

26 November 2007

Mr Paul Curran
Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Islington
Laycock Street Buildings
Laycock Street
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Dear Mr Curran

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

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 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

The council continues to deliver good services for children and young people, as at the time of the joint area review and in accordance with its own assessment. It has responded with energy and commitment to the recommendations made in the joint area review, often extending the scope of this work, and making clear progress in most respects. The children's services department is very well led. There is high, clearly articulated, ambition for the young people of Islington, tempered with realism about what can be achieved in given timescales. *Celebrating Islington's Young People* was the mayoral priority for 2006/7. The management and coordination of services is improving in line with the joint area review recommendations, though there is work still to be done in sharpening the focus and demonstrating the value for money of some pieces of work. Children and young people are involved in strategic planning and are positive about living in Islington. This is a high spending council, though progress is being made in reducing some 'non front-line' costs. The contribution the council makes to children and young people being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving and making a positive contribution remains good. The gap between the outcomes for many vulnerable groups, including looked after children and young people, and the outcomes for all young people is narrowing.

within a generally improving picture. The council's contribution to young people's future economic well-being is adequate and improving.

Being healthy

Grade 3

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 joint area review.

Good progress is being made to redress the previously below average performance on health indicators which reflected the deprivation found across the borough. Council health and council social care staff work well together to identify need and achieve effectively integrated universal and targeted services to promote the health of children and young people. Different work streams are linked precisely at a variety of levels. This contributes to good improvements in overall indicators most of which reach national averages and some, such as non smoking and breast-feeding, are better than the national average.

Good and increasing support is offered to parents through the developing children's centres and directly to young people through the well used and expanding integrated young people's service, PULSE N7, the development of which is in direct response to engagement of young people.

The Healthy Schools programme is exceeding national targets both in terms of the proportion of schools involved and those that achieve Healthy School Status. The programme is well linked to other safety and health promotion strategies. All schools completed the obesity survey which revealed high rates of obesity amongst children and young people. A thorough analysis of the data has informed a multi approach strategy, including project work with families. Lessons learned from this are being used to develop further support to families. Initial results from this year's survey indicate no significant rise in rates, meeting the council's first objective. Targets for a reduction in obesity rates are planned.

Children and young people benefit from a strong and well regarded Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), which provides particularly good access to outreach programmes whilst meeting all service extension targets. Waiting times are generally better than the national average. The council's innovative approach to enable increased access to specialist services, following improved access to other services, unfortunately resulted in waiting times for specialist referrals falling to the national average when previously they had been better. The council is exploring alternative and sustainable ways of working with some families to address this situation. Services all work well on an integrated multi agency basis to support vulnerable young people effectively, including those looked after and those at risk of offending.

Last year there was a slight rise in the number of teenage conceptions. This was contrary to the steadily decreasing trend of previous years which was from a high baseline towards the national average. The council continues to compare favourably

with its statistical neighbours in this regard. A rigorous review of the approaches taken to reduce teenage pregnancy, supported by good data analysis, led to the implementation of a well constructed action plan with a particular focus on risk areas in the borough. As a result, some key projects are being developed further and additional measures are being put in place. The emphasis is appropriately on supporting discrete sexual health services for young people in non clinical settings, which have been identified in consultation with young people.

The physical and mental health needs of looked after children and young people are well met through a proactive multi disciplinary specialist health team which works effectively with all children and young people regardless of whether their placement is within or outside the borough. Health outcomes for these young people are better than the national average and continue to improve faster than the national rate.

Areas for development

- Continue to take action to reduce the level of teenage conceptions.
- Enable waiting times for specialist referral to CAMHS to return to their previously better than the national average level.

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. One recommendation for action emerged from the joint area review

For immediate action

- The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) should review processes for auditing child protection work among member agencies, and establish systems for the board to monitor and evaluate the interim response to serious case reviews in order to ensure that all agencies learn from such reviews.

Positive and effective action has been taken by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board to address this. A standing sub-group is established to deal with actions arising from serious case reviews and a multi agency audit framework has been agreed. A report to the board of a pilot audit of work to protect some disabled children and young people is imminent and will inform how this work is taken forward.

Sound vetting procedures and generally good risk assessments ensure settings providing services for young children are secure and stable. Action, well informed by young people's views, has been taken to reduce incidents around schools and the number of road accidents has reduced considerably in excess of the national target. Responses from children and young people in the Tellus2 survey, supplemented by a

local survey, about feeling safe and bullying are similar to national averages. A good anti-bullying strategy is being implemented, supported by an active programme of training for school staff. Clear reporting requirements are being piloted online in some schools.

Evidence of increasingly effective preventive and support services is found in the rapidly declining number of referrals to the social care service. The rate of repeat referrals is considerably below the national average, whilst the council meets the national average for child protection re-registrations. The numbers of children and young people on the Child Protection Register, and the numbers of looked after children and young people, are declining at an increasing rate and are less than statistical neighbours. Performance on the timely completion of assessments declined last year to below the national average. Analysis shows a close correlation between this decline and the phases of introduction of a new electronic recording system. This matter has been suitably addressed to prevent re-occurrence during further implementation of the system.

Schools' attendance at the council's regular child protection training is good, as is the identification of designated staff. However, the schools' survey indicates some concern from schools about the effectiveness of the training, advice and support on child protection from the council. Training is provided for childminders in child protection, though the council agrees that the impact and take up of these need further evaluation.

The number of looked after children and young people is at an all time low and those concerned receive a good service. Stability of placements, the proportion of looked after children and young people in family placements and performance on reviews are better than the national averages. The proportion of adoptions is at the national average. A new programme, well based in the council's self evaluation, is designed to further enhance the service and improve value for money. This includes a planned reduction in the numbers in residential care through an increase in specialist local and preferred provider foster placements, some of which have already been realised through the recruitment of new carers. Some appropriate outcome targets have been set for this programme.

Assessment and case management for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have a good impact on meeting their needs. Broad packages meet leisure and play needs as well as family support and respite needs. Although now achieved, progress has been slow to engage all partners and agree a strategy to aid smooth transition for individuals from young peoples to adult services

Areas for development

- Ensure training, advice and support on child protection meets the needs of child minders and school staff.
- Continue to ensure that core assessments are completed more quickly.

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 joint area review.

For immediate action

- The council and CEA@Islington should clarify the strategic aims and purpose of the pupil referral units (PRUs) to provide a secure framework for their improvement.

This long standing issue has been dealt with well. Pupil referral unit provision has been carefully re-organised and now has clear strategic purposes, increasingly known to mainstream schools. The pupil referral units work in partnership together, complementing each other and schools. CEA@Islington has established sound management and accountability arrangements for them. Their curriculum offer is much more flexible and significantly better aligned to the needs of the young people. None of the pupil referral units is now in special measures and together they are achieving notably better outcomes for their students. Project 16, for example, now offers a good curriculum and students' personal development is good.

CEA@Islington's approach to categorising, challenging and supporting schools is very well honed, through synthesising and applying carefully a wide range of information. The school survey indicates that schools rate highly the council's support for raising attainment. This is promoting improvements in attainment and also in school inspection outcomes, which are better than average. Inspection grades indicate that more schools than average are at least good overall and that pupils enjoy their education because of interesting curricula and schools' inclusive ethos. Overall grades for behaviour are slightly above those of similar councils. No schools are in Ofsted categories of concern, with inspectors often commending the inclusivity and strong leadership in Islington schools. This is well supported by the council's clear and effective strategies for succession planning. Significantly more Islington parents are choosing to send their children to the borough's schools. However, despite sustained and significant improvement in recent years from a historically low base, especially at Key Stage 2 and GCSE, standards remain lower than statistical neighbours and well below national average in all key stages. However, most pupils now make generally better than average progress. This is especially true in the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. There is slower progress in Key Stage 1 in particular and Key Stage 3. The council's work with schools on assessment for learning and progress tracking has had a clear and very positive impact on progress but CEA@Islington recognises there is more to be done to support transition and the continuation of good practice from one key stage to another. Educational outcomes and progress for pupils within potentially vulnerable groups are often good, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and looked

after children and young people. The council has high aspirations for these young people, who attain better than those in similar authorities and nationally.

Overall exclusion rates are much lower than the national average and those for similar councils. In special schools, the exclusion rate is less than a third of the national average and there have been no recent permanent exclusions in these schools. However, absence rates in Islington primary schools were recently the highest in the country at 7.3%. In 2006/7, the council undertook a 'Year of Primary Attendance' to redress this. It was a focus for the members' scrutiny panel, indicating its high priority. Over the year, a 1% improvement was made and further work is planned. In secondary schools, absence rates fell from 9.2% in 2002/3 to 8.7% in 2005/6, remaining a little higher than the national average. However, significant absenteeism by looked after children and young people is lower than similar councils and the national average.

The council is on target to have 16 children's centres fully operational by 2008. It cannot yet be sure whether the existing centres entirely meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and families, partly due to some problems with transfer and management of data. The youth service is now reaching more young people but the net cost per young person reached is nearly twice the national average with the discrepancy growing. As with children's centres, the council is not able to analyse the extent to which, as a result of this expenditure, the needs of the most vulnerable young people are met.

Areas for development

- Continue to raise standards in all key stages, focusing particularly on Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 3 and the transition between key stages.
- Analyse the extent to which children's centres and the youth service meet the identified needs of the most vulnerable children and young people and use this information to inform future planning.

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 next six months

- The council and its partners should improve the coordination of children and young people's contribution to the community to extend their participation, increase understanding and enable good practice to be shared.

Good progress has been made in addressing this issue through a long term programme providing for improved and broader outcomes both in the long and short terms. The Tellus2 survey indicates that children feel particularly well listened to in Islington. All groups of young people have opportunities, and are encouraged, to contribute to decisions that affect them. Young people's willingness to participate is shown through the significant increase in take up in the youth service. Following the joint area review, the council collated the information it had received from young people in recent years and ensured all managers had access to this, including through a DVD. The already significant involvement of young people in strategic reviews, the work of the children's board, school councils and other forums and processes was also critically examined so that it could be made more systematic. This has resulted in a clear draft strategy for participation to be presented to the children's board in early 2008. The strategy is well designed and engages board members proactively in seeking knowledge from young people as well as increasing further access to the board for young people. It also addresses young people as residents and citizens and links them into corporate participation services for adults as well as coordinating existing opportunity for participation. The council is actively working to assist schools to develop school councils further and enhance inter-school links as well to engage them more with the council's pupil parliament.

The participation rate of looked after children and young people in their reviews is better than the national average. Children and young people are increasingly and actively involved in wider corporate parenting work to good effect through the council's Children's Active Involvement Service (CAIS). This service is also an effective support to other groups of vulnerable children and young people. A popular and inclusive annual achievement celebration recognises the individual progress and contribution being made to society by looked after children and young people.

Good inter-agency collaboration supports the majority of young people in dealing with routine changes and major challenges in their lives, and children and young people are involved in a variety of successful peer mentoring schemes both for pupils and those worked with by the youth justice service. School exclusion rates are much better than the national average partly as a result of strategies promoted by the council and agreed by schools. School attendance rates are below the national average but improving as a result of strong council action.

The council consistently performs better than national averages with regard to recidivism and in achieving good improvement scores. The number of first time entrants to the youth justice system is declining in line with national trends and in excess of statistical neighbours. Careful analysis of re-offending patterns has led to participation in a national multi agency pilot to support those most at risk of re-offending and their families. Additional funding has been secured to target a small number of prolific offenders with intensive support which is achieving success in reducing the frequency and severity of subsequent offences. The number of final warnings, reprimands and convictions of looked after children and young people is consistently better than national averages.

There is good take up and effective engagement in parenting programmes. An active young carers' service provides specialist individual and group support, including study support, for a variety of age groups as well as opportunities to participate in activities.

Areas for development

- Continue the development and implementation of the strategy to coordinate and improve participation of children and young people and enable good practice to be shared, with particular focus on increasing their contribution in schools

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 2

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 adequate. One recommendation emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the next six months

- The council and its partners should further reduce the numbers of young people, particularly in vulnerable groups, not in education, employment or training (NEET) and take steps to maximise the opportunities for support to young people who are NEET through regeneration initiatives.

This recommendation has been dealt with well, through carefully targeted work coordinated by the not in education, employment or training action group, though there remains more to do. The number of young people who are not in education, employment or training has reduced very significantly in a short time. The not in education, employment or training rate is now below statistical neighbours for 16- to 18-year-olds but above the national average, whilst for 19-year-olds it remains above statistical neighbours and the national average but the gap is about five times less than it was two years ago. The council has a lower than average rate of young people who are not in education, employment or training getting back into education or employment, though recent work is showing some success in improving this. There is a low not in education, employment or training rate for care leavers. However, young men, teenage mothers, young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from white and ethnically mixed backgrounds remain significantly more likely to be not in education, employment or training than those from other groups in the borough, or against the same groups in comparator boroughs.

The council is currently undertaking a sufficiency assessment for childcare places. This is almost complete but until then the relationship between the supply and demand for affordable places, to help families and young people get back into work for example, is not clearly known. The proportion of 0- to 14-year-olds living in

households with no one working is consistently above that of comparable authorities and the national average.

Standards by age 19 are rising but overall attainment in Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications is low compared with similar councils, requiring significant further improvement. The average point score per student in school sixth forms is well below that of similar councils and the national average. However, success and retention rates in City and Islington College are mainly higher than the national average. Success rates in NVQ are below the national average. The council's work at 14–19 continues to be effectively led by the board and the 14–19 director. The director has raised the profile of 14–19 issues in the borough and robust partnerships continue to be built across schools, Connexions, City and Islington College, and other providers, giving a strong platform for future development. Work towards national diplomas is progressing soundly with two diploma lines successfully approved and five more planned to be applied for. There is a firm link between those diplomas and local labour market needs. The breadth of the curriculum offer at Key Stage 4 is improving, though not consistently in all schools. There is an understandable focus in 14-19 work on enhancing provision and partnerships but less emphasis on identifying clearly what improved outcomes are intended for young people. The success criteria in plans, including the 14-19 strategy itself, are often imprecise and are not always associated with clear timescales. The council understands that more clearly measurable, ambitious and timed targets for students' outcomes are needed to increase the urgency in improving attainment. The council currently offers its young people a pan-London website to help them choose courses. This meets requirements but there is no specific Islington site, though this has been planned for.

Areas for development

- Raise attainment by age 19.
- Improve the 14–19 strategy so that intended outcomes for young people are more closely targeted and actions and processes towards achieving these are more clearly identified and timed.
- Take any necessary actions to ensure the availability of sufficient, appropriate and affordable childcare when the sufficiency assessment is complete.

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 joint area review.

For immediate action

- The council and partners should improve the information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure to deliver the common assessment framework and improve information sharing between partners.

For action in the next six months

- The council and its partners should rationalise CYPP planning and decision-making structures and clarify the lines of accountability, aligning CYPP priorities, corporate priorities and the overall vision for Islington.

The council has rationalised and simplified its plans and structures, making good progress in this recommendation. Its overall priorities for 2007/8 are identified clearly and are consistent with the aspects raised in its accurate and realistic self evaluation. This enables staff, partners, young people and the community to understand how what they do fits into the overall picture, supports effective multi agency work and makes accountabilities clear. People are afforded a clear sense of the overall ambitious vision for children's services. Good work is being done to engage staff in contributing to and committing themselves to the vision. This is leading in turn to clear, positive and sustained improvements for children and young people, albeit there remains much more to do, which is well recognised.

Performance management arrangements are comprehensive and effective with information about the council's performance being gathered assiduously and consistently. Strengths and weaknesses are noted and acted upon. The council's belief in itself as a good employer is further illustrated by a low vacancy rate amongst social services staff and its Investor in People status. Senior staff note that these positive factors provide a platform to improve and sharpen further some processes and systems, where needed. There is good stability amongst staff in management posts, leading to clear purpose and improvement, whilst many vulnerable young people are actively involved in identifying their needs and evaluating local services. The voluntary and community sectors are keenly and increasingly involved in effective and vigorous partnerships. The council has also made clear progress in developing its information and communications technology infrastructure to good effect, across its partners, though there remain some further compatibility issues to address, especially in inter-agency work.

The children's services department is high spending in almost all areas compared to its statistical neighbours. The director of children's services is committed to achieve further value for each pound spent and successful improvements in value for money have been made. The quality of service is generally good and, in many areas, the council analyses well how effectively its spending contributes to improving outcomes and meeting its ambitions. Its very productive contract with CEA@Islington in the education service is a clear example of this. However, this is not consistent across all aspects of children's services, and there are some areas where the council does not quantify as clearly what outcomes the spending is designed to achieve. Examples of

this are the 3 year programme to improve placements for looked after children and young people, youth services, children's centres and attainment by age 19.

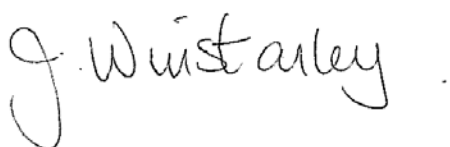
Area for development

- Clarify where necessary the council's own targets for outcomes for children and young people, to better reflect its ambition, and provide a clearer analysis of value for money.

Overall the council has demonstrated good progress in meeting the joint area review 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 black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection