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Mrs A Williams
Director of Community & Social Services
Salford Community & Social Services Department
Crompton House
100 Chorley Road
SWINTON
Manchester M27 4BP

11th Floor
West Point
501 Chester Road
Manchester
M16 9HU
Tel: 0161 876 2400
Fax: 0161 876 2429
Minicom: 0171 972 4940



19th February 2001

Dear Mrs Williams

ANNUAL REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE IN 2000 – 2001

Thank you for your continuing co-operation with SSI's performance assessment programme, and for arranging our recent annual review meeting. This letter sets out the Inspectorate's view of performance for social services in your area during the year April 2000 to date, and comments on action for improvement for the year beginning April 2001.

In assessing your council's performance, we have drawn on evidence from a number of standard sources. These are:

- The published PAF Performance Indicators for 1999-2000.
- Monitoring information from the two SCR Position Statements that your officers completed in June and October 2000.
- SSI monitoring of reviews and plans for service development, including the Quality Protects MAP for 2000-1, Joint Investment Plans, Special grant plans for community care services, and Winter Plans.
- Reading of relevant policy and performance reports submitted to Council Committees and Cabinet.

It is, additionally, recognised that a SSI inspection of Welfare to Work provision made in Salford had been concluded at the time of our meeting, but that no written report had yet been prepared.

The annex to this letter summarises the key strengths of performance over the last year, and highlights priorities for improvement in the year ahead. These are at some level of specificity. At this early stage in the development of the performance assessment system, the annual review does not attempt to review all aspects of performance. It focuses on the key performance issues for which SSI has current information.

We are pleased to have identified one area of outstanding performance over the year, shortly to conclude. This is:

- Formulation and delivery, to time and to budget, of a large – and much needed “Strategic Directions” change programme, which continues. This has required enormous effort by managers and Councillors, and will continue to do so. Few sectors of the Department are unaffected. Concentration of such a change programme within one year has reinforced its demands on all concerned. The programme reflects commitments both to service modernisation and to efficiency across a wide range of user groups. Dialogue with staff representatives has been detailed and extensive, in very difficult circumstances.

We have also identified associated areas of important improvements in performance over the year. These are:

- Restoration of better financial balance in the delivery of social services, through detailed scrutiny of budget pressures and increased provision to meet unavoidable – but demanding – commitments;
- Development of new partnerships with independent sector providers of children’s residential care, home care and residential provision for older people.
- Positive changes in some areas of core challenge in children’s service, such as timeliness of statutory reviews and enhanced placement stability for looked after children, even as their numbers have continued to rise.
- Early leadership assumed by the Council in developing strategic approaches to meet older people’s needs, including the use of intermediate care provision.
- Significant work being done in preparing for take-on of Health Act flexibilities for people with learning disabilities.

We discussed a number of key issues concerning your organisation’s performance in the immediate/medium term future, and which we would expect you to take into account in your Best Value Review Programme. These are:

- Continuing work needed, with NHS organisations, to agree respective inputs in support of older people, at both agency level and in detailed care planning;
- Securing new balance and robustness in relationships with NHS partners, in a changing organisational context, to ensure positive

strategic commitments (eg in mental health) are actually delivered;

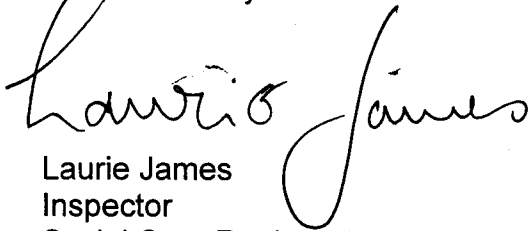
- Continuing focus on information systems development, particularly in relation to cost data, and first contact data, and;
- Delivering Best Value Reviews which are themselves efficient and effective.

This letter and its annex will form part of SSI's performance record for the council, but will not be published by the Department of Health. You are asked to present the full document to an appropriate Committee of the council within two months of receipt and to advise me of the date on which this will take place. The document must be made available to members of the public at the same time.

Progress will continue to be monitored during 2001-2 through our usual processes, and a further Annual Review meeting is expected to take place during the last quarter.

A copy of this letter has been sent to the Council's appointed auditor to assist in the consideration of the social services aspects of the Best Value Performance Plan. Similarly, a copy has also been forwarded to the Health Authority's Chief Executive.

Yours sincerely



Laurie James
Inspector
Social Care Regions (North)

ANNEX : PERFORMANCE SUMMARY 2000-2001

SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

a) Strengths and Improvements During the Year

The assessment has highlighted the following key strengths and improvements to these services over the previous year:

- Continuing evidence of well-managed child protection system (acknowledging return of some erroneous data (C21)).
- Substantial increase in the timeliness of statutory reviews for looked after children.
- Increased proportion of young children in family placements, and continuing increases in the stability of those placed with foster parents.
- Some increase in the numbers of children adopted, from a low base.
- New residential children's resources, developed in partnership with voluntary sector providers.
- New focus on fostering, through enhanced payments, deployment of extra staff and a joint recruitment initiative with HAZ partners.
- Continuing high rates of contact with care leavers.

b) Areas for Development

Assessment and discussion has highlighted the following areas where there are concerns about performance. There is a need to:

- Further reduce the number of external placements.
- Continue to focus on early contact arrangements and development of alternative support mechanisms to vulnerable families.
- Develop, with education providers, a wider range of support for looked after children, to further reduce exclusions and increase engagement and attainment in education.
- Secure more robust placement links for care leavers with education, employment and training opportunities.

- Develop expertise in meeting children's cultural needs.

c) Action for 2001-2

Out of our discussion the following areas appear appropriate for taking specific action in 2001-2:

- Develop better information about initial referrals and timeliness of response.
- Improve adoption rates among children looked after.
- Develop, with corporate partners, shared approaches to meeting care leavers' accommodation needs.
- Take practical steps, with partner agencies, to develop CAMHS services.

Please note that you will receive a separate notification from the Department about decisions concerning the payment of the Quality Protects Grant for 2001-2, following evaluation of your most recent Management Action Plan, which has not been able to be taken into account when constructing this feedback.

SERVICES FOR ADULTS

a) Strengths and Improvements During the Year

The assessment has highlighted the following key strengths and improvements to these services over the previous year:

- High – but reducing – rates of intensive home care.
- Stabilisation of the rate of supported admissions of older people to residential/nursing homes, albeit at very high levels.
- Leadership of joint agency work in the Mental Health Local Implementation Team, on work to deliver more seamless services for people with learning disabilities, and on development of an older person's strategy.
- Externalisation of significant parts of older people's services, with prospects of better value home care and new approaches to meeting accommodation needs of frail elderly people.
- Development of new partnerships with PCGs, yielding new investment.
- Consistently prompt supply of equipment following assessment.
- Expanding provision for drug users, in a multi-agency context.

b) Areas for Development

Assessment and discussion has highlighted the following areas where there are concerns about performance. There is a need to:

- Secure robust inter-agency commitment to delivery of an older person's strategy (OPS), which focuses on support to people living at home.
- Reduce admissions of older people to residential/nursing care.
- Establish more secure data in respect of costs for residential/nursing care and activity levels for those helped to live at home.

c) Actions for 2001-2

Out of our discussion the following areas appear appropriate for taking specific action in 2001-2:

- Agree robust JIPs with partner agencies for adult mental health, older people and those with learning disabilities.
- Examine, with health partners, complementary inputs of home care and community nursing personnel.
- Examine scope for shared funding of complex care packages with NHS partners, taking account of the new funding regime for nursing care from October 2001.
- Develop – with NHS partners – a continuum of intermediate care resources, with common access routes and minimal internal referral systems.
- Review, with NHS partners, the effectiveness of the dispersed housing network for adults with learning disabilities, having regard to considerations of cost and volume.
- Promote consistent risk management practices by frontline staff, and share approaches and develop approaches with GPs and community health personnel.

MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCES

a) Strengths and Improvements During the Year

The assessment has highlighted the following key strengths and improvements to these services over the previous year:

- Keeping within budget at a time of great service reconfiguration, with demonstrable efficiency gains.
- Extensive and regular monitoring of spend and key placement activity.
- Continuing delivery of statutory inspection targets.
- Substantial investment in a major new IT system.

b) Areas for Development

Assessment and discussion has highlighted the following areas where there are concerns about performance. There is a need to:

- Work with independent providers to develop provision of single rooms.

- Better align Best Value Reviews with service reconfigurations already in train.

c) Action for 2001-2

Out of our discussion the following areas appear appropriate for taking specific action in 2001-2:

- Undertake detailed preparation for take-on of RAP system.
- Maintain focus on unit cost data, given high/volatile costs cited by the Council.
- Further develop ownership through successive management tiers of new corporate financial control system.
- Consider scope for greater involvement of community development/work staff to better assist delivery of the Department's "strategic directions" change programme (eg via volunteer schemes, Welfare to Work-linked initiatives).