

26 November 2007

Ms P Reynolds
Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Redbridge
Lynton House
255-259 High Road
Ilford
Essex IG1 1NN

Dear Ms Reynolds

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

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), your action plan arising from the joint area review and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. The letter comments on progress since the recent joint area review. 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 3

Redbridge Borough Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements and continues to make a good contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people in all service functions across the five outcome areas. There is clear evidence of improvement, particularly in achieving economic well-being. Pupils achieve very well from Key Stages 1 to 4, and there is evidence of excellent support for school improvement. Staying safe outcomes are good overall. The council has responded positively to the recommendations raised in the joint area review and has made good progress since that time. Overall, capacity is outstanding with a strong commitment to improving services.

Being healthy

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. One recommendation emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the next six months

- The Children's Trust should ensure that there is effective performance management to secure progress towards key health targets on immunisation and teenage pregnancy.

The Children's Trust has developed an action plan to address the falling uptake of MMR vaccinations. A new system for recording data is planned for next year to improve the monitoring of key health targets. Redbridge's teenage pregnancy rates decreased in 2001–04 but increased in 2005. In order to address this, a new board has responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of a range of teenage pregnancy and sexual health strategies that have been introduced since the joint area review. A sexual health and relationship coordinator has been appointed to lead developments in this area. This has led to targeted action including the opening of a multi-agency contraception clinic in a youth setting.

Partnership working continues to be strong at strategic and operational levels. Health outcomes meet a number of national targets, for example, breast-feeding initiation and smoking cessation. The infant mortality rate has improved. Obesity clinics have been successfully established with 86% of children screened. All schools are part of the School Sports Partnership with good levels of physical activity for children and young people.

There is a strong focus on promoting health in the authority's schools and the effective development of co-located, integrated services. The number of schools engaged in gaining Healthy Schools Status was comparatively low. However, involvement in the Healthy Schools award has increased this year and national targets are on course to be met.

Agencies are working well to promote mental health and reduce substance misuse. Very good progress has been made towards achieving a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and assessments of vulnerable children and young people are completed on time. The council has introduced a number of effective initiatives for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities that include an assessment and follow-up clinic. These initiatives have successfully halved assessment waiting times for children with autism, which now take place within a year.

The needs of vulnerable children and young people, including those who are looked after, are met well. Annual health assessments, including dental checks, are carried out for most looked after children, with performance above the national average.

The health needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met well through universal and additional services. The council has developed a map to encourage the sharing of information about services across all the agencies. The waiting lists for speech and language therapy have reduced considerably from 10 to four months.

Area for development

- Implement the performance management system for better reporting against key health targets for immunisation and teenage pregnancies.

Staying safe

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good with outstanding features. No recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

The number of children on the child protection register has increased, although because of good family support services, numbers are well below the national average. Child protection procedures are implemented well and practice in this area is managed and audited effectively. Re-registration and de-registration rates are low. The proportion of child protection investigations that lead to initial child protection case conferences that are held on time is significantly above the national average. All children on the child protection register have an allocated social worker and 99% of them have their reviews completed on time. Effective performance management systems ensure good compliance with procedures by social workers. Corporate parenting for looked after children is outstanding. Referrals of children in need have decreased but are above the national average. However, re-referrals have fallen and are significantly below the national average.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is highly effective and firmly established and partner agencies work well together. There has only been one serious case review which is currently being investigated within agreed timescales. Implementation of the common assessment framework is imminent with good progress on systems and training across agencies.

The number of looked after children and young people has increased but remains significantly below the national average, with good preventative measures and services in place. All children are allocated to a social worker and the timeliness of reviews is above the national average. The council has successfully reviewed pathway plans for those leaving care to make them more effective. The number completed has increased and the quality assurance of the plans has improved. Short-term stability for looked after children and young people is good and above that of statistical neighbours and the national average. However, long-term placement stability has fallen with performance below similar authorities and the national average. The rate of adoption is good and is below the national average. However, the proportion of children placed in foster care or adoption has fallen and fewer children are placed with family and friends. This is significantly below the national average. The number of looked after children who are placed in residential accommodation is increasing and is significantly higher than the national average. The council has recognised, and planned for, the impact of the rise in unaccompanied asylum seeker children. This is now 17% of the overall number of

looked after children and has increased the demand for semi-independent accommodation.

The fostering service and the residential family centre are well managed. The council has responded positively towards the inspection findings for the council's private fostering arrangements, the adoption service and children's home, and there are comprehensive action plans in place.

The council is making good progress in ensuring that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities live in safe environments and make a smooth transition to adult services. Most of these children have an effective transition plan in place. Family support services are good and improving. Direct payments to families have increased and individual budgets are being developed.

Areas for development

- Improve long-term placement stability for looked after children and young people.
- Improve proportion of looked after children and young people in family placements.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good with outstanding features. No recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

In the Foundation Stage performance is below average against the early learning goals. The weakest aspects are in communication, language and literacy. There was some improvement in 2006, and the proportion of children with a score of six or more across the areas of learning was closer to the national average. Indications from unvalidated data are that this has further improved in 2007 because of action taken by the local authority. A detailed action plan is in place and focuses well on improving outcomes for young children. Pupil assessment data in the Foundation Stage are now used more rigorously to target action and monitor improvement.

Action has been taken to address the high levels of pupil mobility in order to improve outcomes. At the end of Key Stage 1, standards reached by children in all subjects are above the national average and similar areas. Key Stage 2 results remain above the national average. Achievement in secondary schools is very good. GCSE results are among the highest in London and well above the national average. Standards at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 are excellent. The value added from Key Stages 1 to 4 is outstanding.

Most minority ethnic learner groups achieve better than those nationally. Pupils of Black Caribbean, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and mixed heritage, who were previously

underachieving, have improved their performance because of well-targeted measures introduced in schools. Pupils of White European and Black African heritage are achieving below the borough average at all key stages. These ethnic groups are significantly over-represented among the highly mobile population in primary schools and this is impacting on their levels of achievement. Additionally, there has been a recent increasing focus on children and young people from Eastern Europe. The proportion of young people leaving care aged 16 years or over with one GCSE decreased in 2006 and is broadly in line with the national average and similar authorities. The council has introduced a number of successful strategies to improve boys' writing. School inspections indicate that most children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good or better progress.

Attendance in secondary schools continues to be good and is higher than the national average and that of similar authorities. Attendance in primary schools is below average, with authorised and unauthorised absence above the national average. However, unvalidated data for 2007 indicate that a new attendance strategy is proving effective in reducing absence levels. The absence rate of looked after children who miss at least 25 days of schooling increased in 2007 and is above similar authorities and the national average. However, recent monitoring indicates that the average primary attendance rate for looked after children has shown improvement. The proportion of pupils in Redbridge schools who have been excluded is below the national average and that of similar authorities. Recent information indicates that provision for pupils who are excluded from school is outstanding. Based on inspection outcomes, the quality of provision in schools is good. Children and young people enjoy school and pupil behaviour is good or better. The local authority's policy for intervention in schools is excellent. It has taken very effective action to support schools in difficulty and no schools are in an Ofsted category.

The local authority provides good leadership of the education service and effectively supports and challenges schools. Action is effectively targeted to ensure that achievement in schools continues to improve.

Areas for development

- Improve performance of pupils in early years Foundation Stage against the early learning goals.
- Improve pupil attendance in primary schools.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. One recommendation emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the longer term

- Develop the consultation process so that it involves a wider cross-section of children and young people.

The council has made good progress in developing the wider involvement of children and young people through a consultation and participation strategy. Good consultation has taken place with regard to the development of the play strategy and youth involvement strategy. Young people are being trained to become youth champions as well as grant makers for youth funding initiatives. All Redbridge schools have school councils and a growing number of schools have involved young people in the selection process for staff appointments. Young people have also worked effectively with elected members to develop an anti-bullying strategy.

More looked after children and young people are helped to make a positive contribution to their reviews. Participation in these reviews has increased from 77% to 85% in the last year. This data indicate that performance is marginally below the national average and similar authorities.

Schools contribute very well to the personal and social development and well-being of children and young people. Of the 20 schools inspected last year, almost all were judged to be good or better for this aspect of their provision.

The number of first-time offenders to the youth justice system has fallen and is below similar authorities, although rates are still above the national average. However, final warnings for looked after children remain at a higher level than similar authorities and the national average. The youth inclusion support panel has been established to provide support to young offenders. The re-offending rate has reduced over time, but is above similar authorities and the national average, although the gap is narrowing. Following inspection of the youth offending team, there were a number of areas that were unsatisfactory and required improvement, including evaluation of the group work programme and increased education and training for young offenders. The council has strengthened provision in this area through, for example, the youth crime prevention team, and nurture groups to support transition into education for young offenders.

The youth offending team has been remodelled. A scaled approach to the group work programme has been introduced to identify young people at risk of re-offending, so that appropriate interventions can be made. The indications are that there has been a 13% increase in the number of young offenders in education, training and employment. There has also been an increase in the number of young people achieving accreditation.

There are still low numbers of young people reached by the Youth Service, which is below the national average. The council have requested a tender from the National Youth Agency to support service improvement and to establish a model for the delivery of youth work provision.

The Indigo project, led by Barnardos and commissioned by the local authority, effectively supports young carers and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Areas for development

- Reduce final warnings for looked after children and young people.
- Increase the involvement of looked after children and young people in their reviews.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Three recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the next six months

- The 14–19 strategic partnership should improve the take-up, and availability, of work-based learning opportunities and strengthen the partnership with local employers.

For action in the longer term

- Improve education and training opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities over the age of 19.
- Improve the range and availability of housing for vulnerable young people.

Good progress has been made with the take-up, and availability, of work-based learning opportunities for young people who are 14–19 years of age. Strategic leadership and collaborative planning have significantly improved. The proportion of vocational courses has increased, and the number of young people on the increased flexibility programme has risen from 250 in 2004 to almost 400 in 2006. The recent Ofsted inspection of Redbridge College found good capacity for improvement through effective partnership with local schools. A curriculum map is now in place and there are increased opportunities for accredited traineeships in the council. The number of young people completing an apprenticeship has significantly increased and is well above similar authorities and the national average. However, the council's bid to establish specialised diplomas was unsuccessful and a partnership sub-group has been established to finalise the diploma revision plan in preparation for a new bid.

The proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are not in education, employment or training is below similar authorities and the national average. Increased transition support is provided through the Indigo project in conjunction with Connexions and this area continues to be priority for the council to develop in the coming year.

Good progress has been achieved in improving the range and availability of housing for vulnerable young people. In response to the recommendation in the joint area review, the housing department of the council is developing a scheme to prioritise earlier access to suitable accommodation for care leavers and to secure longer term tenancies. The Foyer is an effective resource in the borough and provides accommodation for up to 50 16–17 year old homeless young people. It also has a young mothers' unit comprising self-contained flats with additional support services.

High standards in basic skills, excellent GCSE results and growing 14–19 vocational provision all help children and young people to prepare well for their working lives. Vulnerable young people are tracked and supported very effectively with almost all in education, employment or training, including those from minority ethnic heritages and young offenders. Looked after children and young people are supported well in moving to adult life through clear pathways to education and training.

The local authority is making good progress in its delivery of the children's centres programme. Four children's centres are already designated. Ten further (phase 2) centres are planned for the borough, two of which have opened. The council believes that it is now on course to complete the next phase of development on time.

The preparation of young people for work has improved through stronger partnership arrangements for work-based learning and careers advice. The proportion of 17 year olds in education, employment or training is above the national average.

Area for development

- Successfully bid for, and implement, the Diploma.

Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is outstanding. Its management of these services is good. Capacity to improve was judged to be outstanding in the JAR in October 2006, with only one recommendation under service management:

For action in the longer term

- Ensure workforce planning contains strategies for the recruitment and retention of key groups and ensure that training targets are met.

The strong commitment of the leadership team for change and development combined with well-established and effective partnership working through the Children's Trust, and efficient use of resources, place the council in a very good position for continuous improvement. Workforce planning is now in place although the impact on staff retention has yet to be fully realised. A multi-agency workforce development group has been established to plan, and implement, the workforce strategy. The council has an effective strategy to address the high proportion of vacancies in social care. Recent monitoring indicates that levels have reduced. Retention rates have improved significantly in the last year, although more staff left Redbridge than did nationally or in similar authorities. The council has taken active steps to monitor and evaluate the retention rates and have appointed new officers to lead the implementation of the workforce plan. Unfilled teacher vacancies are reducing and are now below the national average. The council is designing an integrated training package with clear targets for improvement. Significantly more social care staff achieved a national vocational qualification at Level 3 in child care, although the proportion of those holding the post qualifying award for social work remains well below the national average.

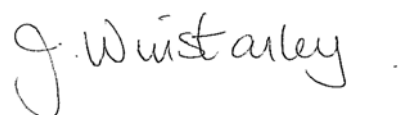
The CYPP 2007-08 reflects consultation with partners and children and young people. The review outlines mostly good progress in addressing the recommendations from the joint area review. In some areas further work is required, for example, the full implementation of workforce planning. Performance monitoring is good. The council knows its strengths and areas for development very clearly and has effectively used evidence based on the analysis of performance information to identify priorities. These are well focused on improving outcomes and making a difference to the well-being of children and young people. The track record of improvement has been sustained in many areas and is having a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people. For example, the very good achievement in primary and secondary schools has continued and there are no schools in an Ofsted category. In addition, the numbers of looked after children and young people, and those on the child protection register, are well below the national average.

The council is developing an integrated electronic system to support the implementation of the common assessment framework. Financial management and value-for-money are good, for example the cost of services for looked after children and young people is below the national average.

Overall, the council has demonstrated good progress in meeting the joint area review recommendations. It has shown outstanding capacity to maintain and improve further its services 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 blue ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection