

26 November 2007

Mr Kevan Collins
Corporate Director for Children's Services
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Mulberry Place
5 Clove Crescent
London
E14 2BG

Dear Mr Collins

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

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 (CYPP) where it was available, 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 4

Tower Hamlets council consistently delivers services well above minimum requirements and makes an outstanding contribution towards improving outcomes in all five areas for its children and young people.

Service management is of very high quality and the council demonstrates an outstanding capacity to improve. The CYPP is ambitious and comprehensive in its priorities for improvement, identified through a rigorous and accurate needs analysis. Excellent partnerships across services and organisations, pooling of budgets for key services and joint appointments contribute to high quality and well coordinated services for children, young people and their families. The authority has a very good understanding of the needs of its communities and targets resources precisely to achieve good outcomes for young people, particularly in relation to their very low starting points. High expectations and an ambition to excel, combined with purposeful and well judged interventions, succeed in supporting children and young people to overcome significant social and economic barriers. There are extensive opportunities for young people to influence the shaping of the council's services as well as to take part in the evaluation of their effectiveness.

Strengths outlined in the 2006 APA have been sustained and good progress made in tackling the areas for improvement.

Being healthy

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. Excellent partnership working, including joint commissioning, pooled budgets and joint appointments, between services very effectively promotes children and young people's health. Very good progress has been made against some key health indicators including infant and perinatal mortality, breast-feeding and smoking amongst expectant mothers. There is a strong emphasis on prevention and detailed needs analysis ensures proactive and responsive services. Local area partnerships have contributed to better sports and leisure facilities, improved access to general practitioners, dentists and sexual health advice. Decisive action is being taken to address low levels of childhood immunisation and dental health of children under five through a range of targeted services.

A comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is available; including fully implemented plans and protocols between services covering the whole council area for children with learning disabilities and mental health needs. Consequently, all 16 and 17 year olds who require mental health services have access to 24 hour cover that meets their urgent health needs. Performance across the board for waiting times for assessment is good compared with England averages, 100% of specialist cases are seen within the recommended time frame. CAMHS works in close partnership with other agencies, including schools, to provide highly effective support to children and young people with complex, persistent and severe behaviour problems.

Performance for youth offending team referrals to CAMHS is very good and well above national figures for both acute and non-acute cases. The proportion of young people who receive specialist assessment for substance misuse within five working days, at 100%, is excellent and well above national figures, as is the access to early intervention and treatment services. Users of CAHMS have been trained to review the service, and their young people's charter has contributed to raising service standards further. Very good progress has been made by the Drugs Action Team to increase the proportion of young people in treatment, which is now above the London average.

The rate of reduction of teenage pregnancy at 25% is significantly above the national average of 12% and the authority has put in place funded joint multi-agency strategies to improve its performance further. Services for children with disabilities are fully integrated; this includes common assessment and referral pathways enabling efficient and targeted allocation of support to individuals and their families.

Very good performance for the health of looked after children has been sustained and built on further. The proportion of looked after children who had an annual health and dental check, at 88%, is above national average. The number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents is low, and represents a 71% decline on baseline figures which is significantly better than the national target of 50%. The authority has exceeded national targets for achieving Healthy Schools Status and is set to meet ambitious local targets.

Staying safe

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

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

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), operating since March 2006, has adopted policies to safeguard young people in custody, addressed bullying in schools, promoted community safety projects and the multi-agency arrangements for missing children. The capacity of the LSCB has been further enhanced through a substantial increase in funding. All schools have now reviewed their anti-bullying policies and police have been involved in joint safeguarding training.

Extensive multi-agency training has supported the introduction of the Common Assessment Framework and the team around the child approach in children's centres and extended schools. One early years setting out of 57 was issued with actions in relation to child protection. Immediate and rigorous action was taken to provide very good support and monitor early years settings regularly to ensure that all settings comply fully and child protection systems are secure.

Very strong and clear systems for information sharing and cross agency working ensure the needs of vulnerable children are met. The authority has been very successful in reducing the numbers of referrals of children in need and repeat referrals to levels below similar authorities and national figures. There are more initial assessments suggesting a higher percentage of appropriate referrals and responses within thresholds. Although the overall number of core assessments is above national rates, investment in multi-disciplinary commissioned services has resulted in reducing this to a rate below that of similar authorities. At 83%, the proportion of core assessments completed within 35 days is considerably higher than for similar authorities and national rates. Performance on timely completion of initial assessments, at 91%, is also very good and well above the national rate and that of similar authorities.

All children on the Child Protection Register are allocated to a social worker and their reviews are conducted on time, maintaining excellent performance that is above national average. The number of children included on the register has increased and is now more in line with comparable authorities and above the national average. There are a greater number of Black and minority ethnic children on the register; a more accurate reflection of the local population. This increase in turn is due to the

effective signposting of services and focussed work on raising awareness of safeguarding and child protection issues amongst ethnic minority communities. The specific emphasis placed on raising awareness of the effects of domestic violence on children, including the training of police officers, is reflected in the increased registration for emotional abuse.

Regular scrutiny of cases has significantly improved performance for duration on the Child Protection Register. Levels of de-registration, particularly for those who have been on the register for two years or more, have improved significantly and places the authority in the top band. Effective intervention and successful multi-agency work has contributed to a significant reduction in levels of re-registration to just over 3%; this is well below similar authorities and the national average.

The proportion of looked after children has further reduced and is significantly lower than similar authorities although above national figures. Performance related to the allocation of social workers to looked after children is very good. Timeliness of their reviews, at 98%, is also well above national figures.

Stability of short term placements is very good, fewer changes in placements are made than national or for similar authorities. Long term stability has declined and is below national figures and similar authorities. However, the authority has worked very effectively with minority ethnic communities to promote legal guardianships and has significantly increased the proportion of looked after children in adoption to twice the national rate. The numbers of looked after children placed in family settings has increased and is similar to comparable authorities but just below the national average. The inspection of fostering and adoption services in the authority judged these as outstanding.

All young people leaving care are very well supported towards independence by their personal adviser; the proportions who have pathway plans that address their specific needs is significantly above national rates. The authority has taken appropriate action to ensure that all children with disabilities now have transition plans, an improvement from the previous figure which was lower than the national average.

A range of initiatives, including good behaviour zones, youth victim support and encouraging the reporting of crime is helping to provide a safer environment for children. Latest local authority data shows robberies involving young people were significantly down and below similar authorities, the Tellus2 survey reported significantly lower levels of bullying in schools than national rates. The authority has worked with schools to conduct environmental reviews to develop safer areas around schools.

Area(s) for development

- Improve long term placement stability for looked after children.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. Extensive and good quality provision for children in the early years and Foundations stage contributes to positive outcomes in all areas of learning. The authority has put in robust moderation systems to ensure that assessment of learning is accurate and raises expectations of children, a significant proportion of who enter the settings as learners of English as an additional language. The authority met its target of raising achievement in personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. From very low starting points, children make good progress in the Foundation stage and the authority met its targets last year. However, the proportion of children achieving age related levels at five is below national expectations.

Standards over time at all key stages are improving at a faster rate than nationally. Children and young people make good progress by end of Key Stage 1 and reach standards above similar authorities, but below national average in reading and mathematics. By the end of Key Stage 2 year on year attainment has risen consistently and is now slightly above the national average. Given children's very low starting points, this represents very good progress. Although improving at a rate well above national and similar authorities over three years, attainment at Key Stage 3 is well below national averages. Robust action is being taken to improve outcomes in this area, including centrally moderated and analysed assessment throughout Key Stage 3 across the local authority.

Children and young people make good progress, well above national rates, between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 and the proportion attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C is in line with national average. However, although increasing at twice the national rates, the proportion of young people attaining these passes including English and mathematics is well below national average. The high proportion of young people attaining at least one GCSE pass, and the closing of a substantial gap between the performance of those from Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean heritage and the national average are examples of the authority's success in raising standards for all its children and young people.

Children in local authority care make very good progress and their attainment is well above the national average and that of statistical neighbours for this group. However, a wide gap remains between the performance of this group in comparison to all children and young people nationally. The authority has set challenging targets to raise standards further for these children and is using tutors and appointing a virtual headteacher as part of its actions to meet these.

The authority provides strong leadership to schools and works closely with families and local communities to maintain its relentless focus on improving attendance. Attendance in primary schools has improved and most recent monitoring by the authority shows it is now in line with national average. Attendance in secondary

schools is also in line with national average and authorised absences are low. Due to a tough stance on taking holiday during term time, unauthorised absences are reducing but remain high and well above national figures in both phases.

Fixed-term exclusion rates are lower than similar authorities and national rates in both primary and secondary schools, however permanent exclusions in secondary schools increased sharply to above national rates. The authority has taken swift action and recent data shows permanent exclusions have reduced.

The authority has a designation status as a hub for effective practice to provide for children and young people with special education needs in schools. The number of children with statements continues to reduce and the proportion of children with statements placed in mainstream schools is above national figures and continues to increase. The majority of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in schools, at rates above national figures.

School inspection evidence and responses from children in the Tellus2 survey indicate that children and young people enjoy school. A more varied and increased provision for recreational activities has improved take up. Young people are involved in the commissioning of some of these activities. A close monitoring of participation enables resources to be targeted to ensure vulnerable groups access the provision available.

The authority's high quality challenge and support to schools in raising standards has been recognised nationally by its beacon status in school improvement and early intervention work. In inspections a significantly higher proportion of schools at 72% have been graded good or outstanding for their effectiveness in comparison to 56% in similar authorities. The number of schools in a category of concern is lower than similar authorities; one school has notice to improve.

Area(s) for development

- Improve attainment in all subjects at Key Stage 3.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. Children and young people are engaged actively in shaping and evaluating the authority's services.

School and community based projects, very effectively and often innovatively, promote citizenship and community cohesion. For example, to promote greater communication and understanding between different generations, older and young people are studying for GCSE citizenship together. Peer mentors are trained and

innovatively deployed to improve relationships between younger and older residents. Activities organised through the Inter-faith forum such as questioning by young people and dialogue with faith representatives promotes community cohesion and interfaith understanding; this has been extended across schools in the authority.

The youth service reaches very good numbers of young people through a range of community based services. In the evaluation of the youth service young people expressed high levels of satisfaction with the provision. Youth participation in activities such as the youth inclusion support panel and the multi-agency youth inclusion programme is very good; of the 161 young people supported by this programme only two re-offended. Increasing numbers of young people with disabilities are using youth services and specialist sessions are provided for young people with profound needs. Active support for young people with disabilities ensures their participation, such as schemes to ensure their use of new parks and participation in the London youth games.

The youth offending service operates a targeted diversionary programme, working with young people at risk of crime or anti-social behaviour. First time entrants to the youth justice system have declined but there has been a small increase of 2% in the numbers re-offending; figures are slightly above the national figures. The authority reports that current figures show a reduction in recidivism in three out of four categories.

The Children's Rights Officer is proactive in contacting looked after children leading to increased contact and self-referrals to the children's rights service. The rate of participation of these children and young people in their reviews, at 92%, is above similar authorities and national figures. Final warnings, reprimands and convictions for looked after children are below similar authorities and national figures.

The youth participation team ensures children's voices are heard. There are many opportunities for young people to engage in service development. Young people sit on the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Group, the partnership management group and the borough's policing forum. They have helped to redesign CAMHS, conducted inspections of Connexions and been involved in recruiting senior staff, including the director of children's services. An increasing number of young people attain accreditation through their involvement. The youth mayor leads on the youth opportunities fund and distributes funding for activities and facilities. The views of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were sought in drafting the CYPP. A significantly higher than national proportion of young people reported their views are listened to in decisions about the local area.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The authority makes an outstanding contribution to improving children and young people's economic well-being. Through a detailed needs analysis and wide ranging consultations, the authority has an accurate understanding of the needs of its young people and the barriers they face in achieving economic well-being. The authority, along with its partners, targets resources effectively to improve outcomes. There is an extensive range of initiatives and programmes in place to tackle the high rate of unemployment and worklessness in families. Young people at risk of not entering into education, employment or training (NEET) are identified by end of year 11 and supported by designated staff over the summer to engage them in available opportunities. Subsequently personal advisers track progress to ensure individuals' success in taking up the opportunities made available. This is further enhanced by tailored one-to-one programmes for individuals and joint working with families and employers. The success of this strategy and effective partnership work can be seen in the continued reduction of the number of young people who are NEET, which is in line with similar authorities but above national rates. Additionally, at 45%, a substantially higher proportion of teenage mothers than the national rate of 30% are in education, employment or training. There has been an increase in the number of young people who stay on in education post-16 and substantial increases in the number of young people who are going onto higher education.

Strong corporate parenting promotes very good outcomes for children who are looked after, all of whom are in suitable accommodation, and a higher than national proportion have pathway plans. At 92%, a significantly high proportion of care leavers are in education, employment and training; this is well above similar authorities and national figures. The proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on work based learning programmes has increased, however, the relative lack of suitable opportunities for employment in adulthood constrains the authority in making suitable plans for transition. The proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are NEET is above similar authorities and national figures.

A comprehensive 14-19 Education Improvement Partnership (EIP) exists, with engagement of all key stakeholders, including all 14-19 providers, work based learning providers, local businesses and employers, local higher education providers and the Learning and Skills Council. The senior most leaders provide a strong steer to the work of this partnership. The EIP has been successful in gaining accreditation to deliver the information technology and social, health and development diplomas. To address gaps identified by an audit of existing provision, vocational courses have increased and the authority has a clear strategy for improving achievement further through schools and the local college.

Although the proportion of young people achieving Level 2 by age 19 is below similar authorities and national average, this figure continues to increase at a faster rate

than nationally with a 10% rise since 2004 compared to a national rise of approximately 5%. The proportion of young people completing an apprenticeship is well above national. To address the issues of high and 'under' employment, an employability framework has been established to ensure young people's skills and qualifications match the employment they take up.

The authority is making good progress in setting up children's centres; 15 are operational and a further six are due for early next year. Strong links between the children's centres and social and health care providers makes it easy for the hard-to-reach families to gain access to the services required. An increase in the number of childcare providers, matched with targeting of information to vulnerable families has increased the take up of services and benefits. The authority has successfully developed lifelong learning alongside basic skills courses and increased the number of learners accessing its provision by nearly a third to over 9000.

Area(s) for development

- Reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The authority's capacity to improve its services for children and young people further and its management of these services is outstanding. Strengths outlined in the 2006 APA have been sustained and good progress made in tackling the areas for improvement. Standards at all key stages are rising faster than national trends and very good outcomes in relation to children and young people's health and safety have been maintained. The authority continues to sharpen its understanding of the precise needs of its local population and uses this knowledge to target interventions and resources accurately. Highly effective performance management ensures that the authority delivers a responsive service and keeps its work under regular scrutiny against its plans and agreed performance indicators. The authority invests significant funding in children's services and demonstrates sustained improvements in a number of important outcomes for children and young people. Ambitious targets are shared by staff, and despite the challenges the authority faces in delivering good outcomes for its children and families, it has very high expectations of its services and they excel in what they achieve.

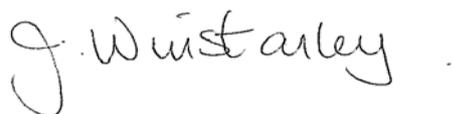
Inclusion is central to the authority's approach to all its responsibilities and progress on CYPP is reviewed against the equalities strands. There is a strong focus on meeting the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable children and overcoming barriers to progress of all. The results from Tellus2 survey show that a very high proportion of young people felt their views were listened to in decisions about their area.

The CYPP is informed by comprehensive needs analysis and extensive consultation, including with young people. The draft CYPP was translated into child friendly language to inform them and seek their feedback. Priorities are clearly established and ambitious targets drive the authority's commitment to achieving success for all its children and young people. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Group oversees the delivery of the CYPP, and coordinates strategic planning for services. Robust quality assurance systems for contracted providers are in place.

Multi-agency work and highly effective partnerships are a major strength; this helps to provide joined up and cohesive services to children and young people and their families, particularly for the most vulnerable. The children's centres are a good example of this. The authority has made a number of joint appointments with the Primary Care Trust, including that of the Director of Public Health and Human Resources, to strengthen joint working across different disciplines and obtain best value for money. There are strong arrangements for pooling of budgets for cross cutting services such as CAMHS and youth offending teams. The authority plans to build on the very effective joint commissioning work of the health group to develop a commissioning strategy for children and young people.

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". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection