

Joint area review

**London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Children's
Services Authority Area**

Review of services for children and young people

Adult Learning Inspectorate
Audit Commission
Commission for Social Care Inspection
Healthcare Commission
HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
HM Inspectorate of Court Administration
HM Inspectorate of Prisons
HM Inspectorate of Probation
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Introduction

1. This joint area review was conducted using the arrangements required under section 20 of the Children Act 2004. It was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of eight inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Audit Commission. The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the inspection of children's Services*.

2. The review was linked to the contemporaneous corporate assessment of the local council by the Audit Commission and its findings are represented in the relevant part of the corporate assessment report.

3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in the Barking and Dagenham area and evaluates the way local services, taken together, contribute to their well-being. Joint area reviews focus on the extent to which children and young people are healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and are well prepared to secure economic well-being.

4. The review evaluates the collective contribution made to each outcome for children and young people by relevant services in the area. It also judges the contributions made by the council's services overall and, specifically, its education and children's social care services. Particular attention is given to joint action by local services on behalf of those groups of children and young people who are vulnerable to poor outcomes. Two such groups are covered in detail: children and young people who are looked after by the council; and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

5. The review took place in two stages consisting in total of three weeks over a six-week period. The first stage reviewed all existing evidence including:

- self-assessment undertaken by local public service providers
- a survey of children and young people
- performance data
- the findings of the contemporaneous inspection of the youth service
- planning documents
- information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day-care provision
- evidence gathered during the earlier Youth Offending Team inspection
- briefings from staff within inspectorates, commissions and other public bodies in contact with local providers.

6. The second stage included inspection fieldwork. This included studies of how far local services have improved outcomes for a small sample of children and young people, some of whom have the most complex needs, and a study

of provision in the Gascoigne and Abbey neighbourhoods. It also included gathering evidence on nine key judgements, selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. This included discussions with elected members of the local authority and their equivalents in other public agencies, officers from these agencies, service users and community representatives. A review of case files for children and young people receiving support from a number of local agencies was also included.

Context

7. Barking and Dagenham is located at the heart of the Thames Gateway, approximately 11 miles from central London. It is a small outer London borough with 29% green space and most of the remaining area made up of brownfield land. It has a population of 170,000 living in just over 69,000 households. The borough is one of the fastest growing in the country. The population is predicted to increase to 205,000 by 2020. The borough has a higher proportion of older people and children than the London average. Almost one quarter of the population is aged 0–15, compared to the London average of 19%. The diversity of the borough's population is growing more quickly than any other part of the country. Black and minority ethnic residents make up one quarter of the population, an increase of 15% since 2001. Twelve percent of school pupils speak English as a second language. Many families are moving to Barking from other parts of London because of affordability. There are also many children and families who are new to the UK, particularly from Eastern Europe, who are settling in the area. The pace of change has been a source of local tension at times.

8. Historically, employment opportunities within the authority have been centred on the docks and Ford car plant. Political and community leadership had been stable for a lengthy period of time. Leadership within the authority has acted to challenge a historical culture of low aspiration by raising expectation and comparing Barking and Dagenham to the best practice found in other parts of the country.

9. The borough is the 21st most deprived authority out of 354 authorities on the Index of Multiple Deprivation. The average household income is the lowest in London and below the national average. The rate of employment is also low. The percentage of residents with no qualifications is the highest in London and the percentage with degree level qualifications is the lowest.

10. The borough's 59 primary and secondary schools are generally large, with a very low percentage of surplus places. One special school caters for a wide range of special needs and a pupil referral unit caters for pupils with behavioural difficulties. A range of additional resource provision is located in schools to provide support for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A children's centre programme is well under way with the aim of a complete network of 14 settings across the borough.

11. Average house prices are the lowest in London. There are a number of major regeneration programmes underway with the most significant being the development of Barking Riverside.

12. The London East Learning and Skills Council works with the local authority, Barking College, voluntary sector providers and schools in addressing the 14–19 strategy. Post-16 education and training is provided by Barking College but students also attend colleges in neighbouring boroughs. All secondary schools have sixth forms, including the special school Trinity. Barking and Dagenham Training services deliver apprenticeships in construction, early years and childcare and Education to Employment provision. Adult and community learning, including family learning, is provided by the Adult College.

13. Primary care for children in Barking and Dagenham is provided by the Barking and Dagenham Primary Care Trust (PCT). Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospital NHS Trust is the main provider of acute health services. Children's mental health services are provided by the North East London Mental Health NHS Trust. The trusts providing health services for the children of Barking and Dagenham with the exception of the Ambulance Service fall within the NHS London Strategic Health Authority

14. There are no young offender institutions in the area.

15. Within the council, children's services are delivered through the Children's Services Department. Children's Trust arrangements are in place chaired by the Director of Children's Services. Voluntary sector representation is identified through a democratic process, and members represent the sector as a whole.

Summary report

Outcomes for children and young people

16. The majority of Barking and Dagenham's health-related performance indicators for children and families are in line with those for England as a whole, although teenage pregnancy rates remain significantly higher than the national average. Due to concerted efforts and effective joint working, this has begun to decrease. There are effective systems for responding to child protection referrals and the numbers of children on the child protection register and who are looked after have declined. Many looked after children are placed outside of the borough because of a shortage of local foster placements. Fifteen percent of looked after children are living further than 20 miles from their home address; this figure has been declining over the last 12 months. Children enter the school system with significantly lower levels of attainment than the national average but, by the end of Key Stage 1, they have improved to be in line with national expectations. They continue to improve at Key Stages 2 and 3 but despite significant improvements in results over the past three years at GCSE and A level, they remain below the national average. They are, however, in line

with results achieved in similar areas. Attendance rates have improved and are now in line with national expectations in both primary and secondary schools. More young people are moving on to higher education, with a rise from 261 to 402 in the last four years. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training has dropped over three years although it remains high. The attendance of looked after children at school has improved and is now better than that of other groups of children and young people. The proportion of looked after children in education, employment and training has been above the national average for the past three years. Their achievements at GCSE and A level have improved significantly and the number progressing to higher education has also increased. The take-up of direct payments is good, with 50% of families participating in the scheme. The rates of offending and re-offending dropped last year and are now lower than similar areas. There are arrangements to encourage the participation of young people in civic life through school councils and a youth forum but these are not easily accessed by all young people, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to participate in employment, education or training post-19 are inadequate.

The impact of local services

17. **The impact of local services in improving outcomes for children and young people is adequate.** The children's services agenda within the council has a high profile. There is strong leadership from the Chief Executive on a number of key issues such as teenage pregnancy and child and adolescent mental health. Good and committed leadership for the children's agenda is also evident through the Chief Executive of the PCT and the Borough Commander along with strong partnership working at this chief officer level. This enables clear direction and leadership to improve services. The council and its partners have a good understanding of the community they serve and the challenges and opportunities it faces. A number of strategies have been developed to address key issues, for example weaknesses in transition. However, some of these strategies are in the early stages of implementation and it is too early to identify long-term impact.

18. Safeguarding of vulnerable children is an area where the council has previously been weak but, due to a robust action plan and good leadership this area has become a strength. The council is aware of vulnerable groups in the community and has taken action to improve services for looked after children. However, services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities require further development.

Being healthy

19. **The impact of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is adequate.** Partnership working is continuing to develop to improve health outcomes for children and young people. However, target setting and consistent evaluation and monitoring of performance indicators is at

an early stage of development. Good information and advice is available to those parents and carers who attend the children's centres, and healthy lifestyles are positively promoted through a range of joint initiatives. Health visitors, school nurses, midwives and speech and language therapists are well placed to meet the health inequalities agenda. There is a comprehensive obesity strategy and alcohol and substance misuse services are beginning to develop, although it is too early to see a sustained impact. Looked after children receive good support in meeting their health needs both within and outside of the borough. Services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well integrated for those up to the age of five, but services for those above the age of five are more fragmented and less effective. Teenage pregnancy rates are high but have begun to decrease due to concerted efforts from many key partners, particularly schools, health visitors and sexual health advisers.

Staying safe

20. **The impact of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.** A good range of information and accessible guides on safety issues are available for parents, young people and staff. A wide variety of road safety initiatives have contributed to low serious accident rates for children. There is a well represented Domestic Violence Forum with good operational networks and a wide range of anti-bullying initiatives. Good training and support effectively enable staff to identify and manage risks to children. There are clear eligibility criteria for access to social care services and high numbers of children in need are well supported. Effective systems are in place for safe recruitment and for dealing with complaints against staff.

21. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is well established with good representation, a clear structure, and plans and a pooled budget. However, partners whose remit extends beyond the council areas have struggled to maintain the level of representation required. Effective inter-agency safeguarding protocols, procedures and policies are in place, including information sharing. Serious case reviews are appropriately conducted and action plans systematically implemented. Multi-agency partnership work is good, from referral through to conferences and plans of protection. However, the timeliness of producing minutes of core group meetings is poor and attendance is variable. Training provided through LSCB and individual agencies is comprehensive.

22. Good performance management and audit systems have been developed and effectively used in social care. This information is also used by LSCB agencies to target problem areas, commission research and develop services.

23. The quality of assessment and performance in social care services is good. However, the volume of work in the care management service is placing pressure on the capacity of that service and some service users reported variability in the quality of support they received from some social workers.

There has been effective action to reduce the numbers of looked after children, although most looked after children are placed out of the area. There is good training, support and review of foster carers and stability of placements is improving. There is good multi-agency response and support to safeguard children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, with case files routinely audited to improve practice and to monitor their safety. The council is aware that transition arrangements from child to adult services for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are inadequate.

Enjoying and achieving

24. **The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is adequate.** There is a satisfactory range of information, advice and guidance for parents, although access to this is variable. Early years' provision is of good quality and supports children well in their care and development. The number and type of childcare places has increased over the last three years and there are sufficient places for three and four year olds. Most children and young people enjoy their education but some report that there are limited opportunities to access leisure and voluntary learning opportunities for 16–19 year olds.

25. Services to support attendance and school admissions are adequate and improving. Provision for children and young people out of school has improved since 2006 and all now have access to at least 20 hours of tuition. Formal structures to support reintegration back into school are not yet embedded but informal arrangements work well. The council undertakes more frequent monitoring of elective home education than is required and takes appropriate action where standards are unsatisfactory. The council works well to support the education of looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportion of statements of special educational need prepared within 18 weeks shows an improving trend, and Barking and Dagenham is amongst the top performing authorities in this respect, but the use of data to inform service delivery and planning for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is inadequate. The level of challenge and support the council provides for schools has recently been further strengthened and is satisfactory overall. There are three schools in special measures. No schools have been identified as requiring additional support by Ofsted recently. Data, whilst available, is not always used systematically to help identify the schools requiring the most intensive support.

Making a positive contribution

26. **The overall contribution of services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate.** Services share a strong commitment to engaging with children and young people but this is not effectively promoted across all groups. There are school councils in the majority of schools but the formal links between these and the youth forum are not well

developed. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are under-represented on the youth forum although they contribute their ideas at school level. These young people do not always receive adequate support when managing changes in their lives.

27. Children who have offended receive very good support from the Youth Offending Team. Nearly all of those known to the service are provided with an education placement. Collaboration between the council and police to support these young people and prevent re-offending is excellent. Children and young people contribute their ideas to a range of projects but not to the overall design of children's services, and effective consultation is not yet common practice across all levels of council activity. Children and young people were consulted on the Children and Young People's Plan but feedback to them on the outcome of their involvement is not yet fully effective.

28. Children and young people who are looked after receive good support. A number of them have been trained to deliver the Total Respect training programme and have delivered training to senior officers and members.

29. Children's centres provide good advice and support for families. Learning mentors provide good support in schools for pupils' emotional and social development. The preventative programmes to reduce antisocial behaviour are effectively managed and the partnership between the police and youth offending services is very good. There has been good progress on restorative justice and innovatory approaches to re-engaging young people with education. Youth services for young people aged 13 to 19 are not fully developed.

Achieving economic well-being

30. **The impact of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate.** The children's centres across Barking and Dagenham provide a cohesive approach to health, social care and support. The Centre for Engineering and Manufacturing Excellence offers very good opportunities through its Gateway to Skills programmes. The range of post-16 vocational courses is satisfactory and schools have recently introduced some vocational studies in their sixth forms. Opportunities for young people to train in construction at levels 1 and 2 are limited. The voluntary sector works well with the local authority and schools to provide alternative education for some young people at risk. Local community and faith groups make good use of school facilities at the weekends.

31. There is good collaboration between the further education college, schools and the local authority in developing and planning 14 to 19 education, and plans for four specialist diplomas are well advanced. Achievements at GCSE and A-level have significantly improved over the past three years and are now in line with similar authorities, although they remain below national averages. The proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training has declined and numbers are now the same as similar authorities, although still above the national average.

32. Extensive urban regeneration has significantly improved the number of affordable homes and rented accommodation, however access to good quality housing is still variable. The borough no longer uses bed and breakfast or hostel accommodation for those who are homeless.

33. Young people in care receive good support and guidance to enable them to progress in education and training. The achievements of looked after children at GCSE and A level have significantly improved. There is a range of post-16 options for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and they are supported in their transition to college, however opportunities post-19 are poor and the proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are not in education, employment or training is well above the national average. There is insufficient analysis to predict learning difficulties and/or disabilities needs across the age ranges in order to plan provision.

Service management

34. **The management of services for children and young people is adequate.** The council and its partners have set an ambitious vision for improving outcomes for children and young people through the Children and Young People's Plan. This is supported by needs analysis and consultation with partners and children and young people. Ambitions and priorities are understood by partners and there is a clear commitment and enthusiasm to achieve these. Not all targets are sufficiently outcome focused and the resources to deliver priorities are not explicitly identified. Comprehensive service plans are in place but lack explicit links to the priorities set out in the Children and Young People's Plan. There is a strong shared will from partners to improve services but the newly formed Children's Trust has only been in place long enough to have met on three occasions. Joint workforce planning and performance management by the partnership are developing. Recent restructuring is designed to enable best practice to be developed across the whole of children's services.

35. There are examples of good leadership and management across children's services and there is a clear and sustained focus on value for money. The council has an established balanced scorecard approach to performance management in place and there are good quality assurance systems and performance management in children's social care. However, data analysis to inform service planning does not take place on a consistent basis. Knowledge of complaints is used to improve services. The contribution of children and young people to performance management is developing well in some areas of work but there is no consistent approach. There is insufficient capacity in terms of time and focus in the Scrutiny Management Board, due to the breadth of their responsibilities, to effectively scrutinise children's services and the developing Children's Trust.

36. The capacity of the council and its partners to improve further is adequate. There is strong and effective leadership at Chief Executive level and the Director of Children's Services provides leadership to a team of motivated and able heads of service. There is a good understanding of shared priorities with partners, and the Children's Trust provides the infrastructure for delivering on these; however, it is too early in the life of the Trust to predict the effectiveness of these arrangements.

Grades

Grades awarded:

4: outstanding; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate

	Local services overall	Council services	Health services
Being healthy	2		
Staying safe	3		
Enjoying and achieving	2		
Making a positive contribution	2		
Achieving economic well-being	2		
Service management	2		
Capacity to improve	2	2	
Children's services		2	
The education service		2	
The social care services for children		3	
The health service for children			2

Recommendations

For immediate action

- The council should take steps to improve the employment and education opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- The PCT and the council should take action to improve the integration of services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are over five years of age.
- The council to work with local further education institutions to ensure a fall in drop-out rates from post-16 provision.
- The Children's Trust should improve the analysis and use of data in all areas so that it effectively informs planning and future actions.
- The Children's Trust and the 14-19 strategic management group should take action to decrease the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training.

For action over the next six months

- The council should ensure that members have sufficient time to effectively scrutinise children's services and the wider Children's Trust.
- The Children's Trust should improve the provision for and consultation with children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- The council should review the care management services within social care and the impact of pressure of casework on the quality of direct work with children, young people and their carers.
- The council should take action to widen the representation of the youth forum and participation of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

For action in the longer term

- The Children's Trust should increase access to level 2 vocational provision in schools and include construction programmes.

Main report

Outcomes for children and young people

37. The majority of Barking and Dagenham's health-related performance indicators for children and families are in line with those for England as a whole, although teenage pregnancy rates remain significantly higher than the national average. Due to concerted efforts and effective joint working this has begun to decrease. Partnership working is continuing to develop to improve health outcomes for children and young people. Arrangements for safeguarding are secure with good partnership working across agencies. There are effective systems for responding to child protection referrals and the numbers of children on the child protection register and looked after have declined. Many looked after children are placed outside of the borough because of a shortage of local foster placements. Fifteen percent of looked after children are living further than 20 miles from their home address, although this figure has been declining over the last 12 months.

38. Children enter the school system at significantly lower levels of attainment than the national average but, by the end of Key Stage 1, they have improved to be in line with national expectations. Most children continue to achieve in line with national expectations. They continue to improve at Key Stages 2 and 3 but despite significant improvements in results over the past three years at GCSE and A level, they remain below the national average. They are, however, in line with results achieved in similar areas. Attendance rates have improved and are now in line with national expectations in both primary and secondary schools.

39. More young people are moving on to higher education with a rise from 261 to 402 in the last four years. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training has dropped over three years although it remains high. The attendance of looked after children at school has improved and is now better than that of other groups of children and young people. The proportion of looked after children in education, employment and training has been above the national average for the past three years. Their achievements at GCSE and A level have improved significantly and the number progressing to higher education has also increased. Children are encouraged to participate in public life but not all children have equal access to these opportunities. Opportunities for children post-16 are improving but many young people are not in education, employment or training, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

40. **Children and young people in Barking and Dagenham are generally healthy.** Health outcomes are variable, particularly for adults; life expectancy in Barking and Dagenham is significantly lower than the national average and the rates of limiting long-term illness are high. Children, however, generally get a good start in life and many of their outcomes are in line with similar areas and the England average.

41. Perinatal and infant mortality rates are broadly in line with the national average, but the percentage of low birth weight babies is higher than average. The PCT has prioritised smoking cessation to address this issue. The number of women initiating breastfeeding is slightly higher than the national average. Child health surveillance is adequate and immunisation rates at ages two and five, as well as first contact with a health visitor, are slightly below the national average. Local unvalidated data indicates that rates have remained consistent over the last three years at 93%, which is in line with the national average. The incidence of measles is significantly below the national average. The oral health of children and young people is poor, with the number of decayed, missing or filled teeth being significantly above the national average. Levels of obesity are significantly below average for this area.

42. Teenage pregnancy rates are declining but are still significantly above the England average. Good partnership working between the council and the PCT has resulted in a decrease in the rate over the last two years. Access to accident and emergency services is good, with separate child-friendly facilities provided at the Queen's Hospital. Admissions to accident and emergency due to substance misuse are lower than both the benchmark and England averages. Access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) is adequate, with waiting times for assessment and treatment in line with the England average. Outcomes for looked after children are very good in comparison with similar authorities and 98% of looked after children receive annual health and dental checks. There is adequate participation in the National Healthy Schools Scheme with 54% of schools achieving practice status.

43. **Children and young people appear safe.** Good information on safety issues has resulted in low levels of serious injuries to children. Effective initiatives have reduced bullying, domestic violence and antisocial behaviour, although some children are still worried about their safety on the streets at night and in the stairwells of the flats where they live.

44. Effective multi-agency policies and collaborative practice safeguard children well and prevent harm through early intervention. The numbers of children on the child protection register and those looked after have been significantly and safely reduced with low levels of re-registration. Stability of placement for looked after children has significantly improved, and there is good quality foster care provided, although mainly out of the area. All children looked after and on the child protection register are allocated qualified social workers and consistency and continuity of workers has improved due to effective recruitment and retention initiatives. This has resulted in timely and consistent assessment of their needs, and implementation of children in need plans following core assessment and de-registration from the child protection register. Looked after children and those on the child protection register are regularly and effectively reviewed, with high levels of participation by children and their carers.

45. The volume of work continues to place pressure on care management services and impacts adversely on the consistency of direct support some children receive. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are appropriately safeguarded with good collaboration on individual cases.

46. Good performance management and audit within social care and the LSCB have driven improvements in outcomes and partnership working.

47. **Children and young people achieve standards below the national average but achieve adequately.** Standards on entry to school are well below average; this is reflected in Foundation Stage Profiles. By the end of Key Stage 1, most pupils have made good progress so that attainment is broadly in line with national expectations, although raising standards to the upper level of this stage remains a council priority. A period of sustained improvement has narrowed the gap between Key Stage 2 results and national expectations, although the rate of progress is slowing. Results have been static for the last three years and remain below national expectations. Recent improvements at Key Stage 3 place the council in the top 40 most improved authorities. Despite this improving picture, standards at this stage continue to remain below national expectations. Key Stage 4 results showed very good improvement in 2006 and maintained an improving trend.

48. Children in the care of the council generally make good progress. The number of care leavers sitting GCSEs increased in 2006, as did the proportion achieving one or more GCSEs at grades A*–C, although this still remains below similar areas. The educational achievement of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is generally satisfactory. Children and young people of black and minority ethnic heritage make satisfactory progress. Attendance rates have improved and are now in line with national expectations in both primary and secondary schools. The attendance of looked after children has improved and is now better than that of other groups of children and young people. The proportion of looked after children in education, employment and training has been above the national average for the past three years. Achievements at GCSE and A-level have improved significantly and the number progressing to higher education has also increased. Satisfactory behaviour is maintained in most schools and local services contribute well towards this. Whilst exclusions have reduced they remain high in some schools.

49. **Children and young people have an adequate range of opportunities to make decisions and take personal responsibility. Many make a good contribution to their schools and communities.** Most children and young people feel well supported and there are examples of good support to develop their personal and social skills in schools and children's centres. The majority of schools have school councils and this encourages participation at a local level, while the youth forum has made a valuable contribution to individual projects such as the Local Development Framework. However, the forum is not representative of all groups; in particular there are no formal links for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or

disabilities. There are limited opportunities for young people aged between 13 and 19 to make a contribution through the youth services. This means that some vulnerable young people are not aware of the opportunities to participate which do exist. The lack of established systems for consulting with young people at a strategic level limits the contribution that they can make to the design of services.

50. Effective partnership between the police and the council has resulted in a drop in the number of first time entrants to the criminal justice system and in the rate of re-offending. There has been good progress in establishing restorative justice with examples of work on the Gascoigne estate. The partnership with education is good and most young people known to the youth offending service are in full time education and training.

51. **Children and young people are able to achieve economic well-being and are prepared adequately.** The number of childcare places has increased over the past three years. The borough and partners provide good information and support to families through a growing network of children's centres. The proportion of teenage parents who are in education, employment and training is above the national average.

52. There are good work-related learning and flexi-learning opportunities for young people in Years 10 and 11 and effective collaboration between the further education college and secondary schools to provide vocational programmes for 14–16 year olds. Further education locally provides a good range of post-16 vocational courses, although opportunities for training in construction are limited. The voluntary sector works well with the local authority in arranging alternative provision for young people who are at risk. Achievements at Key Stage 4 have significantly improved over the past three years but remain just below the national average for those achieving 5 A*–C grades, including English and mathematics. Advanced level achievements are broadly satisfactory and there has been an increase in the popularity of vocational courses in sixth forms. The proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training has declined but is still above the national and east London averages. Currently around a third of these young people have been in this category for a year or more. Full framework completions by work-based learners have improved but were below the national average in 2006. The numbers of young people going on to higher education have increased by 58% over the last three years

53. Regeneration has significantly increased the number of affordable houses and those available to rent. The borough no longer uses bed and breakfast or hostel accommodation for anyone who is homeless. Access to good quality housing across the borough is still variable and some transfer arrangements are not equitable. Young people in care receive good support and guidance, their achievements have improved significantly and the number progressing to higher education has also increased. The proportion of young people over 16 with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are not in education, training or

employment is well above the national average. Transition arrangements for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to post-16 training or education are variable in their effectiveness.

The impact of local services

Being healthy

54. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is adequate.** Partnership working is good at an operational level and is developing well. Health needs have been identified and services are being reconfigured to tackle the health inequalities agenda. There has been an appropriate and ambitious programme to develop children's centres and where these exist there are examples of services working together to improve health outcomes. However, evaluation of individual service intervention and evidence of impact is limited due to a lack of robust target setting and consistent evaluation and monitoring of performance indicators.

55. Support and information for parents and carers is adequate. Where children's centres exist, advice and information is available from a number of different health professionals. Whilst services have been targeted to meet the needs of hard-to-reach groups, there are no community outreach programmes for those groups that do not access the centres. Some services have been reconfigured to ensure that more people have access to information and advice. For example, the modernisation of maternity services has resulted in more community-based midwifery, and ante and post-natal care is provided within the centres. The impact of this change in service delivery is not known. Health visitors provide a wide range of support to parents and carers and encourage breastfeeding through initiatives such as the breastfeeding cafes. However, breastfeeding is not universally or consistently promoted. Access to speech and language therapy has improved with the provision of drop-in sessions at the children's centres. Initiatives such as 'babbling babes' provide support and education to parents, carers and staff in the promotion of early speech.

56. Healthy lifestyles are adequately promoted. Some initiatives provided within the children's centres such as the food and nutrition project give support and information to parents and carers about healthy options. There is adequate participation in the national Healthy Schools programme. Healthier meals are provided within schools and some children reported that there was good access to healthier snacks during break times. Healthy lifestyles are beginning to be actively promoted through the joint, multi-agency initiative to reduce childhood obesity. There is a comprehensive strategy and a range of activities available but it is too early to evaluate the impact this is having.

57. The promotion of children's and young people's physical health is adequate. There is an awareness of the importance of physical exercise amongst most children but only 58% of children receive two hours a week of high quality physical education in schools; this is below the council's target of 75%. A number of activities such as boxing, dance, netball and football are

available within and outside of school hours but not all children and young people have equal access to them.

58. Rates of teenage pregnancy have declined but remain high. The council and its partners, in recognition of this, have implemented a range of initiatives to tackle this issue. For example, a number of different professionals have been trained in the safe distribution of condoms, 50% of pharmacies issue emergency hormonal contraception, peer education is provided within schools and the Speakeasy Programme provides support to parents and carers to openly discuss sexual health concerns. This is beginning to have a positive impact in reducing the number of teenage conceptions.

59. There is adequate access to primary care and health surveillance offered by GPs is broadly in line with the national average. Children in hospital receive good support for their well-being and continued educational needs. Facilities are age appropriate and cater for a wide range of conditions. The accident and emergency department provides separate facilities for children and young people and unvalidated data suggests that waiting times and access have improved. There is good access to NHS dentistry but registration rates are low and as a result rates of dental decay amongst children are high.

60. CAMHS provision is adequate but does not yet provide a fully comprehensive and accessible service for all children. Following a review in 2006, it was recognised that there were significant gaps in provision in some areas. Strong leadership and committed staff have taken steps to address this issue and there is commitment for further planned investment. There is good access to assessment and treatment services at tier 3 and waiting times are now in line with the national average. This is supported by the provision of a comprehensive counselling service provided by The Listening Zone. The emotional needs of children and young people at school are only adequately addressed through the school curriculum and school nursing service, and teachers and other professionals working in schools and healthcare settings express concern at the lack of support provided by CAMHS. There is good support for looked after children and young offenders but children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are only just beginning to receive a service. Tier 4 specialist services are provided within the borough. However, a few parents expressed concern about access and referral criteria to this service. There is concern amongst some professionals that 16–18 year olds may not receive appropriate services since they do not meet the referral criteria of either the CAMHS or adult service.

61. Good support is provided to looked after children by designated medical staff, who form part of the Looked After Children Health and Education Support Team. This team ensures that annual health and dental checks are regularly undertaken. This service is also provided to children who are placed out of borough. A number of initiatives such as 'straight talk' and 'healthy U' events have been developed to provide information and support to both children and young people and staff. Young people spoken to during the review confirmed

that they can access advice and information when they need to. The recent appointment of a CAMHS worker specifically designated for looked after children is viewed positively by professionals and has improved access to this specialist service.

62. A strategy has recently been developed to provide an integrated children's service for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities by 2008 but this is at an early stage of development. A specialist worker for CAMHS has recently been appointed to work with children with a learning disability or difficulty but it is too early to say what impact this has had on service outcomes. The children's development centre provides timely access for children with complex needs aged 0–5. Transition is facilitated by the centre but services for older children are fragmented. Access to occupational therapy is limited. The provision of specialist equipment is good and there are good protocols in place to ensure that children have the equipment they need.

Staying safe

63. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is good.** There is a good range of information and accessible guides on safety issues for parents, young people and staff. A wide variety of road safety initiatives have contributed to low serious accident rates for children. There are good procedures for ensuring the safety of pupils engaged in out of school activities, which are well monitored. There is a well represented Domestic Violence forum with good operational networks across agencies, although a draft strategy for this forum is at an early stage of development. There is a wide range of anti-bullying initiatives and police work well in schools to reduce the fear and incidence of crime.

64. Good training and materials provided through the LSCB and partner agencies effectively enable staff to identify and manage risk to children. Clear eligibility criteria for access to social care services are in place; however, some staff in partner agencies are unfamiliar with these, other than for child protection. High numbers of children in need are supported, and there is good multi-agency commitment to piloting new cross-agency eligibility criteria. A good range of preventative initiatives are in place. The establishment of an overarching preventative strategy is at the early stages.

65. Effective systems are in place for safe recruitment of staff and for dealing with complaints against them. Recruitment and retention initiatives within the council children's services have significantly improved staff stability and continuity of support to children. Good publicity and procedures identify and support private foster carers, although reported numbers are low.

66. There have been significant improvements in assessment services within children's social care services, which have resulted in more timely intervention, better assessments and closer collaboration with partner agencies. Good transfer arrangements are in place between assessment and care management services. However, this has increased pressures on care management services

which, although having all cases allocated, are struggling to maintain the quality of direct work to support children and families. Children and carers seen commented on variability in the engagement and understanding of their circumstances by social workers.

67. All children on the child protection register are allocated social workers, and safe action has been taken to appropriately reduce numbers of children on the register to levels in line with comparators. Child protection conferences are well managed with good representation and engagement of carers and appropriate young people. Core groups are routinely monitored to ensure that plans of protection are implemented; however not all core groups are held regularly and attendance at some is variable. Children de-registered from the register are effectively monitored through children in need plans, resulting in low levels of re-registration.

68. The LSCB is well established with generally good representation, a clear structure and plans, and a small pooled budget. However, some partners have struggled to maintain the level of representation required, for example CAFCASS and Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospital NHS Trust. A small number of well-represented LSCB sub-groups effectively manage the operational work and developments and provide good information to enable LSCB members to plan. Effective inter-agency safeguarding protocols, procedures and policies are in place which are well monitored and kept up-to-date.

69. There is a good LSCB multi-agency annual training programme, complemented by effective individual agency training, annual conferences and road shows, including some run by the voluntary sector. There is only limited assessment of the impact of training in improving the quality of work. Designated staff for safeguarding are identified by all agencies and are well trained and supported. Serious case reviews are appropriately conducted and action plans systematically implemented and reviewed by the LSCB. Good performance management and audit systems, including financial monitoring within social care services, are also monitored by LSCB agencies and effectively used to target problem areas, commission research and develop services. Children and young people are well supported by appropriate systems to enable them to raise concerns and complaints: these are well publicised and monitored.

70. Effective protocols for children missing from education and care are well implemented by staff. They are clear about their responsibilities and network effectively with partner agencies to share information. Good Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) are in place, together with a Junior MAPPA linked through the youth offending service. There has been effective action to reduce the numbers of looked after children, which are currently in line with comparators.

71. There are insufficient local foster carers, and pressure on placements often requires carers to take children outside their approved range. Diversity is taken into account in all placements, although the majority of foster carers are white, therefore limiting options for placing children from black and minority ethnic groups. The stability of placements for looked after children is improving but too many remain in out-of-borough placements, although this figure is reducing.

72. All looked after children have an allocated social worker. Reviews are regularly held on time, with good participation from children, and are held in venues most suited to the needs of the children and their carers, including schools and foster homes. There is a good user-friendly website for looked after children, 'Care Web', through which they can email social workers. There is good access to a children's rights and advocacy service and looked after children have participated in some staff appointments and appraisal. Care leavers receive good support.

73. There is good multi-agency response and support to safeguard children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff working with children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have undertaken signing and MAKATON training to improve communication with children. Case files are routinely audited to improve practice and to monitor the children's safety. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive respite care at a similar level to that offered to looked after children. All residential provision is regularly monitored to ensure children's safety. There is a lack of local respite care provision, although a panel ensures that out-of-borough placements are safe and meet the children's needs on a case-by-case basis.

74. Transition arrangements for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to adult care is acknowledged by the council as needing improvement, with the development of an integrated children's service targeted for 2008 in a multi-agency strategic plan. The current arrangements are inadequate.

Enjoying and achieving

75. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is adequate.** Access to guidance and support for parents making use of children's centres is good. For the rest of the community, availability is more limited and inconsistent. There is a satisfactory range of information on education services available for parents but some find it hard to access this because they are unaware of Barking Direct or the Children's Information Service and find it hard to understand how systems operate. As a result many parents rely on their children's school for advice and signposting to other services.

76. Early years education and childcare is good. There are strong partnership arrangements with voluntary and private sector providers. The council has worked hard to improve the quality of provision and to increase the number and types of places over the last three years. There are enough suitable places to meet the needs of all three and four year olds, although some parents find the costs of childcare beyond their reach. Most teaching in early years settings is satisfactory or better and monitoring and challenge is improving. A comprehensive professional development programme is available, with high participation rates. Advisory teachers provide good support to both maintained and non-maintained settings. These strategies make strong contributions to raising standards and are highly regarded by providers. Effective systems are in place for early identification of need and to support young children who may have a learning difficulty and/or disability. Agencies work well to support these children and their families.

77. Most children and young people enjoy their learning and believe they are making good progress. Children and young people of black and minority ethnic heritage make satisfactory progress in line with other groups. White working class boys achieve less well at all stages of their education. In order to tackle this underachievement, the council is participating in two national projects and has forged good partnerships with schools and the college. This has resulted in a common approach to timetabling to enable work-related learning, and the development of the vocational curriculum is an emerging strength. The Jo Richardson School, for example, has specially designed accommodation to support the delivery of some construction crafts such as plumbing and painting and decorating.

78. Provision to raise the educational achievement of looked after children is good and most make good progress throughout their schooling. This is supported by effective personal education plans which are well monitored. The multi-disciplinary nature of the Looked After Children Health and Education Support Team enables the health, education and social care needs of individual looked after children to be met. Designated teachers based in each school work very closely with this team. There is an effective and popular homework club for looked after children on Saturday mornings. All looked after children receive a leisure card which gives them free access to leisure facilities within the borough.

79. The number of children and young people with statements of special educational need has fluctuated over recent years but is currently below comparators. Special educational needs coordinators are well supported in their role by the council, which provides a good range of training and professional development opportunities for them; much is also available to foster teaching and learning strategies for classroom teachers. This supports integration as well as developing mainstream teaching skills.

80. The authority has a strong commitment to inclusion and most children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are educated within mainstream

schools or specialist units attached to them. Analysis of achievement data for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities provision lacks rigour. As a result its use to inform planning and service delivery is inadequate.

81. The council has effective relationships with school improvement partners. Support for national strategies is good. Recent improvements within the Community Inspection and Advisory Service have resulted in clearer, well targeted and more effective statements of action for individual schools causing concern. Better structures have been put in place to provide enhanced support and more rigorous challenge and to intervene when necessary. Schools below floor targets in receipt of Community Inspection and Advisory Service support showed greater improvement in 2006. Data relating to performance within schools is not always used effectively and consistently to monitor, track and improve performance.

82. Services to support admission and attendance are adequate and improving. This has resulted in good relationships with schools and Looked After Children Health and Education Support Team and the more effective use of data in this area. Suitable procedures are in place for admissions which give priority to children and young people who are looked after and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The number of schools with surplus places has decreased since 2003 and is much lower than that found nationally.

83. Services to support behaviour and inclusion are adequate. The newly formed pupil referral unit, together with the Reception and Reintegration unit, provide good support for schools and for those children and young pupil who are not attending. However, formal structures to support reintegration into mainstream schools are not yet in place.

84. The council does not have a coordinated strategy for extended provision and the potential contribution of specialist schools has not been fully realised. A number of opportunities are provided for children and young people to take part in leisure and recreational activities, although their quality and organisation varies. As a result, some children and young people and their parents report being dissatisfied with what is on offer. Young people themselves identify shortages in the range of leisure and voluntary learning activities and concerns about personal safety as particular factors which limit their recreational opportunities.

Making a positive contribution

85. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is adequate.** The council and local partners indicate a strong commitment to engage with children and young people but the process is not always clear and consultation doesn't always reach out to all groups. There are plans to improve this which are appropriately targeted and good leadership is shown by newly appointed officers. A structured approach to consultation with children and young people is not yet common practice across

all levels of council activity; it is, however, better established in schools and other settings.

86. Children's centres and schools provide a good range of opportunities to help children and young people develop the skills necessary for establishing healthy and positive relationships. An excellent example is the strengthening families work at both Gascoigne and Abbey children's centres. Parents speak highly of the support they receive and how this increases confidence and helps to improve relationships with their children. The centres are able to demonstrate evidence of progress against targets but this information is not yet collected centrally to inform the review of the Children and Young People's Plan. The council effectively uses courses run by the national college of student leadership to develop the skills and confidence of young people, for example in peer mentoring. One girl spoke of how such training had helped her to 'think outside the box'.

87. A limited number of young people receive good support in coping with change and difficult periods in their life. The voluntary sector makes a good contribution, for example, in the support for young carers, while mentoring schemes in schools provide positive support for individuals. However, some young people from vulnerable groups, in particular those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, do not always get the help that they need; this is particularly true when they are making choices post-16. The council and its partners are aware that not all local communities use the children's centres and they are working to encourage wider attendance. For example, local midwifery services are delivered in all children's centres to encourage attendance from all local families.

88. The recently developed engagement strategy shows a good understanding of the principles and practice underpinning effective consultation but young people contribute their ideas to specific projects rather than to the overall development of services. They were encouraged to contribute their views to the Children and Young People's Plan through a website and an organised process of consultation. However, feedback on this is not effective and children and young people are not always aware of how their ideas have influenced the final plan. At a school level there are opportunities to take part in decisions and there are examples of innovative approaches to feedback such as using the email system to communicate with individual pupils. The youth forum is active and children and young people speak of their participation with enthusiasm; they are currently working on a video designed to combat bullying and some have contributed to the inspection of local provision for children and young people. There are no formal links between the youth forum and school councils; young people put themselves forward for the latter if they are interested. This lack of election means that some young people are unaware of the forum and the role it plays. This limits the approach to representation. There is a consultation board at which policy is considered from the perspective of children and young people but this is yet to show any real impact.

89. The youth offending services provide good strategic leadership to reduce the incidence of antisocial and offending behaviour. One young person commented that they had 'helped to turn my life around'. This work is well supported by strong partnerships with the police and a range of council services. In one project on the Gascoigne estate, the police, youth offending services, housing and schools worked together on a series of activities designed to reduce antisocial behaviour. This included work on restorative justice where young people met with older residents to discuss common fears and establish better relationships. This project helped to reduce the incidence of crime in the area. In one school, learning mentors also spoke positively about the links with Youth Offending Service which have made a real difference to some young people. There is a clearly developing preventative strategy to this work with projects designed to improve initial parent-child bonding, which is then developed into supportive work for families in children's centres. The council is aware of the need to coordinate extended activities in schools that will then feed into this approach. The range of opportunities for young people aged between 16 and 19 to contribute through organised youth activities is not well developed.

90. The rates of offending and re-offending dropped from 2005 to 2006 and are now lower than similar areas. The youth offending service clearly understands that the target is now to sustain this. There is an innovative approach to re-engaging with education and training, with a concentration on closing the skills gap. When they return from a custodial sentence young people are given opportunities to practice skills locally which, in some cases, can lead to apprenticeship schemes.

91. Children who are looked after receive good support from a range of services and they have the opportunity to be involved in key decisions about their lives. An independent advocacy service provides support and a good website enables children and young people to email or text any concerns which they may have to either their social worker or reviewing officer. Many spoke highly of this approach since it made communication so much easier. Young people are involved in delivering the Total Respect training for staff and are keen to use this to influence service improvement. There are plans to include members as participants in future training. Good contact is provided for children and young people placed outside the borough by independent reviewing officers.

92. At a school level, children and young people who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are able to contribute their opinions and they participate in decisions about their future. However, there are no formal and established routes to consult with them and they are under-represented at the youth forum. Currently, the council does not use the voluntary sector to help with this, although there are plans to involve them more systematically.

Achieving economic well-being

93. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is adequate.** The borough, along with a variety of partners, provides a good range of information and services to guide families and young people to appropriate childcare and sources of financial support. The development of seven children's centres, with seven more planned, represents a comprehensive approach to family health, social care and support. The number of childcare places and trained childminders has increased at a greater rate than the national average over the past three years. An innovative childminding network has helped 30% of teenage mothers stay in education, employment and training. This is above the national figure. Good family learning opportunities are provided through the Adult College; an example of good practice is the development of a learning support qualification to be delivered through children's centres, which meets the employment needs of local communities, whilst providing childcare, and meets a recruitment gap for local schools.

94. There are good and developing work-related learning and flexi-learning opportunities for young people in Years 10 and 11 at secondary schools. Barking further education college collaborates with the local secondary schools to provide taster days and part-time vocational programmes for 14 to 16 year olds. Schools have developed flexible timetables to enable children to pursue their choice of courses across institutions. The Centre for Engineering and Manufacturing Excellence offers excellent opportunities for young people through its Gateway to Skills programmes. Managers at the secondary schools and the further education college have worked with the local authority to complete a bid for four specialist diplomas that reflect well the local training needs. Just over three quarters of all young people progress at 16 to sixth form, further education, training or employment after completing the GCSE; this is more than in similar authorities. However, too many young people do not complete their courses.

95. Barking College is helping to develop employment opportunities in line with childcare needs by offering an NVQ which equips participants to work in local schools where recruitment has been difficult. Further education locally provides a good range of post-16 vocational courses at levels 1, 2 and 3. However, opportunities for young people to undertake training in construction at levels 1 and 2 are limited. Vocational courses at level 3, particularly BTEC national diplomas, have been developed recently in school sixth forms, although the provision at Key Stage 4 and level 2 remains limited. Appropriate work-based learning is available from the further education sector and a number of other providers in the area. A small Living and Learning unit within Trinity meets the needs of a number of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A recently reorganised pupil referral unit now collaborates effectively with schools to support children and young people at risk. In addition, the voluntary sector works well with the local authority in arranging alternative provision for young people who are vulnerable, excluded or very

recently arrived in the area. Local community and faith groups make good use of school facilities in the evenings and weekends for worship, recreation and homework clubs.

96. The collaboration between the local authority, schools and post-16 providers is good and the local authority has been a key partner in developing and planning 14 to 19 education in Barking and Dagenham. It has played a key role in providing leadership and driving improvements in this area. Examples of this include a brokering role in encouraging Barking College to deliver construction programmes on school sites, and good support in the development of work release programmes. Two collaborative consortia of secondary schools and further education institutions are established and, as a result, young people have better access to a range of post-16 studies.

97. The extensive urban regeneration currently underway across Barking and Dagenham has significantly increased the number of affordable houses and those available to rent. A well planned building and development programme in Barking town centre gives clear evidence to the residents of the council's commitment to and progress with improving the built environment. There was good consultation of young people on the council's plans for regeneration, and their views were used to develop plans for recreation and open space. Regeneration plans have also focused on skill development for those seeking work and those who are employed. However, consultations with local businesses have been ad hoc and a business forum has not been established. The borough no longer uses bed and breakfast or hostel accommodation for anyone who is homeless and suitable temporary accommodation has been provided. Youth offenders have effective support to help them reintegrate and to access housing. The major development at Barking Riverside should allow local people to become involved in the way affordable and rented accommodation is developed. However, access to good quality housing across the borough is still variable and some transfer arrangements are not equitable.

98. Young people in care receive very good support and guidance to enable them to stay in education or training. They spoke very positively about the quality of support and encouragement they received, including the continued provision of foster placements for them to return to during university breaks. The proportion of looked after children in education, employment and training has been above the national average for the past three years. Achievements at GCSE and A-level have improved significantly and the number progressing to higher education has also increased. Young people are fully involved in their annually reviewed pathway plans. The leaving care team give good support and guidance to young people who report that staff are accessible and information and support are available through a number of channels. Leaving care arrangements are good and appropriate accommodation is available.

99. The proportion of young people over 16 with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are not in education, training or employment is well above the national average. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and

their families are supported in achieving economic independence, and over 50% of families are in receipt of direct payments. This figure compares well with other authorities. Transition arrangements for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to post-16 training or education are variable in their effectiveness and some do not enrol on courses that they applied for. However, there are good opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to access work-related learning in Years 10 and 11. The proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in work-based learning is low. There is insufficient analysis to predict their needs across the age ranges in education in order to plan future service needs.

Service management

100. **The management of services for children and young people is adequate. The capacity to improve further is adequate.** The ambitions established by the council and its partners for children and young people in Barking and Dagenham are good. The Children and Young People's Plan links clearly to the Every Child Matters outcomes and is based on an analysis of shared needs based on data and evidence from a range of sources. The council and its partners have recognised the impact of the changing demographics of the area and the need to revise the needs analysis in order to reflect this.

101. Consultation with partners and children and young people supports the Children and Young People's Plan. Children and young people are a priority for the council and its partners and the Children and Young People's Plan forms the children and young people block of the Local Area Agreement. This serves to give added emphasis and drive to improve the area. There is a strong understanding from stakeholders, including staff, of the ambitions for children and young people in Barking and Dagenham and a clear commitment and enthusiasm to achieve these. This has been particularly evident in the development of the new children's centres, some of which have been successful in gaining national awards. The lead member of children's services and the chair of scrutiny have a good understanding of their corporate parenting responsibilities though these remain a developing area for some other members. Overall the council has responded well to its obligation for looked after children, and services such as the Looked After Children Health and Education Support Team have led to improved outcomes.

102. Prioritisation to improve outcomes for children and young people is adequate. The Children and Young People's Plan clearly sets out the priorities for action for the next three years and these are understood by partner and community organisations. The implementation plan for the Children and Young People's Plan identifies strategic accountability for each priority, however not all targets are sufficiently outcome focused. Resources are broadly identified to deliver some priorities but these are not explicitly identified. The aligning of budgets to deliver the priorities is at an early stage of development. However, some resources are being targeted at specific priorities, for example teenage pregnancy and CAMHS.

103. The Children and Young People's Plan is not consistently underpinned by robust strategies for delivery as some remain in draft. Elements of a preventative strategy for children and young people are in place but the development of a coordinated strategy for preventative services is in the early stages of development. Comprehensive service plans are in place and all include actions to achieve value for money, equality of access to services, communication and participation. This enables a strengthened focus in these areas. However, there are no explicit links to the Children and Young People's Plan and the priorities and actions set out in the implementation plan. As a result, the means of delivering the priorities set out in the Children and Young People's Plan by individual services are not explicit. Difficult decisions are taken by members and officers where necessary and focus is sustained, for example in the development of the Castle Green Centre.

104. The overall capacity of the council and its partners is adequate. The Children's Trust is in place and there is good membership from a range of partners, including the voluntary sector. There is a strong shared will to improve services. However, the Children's Trust is in the early stages of development and, as a result, roles and responsibilities and some governance arrangements are not yet fully developed and embedded. The roles of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services are developing. There are examples of good leadership and management across children's services.

105. There is good financial management capacity in children's services with good value for money. Budget monitoring is robust and there is a clear and sustained focus on value for money. There is a good understanding of areas of high and low cost and action is taken where appropriate to address these. For example, the out-of-borough placement budget is an area of overspending and the review of high cost placements has strengthened gate keeping procedures and reduced the numbers of children placed outside the borough. Good financial support is offered to schools and there are no significant surpluses in school budgets. Recovery plans are in place for the three schools in the area with budget deficits.

106. The council and its partners are addressing key capacity issues. The children's workforce strategy has recently been developed but has yet to be approved by the Children's Trust. Sub-groups and action plans to deliver the strategy are in place but impact is as yet limited. Recruitment and retention initiatives are being used with some evidence of impact in, for example, the recruitment of social workers. There is no overarching commissioning strategy for children's services but this is being developed along with the formation of a new commissioning unit. The recent appointment of a children's commissioner in the PCT has increased capacity and is enabling discussions on the establishment of joint commissioning. Engagement with, and capacity building of, the voluntary sector has been strengthened with some good examples of using the voluntary sector to provide services for some hard to reach groups, such as the management of a children's centre and work with young carers.

There are good examples of work being undertaken to improve information and communications technology capacity; however an overarching strategy is being developed. An information sharing protocol has recently been agreed but this is in the early stages of implementation.

107. Performance management is adequate. Performance management across the children's service partnership is at an early stage of development. The Children's Trust is new and has not yet progressed sufficiently to agree a process for performance management. The council has an established balanced scorecard approach in place which has provided a clear framework for service planning and covers cross-cutting themes such as diversity and partnership working. There are good quality assurance systems and performance management in children's social care, used to target areas for improvement and develop services. Service reviews have informed service improvements and performance, for example the childcare audit. However the use of data is inconsistent and does not inform service planning on a regular basis. The council is developing a 'hot spots' performance system for use by the senior team in children's services. Data is now being collated across children's services in the council with the aim to identify trends and areas for further evaluation.

108. The council has an accessible and appropriate complaints process. Complaints are analysed and used to produce recommendations for service improvement. These are published on the intranet to share learning. Regular supervision and appraisals are in place, with some examples of children and young people inputting into appraisals. There is good involvement from looked after children in their reviews.

109. The role of scrutiny in children's services is underdeveloped. There is insufficient capacity in terms of time and focus in the Scrutiny Management Board, due to the breadth of their responsibilities, to effectively scrutinise children's services and the developing Children's Trust. The Health Scrutiny Panel has been used to good effect in children's services, for example teenage pregnancy, and provides a local model for the scrutiny of integrated services.

110. The capacity of the council and its partners to improve further is adequate.

Annex: The children and young people's section of the corporate assessment report

1. The council and its partners provide adequate outcomes for the children and young people of Barking and Dagenham. There are clear shared priorities and good partnerships including with the voluntary sector. The Children's Trust is at an early stage of its development but has the right membership and commitment. There is evidence of motivated and committed staff at all levels across the council and its partners, and a good understanding of the needs of the community. Performance management across the council and its partners is developing and is strong in some areas such as social care. However, data is not used routinely to plan service delivery and analysis of data is a weakness across all outcomes. The Children's Trust is only now starting to review performance management information at its meetings.

2. Outcomes for looked after children are good but the needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not yet effectively addressed. In particular there are few opportunities for them to be involved in decision making and too many of them are not in education, employment or training after leaving school. The Looked After Children Health and Education Support Team provides a good service to support the health and education of looked after children, and outcomes in both these areas have significantly improved.

3. Most children are healthy and many health outcomes are line with comparator groups. Rates of teenage pregnancy though reducing remain high, and there is a high incidence of oral decay amongst the child population.

4. Most children reported feeling safe in their schools and homes, and there are effective procedures and protocols to protect children entering the social care system. Numbers of children on the child protection register and looked after have been reducing and are now in line with comparator groups. There is effective use of performance management information within social care to monitor performance and address trends. There is a shortage of foster placements within the authority and as a consequence too many looked after children are placed out of the borough.

5. Early years provision is good and there has been an increase in the amount of childcare places available. Provision for children out of school is improving but there is not yet an effective arrangement for the reintegration of excluded pupils. The numbers of schools below floor targets or causing concern has reduced in the last few months. However, data is not used systematically to track the achievement of all pupils and improve service delivery.

6. The council and its partners have a strong commitment to the engagement of children and young people but this is not effectively promoted across all groups, and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are insufficiently represented. There is an active youth forum

and school councils but the two processes are not linked so appointment to the youth forum is not as a result of a democratic process.

7. Children and young people are consulted and do contribute to individual projects across the council and its partners, but there are no formal arrangements for them to input into strategic decisions or policy.

8. Achievements at GCSE and A level are improving but still below the national average. The numbers of children and young people who are not in education, employment or training in Barking and Dagenham are too high, though this number is declining. Retention rates on post-16 courses are poor, which suggests that young people may not be getting correct advice. Care leavers are increasingly achieving better outcomes at GCSE and the council provides good support to enable them to go on to further education and university.