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26 November 2007

Mr Chris Kiernan
Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Waltham Forest
Silver Birch House
Uplands Business Park
Blackhorse Lane
London
E17 5SD

Dear Mr Kiernan

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST

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, 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.

In Waltham Forest, most education services are delivered by EduAction under a contract that ministers directed the local authority to enter into in 2001. It is due to end on 31 March 2008.

Overall effectiveness of children's services Grade 3

The local authority delivers a good level of children's services overall. Its services have a good impact on each of the five *Every child matters* outcomes. The capacity for improvement is good.

Being healthy Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Action plans address priority issues well, including areas for development identified in the 2006 APA. Partnership working is strong and good integrated services promote effective coordination of support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The health needs of looked after children and young people are met well.

There has been a good sustained reduction in infant mortality which is now in line with national and benchmark figures. The incidence of low birth weight babies, although in line with benchmark figures, remains higher than nationally. Targeted action plans are in place to address this and are supported by plans to further align primary health care with universal children's services. Integrated work within existing children's centres has resulted in a good reduction in the numbers of mothers smoking during pregnancy. Overall, a good number of mothers initiate breast-feeding and relatively few smoke during pregnancy.

The area has made a good start in addressing childhood obesity, for example, through the Healthy Schools programme. Services to curtail young people's drug use are developing well. A specialist early intervention and treatment service is in place with plans to re-commission this service. Vulnerable young people, for example, children who are looked after and young offenders, have good access to substance misuse services. The rate of teenage conceptions remained static in 2005, the most recent year for which data are available, following a good reduction in previous years. Considerable further reduction is needed to reach the 2010 target. A new appointment has recently been made to the teenage pregnancy co-ordinator post and the action plan has been revised. The development of integrated youth provision will also support this work. Services recognise the need to respond to the message from the Tellus2 survey that young people in Waltham Forest would welcome improved information on a range of health issues.

The area is making good progress towards the provision of comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Children and young people referred to the service are seen promptly, particularly those from the youth offending service. Waiting times for specialist services are significantly better than nationally. Some progress has been made in developing Tier 2 services, an area for improvement in the 2006 APA. Nevertheless, further work is needed, particularly in improving the co-ordination of provision and services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Areas for development

- Reduce teenage pregnancy.
- Provide young people with more information on healthy lifestyles.
- Improve the co-ordination of Tier 2 CAMHS services.

Staying safe

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

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

The local authority is addressing young people's concerns about safety in the community through good partnership working and careful attention to young people who are victims of crime.

Child protection services within the borough are secure and well managed. There is a well-established Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). It is developing multi-agency quality assurance systems that are having some impact on improving practice. A culture of safeguarding is well embedded across agencies. There are good initiatives to engage faith communities in safeguarding children and to improve the multi-agency response to young people at risk. Schools' contributions to safeguarding children are well supported by the local authority.

Improvements in child protection practice within social care identified in last year's APA have been sustained and this is well supported by good audit and quality assurance systems. There has been some reduction in the number of children subject to child protection plans, due mainly to a high level of de-registrations, but there is good evidence of effective planning for these children. The number of initial and core assessments completed is low relative to statistical neighbours and national figures and fewer initial assessments are completed to timescale. However, timescales for completion of core assessments have improved and are now good, in line with national rates and better than statistical neighbours. The local authority should take steps to ensure that it can be confident that all children who would benefit from a child in need assessment receive one.

The local authority is ambitious in its plans to develop integrated early intervention and prevention services and is making good progress with them. Plans to implement the common assessment framework, the role of the lead professional and information sharing are progressing well and the authority has plans in place to ensure good engagement of schools in this.

The number of looked after children and young people continues to fall steadily. A family group conference service and other targeted provision contribute to ensuring that fewer older children enter the care system.

There has been a reorganisation of, and re-focus on, services for looked after children, including unaccompanied minors, and improved care planning and performance management. These have contributed to better outcomes for looked after children, including a significant improvement in long-term placement stability which is now good, and some improvement in the number of children placed for adoption. Additional resources have supported improved arrangements for reviewing care plans for all looked after children, which have resulted in a good improvement in the number of children whose plans were reviewed to timescale. Further improvements in care planning are needed, however, particularly in relation to timescales for adoption. The local authority has action plans in place to address this.

Good integrated services are in place for children with disabilities including allocation of a lead professional for over 500 children and young people.

Areas for development

- Ensure that all children who would benefit from an initial assessment receive one and improve timescales for their completion.
- Ensure timely care planning for all looked after children and young people.
- Improve the proportion of looked after children made subject to adoption or special guardianship orders.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

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

Value added measures show that pupils in all key stages made above average progress. This was outstanding between Key Stages 2 and 4 where it was fifth highest nationally. Most attainment has improved at a faster rate than nationally and for similar authorities. Attainment is still an area for development as it remains generally below national figures although much of it is slightly better than in similar authorities. GCSE results have improved faster than national results. They remain below national figures for the percentage of pupils achieving the threshold of five grades A*– C, but are now in line with national performance for average capped total points score, and above it in the attainment of one GCSE qualification after a big rise. The number of schools with fewer than 25% of pupils reaching the GCSE threshold fell to zero. At Key Stage 3, attainment in English and mathematics shows an upward trend, above that nationally and for similar authorities. It also rose in science. The focus on supporting underperforming departments and on groups of pupils performing just below the GCSE threshold has contributed well to these improvements.

At Key Stage 2, the upward trend in attainment is above the rate nationally and in similar authorities in all three subjects, with big improvements in 2006, particularly in English. A range of strategies has effectively raised standards in groups of targeted schools. Nevertheless, attainment in a few other schools slipped so that the number with fewer than 65% of pupils reaching the expected level did not decrease sufficiently in 2006; subsequent support has further cut this number. At Key Stage 1, attainment has fallen in reading and writing while there has been a demographic change in intake. Attainment of pupils of Black African, Black Caribbean and Turkish heritage is below that for all pupils. Attainment of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has come closer to that of all pupils at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. The attainment of looked after children in 2006 assessments at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 showed substantial improvement since 2005 and was above the national average.

The behaviour and attendance strategy has made a good impact on attendance in secondary schools. It has risen more than in similar authorities and is above figures in similar authorities and nationally. Attendance in primary schools has fallen slightly.

However, it remains above that in similar authorities, although just below national average. There is now focused support where attendance is low. For looked after children, attendance is in line with the national figure and above similar authorities.

Most provision is good or better. Children do well in day care but less well with childminders. Closer monitoring of performance against action plans is bringing about improvement. Inspections show good or better overall effectiveness in the majority of schools and in the Foundation Stage. They show that pupils enjoy their education, particularly in special and secondary schools. Behaviour is good or better in most secondary schools and almost all primary schools, and outstanding in special schools. Achievement of most learners is good, and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in secondary schools it is also substantially better than in similar authorities. Effective support has enabled schools to be removed from formal categories of concern with one currently remaining, having been made subject to special measures since September 2006.

Areas for development

- Raise attainment at all key stages.
- Raise the attainment of pupils of Black African, Black Caribbean and Turkish heritage.
- Improve outcomes for child care by childminders.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. In inspections, it is judged good or better in most primary schools and outstanding in over half of secondary schools, and shows improvement. For day care it is broadly in line with similar authorities but for childminders it is below.

The youth offending team (YOT) continues to make a strong impact in reducing crime. Its successful work with schools and young people has contributed to a substantial drop in first-time offending. Habitual re-offending has also fallen and is much lower than in similar authorities and nationally. Nevertheless, it rose slightly at the pre-court stage and the YOT has since altered the support for this group. There has been a reduction in the numbers of looked after young people receiving convictions or final warnings. The proportion of young people completing YOT orders who are in education, employment or training is well above the national average. Innovative research commissioned on gang culture in the authority is informing actions to reduce fear of crime and vulnerability to gang membership. They include a project through the youth inclusion and support panel involving young people at risk of offending.

The youth service has increased its proportion of staff contact time. After an apparent drop in the number of young people reached, caused by inaccuracies in

records, it has improved its use of data. The percentage of young people reached who gained recorded or accredited outcomes is above average for similar authorities. Targeted activities have been successful; a summer programme was well attended and police reported a drop in summer assaults and theft. There is Connexions support for more schools, with area based youth worker teams. Plans are well advanced for integrated youth provision, and to improve the reach and value for money of the youth service.

The number of permanent exclusions remains below that in similar authorities. The close collaboration of schools through the fair access panel is dramatically reducing it. The proactive stance to the rise in knife crime in the community has contributed to a slight rise in fixed-term exclusions, which is reflected in the rise in exclusions amongst pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There has been a decline in the number of exclusions of pupils with Black African heritage. Nevertheless, the proportions of excluded pupils of Black Caribbean heritage, of Mixed White and Black Caribbean heritage, and with any other Black background remain too high. The proportion of excluded pupils provided with alternative tuition continues to increase and is above that in similar authorities and the national average.

Good corporate parenting arrangements are in place, with council members and other council departments engaged in improving life chances for looked after children and young people. An effective children's rights service supports looked after children with good opportunities to contribute to service design and delivery. This has had a demonstrable effect, for example through input to staff appointments. A decrease in the number of looked after children who contribute to their reviews is being addressed.

Young people have an increasing variety of ways of participating in decision-making and consultation. Many pupils from vulnerable groups are involved. The council recognises the need to build on these strengths and to monitor involvement to ensure that participation increases, including amongst groups that are hard to reach or at risk of becoming disaffected.

Areas for development

- Reduce the proportions of excluded pupils of Black Caribbean heritage, of Mixed White and Black Caribbean heritage, and with any other Black background.
- Increase involvement in decision-making, including for hard-to-reach groups.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

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

The authority has successfully increased participation in education, employment and training (EET), which is substantially above average and rising. It is strong for 16–18 year olds and for vulnerable groups, with participation rates for 17 year olds far above national rates. The proportion of 16–18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training has continued to fall and is below that of similar authorities and nationally. For the two ethnic groups, for which it was above the rates in similar authorities, it has now fallen below them. For young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities it has also fallen and is below the national average. Nevertheless, data quality has not been assured effectively enough to track 19 year olds, so the proportion for whom current activity is unknown has risen as has the proportion recorded as not in education, employment or training. The percentage of teenage mothers in education, employment or training is above figures nationally and in similar authorities. Although the proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training has fallen, it remains rated as very good.

Well established collaboration underpins the alternative education programme that offers effective vocational pathways to young people at risk of joining the not in education, employment or training category at age 16. Although the 14–19 partnership is in its infancy, it has one diploma line approved and six submissions under development, and a creative structure aligning it with building schools for the future and preventing youth crime.

The achievement rate has risen at Level 2 faster than in similar authorities and nationally and is in line with the national rate. At Level 3, it has also risen faster than nationally and is above the national rate. AS level results were recognised as being relatively low, so more appropriate courses and advice have been identified as needs for this target group. Success rates at NVQ are rising, with learners of non-white heritage doing better than others and learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities doing better than nationally at completing on time. Although the current Key Stage 3 and 4 attainment of young people in care is above the national average, those leaving care have accrued lower levels of qualification than nationally.

The number of child care providers and places has increased by more than in similar authorities. The council audits need each year and has reorganised its analysis of data to target its actions more effectively. The Children's Information Service is very effective in identifying places to meet families' needs. Development of children's centres is on target but there is room for a greater focus on helping parents to increase their economic potential.

Areas for development

- Reduce the proportion of young people aged 19 who are not in education, employment or training.
- Raise the attainment of care leavers.
- All children's centres to provide support for parents which enhances their economic potential.

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

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The local authority has good capacity to improve and manage its children's services well. Good leadership sets a strong strategic vision, which is supported by clear action plans linked to careful financial planning. Although the action plans lack measurable criteria for evaluating the outcomes of the actions for children, some underlying evaluations fulfil this purpose well. In social care, in particular, the effective self-evaluation, performance management and use of data have led to sustained improvement in most areas. Nevertheless, the local authority recognises that data are not used effectively enough to pinpoint areas for improvement across all of its children's services.

The authority is making good progress in developing integrated services, for example, with health staff in children's centres, for children with disabilities, and in youth provision including the transfer of Connexions staff. Partnership working is strong in many areas, and relationships with schools continue to improve but from a very low base. The authority has plans in place to improve communication with a range of partners, particularly schools.

The authority is currently delivering some vulnerable children functions and does so effectively. It has well-defined strategies for taking other vulnerable children functions back in-house. It has taken clear steps to secure succession planning, identify ways of achieving budget efficiencies and accomplish greater integration of services.

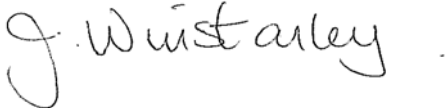
The authority has taken good action which has greatly reduced the proportion of social work staff leaving to below the national average. However, recruitment of appropriately qualified and experienced permanent staff remains a challenge so vacancy rates remain very high, although they are covered appropriately with temporary staff. Teaching vacancies are also above national rates.

Areas for development

- Focus the use of data more sharply on driving improvement.
- Improve communications and relationships with schools.
- Decrease vacancies for social care and teaching staff.

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