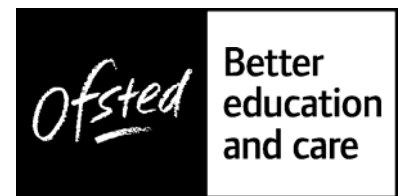


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Making Social Care
Better for People



Ms Eleni Ioannides
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1 December 2005

Dear Ms Ioannides

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF BURY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of our joint meeting held on 4 July 2005 to assess the performance of the education and social care services within your authority. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues. Also for your subsequent factual comments on the draft report which are reflected in this final version.

Being healthy

Outcomes in this area are good. There is strong engagement with schools for promoting the health of children generally through a range of initiatives such as: the National Healthy Schools Standard and Fruit in Schools programmes; a strong and growing focus on school sports; and specific initiatives to tackle key issues such as smoking, obesity and substance misuse. There is also evidence of effective targeted support for vulnerable groups such as looked after children, children with disabilities and teenage parents.

There has been further investment in child and adolescent mental health services that is delivering improvement in the coverage and responsiveness of services. One example is that all young offenders with acute and non-acute mental health needs are assessed within the performance standard of five and 15 days. This is contributing to more children and young people being supported at home or with families, earlier targeted support for children with disabilities and their parents or carers, and the return of some children who had previously been placed out of the borough. Overall, the council, with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and other partners, have some good

examples of innovative practice and are making successful contributions to wider health outcomes for children and young people in the borough, such as a high rate of children being immunised and reductions in teenage conceptions and levels of substance misuse.

Staying safe

On balance, outcomes in this area are generally good. Risk assessment of work with children underpins a wide range of school and council activities and health and safety training is provided for relevant staff. Bury has had a particular focus on tackling bullying in schools and other settings and there is some evidence of better reporting, investigation and action to respond to incidents. Performance on pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is strong, especially in primary schools.

There has been significant improvement in performance in some key areas of staying safe; these include those areas identified for improvement in last year's Annual Performance Review. This included all children requiring protection having an allocated social worker, improvements in the timeliness of statutory reviews of children on the child protection register (CPR) and more effective response times for initial and core assessments of children's needs. These improvements have been achieved, in some cases well ahead of the average level for similar councils. One example is the improved timescales for completing assessments and the reduction in time children spend on the CPR. These improvements have been achieved at the same time as staff have managed increasing levels of referrals for children's services, resulting from improved information and accessibility of child and family support services.

During the past year there has been an increase in formal child protection referrals and conferences and these are significantly above the average for similar councils. This trend is also reflected in the higher number of children who are subsequently placed on the CPR. The council reports this trend is partly due to increased activity in relation to domestic violence and also an increase in awareness in the wider community about safeguarding children. However, further work has now been initiated to better understand these trends and a strong focus is being given to putting in place the new Safeguarding Board and arrangements. There have been some continuing issues about the number of designated (child protection) teachers who have not had appropriate training through the Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC). The council have now influenced governing bodies who have passed a resolution that the relevant training targets will be met and staff with substantial access to children, such as youth workers, connexions and family support workers have now received level one training.

Regulatory inspections have identified the need for increasing support for early years providers due to the higher number having issues arising at their first Ofsted inspection. In many cases these issues relate to the need to have effective child protection policies and measures in place. The council has confirmed that pre-

registration training will now be offered to providers to reduce this trend and to enable them to be registered more effectively.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area overall are very good. Early years provision is expanding appropriately and free nursery provision meets needs. School provision has many strengths and there are almost no schools with significant weaknesses. The council has a good school improvement service and standards of attainment are generally good and sometimes very good. Particular attention has been given to outcomes for looked after children and although general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) success by pupils in Year 11 is still weak, the numbers of care leavers involved in education, employment and training is much improved and now well ahead of the average for similar councils. While the rates of improvement have historically been very positive, there has been a slow-down in some aspects, warranting renewed attention, including at Key Stage 1 where there has been slippage of standards in reading and writing. Improvement at Key Stage 3 also requires there to be attention to value-added measures as pupils' progress from Key Stage 2 are not good. Special educational needs procedures have been improved through consultation with parents and schools, this is resulting in more early intervention which should further reduce numbers over time and the timeliness of statementing is now good. The pupil referral unit is effective and reintegrates pupils well and there has been some success in reducing exclusions, although there are still too many. Considerable support is given to vulnerable pupils by the youth service and by specific services targeting particular groups.

The council gives good leadership to the educational service. It has a good school improvement service, provides good value in its traded services to schools, and gives strong support to schools in its provision and analysis of data.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. The involvement of children and young people is strong and continues to grow. Young people participate in decision-making in their communities through school councils, effective Youth Action Groups, and the Youth Cabinet, which has adequate funds at its disposal to further raise participation levels and impact on local plans and services. Almost all looked after children are now actively involved in their statutory reviews following a joint initiative involving social workers and Bury Independent Visitor and Advocacy Service, a local voluntary sector provider. Children and young people, particularly those from vulnerable groups, are supported in managing changes and challenges in their lives, and work on key transition stages is strong. There is clearly a lot of activity for supporting at-risk groups such as looked after children, care leavers, children with disabilities, teenage parents and those at risk

of exclusion. Examples of improved outcomes include the proportion of care leavers, teenage parents and young offenders now in education or employment; the proportion of children with disabilities having access to short break activities; extension in the use of direct payments; and lower than average levels of offending by looked after children, although there has been a small rise in the past year. There is evidence of strong support from schools and aspects of the Youth Service and the Youth Offending Team that are delivering a reduction in local re-offending rates, an increase in young offenders in employment and training and in those receiving psychological support.

Children and young people are increasingly involved in higher level service planning, and this is now well embedded. Recent examples include their involvement in developing new leaving care services and support services to enable children with disabilities and young people to achieve their potential. Joint work with schools on children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well embedded and this has particular relevance in view of the religious and cultural diversity of the borough's population. There is however a need for further involvement of young people in managing and planning their own youth service activities so that they more closely reflect their own interests and aspirations. There is scope to raise the profile of work on race equality and community cohesion, particularly within the youth service. The council is aware of the challenge it faces in ensuring an adequate supply of appropriate placements for children with complex needs and disabilities.

Achieving economic well-being

Overall, outcomes in this area are good, and there are some examples of innovative practice, such as the council's commitment to provide employment opportunities for all care leavers and improved access to advice and information services for young people, including information technology (IT) access. All looked after children have personal education plans, have a priority for allocation of school places and most have access to a personal computer where they live. Educational achievement for this group of young people remains poor overall, although performance on absences is much improved and well ahead of the average for similar councils. A wide range of initiatives are in place to improve outcomes in this area, such as the appointment of learning mentors, the creation of a specialist, multi-disciplinary looked after children's team, and an annual awards ceremony to celebrate young people's achievements.

There is strong support from the Youth Offending Team and almost all supervised young people are in training or employment and the proportion of care leavers with this outcome has more than doubled in the last year. All children with disabilities have a personal education plan and are offered additional support at key transition stages. A higher proportion of children with statements of special educational needs are educated in mainstream schools. Work between the Connexions Service, the Red Centre and the council is enabling more young people to overcome isolation and engage in positive learning. More young people with disabilities and carers of children

with disabilities are taking up direct payments, although current performance in this area is a little below average.

Strategic partnerships for young people, involving young people, training providers and local businesses are secure and are delivering improvements in the choices and quality of training available. Overall planning for 14 to 19 year olds has been developed rather late, but satisfaction rates are high and youth services are judged to be well led and managed. Action is underway to increase levels of participation in planning youth service activities and future development of the service.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high immunisation rates • involvement and early progress in the Healthy Schools Initiative • levels of participation in school sports • reducing teenage conceptions • strategy, investment and improving coverage of child and adolescent mental health services • improving health outcomes for looked after children. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meeting statutory duties in terms of allocation of child protection cases and reviews completed to time • increasing referrals of children and families and improved performance in terms of response time for initial and core assessments • significant increase in placement choice, particularly for the proportion placed in adoptive and family placements; the former having nearly doubled and the latter now above the average for similar councils • strong focus being given to putting in place new Safeguarding Board and arrangements. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the rate of referrals and initial child protection conferences have further increased and the overall rate of children on the CPR is the highest in the comparator group and this gap is widening • there is also an increase in the rate of children becoming looked after by the Council • there continue to be some issues about the number of designated (child protection) teachers who have not had appropriate training through the Area Child Protection Committee; the council have now influenced Governing Bodies who have passed a resolution to meet the relevant training targets.

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most aspects of pupils' attainment are good • school attendance • reintegration of excluded pupils • almost complete lack of schools causing concern • impact of consultant support • provision of primary school places • school admissions • involvement of children and young people in their own plans and in wider service development • service collaboration • leadership and management of authority's educational work • value provided to schools by the council's traded services. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number of early years providers failing to meet the standard at registration • improvement rates at Key Stages 1 and 3 • fixed term exclusions.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Service strategy • support for particular vulnerable groups such as teenage parents, children with disabilities and those looked after • involvement of children and young people looked after in their own reviews • involvement of children and young people more in higher level service planning • joint work on Youth Justice matters and improved outcomes such as the reduction in re-offending rates; the proportions of young offenders in education, employment or training • schools' work on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • young people's involvement in planning Youth Service activities • Youth Service's work on race relations • quality and supply of appropriate placements for children with complex needs or disabilities.

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCSE attainment • Youth Service and collaborative support for pupils at risk • overall rate of young people in education, employment or training post-16, particularly the significant improvements in rates for care leavers, which had been identified as an improvement area last year. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is further scope to extend the use of direct payments for young people with disabilities and carers of children with disabilities; however, it is recognised that current performance for this group is in line with the average for similar councils.

Service management

The council continues to have promising capacity to improve on the basis of: its overall track record of delivering improvements over recent years; its improving resource base for children’s services; the strength of local partnerships, corporate focus on performance improvement; elected member support for children’s services and the experience; commitment and continuity of its front line staff.

Education and social care for children have consistently been a high priority for the council; its commitment to social inclusion and to combating the effects of poverty on educational achievement is strong and longstanding. The corporate structure ensures that ambitions for children’s achievement are represented in many aspects of the council’s work. The council’s involvement in the strategic partnership is good and its partnership work for children’s education, health and social care is effective. This is reflected in the integrated management of services, both at a strategic level and in the front line delivery of some services, such as those for looked after and children with disabilities and services commissioned for care leavers.

Good progress is being made to embed and develop the newly established children’s service and to manage the cultural and operational changes required. The council has good priorities for education and social care and has responded well to external evaluation in both areas. It has analysed its strengths and weaknesses reasonably well and rapid progress has been made in some areas needing improvement, such as special educational needs statements and personal education plans for looked after children. All priorities for improvement identified in last year’s inspection and performance reports have been addressed, with evidence of clear improvement achieved, in some cases well ahead of planned targets.

There is some evidence that the gap in spending on children’s services between Bury and similar councils has begun to reduce and the council is increasing its investment in children’s services to support modernisation. It acknowledges that demand for services

and financial pressures continue to present risks to the council, although thresholds for access to services are being actively monitored. While there has been a considerable increase in children looked after in family placements, the council continues to struggle to find appropriate placements for those children with the most complex needs. While a commissioning strategy is being developed, the issue in terms of more local placements has not yet been resolved. However, the balance of spending on family and adoptive placements is much improved and unit costs of placements remain below the average.

Bury has a stable and committed workforce and staff turnover and vacancy rates for teachers and social care staff are in line with the average for similar councils, and good progress is being made to reduce sickness absence where levels are well below the average. Spending on training is in line with other councils and this is reflected in more staff achieving national qualifications and awards.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Staying safe

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

- trends in increasing levels of child protection activity.

Agencies collaborate to safeguard children according to the requirements of current government guidance:

- child protection training by designated teachers.

Looked after children live in safe environments and are protected from abuse and exploitation:

- commissioning of appropriately registered placements for children with complex needs or disabilities.

Enjoying and achieving

Action is taken to ensure that educational provision 5-16 is of good quality:

- rates of improvement in standards at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 3.

Making a positive contribution

Action is taken to prevent offending and to reduce re-offending by children and young people:

- trends in youth offending rates, particularly of first time offenders
- offending by looked after children.

Achieving economic well-being

Action is taken to ensure that 14-19 education and training is planned and delivered in a coordinated way, and to ensure that education and training (16-19) is of good quality:

- partnership work in planning and implementing improvement at 14 to 19.

Final judgements

Please see your final annual performance assessment judgements attached at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY

Divisional Manager
Office for Standards in Education



JONATHAN PHILLIPS

Director – Quality, Performance and Methods
Commission for Social Care Inspection

APA final judgements 2005: Bury Metropolitan Borough Council

Areas for judgement	Final judgements ¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	3
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	4
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 capacity to improve its services for children and young people	3

1

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