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Mr Roger Luxton OBE
Corporate Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
Town Hall
1 Town Square
Barking
IG11 7LU

Dear Mr Luxton

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham 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	3
Achieving economic well-being	2
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

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham has improved rapidly since its joint area review (JAR) and now consistently delivers good services. Good progress has been made on all of the areas for development since the March 2007 JAR. The Children’s Trust is operating well and the partnership between local services, including health and youth justice services, are well embedded. An important strength in the effectiveness of children’s services is the priority given to this area by the chief executive and by elected members. The high, although reducing, number of teenage pregnancies in the borough has rightly been made a major priority. Safeguarding processes are good. There remains a clear need to close the gap between the effectiveness of the council’s best and least well performing schools, but good progress is being made. Primary school attendance remains an area of concern for the council. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training has reduced significantly and, whilst the council recognises it as being still too high, is now lower than that found in some neighbouring boroughs. Multi-agency services for looked after children and young people are very good and the fostering services have been judged to be outstanding. Robust action has been taken to address the recommendations of the JAR in relation to the development of multi-agency services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good progress towards comprehensive child and adolescent mental health services. ▪ Very good health assessment and support for looked after children, including those placed out of borough. ▪ High rates of participation in Healthy School status and National Expectation achieved.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High rate of teenage pregnancy, although reducing.

Staying safe

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. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outstanding fostering services. ▪ Well-established Local Safeguarding Children Board which uses outcome data well to prioritise future action and drive up performance. ▪ Robust processes for tracking and supporting children and young people missing from home, care and school. ▪ Improving performance in safeguarding year on year, despite significant new demographic challenges.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The numbers of transition plans for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is too low.

Enjoying and achieving

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. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Early years provision is good and continues to improve. ▪ The school improvement service has been effective in providing rigorous challenge to schools, helping to raise standards and improve the overall quality of education. The overall effectiveness of most schools is at least good, with some of the largest secondary schools being outstanding. ▪ Higher levels of attendance and attainment of looked after children than statistical neighbours or national average.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Persistent absenteeism from primary schools remains high and the impact of good collaborative working has yet to be seen.

Making a positive contribution

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.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective youth offending service. ▪ Effective consultation with, and involvement of, children and young people in development of services. ▪ Improved involvement of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in contributing to service planning and delivery.
Important weaknesses and areas for development

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimate two important weaknesses. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good progress with the introduction of the Diplomas. Good partnerships exist among post-16 providers. ▪ Post-16 participation rates are improving and the number of successful applications to university is rising. In partnership with Barking College, there has been increased provision of construction apprenticeships. ▪ Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are provided with good support to enjoy and achieve, good access to work-related learning in Years 10 and 11 and the local college report notes that learners with additional needs are particularly well supported.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Whilst there has been some improvement in standards in post-16 education, outcomes are still below those of similar councils. ▪ The proportion of young people not in employment, education or training is higher than similar councils and the national average.

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 is good and its management of these services is also good. The needs of children and young people are at the heart of the council's successful drive for improvement. The council has been reflective and open in its self-assessment and has taken appropriate and robust actions to address the problems identified. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development is consistent with the evidence with the exception of achieving economic well-being.

Major strengths

- Rapid and well targeted improvements on issues identified in the last JAR and across the range of services for children and young people.
- Well-developed monitoring and performance management systems, which are used effectively to bring about improvements.
- Embedding of robust Children's Trust arrangements, with all key agencies on board, and contributing to good progress in the development of integrated services.
- Good focus on safe recruitment processes.

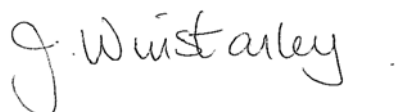
Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Despite recent improvements significant weaknesses remain in economic well-being, attainment at Level 2 and 3 and the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training.

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



Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection