

26 November 2007

Ms Gillian Palmer
Director of Education and Children's Services
London Borough of Barnet
North London Business Park
Building 4
Oakleigh Road South
London NW4 4BG

Dear Ms Palmer

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment for your local authority. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan, your action plan arising from the joint area review and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. The letter comments on progress since the recent joint area review. 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

Barnet Council consistently delivers services for children and young people to a good level. The council has responded positively to the recommendations raised in the joint area review report and has made good progress since that time. The council's contribution to enjoying and achieving is outstanding; its contribution towards improving outcomes for being healthy, staying safe, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being remain good. Overall, the council has taken significant steps to further improve integrated working in the new children's and adult services departments and there is a good commitment to improving all services.

Being healthy

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

Children and families in the borough are well supported in promoting and enjoying good health. One recommended action was highlighted in the joint area review report.

For action in the longer term

- Review the projected rates of improvement for MMR immunisation so that levels sufficient to prevent an outbreak are achieved in a realistic but more challenging timescale.

Whilst targets for immunisation rates are similar to comparable authorities, the borough has shown significant improvement in the past year. A high proportion of mothers now breast-feed and lower rates of expectant mothers smoke, although local rates remain above those of similar authorities. Primary health care provision is good. Local children's centres are accessible to families and most early years provision contributes positively to the health of those who attend. The borough has improved the use of data to target services better, for example sexual health services. Teenage conception rates have risen at a rate higher than similar authorities, but the council has undertaken a thorough analysis of where services need to be targeted. However, they are not on track to meet the Government's 2010 target.

Children and young people report lower rates of drinking and smoking than the national average. The borough has demonstrated good performance against key substance misuse indicators, including that by youth offenders. Mental health screening of young offenders is good.

There has been significant improvement in the numbers of schools participating in the Healthy Schools Programme and this provides opportunities for strengthening work around teenage conception, child weight and other public health issues. However, the improvement in participation needs to continue. Currently, 39% of schools have achieved the new Healthy School status and the council is on track to achieve its 46% target.

There has been a significant improvement in the completion of health and dental checks for looked after children and young people, from 53% to 93%, better than the national average, and the health of these young people is also regularly monitored. Services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly those with complex and continuing care needs are generally good, especially for younger children. The council reports that there is a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service with a new service for children with learning disabilities fully operational, 24-hour access in place since January 2006 and a comprehensive service for 16 and 17 year olds with additional services commissioned for those with the most complex needs. Work is underway to improve further the access to tier 4 mental health care through a pan-London partnership.

The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.

Areas for development

- Continue to target services and interventions to address the rate of teenage conception to bring the authority at least in line with statistical neighbours.
- Improve the number of schools achieving the Healthy Schools status to reach the July 2007 national target of 50%.

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 aspect remains good. Progress has been made since the joint area review. One recommended action was highlighted in the joint area review report.

For action over the next six months

- Establish and implement a strategy to improve the co-ordination and scope of family support and preventative services for children in need.

Children and young people who are most at risk are protected well through good inter-agency arrangements for child protection and safeguarding. The local safeguarding children's board is well resourced, has good representation and shows evidence of addressing key priorities in a collaborative and effective manner. Performance in both the allocation of social workers for children and young people on the child protection register and the reviewing of these cases is good. There has been improvement in the timeliness of both initial and core assessments being completed. Whilst the performance on the timeliness of initial assessments remains below that of similar authorities, performance on core assessments exceeds the national average and is very good. Current data show Barnet has achieved the top band of performance against a number of performance indicators, for example the low proportion of repeat referrals and the high proportion of referrals leading to an initial assessment. Although there are currently no children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on the child protection register, the authority reports that strategy meetings and s47 investigations are held on these children as required. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are a priority group in the externally commissioned service from the Children's Rights Service to ensure they receive the necessary external scrutiny.

The council has demonstrated improved performance in its work with hard-to-reach groups, for example engagement with local faith groups has resulted in an improved channel of communication regarding safeguarding issues.

The council's robust approach to planning in response to the 2006 joint area review recommendations is good. This work includes the revising of thresholds, the implementation of the common assessment framework (CAF) and the appointment

of the lead professional to assist in developing this common understanding. Progress on the CAF is good, with the numbers of staff trained exceeding 500, a Board to oversee progress, a practitioners' group established and a CAF co-ordinator appointed, who visits teams and services regularly to assist with implementation. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board has agreed a framework for a wide-ranging prevention strategy. Whilst the council has audited the effectiveness of de-registration and re-registration decisions, it has not done similar work to establish the effectiveness of family support packages. Plans to work with voluntary sector partners to establish priorities and refocus provision are a good prospect for improvement.

Schools in the borough are doing well in their approach to anti-bullying and this is broadly supported by the views of children and young people expressed through the Tellus2 survey.

The borough has a strong family placement service which is enabling a range of placement options, mostly close to children and young people's homes and providing stability of placement. Performance against the short-term and long-term stability of placements for looked after children and young people is better than both the statistical neighbour and national averages. It is good that a high proportion of looked after children are placed in foster homes. This means that services to monitor and support these young people are crucial and the council has re-organised its fostering teams to provide more specialist support. The council has been successful in ensuring that all care leavers have a key worker. However the proportion of looked after children and young people who have an allocated qualified social worker is well below the national average. The council has adopted a range of approaches to improve this requirement. The numbers of looked after children who are adopted is lower than the national average and outturn has proved less effective than expected by the council. Local information on the numbers and location of privately fostered children has resulted in a small rise in numbers and strategies to improve this have yet to impact.

Areas for development

- Improve information on the numbers and location of privately fostered children.
- Increase the number of looked after children and young people who are adopted.
- Increase the level of allocation of qualified social workers for looked after children.

Enjoying and achieving

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 aspect is outstanding. The positive work identified at the time of

the joint area review has been improved upon. The joint area review report highlighted no actions to be taken, nor are there any from this assessment.

Standards achieved by children and young people in primary and secondary schools in 2006 are high and have continued to be above both regional and national rates. Children's achievement in primary schools is very good and young people have continued to achieve well in secondary schools. The overall numbers of pupils with statements of special educational need is low. The proportion of children with statements of special educational need that are now placed in maintained mainstream schools has improved and is now well above national and regional figures.

Results at all key stages remain above national expectations and have been for the last three years. At Key Stage 1, Barnet compares favourably with its statistical neighbours in reading, writing and mathematics. At Key Stage 2 there was a more significant improvement than regionally and nationally. English and mathematics results are well above average. Young people perform better in English and mathematics, than in science at Key Stage 3. In all three subjects performance has been consistently above regional and national expectations. The percentage of pupils achieving five or more grades A* to C at GCSE has continued to rise in the last five years and is above regional and national averages. Young people achieving five or more grades A* to C including English and mathematics is well above national averages. This improvement in performance reflects the success of the local authority in tackling underachievement. The proportion of looked after children who gained one GCSE or equivalent is much higher than national and regional rates. The percentage of young people leaving care with five or more GCSEs at A* to C or a comparable qualification has improved and is now higher than national and regional rates. All Barnet secondary schools met floor targets at GCSE in 2006.

The authority has continued its sharp focus on school improvement. Improvement strategies have varied according to individual schools' need. There is a continued priority to develop the capacity of school leaders in order for these schools to become less reliant on local authority support. The council reported that the majority of secondary schools that had been identified as causing concern had showed improved results in 2007. Measures taken have been very successful in raising standards in those schools particularly at Key Stage 4. One of the supported schools achieved a good Ofsted report in 2007. There is also additional support for schools through various online 'toolkits'. No secondary schools have required special measures in the last two years. Improvement strategies continue to be used to raise standards. Similar work is being undertaken by the council to improve some primary and early years provision.

The council has made good progress in its task to raise achievement of groups from minority ethnic heritage. It has spearheaded a 'Getting it Right' campaign which provides in-service training for teaching and learning managers in raising attainment for African, Caribbean and mixed heritage pupils. The authority has undertaken pupils' needs analysis which has resulted in the identification of specific support to raise attainment. The impact of this has been an increase in attainment in the

majority of key stages for both Black African and Black Caribbean children and young people. Standards have shown a marked improvement for both groups during the period of 2005-07. For example, the percentage of Black Caribbean and Black African young people achieving five or more A* - C including English and mathematics rose significantly to just below the national average at 41% and 45% respectively.

Attendance strategies have had a positive impact on the levels of attendance of children in primary schools. Overall attendance at primary schools within the authority for 2006 showed a slight improvement on the previous year, which was just below the national rate. The authority's data for 2007 show that this rise has been maintained and that the rate of attendance is now above the national rate at 94.98%. There is good and sustained attendance in secondary schools, which is above regional and national rates.

The council reports that the percentage of looked after children and young people absent for more than 25 days has reduced but it still remains high. Measures have been put in place to further improve attendance figures for this group. However, it is too early to assess the full impact of these measures.

In 2006, the rate of permanently excluded pupils in secondary school fell compared with the previous year; it is now below regional and national rates. The rate of primary exclusions is in line with the national average. The council's performance in relation to its provision of tuition for pupils who do not attend school was not as good as the performance of similar authorities in 2006. The authority's data for 2007 indicate good improvement. Rates are now reported at 96.8% which is an improvement on 2005-06 which was 91%. Improved arrangements to provide tuition earlier have been devised and have now been put in place.

Making a positive contribution

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 aspect continues to be good. Good progress has been made since the joint area review. The joint area review highlighted one area for immediate action in the next six months and one area for action in the longer term, both of which have been dealt with promptly and efficiently.

For immediate action

- Routinely provide feedback to children and young people on their participation and involvement.

For action in the next six months

- Improve arrangements for supporting young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, especially those with complex needs, to make the transition from children's services to adult services.

The majority of young people in secondary schools within the borough make an outstanding positive contribution to the community, which is well above regional rates. Information from the Tellus2 survey has identified that a larger than average proportion of young people within Barnet have helped elderly or disabled members of their community. Many have aspirations to study and go on to university. Results of the Audit Commission school survey identified that there was a high level of satisfaction of the effectiveness of local services in helping young people to understand their civil and legal rights and responsibilities. The authority continues to examine the gaps within its services and has been successful in providing new services for lesbian and gay young people, young parents and teenage carers. The council has developed mobile youth provision that responds to community demand and delivers activities in areas of need.

The percentage of looked after children and young people who communicate their views through their review has improved on the council's 2006 performance of 91%, which is good although not as high as its statistical neighbours. This improvement demonstrates a year-on-year increase for the last three years; in 2005-06 it was 84%. All cases where the child does not participate are given management attention. Analysis by the council indicates older young people make up the majority of cases where there is non-participation. The council continues to increase participation even further, for example, through its 'Right2B Cared 4' pilot.

Good progress has been made by the authority in improving feedback to children and young people. A protocol has been developed to guide consultation with the Youth Board and ensure that they are told of the outcomes. Additional funding has strengthened this board, increasing direct representation from school councils, allowing more systematic feedback and enabling them to contribute further to community debate in the borough. Youth Board members sit on the local strategic partnership and several parts of the service have established formal user groups. For example, the views of United Youth (the Youth Service and Connexions user group) contributed to the development of a new youth facility in Hendon. Barnet Youth Board has organised several successful events for young people, including a festival in summer 2007, which was attended by 400 young people.

Sitting alongside the Barnet Youth Board, and with some common membership, the Barnet Youth Bank has successfully developed a commissioning strategy and has led the allocation of Youth Opportunity and Neighbourhood Renewal funds to improve facilities and services for young people in Barnet. The Bobby Panel, established in 2006 to provide the views of younger children (8-13 year olds) on the allocation of Children's Fund monies, is also consulted routinely. Feedback from these groups has resulted in the authority reviewing some of the recreational facilities it commissions.

Membership of the Youth Board does not at present fully represent the majority of school councils within the borough. The council has put in place initiatives to allow for wider representation.

Good progress has been made on improving the transition of young people from children's to adult services. Improvements in processes were implemented quickly by the council. As a consequence, there has been an increase in staffing in the authority's adult services transition team to enable improvements to become effective. The impact of these new measures includes increased monitoring of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities by both children's and adult services. Adult services are also involved in transition arrangements at an earlier stage. The involvement of adult services in all panels where decisions regarding young people approaching transition are made has also enabled joint planning to take place.

There has been a steady reduction in the number of children and young people entering the criminal justice system. This is now well below regional and national rates. Although the rate of recidivism has increased in 2006, it is still below regional and national rates. Analysis undertaken by the Barnet youth offending services and the police indicate that the rise in recidivism is primarily due to the rise in arrest rates facilitated by increased police resources. There has been stronger police attention on reducing motor vehicle crime and street robbery, which are commonly committed by young offenders. There are some good new joint initiatives in place that are a result of effective partnerships. These include parenting programmes that are supported by the council's new parenting policy, and advice and guidance for younger siblings of youth offenders and young people already attending pupil referral units. There are also preventative programmes for young people at risk of re-offending or who are demonstrating anti-social behaviour. The council now provides dedicated youth service provision in four schools to target support for young people at risk of committing anti-social behaviour. The youth offending service has extended its work with victims of crimes, following its development of a victim policy. Through the youth offending team's work with the London Probation Service and the police there is now a 'Community Payback' scheme where young offenders are being offered community reparation opportunities.

Area for development

- Extend the Barnet Youth Board participation to increase representation by school councils.

Achieving economic well-being

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 aspect remains good. Two recommendations for action were highlighted in the joint area review report.

For action in the next six months

- Ensure that all care leavers have a named key worker and that access to education, training and employment is improved.

- Improve the post-16 education employment or training outcomes for looked after young people, young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and young people who offend.

The council has a good track record for young people achieving five or more A* to C GCSEs including English and mathematics. This has continued to rise and is well above both regional and national rates. The proportion of young people who are care leavers achieving one or more A* - G GCSE has continued to improve and is also above both regional and national rates. Effective partnership working has resulted in the development of a good strategy and action plan for 14 to 19 education. In September 2007, the council and its partners further extended the borough's 14 to 19 curriculum offer. Six Level 2 qualifications were introduced to add to the good range of vocational courses already on offer within the borough.

Most young people including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have good support to enable them to prepare for their working lives. The proportion of young people who complete Year 11 and continue in learning has remained high and has improved during the period of 2004-07. This is well above both regional and national rates. The number of young people not in education, employment or training continued to fall in 2007; it has remained below both regional and national expectations for both 16 to 18 year olds and adults for the last two years. The number of 16 to 18 year olds and adults whose current activity is not known also fell to well below regional and national rates. However, the number of 16 to 19 year olds with learning disabilities and/or difficulties not in education, employment or training is higher than regional and national rates.

The authority's 'personalised approach' has extended to reducing the numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training from all groups of its population, which include care leavers, looked after children, young people from minority ethnic heritage and those with learning disabilities and/or difficulties. This has led to tailored solutions that specifically address the needs of the young person, for example a new Muslim youth project provides training for volunteers working with young Muslim people. The authority has also recently commissioned the voluntary sector to provide a youth worker to work with refugees within the borough.

Work placement opportunities have increased and the authority is working with a number of partners to extend this. In partnership with the local learning and skills council who are funding the initiative, the council has recently introduced a voucher scheme where young people can purchase their own training.

Many good initiatives, some of which are still in their infancy, have been put in place to support education, employment and training outcomes for care leavers, looked after children, and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Actions for young people who are care leavers include a council-based apprenticeship programme which is being piloted during 2007-08. There will be various placement opportunities which include children's centres, customer services, pest control and strategic development. Other developments include the extension of the authority's education champions' role so that they continue to support looked after children

beyond year 11 and an educational programme specifically targeted at care leavers. The majority of looked after children and young people achieved their intended destination for 2007.

Progress has been made on increasing education, employment and training for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Transition summaries are now completed for all young people with the most complex needs. There is a comprehensive support system in place for young people with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Transition arrangements for young people from Children's to Adult Services are much improved. The results of the council's commissioned research to identify ways to improve partnership arrangements to enable better transition has led to increased staffing to support multi-agency work. The council is continuing to review Connexions services to improve the support for these young people.

The council reports that their personalised approach to supporting young people who offend has resulted in further initiatives led by the youth offending service. Regular review meetings with partners within education, youth and Connexions services have enabled every young person to access increased support. The new learning mentor working in the youth offending service is also motivating and supporting young people into further study and training. The opportunity of working in local authority placements for two young people has resulted in them accessing further study.

Despite the increased availability of council placements for young people who are care leavers, there is still room for improvement in securing training and employment opportunities for these vulnerable groups.

Area for development

- Broaden the opportunities available to participate in employment and training for looked after young people, young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and young people who offend.

Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council to the management of its services for children and young people and its capacity to improve them further is good. The council's planning has been developed from a good needs analysis and provides challenging ambitions. The borough has a strong commitment to delivering further improvement for its children and young people. There is evidence of robust action having been taken in response to the 2006 joint area review including the restructure of senior leadership. There is a strong local area agreement and the council has identified and is focusing on its key priorities. Further achievements in safeguarding include strengthening links with Orthodox Jewish schools, centralising management of allegations against staff and making the membership of the School's Review Group

more safeguarding-focused. The authority describes change occurring at a cultural level, but that the key challenge now is to translate this at the front-line of service delivery. The authority has continued to improve standards at GCSE grades A* to C and narrowed the achievement gap for children from minority ethnic heritage. It has also continued to reduce the level of first-time offending within the borough and increased work placement opportunities for look after children and young people. Other achievements include a unification of disabled children's services to strengthen transition arrangements and on-going work to align the services delivered by local children's centres with the broader family support strategy.

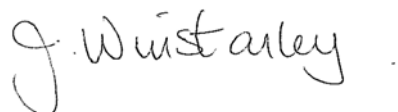
The council has good capacity across its services and this is supported by both strong political commitment and determined leadership, and is underpinned by strong partnerships. There is a demonstrable approach to performance management with the authority taking a comprehensive, robust and transparent approach to managing performance across the full range of indicators. The council continues to have a financial overspend, but this has been reduced from £1.6m in 2002/03 to a projected outturn for 2007/08 of £178,000. There are good examples of the views of children and young people influencing commissioning and service design.

Areas for development

- Define measures by which to judge the impact of changes in practice in prevention and safeguarding.
- Continue to improve financial management of the budget to ensure a balanced budget.

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 large initial 'J'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection