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Ms Eleni Ioannides
Executive Director of Children's Services
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
Athenaeum House
Market Street
Bury
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Dear Ms Ioannides

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Bury Metropolitan Borough Council 2008

This letter summarises the findings of the 2008 annual performance assessment (APA) for your council. The evaluations and judgements in the letter draw on a range of data and information which covers the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. As you know, the APA is not based on an inspection of your services and, therefore, can only provide a snapshot based on the evidence considered. As such, I am grateful to you for assuring the quality of the data provided.

Performance is judged on a four point scale as detailed in the handbook. I should emphasise that the grades awarded are based on an overall 'best fit' model. For instance, an outstanding judgement of Grade 4 reflects that overall most aspects, but not necessarily all, of the services in the area are working very well. We know that one of the features of outstanding provision is the drive for greater improvement and no council would suggest, and nor would Ofsted, that a judgement of outstanding indicates that everything is perfect. Similarly within a judgement of inadequate overall, Grade 1, there could be some aspects of the overall service that are adequate or even good. Judgements are made in a rounded way, balancing all of the evidence and giving due consideration to outcomes, local and national contexts, priorities and decision-making.



The following table sets out the grades awarded for performance in 2008.

Assessment judgement area	APA grade
Overall effectiveness of children's services	3
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	3
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	2

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale
4: outstanding/excellent; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate*

Overall effectiveness of children’s services

Grade 3

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council makes a good contribution overall to improving outcomes for children and young people. Outcomes in economic well-being, enjoying and achieving and being healthy have been consistently good. However, in the areas of safeguarding and making a positive contribution, outcomes are less good than in 2007. The ambitions of the council are high and financial management is strong; but progress in developing key strategies and arrangements for joint working has been slow. The council responded well to most of the recommendations of the 2007 APA. This resulted in improved access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), better standards in English at Key Stage 3, improved early years provision, and more timely reviews of looked after children. Improvements have also been made since the JAR which took place in January and February 2008. For example, CAMHS inpatient provision for 16- to 17-year-olds is now in place, resources have been identified to increase short break opportunities for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the council has taken decisive action to strengthen corporate parenting arrangements. However, not all targets for development have been met. The rate of teenage conceptions remains too high as is the percentage of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training; partnership working between the youth offending team and children’s social care is a particular area of concern.

Being healthy

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council’s analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Healthy lifestyles are well promoted for children and young people. ▪ Effective multi-agency work is taking place to reduce the involvement of parents and young people in substance misuse. ▪ Looked after children have good access to CAMHS and other health services.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is insufficient progress in reducing teenage conceptions.

Staying safe

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The council’s analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence. The recent JAR judged both safeguarding arrangements and the contribution of services to

improving outcomes for looked after children to be adequate. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The JAR found there are good inter-agency partnerships, the Local Safeguarding Children Board is well led, and joint agency work to prevent domestic abuse is effective. ▪ Good work has been carried out to improve referral and assessment processes. Referral rates have increased since 2006/07, while the rate of repeat referrals has declined. The proportion of initial assessments completed within timescales has also improved and Bury is outperforming the average for similar councils and England on these measures. ▪ The child protection system is well managed. All child protection cases are reviewed on time with only a small proportion subject to a child protection plan for more than two years. This is better than in similar councils and England. ▪ The placement stability of looked after children is good, with performance on both short term and long term indicators above the average for similar councils and England.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnership working between the youth offending team and children's social care is insufficiently effective to keep children and young people safe. ▪ Preventative services are not yet fully developed resulting in high numbers of looked after children. ▪ The proportion of reviews of looked after children and young people completed within timescales, though increasing over the past two years, is still lower than average for similar councils and England. ▪ The JAR found the quality of care planning and reviews is variable and arrangements for auditing case files to assure quality are underdeveloped.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attainment in Key Stages 2 and 3 is consistently above statistical neighbours and the national average. ▪ The overall effectiveness of primary schools is mostly good or outstanding. ▪ Most children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good or better progress in primary school.
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- At all key stages, the gap between ethnic minority and all other children has narrowed.
- Effective protocols are in place for the early identification of schools causing concern.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Achievement in writing at Key Stage 1 is too low.
- The percentage of permanent exclusions in secondary schools is too high.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths

- Children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision making and supporting the community. There is an active youth cabinet and high participation in elections of the UK Youth Parliament.
- A good range of placements is available in order to meet the cultural and religious needs of looked after children.
- Good action is taken to prevent offending and to reduce re-offending.
- A high proportion of supervised juveniles are in employment, education or training.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Looked after children and young people are not sufficiently consulted on service developments.
- The proportion of looked after children and young people who participate in their reviews has increased since 2006/07 but remains low.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths

- The wide 14–19 curriculum range successfully meets the needs of learners and communities.

- Level 2 and 3 achievement is consistently good and the overall effectiveness of both colleges is outstanding.
- The proportion of care leavers in employment, education or training is high and the proportion of 19-year-olds not in employment, education or training has reduced.
- There have been improvements in the overall success rate for work-based learners.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in employment, education or training is too high and the proportion of teenage mothers in employment, education or training is too low.
- Planning and support processes for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are inconsistent.

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

Grade 2

The council’s capacity to improve its services for children and young people is adequate. The council’s analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence. The recent JAR judged capacity to improve to be adequate.

Major strengths

- The ambitions of the council and its partners to improve services are good.
- There is sustained improvement in the effectiveness of schools, educational achievement and economic well-being.
- The council has accurately evaluated the strength of the service contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people.
- The partnership working developed through the Children’s Trust is well-established and effective.

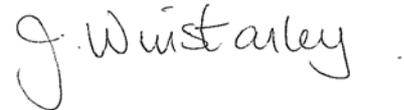
Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Gaps in senior management capacity has slowed progress in developing joint workforce planning, children’s centres and joint commissioning, thus reducing the capacity of services for children and young people.
- Lack of performance management in the youth offending team at all levels has resulted in policies, systems and performance not being adequately implemented, monitored or managed.

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.

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.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a trailing dot at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection