

17 December 2008

Mrs Edna Sutton
Director for Children, Young People and Families
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Directorate for Children, Young People and Families
Berneslai Close
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Dear Mrs Sutton

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Barnsley 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	3
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	4
Achieving economic well-being	3
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	3

*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

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council delivers services for children and young people that are consistently above minimum requirements and outstanding in some aspects. The council’s capacity to improve, including its management of services, is good. It has established clear and ambitious priorities for improving the life chances of children and young people. It knows both the needs of its area and the strengths and weaknesses of its services well. It is successfully establishing partnership working between services, and most outcomes for children and young people are improving, albeit from a low baseline in many cases. Priorities for improvement identified in the previous APA are being tackled effectively, most notably in relation to children and young people being healthy and staying safe. Provision for economic well-being is a significant strength and effective practice developed by the council is being used to support other councils. Whilst services are improving overall and both rapidly and substantially in some cases, there is still much to do before many outcomes for children and young people are as good as they should be. The council is on track in building a strong platform to deliver the improvements needed.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teenage conceptions have reduced by 17.5%, which is better than the average for statistical neighbours of 13.8% and the national average of 13.3%. ▪ The number of looked after children who have their health and dental checks, at 89%, is high compared to statistical neighbours (86%) and the national average (85%). ▪ There has been a significant improvement in the number of schools with Healthy School Status from 39% to 61%.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The rate of initial take up of breast-feeding is low (51.2%) compared to statistical neighbours (60.2%). ▪ The rates of obesity are higher than is the case for statistical neighbours.

Staying safe

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council in their self-assessment judged this outcome to be outstanding. While much progress has been made since the previous APA, particularly in relation to referral and assessment processes, there is still a need for

improvements to outcomes in some important areas. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There has been an improvement in the timeliness of assessments following the recommendations of the APA in 2007. The number of initial and core assessments completed within timescales has improved and is now above statistical and national averages. ▪ Many of the services provided for looked after children including adoption, fostering and children's homes were judged to be good for safeguarding when inspected. The children's unit providing care for children with a learning difficulty and/or disability was judged outstanding for this outcome. ▪ Private fostering arrangements were judged to be good at safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. ▪ The number of looked after children cases reviewed on time has significantly improved since last year, from 75% to 91%, and is now better than the statistical neighbour average and the national average, (both 90%).
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The number of children killed or injured on the roads has risen since last year from 13 to 24 and is well above the statistical neighbour and national averages. Although, in total, the number has reduced by 16% since 1998, there has been a reduction of 52% nationally. ▪ The number of children subject to a child protection plan has decreased. However the percentage of children who were re-registered or subject to a child protection plan for a further time has increased from 14% to 17.1% and is now significantly higher than similar councils (11.1%).

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good, with outstanding features. This is in line with the council's self-assessment. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standards in national tests and assessments at the end of the Foundation Stage and Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 are improving at a faster rate than is the case in statistical neighbours and councils nationally. ▪ The highly effective school improvement service knows its schools well and has very good arrangements for providing support and challenge proportionate to need. There are no schools in an Ofsted category of concern. The management of the school improvement partner programme is very effective. ▪ The council's work on improving behaviour and attendance is very effective.

Attendance has improved significantly and is now around the national average. The rate of exclusions is well below average. The council's support for children with a learning difficulty and/or disability is effective and is very highly regarded by schools. The achievement of this group in national tests and assessments is improving.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Although standards at the end of each key stage are improving at a faster rate than the national average and the average for statistical neighbours, they still remain comparatively low.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths

- The council provides excellent opportunities for children and young people to influence service delivery, for example the provision of youth services has been significantly reconfigured following their participation in decision making. Consequently the service has received positive feedback from young people.
- At 29.9% the youth service has exceeded the national target of 25% for the number of young people they reach. This equates to 6145 children and young people.
- An excellent range of prevention activities, including parenting support delivered through the youth offending team, has reduced re-offending rates from 41.8% to 36.5%, which is below the national average.
- The positive contribution of children and young people living in foster care was judged to be outstanding in the last inspection of fostering services.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The proportion of young offenders engaged in employment, education or training has dropped in the last year from 69% to 63%, which is below the average for statistical neighbours (71%).

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good with outstanding features. The council judged this area to be outstanding. While there are undoubtedly a number of outstanding features, further improvement is still needed in some important outcomes, as the council acknowledges in its self-assessment. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths

- Very effective partnerships in 14–19 provision have brought about outstanding progress in reducing the percentage of young people not in employment, education or training, from 11.8% to 7.7%. This is well below the average for statistical neighbours.
- The council's work in introducing diplomas is outstanding. It is one of only five that will be delivering all 10 diplomas in 2009.
- Post-16 support for vulnerable groups is effective. The proportion of young people with a learning difficulty and/or disability who are not in employment, education or training has reduced; it is well below the average for statistical neighbours and just above the national average. Almost all looked after young people have pathway plans, personal advisers and suitable accommodation, which is above average performance. Improved provision is not yet having a sustained positive impact on the number of this small group not in employment, education or training.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Level 2 and 3 attainment at 19 and the proportion of students gaining five A* to C GCSEs, including English and mathematics, are improving but not significantly closing the gap with statistical neighbour and national averages.

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

Grade 3

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people and its management of these services are both good. The latter judgement accords with the council's self-assessment. However, the former is a grade below that of the self-assessment. This is because some key aspects of management processes are at too early a stage of development to constitute a platform for service improvement which is both comprehensive and secure. Joint commissioning, for example, is at an early stage of development. Nonetheless the council has done well overall in recent years in improving outcomes for children and young people, particularly bearing in mind the significant challenges presented by the borough's social and economic circumstances. It has a very clear understanding of service strengths and weaknesses and sets challenging but realistic targets for improving outcomes. Key priorities for improvement are being tackled effectively. Planning, financial management and performance management processes are good. Partnership working to deliver integrated children's services is developing well and working relationships are good. The recent, jointly funded appointment of a senior manager for safeguarding and welfare reflects the strong commitment of partner agencies to these aspects of their work. There are very effective arrangements for engaging children and young people in shaping new developments. The implementation of the common assessment framework and the introduction of ContactPoint are being very well managed. Much has been done to expand service capacity. For example, an ambitious school rebuilding and re-organisation programme is being efficiently

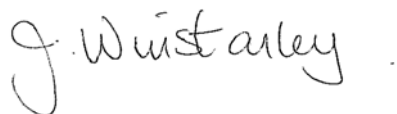
implemented and there has been very good progress in providing children's centres and extended services in schools. Cost effectiveness is being improved in some key areas of service, for example in the care and education of children who are looked after or who have a learning difficulty and/or disability.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Where the council has focussed effort and resources on improving outcomes for children and young people, this has had a very positive impact.▪ Where the council is not yet having a strong impact on improving outcomes for children and young people, this is clearly recognised in their self-assessment report and appropriate action is being taken.▪ The council demonstrates an excellent commitment to achieving value for money underpinned by recent budget reviews and ongoing investment to save strategies.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Some key developments are at an early stage and have not yet shown a track record of improvement.

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



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