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Mr David Lund
Executive Director of Children's Services
Blackpool Borough Council
Children and Young People's Department
Progress House
Clifton Road
Blackpool
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Dear Mr Lund

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Blackpool Borough Council 2008

This letter summarises the findings of the 2008 annual performance assessment (APA) for your council. The evaluations and judgements in the letter draw on a range of data and information which covers the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. As you know, the APA is not based on an inspection of your services and, therefore, can only provide a snapshot based on the evidence considered. As such, I am grateful to you for assuring the quality of the data provided.

Performance is judged on a four point scale as detailed in the handbook. I should emphasise that the grades awarded are based on an overall 'best fit' model. For instance, an outstanding judgement of Grade 4 reflects that overall most aspects, but not necessarily all, of the services in the area are working very well. We know that one of the features of outstanding provision is the drive for greater improvement and no council would suggest, and nor would Ofsted, that a judgement of outstanding indicates that everything is perfect. Similarly within a judgement of inadequate overall, Grade 1, there could be some aspects of the overall service that are adequate or even good. Judgements are made in a rounded way, balancing all of the evidence and giving due consideration to outcomes, local and national contexts, priorities and decision-making.



The following table sets out the grades awarded for performance in 2008.

Assessment judgement area	APA grade
Overall effectiveness of children's services	3
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	3
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	3

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale
4: outstanding/excellent; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate*

Overall effectiveness of children’s services

Grade 3

Blackpool Borough Council makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people. It consistently delivers services that are above minimum requirements. The council demonstrates a very strong ambition for improving the life chances of children and young people, including those who are most vulnerable. With strong, clear leadership, the council is successfully establishing partnership working between services, and outcomes for children and young people are improving. The challenges associated with a mobile and transient population and the tourist industry are tackled with determination. A multitude of often innovative strategies are in place to improve long term life chances. This focus on the long term benefits for children and young people is central to the vision of the council, irrespective of whether families remain in the area. The council’s approach to tackling social problems such as domestic violence has generated significant additional demands on its services for children. The council recognises that there is more to do to bring outcomes closer to national norms. The council’s contribution is good for all aspects: enabling young people to be healthy, to stay safe, to enjoy and achieve, to make a positive contribution and to achieve economic well-being. The council manages its services well and has good capacity to improve.

Being healthy

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council’s analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduced waiting times for child and adolescent mental health service new non-specialist cases. ▪ Effective planning of substance misuse services leading to improved take-up of service by young people. ▪ All schools are participating in the Healthy Schools Award Programme.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Breast-feeding rates remain below national average. ▪ Despite a wide range of well planned strategies to reduce teenage conceptions, rates remained relatively static in 2007 after a reduction the previous year.

Staying safe

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The high rate of completion of child protection reviews to ensure actions and impact of service and the protection of children is monitored closely. ▪ The high proportion of looked after children who are adopted is leading to improved stability for children and young people. ▪ The good standard of council residential and foster care provision is leading to improved outcomes for looked after children and young people.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rates of re-referrals are above those found in similar council areas.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimate a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In 2007 the progress made by children and young people between the ages of 11 and 16, as shown by the contextual value added measure, was above average in all Blackpool secondary schools. ▪ No Blackpool secondary schools were below the relevant floor targets in 2006 and 2007. ▪ Between 2005 and 2007 the proportion of young people achieving five or more GCSEs grade A* to C improved at a faster rate than comparator groups or the national rate, although this remains below similar councils. ▪ Permanent exclusions from secondary schools have reduced and are below comparator groups and the national average. There were no permanent exclusions from special schools in 2007, and the percentage of fixed term exclusions was well below similar councils and the national average. ▪ The council has no schools in an Ofsted category of concern. ▪ The attendance of looked after children is better than comparator groups and the national figure.

<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attendance at secondary schools is below comparator groups. ▪ There are more fixed term exclusions from primary and secondary schools than is the case in similar councils. ▪ The proportion of young people achieving five or more grades A* to C including English and mathematics is not increasing as rapidly as nationally and remains below that of similar councils. |
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Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p>Major strengths</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Excellent degree of engagement with young people and their active participation in decision-making as demonstrated by achieving a national Beacon Award. ▪ The wide range of opportunities for children and young people to influence the shape of services, for example 'Blackpool Lights', the children and young people's Shadow Trust Board. ▪ The high proportion of children and young people reached by the publicly funded youth service. ▪ Targeted work leading to a reduction in the number of young people who enter the criminal justice system for the first time. |
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<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The rate of re-offending at 51.2% is above those in similar council areas. |
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Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p>Major strengths</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of young people completing apprenticeships is better than comparator groups and the national average. ▪ The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in employment, education or training has decreased significantly and is below that of comparator groups. ▪ Between 2005 and 2006 the increase in the proportion of 17-year-olds in full time education was greater than the national figure. ▪ The proportion of 16- to 19-year-olds whose activity is unknown has decreased |
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and is below the national average.

- The proportion of teenage mothers who are engaged in employment, education or training is above the national average.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The transience of some of the teenage population in Blackpool is reflected in the below average percentage of 19-year-olds achieving Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications.

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

Grade 3

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is good and its management of these services is also good. The council has a strong focus on aligning the delivery of services with the needs of children and families in local areas. The appointment of a new Assistant Director's post to lead on health has improved joint working across the Children's Trust and gained additional funding for important priority areas such as mental health and teenage pregnancy. Wireless technology is being developed to support multi-agency and mobile working. New management information systems are enabling knowledge gained from assessment to help design new services and to streamline allocation of resources. There has been significant progress with integrated service delivery, including developments in children's centres, extended schools, the Springboard Integrated Family Support Project, Early Support for Children with Disabilities, Awaken Team (Protecting Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation) and a new integrated Young People's Substance Misuse Team. Springboard has led to improved social outcomes for some of the most vulnerable families. The council has maintained low turnover in key children's service staff and it has recently gained Investors in People status. A Joint Commissioning Framework has been produced with the Children's Trust setting overarching priorities. The council recognises that despite its efforts, more needs to be done to address the shortage of specialist teachers of mathematics in secondary schools and to improve attainment in GCSE mathematics. The council's self-assessment grades were overgenerous in three areas of the APA.

Major strengths

- The strong leadership and commitment of senior officers in providing services to improve the long term life chances of children and young people in Blackpool.
- The appointment of a new assistant director's post to lead on health has improved joint working across the Children's Trust and gained additional funding for important areas such as mental health and teenage pregnancy in line with the Trust's priorities.
- A high proportion of residential child care workers have obtained a relevant vocational qualification, and this figure is above similar councils and the national average.
- The percentages of primary and secondary schools with 25% surplus places are

below the national average.

- All Blackpool schools meet the full extended schools 'core offer'.
- Innovative projects to tackle challenging social problems such as Springboard and Awaken are having an impact.

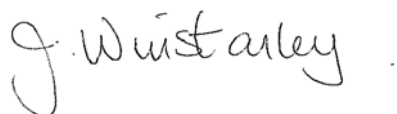
Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Although the percentage of full time teacher vacancies is low compared with similar councils there is a shortage of specialist mathematics teachers in high schools which is hindering progress in improving the percentage of young people achieving five or more GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics.
- Despite the wide range of good strategies implemented by the council, improvements in some areas are modest and outcomes remain below national averages.

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

We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the assessment.

Yours sincerely



Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection