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Ms Isobel Cattermole
Corporate Director – Children, Schools and Families
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Dear Ms Cattermole

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This performance profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the local authority has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of all inspected and regulated services for children and young people, arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against national measures. More weight has been given to the outcomes of Ofsted's inspections and regulatory visits (Blocks A and B in the performance profile).

The annual assessment derives from a four point scale:

4	Performs excellently	An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
3	Performs well	An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements
2	Performs adequately	An organisation that meets only minimum requirements
1	Performs poorly	An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements

Within each level there will be differing standards of provision. For example, an assessment of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, an assessment of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects. As in 2009, while the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's assessment, meeting or not meeting the minimum requirements alone does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets children's services assessment 2010

Children's Services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets perform well. In 2009, a transitional year, Tower Hamlets was assessed as performing excellently. However, in 2010 there is not enough good universal provision, to meet the minimum requirements for that grade.

The large majority of types of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Most special schools are outstanding and the pupil referral unit is good. Much of the nursery provision in the borough is good, but not enough childminders and childcare providers are good and there has been a small increase in the number of childminders that are inadequate than last year. A large majority of primary schools continue to be good and a higher than average number are outstanding. However, one primary school was found to be providing an inadequate standard of education in its most recent inspection following a turbulent period at the school. In the previous year no primary schools were in this category. Inspections show only just over half of secondary schools are good, but two schools which were inadequate are now providing a satisfactory standard of education. The proportion of good post-16 provision in school sixth forms has reduced in the last year, and is satisfactory in the further education college. The local fostering agency is outstanding and the local adoption agency is good.

A recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found many areas of strength and no issues that seem to be putting children whose circumstances have made them vulnerable at risk of harm. However, improvements to one of the local authority's two children's homes have not been sustained and it was judged to be satisfactory in its most recent inspection.

National performance measures show a large majority of outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or for similar areas. The educational achievement of very young children continues to be very low and for the first time in 2009 Tower Hamlets was one of the ten lowest performing authorities in England. Test results for 11-year-olds are much higher than in similar areas and examination results for 16-year-olds are improving quickly. However, 19-year-olds do not obtain as many advanced level qualifications as those in similar areas and improvement in this area has been slow. Children and young people from lower-income families achieve well at school.

Key areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Improve the quality of childminders and childcare providers and the educational achievement of very young children.▪ Improve secondary schools so more are good or better.

- Increase the number of 19-year-olds who are successful in obtaining qualifications.

Outcomes for children and young people

Healthy lifestyles are promoted strongly, especially within educational settings, but not enough childcare provision is good at doing this. Slowing down and reversing the long-term rise in obesity among children in the borough is a priority. In the last year there has been some success in reducing obesity among five-year-olds. However, for 11-year-olds obesity levels have risen and are now above those in similar areas. Local knowledge of how many mothers are still breast-feeding their babies at six to eight weeks is good: numbers are consistently much higher than in similar areas. The local authority's work to increase the take up of school lunches has been successful. Above average numbers of children eat school lunches in both primary and secondary schools. More children and young people each year are regularly taking part in sporting activities, but numbers are low compared to the rest of England. An extensive and flexible range of services have been developed to promote children's mental health and well-being. Preventative health care for children in the care of the local authority remains very good. A high number receive annual health assessments.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are largely good, except among childminders and childcare providers. An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection in January 2010 found local services work well together to protect children at risk of harm. Although the time taken to carry out assessments of children's needs is improving, performance remains below the rest of England and similar areas. There is a lack of clarity and duplication in referral processes to some specialist services which results in inconsistent levels of provision to some children and young people. Excellent work continues to raise the awareness and understanding of safeguarding matters among key religious groups in the borough. More children who took part in a recent survey reported they had experienced bullying than those in similar areas who took part in the same survey.

Nurseries, primary and special schools are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning, but too little childcare provision is good in this area. The achievement of very young children is improving, but is still below other similar areas. Test results for 11-year-olds are much higher than in similar areas and are above the national average. However, in 2009 the number of primary schools not reaching minimum expected standards increased from three to six, reversing a three year trend of improvement. Examination results for 16-year-olds are lower than average, but have been improving at a faster rate since 2005 so the gap with similar areas and England as a whole is narrowing. Pupils of White British heritage do not do as well as those from other ethnic groups in examinations when they are age 16. Behaviour is almost always good in secondary schools and far fewer pupils are regularly absent from secondary schools than in similar areas. Pupils from lower-income families do well at primary and secondary school.

Successful arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services are in place. Most schools and other settings are good at involving young people in decision making and activity in their community. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant continues to fall very rapidly, reflecting the effectiveness of local services working together in this area. High numbers of young people are being tested for chlamydia and other sexually transmitted diseases. On most measures the youth offending service is performing excellently. Fewer young people are offending for the first time than previously. More young offenders take part in education and training than in the rest of England and the number receiving a custodial sentence for their offence has fallen substantially.

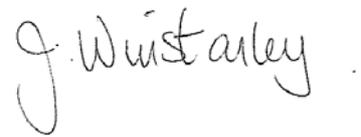
A high proportion of children and young people live in families on low incomes. Breaking cycles of worklessness is central to the local authority's approach to tackling child poverty. However, few families on low incomes make use of the funding available to them for childcare. The local authority knows that not all young people achieve as well as they should by the time they are aged 19. This is a key priority for improvement in which local services are beginning to have some success. In 2009 there was a larger than average rise in 19-year-olds obtaining qualifications which are the equivalent of five or more higher grade GCSEs. However, not enough are attaining two A levels or equivalent qualifications. More young people are continuing to take part in education, training or work, including those leaving the care of the local authority, when they are aged 16. The proportion that takes no part is falling and remains lower than in similar areas.

Prospects for improvement

Many outcomes for children and young people in Tower Hamlets are improving. A review of the Children and Young People's Plan by the local authority and its partners demonstrates good progress in reducing teenage pregnancies and preventing young people from committing offences. It has been less successful in improving the achievement of young children and ensuring 19-year-olds become well qualified. The recent inspection of front-line child protection services found senior managers effectively manage performance and have robust plans in place to bring about any necessary improvements. The good supervision, training and support of social workers has contributed to there being a stable and experienced work force in the borough. Local councillors also support the service well through providing extra resources to meet an increase in demand. Ofsted monitoring visits to weaker schools show they are receiving high quality support and appropriate challenge from the local authority to help them get better. However, there remain weaknesses in the quality of childminders in the borough, but the council is working hard with these providers to improve their performance.

This children's services assessment is provided in accordance with section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

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, Children's Services Assessment