

26 November 2007

Ms Gillian Pearson  
Director, Children and Young People Services  
London Borough of Bromley  
Civic Centre  
Stockwell Close  
Bromley  
BR1 3UH

Dear Ms Pearson

## **2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF BROMLEY**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment for your local authority. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan, and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the assessment.

A joint area review took place in Bromley in 2006. At the time of writing this letter the action plan in response to the joint area review was not available for the annual performance assessment. However, action is being implemented on all of the recommendations and this has been taken into account when considering the outcomes for children and young people in Bromley.

### **Overall effectiveness of children's services**

**Grade 2**

Bromley Borough Council consistently delivers services for children and young people at an adequate level with some significant strengths and an overall trend of improvement. Good progress has been made in addressing the recommendations of the joint area review, in particular, in improving aspects of children's social care that were of concern at the time of the inspection. The contribution the council makes towards improving outcomes for enjoying and achieving is good. Outcomes for ensuring economic well-being were adequate at the time of the joint area review and are now good. Outcomes in all other areas were adequate at the time of the joint area review and this continues to be the case although there are some indications of improvement. Shortcomings identified in the joint area review, particularly in relation to provision for some vulnerable groups and services such as the Youth Offending Service, are being tackled vigorously but it is too early to see evidence of sustained positive impact. There is a strong commitment from the council to embed integrated

services. Leadership of the service is strong and officers are determined in their pursuit of good outcomes for children and young people.

## Being healthy

Grade 2

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The joint area review made the following recommendations for improving the outcomes for being healthy.

#### For action over the next six months

- Audit and improve partnership working to address child health inequalities, ensuring that GPs can fully contribute to achieving the *Every child matters* outcomes.
- Secure improved uptake of immunisation.
- Improve access to community leisure and recreation facilities, including for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Services are working increasingly well together to promote healthy lifestyles, and direct contact has now been made with most GPs to engage them in the development of children's health services. Practice profile indicators have been developed and local data are being used to ensure that services such as health visiting are targeted effectively. The number of GPs providing health surveillance has increased. Immunisation rates have been given high priority, data are analysed to identify priority areas and a strategy is in place to encourage earlier uptake and to improve immunisation levels in vulnerable groups. Smoking during pregnancy continues to be much lower than the national average and the proportion of mothers initiating breast-feeding is high, but there have been no further improvements in these areas in the last twelve months.

Access to community leisure and recreation facilities is being improved. Exclusive play sessions have been set up for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and funding provided to a voluntary organisation to support summer play activities. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are increasingly being consulted on service development. This is an improvement since the joint area review. A joint commissioning strategy is being developed to identify strategic priorities for integrated services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Action to tackle the rate of teenage pregnancy has not had significant enough impact, and the reduction in 2005/06 has not been sustained; numbers are currently above the baseline year of 1999. The action plan has been strengthened following a recent review, and some services are being redesigned to improve access. Services have also seen an increase in alcohol misuse amongst young people and prevention

work is being targeted at all pupils in Year 9, in conjunction with education on teenage pregnancy.

All schools are participating in the National Healthy Schools Programme and are expected to meet the December 2007 target. Inspections of schools have assessed most schools as good or outstanding in enabling learners to be healthy. In the recent Tellus2 survey of Year 6 pupils, most children reported that they are healthy, and a higher than average number spend time on sport.

There is more progress to be made on developing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The council has confirmed that comprehensive coverage is now in place, but there are long waiting lists for some services. Capacity has recently been increased but there is a recognition that more action needs to be taken to reduce the overload on specialist services.

The percentage of health assessments for looked after children and young people has improved and is now at a very good level, in line with the national average. Looked after children and young people have a designated doctor and nurse, in addition to a priority response from CAMHS if specialist services are required.

### **Areas for development**

- Ensure that the strategy to reduce teenage pregnancy continues to receive priority within the council.
- Address the rising level of alcohol misuse.
- Review the CAMHS strategy to ensure that referrals are appropriate, and that waiting times are reduced.

## **Staying safe**

**Grade 2**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate with some significant strengths. Well-targeted activity is taking place to address weaknesses in services and there are early signs of improvement, although it is too early to demonstrate the impact of initiatives. The joint area review made the following recommendations for improving the outcomes for staying safe.

### **For immediate action**

- Implement secure vetting procedures for all who work with children and young people.

- Develop a risk-assessed project plan for integrated adolescent services that:
  - addresses the very serious weaknesses in the youth offending service, including safeguarding issues
  - ensures targeted support to young people at risk of family breakdown
  - improves transition planning for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and pathway planning for young people who are looked after.

### **For action over the next six months**

- Undertake a strategic review of preventative services and agree a joint commissioning strategy that identifies:
  - strategic priorities for integrated services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
  - a joint placement strategy for children and young people who are looked after
  - improved support for young carers.

Vetting arrangements have been strengthened; agency workers are now secured through a single neutral vendor who is contractually required to ensure that appropriate vetting arrangements are in place including, where appropriate, evidence of Criminal Records Bureau disclosure checks. The organising principles for the integration of youth support services have been agreed and coherent management arrangements are being developed. Risk management issues in the youth offending service have been addressed and a multi-agency risk panel is enabling effective early identification of risk and of vulnerability. Stronger links with the police have meant that the youth offending team is able to assess the safeguarding and vulnerability of children and young people prior to a court appearance. Effective joint work on housing issues is enabling early intervention and prevention work with young people at risk of family breakdown. The council reports that performance on transition planning and pathway planning has recently improved considerably. However, the number of care leavers with pathway plans is still below the national average, as is the number of children with disabilities aged 14 plus who have transition plans.

Bromley Council is now developing an integrated disability strategy with the intention that this will lead to a multi-agency disability service for children and young people, supported by pooled budgets. In-borough residential provision for young people has recently been reviewed and fostering capacity has been increased, enabling looked after children and young people to be placed more locally. The carers' strategy is being revised, with the aim of improving identification and providing more comprehensive and accessible support to young carers.

All children and young people on the Child Protection Register have an allocated social worker and all reviews are carried out on time; duration on the register continues to be at a good level. Children and young people from Black and minority ethnic groups are over-represented on the register. Analysis of the figures has revealed some mis-recording but the council has nonetheless identified a need to develop earlier intervention and preventative services to families with children of mixed ethnic origin. The number of initial child protection conferences completed within timescale continues to be above that of similar councils and just below the national average.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board has a high profile across agencies. There is good representation from statutory and voluntary organisations and priorities have been identified. Learning from serious case reviews is disseminated across staff groups and multi-agency local safeguarding forums have been introduced to improve communication and learning. These are all positive steps.

Referral levels continue to be lower than the national average and repeat referrals are very low. The percentage of referrals that lead to initial assessments is in line with the national average. The number of core assessments has increased significantly in the last year but is still below the national average. The timeliness of assessments is very good.

The number of looked after children and young people has decreased, reviews are carried out on time and all looked after children and young people have a qualified social worker. There has been a good increase in the proportion of looked after children and young people who have been adopted.

### **Areas for development**

- Improve performance on transition planning.
- Improve performance on pathway planning for care leavers.
- Develop preventative services to reduce the disproportionate number of children from ethnic minorities on the Child Protection Register.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

**Grade 3**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Standards at all key stages are above national averages and from Key Stage 2 onwards there is a continuing trend of improvement.

Most children get a good start to their education. The quality of provision in early years settings as demonstrated by inspection outcomes is better than the national picture. Standards achieved in the Foundation Stage fell slightly in 2006 and are in line with national expectations. There are early indications that the authority's well-

targeted support and development are resulting in significant improvements particularly in areas of highest need.

Standards at Key Stage 1 dropped in 2006. They remain above national averages in reading and are now in line with the national picture in writing and mathematics. The rate of improvement in standards at Key Stages 2 and 3 is good and attainment in all subjects is above and in some cases well above national averages. In English, Bromley is one of the top achieving authorities in the country. Standards in English are stronger than in mathematics and science at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. There is emerging evidence that focused support for low attaining schools is successful. However, although standards have improved in these schools and some successfully achieve the government's minimum targets, the relatively small number of schools achieving below these targets remains fairly constant.

GCSE results also show good improvement and the percentage of pupils achieving at least five A\*—C grades, including English and mathematics, is well above the national averages. The local authority is keenly aware that there is wide variation between the progress made by individual pupils. It is providing sharply focused and effective support and challenge to schools to ensure that they are suitably equipped to interpret and use the relevant data and set appropriately challenging targets for each pupil. All eligible schools have specialist status and there are well developed strategies for the development of partnerships and sharing of expertise across schools. The attainment of Black and minority ethnic groups is above that of similar groups nationally.

Ofsted inspections indicate that, in the schools inspected, children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally make good progress. The authority has reviewed its provision and is taking action in order to reduce the need for statements and reduce the higher than average percentage of children and young people currently placed outside the borough in independent and non-maintained special schools. Attainment of children and young people looked after by the authority is improving and is now satisfactory. Standards at GCSE or equivalent are similar to the national averages although the attainment of this group is improving at a slower rate than other groups in the borough. The authority is working hard to improve provision for these groups and now undertakes very careful monitoring, tracking and intervention to raise achievement.

Ofsted's school inspections have generally judged schools to be good and several outstanding. The authority has good systems in place to identify, challenge and support individual schools and consequently, in recent years, very few schools have been placed in Ofsted categories of concern.

Results of the Tellus2 survey carried out with Year 6 pupils, show that more than average numbers enjoy school, try hard and believe that their teachers help them to achieve well. Children and young people's behaviour and attitudes in school are judged in inspections to be mostly good or better. The number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced and is now in line with national averages although permanent exclusions in secondary schools remain too high.

Improving attendance has been a priority for the authority but progress has been slow. Strategies adopted by the authority, including the work of the 14—19 collaborative, have impacted positively on the attendance of secondary aged pupils and have resulted in attendance rates which are now in line with national averages. Attendance amongst primary aged pupils and children and young people who are looked after by the authority is too low. Action is currently being taken, involving a multi-agency approach, to target the lowest attending groups.

### **Areas for development**

- Raise standards at Key Stage 1 and in mathematics across all phases.
- Improve attendance in primary schools and for looked after children and young people.

## **Making a positive contribution**

## **Grade 2**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate with some strengths. The joint area review made the following recommendations for improving the outcomes for making a positive contribution.

### **For immediate action**

- Develop a risk-assessed project plan for integrated adolescent services that:
  - addresses the very serious weaknesses in the youth offending service, including safeguarding issues
  - prioritises the setting up of a Youth Inclusion Support Panel
  - ensures sustained progress in addressing weaknesses in the youth service.

There are good systems in place and a strong shared commitment to consult with children and young people, including those from vulnerable and under-represented groups, to enable them to participate in decision-making and contribute to the direction of the authority. Continued improvements in the Youth Service are resulting in increasing participation and young people's involvement is emerging at a more strategic level, for example by involving them in shadowing council members and committees.

Both the Young Offender Service and the Youth Service were judged inadequate in the very recent past; the local authority had not acted early enough to recognise the problems and make the necessary improvements. Much valuable ground work has taken place to rectify this situation, for example by ensuring effective partnership

working, establishing a full complement of trained staff and implementing appropriate structures and systems. Improvement plans are detailed but are not sufficiently focused on the outcomes for young people. As a result, it is difficult to measure the impact of particular actions. The establishment of multi-agency working and stronger partnerships is resulting in more coherent, better targeted support for vulnerable groups. Improved arrangements are in place to ensure effective transition and pathway planning for young offenders, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, young people looked after by the authority and those leaving care. The percentage of young people from these vulnerable groups who actively participate in their reviews has improved and is now very good. These new arrangements and improvements are well designed and are beginning to ensure that more young people are able to make a positive contribution.

Strengthened strategies are in place to emphasise the importance of restorative justice and young offenders and other vulnerable groups are beginning to have increased access to appropriate diversionary activities. Early intervention work with those at risk of participating in crime or anti-social activities has resulted in reductions in the number of first-time offenders and in the incidence of re-offending. The Youth Inclusion and Support Panel is now fully operational although it is too early to measure its long term impact on young people.

Permanent exclusion rates are too high and the number of exclusions involving children and young people from Black and minority ethnic communities is well in excess of that seen nationally. Too many children and young people not attending mainstream schools have not had access to at least 20 hours full-time education per week. The authority has implemented measures to address these problems. Accommodation is significantly improved, children and young people are now entitled to access provision for 25 hours per week and staff work exclusively with children and young people at risk of exclusion or non participation. These measures are relatively recent and look promising but it is too early to assess sustained improvement.

### **Areas for development**

- Reduce exclusion rates, in particular for children and young people from Black and minority ethnic communities.
- Ensure that improvement planning and monitoring processes have a sharp focus on improving outcomes for children and young people.

## **Achieving economic well-being**

**Grade 3**

### **Summary of strengths and areas for development**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good, although there remains work to be done to sustain the improvements for some vulnerable groups. The joint area review made the following recommendations for improving the outcomes for achieving economic well-being.



### **For action over the next six months**

- Develop more locally available and affordable child care provision.

### **For action in the longer term**

- Increase the availability of suitable and affordable housing for vulnerable groups.

Child care provision is increasing at a faster rate than the national picture, enabling parents to return to work and the authority is establishing a good structure of local neighbourhood children's centres providing multi-agency support. This is a relatively new initiative but builds well on the good work of the existing children's centres and the Bromley Children Project. Information provided by the borough on services and provision is of high quality and access to it is good.

The local 14—19 collaborative provides high quality and imaginative access to a range of school, college and work-based learning opportunities. Attainment at post-16 is higher than average and there is an improving trend. Participation rates are high and the proportion of young people who are involved in education, employment or training is much higher than average. Employer engagement is strong and the increase in young people completing apprenticeships, although a relatively small number, is well above the national average.

Access to and involvement in post-16 education by young people looked after by the authority and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was identified as needing significant improvement by the 2006 joint area review. Since then, improvements have been made to ensure that appropriate individual plans are in place and that the engagement of these young people is closely monitored. The number of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities not involved in education, employment or training has reduced significantly and is now better than national figures. Similar improvements have taken place with young people looked after by the authority and the ratio of those in some form of education, employment or training is now better than national averages. The authority is fully aware that, although participation is increasing, there is a need to improve the range of study options to enable higher attainment as those groups of young people do not achieve as well as similar groups elsewhere. The authority has worked well to improve support and effectiveness of provision for these young people and, although some of these improvements are at an early stage of development, early indications are positive.

The local authority reports that effective action is being taken to ensure that young people, particularly those leaving care, are in appropriate accommodation; the percentage of young people leaving care in suitable accommodation is higher than average. The number of families with children living in hostels is very high relative to other councils and, although the number of those living in bed and breakfast accommodation is reducing, it is still too high.

## Areas for development

- Raise attainment of looked after children and young people and of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities by improving and increasing their access to appropriate services, education and training opportunities.
- Reduce the need for homeless families to be placed in hostels and eliminate the need to place such families in bed and breakfast accommodation.

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

Grade 2

### Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council has an adequate capacity to improve its services for children and young people, and the management of these services is also adequate. There is strong senior leadership and much of the groundwork has now been completed to improve services, some of which had been found to be inadequate by the joint area review. The council and its partners have a clear vision of what they want to achieve, partnerships are increasingly strong and services are becoming increasingly integrated and focused at a local level. There is a strong shared commitment to the priorities identified in the Children and Young People's Plan. The council has identified the right priorities and has a detailed planning structure to ensure action is taken to improve outcomes for children and young people. The council's review of the Children and Young People's Plan does not fully reflect the extent of this work.

The joint area review made a number of recommendations which have relevance to service management; the majority of these have been addressed under the individual outcome areas. However, one recommendation was specifically regarding performance management.

### For action over the next six months

- Agree a framework for the performance management of the Children's Trust partnership, including for the comprehensive reporting of key activities and outcomes to track the implementation of the Children and Young People's Plan.

A framework has now been developed and there is much improved scrutiny of performance and increasingly effective use of data. Monitoring of performance is becoming embedded within the organisation. For example, senior managers monitor performance and budgets monthly and assess progress on action plans and as from September 2007 quarterly performance reports are being provided to elected members and the Trust Board.

A number of initiatives are at an early stage, and the council has yet to identify developmental milestones as a way of measuring progress. The council has

developed a detailed joint area review action plan, with lead officers identified and most completion dates in place. However, sustained high performance has yet to be demonstrated in some areas.

Unit costs for looked after children and young people in residential care are at a good level and much lower than the national average. However, expenditure on family support services is low and the proportion of expenditure on children in need is falling increasingly behind that of other councils.

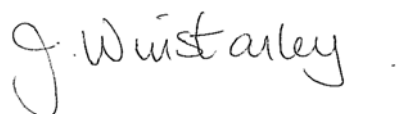
Recruitment and retention of teaching staff including senior staff is good. However, vacancy levels in social care have exceeded national averages for some time, and increased to over 25% of posts in 2006/07. The council is using a good range of strategies to improve recruitment and is also developing and rewarding its own staff to improve retention levels.

### **Areas for development**

- Ensure that sufficient resources are available to support preventative services.
- Reduce the number of social care vacancies.

The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment and will be published to the Audit Commission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager  
Local Services Inspection