Notice of Meeting

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 30 April 2013 - 6:00 pm
Committee Room 2, Town Hall, Barking

Members: Councillor G Letchford (Lead Member); Councillor T Perry (Deputy Lead Member); Councillor P Burgon, Councillor L Butt, Councillor R Douglas, Councillor A S Jamu, Councillor E Kangethe, Councillor B Poulton and Councillor A Salam

Co-opted Members (for education related matters): Faith Representatives: Reverend R Gayler (Church of England) and Mrs G Spencer (Roman Catholic Church); Parent Governor Representatives: Mrs Ghadeer Al-Salem Youssef (Primary); Mr Ishmael Ncube (Secondary); Youth Representative: Paul Cox

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Chief Executive

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AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Declaration of Members' Interests

   In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Members are asked to declare any interest they may have in any matter which is to be considered at this meeting.

3. Minutes - 20 March 2013 (Pages 1 - 7)

4. The Local Picture: Update on Evidence Gathering in Schools- Student Voice Review

   Members are asked to note that the evidence gathering from schools was completed recently and the report will be shared with Members once complete. This item is to allow the Corporate Director, Children's Services to provide a verbal summary of the findings.

5. Education Standards (Pages 9 - 11)

6. Children in Care Council (Skittlz) (Pages 13 - 29)
7. Children's Social Care Reviews (Pages 31 - 42)

8. Date of Next Meeting

12 June 2013 at 6.00pm
Committee Room 2, Town Hall, Barking

9. Any other public items which the Chair decides are urgent

10. To consider whether it would be appropriate to pass a resolution to exclude the public and press from the remainder of the meeting due to the nature of the business to be transacted.

Private Business

The public and press have a legal right to attend Council meetings such as the Children’s Services Select Committee, except where business is confidential or certain other sensitive information is to be discussed. The list below shows why items are in the private part of the agenda, with reference to the relevant legislation (the relevant paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended). There are no such items at the time of preparing this agenda.

11. Any other confidential or exempt items which the Chair decides are urgent
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 20 March 2013
(6:00 - 7:47 pm)

Present: Councillor G Letchford (Chair), Councillor P Burgon, Councillor L Butt, Councillor R Douglas, Councillor A S Jamu, Councillor E Kangethe, Councillor B Poulton and Councillor A Salam; Paul Cox

Apologies: Councillor T Perry, Mrs Ghadeer Al-Salem Youssef and Mr Ishmael Ncube

44. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

45. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 Feb were confirmed as correct.

46. The Local Picture: Verbal Update on Evidence Gathering in Schools

Anne Pepper, Principle Adviser, Secondary (PAS), provided a verbal update on the work being done to establish what role school councils play in promoting student voice in the Borough, as part of the Committee's in-depth review.

This involved working closely with different schools and asking them a variety of questions on how their school councils function. Officers working on this had about a five week window to work with schools, collate and analyse the data and, draw conclusions from it.

50 schools indicated that they would participate and visits were arranged with each school to draw out the evidence. Of the 50 visits, 42 had been undertaken to date and the remaining 8 visits would be rearranged after Easter, and so may not able to be included in the final report.

A summary report would be drafted to be completed, two weeks after the Easter holidays. Each visit has been evaluated using the Ofsted criteria of ‘outstanding’, ‘good’, ‘satisfactory/requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’. So far, none of the schools had been rated ‘outstanding’ in terms of their school councils’ functions; however, most had been rated ‘good’, some satisfactory/requiring improvement. None of those visited to date, have been rated as inadequate.

The evidence so far suggests that schools councils in primary schools are more resourceful and imaginative, and have moved on from basic topics such as toilets and food to intermediate areas such as the playground and school uniforms. A few were tackling more complex matters such as improving learning or safety and conduct. One school, for example, put up posters in response to behaviour of some parents in the playground which the children were not happy with.
Schools were generally very positive about taking part in this work and contributed
to recommendations which may be proposed in the report presenting the evidence
from this exercise. One thing that was already clear was that staff felt that further
local face to face training in supporting school councils was needed. They had
pointed to downloadable courses on the Schools Councils UK website.

It was evident that school councils were a real strength to their schools; however,
there were areas where further development would really help. Staff were
observed to provide substantial advice to the children and there were questions
around how much assistance they should provide in the selection process which
admitted children to the school council. Furthermore, school council activities had
apparent links to principles such as leadership and citizenship; however, these
needed to be more firmly embedded. Some schools worked on a 'you said; we did'
model which was particularly good.

The Corporate Director, Children's Services (CDCS) stated the 'you said we did'
model was very important as lack of reporting on what the school council was
doing about matters raised gave the impression that it served only a 'tokenistic'
purpose. Something Paul Cox, (who acted as the Youth Representative on this
Committee) had raised during this review was that when the recommendations of
school councils could not be implemented, it was crucial that the school explains
why to avoid creating an atmosphere of futility.

In response to questions, the PAS stated that a particularly good model at one
school was that pupils on the school council were appointed for two years so that
for example, a pupil in Year 1 elected to the school council would remain a school
councillor in Year 2, having shadowed their Year 2 peer in Year 1.

The PAS stated that school councils were very good at promoting their work and
reporting to the school what they had done about a given issue. However, they
needed to work on the time between when the matter had been raised with them
and the time they reported back to the rest of the school.

Members asked what methods schools councils used to report back on the issues
they had been looking at. The PAS stated this varied from school to school but
included reporting at school assembly, school council representatives reporting
back to their class or form and newsletters, for example.

Members enquired about the role of teachers in supporting school council
representatives. The PAS stated that teachers supported with matters such as
structuring the constitution, defining the remit of the school council and budget
setting.

Members expressed keen interest in the finer details of the work being done with
schools and its findings. Officers explained that this agenda item was to provide a
verbal summary of the work currently being done. There was a lot of evidence to
get through to bring together the findings from this review and once this is done,
officers would share the information with members who would then be able to use
the evidence for its Scrutiny Report on Student Voice. Officers would also give
consideration to whether the findings could be shared with stakeholders in a
different way, including via social media.
Sem Simkins, Trainer and Consultant from School Councils UK, introduced himself to the Committee and outlined his background.

He recommended the two following very useful resources in the field of school councils:

- *School Councils – School Improvement* (Prof. Lynn Davies and Hiromi Yamashita, University of Birmingham, 2007)

Mr Simkins shared a handout with those present, which was used to discuss his experiences of the effectiveness of school councils and facilitate a discussion with member. The discussion is outlined below.

**Pupil Voice (introduction)**

There were very clear reasons as to why schools should have school councils:
- Children's rights
- Active citizenship
- School improvement
- Personalisation

Model school councils are ones:
- That have ownership and responsibility
- That have a voice and a raised profile
- That have links to Personal, sexual, health education (PSHE) matters
- That operate on the principles of democracy and promote good citizenship
- That work in partnership
- That communicate well
- Where staff enlighten the perception of themselves with children

1. The "Perfect" School Council

The structure of the school council should form part of the school's teaching strategy. The whole basis of the school council is to serve and impact positively on all the pupils of the school.

Mr Simkins provided an example of work he did with a school in Hendon where he had used the analogy of a car to describe to the children how school councils work. The children understood that like petrol was needed to get the car moving, good school council reps were needed to make their school councils effective.

All pupils need time and space to meet and receive feedback from the representatives who attend school council meetings. It's often necessary for staff to let go and allow pupils to take ownership. Tutors need support and training to empower pupils. Schools councils should be a decision making body, responsible to relay what students have to say to staff.
There was a tendency in some primary schools to operate a 'decision-action' model whereby the pupils would identify the action that needed to be taken but the action itself would be taken by the teacher. Where appropriate, pupils should also be involved in taking action.

It was important that school councils were not seen as the sole responsibility of the link-teacher and there was input from all staff. The budget available to support the school council should be made clear.

Mr Simkins described an exercise he undertook with schools whereby he asked pupils to choose whether red, blue or green was their favourite colour and then move to the relevant marked space to indicate their preference. He observed that very few pupils ever said that they could not choose (because their favourite colour was not given as an option) and instead went along with what their peers did. He highlighted this to them and used it to explain to pupils that they should speak out if a viable option had not been put forward in their school council meetings. Another exercise involved asking pupils to name their favourite animal and explain their choice. This demonstrated that people could arrive at the same decision but for different reasons, and it was therefore important to explore the reasons behind people's support for a decision.

School council elections should be democratic and the best model was the secret ballot. In some schools the elections take place during break time with over 68% turnout, which was very positive and telling. Election information should spell out what role a school council representative will play and feedback following the election should be given. This was an area for weakness for some schools and one where tutors could provide more support by learning from practice.

It was important that school councils avoided a 'no-moans' culture and instead promoted a proactive one where pupils are motivated to do something about issues they are not happy with. Consistency in how staff across the school view the school council was particularly crucial for secondary schools and could be improved via training.

School councils should be holistic in who they involve and should include more than just pupils and teachers. There are good examples of schools liaising with their care takers and kitchen supervisors to resolve matters effectively.

School council should celebrate big and small successes such as pupils taking part in staff appointments.

2. Models for School Councils

Every school was unique and it was important to create a system that worked for it.

There were two models of school council and the appropriateness of each depends on the size of the school. Model A requires pupils to be elected to the relevant 'year council' (one to represent each year group). Representatives of the year council are then are then elected to the whole school council, which represents the whole school. Model B simply requires representatives from each year to sit on the whole school council and there is no 'year council' tier.
An advantage of Model A (and thereby a disadvantage of Model B) was that issues relevant to year seven may not be relevant to Year 11 pupils and therefore the year council provided a forum to discuss issues specific to that year, leaving the wider school council to deal with issues affecting everyone. A further disadvantage of Model B was that not all forms or classes would have direct representatives in the school council.

In response to questions, Paul Cox stated that at his School, there were 12 'student voice' representatives; two per year group. The representatives did well in communicating with their year and form groups. He and his peer were the two representatives for the Sixth Form and he was also the Chair of the School Council.

The CDCS stated that one of the questions was whether to go for continuity of membership on the school council to promote learning and development, over regular change in membership to allow a wider group of people the opportunity to be on the school council. Mr Simkins felt that on balance, continuity to an extent was more important to develop a key set of skills.

Mr Simkins enquired whether representatives who were members of the Youth Parliament also sat on their school councils. Paul Cox stated that every school in this Borough was represented in the Youth Parliament; however, the young people acting as their school's representatives were not necessarily on their school council.

Mr Simkins stated that the structure in Wales involved all schools having a school council, that fed into an 'area youth council', which reflected the Welsh Assembly model; however, this model was a particularly large scale one which may not be suitable for all.

**3. The Profile of School Councils and Communication**

The school council should have a high profile and to do this it needs to plan how it would communicate with year groups and staff. Some schools ensured a member of its Senior Management Team attended school council meetings, which sent out a resounding message.

The school council's profile may also be raised through the school handbook or prospectus to ensure all students including new ones, know the structure and their points of contact. The Notice Board was also a good way to promote the school council's work.

In this Borough, the Sydney Russell School Council used email to identify issues of concern. Some staff may feel wary about using emails due to the fear of pupils using email to send unsolicited messages; however in 2005, of the 1000 emails the School Council received, only 10 were considered inappropriate. It was about trusting pupils to use the facilities and opportunities correctly.

It was important to provide the school council with all relevant information so that it could make good decisions. The minutes and other forms of feedback should be consistent.
4. Using Pupil Voice to support school improvement and governance

Mr Simkins stated that from the earlier agenda item and the fact that he had been asked to come today to speak about school councils, it was evident that the Council was very serious about this issue- it was the first time he had been invited to a council meeting.

It was essential to have some mechanism to link the school council with the school's governing body. In one school the chair of the governing body joined a students' training session, which sent out an important message. The CDCS stated that this would be effective provided the chair listened, knew where to step back and congratulate. She also stated that one of the positive outcomes of the Student Voice review could be to enable school governors to ask their Senior Management Teams to ask to see what was being implemented to strengthen their schools councils.

Mr Simkins commented that he had observed that schools could often be seen as, and work as, isolated units. The CDCS stated that fortunately, this was not the case in this Borough as schools had signed up for strong partnership working with the Local Authority, which facilitated its close-working with the Barking and Dagenham (BAD) youth forum, made up pupils from different schools across the Borough.

Members commented that the role of parents also needed to be focussed on as without their support and encouragement it would be difficult for young people to have the enthusiasm and confidence required to be actively involved in their school councils. Mr Simkins stated that it was therefore important for schools to articulate to parents what role the school council plays and provide them with relevant information.

Members felt that more information about school councils should be shared across the Borough, as a lot of people were ignorant of them. Mr Simkins stated some ways to do this were parents' evenings, displaying information about the school council on notice boards at schools and working with local councillors.

Councillor Kangethe stated that as a teacher, she was concerned that in order to empower school councils, teachers needed to put in time, and needed support. Mr Simkins stated that staff time was an issue for many schools; however, schools which ensured that their school council was a part of their listening and speaking strategy, and acknowledged that the skills pupils picked up in being involved were general ones that could be applied to all subjects, had more chance of being successful.

Members felt that schools need to make it clear that young people would be listened to. It is very hard to engage even adults into being active in their communities; a lot of people had the view that it was boring and, children may also feel that way about their school. It was therefore important to shape school councils to become interesting places which make real differences.

Mr Simkins stated that some primary school children have very active roles on their school council in their final year but after their transition to secondary school, find that they have very little opportunity to have an input as their school was not aware of their previous role. The CDCS stated that again, fortunately, in this
Borough pupils did not appear to become disinterested at the secondary stage and this was evident in the activities of the BAD Youth Forum. Paul Cox stated that this was correct, young people themselves did not switch off; however, some senior staff held very conservative views about the roles of pupils in their schools, and the key for him was how to change their mindset.

Mr Simkins expressed regret that the new national curriculum could mean that a number of skills such as critical thinking, relating to school councils, would not get as much focus.

5. Closing comments

A novel way to give the school council a voice would be to schedule a few minutes for a school council representative to address staff at their staff meetings.

Councillor Kangethe stated that another possible way to give the school council more voice would be to dedicate at least one school assembly every year to receiving a talk or presentation from the school council on a matter that was important to pupils.

The CDCS stated that the young people in the Borough had been failed in the sense that although they had good qualifications, some of their skills such as speaking and presenting, had not been developed to their full potential, which made them less competitive at job interviews, for an example. This report on Student Voice was ultimately about improving opportunities for young people to have a voice within their school, which would have continuous benefits for them after leaving school.

48. Date of Next Meeting

Noted.
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Summary of the Borough’s Performance in the summer 2012 Public Examinations and National Tests – Primary and Secondary Schools

Report of the Corporate Director, Children's Services

Open Report

Report Author: Jane Hargreaves, Divisional Director Education

For Information

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Accountable Divisional Director: Jane Hargreaves, Divisional Director Education

Accountable Director: Helen Jenner, Children's Services

Summary:

This report provides a summary of the borough’s performance in national assessments and examinations from age 5 to 18. It provides information on trends, national and local comparisons and key issues.

Recommendation

The Select Committee is asked to note the report.

Reason(s)

The issues in this report are linked to the “Better Future” in the Council's Policy House theme, and specifically the following priorities:

- A borough with excellent and improving attainment through education and training.
- A borough with excellent schools, constantly improving and which are growing to meet the demands for pupil places.

1 Background

1.1 The current government national floor standards for attainment are:

- At Key Stage 2, 60% in the joint Level 4+ in both English and mathematics.
- At GCSE, 40% for 5A*-C including English and mathematics.

The intention is to further raise all the floor standards over time and to restrict the qualifications that are included at Key Stage 4, to only or mainly GCSEs.
The floor standards also include measures for levels of progress. Schools below the floor standards are at risk of being subject to structural interventions such as enforced Academy status.

The national problems this year around the changes made to grade boundaries in GCSE English between January and June have been well publicised. In Barking and Dagenham this has affected around 170 young people (8% of the cohort) who have achieved a grade D in English rather than the grade C forecast.

2 Primary Phase

2.1 Headline measures of performance in the Early Years Foundation Stage (by age 5) and Key Stage 1 (age 7) are improving steadily.

2.2 For five year olds the two priority areas of learning, personal, social and emotional development (PSED) and communication, language and literacy (CLLD) have both improved on last year’s performance by 2% and 6% respectively. 82% of pupils achieved 6 or above in all elements of PSED and 63% in CLLD. Both scores are slightly above last year’s average.

2.3 Another key indicator for the Early Years Foundation Stage is the percentage gap between the average score of pupils in the lowest 20% and the median (50th percentile). This narrowed further from 32% in 2011 to 30% in 2012 and is now in line with the national gap.

2.4 Level 2B remains the level children are expected to reach by the end of Key Stage 1 (age 7). The percentage of pupils achieving this level has improved well in reading, writing and mathematics. For the 3 areas the local authority performance remains in line with national average levels for 2012.

2.5 At level 3 or above (above average performance), there has been very slight improvement in reading and mathematics, whilst writing has remained the same. All are still below the 2012 national figures, by 4 percentage points in reading, 2 in writing and 3 in mathematics. Securing improvements at these higher levels including at L2A+, remains a key area for improvement within the local authority.

2.6 Outcomes at Key Stage 2 (age 11), have made substantial improvements, across all subjects at both Level 4+ and Level 5+. The percentage of pupils achieving Level 4+ in English and mathematics has improved considerably from 71% in 2011 to 78% in 2012. Nationally 79% of children achieve Level 4+ in English and mathematics. This shows the borough has narrowed the gap with the national to within 1%.

2.7 At Level 5 or above (above average performance), there has been strong improvement in all three areas: reading and writing are each up by 7 percentage points and mathematics by 4. However, national figures have increased at the same rate so we remain below the national by between 3 and 6%. As in KS1 securing improvements at these higher levels remains a key area for improvement within the local authority.

2.8 Two primary schools are below the government floor standard of 60% for the joint Level 4 or above in both English and mathematics. A further 9 schools near or below the floor standard in 2011 have made considerable improvements this year.

3 Secondary Phase

Headline indicators have continued to improve at both Key Stage 4 and Post 16 for the sixth year.
3.1 GCSE

- The headline A*-C including English and mathematics indicator has risen by 1.4% to 58.6%. This is a much more modest increase than forecast owing to the impact on five schools of the changes to English grade boundaries between the January and June examinations.
- This rise, albeit modest was greater than the national rise of 0.4% to 59.4%. As a result the performance gap has closed since 2011.
- The 5A*-C measure at 83.3% has risen by 2.1% and is above this year’s national average of 81.8%.
- Results in English and mathematics GCSE are above the national average - in mathematics for the first time.
- A and A* performance has improved by 1% against a 3% fall nationally. LBBD pupils are still well below the national on this indicator which is a priority for schools.
- Performance at A*-G has fallen.

3.2 GCE A Level / Level 3

- 2012 has seen another year of improving results, with the overall A*-C pass rate rising from 69% to 71% - beating last year’s previous best performance. This represents six years of improvement on this indicator.
- A*-C pass rates for A level saw rises of about 5% or more in 4 schools (Eastbrook, Eastbury, Jo Richardson and Robert Clack).
- A*-C pass rates for A level for one school (All Saints) is 78%. Another 5 schools are around 70% and above (Barking Abbey, Eastbrook, Eastbury, Jo Richardson, and Sydney Russell). This year’s national average was 77%.
- The overall A*-E pass rate also rose slightly to 98.5% - just below this year’s national average. One school (All Saints) maintained its 100% pass rate on this indicator for the fourth year in succession and three other schools (Eastbrook, Robert Clack, and Warren) also reached 100%.
- Top grades (A*/A) fell from the higher figures in 2010 and 2011; this followed the national trend which is also down slightly by 0.2%.
- The two main headline point score measures – average points per entry and average points per pupil which include equivalences- are both showing a drop compared to last year to 203.2 and 655.7 respectively. Both measures have also fallen nationally since 2011.

4 Priorities for the Borough

- Reaching national average performance in schools, where this has not already been achieved.
- Raising performance in lower performing schools to close the gap between highest and lowest outcomes for young people; eliminating performance below the KS2 floor standard.
- Improving the proportion of children and young people achieving higher levels and grades in national assessments and tests.

The three priorities above are well established and the improvement trend indicates that schools and local authority officers are working together effectively in partnership.
Title: The work of our Children in Care Council (Skittlz)

Report of the Corporate Director

Open Report For Information

Report Author: Kevin Donovan, Children’s Rights, Participation and Engagement Manager

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Accountable Divisional Director: Christine Pryor, Divisional Director: Targeted Support

Accountable Director: Helen Jenner, Corporate Director of Children Services

Summary:

This report is to inform Children Services Select Committee of the work of our Children in Care Council (CICC) Skittlz.

The CICC is a group of young people who are in Care and who meet fortnightly. They talk with professionals within and beyond Social Care as well as Members, who are there to find out what the young people need and how services for Looked After Children can be improved. The young people inform the Local Authority as a corporate parent how they can make being in care better for them and other young people and children. The CICC is a mechanism for young people to get their ideas across to those who are responsible for their care in Barking and Dagenham. The CICC also makes representations nationally, and inputs into national consultations. The Local Authority has a statutory requirement to have a CICC.

The report’s content details the work of the CICC to date and highlights a number of their achievements since its inception.

Recommendation(s)

The Select Committee is asked to note the report and:

(i) endorse the contents of this report and support the work of the Children in Care Council and
(ii) make suggestions on how the Children in Care Council can better inform Barking and Dagenham’s role as a corporate parent.

Reason(s)

As well as being a statutory function, an active Children in Care Council strongly supports a number of objectives within the Council’s Children and Young People’s plan, principally to:
• strengthen multi-agency practices to protect children;
• improve outcomes of children in care;
• improve outcomes and choices for all children and young people, including vulnerable groups;
• empower children and young people to realise their aspiration through positive activities and decision-making in school and the local community;
• increase the emotional health, wellbeing and resilience of children and young people, with a strong focus on children in care.

In addition, the work of the Children in Care Council is key to successfully delivering aspects of the Local Authority’s action plan following the 2012 Safeguarding Inspection from Ofsted.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 A child’s wishes and feelings should be ascertained before making decisions affecting them and their care, and a written record of their wishes and feelings should be maintained - as stipulated in section 22 of the 1989 Children’s Act. The Care Matters agenda and the Children and Young People’s Bill 2007 highlighted the need for the right structure to be in place to enable children and young people to receive high quality care and support. It also highlighted that those entering the care system should be able to share the same aspirations as those in supportive family homes. The White Paper had set out that every local authority must set up a "children in care council", where looked-after children can give their views and influence service provision.

1.2 In order for young people’s views to be heard and for a direct dialogue to occur with Corporate Parents, Barking and Dagenham established their Children in Care Council in 2007. A number of planning sessions occurred with the young persons’ representatives who decided that Barking and Dagenham’s Children in Care Council should be named ‘Skittlz’. The name was chosen by young people to demonstrate that, as Children in Care, they have the resilience to get back up whenever they’re knocked down in life. The group is supported by a lead worker and has access to a budget, as well as making decisions that have financial implications as well as implications around social work practice.

1.3 The group currently has ten members, ranging in age from 9-21. Children in Care are recruited to Skittlz via the Children’s Rights and Participation Team within Integrated Youth Services. The Participation Officer, the lead worker for the group, regularly visits social care teams, and attends foster carer conferences. It is promoted quarterly in ‘Home and Away’, the borough’s newsletter for LAC, as well as on Careweb.tv, Barking and Dagenham’s website for LAC. The Participation Officer is additionally scheduled to spend a morning, and an afternoon a week with Care Management to further promote the work of the group and to better integrate its work with that of social care.
1.4 The Children in Care Council encourage views and participation from non-members in a number of different ways. They produce an annual questionnaire which is posted out to all CiC, with their responses shaping the work of the CICC (see appendix 1). In addition, the Children’s Rights and Participation Team have recently reintroduced out of borough ‘have your say’ days entitled ‘Out of sight, In mind’ across four locations regionally. All Looked After Children are encouraged to submit any issues for discussion at Skittlz via the quarterly ‘Home and Away’ newsletter as well as through careweb.tv. Links between Skittlz and our 7-11 and 12-16 youth groups for Children in Care are strong, with members sitting on both and using them to conduct wider consultation.

2. Proposal and Issues

2.1 Key achievements

Skittlz have been involved in a number of local and national developments and consultations, which have helped to improve the quality of their care and inform the Council’s role as a Corporate Parent. These are outlined here.

2.1.1 Ofsted’s inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in Barking and Dagenham in 2012 gave the recommendation that the Children in Care Council should review and revise the Council’s Looked After Children Pledge. A period of thorough consultation followed, involving the Children in Care Council and Corporate Parenting Group, resulting in the recent publication of the new Barking and Dagenham Children in Care Pledge or ‘Promises’ (see appendix 2). A graphic designer is now working with the CICC to produce a young person-friendly version.

2.1.2 The CICC reported varied experiences of CiC review meetings, and were keen to make them more meaningful and personalised. Through an extended period of consultation, the CICC designed, developed and promoted the ‘menu of choice’ (see appendix 3). This document, which is sent to all LAC prior to reviews, allows children and young people to decide how their review should take place.

2.1.3 Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are a statutory requirement for all Looked After Children. The CICC reviewed this document to ascertain its effectiveness. This led onto further discussions with Social Work teams, as the CICC discovered that reviews and PEP’s were being completed at the same time. Consultation with other Children in Care, highlighted that some children would like these completed separately. The outcome was that options would be included on the ‘menu of choice’ so children and young people who did not want to complete these meetings together are aware they have a choice between the two.

2.1.4 In 2012, The CICC met with Kat Cooper, Community Safety Coordinator from Adult and Community Services, to discuss questions they wanted to ask the Council Leader regarding Council savings. This helped ensure that the views of Looked After Children around savings were represented.

2.1.5 The CICC have reviewed our Children in Care Guide, that is given to all children and young people that come into care. In addition, they have provided consultation support for the development of our CiC website (www.careweb.tv) with regards to colour, layout and content. The new website was launched in 2012, and work is
nearly complete to allow CiC to input into reviews electronically, via the website (see appendix 4). This has come from requests from CiC and will be an exciting development.

2.1.6 In order to create an ongoing dialogue between Looked After Children, the CICC and social work professionals, the CICC support and co-facilitate our Participation Champions Meeting. Launched in 2012, this group is attended by representatives of all social work teams in Children’s Services, as well as the Divisional Director. The group acts as a sounding board for the CICC. It provides opportunities for staff and children and young people to discuss practice, social care issues and a chance for professionals and young people to work together. These meetings have also been used to look at the Munroe recommendations and how these recommendations can work in practice.

2.2 **Link with Corporate Parent Panel and governance**

The CICC reports directly to the Member’s Corporate Parenting Group, with a least one CICC member attending the meeting bi-monthly, supported by the Children’s Rights, Participation and Engagement Manager. The Member’s Corporate Parenting Group Chair regularly attends the CICC to gain an understanding of the work the young people do. In addition, the Lead Member for Children’s Services and the Corporate Director for Children’s Services have both visited the CICC on several occasions and take a keen interest in its work.

2.2.1 Outcomes of work of the CICC are additionally monitored through the Headline Engagement Report. Produced twice a year, this report summarises the work of the Council’s various engagement fora and provides implications for the Children’s Trust. It is sent to all Divisional Directors within Children’s Services, as well as key stakeholders.

2.3 **National Initiatives**

Members of our CICC have been proactive in a number of national initiatives. These include:

- previously active Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) National Youth Advisory Panel members; supporting the organisation with their tendering process;

- ‘Don’t Write Us Off’ campaign, in partnership with the Who Care’s Trust;

- Children in Care Council national meetings with then Children’s Minister Tim Loughton, to discuss what funding CiCC receive and the vision that the Minister had for the future;

- consultation with Ofsted on how can we make Children’s Services better through inspections and the inspections process;

- consultation event with the Children’s Rights Director of England and the Children’s Commissioner regarding the future of children’s rights;
• Open Space Event in Birmingham attended by two CICC members, leading discussion groups covering a whole wealth of areas including preparing for independence, reviews, education, foster care, children in care councils;

• CICC members were invited to attend and present three Awards at the Children and Young People Now Awards;

• One member of the CICC was chosen to be a torch bearer for the 2012 Olympic Games;

• A number of CICC members are a part of the Young People’s Panel for the Children’s Rights Director of England, allowing them to feed in directly regarding issues effecting them and their care;

• CICC members were also part of the Legacy Youth Panel to support decisions regarding what happens to the Olympic site following the games.

2.4 Comparison with the National Picture

2.4.1 According to the organisation A National Voice, out of the 152 Local Authorities, 147 have fully functioning Children in Care Council, with 76% reporting regularly to their Corporate Parenting Board.

2.4.2 Of the participating Local Authorities which took part in a scoping report led by A National Voice, 30% were not clear whether they had a dedicated budget assigned to their CICC. It is therefore positive that the Barking and Dagenham CICC has a budget. This budget is to promote the work of the CICC and influence service improvement. The CICC have also had a say in various developments that have financial implications, for example the development of Careweb.

2.4.3 Nationally, 35% of CICC reported that they had difficulty in getting their Lead Member or Director to attend CICC meetings. It is a strength in Barking and Dagenham that they both regularly attend and contribute to the CICC meetings which, in turn, has helped young people form relationships and gain an understanding of their role.

2.4.4 The vast majority of the CICCs were chaired predominantly by a young person. Therefore, to fully empower young people, Barking and Dagenham CICC will be supporting a young person chair to take on this role over the coming year. In addition, the Child’s Right Director for England recommends that a Children in Care Council should comprise 12 young people. Skittlz falls just short of this recruitment target and we must make a concerted effort to meet this recommendation and exceed it.

2.4.5 Some common challenges nationally included ensuring that the CICC reached out of borough looked after children, measuring success and impact of the work undertaken and ensuring clear messages were fed back to Social Care. Barking and Dagenham’s CICC has encountered some similar difficulties. The ‘Out of Sight, In mind’ and ‘Home and Away’ newsletter are effective ways in reaching young people in out of authority placements but we need to be pro actively encouraging
young people to contribute to the CICC and this will be an area for development over the next six months.

It is important that social care take the messages back to front line practitioners so that practice can be improved. The Participation Champions Meetings has a dedicated Social Care Divisional Director in attendance at the Steering Group Meetings and a Senior Practitioner for Children in Care. IROs are crucial to the success of the CICC as they have daily contact with Looked After Children. The Senior Practitioner role is to ensure messages are fed back to IRO’s and social care practitioners.

2.5 Future development

2.5.1 In addition the challenges and priorities set out above, the CICC has number of other areas for future development:

- further meetings/consultations with the Children’s Minister;
- further partnership working with the BAD Youth Forum;
- consultation and creation of the ‘Health Passport’ for CIC and Care Leavers;
- direct involvement and development of a support group to assist CIC through court processes;
- developing confidence and skills in challenging decision making. This will be further enhanced by the development of a young person chair to lead on the key areas and encourage participation from the other members.

2.5.2 Whilst there are a number of ways in which non-CICC members can input into the work of the group, it is recognised that Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) are not used enough to channel issues in. We plan to put systems in place to ensure that IRO’s promote the work of Skittlz at the Review stage, and see if there are any young people interested in becoming members or wanting to feed in their ideas.

2.6 Conclusion

The CICC has matured since its inception in 2007 and is now actively influencing practice and service development at both strategic and operational levels. This is both locally and nationally. The CICC share the same aspirations as Barking Dagenham as a Corporate Parent, i.e. to improve outcomes for CIC and work to improve educational outcomes and quality of care. A strong focus on outcomes and measuring impact remain the key priorities. The all-new Pledge is a key safeguarding mechanism to ensure CIC are championed and can speak directly on the issues affecting their life chances.

3. Options Appraisal

None

4. Other Implications
4.1 Safeguarding Children

The work of the Children in Care Council undoubtedly plays a vital role in helping to safeguard our most vulnerable children and young people. In addition to undertaking single pieces of consultation, most important of all is facilitating an open and ongoing dialogue between Looked After Children and Barking and Dagenham Council as a corporate parent.

Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services – London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (Ofsted, 2012).

Children in Care Mapping Project 2010-2011 (A National Voice, 2011)

List of appendices:

Appendix 1 – Skittlz 2012-2013 consultation.
Appendix 2 – Barking and Dagenham Children in Care Promises.
Appendix 3 – Barking and Dagenham Menu of Choice.
Appendix 4 – Screenshot from www.careweb.tv.
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CONSULTATION 2012/13

After a lot of thought and conversations with other children and young people in care, Skittlz have put together this questionnaire to help Children Services understand what’s important to us, and to help us work with our Corporate Parents on improving the care experience of children and young people in care of Barking & Dagenham.

Placements/Foster Care/Home:

1a, What makes you feel safe in your home? (Please write your answers below)

• ________________
• ________________
• ________________

1b, If you had a problem in your placement; do you have someone you can speak to about it? If so, who do you tell?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

1c, If you have had an issue, were you happy with how the issue(s) were resolved? (Please circle)

• YES
• NO

1d, If you were unhappy with how the situation was resolved, what do you think should have happened to make it better?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

1e, What do you think would help children and young people in care, settle into a new placement?
1f. What do you think makes a home feel like home? What would make you feel part of a family, when the person/people you are living with are not your family?

Contact:
2a. If you have contact with your family, are you happy with the contact arrangements?
   • YES
   • NO

2b. If you said NO, what do you not like about your contact arrangements? (For example, the place where I have contact, how often I have contact, I don’t want to go to contact anymore) (Please list)

   If you said YES, what are you happy about with contact?
   •
   •
   •

Social Worker:
3a. Are you happy with how often you see your Social Worker?
   • YES
   • NO

3b. How often would you like to see your Social Worker?

3c. What do you think makes a good Social Worker?
   •
   •
   •
3d, What are the things that you like least about your Social Worker, If anything?
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

3e, What are the things you like most about your Social Worker?
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Lastly ........

Please tell us 3 things that would make the biggest difference to your life?

•  __________________________________________________________
•  __________________________________________________________
•  __________________________________________________________

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE 😊
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Promises to Our Children in Care

Everyone at the Council wants to do their best to support young people who are in our care. Our promises to you will help us to make sure that all children and young people in care are looked after well. Our promises include a number of things we will do that will help make sure that your time in care is a positive experience.

To make sure you get the best care we promise to:

- give you your own social worker and tell you who you can contact when they are not available;
- Involve the Children in Care Council (Skittlz) in reviewing how well we are keeping our promises to you;
- make sure that adults, such as carers and workers, get the right training to understand the issues that affect children in care;
- talk to you about when you and your family can see or contact each other and support travel arrangements: if you can't see or contact your family we will tell you why;
- keep brothers and sisters together, wherever possible;
- make sure you meet with an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) before your review so you can share your thoughts about your care;
- share the good things that you have done in your review and discuss issues you feel are important;
- support you to make a complaint if you need to;
- provide a Children’s Rights Service and an independent advocate to speak for you if you want them to.

To look after you and treat you well we promise to:

- make sure your social worker doesn’t change unless there is a good reason for it;
- make sure your social worker stays in touch and visits you regularly to see how you are;
- write a care plan which is all about you and your needs and which is looked at regularly;
- listen to you, be honest and take notice of what you want;
- talk to you about why decisions are made and explain this clearly in a way you can understand;
- make sure you are in a placement that is suitable for you.

Barking and Dagenham Children in care Pledge Revised March 2013
To help you be healthy we promise to:

- make sure you have regular health, dental and eye check-ups;
- make sure you have opportunities to do fun things and get to know other children in care;
- provide allowances for you to do activities and access our Leisure Centres for free if you are a care leaver.

To get the best education we promise to:

- make sure that you have a place at a good nursery or school that will help you to do your best;
- work with your school and designated teacher to help you do your best by having a personal education plan;
- help you to get on the courses you want to study;
- celebrate your achievements and successes.

To be successful in life we promise to:

- make sure that you are asked about important decisions which affect your life;
- make sure that when you move from one service to another or leave our care that there is a plan in place that is suitable for you;
- provide you with support to live independently when you’re ready;
- make sure you leave care with your savings;
- help you learn to manage money well;
- help you get ready for the world of work, find a job or training placement.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Children’s Rights and Participation Team should you have any questions or queries 020 8227 3760
Review
Menu of Choice

Your menu choices show your rights in deciding how you want your review to be.

Attend the whole meeting

Attend beginning of the meeting

Attend end of meeting

Phone before meeting

Phone after meeting

Not in school hours

Do not want to attend at all

I would like an advocate

I would like to use a code word in the meeting

I would like some other people at my meeting

Please indicate your choices above by circling the diagram.

Your choices will be used as a tool to make changes and improve your Review.
Child/Young Person’s name:


Your Review is on:


Your Review will be held at:


The name of your Reviewing Officer is:


You can contact your Reviewing Officer on:


We need this form back by:

(Please use the freepost envelope provided)

Would you like your Review meeting and your PEP (Personal Education Plan Meeting) to be completed separately?

No

Yes
**Title:** Children’s Social Care Review Report

**Report of the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Report</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Report Author:</strong> Chris Martin, Divisional Director Complex Needs and Social Care</td>
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<td><strong>Accountable Divisional Director:</strong> Chris Martin, Divisional Director Complex Needs and Social Care</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Accountable Corporate Director:</strong> Helen Jenner, Corporate Director, Children’s Services</td>
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**Summary:**

This report went to Cabinet in March 2013 and is provided to the Children's Services Select Committee (CSSC) for its information and comment. It provides a review of significant operational service developments and inspections over the past 18 months within the Complex Needs and Social Care teams within Children's Services. The report provides a high level summary of action taken in response to inspections, namely, the Fostering Service Inspection, the Adoption Agency Inspection and the full service Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection. The report describes the positive outcomes of these inspections, namely:

- ‘Outstanding’ for our fostering service,
- ‘Good’ for our adoption agency,
- ‘Good’ overall for safeguarding and
- ‘Adequate’ on a multi agency basis with regard to services for looked after children.

The report illustrates that at a time of fiscal challenge and increasing demand, through a growing young children’s population, these Inspection judgements are a positive reflection of local services.

The report includes details of the work of the Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board and areas of service improvement including the introduction of our Triage and Assessment service and the implementation of our local Quality Assurance Strategy.

The report also provides more specific details regarding the Council’s looked after children’s population, including some key performance indicators linked to placement availability and performance targets for the future.

Corporate Parenting arrangements were a particular area identified within the inspection report that required strengthening. Whilst this had been recognised prior to the inspection itself, improvements to our corporate parenting arrangements were not sufficiently embedded for positive change to be recognised. This report describes our current, revised corporate parenting arrangements as well as the roles of elected members with assigned portfolio leads, within our corporate parenting responsibilities.
1. **Introduction and Background**

1.1 The Complex Needs and Social Care Division comprises of three integrated service areas each with a Group Manager lead. The Assessment and Care Management Service, the Fostering, Adoption and Looked After Children Service and the Disabled Children and Special Educational Needs Service.

1.2 The Division has operational responsibility for all child protection and looked after children’s services and more recently has included Special Educational Needs (SEN) services in response to the government’s SEN Green Paper and the need for local authorities to implement more integrated assessment and support options for families who care for children with disabilities.

1.3 The division is committed to:

- Earlier intervention and prevention through our own Prevention Service and via close operational relationships with colleagues provide targeted and universal support.
- Reducing the proportion of the child population who are looked after.
- Minimising the duration of Child Protection Plans.
- Strong means of engagement with young people and their families so that they can ‘shape’ future services.

2. **Safeguarding**

2.1 The Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board completed its 6th annual report this financial year (Appendix 1). Significant developments included:-

- The appointment of a new independent chair.
- The publishing of the Child T Serious Case Review, including action plan and training events.
- Board level focus upon the safeguarding of children and families across the changing landscape within local health services.
- Recruitment of lay members to enhance community engagement.
- Revision of board membership to better reflect the partnership across Barking and Dagenham.

2.2 Future Barking & Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board (B&DLSCB) priorities include:-

- Development of roles and responsibilities of B&DLSCB members.

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**Recommendation(s)**

The CSSC is asked to note the Report.

**Reason(s)**

- This Report is presented for the CSSC’s information.
Engaging more directly with young people, families and faith communities across the Borough
- Specific board focus upon preventing trafficking and sexual exploitation of children and young people
- Joint work with the Safeguarding Adult Board to support improving outcomes for families

2.3 To improve safeguarding practice the Assessment & Care Management Service completed the implementation of the ‘Triage and Assessment Service’ in April of this year. The re-organisation of the social care ‘front door’ had been piloted from August 2011 to February 2012 and with some minor adjustments proved to be ready for full operational implementation at the start of the financial year.

2.4 The implementation of the Triage and Assessment Service has brought a number of improvements:
- Improved information sharing to effectively identify risk and ensure families get the most appropriate services
- Improved timeliness of core assessments
- Improved responses to partners and referring agencies, in particular schools
- An effective multi-agency process to ensure appropriate responses via the inclusion of health professionals, housing colleagues, targeted services etc. within the triage team
- Maximising the impact of resources on preventing poor outcomes
- Better access to support for families as Triage acts as a pathway to both targeted and specialist services
- Closer working relationships with Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals University Trust (BHRUT) via dedicated hospital social worker within the assessments team
- More robust casework for ‘no recourse to public funds’ (NRPF) families through dedicated social worker in the assessment team

2.5 Quality Assurance Strategy – this year we have also implemented our Quality Assurance Strategy ‘Building a Better Life for All’ (Appendix 2). The strategy itself will help demonstrate the progress made around the top priorities set by the Children’s Trust Board which carries with it a clear safeguarding priority. The five Trust priorities are:-
- Ensure children and young people in our Borough are safe.
- Narrow the gap, raising attainment and realising aspiration for every child.
- Improve health and well-being, with a particular focus upon obesity and sexual health.
- Improve support, via fully integrated services, for children and young people.
- Challenge child poverty.

2.6 The strategy itself also links to our improvement plan, Project SURE, which seeks to strengthen supervision, improve our understanding of families through quality assessments, improve the quality of recording and case analysis and ensure effectiveness of interventions by measuring outcomes.
2.7 The strategy provides a schedule of case file audits which are run across a 12 month cycle. They include:-

- Quarterly case file audits – involving the directorate and corporate management team undertaking a schedule of case file audits alongside the allocated social worker
- Supervision file audit – the Quality Assurance Manager to undertake a 6-monthly sample of supervision files
- Themed audits – each year there will be three themed audits overseen by the Child Protection and Reviewing Service
- Multi Agency Audits – case file audits which include the contribution of all partners engaged with particular families

2.8 Findings from the audit scheduled are shared with directorate and divisional management teams as well as the Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board. Individual action plans identifying improvements are also provided and these findings also contribute to the overall improvement plan, Project SURE.

3. Looked After Children

Scrutiny of performance with regards to children looked after by the Borough has come in the form of several inspections over the past 12 to 18 months. In this time period both Fostering and Adoption services have been subjected to individual OFSTED inspections. In this period we have also participated in a ‘thematic’ OFSTED inspection exploring the effectiveness of our virtual head teacher and support for looked after children with regards to their academic attainment. These individual inspections also contributed to the work of the Safeguarding and Looked after Children Inspection in June 2012. Progress against improvement actions identified from these inspections has been reviewed by the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children’s Select Committee.

3.1 Children in Care Placement Availability Review – our annual review of children in care was drafted in July 2012 and provides evidence of an improving service area for looked after children in the Borough (Appendix 3).

Headline findings are:-

- Looked after population increased from 411 in March 2011 to 427 in March 2012. Whilst an overall increase this represents a stabilisation of the ‘in care’ population. This position has been sustained throughout the year and children in care numbers at October 2012 show a slight reduction to 423.
- An increasing number of young people are cared for via foster carers (approx 80% of the children in care population)
- Over 50% of all children in care are placed within the Borough foster carers, which is an improving position (209 in March 2011 compared to 242 in March 2012)
- Improved performance regarding the approval and availability of adopters, 39 in 2011/12 compared to 26 in 2010/11
- Numbers of young people in residential continued to reduce, 22 in total in October 2012 (compared to 38 in March 2011 and 29 in March 2012) and only 8 in high cost residential long stay units. This indicates a range of successful performance in relation to placement identification and support but also includes
the contribution of our specialist fostering service Pitstop and our Prevention service, both of whom prevent young people entering high cost care options

3.2 Future actions regarding looked after children capacity during 2012/13 include:-

- Fostering team to ensure a net gain of 20+ foster carers.
- Adoption service to approve 20+ adoptive parents.
- Seek the support of housing colleagues to identify creative options whereby young people in out-of-borough high cost placements can be brought back to the Borough via the provision of suitable accommodation and support.

3.3 Barking and Dagenham Adoption Agency was inspected by Ofsted over four days in 2012. The service received an overall quality rating of good and more specifically an outstanding judgement for safeguarding children.

3.4 In particular the inspection found that, "This is a good adoption agency with some outstanding features. It is ambitious in considering adoption as a placement choice for all children, where this is appropriate, and it is successful in placing children promptly in stable, secure family situations, where their safety, health and well-being are fully promoted." To quote an adopter: 'They want the best for the children.'

3.5 Significant strengths include working with siblings who are being placed for adoption, to ensure they understand what is happening and can express their views in a safe therapeutic environment.

3.6 Areas for improvement included:-

- Documenting and evaluating adoption support
- Using the views of children to develop the adoption service
- Insufficient staff to provide a timely post adoption service to adults
- The quality assurance functions of the panel and its decision-making process

3.7 All areas of improvement have been listed in the adoption agency action plan 2012/13, which also includes revised adoption regulations that became mandatory in September 2012 and are aimed at ‘speeding up’ the adoption process and removing some of the responsibilities of adoption panels. In particular the fact that adoption panels no longer consider whether a child should be placed for adoption. Such requests are now submitted to the Agency Decision Maker (Divisional Director Complex Needs and Social Care ) for decision.

3.8 It is worth highlighting that the field of adoption is currently undergoing unprecedented changes that will affect the way we work for many years to come. It is very evident that the Government attaches a great deal of importance on improving the adoption system and the impact that delay has on children. There is a strong political lead from the government to increase the number of adoptions as a positive option for some children in care in a number of ways, many of which come into effect in 2012/13. This includes the introduction of adoption scorecards and direct scrutiny from the Department for Education. In particular, the amount of time taken between a child starting to be looked after and their placement for adoption will prove to be a significant indicator. The adoption action plan includes a
number of measures aimed at improving this performance some of which have already contributed to a measurable improvement (Appendices 4 and 5).

3.9 The Borough’s Fostering Service was subject to a full Ofsted inspection in June 2011. The service was judged overall to be outstanding. All individual judgements, including safeguarding, were also outstanding.

3.10 The inspection used the five Every Child Matters outcomes framework and headline findings included:-

Be Healthy:
- Child and Adolescent mental Health Services integration – very positive support provided to young people
- Strong relationships with local community based health services provided by the NHS North East London Foundation Trust

Stay Safe:
- A strong and well regarded multi-agency training programme
- A strong Local Safeguarding Children’s Board training programme
- Pitstop project – effective strategy to manage high risk young people and reduce costs associated with residential care
- Low numbers of children missing from care

Enjoy and Achieve:
- 27 young people at university who are care leavers
- Placement stability very good
- Reduced numbers of school exclusions for looked after children
- Increased leisure opportunities for looked after children

Make a Positive Contribution:
- Excellent examples of engagement with young people
- In-house foster carers provide a high value for money service
- Placement preparation is a real strength within the team

Achieve Economic Wellbeing:
- Leaving care service provides good support for young people who are well prepared for adult life
- Suitable accommodation for care leavers has also improved

3.11 Being an outstanding inspection there were very few areas requiring immediate attention and in need of improvement, but those areas of significance noted in the inspection included:-

- Revision and update of the ‘Foster Carers Handbook’ (Appendix 6)
- Development of the Short Breaks fostering scheme for children with disabilities
- Benchmarking exercise to compare fostering allowances with other local authorities

3.12 The fostering team subsequently developed an action plan which encompassed these areas of improvement as well themes identified within the service area itself.
The action plan includes priorities such as:-

- Implementation of Connected Persons Policy
- Recruitment of five additional Short Breaks fostering scheme carers for children with disabilities
- Train and support an indentified cohort of foster carers to supervise contact arrangements with parents and thus save potential costs associated with contact provision
- Recruit net gain of 20 foster carers across the financial year
- Reduce levels of independent fostering agency usage and increase the numbers of transfers of carers from Independent Fostering Agencies to ‘in house’ foster carers(target of 5 for financial year)

4. Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection

4.1 Barking and Dagenham Children’s Services Directorate were subject to a full service Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection between 11 and 22 June 2012. The outcomes of the inspection were reviewed by Cabinet members and the Children’s Select Committee. This inspection, being part of a 3-year cycle across all local authorities, explored all provision to safeguard children and to support children already looked after, scrutinising practice across all agencies.

4.2 The outcomes for the inspection were positive; services to safeguard children being judged as good and services for looked after children judged as adequate. There were also a number of recommendations made by the inspection team and these recommendations have required actions from all partners, including NHS and Metropolitan Police Service colleagues. (The inspection report itself is included as Appendix 7).

4.3 The draft action plan has subsequently been improved with further contributions from partner agencies. The action plan itself has been agreed by the multi agency local Inspection Preparation Board and progress is monitored regularly through this forum (Appendix 7a) and reported to the Children’s Trust and Children’s Select Committee.

4.4 The inspection highlighted areas in need of immediate attention within both safeguarding and looked after children judgements. In particular for safeguarding children these included:-

- Improve the quality and timeliness of record keeping so that the key issues in cases are clear and progress can be monitored.
- Ensure that cases referred to the Multi Agency Locality Teams contain clear assessment of risk and that information sharing is compliant with national and local protocols

4.5 Progress thus far for these actions:-

- The quality and timeliness of record keeping has been improved so that the key issues in cases are clear and progress can be monitored
- Implementation of our QA strategy as discussed above. The QA strategy is crucial in monitoring progress around improvements to recording but also to inform future training needs and service area requiring targeted improvements
• Two audits have been undertaken in August 2012 as part of the QA schedule. These audits have ostensibly been Children’s Social Care Management Audits with particular focus upon Looked After Children (LAC) and how well they are achieving the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes
• An Independent Reviewing Officer Child Protection Audit undertaken, looking at and child protection investigation compliance, including recording, case progression and outcomes.
• Both these audits have contained specific reference to quality of recording which has been fed back to the divisional management team and Children’s Service Senior Management Team
• Equalities dimensions are also a feature of both these audits and will be included in the future overview report
• Cases referred to the Multi Agency Locality Teams now contain clear assessment of risk and information sharing is compliant with national and local protocols
• B&D Triage staff have been briefed as to the importance of being more analytical in their assessment of risk on all cases which are referred to children’s services passing through the Metropolitan Police Service Public Protection Desk (PPD) and Children’s Services Triage Team. This is to ensure that there is clear case recording as to why the case does not meet the threshold for a safeguarding assessment and should be passed to the relevant Multi Agency Locality Team (MALT) for consideration
• A risk assessment tool has been developed in relation to domestic violence cases. This is to ensure that cases passing through Triage and the PPD which involve domestic violence are assessed for potential child protection concerns which may warrant a statutory safeguarding assessment
• New MALT protocol adopted
• Monthly audit of chairing, of MALT meetings has been implemented

4.6 For looked after children immediate recommendations included:-

• Review procedures for children and young people entering the care system through the powers of police protection so this response is only used when no other alternative is possible
• Ensure practice is improved so young people do not miss school to move placements or attend appointments linked with their looked after status
• London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and North East London Foundation Trust to review the provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to children in care to ensure that they receive a prompt response to their needs

4.7 Action taken to progress these recommendations thus far:-

4.7.1 Review procedures for children and young people entering the care system through the powers of police protection so this response is only used when no other alternative is possible

• A ‘Police Protection action plan’ has been drafted and agreed with the Metropolitan Police Service Child Abuse Investigation Team (MPS CAIT) colleagues
• The level of Police Protection Orders (PPO) use is now monitored and analysed regularly. Numbers are weekly reviewed and reported to DCS
and Divisional Director. Data is also shared monthly with lead member as part of placement scrutiny

- PPO use reviewed on a bi-monthly basis with MPS CAIT via bi-monthly meetings between CAIT Detective Inspector and B&D Divisional Director
- We have developed a joint protocol with MPS around the use of PPO. The protocol is aimed at reducing the numbers of PPO and encouraging dialogue between Police Officers and social care staff before powers of protection are taken
- Provide an in-depth analysis of factors around families experiencing PPO but previously supported through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)
- Monitor progress and outcomes via quarterly reports to Children's Trust

4.7.2 Ensure practice is improved so young people do not miss school to move placements or attend appointments linked with their looked after status

- We have developed a placements 'checklist' to ensure that any placement move does not disrupt school attendance
- Looked After Children reviews are always to be scheduled outside of school hours to ensure that education is not disrupted

4.7.3 London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and North East London Foundation Trust to review the provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to children in care to ensure that they receive a prompt response to their needs

- North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) have recently reviewed the referral criteria and processes across Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) services for looked after children
- Monitoring of the referral to appointment time has been undertaken for the B&D CAMHS service in June-August 2012 (inc) and found that on average this took:
  - June - 4 weeks
  - July - 3 weeks
  - August - 2 weeks

- NELFT are in the process of establishing a new Triage Service within B&D CAMHS which is planned to be operational as a pilot by January 2013
- NELFT now has a system in place to ‘flag’ Looked After Children and monitor progress through the service for B&D CAMHS
- Specific CAMHS resource to support the LAC Team has been identified and the practitioner commenced duties in post during September 2012

5. Governance and Corporate Parenting Group

5.1 In addition, governance arrangements have been revised leading to the establishment of a single portfolio lead for Children’s Services. All cabinet portfolio leads have agreed to take a corporate parenting responsibility for their areas. A summary of work last year is available as Appendix 8.
5.2 The report also recommended that corporate parenting arrangements and strategic planning are strengthened to ensure that they properly reflect the Council’s responsibilities to children looked after.

5.3 Corporate Parenting Group has been refreshed in April 2012 and the inspection has lead to the following actions:-

- Lead member to attend the Corporate Parenting Group
- Attendance from senior managers from within and beyond the Council to be secured
- Corporate Parenting Group to ‘sign off’ revised ‘Children in Care Pledge’ and monitor outcomes Corporate Management Team to ensure that Corporate Parenting roles are embedded throughout services
- In particular elected members who are assigned portfolio leads within Cabinet are specifically requested to illustrate how they will support looked after children and how they will carry out their role and function as corporate parents within the council directorates that they oversee.

6. Consultation

This report has been widely circulated and comments where received have been included.

6.1 Financial Implications

Completed by Dawn Calvert (Group Manager – Finance)

6.1.1 The Children’s Social Care budget is funded from within the general fund. In 2012/13 there is budget provision of £29.352m and a forecast cost pressure of £1.5m. This cost pressure is largely related to assessment and care management, Section 17, SEN transport and supporting those families with no recourse to public funds. The forecast pressure is currently being mitigated by under spends within other areas of the Children’s Service budget.

6.1.2 The impact of future service pressures is currently being modelled.

6.2 Legal Implications

Compiled by: Lindsey Marks - Legal Services

6.2.1 The responsibility of corporate parenting applies to the Local Authority as a whole and not just the departments directly responsible delivering services to children and young persons.

6.2.2 The Children Act 2004 and statutory guidance specifies that the Cabinet Member for Children Services has the lead political role in respect of looked after children and young people contributing to and being satisfied that the Local Authority high standards of corporate parenting.
6.2.3 Since the 1 September 2012 the Adoption Panel no longer makes recommendations to the Agency Denison Maker as to whether or not a child should be placed for adoption save in the case of a relinquished baby.

6.3. **Other Implications**

6.3.1 **Risk Management** - All of the necessary and relevant actions related to this report are contained within the action plans for the CR01 & 2 as relevant.

6.3.2 **Staffing Issues** - There are no specific staffing issues contained within this report. However, the ability of the service to sustain continued performance improvement at a time of fiscal austerity and increasing demand without further resource consideration is a very serious challenge.

6.3.3 **Customer Impact** - The report highlights the areas of service improvement, as well as the areas where performance continues to be addressed. Children and their families will continue to experience a positive response to their social care needs. In particular the strengthened role of the Members Corporate Parenting Board will provide more rigorous oversight and scrutiny with regards to the outcomes for the Borough’s looked after children population.

6.3.4 **Safeguarding Children** - The report includes the findings of the recent OFSTED inspection of June 2012 which judged the safeguarding services for children within the Borough to be ‘good’. The report also highlights the strength of the local safeguarding children board and the contribution of the partnership to the safeguarding of local children. Services are determined to continually improve but such aspirations are an ever increasing challenge within a local context of growing demand and fiscal austerity.

6.3.5 **Crime and Disorder Issues** - Research shows that young people who have stable support mechanisms and sound parenting are less likely to become involved in anti-social behaviour and crime. The work highlighted in the inspection reports and undertaken through children’s social care and the LSCB, as detailed in this report, contributes to the wellbeing of young people, as set out in the Children and Young People’s Plan and helps them to make positive choices as they grow older.

**Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:** None

**List of appendices:** The appendices are available via the following links:

**Appendix 1** - Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Board’s 6th Annual Report

**Appendix 2** - Quality Assurance Strategy, ‘Building a Better Life for All’

**Appendix 3** - Annual Children in Care Placement Availability Review
Appendix 4 - Adoption Inspection Report
http://www.bardag-lscb.co.uk/Documents/Adoption%20Inspection%20Report.pdf

Appendix 5 - Adoption Inspection Report, Action Plan

Appendix 6 - Revised Foster Carers Handbook

Appendix 7 - B&D Safeguarding & Looked After Children Inspection report via

Appendix 7a - SLAC action plan

Appendix 8 - Corporate Parenting Actions by Portfolio Holders