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Making Social Care  
Better for People



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**1 November 2006**

Dear Ms Ioannides

**2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BURY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment (APA) process for your local authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

**Summary**

Areas for judgement	Grade awarded <sup>1</sup>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	4
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	3

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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

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council delivers well above minimum requirements for children and young people. It has sustained the strengths identified in last year's APA and improved the quality in several strands, particularly in social care. There are many areas where outcomes are outstanding. The quality of provision has strengthened through the work of specialist teams and effective partnerships between agencies in prevention, intervention and support. Positive action has either resolved or is tackling weaker aspects identified in last year's APA. The Bury Plan and the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) set out a clear vision and priorities arising from wide consultation, last year's APA and an accurate analysis of where realistic gains can be made in the five outcome areas. The competent, highly committed, innovative department of Children's Services is well led and corporate decisions are informing the use of resources. However, financial and staffing constraints have undermined the effectiveness of the delivery of some aspects of social care. The council has good capacity to improve its services further.

## **Being healthy**

The council makes an excellent contribution to improving the health of children and young people in the area. Children's services are enabling access to an increasing range of preventive and intervention health services. The post of director of inclusion and healthcare, jointly funded by the council and the Primary Care Trust (PCT), has been highly influential in tailoring services to need. There is effective multi-agency working to promote healthy lifestyles: a good example is the work of the youth offending team (YOT), the drug and alcohol action team and the voluntary sector.

Nearly all schools are actively engaged in promoting the health of children through initiatives such as the National Healthy Schools programme.

The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy has clear direction and the service is on course to achieve the national target for reduction in under 18s' conceptions by 2010. Although teenage pregnancy rates have increased for the last two reported years, the overall downward trend since 1999 is better than the national average. The council has identified hot-spots in the borough to target intervention and is taking advantage of up-to-date information through its partnership work with the PCT. Sexual health programmes delivered to vulnerable groups, such as looked after children and young people at risk of offending, are well received.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have developed extensively with a 25% increase in resources in real terms since 2002. The service is a model of good practice in most aspects of its work. Where there are areas for improvement, most particularly the provision of services for 16 and 17 year olds and for children and young people with learning disabilities, there are clear points for action in the CYPP. These areas are key priorities for investment by the PCT and funding will come on stream from April 2007. In the meantime, Children's Services intend to redirect funding to begin the provision.

Health outcomes for looked after children remain very good. The number of children who receive an annual health assessment and dental check is above the average for similar

councils. There has been an improvement in the delivery of specialist assessment services for substance misuse to young people along with timely interventions.

## **Staying safe**

The contribution of Children's Services to outcomes in this area is good. There have been improvements in some outcomes from an already high level. In most cases, outcomes are better than in other authorities. The two outcomes where Bury performed less well than others were the rate of assessments of children in need and the timeliness of reviews of looked after children. These are now the focus of attention.

Social work teams were reconfigured in September 2005 to improve effectiveness of service delivery; it is early days for a full evaluation of the impact. A promising innovation is the multi-agency children in need team (known as Family Intervention Team) which has been set up to work with families below the threshold for social work intervention. The team also works intensively with cases that may otherwise enter the child protection system and to prevent family breakdown. Last year's APA identified the high number of children on the Child Protection Register as an area for improvement. Bury has achieved a reduction from 43.1 per 10,000 of the population to 26.5 which is close to the average for similar councils, (26.3).

The management of cases on the Child Protection Register is effective. All children have a named social worker, all reviews are completed on time and only a small proportion of cases remain on the Child Protection Register for more than two years, which is good.

Timescales for the completion of initial assessments and core assessments have been maintained at the good levels reported last year; these are well above the average for similar councils. However, the rates of referrals received, and of initial and core assessments undertaken, have reduced. In the case of core assessments, the reduction was greater than that planned and is well below the average for similar councils. The council is investigating the reasons, including the impact of the new teams, and is recording issues. The rate of repeat referrals remains low at just over half the rate for England averages, indicating that children's needs are being met first time.

The above average proportion of looked after children per 10,000 of the population was an area for improvement in last year's APA. A reduction was planned but the rate has increased in the current year. However, during the year, Bury has received 13 children from other authorities under national initiatives such as arrangements for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. If these children are discounted, the number of looked after children has reduced slightly, but the planned reduction has not been achieved. Significant numbers of looked after children are placed back with parents with a plan to discharge the care order. The council has been unable to carry out these plans. The rate of reviews for looked after children that are completed on time is below the rate of other councils. Efficiency and effectiveness have been affected by issues related to systems and resources. The council has taken action, including a review of its care planning procedure for children starting to be looked after, who should have a review within 28 days.

There are many continuing, strong aspects in the services for looked after children. The level of placement stability is significantly above the national average. Most looked after children have a secure, stable placement and have access to stable education and health provision. All have a named social worker and all care leavers have a personal adviser and a pathway plan. Almost all children starting to be looked after are placed within 20 miles of their last address. The rate of looked after children placed with foster carers (or for adoption) is higher than the national average and the use of relatives or friends as foster carers for children is also well above the national average. Bury successfully achieved a further reduction in the number of children with three or more placements in one year and has increased the rate of children who have lived in the same placement for more than two years. The council is planning for further improvement to the range of services and support. During the year, it has completed a wide ranging review of its commissioning strategy for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities; this has received wide support from parents and stakeholders.

The rate of adoptions of looked after children has improved and is now very good. Since the last APA, there have been very positive reports from the inspections of the fostering and the adoption services. In both cases, action had been taken in response to the areas for improvement. There is a strong focus on support and training for carers, and the inclusion of carers and young people in service development.

Despite efforts to initiate action, child protection training for teaching and support staff in schools is a priority for improvement as in 2005. The council aims to complete training for all designated child protection teachers by summer 2006 and the training for all schools by summer 2007.

Effective preventive and support programmes involving the YOT and other agencies have had a positive impact in reducing the number of first offences and incidents of anti-social behaviour.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

Children's services make an excellent contribution to ensuring that children and young people achieve at school and enjoy their education and leisure activities. Performance in this outcome area remains outstanding and there have been significant improvements in key areas of education and social care.

School provision remains strong; Ofsted finds the effectiveness of the majority of schools to be good. One secondary school has been given a notice to improve and no school has been made subject to special measures. Educational performance is excellent. In the national tests in 2005, the authority was in the top 30% for performance at Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4. At Key Stage 2, the English results were the best in recent years and the improvement in mathematics placed Bury in the top 10%. Bury is one of the most improved local authorities in relation to primary schooling. As in 2004, the authority exceeded others in the percentage of boys gaining five or more GCSE passes, and the improved performance of girls lifted the overall capped average points score. Girls' performance at age 16 is now far higher than in similar councils. Standards have also risen

for post-16s, partly as a result of a higher percentage of young people achieving intermediate vocational qualifications.

Borough wide and local initiatives, including the implementation of the policy regarding gifted and talented pupils, the 14 to 19 Strategy and the work of the effective school improvement team, are highly evident in the improved standards and in the increased value added, especially at Key Stages 2 and 4. Floor targets were met at Key Stage 4 and the number of schools below floor targets at Key Stage 2 has more than halved. Performance in mathematics is strong at all key stages. Although performance at Key Stage 3 is above the national average, the value added has not improved and, as in 2005, remains an area for improvement. Bury is monitoring closely the very differing performance and progress of boys of Pakistani heritage in its secondary schools and has plans to share best practice.

Effective, productive partnerships between services and agencies have been a positive factor in the improved profile. Compared with similar councils, Bury has a higher percentage of supervised juveniles in employment, education and training and there has been an increase in the percentage of young people leaving care with academic qualifications. Bury's performance is now well above that of similar councils. Attendance has improved, especially in secondary schools where the rate is the highest in the last six years and places the authority in the top 10%. Unauthorised absence has fallen significantly to well below the national average. In addition, the level of permanent exclusions has dropped and almost all excluded pupils receive at least 20 hours tuition. Although no looked after child has been excluded permanently, the absence rate is high at 15% despite the successful placement of many looked after children within 20 miles of their last home address.

The service is prompt to analyse data about schools' performance, to look at contributory contextual factors, including the amalgamation of infant and junior schools, and to target support accordingly. It has already drawn on provisional results from the 2006 national tests to evaluate the effectiveness of action taken in 2005/06 and to inform decisions about intervention and support in 2006/07. As a result, there are plans, for example, to repeat the programme which, in seven target schools, raised performance, especially of boys, in writing at Key Stage 1. Writing at Key Stage 1 remains an area for long term improvement; the dip in standards to below the national average echoes the findings from inspections of childcare settings, of lower performance in communication, language and literacy in the early years compared with other areas of learning.

### **Making a positive contribution**

The council makes an excellent contribution towards ensuring that children and young people achieve this outcome. The council has sustained highly effective practice in its many systems to give children and young people a voice in the review and development of educational and social care provision. The Youth Cabinet makes a strong contribution to making and evaluating policy. There are also good processes to support vulnerable groups and individuals, including an independent advocacy service to support children and young people looked after who are placed out of the borough, and the introduction of a Passport

to High School to ease the transition from primary to secondary schooling. The involvement of looked after children in their reviews continues to be good.

Colleges have consulted young people on how best to meet their learning needs and this has resulted in changes to courses, the introduction of new learning pathways and support for those young people at risk of becoming disaffected.

The YOT and other partners have continued their effective work with children and young people to reduce the number of incidents of anti-social behaviour and the rate of re-offending. After three years of reductions in the re-offending rate, the increase for the 2003 cohort needs to be set alongside changes in the judicial process, reflecting the agenda to narrow the justice gap.

For the fourth year running, there has been a decrease in the number of looked after children and young people who have received police warnings, reprimands and convictions. The rate remains considerably lower than the national average. The YOT has had good success, especially in the spring months, in working with the local business community to place young offenders in employment as well as in training and education.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

Children's services make a good contribution to children and young people's economic well-being. The implementation of the 14 to 19 Strategy is being given a strong steer by the director of learning and culture. Further education retention and pass rates have improved. Colleges are responding to the needs of young people and are offering a wider curriculum with enhanced vocational and occupational learning opportunities. Stronger links between the Learning and Skills Council, the council, and local businesses are echoed in the growing numbers of young people aged over 16 who are in education, employment and training. There are also more young mothers and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in education, employment and training. The ratio of those leaving care who find employment or stay in education and training is high compared with similar councils.

The take up of services for children with disabilities is good and a new commissioning strategy has been produced for this group, taking account of wide ranging consultation and participation of children and families. Children's services are piloting a new, more comprehensive scheme to manage effective transition to adult services for children with disabilities. All children in the pilot have a transition plan and a designated transition worker. The process will be launched in all schools in September 2006.

The use of direct payments for children and young people remains low but arrangements, including a new in-house direct payments team, are improving to increase take-up.

## **The council's management of its services for children and young people, including its capacity to improve them further**

Overall, the council shows excellent management of its services and good capacity to improve. It has proven success in improving services and has successfully sustained high performance given a lower budget than similar councils.

The council continues to place very high priority on education and social care. At a time of financial difficulties, children's services have been allocated a 10% increase in funds. The schools' budget remains lower than in similar councils. Reasoned decisions have been taken to repeat overspending in children's services and to reduce costs, particularly those related to school transport and out of borough placements. As a result of judicious review, some services, including those for children with moderate learning difficulties, have been decommissioned and new ones set up to reflect changes in local needs. Increasing emphasis is being placed on preventive services along with timely intervention. In education, for example, this has been highly beneficial in raising standards at Key Stage 2.

The council consistently delivers very well against the indicators in the performance assessment framework for social care. It was ranked second nationally for the year 2004/05. The organisation of children's services is now well embedded and there is strong leadership in health, social care and education. Roles and responsibilities are clear across the service; good communication, coupled with a shared commitment to improving services, has enabled difficult strategic decisions to be taken regarding the use of resources. Analysis of staff absence, careful risk management and reviews of practice have informed decisions about recruitment; front-line posts have been held. However, there have been some areas where children's services have been stretched to sustain good outcomes, to meet targets, to ensure that all statutory requirements are fulfilled and to implement new initiatives. An instance of this was when the secondment of an independent reviewing officer, followed by the sickness of another such officer, reduced the capacity to conduct reviews of looked after children.

While the collection and analysis of data are major strengths, not all teams make optimal use of the findings as part of their quality control and assurance. The thorough self-assessment undertaken for the APA identifies correctly the major areas of strength and those for improvement. However, it focuses predominantly on provision rather than outcomes.

Good progress is being made towards the launch of a Children's Trust in 2007. The case is well argued for change with the setting up of multi-disciplinary local teams. Wide consultation is planned. There are robust monitoring procedures to track the progress in implementing the CYPP and the executive member plays a strong part in holding children's services to account.

Overall, the council has good capacity to make further improvements in its services for children and young people.

## Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>schools' focus on healthy living</li> <li>sexual health programme</li> <li>work of CAMHS</li> <li>health assessments of looked after children</li> <li>programme to assess needs and intervene in substance misuse.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CAMHS provision for 16 and 17 year olds and children with learning disabilities.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>timescales for the completion of assessments for children in need</li> <li>multi agency work to reduce offending</li> <li>work of fostering and adoption service</li> <li>support for children on the Child Protection Register</li> <li>placement choice and long term stability for looked after children</li> <li>adoption of looked after children.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>number of looked after children</li> <li>reviews of looked after children</li> <li>rates of referral and assessment of children in need.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>standards and value added at Key Stages 2 and 4 and post-16</li> <li>school attendance</li> <li>decrease in number of permanent exclusions</li> <li>improved academic qualifications of care leavers</li> <li>support for children in need.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>standards at Key Stage 1</li> <li>value added at Key Stage 3</li> <li>attendance of looked after children.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>work of YOT to reduce incidents of social nuisance</li> <li>regular consultation with children and young people to review practice and decide policy</li> <li>low rates of offending of looked after children.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p>

<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improved number of care leavers in employment, education and training</li> <li>• increasing vocational opportunities in post-16 education</li> <li>• improved attainment and retention rates for young people over the age of 16.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use of direct payments for young people in need.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• corporate vision and strong leadership</li> <li>• consistently good delivery against performance indicators</li> <li>• high profile of social inclusion</li> <li>• committed teams</li> <li>• targeting of resources to need</li> <li>• data collection and analysis.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use of data by teams and their partners</li> <li>• quality control.</li> </ul>

### Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA

- The impact of the school improvement team in raising standards at Key Stage 1 and increasing the value added at Key Stage 3.
- The progress towards Children's Trust status in the light of current financial constraints and the implications for the use of resources.
- The impact of the actions of Children's Services and its work with partners to identify the factors behind reduced rates in referrals and assessments of children in need.

We confirm that the children's services grade will provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) and will be published to the Audit Commission. The social care judgement is for CSCI information only.

Yours sincerely



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