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Making Social Care
Better for People



Ms Pauline Maddison
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Dear Ms Maddison

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF NEWHAM

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment process for your local authority. The judgements reflect the outcomes of the joint area review and the updated self-assessment provided by the council. We are grateful for the information that you provided to support this process and for the time that you and your colleagues have given to discussing relevant issues.

Summary

Areas for judgement	Grade awarded ¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people	3
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	2

Grade	Service descriptors	Capacity to improve descriptors
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Excellent / outstanding
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate

The London Borough of Newham delivers generally good outcomes for children and young people and some are outstanding. The council demonstrated strong ambitions, good leadership, strong partnerships and well targeted actions. As a result, the opportunities available for young people and their families to lead healthier lifestyles are significantly enhanced. However, the borough continues to suffer from high rates of infant mortality, low birth weight babies and poor rates of oral health. While there is good interagency working to protect children, procedures for intervention and initial referrals are not always prompt or effective.

As a result of the relatively short period of time between publication of the joint area review (JAR) and the APA, the council's plans have as yet had limited impact on outcomes. However, the Local Safeguarding Board is reviewing intervention thresholds and all children on the at risk register now have a qualified social worker. The council demonstrates a clear commitment to continue to improve and a good focus on improving outcomes for all children and young people.

Being healthy

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is good. One recommendation for action emerged from the JAR, for action over 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.

In addressing the above recommendation, the council, with health partners, has established an electronic database to manage waiting lists and increase clinician focus on priorities. The council plans that every child will have a key worker through the Child and Family Consultation Service and this is intended to ensure speedier assessments and access to specialist provision.

Staying safe

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is adequate. The JAR highlighted three actions to be taken immediately:

- 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.

A satisfactory action plan is now in place with the children's assessment and investigation team to ensure consistency across teams. The implementation of the action plan is regularly monitored by senior managers. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is reviewing thresholds with partners to extend understanding, agreement and implementation.

The council is reviewing the way it manages referrals and is undertaking regular auditing of appropriateness and quality. Although integrated working is uncovering increased need, the council anticipates that the Common Assessment Framework, currently being piloted, will bring improvement in how initial referrals are dealt with.

The Board will also investigate how cases of sexual abuse are identified to ensure suitable action is taken. The chairs of child protection conferences will now retain the category of sexual abuse in cases where it has been identified, even when other issues present.

Enjoying and achieving

The council's services for children and young people make an outstanding contribution to improving outcomes in this area. The JAR highlighted one action to be taken over 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.

The council has begun to put appropriate strategies in place to reduce the number of permanent exclusions. This has resulted in a reduction of 40% in the number of permanent exclusions overall in the spring term 2006 (compared with autumn 2005). Data on exclusions in the spring term, for identified groups of students, is not yet available. Specific strategies to address rates of permanent exclusion among students from minority cultures and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not yet in place. However, the council has identified as a priority the need to ensure there is appropriate curriculum provision which meets the needs of all students at risk of permanent exclusion. More effective collaborative working across local authority teams has resulted in better early identification of students at risk of permanent exclusion and more focused support.

Making a positive contribution

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is outstanding. The JAR highlighted one action, to be taken over 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 council is adopting a more proactive strategy to ensure the proportion of post-16 students not in education, employment or training (NEET), or whose destination is unknown, continues to fall. All data and information regarding young people post-16 continues to be held on CorePlus (the council's database) but NEET information is now accessible to each of the five Connexions one stop shops. Further system developments are current and the council aims to have a robust information system by the end of 2006. The council is keen to ensure young people are employable and in employment, in addition to being in receipt of high quality careers advice.

Achieving economic well-being

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people make to improving outcomes in this area is outstanding. The joint area review made no recommendations in relation to this outcome.

Service management

The JAR highlighted two actions to be taken over the next six months:

- The council should strengthen performance management to:
 - identify weaknesses in services and emerging trends at an early stage; and
 - 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; and
 - improve the quality of youth work practice.

To meet these recommendations the council has the following actions underway:

- the council is strengthening the performance management team and bringing together performance information and financial strategies to create better integration and more effective use of data
- coordination and extension of the range of audits of workplace skills by senior managers to ensure there is appropriate training for staff regarding case records and plans. All newly appointed social workers must attend the council's induction course
- there is a clear strategic service plan, ensuring that the development of the youth service is placed within the council's structures and the Children and Young People's Plan. The council acknowledges the need to communicate its strategy more effectively to staff and partners to better meet corporate targets. Work to address this is underway.

The council has demonstrated a clear commitment to meeting the joint area review recommendations and is developing an appropriate action plan. It has good capacity to further improve its services for children and young people.

Yours sincerely



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