

26 November 2007

Dr Ian Birnbaum
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Children, Young People and Learning Services
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Dear Dr Birnbaum

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

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 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 3

The London Borough of Sutton consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users. The council has responded well to the key areas identified for improvement at the last annual performance assessment (APA) and has continued to make good progress in improving most outcomes for children and young people. Its contribution to outcomes in enjoying and achieving are outstanding because of successful support for schools and the targeting of underperforming groups of pupils. This has resulted in standards of attainment that have improved from an already high level and the closing of attainment gaps among vulnerable groups, such as minority ethnic pupils.

In the other outcome areas, being healthy, staying safe, making a positive contribution and economic well-being, the council's contribution remains good. However, there remain areas for improvement across these outcomes particularly in relation to the most vulnerable children and young people. For example, the need to improve long-term placement stability and adoptions of looked after children, the offending and re-offending rates and access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service for non-specialist cases are all areas that could be improved.

There have been improvements in several outcomes, most notably in the capacity of the CAMHS, lower incidence of substance misuse, the provision of youth workers and rising proportions of young people entering employment, education or training. In most areas of the authority's work with children and young people, outcomes are above or well above national averages and its statistical neighbours. There is a strong commitment to improving all services and effective partnership work with relevant agencies.

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. Healthy lifestyles for children and young people are clearly promoted through a number of initiatives throughout the authority. A high proportion of schools have achieved Healthy Schools Status, contributing significantly to the health and welfare of children and young people in the area.

There are effective relationships with the Primary Care Trust, providing good health services for mothers and young people and positive healthy outcomes for them. The health needs of looked after children and young people are assessed well, with very high proportions having annual dental and health checks. Teenage conception rates are falling and are well below average.

The authority's progress towards implementation of the four elements for the CAMHS framework is very good and in line with statistical neighbours. The provision made by the service is comprehensive; protocols and plans are in place and fully implemented, and access arrangements are operational. Access to CAMHS has improved and the capacity of the service has been strengthened through additional posts. Waiting times for new specialist cases are shorter than average, although waiting times for new non-specialist cases are longer than average. Access to CAMHS for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and much improved since last year's APA. This reflects effective investment in training, assessment practice and information systems, and the representation of parents and carers on the CAMHS partnership group.

The proportion of young people with identified substance misuse needs who receive timely assessment and treatment is very good and above average, particularly for the under 18s. Services are tailored explicitly to the needs of young people. Substance misuse related admissions of under 20 year olds have decreased and are below average. This indicates the successful work undertaken by the authority to reduce substance misuse among children and young people.

Area(s) for development

- Improve waiting times to access the CAMHS service for non-specialist cases.

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. Young people report that they feel safe in the community and the number of road traffic accidents shows a year-on-year decrease. Child protection procedures are good; they are effectively organised and well monitored. Although there are some case conferences arising from section 47 enquiries (under the Children Act 1989) that are not held within 15 days, this is not adversely affecting the protection of children. The authority ensures that all urgent or unknown cases are managed within the timescale and those that fall outside this period are dealt with very soon afterwards.

The number of referrals of children in need has risen slightly and is above national averages and some statistical neighbours. This is because the authority's system records all contacts as formal referrals, which is not the practice in all authorities. As a result, the number of referrals that lead to an initial assessment is significantly lower than average, although not substantially lower per 10,000 population. Response to referrals was an area identified for improvement in last year's APA. This has been the subject of effective scrutiny within the authority and continues to be so. There is improvement in the timeliness of completion of initial assessments this year and this is now closer to average, but still a little below. Although the number of repeat referrals remains above average, this is not of concern because the authority audits them carefully and knows that they relate to a small number of children with complex needs as well as to the counting of incident reports of domestic violence. The number of core assessments completed on time has increased and, at 81%, is above average.

The authority's child protection plans are effective and meet vulnerable children's needs well. The number of children on the child protection register remains in line with its statistical neighbours and below the national average. The number of initial child protection case conferences is consistently below average. All children on the child protection register have an allocated social worker and this remains one of the authority's strengths. The number of re-registrations on the authority's child protection register has decreased and is significantly better than the national average. This is indicative of high quality and effective multi-disciplinary protection plans that reduce identified risks to children.

De-registrations are at a good level and consistently below the national average. The number that became registered has increased and the length of time that some children are on the child protection register is above average. The authority's recent review of the register demonstrates very sound reasons for a small proportion of children remaining on the register for a longer period. Family support and preventative services are being increased by the authority in light of recent audits and service reviews. A further audit of referrals and re-referrals is being carried out to ensure these continue to be appropriate and that services are targeted in the most effective areas.

The proportion of looked after children and young people in Sutton is lower than the authority's statistical neighbours and the national average. The percentage in residential care is lower than average and the percentage in foster placements is above average. These figures clearly reflect the authority's policy to place children in foster placements rather than in residential care. The timeliness of reviews of cases of looked after children and young people is better than average and the percentage of looked after children with an allocated social worker is good. Whilst the stability of placements within the last year is good and above average, long-term stability of placements has dropped from last year and is below average. Adoption rates for looked after children are acceptable but the percentage of those adopted within 12 months of the adoption decision is lower than average. The allocation of personal advisers by the authority remains consistently very high and there is effective pathway planning for looked after children and young people and their future.

Area(s) for development

- Improve the timeliness of initial assessments.
- Improve long-term stability and adoption rates for looked after children and young people.

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 and has improved since the previous APA. This is because the council has successfully improved the quality of education provided in its schools and standards of attainment continue to rise. The one school in an Ofsted category of concern last year is now at least satisfactory and all secondary schools are above floor targets for GCSE because of the excellent support of the school improvement team.

Early years settings, including Foundation Stage classes in schools, continue to be of good quality and result in standards of attainment that are higher than those found nationally. In particular, the inequality gap in the Foundation Stage profile has narrowed and is much less than the national picture. The council works well with child care providers to ensure that most provision is good or better.

Standards of attainment in all key stages continue to be above or well above national averages and statistical neighbours and there is, overall, an upward trend of improvement. This trend has not been as evident in Key Stage 1, where performance in reading and writing fell slightly in 2006, but not by as much as seen nationally. Standards in mathematics rose against a small national decline. Very well targeted support has resulted in improvement in the most recent figures. Gains in Key Stage 2 attainment have continued to be made, especially in mathematics. The good progress that pupils make continues and increases in secondary schools so that standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 are well above national averages and those of

statistical neighbours, with a strong upward trend. The council has been very successful in narrowing attainment gaps for its vulnerable pupils. For instance, many groups of minority ethnic pupils attain above the borough's average and the gender gap is closing well, particularly for Black Caribbean boys. The authority is working very well with schools to raise the attainment of gifted and talented pupils still further.

Attendance remains around average in primary schools but well above average in secondary schools, and is among the highest in London. Exclusions from school are low and the council is very effective in ensuring that appropriately tailored provision is made for permanently excluded pupils. Provision at the pupil referral unit is good. At the last APA, the attendance of looked after children was not high enough. This has improved significantly and is now around average, and continuing to rise. The achievements of looked after children at primary and secondary schools continue to be good and improving. For example, 83% of looked after children gained at least one GCSE at grades A*-G, well above national averages and statistical neighbours.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities continue to make good progress and achieve well. Few are excluded from school. The council works effectively to make early identification of need and targets support well. It has taken good steps to ensure that the number of statements of special educational needs that are completed on time is increased and is now good.

Area(s) for development

- Improve attendance in primary schools and of looked after children still further.

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. The authority has invested significantly in this area and has facilitated a number of events, as well as on-going programmes to capture the views of children and young people. Six peer counsellors have been appointed, consultation events have been held and anger management sessions provided. *Our Lives* magazine provides children and young people who have experienced bereavement with a voice, as well as support.

A number of events have been held for children and young people with disabilities to express their hopes and fears about transitions to adult life as well as on life now. Jigsaw4U continues to be an effective tool for gleaning views of children and young people across the area. The authority has run a number of support groups and published literature to support parents of children with disabilities, as well as help maximise life chances and opportunities. The authority has successfully piloted Person Centred Transition Reviews at a special school for children with severe learning difficulties.

The proportion of looked after children and young people who contribute to their reviews has risen slightly from last year and remains above average, demonstrating consistent delivery in this area. The authority has provided additional support to looked after children in order to facilitate their participation in their reviews. Looked after children and care leavers contribute to service planning and review through the Young People's Panel, convened by Jigsaw4U, and to *My Shout* magazine.

The rates of re-offending have increased for the 2003 cohort but are in line with the national trend. The numbers of first-time entrants to the Youth Justice System have increased; they are well below those of the authority's statistical neighbours but above the national average. The authority attributes a proportion of these to the work of the Safer Neighbourhood teams, working in all wards. The impact of this work is expected to be seen in lower re-offending rates in the coming months. Offending rates for looked after children have increased. The authority is aware of the need to reduce offending and re-offending rates still further.

The provision of youth workers in the area is significantly better than average and reflects the authority's clear commitment to effecting change in terms of outcomes from their youth service. Effective strategies to help children and young people with disabilities are in place and have been successful in ensuring smooth transitions between child care and adult services, and in planning for their future.

Area(s) for development

- Decrease rates of re-offending for all children and young people.
- Decrease rates of offending by looked after children and young people.

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 and improving. Council services are having a strong impact on improving outcomes, particularly for those who are most vulnerable.

There has been good progress in the creation of children's centres, bringing information and services to families on a local basis. For example, Home Start has worked with a significant number of vulnerable families to promote learning opportunities. The authority has increased the number of child care places in line with national trends and those of statistical neighbours, but recognises the need to provide more of them that are affordable.

The authority has made good progress in helping children and young people to enter employment, education or training; this is among the highest in London at 95.2% and above target. Almost all 16 year olds continue in some form of education. There has been particular improvement in the proportions of children and young people who are looked after and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who continue in employment, education or training. These are better than national

averages and for statistical neighbours. However, this is not the case for young offenders, for whom such engagement post-16 is below target, but improving well.

Post-16 provision remains of good quality and enables young people to achieve very high standards at A-level and equivalent qualifications. The number gaining Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications is higher than local and national averages. Effective steps have been taken to secure the 14-19 strategy across the borough, a good improvement since last year's APA. Greater collaboration between schools and the local college of further education is leading to wider choice for young people in both academic and vocational courses. The council has not yet been successful in its bid to provide the new applied diplomas but plans for this are well in hand.

Young people who are leaving care are well supported in their transition to adult life through being involved in their reviews and in being guided to appropriate work experience programmes. However, there has been a reduction in the number living in suitable accommodation, which is below local and national averages. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities continue to be well supported by the Transition Unit, which acts on feedback from them to improve its service.

There has been good progress in improving the living conditions of families who are vulnerable. No shared bed and breakfast accommodation has been used in the last year and no young people were placed in hostels. This is better than for statistical neighbours or national averages. However, the number of homeless 16 and 17 year olds has risen.

Area(s) for development

- Increase the proportion of young offenders who enter employment, education or training at age 16 plus.
- Place more 16 and 17 year olds in suitable accommodation.

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

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people remains good; its management of these services is also good, with some outstanding features. This is because it has successfully demonstrated a good track record of improving on already strong outcomes and because of the good quality of plans to bring about further improvement for children and young people, particularly the most vulnerable.

In last year's APA, several areas were identified as requiring some improvement. The council has worked successfully to bring the relevant changes about and demonstrates that key indicators are either better than average or improving. For instance, the involvement of young people in the planning and evaluation of local

services is good and there are fewer children and young people involved in road traffic accidents.

The Children and Young Persons' Plan (CYPP) is well designed to direct resources to where they are most needed. It is monitored against measurable criteria and evaluations are cogent and objective, leading to a redefinition of priorities for the following year's work. Last year, almost all of the targets were met and none of them showed inadequate progress. In addition, a strong feature is the close partnership working with other agencies to support children and young people more effectively. A good example of this practice is the link with the Children and Young People's Integrated Support Panel, where support from a range of agencies prior to specialist assessment is co-ordinated. The council recognises that its joint commissioning arrangements could be strengthened still further and this is an integral part of the CYPP for the current year with strong partnerships evident.

There is strong, stable and well-organised leadership of services, demonstrated through clear links between different service plans. Decisions are made that take good account of the views of children and young people, through such forums as the Youth Parliament, Jigsaw4U and the Safer Sutton for Young People group.

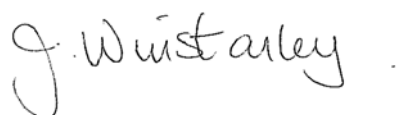
Financial management continues to be good with stable expenditure on provision for children and families. The costs for looked after children and young people were high at the time of the last APA. Subsequently, these rose a little, but action taken to provide more local placements is leading to a significant reduction in costs. Vacancies for social workers have fallen, particularly for those newly qualified, as have those for teachers. There are few surplus places in Sutton's schools and no school has a deficit budget. The level of balances in schools' budgets is among the lowest in London. Overall, the value for money of services for children and young people remains good.

Area(s) for development

- Strengthen the arrangements for joint commissioning services as planned.

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".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection