14. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

15. Minutes - 24 July 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 July 2013 were confirmed as correct.

16. Attainment data - Key Stages 1, 2, 4 and 5: Initial Commentary

The Divisional Director of Education (DDE) outlined the key points of the Report, which provided an initial commentary on attainment, as not all national data was available, as follows:

**Early Years Foundation Stage - 2013**

It was not possible to observe a trend as the method of assessment completely changed in 2013 so comparisons with previous years were not valid. On the headline indicator of a ‘good level of development’, the Borough's overall outcome is 46 percent. This is six percentage points below national figures. Although the full implications of the 2013 results will not be clear until a complete picture of 2013 results across all other schools is published, analysis around the lower figure for Personal, Social and Emotional Development is already underway.

**Key Stage 1 - 2013**

Results rose in reading, writing and mathematics at both Level 2B+ and Level 3+. However, Level 2B+ results nationally rose more than in the borough. As a result, the Borough overall has slipped to one percent below the national average in each of reading and writing at Level 2B+.

**Key Stage 2 - 2013**

Not all national 2013 results are yet available. On the new combined measure of Level 4+ in reading, writing and mathematics, the Local Authority consolidated last year’s rise to 73 percent; two percentage points below the 2012 national figure of 75 percent. It is expected that the final figure will be 74 percent after adjustments have been made. The gap between the Borough’s and the national figure for
higher levels, a key focus for the Local Authority, has closed to within two percent in writing and three percent in mathematics, but remains seven percentage points below in reading. Attaining higher levels in all three subjects and improving outcomes in reading remains the focus for Key Stage 2.

**Key Stage 4- GCSE 2013**

National 2013 results are not yet available. On the headline measure of 5 A*- C including English and mathematics overall, the Local Authority's results improved to about 60 percent, continuing the trajectory of improvement for the fifth year. In separate English and mathematics, A*-C results rose in English to 74 percent but results fell in maths to 66 percent. The implications for this will not be clear until national results are known in more detail. Higher grades for English have improved to 15 percent and in maths this has been maintained at 14 percent. However, these are still both below the 2012 national levels. Improving outcomes at these higher grades is still a key priority for Key Stage 4.

**Key Stage 5 post 16- 2013**

Not all national 2013 results are available. On the headline measures of average points score (APS) and APS per entry, results improved so that the average grade overall is above a C. A-level pass rates across grade groups improved. A*- E at 99.5 percent is now above the national figure of 98.1 percent, which means almost all the Borough's A-level students are gaining a pass grade. Pass rates at the higher grades, A*-C and A*-A, have improved but there is more to do, particularly at the highest grades which are still well below those nationally.

Overall, the DDE felt that there was a solid set of results this year but there were areas which needed looking at carefully, such as the Foundation Stage.

In response to questions from Members, the DDE stated that results of Key Stage 1 generally fluctuated less than the other key stages and when it did fluctuate it was usually related to changes in the method of assessment. In relation to this year, she could not say exactly why there had been a drop; however, the method of assessment was changed. More would be clear when all the national data was available.

With regards to children who spoke English as a second language, the Borough did see an increase in the number of these children over recent years. Evidence suggested that these children may take some time but could end up doing very well by the end of primary school.

**17. Impact of the "Children and Families Bill" on the Adoption Service**

The Group Manager for Looked After Children Placements (GMLACP) and the Team Manager for Adoption (TMA), asked members for their comments and questions on the Report, which outlined the impacts of the reforms already made to adoption practice and the further potential impacts of the Children and Families Bill.

In response to members' questions and comments the GMLACP and TMA stated that:
The attempt of the reforms to promote "fostering for adoption" was not as straightforward as it may seem. People fostered children for different reasons to why people adopted children. Adopters often wanted to adopt a child due to infertility and wanted the 'perfect baby' to raise, whereas foster carers were motivated by their willingness to help a child develop and move on.

There was a gap between what people aspired for when looking for a child to adopt and the children available for adoption; children in care had differing levels of care needs, may be a part of a sibling group and came from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Local authorities are now expected not to delay the adoption process in the search for a perfect ethnic match. Attracting people from across different backgrounds to adopt children was a big challenge nationally.

There was a dip in performance with regards to placing children within one year of the 'Adoption Decision' (National Indicator 61); last year performance was at 78 percent whilst this year it was 66.7 percent. This year there was a significant increase in the number of cases transferring to the Adoption Team following the granting of a Placement Order. Furthermore, the cohort of children needing placements included more sibling groups which was a challenge as it was much more difficult to find adopters for these children. Some cases did throw the figures out; the example of a 20 month year old child with a high level of special needs who was adopted after two years was given. If it became law that care proceedings must be completed by six weeks this may help improve the Team's performance figures.

The new structure of the Team would consist of existing posts as well as new ones which would be funded by the Adoption Grant. It was not known however, how long this funding would last.

Cases where foster carers adopted the children they looked after were few in number. However, there were cases which involved foster carers who were given a special guardianship order, which gave them parental responsibility for the child but did not end the legal relationship between the child and his or her birth parents.

At the moment the Team's cohort comprised of 55 children (roughly double the figure 18 months ago) with the youngest child being one year of age and the oldest, 10.

For children under the age of 12, usually, the aim was to find adopters; however, after the age of 12, it was normally the case that adoption would not be achievable and the child would remain in the long term foster care of a carer who had a special guardianship order.

The disruption rate of adoptions was three percent in this Borough compared to the national average of 20 percent. Where an adoption is disrupted, the child would go back to care.

There are also changes in legislation regarding a reduction in the time taken to complete the assessment of prospective adopters to four months, when previously an assessment would be undertaken in approximately eight months. The change did present challenges as it would give adopters less time to think about the decision to adopt and the Service would need to adjust its processes. On the other hand it was recognised that the changes were based on the experiences of adopters and the interests of the children. Assessments were usually completed quicker when the authority used its own adopters compared to when it 'bought in' adopters from
elsewhere. To achieve this time target it is important that services continue to work in an integrated way to ensure duties are met.

In response to a request from Members the GMLACP agreed to look into the evidence for people's motivations for fostering and adoption in the Borough.

18. **Briefing on Cyber-bullying**

The Corporate Director for Children Services (CDCS) joined the meeting.

The Advisory Teacher (AT), Primary, ICT, outlined the Report as follows:

- Cyber-bullying is bullying, but in a different form. It could be defined as repetitive behaviour intended to harm another person.
- As the use of technology in everyday life increases, cyber-bullying appears to be becoming more prevalent.
- It was not exclusive to teenagers or young people and victims could often be adults.
- The challenge with this type of bullying was that it was difficult to get away from it as people tended to keep their phones or other 'smart' devices on all the time, which meant that the opportunities to receive or view abusive messages was increased.
- The other complexity was that there was a variety in the forms of media that could be used to cyber-bully someone such as texting, sending or circulating messages, pictures or videos through social media websites or via mobile phones, which could be spread maliciously very quickly, causing a lot of damage to the victim.
- A survey undertaken earlier this year for 'knowthenew.org.uk', showed that two-thirds of teens have experienced trolling, *(when a person, a 'troll', posts a deliberately provocative message on the internet with the purpose of causing argument or upsetting people)* or cyberbullying, but that only 17 percent would turn to their parents, and only one percent would turn to their teachers for support as their first reaction.
- Social media websites were getting better in terms of creating a safer environment for their users. This included placing a 'report abuse' icon on their websites. The website, 'ASK FM', after an incident in which a 14 year old girl was found hanged after suffering cyberbullying in Leicestershire, had put in measures such as viewing all reports within 24 hours and adding bullying and harassment as a matter to report.
- In Barking and Dagenham there had not been a huge number of cyberbullying reports reaching the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) from schools, but it is nevertheless an issue that is being taken seriously.
- It was recognised that cyber-bullying may often take place outside of school; however, the repercussions of these incidents could take place within school. All schools including primary and secondary have an e-safety policy in place. Schools are provided with a policy template which they can modify if needed. The policy in each school is reviewed annually and approved by governors. The annual Section 11 audit confirms the policies are in place. In addition schools are signposted to websites about dealing with cyber-bullying effectively.
- Aspects on dealing with cyber-bullying were in the curriculum for
Information Communication Technology and Personal, Social and Health Education. The best approach to take in teaching was a 'little and often' approach so that students were frequently informed about what to do if faced with cyber-bullying.

- The Arc Theatre Group had undertaken work with young people on 'sexting' and had obtained further funding to work with more year groups. The feedback received from the young people who took part was extremely positive with many stating it was easier to discuss many of the issues with people who were not their teachers.

- Members of the Committee could attend one of the Arc Theatre's sessions at schools to observe their work and how it impacted on young people.

- Schools did raise the issue of cyberbullying with parents via information on their websites and parents' evenings.

- As a result of doing this Report, she had formed closer links with the Local Children's Safeguarding Board. She would be working with the Chair of the Board to ensure information was shared with the Board's members during 'cyber-bullying week' to ensure partners were working in an integrated way.

Members raised concerns that schools were not requested to report cyber-bullying incidents to the Safeguarding Lead for Education which meant that there was no way for the local authority to know whether there were any schools which had a significantly high number of cyber-bullying incidents, which would indicate that they may need support with developing better policies and procedures. The CDCS stated that the same could be said of a number of other issues such as general bullying or accidents. Schools did keep their own records and exercised their professional judgment when deciding what should and should not be reported to the local authority. She proposed that a survey of schools could be done to obtain a general picture of the incidence of cyber-bullying in schools, which was agreed by the Committee.

Members were keen that children were confident in knowing what to do when faced with cyber-bullying of any degree. Officers assured members that all schools had a policy which included teaching children about how to respond to cyber-bullying.

Officers commented that sometimes the language used by young people in social media websites could be viewed by adults as derogatory whereas to the young person it was appropriate amongst their peers and youth culture.

In response to a question, the CDCS stated that the guidance around hate crime stated that cyber-bullying relating to race should be reported; however, its standing was not as strong as before. The most common type of abuse was homophobic, which authorities knew was happening but it was not being reported.

Members queried whether the Arc Theatre could do specific work with Year Six pupils and their parents to equip them with the knowledge about exactly what to do if faced with cyber-bullying at secondary school. Members felt this would create a good atmosphere for children and their parents to prepare for these issues together, as once in secondary school, young people often found it difficult to talk to their parents about many issues include bullying. The AT stated that she would feed these comments back to the Arc Theatre Group.
19. **Action Plan for recommendations relevant to the Authority made by the Committee’s Scrutiny Report on school councils**

The Committee noted the Action Plan.

20. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting would be on 13 November 2013 at 6.00pm in committee room 2, Town Hall, Barking.