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Ms S Westcott
Executive Director of Children's Services
Peterborough City Council
Children's Services
Bayard Place
Broadway
Peterborough
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Dear Ms Westcott

A review (pilot) of the effectiveness of education and training provision for 16- to 19-year-olds in Peterborough – May 2014

Thank you for your hospitality, cooperation and coordination of the arrangements with your partners to enable this review to take place. I apologise for the length of time it has taken for us to write to you with our findings.

This letter details the main findings and recommendations of Her Majesty's Inspectors following their visit during the week of 19 May 2014. The annex to this letter sets out a commentary designed to help you and your partners continue to improve the quality of education and training, and to raise standards in Peterborough. It also provides an agenda for Ofsted's ongoing regional challenge and support to the City Council.

The review focused on:

- standards and progress
- the effectiveness of the local authority in meeting its statutory duties and in providing strategic leadership in relation to the participation of 16- to 19-year-olds in education or training and their well-being
- the effectiveness and impact of the full range of organisations working individually and collectively, to ensure that young people are supported in their transition into post-16 education, employment and training
- the scope of 16 to 19 provision for young people, particularly the most vulnerable
- the accessibility, responsiveness and quality of information, advice, guidance and support.

Strengths

- Vulnerable young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) are well supported by the local authority and its partners; many gain the skills and confidence needed to keep them in learning.
- The local authority has good oversight of provision and works well with partners. It is making good progress in managing the 'raising of the compulsory participation age' (RPA) initiative and in increasing the proportion of 16- and 17-year-olds engaged in education and training.
- There are bold post-16 initiatives on the near horizon, each with the potential to broaden provision for young people.
- Operationally there are excellent examples of practitioners working highly effectively across colleges, schools, youth intervention teams, housing and the youth offending service to ensure a holistic response to the issues young people face.

Weaknesses

- Too high a proportion of young people within school sixth forms perform poorly at Key Stage 5.
- Young people in schools are not always sufficiently well-informed to enable them to access vocational programmes best suited to their needs.
- There is a lack of a city-wide strategic approach to planning for all young people.
- The approach to the monitoring of and support for schools, colleges and other providers to ensure that they meet their statutory responsibilities in providing well-informed and impartial careers information, advice and guidance is ill-defined.
- There is a lack of understanding by all parties of the impact on young people's future opportunities of the new initiatives planned in the city, such as the Innovation and Skills Centre and the university technology college.

Recommendations

Peterborough City Council should:

- work with schools to continue to raise achievement
- determine clearly the key strategic priorities needed to bring about further improvement in post-16 provision
- review and amend the current consultative and planning arrangements so that the local authority and its partners can take swift action to tackle their shared priorities
- continue to champion the needs of all young people but report publicly and more robustly on shortcomings in post-16 provision across the city
- devise a means to support and challenge schools in sharpening the quality of their information advice and guidance for young people, to meet statutory requirements.

All providers should:

- individually review the extent to which they are meeting their post-16 obligations, particularly in respect of data sharing
- build on existing joint working with a view to contributing to the collective improvement of outcomes for all young people post-16.

I hope you and your officers found the review helpful and that this letter and annex supports you in making further improvements in provision and outcomes for the young people of the city.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean Harford".

**Sean Harford HMI
Regional Director, East of England**

Annex

Context

Post-16 education and training in Peterborough is provided through all 12 of the city's secondary schools, Peterborough Regional College, which provides general further education, and City College, designated as a community learning and skills provider. There is also a network of often small independent learning providers. There are some 2,280 young people in the current Year 12 cohort. The vast majority of provision offered by schools is at A and AS level, with only a few offering vocational courses at levels 2 and 3.

Commentary

Standards and progress

Measures to improve the educational outcomes for children pre-16 within the city are beginning to have a positive impact. Over the last three years, the proportion achieving five or more GCSEs grade A* to C, including English and mathematics, has increased noticeably, although rates remain below national averages. School attendance rates are also improving. Aided by the local authority's increased focus on school improvement and the pilot school-to-school support model, outcomes for young people when they leave Year 11 have been raised.

Participation rates in learning in Year 12 are high at 92.3%. April figures for 2014 show that the Year 12 cohort was 2,280 of which 819 (36%) were in further education and 83 (3.6%) were in employment or some form of work-based learning. The majority of young people (52%) stay on in learning within their own school's sixth form. Retention rates within school sixth forms are above the national rate in eight out of the 12 secondary schools.

At 6.7%, the figure for 16- to 18-year-olds not in employment, education or training (NEET) in 2013 is above the national average. This equates to some 450 young people but represents a reduction from previous years. The NEET rate increases with age incrementally to 9.7% at age 18. The proportion of young people whose activity is unknown is currently around 3%. In each of the last three years, this proportion has dropped markedly and is now well below the national average of 9.2%.

Standards in post-16 provision are too variable and are poor overall. While achievement rates in about half of the sixth forms are above national averages, this contrasts greatly with the others where rates are much lower. In aggregate, this has pulled down Key Stage 5 success rates in the city over the last three years consistently to around 10 percentage points below national averages.

Performance for individual subjects at A level is also variable across school sixth forms. The proportion of students gaining A levels at grades A* to B is below the national level – the average grade achieved sits between C and D. Achievement of learners studying classroom-based vocational courses is at the national average.

Achievement rates for learners studying in the workplace, at 85%, are below the national average of 89%.

The local authority and its partners work well to reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET. In reducing these figures over recent years, the city has responded proactively to the needs of a rapidly expanding cohort, including young people arriving from Eastern Europe.

Working together, the two colleges, the pupil referral unit and the local authority's youth intervention teams are effective in helping the various different groups of vulnerable young people access education and make progress towards employment. The standard of such work is often high. For example, the Prince's Trust programme delivered by the local authority in close partnership with Peterborough Regional College, as the funding partner, is intensive and effective. Success rates are routinely above 85%.

The local authority monitors the proportions of young people following the different options for post-16 education well. It does not, however, analyse sufficiently the performance of those moving into further education in colleges or with private training providers. The local authority provides RAG-rated risk assessments to receiving providers, but more support needs to be provided to these organisations on their use in identifying vulnerable learners. It is hindered by limited access to national qualification success rate data, which restricts officers' abilities to monitor the performance of aspects of post-16 provision.

Local authority strategic planning and local area provider accountability

This review was informed by the statutory duties placed on local authorities to:

- promote the effective participation of all 16- and 17-year-old residents in their area
- make arrangements to identify young people who are not participating
- secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all 16- to 19-year-olds
- track young people's participation.

The review was also informed by the specific requirement on the local authority to ascertain views on existing provision of positive activities and facilities from young people in its area.

The local authority is making good progress in managing RPA. The indications from this review are that its oversight of post-16 developments places it in a good position to move forward strategically and effect further improvements. However, it is evident that more rapid improvement can only be achieved with the full cooperation of key agencies and providers. Currently, this is not the case.

The Skills Service, managed by Opportunity Peterborough, the economic development arm of the council, is working to identify and meet the city's skills needs. The NEET/RPA strategy group is in place to promote post-16 education and training. However, overall planning, consultation, delivery and improvement are weakened by the absence of an agreed single strategic mechanism. The local authority acknowledged this. Schools are regularly invited to contribute to post-16 strategic planning groups but are still not fully represented at a senior enough level. The local authority has too little engagement with the private training sector. As with many other local authorities, Peterborough does not receive information about work-based learning providers and where they operate. This lack of information is holding back further development.

While the local authority has succeeded in harnessing the goodwill of partner organisations, the perception of many is that not all are working towards common goals and too much activity is independent and insular. This comes at a crucial point where new national policies, such as the study programme, require embedding. It is also the case that local proposals, including Peterborough Regional College's sponsored university technology college and the Innovation and Skills Centre, either have commenced, or look likely to do so. The respective roles and the working relationship with the Greater Cambridge/Greater Peterborough Enterprise Partnership are not clear. This is particularly so in respect of actions to support the training and employment prospects of vulnerable young people, and to better understand and address the particular challenges faced in Peterborough.

The adolescent intervention, youth in localities and NEET teams represent a significant resource and work well in supporting the most vulnerable young people. The success of this work is enhanced by strong day-to-day operational links with, for example, Cross Key Housing, the Youth Offending Service, the pupil referral unit and the two colleges.

Post-16 developments in education and training rightly form part of the local authority's wider strategic ambitions for economic growth and creating routes to employment. The work of the newly created communities directorate, responsible for commissioning all education and training provision, is becoming embedded and commissioning intentions are being modified to more accurately respond to the needs of specific groups of young people. For example, it has been adept at attracting external funding and, increasingly, forging partnerships to support economic and employment-related initiatives.

The new Peterborough school-to-school support and challenge network, which has been facilitated by the local authority, has not yet extended its philosophy and reach sufficiently to post-16 issues, but this is planned from September 2014. On occasions, the responsiveness of city-wide services to the needs of young people is impaired because some schools are too slow to submit timely data about 16- and 17-year-olds who drop out from courses.

Strategic planning now needs to be sharper and focused more keenly on the most vital issues and actions that pertain to the entire city's young people. The evidence from this review suggests the need for the local authority to strengthen its key leadership role in areas such as:

- publishing comparative data and challenging all providers about the quality of what is being delivered
- brokering effective relationships
- improving the effectiveness of information exchange with funding agencies, in particular the Skills Funding Agency (SFA)
- creating a pool of high quality information, advice and guidance providers from which schools could commission services
- in conjunction with partners, considering the merits of a common application process
- leading on strategies to attract alternative funding to support 16 to 19 provision through, for example, social finance routes.

Such ambitions are only likely to be achieved by the local authority drawing directly and strategically on the skills and expertise that other agencies and providers in the city possess and that it does not.

Provision and curriculum

While there are sufficient school sixth form and level 3 provision places in the city, results need to improve. Key Stage 5 performance is poor and some young people are not accessing the available vocational programmes that are better suited to their needs.

The local authority and its partners are working well towards a holistic approach to curriculum planning in relation to the most vulnerable young people. This approach enables agencies to manage effectively the challenges that young people may encounter, including learning difficulties and/or disabilities, securing housing, mental health, offending and improving their English language skills. In the work viewed by inspectors, great efforts are made to meet the needs of individuals and to good effect.

Good wrap-around care is provided for care leavers, with local services performing well in relation to national standards for education, training and employment, including to higher education. Few care leavers, however, remain in school sixth forms, preferring to progress to college. A recent inspection of the Youth Offending Service reported a positive focus on education, training and employment, resulting in high numbers of children and young people being placed in suitable provision. It also noted excellent links with colleges within the area that help provide opportunities for young people to progress into education and training after completing their court orders. New young arrivals from, for example, Eastern Europe are well supported by services.

Flexible provision for young parents is provided at Peterborough Regional College, where they receive good individual support and achieve well on vocational courses. Similarly, City College has well-structured educational programmes for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Some good programmes ensure that young people at risk of leaving education or training remain engaged in constructive activities over the summer period. These include the Prince's Trust, the National Citizens Service (NCS) provided by the local authority, and Peterborough Regional College's summer arts award programme. These approaches work well but arrangements to ensure that all vulnerable young people known to the local authority benefit from such support during the summer period are not secure.

More potential exists for the local authority, its commissioned partners and outsourced services to host apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship opportunities for young people. Cross Keys Homes does so to good effect and has been able to provide secure jobs for some young people as a result.

Where targeted programmes for the more vulnerable are successful, such as in the two colleges and the pupil referral unit or through the youth intervention teams, they include many of the following elements:

- partnership working where complementary roles and accountabilities are understood and acted on
- flexible recruitment that allows students to join at various points in the year
- a very strong focus on self-esteem, resilience and achievement
- robust processes to ensure retention and enable progression
- outreach youth work to engage the most vulnerable
- good initial assessment of young people's needs and appropriate levels of support that is reviewed regularly
- development of English, mathematics and employability skills
- opportunities for realistic work experience
- support to reintegrate young people into mainstream provision where appropriate
- skilled practitioners who challenge young people's behaviour and show determination in ensuring that young people stay on programme.

The local authority recognises the desirability of consulting with young people about city-wide services and its requirement by government to consult them on existing provision of 'positive activities'. Engagement is undertaken predominantly through the Youth Council and neighbourhood panels and policing forums, but more can be achieved to broaden the participation of all young people in the council's decision-making processes.

Both Peterborough Regional College and City College are providing the government's new traineeship programmes. The relatively new University Centre Peterborough (UCP) has broadened higher education opportunities for the area. A few young

people spoken to by inspectors had firm plans to enrol at UCP, which meets their particular domestic needs.

Significant developments are at the planning stage. The Innovation and Skills Centre, due to open in 2015, aims to promote learning in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Similarly, the proposed Peterborough Regional College's sponsored university technology college, specialising in engineering, environmental sustainability and construction, will have a significant impact of the breadth and depth of the local area curriculum. More needs to be done to ensure that post-16 providers, individually and collectively, review the impact of these forward-looking developments on the city-wide curriculum and on existing programmes.

The local authority, schools and colleges all identify a lack of parental understanding about the various options which exist post-16. This lack of knowledge and information weakens parents' and carers' abilities and confidence to challenge the advice they may be being given.

Information, advice and guidance

Raising the participation age and the diverse range of routes open to young people point to the need for sophisticated and well-informed information, advice and guidance to be provided at key points. Current arrangements, however, do not ensure that all young people have access to guidance about the full range of options open to them.

Different providers of post-16 education are not working together sufficiently well to ensure that objective, well-informed and impartial information, advice and guidance are in place. Indeed, the perception of many partners is that some groups are resisting an overall strategic approach to provide this overview.

Schools express starkly differing levels of understanding about the purpose, principles and delivery of information, advice and guidance. In some cases, it is refined and well-embedded within the broader school curriculum, but in other cases provision is insufficient. Many have good working links with local companies and employers, but knowledge about, for example, work-based learning options is weak. Quality assurance procedures and reporting mechanisms to school governors on careers information, advice and guidance require improvement.

Senior school managers make the point that, despite recently inheriting information, advice and guidance duties, few have sufficient capacity to ensure that they can engage with the complexity of schemes and routes available to young people. They concur with the need to further develop schools' expertise in careers information, advice and guidance and better utilise the networks that exist to improve planning and share good practice. In a valid attempt to ensure that young people can access professional careers guidance, some schools buy in careers education expertise. However, there is an urgent need for schools to be supported in determining their levels of need and on how best to procure effective services.

The local authority is working well to improve some aspects of information, advice and guidance through, for example, an annual careers event linked to a summer music festival for young people.

As part of a national poll in 2013, the UK Youth Parliament reported to government that, out of 15 issues, young people had selected the lack of access to work experience as their primary concern. The national findings were mirrored through Peterborough Youth Council's consultation. Clearly, young people are very alert to the need for the qualifications, skills and experiences required to prepare them for their future lives.