components of provision, and the council is moving forward well to ensure that these are all implemented and services fully operational over the next year. The extent to which services have been developed is broadly similar to that of many other councils.

Staying safe

The contribution made by the local authority to the outcomes in this area is good. Children and young people are provided with a safe environment. The child protection policy is fully developed and implemented. Good use is made of the local authority's web and e-information facility that allows for the reporting of serious incidents. All children on the Child Protection Register have a qualified social worker. Child protection conferences are conducted using the strengthening families model in which families are involved in making decisions and finding suitable solutions to problems through partnership working. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board has progressed well since the 2005 APA. Stability of placements for looked after children is excellent in the short-term and good in the long-term. The use of kinship care for looked after children has increased. Good systems are in place across health, education and social care for identifying, reporting and assessing private fostering placements. The local authority has improved early intervention by children's services with successful use of the multi-agency approach.

The number of adoptions of looked after children is lower this year, although it is comparable to other similar authorities. The local authority reports that this performance is as a result of increasing placement with kinship carers. A fifth of looked after children are unaccompanied asylum seeker children. In view of this, the authority has developed effective identification and support systems to address this specialist area and the feedback from these children is very positive.

Whilst performance in completing initial and core assessments remains very high, the timeliness of reviews of looked after children is not nearly as good as the very good outcome of the previous year. Performance data do not entirely reflect the council's good practice because of problems with consistent recording onto the newly installed data system; these have now been resolved. Early intervention and a multi-agency approach have resulted in more appropriate targeting of services.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) and their families can access support at the newly developed Castlegate Centre. The regulatory inspection of Castlecroft (now Castlegate) has found the service to be excellent. This service is jointly provided by the local authority and the Primary Care Trust. It offers excellent support in respite, residential and day care to meet needs for both nursing and social care.

Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are undertaken on all local authority staff, volunteers and main contractors. A third of all school staff have been trained at level one in child protection. The foster carers' strategy is good. All foster carers are trained in safer care. There has been positive fostering inspection feedback.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution the local authority makes to ensuring children and young people achieve at schools and enjoy their education and leisure activities is good overall. Educational standards have risen reasonably well in many areas over the last year.

The quality of educational provision is good overall. The local authority is working effectively so that it meets even more closely the needs of children and young people, particularly those from vulnerable groups. The majority of pupils with LDD make good progress with improved inclusion in mainstream schools and very good provision in the two special schools. The work of the Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) is a strength in that pupils are enabled to gain qualifications or return to mainstream education wherever possible.

Provision and outcomes in the Foundation Stage are good overall although the local authority reports some variability which it is seeking to eliminate. Good work has been undertaken to strengthen the qualifications of staff working in this stage and also headteachers' effectiveness in improving it. Children generally leave the Foundation Stage having reached the learning goals expected for their ages, with communication, language and literacy being the relatively weakest areas.

In Key Stage 1, standards rose from 2004 to 2005 in reading and mathematics but not for writing. In both years, standards were above national averages and in line with those in similar authorities. Standards in Key Stage 2, whilst still at least in line with national averages, and better in English, have not risen nearly as well in recent years as those nationally and in similar authorities. The gap in the performance of boys and girls is narrowing, however.

The trends of improvement in Key Stage 3 results have been similar to the national trends for English and mathematics but not as good in science. Results continue to be above the national average in English and science and have moved to being well above average in mathematics. Results are in line with those in similar local authorities other than in mathematics where they are above. Pupils make average progress overall from Key Stages 1 to 2 and also from Key Stages 2 to 3. Rates of progress have shown a slight improvement in both cases from 2004 to 2005.

The percentage of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-C at GCSE has remained at 61-62% for the last three years although the average point score in 2005 increased from that in 2004. GCSE results in 2005 were above the national average and in line with those in similar local authorities. The proportion of pupils gaining at least one GCSE grade A*-G has risen steadily over the last three years so that only just under 2% of pupils leave with no GCSE or equivalent qualifications. This is better than the picture nationally. The percentage of looked after children leaving care with five or more GCSEs at grade A*-C has increased. GCSE results in all secondary schools have been above floor targets for the last five years. No secondary schools have featured in any of Ofsted's categories of concern since January 2003.

The proportion of schools placed by Ofsted in the category of causing concern is similar to that occurring nationally. The local authority is working effectively with these schools to remove shortcomings and continues to develop its support and challenge to all schools in order to raise standards. For example, although the local authority is not in receipt of funding for the Intensified Support Programmes, it has made arrangements for these to be run for those primary schools most in need of them. It has provided schools with valuable data to inform target setting and the evaluation of pupils' progress. Schools are encouraged to gain the National Challenge Award for Able Pupils: seven out of ten secondary schools either have the award or are working towards it. It has worked with secondary schools to enhance attitudes to learning and widen curriculum provision for pupils in Key Stage 4.

Attendance has improved over the last few years and is broadly average in both primary and secondary schools. Fixed-term exclusions have reduced by 10% since the 2005 APA. Permanent exclusions from secondary schools have risen significantly but schools have agreed to work in partnership with the Children and Young People's Trust to develop an inclusion protocol. Attendance at school by looked after children is acceptable although there is room for improvement; this is being addressed through the looked after children's teachers who are based within social care teams to good effect.

Direct payments for children and young people with LDD have more than doubled since last year. The local authority operates a new joint (Primary Care Trust and Social Care) residential care home. The effective system of individual person centred planning at the Castlegate Centre takes account of the views of young people and includes elements of education related to the development of independent living skills.

The local authority has tracked out of school hours activities since the 2005 APA and while the supply is good, take up by children and young people is limited mainly because of the difficulties in transport in some rural parts of the area.

Making a positive contribution

The contribution made by the local authority to the outcomes in this area is good. Children and young people have many opportunities to contribute to strategic planning and to judge the effectiveness of provision for them. The local authority has supported young people in actively participating in consultation through the 'Big Buzz' conferences. The Involving Young People (IYP) group has facilitated consultation about the development of Newbury 2010. This group has also consulted children and young people about the setting up of the Children's Trust. The Member for Youth Parliament initiative enables young people to participate actively in local and national forums and events such as the Annual Citizenship Day. The views of children from the residential respite service for children with disabilities have been included in the IYP consultation about the Children's Trust. More than 15 community conferences have been held to enable children and young people to express views, hear about developments, and to play a part in working together as a community. Looked after children are helped well to make a positive contribution in their reviews.

The Connexions service works in effective partnership with the local authority. In particular, it supports young people with disabilities through transition and most of them have continued into education, employment and training after the age of sixteen.

The prevention of re-offending is good although the re-offending rates have remained much the same as in previous years because of the increased police activity regarding detection and the applying of sanctions. This has had a greater impact on looked after children than others in that a slightly higher percentage have received final warnings or convictions.

Achieving economic well-being

The contribution made by the local authority to improving outcomes in this area is good. The extent to which learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being is predominantly good or better. Post-16 attainment in secondary schools, for students taking Level 3 courses, has improved with average point scores per student showing a year on year increase taking the local authority's performance further above the national average. The range of qualifications offered to sixth form students, however, is still rather limited. The local authority is working with schools to broaden the curriculum, particularly in relation to vocational courses. It has worked with Berkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to develop a 14-19 learning entitlement and strategy. The local authority's partnership with Connexions is good and Connexions staff are involved in multi-disciplinary teams across the local authority to the benefit of young people.

The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), is reducing but, at 6.2%, it is still higher than the target of 3.5%. It is particularly high for young offenders but the Youth Offending Team (YOT) is working vigorously to reduce it. The YOT Mentoring Service for Literacy and Numeracy, having secured partnership funding for another two years, has also been able to expand with funding for an additional part-time worker to work with looked after children who may benefit from the service. Of children in care, a good proportion engages in education, employment or training on leaving school. This is also the case for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The local authority provides for 90% of care leavers aged 19 to live in suitable accommodation; this figure is similar to last year's. The main provider of supported housing for 16 to 25 year olds is the YMCA with whom the local authority is working to plan for further housing developments. Effective personal educational plans are in place. These include looked after children's teachers visiting children placed outside the local authority's boundaries. The plans assist with transition to education, employment or training. A high percentage of disabled children over the age of 15 have pathway plans in place and all statemented pupils have a transition plan.

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

The management of services and its capacity to improve them further is excellent. Services work with commitment, clarity of purpose and exceptionally high levels of coordination and collaboration in their efforts to improve outcomes for children and young people and ensure they have the best possible life chances. Strong partnerships have been established with schools and a wide range of agencies, and also with parents and the young people themselves. This has led to a range of sustainable initiatives making a demonstrable impact across a broad range of areas to deliver high quality services. The views of partners contributed well to the construction of ‘Making it Happen’, the strategic plan for the West Berkshire Children and Young People’s Partnership. This well constructed document articulates clearly which outcomes need to be improved further and how. In this small unitary authority, building capacity is seen as crucial and every effort is made to strengthen efficiency and effectiveness by linking services so that information is shared quickly to address children and young people’s needs.

Performance is kept under review very well and actions for improvement are regularly evaluated in terms of their impact. The transfer of data and information from a predominantly manual system of recording to electronic form caused some initial difficulties which have now been largely resolved. The local authority champions the needs of children and young people by providing innovative and community leadership. For example, the pilot work of the Multi-Agency Team for Children (MATCh) is proving to be valuable.

There is optimum use of joint commissioning. For example, Castlegate services are used to help young people with disabilities to remain in the community. The local authority makes good use of funding to meet and improve the needs of children and young people.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased number of schools gaining the Healthy Schools Award • low rate of teenage conceptions • drop in breast feeding clinic for teenage parents • smoking cessation group has been very successful • good contributions from early years settings. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complete the implementation of plans to meet the mental health needs of children and young people through CAMHS.

<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good use of the web and e-information facility to report incidents • excellent stability of placements for looked after children • effective multi-agency systems to check health and safety of children in private fostering placements • good support systems for separated children • enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are made for all staff • schools ensure that learners stay safe and free from harassment. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve the timeliness of the reviews of looked after children.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educational standards are generally above average and rising • very effective Pupil Referral Units • all secondary schools are achieving above floor targets • pupils with LDD generally make good progress • good liaison between looked after children teachers and social care. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards are generally improving but not as fast as nationally • exclusions from secondary schools are being reduced but are still too high.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extensive consultation with children and young people about the CYPP • children and young people, particularly those with LDD, are supported well to make decisions at transition times • very effective Youth Offending Team. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • post-16 achievement has improved to even further above the national average • good partnership with YMCA gives rise to 90% of care leavers living in suitable accommodation • teachers of looked after children visit those placed outside of West Berkshire boundaries • high percentage of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have pathway plans in place. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEET figures are reducing but are still too high, particularly for young offenders • the range of vocational qualifications post-16 is limited.

<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high quality CYPP, self assessment and review of the strategic action plan • very efficient and effective coordination and collaboration of multi-agency services • an innovative pilot multi-agency pathfinder strategy • many good and productive links with a range of agencies eg Connexions, YMCA, Castlegate. 	<p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None.
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Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA

- Explore the impact of LA work to raise further educational standards.
- Determine the extent to which the range of vocational qualifications post-16 has been increased.
- Determine the extent to which exclusions from secondary schools have been reduced.
- Check for a reduction in the NEET figures, particularly for young offenders.

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

Yours sincerely



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