

26 November 2007

Ms Eleni Ioannides
Executive Director of Children's Services
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
Children's Services Department
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Dear Ms Ioannides

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BURY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

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 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

Bury Council consistently delivers services for children and young people that produce good outcomes overall. Their role in helping children and young people make a positive contribution is outstanding. The council has responded constructively to areas for improvement highlighted in the 2006 APA. Services and departments successfully work together and have ambitious plans for the future. Slower than expected progress in certain aspects of health and education have resulted in the council making good rather than, as in 2005/06, outstanding contributions to health and enjoying and achieving. Consequently the combined judgment for the overall effectiveness of children's services has reduced to good. The council has good capacity to improve.

Being healthy

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 area is good. This is a decline from 2006 when the contribution was excellent. The main reasons for this are the difficulties in securing suitable

inpatient services for some of the children and young people with acute mental health needs, continuing high rates of dental decay and limited progress in reducing teenage conceptions.

There is strong partnership working between the statutory and voluntary sector and good joint planning based on a thorough needs assessment including the views of children and families. Joint commissioning strategies for substance misuse and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are improving capacity to deliver services.

All schools are now engaged in the National Healthy Schools Programme and the proportion achieving the standard is ahead of target and higher than the national average. Childhood obesity rates are in line with the national average. Reducing obesity is a priority in the Children and Young People's Plan. A multi-agency group has been established to lead the Transforming School Food/Healthy Eating Strategy which takes a whole school approach to nutrition. At least 85% of primary school pupils are engaged in two hours of physical activity each week and participation is improving. Reported rates of dental decay are significantly higher than average and increasing. The council and partners query the validity of the data which is based on sample surveys, and are planning a full census soon. Oral health is a priority for the Primary Care Trust. The Oral Health Team works in partnership with schools and early years settings to deliver an integrated oral health strategy. This is supported by the Healthy Schools programme, while the Golden Apple Award scheme operates in nurseries. The Primary Care Trust and the council are lobbying for fluoridisation of water, across Greater Manchester.

The teenage pregnancy strategy involves partners in targeted work, and has improved outcomes for teenage mothers and their babies through 4U & Baby 2, ante and post-natal support groups, and increasing numbers of young parents in education, training and employment. Teenage conception rates have reduced by 12% since 1998. This is in line with the national average and considerably better than the position in Greater Manchester overall. However, the decline is not a steady one and has levelled off since reaching its lowest point in 2002.

The proportion of those in treatment for substance misuse who are under age 18 is high at 25%, indicating Bury Drug and Alcohol Action Team has been relatively successful in offering treatment to young people. An effective partnership between the Drug and Alcohol Action Team and Early Break provides prompt intervention, holistic therapy, support groups and family centred intervention. The service exceeded its targets for interventions in 2006/07 and the partnership is now developing an assessment tool which measures impact and quality.

Progress towards a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) slipped below the average for similar councils in 2006/07. The main area for improvement is in the protocols for partnership working between agencies for children and young people with complex mental health needs. Progress in this area has slipped back from the position reported in 2006. Partners are now taking action

to formalise existing good practices. The 2006 APA identified CAMHS provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for 16- and 17-year-olds as areas for improvement. There has been good progress in developing services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and agreement has been reached to fund a part-time psychiatrist for young people aged 16 to 19. Some young mental health inpatients receiving services from the Pennine Trust are placed on adult wards due to a lack of suitable CAMHS provision locally. There is a plan to address this, with funding approved for a purpose built unit in Oldham, and an interim CAMHS ward facility in the borough.

All looked after children and young people are supported by a multi-agency team of health professionals including a CAMHS psychologist and a mental health outreach worker. A high proportion of looked after children and young people received a health assessment during the year, in line with the national average, and health assessments are also offered to all care leavers.

Areas for development

- Reduce rates of dental decay.
- Reduce the rate of teenage conceptions.
- Improve access to CAMHS inpatient services.

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 area is good.

The council has increased support for childminders in relation to safeguarding. Consultation has taken place regarding the use of procedures. A specific officer has been appointed to support all childminders. There is a quality assurance scheme leading to an award, and risk assessment training is now offered post-registration. Additional support is timely as evidence from inspections of early years providers showing the proportion judged good or outstanding against the staying safe outcome is lower than the average for England.

Low rates of referral and assessment of children in need were areas for improvement in the 2006 APA. Referral rates have increased during 2006/07 and are now in line with similar councils. However, the number of initial assessments completed during the year has declined, and rates are less than half those in similar councils. The rate of core assessments completed has improved but is only two thirds the rate of similar councils. The council has investigated these trends and is confident that thresholds are appropriate and assessment practice is safe: the problem is caused by

incomplete and incorrect recording of outcomes. Work has already been undertaken to clarify what constitutes a referral, as opposed to a contact, and this is reflected in improved referral rates in 2006/07. Improvements have more recently been made to recording initial assessment activity, and a significant increase is now being reported, while recording of core assessments will be monitored through improved file auditing.

Management of the child protection system is good, with all children and young people allocated to a social worker and all reviews completed on time. The rate of re-registrations reduced in 2006/07 compared to improvements in 2005/06. The proportion of children and young people on the Child Protection Register is in line with the average for similar councils, while the rate of initial child protection conferences is higher, indicating that children are receiving an appropriate assessment of their needs. The Local Safeguarding Children Board has established subgroups that take responsibility for the safeguarding agenda. The Local Safeguarding Children Board contributes to service planning through policy development and plays an active role in ensuring that recommendations from serious case reviews are implemented.

The number of looked after children and young people was an area for improvement in the 2006 APA. This reduced slightly in 2006/07 but the rate remains above that in similar councils. A contributing factor is the council's policy of supporting children and young people living with relatives or friends through accommodation under Section 20 of the Children Act. The council has set realistic targets for further reductions in the number of looked after children and young people, and continues to be successful in securing adoption and permanence outcomes. The number of children and young people adopted or made subject of a special guardianship order improved in 2006/07 and performance continues to be better than the average in similar councils and the England average.

There were positive fostering and adoption inspections during the year. The proportion of looked after children and young people living in a family placement is higher than the average and performance on placement stability is among the best in England. Only 68% of reviews of looked after children and young people were completed within timescales in 2005/06 and this was an area for improvement in the 2006 APA. The proportion increased to 86% in 2006/07 but remains below the average. Almost all young people who should have a pathway plan have one, and almost all care leavers at the age of 19 live in suitable accommodation.

Areas for development

- Improve recording of referral and assessment outcomes and improve monitoring systems across the duty and assessment team.
- Reduce the number of looked after children and young people.

- Increase the proportion of reviews of looked after children and young people completed within timescales.

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 area is good.

Most children and young people make good academic progress. At Key Stage 4, GCSE results are higher than the national average and improving. In 2006 just under 60% of pupils achieved five good GCSE passes, which is 1.73% above the national average. The proportion achieving these results with English and mathematics was also above national averages. The percentage achieving at least one GCSE was very high at 99.27%, which is well above similar schools and national achievement levels. Pupils achieve particularly well in primary schools and at post-16. Bury's results are amongst the most improved in England for primary education where results in mathematics and science are above the national average. However, this success is not replicated across the borough. In 2006, two primary schools were judged as inadequate and have been placed in special measures.

Schools track pupils' progress well and target support effectively. As a result most pupils, including the more vulnerable such as teenage mothers and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in relation to their capability and circumstances. There has been an improvement in the performance of Black and minority ethnic pupils across all key stages, narrowing the achievement gap in comparison with other groups.

Provision is less good for the under fives. Much of the quality of teaching in early years settings is no better than satisfactory and there are concerns about the effectiveness of partnerships with parents and the quality of leadership and management in nursery education. Plans are in place to tackle this problem including a major development of Children's Centres across the borough beginning with the most disadvantaged areas.

Much has been done to arrest the decline in standards in writing at Key Stage 1 including plans to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage. It remains, however, a concern. Last year standards at Key Stage 3 were highlighted as a problem and although improvements have been made in mathematics and science, standards in English are still too low.

The personal development and well-being of children and young people is good. This is true for all groups including looked after children and young people and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The number of authorised and unauthorised absences is low compared to similar authorities. The great majority of pupils report they enjoy their education and feel happy and supported at school. Their behaviour

is judged to be good or better in the majority of schools. There are well-considered plans to expand the extended school service to 45 schools by September 2008 and to all schools by 2010.

Areas for development

- Improve standards in English at Key Stage 3.
- Improve the quality of nursery education and standards in the Foundation Stage.
- Improve identification and support for schools at risk of being placed in a category.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is excellent.

The council has taken positive action to support early years providers and improve quality in this area. Inclusion co-ordinators help providers to develop inclusive practice for children and young people. The Include Me too (IM2) Project has supported empowerment of parents from minority ethnic groups and an inclusive assessment tool has been created to ensure positive transitions for all children and young people from early years settings to school. The Youth Service has increased capacity and is reaching more young people. The focus is on more intensive support to vulnerable individuals and in increasing recorded outcomes and accreditation targets. Some 30% of 13- to 19-year-olds involved with the Youth Service are engaged in planning and decision making.

There is strong support for children and young people in managing changes and responding to challenges in their lives. Bury Young Carers is providing good outcomes for this group. Young carers provide mentoring support and participate in shaping the services they want. Young carers are joining the Youth Cabinet.

A successful multi-agency project is running to support children and young people with parents who misuse substances. This allows early intervention with families that would not otherwise receive a social care service. The project will be fully evaluated by Salford University in November 2007. Transition planning for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities improved in 2006/07, building on the successful Bridging the Gap pilot. All schools are now using this guidance and there has been a significant increase in the number of transition plans in place. The council recognises it needs to continue increasing coverage.

Children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision making and in supporting the community. A participation officer has been appointed and a strategy

introduced last year to increase the influence of children and young people on services provided for them. The council and partners have consulted widely on plans, including options for health services, and short break opportunities for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All play and leisure equipment in the Borough is now arranged in consultation with children and young people. Young people, including those from vulnerable groups, are involved in interview panels for the Youth Service, Connexions, and for some head teacher posts. The Youth Cabinet involves young people, elected members and officers. There is strong commitment to the development of school councils, with all high schools and the majority of primary schools having one. Ofsted inspections found young people's contribution to the community to be good or outstanding.

The Youth Offending Team (YOT) and partners have exceeded targets for reducing anti-social behaviour and offending rates during the year. Led by the YOT there are now six youth inclusion support panels across the borough, and the YOT detached team responds to anti-social behaviour 'hotspots' in partnership with the Youth Service and other agencies. The proportion of young people involved with the YOT who are in employment, education or training is well above the average, and school attendance and exclusion rates are better than average.

Looked after children and young people are encouraged to participate in planning and review meetings. The proportion who participated in their review was lower in 2006/07 than the previous year but falls within acceptable levels. Bury Independent Visitor and Advocacy Service works with Connexions to run a looked after children Youth Participation Group known as VOICE. The group has a strong core membership and is currently involved in consultations on improving review meetings. Looked after children and young people have participated in developing the integrated looked after children strategy, and assisted in the design of their health assessments. Bury Independent Visitor and Advocacy Service provides support to looked after children and young people who wish to complain.

Area for development

- Increase participation of looked after children and young people in reviews.

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 area is good. Standards and achievement for 16- to 18-year-olds are good and improving each year. The percentage of young people achieving levels 2 and 3 by age 19 is higher than the national average. Also a higher than average percentage of young people achieve five or more good passes at GCSE (including mathematics and English). Levels of attainment, participation and retention in further education are good.

The authority is taking action to ensure that 14–19 education and training is planned and delivered in a coordinated way. Good progress has been made on the overall 14–19 strategy through the well-established 14–19 Strategic Framework Group. Local employment needs, as well as those of young people, have been taken into account in the plans for the new Engineering diploma and range of vocational options available at Key Stage 4. Expert groups have been established to take forward diploma development with schools, colleges and providers, building on existing collaborations. An innovative on-line 14–19 prospectus has been developed through the Learning Partnership.

Vulnerable young people such as looked after children and young people, teenage mothers and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are well targeted and supported. The National Vocational Qualification success rate for work-based learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and there has been a high increase in the numbers of young people completing their apprenticeships. Pathway plans for looked after children and young people address issues of accommodation, finance, social care and health. There are a range of activities available to support the social development of care leavers and a high percentage of care leavers live in suitable accommodation. As a result the number of care leavers who are in employment, education and training is high. The overall percentage of 16- to 18-year-olds not in employment, education or training is, however, above average at 8% compared to 7.7% nationally. As a preventative response to this concern, Connexions resources in the borough are being targeted on particular schools and pupil referral units where future need has been identified. There are plans to improve the prospects of teenage mothers and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through joint activity between the Youth Service, the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions. An example of this is Steps to Success which is designed to encourage teenage mothers back to learning and employment.

The percentage of all 19 year olds in education, employment and training is considerably higher than similar authorities suggesting that strategies to address concerns have been met with some success.

The Tellus2 survey indicates that young people in Bury have a higher than average opinion of the facilities available to them in their local area and the guidance they receive about their future careers. The authority has good knowledge of the current education and employment activities of young people. The percentage intending to study at university is above the national average.

In response to previous APA targets, 2006 saw an increase in direct payments to children in need but this remains a future target for improvement as are plans to increase quality childcare provision.

Area for development

- Reduce the percentage of 16- to 18-year-olds not in employment, education or training.

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

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council has a good capacity to improve its services for children and young people. There is strong leadership by the council and its partners who share an ambitious vision for the service as set out in the Children and Young People's Plan. This well-conceived plan defines progress, priorities and targets with mostly realistic but challenging ambitions. Consultations with stakeholders are particularly strong.

Priorities for development are based on good analysis of need with increasing emphasis on preventative services, such as the Health and Wellbeing Centre and the attention paid to those at risk of not moving on to an education, employment or training route. Planning, delivery and review is strong together with partnership working.

Overall, value for money is good and progress has been made in reducing spending on agency placements for looked after children and young people. Good workforce planning had led to reduced vacancies and a well-trained workforce. Performance management is generally good and the service is aware of its strengths and areas for development although recording practices of referrals and assessments of children in need have been variable. There is good scrutiny through the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the service is open to external evaluation and challenge.

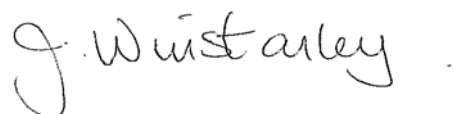
Most areas for improvement in the APA 2005/06 have been successfully tackled although standards at Key Stages 1 and 3 remain concerns. The council is meeting these concerns through a range of actions including an integrated strategy for the under fives to help improve attainment at Key Stage 1. Despite improvements in CAMHS for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities concerns remain around protocols for children and young people with complex, persistent and severe behavioural and mental health needs. The council has plans to address this apparent decline by taking action to formalise existing good practices. There are robust systems in place to address priorities and early indications show that good progress is being made.

Areas for development

- Further develop joint commissioning.
- Improve CAMHS protocols and plans for partnership working between agencies for children and young people with complex, persistent and severe behavioural and mental health needs.

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