London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Corporate peer challenge – July/August 2014
Demand on children’s social care - a corporate challenge (1)

• A clear agenda for improvement in children’s social care has been provided through the recent OFSTED report
• The officers that we met demonstrate a strong understanding of the improvement agenda, particularly around the need to improve recruitment and retention in order to reduce agency costs and improve the service
• The service is clearly extremely pressurised
• Whilst there is a strong improvement culture, there is less of a culture around cost reduction
• There are a number of strategic ambitions within the service that it is hoped will assist with the demographic challenge – ensuring the growth agenda broadens the social and economic mix, making the case to government for increased funding and looking for increased resources from within the council
Demand on children’s social care - a corporate challenge (2)

- Whilst these strategic ambitions may make some impact, they are very unlikely to constitute a solution – even if they were all successful
- Thus more needs to be done to reform services and scale back the volume of delivery if the vision, savings requirement and core business are to be achieved together
- Some of the issues are cultural:
  - Children’s Services feel their demand issues are not well enough understood or accepted whilst corporately there is a view that the service is constantly saying it cannot save any more
  - Considerable effort is expended by the service in putting the argument across – that energy now needs to be spent on finding the necessary savings
- The demand issue is a corporate one and therefore corporate leadership and working is required
Demand on children’s social care - a corporate challenge (3)

• In response to the question of whether children’s services could operate differently, we are confident there are ways in which this is possible but there hasn’t been the opportunity for us to look in the necessary detail at what might be done and how

• The service is too pressurised to deliver both the core business and the in-depth work that would be required to effectively review the way it operates

• Bringing in somebody external who is appropriately placed to undertake such a review, which would include looking at ways of operating in other authorities, might be a helpful start in the reform of services and scaling back the volume of delivery