

26 November 2007

Ms Liz Graham
Interim Executive Director for Children and Young People's Services
London Borough of Newham
Broadway House
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Dear Ms Graham

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

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment for your local authority. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan, your action plan arising from the joint area review (JAR) and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. The letter comments on progress since the recent JAR. 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

Newham Council consistently delivers good services for children and young people and makes a good contribution towards improving outcomes. This good level of performance is set within a context of a highly mobile and significantly disadvantaged population, resulting in considerable social and economic challenge. The area is undergoing transformational change as a result of a number of regeneration initiatives. This has resulted in both greater opportunities, particularly in respect of potential employment and the built environment, and increased challenges in managing a process of rapid change. The authority has strong links with the Primary Care Trust leading to better integration of management and improved services. Support for initiatives to enable children and young people to lead healthy lives are good. While a number of indicators related to infants and mothers are good infant mortality rates are above average. Children and young people are well supported in staying safe and support for the most vulnerable is good. There has been a significant reduction in deaths and serious injuries resulting from road traffic accidents. While standards are rising more rapidly than in England as a whole they remain below average. Ofsted inspections confirm this picture of rising achievement, good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. The authority values the views of children and young people and has been active in consulting them. While a greater

proportion of children and young people who are looked after by the local authority contributed to their statutory reviews last year the figure is below the average for England as a whole. The authority has very good links with employers, the community and organisations such as the local Learning and Skills Council. Progress with 14–19 reforms is good. The authority has put in place a wide range of innovative initiatives to increase employment opportunities for young people. At present these and regeneration are having limited impact as the proportion of young people not in employment education or training rose last year and is above average.

The authority has good leadership and management with a clear focus on improving the lives of children and young people.

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 JAR.

For action in the next six months

- The health service should improve the availability of mental health provision to reduce waiting times between assessment and treatment for those with acute needs.

The Council's relationship with the Primary Care Trust is strong and the joint appointment at Assistant Director level has strengthened that partnership. It has ensured joint working at all levels leading to better integrated management and improved services. The Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is performing well overall with waiting times improving so that almost all measures are above the national average.

The number of teenage pregnancies has significantly reduced with a 23.3% drop in comparison with the national figure and is well below the rate in similar authorities. Positive interagency partnerships and innovative ways of working have been crucial to this. For example, the Youth Parliament has introduced the 'LoveLife' programme to promote health, well-being and social responsibility in school and youth provision.

The overwhelming majority of schools participate in the Healthy Schools Programme and 50% have achieved accreditation. The number of school sport partnerships significantly exceeded the national target.

Support for vulnerable groups such as looked after children is good. Annual health and dental checks are in the top performance band. There is a well established multi-agency service for children and young people with mental health and learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

There is a mixed picture for improving health outcomes. The proportion of mothers initiating breastfeeding is above the benchmark and England averages with 84.4% of mothers in Newham breastfeeding compared to 68.9% in England. While it remains well below average the proportion of expectant mothers smoking has risen, while nationally it has fallen. Performance is poor with respect to infant mortality and dental care for children under 5. Infant mortality rates have dropped but remain above the national average; dental care for children under 5 shows an average 2.49 decayed teeth as opposed to 1.49 for the national average. While a variety of strategies and programmes have been introduced to combat the problems in both these areas they remain areas for improvement.

Areas for development

- Continue to look at reducing the rates of infant mortality.
- Continue with the programme for the improvement of dental health in the under fives.

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. Three recommendations emerged from the JAR.

For immediate action

- The council and its partners should agree and implement appropriate and consistent thresholds for referral to social care.
- The council should ensure the effective management of initial referrals.
- The Area Child Protection Committee should ensure that cases of sexual abuse are identified appropriately and that suitable action is taken.

There has been good performance in a number of important areas. There is a high percentage of referrals of children in need who then require an initial assessment and the percentage of those assessments completed within seven working days is higher than the national average. The percentage of core assessments completed within 35 days is exceptionally high with 90% completed as opposed to the national figure of 78%. Although the number of children on the Child Protection Register remains high, the authority has maintained 100% of reviews carried out within the required timescale and all children on the Child Protection Register are allocated a qualified social worker. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported in their move from children's to adult services.

The local authority is aware that timeliness of reviews for looked after children and young people still needs to improve. Currently the figure, although showing an increase, is slightly below the national average. Robust procedures are in place to address this. The stability of placements for looked after children and young people

has improved and is in line with the national average. The number of looked after children and young people placed in foster care or placed for adoption has remained stable and is higher than the national average. Work has been carried out to enlarge the pool of adopters available. Minority ethnic groups are under represented.

Following the JAR action was taken to ensure cases of sexual abuse were identified appropriately and suitable action taken. This has involved the tightening of procedures resulting in an increase in the percentage of registrations where sexual abuse is an issue. Commissioning of appropriate services to provide treatment programmes for young people who sexually abuse remains an area for development for the local authority. This, therefore, remains an outstanding action from the JAR.

Children and young people report feeling safe in school and in their homes. A majority of children and young people report never having been bullied at school. There are effective anti-bullying strategies in place and children and young people are involved in their development. The Road Safety Education Service provides effective advice and support to children, parents and carers and other road users. As a result there has been a 79% reduction in the number of children seriously injured or killed in road traffic accidents.

Area for development

- Ensure access to a treatment programme for young people who sexually abuse, by the commissioning of appropriate services.
- Improve the timeliness of reviews for looked after children and young people.
- Increase the number of adoptive families within the ethnic minorities.

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. One recommendation emerged from the JAR.

For action in the next six months

- The council and its partners should reduce the number of permanent exclusions among some ethnic minorities, vulnerable groups, and those with statements of special educational need.

Exclusions have fallen and at secondary school permanent exclusions are below average. The most recent data suggest that as a result of a range of local authority strategies to monitor and reduce exclusions the number of permanent exclusions has continued to fall. The number of exclusions of children and young people with statements of special educational need rose slightly in 2007 but has fallen significantly over the last three years. However, while the number of exclusions has

fallen, the most vulnerable groups such as White British and some Black boys continue to be over represented.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are in line with those found in similar authorities but well below those found nationally. This is in large part a reflection of the much lower starting points for the majority of children and young people. At the end of Key Stage 2 standards remain well below average when compared to all authorities but broadly in line with similar authorities. Good challenge and support by the authority has resulted in a consistent trend of improvement in English, mathematics and science which is well above the national trend and that for similar authorities. Improvement has been strongest in English and mathematics. This trend of improving performance and rising standards is also evident in Key Stage 3 where standards in English and mathematics are rising more quickly than in similar authorities and at a rate which is well above that found nationally. However, although improving, standards remain too low. At GCSE standards are rising at a similar rate to the national improvement. While the proportion of young people gaining 1 or more A*-G grade is above both national and local comparators the proportion gaining 5 A*- C is below. The progress children and young people make from the end of Key Stage 2 to GCSE is in the top 30% nationally. Although underachieving groups have been identified and a range of intervention strategies have been implemented White British, Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi children and young people continue to do least well.

There is good collaboration between schools to ensure a wide range of curriculum provision. There was a drop in the percentage of young people who are looked after by the local authority taking at least one GCSE but this is from a very high figure last year. The educational qualifications for looked after children and young people rose sharply last year and the proportion of looked after children and care leavers achieving five or more GCSEs is well above that found nationally, and almost double the Public Service Agreement target. This is in part an indication of the effectiveness of the new cross service steering group which was established to monitor and improve the performance of looked after children and young people. The proportion of new statements of special educational need completed on time is among the best nationally.

The quality of childcare and nursery provision is similar to that found nationally except that in inspections none was judged to be outstanding, (7.6% nationally). Assessments of how well young children are doing indicates that a smaller proportion are meeting the early learning goals than in London as a whole or nationally. The gap between how well the highest and lowest achieving children do is much wider than average. In order to raise standards the local authority is ensuring there are clear links between outcomes and the quality of provision and funding. The authority is also taking active steps to enable the most successful practitioners to disseminate best practice.

Ofsted inspection reports judge that primary school pupils enjoy school very much. In secondary schools students' good levels of enjoyment is closely linked to the breadth and richness of the curriculum. This high level of enjoyment at primary

schools is not reflected in similarly high levels of attendance. Although attendance is average it declined in 2006. Attendance at Newham secondary schools is the highest in England. The attendance of looked after children and young people is good. This positive picture is reflected in the TellUs2 survey to which 458 children and young people responded. Their responses indicate that enjoyment of school is above average but that lessons which were more fun or interesting would help them learn more. The proportion of schools judged to be outstanding is very high and is about twice that found in similar authorities. The proportion of schools judged good or better is also high. Inspectors judged student's achievement to be outstanding in a high proportion of schools, in the case of secondary schools the proportion was almost three times that found in similar authorities. The positive attitudes and good behaviour of children and young people is a particular strength as is the care, guidance and support they receive.

The proportion of schools causing concern is below both the London average and the average for similar authorities. Two primary schools are currently in special measures and one secondary school has a notice to improve. Of these the local authority is judged to be providing good support to two and inadequate support to one.

Areas for development

- Raise standards further at all key stages.
- Monitor more closely the challenge and support to schools causing concern.

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 JAR.

For action in the next six months

- The council and its partners should improve the coordination of information data systems to increase participation in education, employment and training post 16.

The authority has made satisfactory progress in improving the use and coordination of data. Progress recently has been more rapid. A data manager has been appointed and more robust systems put in place. This has resulted in a significant reduction in the proportion of young people whose destination or economic activity is unknown.

There is a well established and successful volunteering scheme for young people and this includes opportunities to engage in peer education and mediation projects. Newham has been at the forefront of involving children and young people in decision making and has actively sought their views through forums such as the Newham Youth Parliament, junior SACRE, and the election of a Young Mayor. In addition, vulnerable young people such as looked after children and users of mental health

services receive feedback from, and have the opportunity to challenge, service management teams. This apparent high level of participation in borough-wide initiatives is endorsed by children and young people. However, they also felt that their views were not listened to sufficiently in the running of their schools.

There is a good range of work to promote social cohesion through anti-racist and cross community youth work and a zero tolerance approach to racist or homophobic behaviour. Young people have access to a very good range of recreational, leisure and cultural activities. These and other initiatives to reduce anti-social and offending behaviour are beginning to impact on crime rates. There was a fall in the number of young people working with the youth offending team and a fall in the number of first time offenders. There have been a number of recent high profile incidents relating to knife crime. In response to this a good range of multi-agency initiatives to reduce gun and knife crime is in place. The authority works closely with a range of agencies and voluntary groups to reduce criminal and anti-social behaviour. Although the ratio of youth workers to young people is relatively low there are high levels of contact between the youth service and young people. Schools who responded to the Audit Commission survey felt the authority's services were effective in providing behaviour support programmes and in providing a range of interventions to deflect young people from anti-social behaviour.

Ofsted inspection findings indicate that children and young people are very well supported in their social and emotional development, particularly at secondary schools. The proportion of looked after children and young people who contributed to their statutory reviews rose last year and is in line with similar authorities, although below the national average. Those young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well in the transition to adult life. The borough has a long standing and wide ranging commitment to inclusion and a number of initiatives are in place including pupil-centred reviews, developing the role of leading teachers in inclusion, and rolling out provision mapping across the authority.

Areas for development

- Consult with children and young people on how their views can better influence the running of their schools.
- Increase the proportion of looked after children and young people contributing to 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. No recommendations emerged from the JAR.

There is a wide range of support available for parents and carers of younger children through programmes such as Early Start and initiatives like London e-prospectus, which help young people and parents and carers understand the range of options

available. There is good outreach work to raise participation rates in hard-to-reach groups and encourage families with no history of higher education to raise their aspirations. Looked after children and young people receive good advice and support which has resulted in improved educational outcomes. Their attendance at school and college has improved as a result of effective intervention and partnership arrangements by the authority. The proportion of care leavers who are in employment, education or training is very good. The proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities known not to be in employment education or training fell and is similar to the national average.

There is very good involvement of employers and the community in respect of work experience placements for young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and vocational opportunities are well promoted. The authority is one of only four area partnerships accredited to deliver all five vocational diplomas. Appropriate levels of staffing and good links with the training consortium are supporting the ambitious programme of setting up these qualifications. The curriculum for 14 to 19 year olds is good and meets the diverse needs of students. There is a well established partnership network for collaborative provision for 14 to 16 year old students involving 13 (out of 15) schools, two colleges and several private training providers. The proportion of young people completing apprenticeships is good. The recent Ofsted inspection of the progress of 14 to 19 reforms judged that there is high achievement at Key Stage 4, the retention rate for students post-16 is good and students achieve well at Level 3.

While there is a good range of partnerships and strategic alliances intended to maximise the employment opportunities afforded by regeneration projects, the current impact on young people is less evident. The proportion of 16 to 18 year olds not engaged in employment, education or training has risen while for similar authorities and nationally it has fallen. This has also risen for 19-year-olds but remains below the average for similar authorities. The proportion of 16 to 18 year olds whose current activities are not known rose considerably and at 14.6% is more than twice the national. There was a similar rise in the proportion of 19-year-olds the authority had lost track of although overall the proportion is well below that found nationally. This has resulted in robust action by the authority to ensure it knows the current activities of all 16- to 19-year-olds. Early indications are that this action is proving successful but it is too early to judge the long term impact.

Areas for development

- Reduce the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training.
- Reduce the proportion of young people whose current activity is not known.

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

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is good, and its management of these services is good. Two recommendations emerged from the JAR.

For action in the next six months

- The council should strengthen performance management to:
 - identify weaknesses in services and emerging trends at an early
 - improve the auditing and quality of case files and care planning in social care.

- The council should improve the leadership and management of the youth service to:
 - better address corporate targets
 - improve the quality of youth work practice.

The authority has an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of its provision and has put in place a wide and innovative range of initiatives designed to bring about improvement. This has enabled them to better identify weaknesses and emerging trends and take appropriate action. Performance management has improved the auditing of the quality of social care case files through better monitoring and tracking systems. Leadership and management of the Youth Service has improved. A new management information system has been introduced resulting in more accurate needs assessments. There are much improved arrangements for tracking and reporting on progress against corporate targets both in the Youth Service and more widely. A progress report by the National Youth Agency comments favourably on the distance travelled and says that 'Good and clear policies and strategies are now in place'.

Senior managers and those involved in the management of children's services are very well informed and provide effective leadership. There is a clear and well articulated commitment from elected members to improve the lives of children and young people and to ensure their views are taken into account. The authority has been particularly effective in obtaining external funding for a wide range of imaginative and innovative initiatives designed to raise standards and increase the employability of young people. A new Executive Director has recently been appointed and will take up post in December 2007. Staff recruitment and retention is improving. There is a new team in place to focus on accelerating the authority's work in respect of 14 to 19 provision. The review of the 2006 children and young people's plan is detailed and comprehensive, as are the updates provided for officers and members on progress with issues arising from the JAR in June 2006. What is less

clear in discussions with officers is the impact they expect some strategies to have on improving outcomes for children and young people.

Schools who responded to the most recent survey of their views (16%) were generally satisfied with the work of the authority, particularly its effectiveness in challenging them to perform better and helping them secure school improvement. They also expressed a wish to be kept better informed on a range of issues such as implementation of the common assessment framework and the coordination of admissions.

While training is well resourced and has generally improved, the proportion of social workers and managers holding appropriate qualifications has not increased and is below the average for similar authorities.

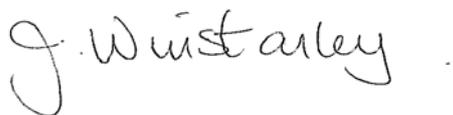
Areas for development

- Improve communication with schools.
- Ensure the authority more closely monitors the impact of its actions.

Overall the council has demonstrated good progress in meeting the JAR recommendations, and has shown good 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".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection