



Making Social Care Better for People



Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Roger Luxton OBE
Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Barking & Dagenham
Civic Centre
Dagenham
RM10 7BN

1 November 2006

Dear Mr Luxton

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BARKING AND DAGENHAM COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment (APA) process for your local authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Summary

| Areas for judgement | Grade awarded ¹ |
|---|----------------------------|
| The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people. | 3 |
| The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people | 3 |
| The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people | 3 |

1

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

Barking and Dagenham Council delivers good social care services for young people and has good capacity for improvement. The council's children's services are good overall, but some aspects of education provision are variable. The majority of services demonstrate that they are contributing to the achievement and well-being of children and young people. The council demonstrates its commitment and determination to drive improvement in the face of considerable challenges. Some of the impact of planned actions was not yet evident within the time period covered by this assessment. All the areas for improvement identified in last year's APA have been subject to carefully targeted action and resources identified. This has led to substantially improved performance against a number of key indicators, particularly for looked after children. The arrangements for the safeguarding of young people have further improved in all areas and the council has set in place a structure for integrated working. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) contains a thorough and accurate needs analysis, demonstrating that the council has a clear view of its own strengths and weaknesses, evidence of good partnership work and engagement of children and young people in the process. With its partners, the council has made substantial investment in workforce training and development. During the year substantial restructuring has taken place to build an integrated service and prepare for a Children's Trust established on 1 April 2006. The council now has good capacity to improve its services further.

Being healthy

Outcomes for children's health are improving and are judged to be good. There is a comprehensive programme of new children's centres being rolled out across the council. They provide increasingly effective community based health and care services, aimed at substantially improving children's health by increasing capacity and promoting health. There is also a programme to replace all the current health clinics with modern, accessible facilities. There is good evidence of joint work with the health authority to coordinate and target these new resources effectively. Early signs indicate some improvements in health for children and young people.

Increasingly schools are engaged in healthy eating initiatives and performance has improved. Promotional work to develop various aspects of healthy eating is taking place in the newly established children's centres. Teenage conceptions remain very high. The authority has identified priorities and devoted substantial resources in a three-year plan to tackle this situation. The drug action team have developed a strategy to improve the poor performance in tackling substance misuse.

Services for children with disabilities have improved with a wider choice of respite, more practical and emotional support to parents and improved take up of direct payments. An integrated best value review to improve services for children with disabilities is programmed for the coming year. There is a fast track system for looked after children, who are seen by these services within 48 hours. Children with disabilities do not yet have a full and comprehensive service, but the best value review is identifying action to improve this. The health needs of looked after children continue to improve and performance is very effective with young people involved in developing

the scope of these and taking a growing amount of responsibility for their well-being. The proportion of looked after children attending their annual health and dental checks this year increased from 91% to 97% which is very high. A jointly funded and multi-disciplinary team, known as the Looked After Children's Health and Education Services, has worked effectively with the children themselves, their GPs, schools and foster carers to provide very effective services to looked after children.

Staying safe

The outcomes in this area are good. The council has worked very hard and substantially improved all areas of performance on the safety of children and young people. Preventative services are developing well, with the large expansion of children's centres and the opening of a range of health centres. Historically, there has been a high proportion of children on the Child Protection Register. This is starting to reduce as a result of more effective safeguarding arrangements, a better range of early intervention services and effective engagement with families. Family group conferences have proved particularly effective in reducing the number of looked after children and all looked after children have an allocated qualified social worker.

The CYPP shows that children reported feeling safe generally and had confidence in their schools' abilities to deal effectively with bullying. There are effective arrangements to deal with racial incidents, and reports of such incidents are low, although under-reporting is considered to be a problem nationally. The council is alert to the potential for increased tensions.

All child protection systems have improved considerably and deliver more effectively than in the past. This is especially true of the assessment services where there is good and improved performance on the start and completion of assessments within timescales. Performance is good when compared to that of similar authorities. Regular quality audits have improved recording, quality and efficiency of services. A good range of safeguarding training has been available to both council and voluntary sector staff. This has improved awareness and understanding. Good inter-agency procedures are in place and good progress has been made in developing information sharing systems.

A local safeguarding board and a strategic partnership board are well established and are good models of integrated working. Recent serious case reviews were done in a timely and well organised manner. Corporate parenting is well established and members and employees take an active role.

Improvements have been made to ensure services reach vulnerable groups effectively, including work with various faith groups within the local communities. The stability of placements for looked after children is good and monitoring has resulted in more effective placements. More children have been adopted this year; performance is good and compares well with other similar councils. Whilst a large majority of looked after children are placed outside the council, most are within 20 miles and in settled foster care. There is a continued need to improve local resources, particularly fostering, so that more looked after children can live locally. A joint commissioning service has been

established and will be developing these resources in the coming year. Every looked after child has a qualified social worker. The youth offending team continues to make good progress in reducing the rate of offending and engaging with parents in developmental initiatives.

Services for children with disabilities have improved, such as the respite services mentioned earlier, and there is better support for carers. A best value review of these services has been delayed so it can be completed more thoroughly with health and education partners in the coming year.

Many partnership relationships have developed good integrated working and the building blocks have been established to develop the new Children's Trust. Transitions from children to adult services for children with disabilities are well planned and supported.

Enjoying and achieving

The contribution the council makes to ensuring children and young people achieve at schools and enjoy their education and leisure activities is generally good, but this is not always reflected in outcomes. Standards and achievement are variable and need considerable improvement for some groups.

The overall quality of early years provision is good; children are supported well and achieve good progress in meeting the early learning goals. At Key Stage 1 teacher assessments are above the national average, but Key Stage 2 presents a mixed picture. At Key Stage 3, the slight improvement in English results since 2004 continues the substantial upward trend since 2000. However, the council agrees that given their focus on Key Stage 3, progress has not been good enough. At Key Stage 4, results reached a landmark with slightly over half the pupils attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C.

Although Key Stage 4 results show sustained good progress, there remain significant differences between the performance of schools. Half of secondary schools have below average attainment and achievement. The achievement of looked after children has improved, with an increase in the number of looked after children taking GCSEs. The proportion of care leavers with one GCSE shows good improvement, as does the proportion of care leavers getting 5 GCSEs.

The level of pupil absence in primary and secondary schools is well above average. The council has a good and robust process for reducing absence including the use of legal action. As a result, some advances have been made in secondary schools. Looked after children attend school more regularly than the national average or the outer London average and this continues to improve. The council has innovative arrangements to reintegrate children excluded from school, but less than half of children excluded from school receive over 20 hours a week of tuition which is below average. The number of looked after children not attending school has been reduced.

The council accepts that too many schools have recently required special measures and council support has not prevented this from being so. While the council continues to be innovative in developing approaches to teaching and learning and advising schools on their implementation, the authority has not been sufficiently robust in challenging the performance of its weakest schools.

The council has significantly increased the support for children with disabilities through children's centres and through support in early years and childcare settings.

Making a positive contribution

Performance in this outcome area is good. Children and young people were consulted on the CYPP, which was amended to include their comments. There are a variety of ways to encourage children and young people to participate in decision making but these have emerged in a piecemeal way. The council is planning increased coherence in using the experience of children and young people to influence services.

The council has used a variety of ways to encourage young people to contribute actively to reviews of their care and the quality of their contribution is good. However, the number of looked after children who contribute to their reviews needs to improve, as performance is below that of other councils.

A youth forum is already well established. Voluntary sector youth groups provide a range of activities for those at risk of anti social behaviour and have been commended by the Government Office for London. The rate of re-offending by young people has reduced significantly and good arrangements are in place to address their education and training needs as well as their mental health needs.

Achieving economic well-being

The council makes a good contribution to children and young people's economic well-being. The key priority for the council has been the reduction of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) and while there has been some success in this area, the number remains too high. The council's knowledge and understanding of the young people in the NEET group is good. This knowledge has helped develop the council's strategy. For example, the NEET group varies widely by school of origin and the council has identified that the school's approach to personal, social and health education (PSHE) is a more influential factor in determining membership of this group than academic performance. As a result the council has prioritised PSHE as an area for central support. The proportion of care leavers in Employment, Education or Vocational training has reduced since last year and the council need to improve this in the coming year. Inspection reports show that in the six secondary and primary schools overall judgements on this outcome for pupils resulted in low grades, and two schools were considered to be inadequate in this aspect of their provision.

There is good collaboration in the planning and delivery of post-16 education and training. The council has improved the range of vocational options. Overall, the quality of education provided for 14 to 19 year olds is satisfactory. A-level results are well below the national average. However Level 1 and Level 2 courses have been expanded and sixth form cooperative arrangements allow a good choice of courses.

The council has worked well to support continuing education for the high number of teenage girls who become mothers. The council's innovative and effective approaches to increasing the skills of its workforce have been very successful. There is good support for helping adults raise their level of qualifications which is in turn raising the value of education within families.

The council's management of its services for children and young people, including its capacity to improve them further

Over the year the council has been putting in place the building blocks for the integrated Children's Services Directorate and Children's Trust established on 1 April 2006. Following a report from external consultants the council acted quickly to confirm new appointments of key staff as part of the extensive restructuring. A particularly innovative and effective appointment has been the role of an Assistant Chief Executive. His role is to identify and plug perceived gaps in provision. Improvement is brought about through challenging service directors at monthly meetings.

The council is committed to drawing human resources from the local community and its workforce increasingly reflects the diversity of local communities. It has been very successful in raising the basic skills of its workforce. This in turn supports educational achievement in families. Senior managers have been proactive in working with partners. Partnerships between schools and police have been highly successful in reducing youth offending. Schools are regularly visited by the Director of Children's Services and the Every Child Matters agenda is reviewed with headteachers. Employees at all levels participate positively to the council's corporate parenting role for looked after children.

The council has targeted its resources accurately on areas of identified need and has been successful in keeping overall costs for children's services within budget. Joint commissioning arrangements are being developed with partners with the clear intention of securing improved value for money. Overall, the council has good capacity to make further improvements to its services for children and young people.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

| Key strengths | Key areas for improvement |
|--|--|
| <p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very effective services for looked after children • range of respite services for children with disabilities • provision of new children's centres • replacement programme for health centres. | <p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor dental health • reduce teenage conceptions and expand support services • develop capacity and improved response to children's mental health needs • best value review of services for children with disabilities. |
| <p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continued stability of placements • effective safeguarding arrangements • effective anti-bullying strategies and pro active response to racial incidents • development of effective prevention strategies • reduced numbers of children on the register • reduced number of looked after children • infrastructure to develop integrated working and Children's Trust. | <p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop more local placements for looked after children. |
| <p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • early years provision • improved results at Key Stage 4 • support and achievement of looked after children. | <p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve effectiveness of monitoring and support for the weaker schools • continue to work with schools and parents to improve attendance. |
| <p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decline in rates of re-offending • consultation with children and young people. | <p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bring further coherence to the many opportunities for the voice of the child to inform decision making • increase the number of looked after children who contribute to their reviews. |
| <p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaborative planning for 16-19 education and training • the identification and analysis of NEET and plans to target its causes • support for teenagers missing out on education through pregnancy. | <p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve standards of attainment in school sixth forms • reduce the number of young people in neither education, training nor employment, including care leavers. |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • restructuring to bring about an integrated service • workforce development • focus on value for money. The authority's astute view of its strengths and weakness leads to well targeted resources • good partnership working • the strong commitment to children and young people across the council. | <p><i>Management of children's services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • challenge for schools regarding pupil achievement. |
|---|--|

Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA

- The impact of the authority's actions to raise standards in schools.
- The impact of the best value review for children with disabilities.
- Development of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service to meet needs.
- Effective implementation of plans to address young people NEET.

We confirm that the children's services grade will provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment and will be published to the Audit Commission. The social care judgement is for CSCI's information only.

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY

Divisional Manager
 Office for Standards in Education



JONATHAN PHILLIPS

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