



# Joint area review

Blackpool Children's Services Authority Area

---

**Better  
education  
and care**

## Review of services for children and young people

Adult Learning Inspectorate  
Audit Commission  
Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI)  
Healthcare Commission  
HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate  
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary  
HM Inspectorate of Court Administration  
HM Inspectorate of Prisons  
HM Inspectorate of Probation  
Ofsted

Audience	Published	Reference no.
All	23 June 2006	890

---

---



---

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the local authority or at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

---

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Summary report</b>	<b>4</b>
Grades	11
Recommendations	11
<b>Main report</b>	<b>12</b>
Outcomes for children and young people	12
The impact of local services	15
Being healthy	15
Staying safe	17
Enjoying and achieving	19
Making a positive contribution	22
Achieving economic well-being	23
Service management	25
<b>Annex: the children and young people's section of the corporate assessment report</b>	<b>29</b>

---

## Introduction

1. This joint area review was conducted using the arrangements required under section 20 of the Children Act 2004. A multidisciplinary team of nine inspectors carried it out from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), the Healthcare Commission (CHAI), the Audit Commission and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP). The review was undertaken according to the requirements of the *Framework for the inspection of children's services*.

2. The review was linked to the contemporaneous corporate assessment of the local council by the Audit Commission and its findings are represented in the relevant part of the corporate assessment report. There were also links with HMI Probation's inspection of the Youth Offending Team (YOT) that took place at the same time. Findings from the YOT have been represented in this report where relevant.

3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in Blackpool and evaluates the way local services, taken together, contribute to their well-being. Joint area reviews focus on the extent to which children and young people are healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and are well prepared to secure economic well-being.

4. The review evaluates the collective contribution made to each outcome for children and young people by relevant services in the area. It also judges the contributions made by the council's services overall and, specifically, its education and children's social care services. Particular attention is given to joint action by local services on behalf of those groups of children and young people who are vulnerable to poor outcomes. Two such groups are covered in detail: children and young people who are looked after by the council; and children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

5. The review took place in two stages consisting in total of three weeks over a six-week period. The first stage reviewed all existing evidence including:

- self-assessment undertaken by local public service providers
- a survey of children and young people
- performance data
- the findings of the contemporaneous inspection of the youth service
- planning documents
- information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day-care provision
- evidence gathered during the (YOT) inspection
- briefings from staff within inspectorates, commissions and other public bodies in contact with local providers.

6. The second stage included inspection fieldwork. This included studies of how far local services have improved outcomes for a small sample of children

and young people, some of whom have the most complex needs, and a study of provision in the town centre and in the Grange Park neighbourhoods in Blackpool. It also included gathering evidence on nine key judgements, selected because of their critical importance to improving outcomes for children and young people in the local area. This included discussions with elected members of the local authority and their equivalents in other public agencies, officers from these agencies, service users and community representatives. A review of case files for children and young people receiving support from a number of local agencies was also included.

## Context

7. Blackpool is the largest seaside resort in England. Tourism is a vital source of local employment and revenue for the town and, although the service-based seasonal economy is in decline, the town continues to attract around 10.7 million visitors per year. It has a population of over 140,000, of whom 98.4% are white. The percentage of those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds is 1.6%, which is lower than other north west authorities. Some 3.5% of Blackpool's population was born outside the UK and 1.8% outside the European Union. Nineteen per cent of the population is aged 0–15 years.

8. Blackpool has the fourth lowest average wage in the UK. There are relatively few high-income earners with a smaller proportion of the working population in managerial or higher professional occupations and fewer people with a degree or higher qualification when compared with the England and Wales average. Deprivation levels are high. In 2004, Blackpool ranked 24<sup>th</sup> worst out of 354 districts on the indices of multiple deprivation.

9. Blackpool is a resort with a high population density of 4,065 people per square kilometre compared with an England average of 380 per square kilometre. A high proportion of the population lives in flats or shared houses. The proportion of children living in one-parent households is 8.4%, which is higher than the national average of 6.5%. The area faces a number of significant challenges, which include high levels of people not in employment and high numbers of people on incapacity benefit. Unemployment is higher than the national average and the rest of the region. There are seasonal variances due to the nature of the tourist industry.

10. Blackpool has one of the highest levels of population migration of children and young people, which is greatest in the most deprived areas of the town. This has a significant impact on services such as the social care initial response and duty team and schools where some have a 30% pupil turnover each year.

11. The council has a Master Plan to regenerate the town and transform it into a centre for retail and housing as well as business and culture. At the heart of the plan is the development of a regional casino. Regeneration projects are targeted at the most deprived areas of the town such as the town centre and Grange Park, which were the focus of the neighbourhood study.

12. Blackpool council acquired unitary status in 1998 when it separated from Lancashire County Council. The council has been Labour-controlled since 1991. There is a chief executive and a cabinet style of governance with a leader of the council, supported by six portfolio-holders. Scrutiny arrangements have recently been revised and there is a specific scrutiny committee for children and young people's services. The council appointed a director of children's services and a lead member in 2004. The functions of the education, social care children's services and the YOT have been brought together to form the new Children and Young People's Department under the director of children's services.

13. The council is establishing the new structural arrangements for delivering the Every Child Matters agenda. As a consequence, the traditional social care and education directorates' structures remain broadly unchanged. There is a multi-agency Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, which has the responsibility for delivering the key priorities for children and young people, which is set out in the draft children and young people's plan. The partnership acts as the Children's Trust through cooperation and collaboration, but no legal arrangements have been set up.

14. The council provides children's services through four divisions; School Improvement, Business Support, Social Care and Pupil Support. Within the area there are 47 schools comprising 32 primary, eight secondary, three special, one pupil referral unit and three independent schools, in total catering for 22,680 children and young people. Social care duty service is provided through two first response teams and three long-term teams. Separate specialist teams provide adoption, fostering, residential care and services for disabled children. There are 277 children who are looked after by the council and 116 children on the child protection register. The area is served by Connexions Lancashire. Lancashire police authority serves the area and there is one primary care trust (PCT) and one NHS trust, all of whom are significant partners in helping to deliver the Every Child Matters agenda in Blackpool.

15. The Lancashire Learning and Skills Council works in partnership with the council, Connexions, schools, colleges, Jobcentre Plus and training providers to deliver the 14–19 strategy under the Fylde Coast Learning Partnership.

## Summary report

### Outcomes for children and young people

16. **Outcomes for most children and young people in Blackpool are good.** The area faces high levels of deprivation and health inequalities but most children and young people are generally healthy due to the positive impact of local services. The numbers of teenage pregnancies have reduced significantly through well-targeted services, although the overall numbers of teenage pregnancies remain high. Children and young people have to wait too long for treatment or services provided by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Tier 3 services.

17. Agencies work well together to ensure that children are protected from abuse and there is very good support to children at risk of sexual exploitation. Access to early intervention and prevention services is improving but is not yet sufficiently coordinated to ensure that most families are offered family support services without having to access these via social care. Too many children are being looked after by the council and too many children are on the child protection register. Children who need to be adopted are placed with families in good time.

18. Most children attend and enjoy school. There are sufficient childcare places to meet local needs. Children in primary schools achieve well despite the low level of skills they have on first entering education. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\*–C grades at GCSE in secondary schools is lower than the national average. However, the rates of improvement of overall are above those found nationally and in similar areas. This is commendable when taken into account the high levels of pupil mobility. Children in some schools in the most deprived areas make the biggest improvements. Looked after children are supported to attend school and achieve adequately. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve good educational outcomes. The proportion of children excluded from school and reintegrated back into mainstream provision is low. Transient pupils and children not on school registers are effectively monitored.

19. Most children and young people are helped to make a positive contribution to their communities. Their views are being listened to and they are beginning to influence how services are developed and delivered. Most young people, including those looked after by the council, are well supported at key transition points. Those who experience traumatic events and who are vulnerable are given good support. Young carers are not offered enough support. Teenage mothers receive good support to enable them to develop parenting skills and to remain in education. A lot of work is being done to deal with bullying in schools, but, despite this, some young people are very concerned that it is not being dealt with consistently. Young people are well supported to take part in a range of activities to divert them from anti-social behaviour. Young people at risk of offending are adequately supported, but those over 16 who have offended find it hard to get a job or access training.

20. Most children receive good help to prepare for working life. The proportion of young people in full-time education or training is improving. Most young people achieve well in further education. There is good access to work placements for most young people including those with a learning difficulty and/or disability. There is good access to careers advice on an individual basis. Teenage mothers are well supported to access education and training. Too many young people aged 17 and 18 do not receive training before moving into employment. Young people looked after and those with a disability and/or learning difficulty are supported well to make the transition from school to work or further education. They are given practical help to enable them to make use of provision. Most young people leaving care have access to appropriate

accommodation, but the availability of suitable and adequate housing for families is limited, resulting in longer stays in hostels.

## The impact of local services

### Being healthy

21. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Partnership working between agencies across Blackpool is good. There is a shared understanding of the challenging health inequalities and health needs of the population, and a strong partnership approach to dealing with the causes of ill health and risk taking. A range of services is available to provide programmes to promote healthy lifestyles and increasing numbers of schools are helping children to eat healthily through participating in the healthy schools programme. There are well-developed sexual health services and support for teenage parents is good. Due to the long-standing complexities of the problem, teenage conception rates remain high but the authority has this year achieved a commendable 11% reduction, thereby successfully reversing what has until now been a stubborn upward trend. There is effective targeted work in schools and in a range of settings and work is being done to change attitudes and culture among both young men and young women. There has been some success in reducing the numbers of second pregnancies.

22. A number of effective, well-targeted initiatives are in place to increase the opportunities available to young people to take part in leisure activities. Access to primary care is good and secondary care facilities are being developed. There is effective partnership working to provide substance misuse services. There are inconsistencies in waiting times and access to CAMHS treatment. Waiting times for clinical psychology are currently too long, although the PCT has recently invested in services to reduce clinical treatment times and therapy waits and these are likely to fall. Difficulties in the provision of services in relation to dual diagnosis in the YOT, identified during the inspection, were urgently addressed by the PCT and a robust process is being put in place. Looked after children have their health needs met well and there are effective plans in place to improve services to make them more user-friendly. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities can access services in a range of settings. While there is effective working at practitioner level, services are not yet fully integrated across agencies, and families report receiving services from a range of agencies that, on occasion, are not coordinated effectively.

### Staying safe

23. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** Children and young people in Blackpool are well informed about risks to their personal safety. Agencies work well to support the most vulnerable and there are some good and innovative services to support them. However, local services are not yet working together to assess and quantify needs at different levels to commission cost-effective services to meet



the needs of children who have complex needs. The assessment of children's needs, when first presented, is improving but is still primarily a social care function rather than a shared interagency task. A prompt response is not yet guaranteed because of the volume of referrals to social care. Links between the YOT and social care teams are not as effective as they should be to ensure good assessment of young people's circumstances. Both the council and young people themselves identify bullying as one of their most serious concerns. Some schools have taken thorough and innovative steps to address bullying, but good practice is not shared sufficiently between schools. The council has a number of strategies in place to address bullying, including the appointment of a coordinator, but has not yet fully identified the scale of the problem, nor ways of ensuring consistency of approach by teachers.

24. Arrangements for child protection decision-making are good and agencies work well together to implement protection plans. The child protection register is very active and is characterised by higher than national average numbers of children being registered and de-registered. However, this is a reflection of the high volume of referrals and the numbers of transient families with complex needs, already known to other council's child protection services, moving into the borough. All children on the register are allocated a social worker and have their plans reviewed on time. The Local Safeguarding Board is in the early stages of development. Previous work by the former Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) around quality audit and standards monitoring is continuing, with extension to focus on the quality of interagency planning and decision-making in respect of child protection work.

25. A strategy to reduce the significant numbers of children looked after by the council is not yet in place. The numbers of families moving into Blackpool with complex problems is a particular feature of the area and is having a significant impact on services. However, although there is a range of services to support families, there is not a clear route to accessing these services early enough to prevent families moving into crisis. Work to develop a family support and preventative strategy is at an early stage of development. Not all looked after children and young people have a qualified social worker allocated to them to supervise their case but present arrangements are well managed and provide young people with good support. Plans to place children and young people in suitable adoption or other permanence placements are achieved effectively. Although the council works hard to support looked after children, the concept of the corporate parent is not well understood by young people and some social workers.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

26. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.** Children and young people are well prepared for school and most attend school regularly and enjoy their education. There are sufficient early education and childcare places to meet the needs of children and their parents. Children enter education with well below average levels of skill and there are high levels

of transience. Despite this, the educational standards achieved in primary schools are broadly in line with those of statistical neighbours and the rates of improvement are above those found in similar areas and nationally. Some schools in the most disadvantaged areas achieve the most impressive outcomes for pupils.

27. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\*–C grades at GCSE in secondary schools is lower than the national average. However, the rates of improvement overall are above those found nationally and in similar areas. This is commendable when taking into account the high levels of pupil mobility. Attendance at schools remains below the national level but the gap is narrowing steadily. The level of permanent exclusions in primary schools has fallen and is now in line with the national average. Permanent exclusions in secondary schools were well above the level found nationally in 2004/05. However, in the last term, there has been a significant improvement in comparison with the same period last year. The provision for children educated other than at school is improving and meets statutory requirements. The rate of reintegration of excluded pupils into mainstream education is low. There is a wide range of opportunities in schools and the wider community for young people to pursue positive activities in their leisure time. The achievement of children looked after by the authority is adequate and they attend school regularly. The provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is effective and achievement is good or very good.

### **Making a positive contribution**

28. **The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.** Children's social and emotional development is generally promoted well in the area. There is good access to peer mentoring and other support for vulnerable young people. Teenage mothers are well supported to build positive relationships with their child and to develop effective parenting skills. Targeted work has been done in schools to develop positively the self-esteem of young women in schools and specific work at Key Stage 4 led to improved standards last year.

29. The involvement of young people in decision-making is a high priority for the council and the Children and Young People's Plan reflects its views and priorities very well. Young people's views are beginning to have an impact on how some services are planned and delivered. Good progress has been made in improving the work of the Blackpool Young Person's Council as a democratic forum. School councils are well established in many schools including special schools. Although looked after children are well supported to take part in their reviews, there is no specific forum for them to make their collective views known. Young carers do not have enough help because of a lack of services.

30. There are very good arrangements to support: children and young people moving into new settings; those who have experienced traumatic events; young people moving into the area; and those who have been out of education for some time, who receive good support. A wide range of action is being taken to

reduce anti-social behaviour. This includes the extension of leisure and youth activities and a thriving Millennium Volunteers programme. A programme of activities for young people who have offended is organised by the YOT, but broader access has not been developed sufficiently through partnership working. Support provided to young people who have been the subject of custodial sentences is generally good and the percentage of them in full-time education, employment or training is above the national average. There is insufficient access for young offenders to specialist mental health services.

### **Economic well-being**

**31. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.** Parents and carers are well informed about and make use of the wide range of childcare facilities available. Local, accessible family learning is beginning to develop the skills of many parents, helping them to support their child's learning and to improve their chances of getting a job. Parents whose first language is not English receive good support through locally delivered programmes. Young people, including those in special schools, have good access to a range of work placements and work-related learning. There is effective support to teenage mothers to enable them to access education and training. Most young people have access to individual careers advice and guidance. There are well-targeted activities to reach young offenders and those who are out of school, training or not in employment.

**32.** The proportion of young people continuing successfully in education and training beyond the age of 16 has improved significantly in recent years and is now comparable with similar authorities. There is increasing collaboration between partners, although access to vocational opportunities at Key Stage 4 is not wide enough and there is insufficient sharing of resources. A high proportion of 16–19 year olds, including young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and looked after children, are in education, employment or training. Jobcentre Plus is effective in helping young people to access work and practical support is provided to help young people with difficulties and/or disabilities access provision. Young people who offend receive good support and achieve well, but the numbers in post-16 education, employment or training is low. Success rates in further education are improving and the achievement of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. There is a shortage of affordable rental accommodation for young people, in particular, young offenders.

### **Service management**

**33. The management of services for children and young people is good.** The capacity of both council services and local services to improve is also good. High levels of deprivation mean that overall outcomes are often well below the national average, but the work of the council and its partners is beginning to make an impact in key areas. The articulation of challenging and far-reaching ambitions for the town and its young people is a strength. These

ambitions are based on a thorough and detailed analysis of need and are understood well by council staff and partners. Prioritisation is adequate. The ambitions in the new Children and Young People's Plan have been successfully translated into nine key strategic priorities but the strategy to deliver these priorities is currently being developed. Progress towards integrated services has been measured. The quality of service planning is mixed.

34. Capacity overall is good. The energy and commitment of those working across the partnership is a real strength and relationships are good. The new children's services team has a clear focus on outcomes for children and young people. Partners work well together: there are numerous effective joint agency initiatives, which are making a difference to children's lives. Resource management is generally good with robust systems in place, although strategic commissioning of services is underdeveloped. Overall, the council provides good value for money. The building blocks to strengthen capacity are being put in place, although some key features are underdeveloped: risk management is not yet routine, the quality of ICT systems is variable and workforce planning is recent and incomplete.

35. Performance management is adequate. Good use has been made of a variety of approaches to analyse and tackle the causes of poor performance. However, performance management is not yet firmly established across the children's services department. There is a low level of awareness of performance management and use of performance management information at practitioner and first line manager levels. The partnership is in the early stages of developing a performance management regime to drive improvement across agencies.

## Grades

Grades awarded:

4: outstanding; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate

	Local services overall	Council services	Health services
Being healthy	3		
Staying safe	2		
Enjoying and achieving	3		
Making a positive contribution	3		
Achieving economic well-being	3		
Service management	3		
Capacity to improve	3	3	
Children's services		3	
The education service		3	
The social care services for children		2	
The health service for children			3

## Recommendations

### For immediate action

- The Blackpool PCT and the council should ensure that the arrangements put in place for the provision of mental health within the Youth Offending Team are robust
- The council should ensure that looked after children have qualified social workers allocated to them within three months.

## For action over the next six months

- The Blackpool NHS PCT and Mental Health Trust should review management arrangements for CAMHS to ensure that there is consistency and clarity of access and sustained improvements in waiting times for assessment and treatment at Tier 3.
- The Safeguarding Board should develop a framework to undertake quality audit work in relation to interagency planning and decision-making in child protection.
- The council should strengthen its corporate parenting work by improving understanding among its staff and establishing specific mechanisms to enable looked after children and young people to discuss and express their views about services.
- The council should ensure that services for young carers are further developed to meet needs.
- The council and its partners should develop a strategy for joint commissioning of services for children with specialist and complex needs.
- The council should set challenging targets for increasing the rate of reintegration of permanently excluded pupils.
- The council should make more progress in identifying the scale of bullying in schools and develop in partnership with schools, clear strategies to ensure that the response of teachers to bullying is consistent and effective.
- The council should ensure that the YOT develops effective partnerships with providers of post-16 education and training to ensure that appropriate programmes of learning are made available to young offenders.

## Main report

### Outcomes for children and young people

36. **Children and young people are generally healthy.** The majority of children and young people who responded to the 'Tell Us' survey considered themselves to be healthy or very healthy. Parents, carers and children and young people receive good advice, support and information. There are a high number of general practitioners (GPs) providing child health surveillance and access to primary care is good, with immunisation rates being generally high. There are high rates of decayed, missing and filled teeth among children and young people. The majority of schools offer sex and relationships education as

part of the curriculum. Chlamydia diagnosis has increased and this has had a positive effect in reducing the level of infection in the population. Teenage pregnancy rates are above the national average but have recently reduced significantly by 11% due to positive intervention by local agencies. Rates of second teenage pregnancies are below average. The numbers of women smoking in pregnancy are above average as are the numbers of low birth weight babies. Rates of uptake of breastfeeding are below national average but this is recognised and a multi-agency breastfeeding strategy is being implemented.

37. Waiting times for treatment in CAMHS at Tier 3 are reducing due to recent investment in provision, although clinical psychology waits remain long. Facilities for children and young people at the accident and emergency (A&E) department are good. The number of children and young people admitted to hospital with asthma is higher than average but a fast response service is provided for these children. There are good levels of participation in school sport across the borough. Looked after children have their health needs met and numbers receiving health checks are increasing, although there is recognition that work needs to be done to further improve access by making services more user friendly.

38. **On the evidence gathered children and young people appear safe.** Parents and children have access to a range of advice on how to be safe on the roads and in the home. The numbers of children on the child protection register are high compared with similar councils. Interagency partnerships are effective and agencies work well together to protect children identified as most at risk, and to make sure plans progress. Children at risk are supported well to protect them from being sexually exploited. There are good links between the police, social care and health professionals so that information is shared about domestic violence incidents where children are present. Duty arrangements are well managed and the First Response Service has improved since it was reorganised and additional resources allocated. However, the service remains under pressure with a high number of referrals. Response times for assessments have been significantly lower than under the national average but recent council monitoring figures show a marked improvement. Too many children are entering the child protection and looked after system. Other agencies' inputs to initial assessment work are limited and different pathways into early family support services other than via social care are not yet well developed. All children on the child protection register are supervised by a qualified social worker. Not all looked after children have a qualified social worker allocated to them. Present arrangements enable unqualified staff to provide support to young people while being supervised by qualified staff. However this arrangement, while well managed, does not meet national standards and guidance. Children who are to be adopted are being placed within good timescales.

**39. Most children and young people are prepared well for school and overall their achievement is good.** Most children attend school regularly and enjoy their education. Parents are well supported through targeted programmes in their neighbourhoods. There is good access to a wide range of early years provision, most of which is of good quality and supports children to make progress towards early learning goals. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and support is provided, allowing them to achieve well. Children in primary school achieve well despite their low levels of skills on entering education. They are being supported effectively to improve their attainment. The number of young people achieving five or more A\*–C grades at GCSE is improving but remains lower than the national average. Attendance at schools is improving but is below the national average. The numbers of primary school children permanently excluded from primary schools have fallen and are below the national average. The numbers being permanently excluded from secondary school are high, although the rate has fallen recently, but too few young people are reintegrated into mainstream schooling. Provision for excluded young people meets statutory requirements but the quality of provision is variable. Children and young people who move into the area and who have been out of school receive good support to get back into education. Initiatives targeted at raising achievement in secondary schools are helping girls at Key Stage 4, but the overall impact is not consistent across all groups. Children who are missing from schools' rolls and who have moved into the area are well monitored.

**40. Children and young people have a good range of opportunities to take personal responsibility and many make a good contribution to their communities.** Their views are taken into account and this is starting to have an impact on service design and delivery. Most are supported well at key transition points. Young people who are new to Blackpool and who have been out of school for some time, are particularly well supported. There is effective support to teenage mothers to help them develop good parenting skills and to access learning. Looked after children make good contributions to their reviews, but do not have a forum to share their views with the council. Young carers are offered limited help. Although there is a lot of effective work being done to tackle bullying, it remains one of the most serious concerns of young people and the response of adults in schools is not sufficiently consistent. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have opportunities to participate in decision-making forums. Young people at risk of offending receive good support to redirect them into more positive activities. However, re-offending among some young people is high. Young people over 16 who have been in custody find it hard to get a job or get on a training course at college or within a work setting. They also have to wait a long time to access mental health services.

**41. Most children and young people are able to achieve economic well-being and are prepared well for working life.** Most young people have good access to careers and advice. The proportion of young people in full-time education or training is improving and broadly in line with the national



average. Educational outcomes are improving for those young people who attend full-time education courses in colleges and work-based learning provision. The proportion of care leavers and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in education, employment or training is well above the national average and they achieve well. Young people looked after are supported well to remain in further education. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given practical advice and support to enable them to make good transitions and participate in learning and work if they so choose. The number of young people not in employment, education and training has reduced significantly and is now in line with statistical neighbours. Most young people leaving care have access to appropriate accommodation but there is insufficient housing provision, in particular for some vulnerable young people such as young people who have offended.

## **The impact of local public services**

### **Being healthy**

42. **The work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good.** Maternity provision for women in Blackpool is undergoing a period of modernisation and detailed plans are in place to ensure services meet local needs. Home births are above the national average and integration of midwife-led care in the community is in its early stages. Breastfeeding rates are below the national average but a well-developed strategy is in place to increase rates, including progress towards baby-friendly hospitals. Some reports of inconsistencies in handover to health visiting services have been recognised and are being addressed. Immunisation rates are generally high.

43. Early years provision is good with a comprehensive range of effective services being provided through services such as Sure Start, children's centres and early excellence centres. Health visitors and school nurses are beginning to work in an integrated way within these resources. Support for parents is good, well targeted and provided in a range of settings. Plans are in place to increase access to services within a full service extended school provision at Montgomery from April 2006.

44. There is a shared understanding of the challenging health inequalities and health needs of the population and a strong partnership approach to dealing with the causes of ill health and risk-taking behaviour. Health promotion and prevention strategies are well developed and provided in a range of community settings. The numbers of schools working towards the healthy schools award are above the national target and healthy eating programmes in schools are increasing access to healthy food for children and young people.

45. The school nursing service is providing a range of targeted intervention, public health and health promotion programmes for young people despite being short-staffed. Additional posts are being introduced into two high schools to improve access for young people. Some young people reported lack of suitable

private facilities for the drop-in services offered by school nurses. The education service notifies the school nursing services of transient children, but some staff reported delays in the process, causing problems for them with chasing up and checking data.

46. Young people's access to school sport and availability of leisure facilities within communities is good. This has been helped by the introduction of the Passport to Leisure scheme that provides low-cost access to facilities. There are examples of innovative development of campuses in children's centre areas including sports facilities (Talbot and Brunswick).

47. Significant progress has been made over the past two years in developing services to tackle the higher than average teenage pregnancy rates. The recent reduction in numbers of conception by 11% is commendable. Services are generally well developed and coordinated. Teenage pregnancy midwives provide good support to parents and, where appropriate, they follow individual packages of care through to the birth of the baby. The cause of the high teenage pregnancy rate is well understood and programmes are in place to change attitudes to sex and life choices through personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) in schools. There is also targeted work on improving emotional well-being and self-esteem, especially among young women. Sexual health services are well developed and are delivered through services such as Connect and are highly regarded by young people.

48. Effective substance misuse services are provided by a range of statutory and voluntary agencies. There is an excellent approach to the management of alcohol abuse through the joint agency Nightsafe project. Under-age drinking and purchase of alcohol is targeted along with the social consequences of binge drinking. There is evidence of a reduction in alcohol-related crime since the scheme was set up. Services are in place at A&E to better assess young people who are admitted to hospital as a result of substance misuse. A multi-faceted public health campaign is in place, but as yet, the impact on the high rates of admission to hospital for substance misuse is not evident.

49. Access to GP and primary care services is good. A&E services for children and young people are good. There have been reductions in the rates of admissions for gastroenteritis overall with a significant drop in rates in Grange Park and Talbot and Brunswick. Admission rates for asthma remain high. There is no in-patient assessment unit for children with a disability, but the PCT has plans in place to invest in one.

50. Effective child health screening programmes are in place. The numbers of children and young people with decayed, missing and filled teeth are significantly higher than average. The PCT is proactively recruiting dentists from abroad and developing a training course for dentists at Lancaster to increase capacity within the region. Oral health promotion programmes are delivered in early years settings and schools. Health services for children with a disability are adequate. Some services, such as speech and language therapy services,

are partially integrated, but this is not the case for physiotherapy and occupational therapy.

51. CAMHS are adequate, and the agencies recognise the areas of weakness and have recently invested in the service. The primary health team provides effective interventions, consultation and training and has good links with GPs and other primary care health workers. The self-harm service is well developed and young people have excellent access to it. There are serious difficulties in accessing CAMHS treatment at Tier 3. Waiting times for treatment are long, although predicted to fall sharply with recent investment. Waiting time for assessment is under 13 weeks. There has been some reduction in the numbers of young people waiting for treatment, but they are unacceptably long. The PCT has funded an additional psychology post for Blackpool children, reducing the waiting time from 104 to 74 weeks. There is good access to consultation in urgent cases and there is evidence of effective partnership working between the PCT, paediatricians and A&E services when managing acutely mentally ill young people. Arrangements for the provision of mental health services within the YOT are under urgent review.

52. Good links with child health mean that looked after children's histories are generally well documented and carers are able to ensure children's health needs are met. The percentage of initial health assessments is below average but is increasing year on year. All looked after children and young people are registered with a GP but access to dentistry remains difficult due to the general shortage of NHS dentists. Services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are adequate. There are long waiting times for speech and language therapy and this is being managed by training early years staff in language programmes. Joint working between the disabled children and occupational therapy services is limited. There are some difficulties in accessing equipment services. Services for children with ADHD are in development. Transition arrangements for disabled children into adult health services are not adequate.

## Staying safe

53. **The work of all local services in keeping children and young people safe is adequate.** Good progress has been made since the children's social care services were found to be 'unsafe' in the joint review of 2003. Capacity has improved with a significant increase in the number of social workers. While there are areas of innovative and good-quality practice, some aspects of performance, such as reducing the numbers of looked after children and children on the register, consistently meeting assessment timescales, remain challenging.

54. The council provides a range of advice to parents and young people on keeping safe in the community and in their homes. Effective campaigns have been undertaken to promote road safety, and road casualty rates involving children have fallen. Good guidance is provided on safety in undertaking outdoor activities and educational visits. Effective programmes are in place to

support young people's personal safety particularly in relation to alcohol-related behaviour, crime and sexual exploitation. An excellent multi-agency approach to sexual exploitation is in place and offers an effective model for action to protect children and pursue perpetrators. The high incidence of domestic violence has been recognised with good links between the police, social care and health to ensure that risks to children are appropriately assessed.

55. The duty service is well managed and provides a safe response to referrals, particularly those concerning child protection. The child protection register is very active, with higher than national average numbers of children being registered and de-registered. All of this is a reflection of the high volume of referrals and the numbers of transient families with complex needs, already known to other council's child protection services, moving into the borough. Initial assessments remain primarily a social care activity. Pathways to early intervention and family support services are not yet fully developed to divert families away from social care. The percentage of initial assessments completed within seven days fell in 2004/05 to unacceptable levels. However, the service has recently been remodelled and received additional staffing resources and most recent data, reflecting the enhanced service, indicates an improvement in this year. Recent monitoring figures also show an improvement in performance this year with regard to the number of core assessments completed on time. . Links between the YOT and social care teams are weak, leading to some inadequate initial assessments. There is confusion among some staff in the YOT about the system for routinely checking if young people are looked after or are on the child protection register.

56. A good range of family support services is provided through statutory and voluntary agencies across Blackpool. However, services have not been developed in the context of an overarching preventive strategy and work is being undertaken on reviewing the mix of provision with stakeholders to ensure duplication is avoided and that programmes are complementary. Positive signs of service integration are in evidence in extended school and Sure Start provisions.

57. Multi-agency child protection work is well managed and children who are identified as in need of protection receive a good service. There is good access to up-to-date, multi-agency child protection procedures. The section of the procedures relating to young people subject to detention and training orders does not reflect good practice as young people who are looked after are being discharged from care once subject to such orders. All children on the register are allocated to qualified social workers and have their needs reviewed within the required timescales. Child protection plans are of a good quality and are effectively managed.

58. The Business Plan for the Safeguarding Board is limited in its scope, reflecting the stage of transition to the Board from the previous ACPC. Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements are well established with effective links to the Lancashire strategy and overlapping membership between the Local Safeguarding Board, the local panel and the Lancashire MAPPA Strategic

Management Board. However, the YOT is not well linked into the arrangements at a strategic or operational level. A range of levels of child protection training is available to staff of all partner agencies across the borough, but not all agencies have ensured that all staff have undertaken the appropriate level of training. Criminal Records Bureau policy and procedures have been strengthened to ensure safe recruitment practices, but the effectiveness of these is inconsistent; the YOT inspection raised concerns about checks on staff in partner agencies used by the YOT.

59. The number of children looked after in Blackpool is increasing and a strategy to reduce the number is not yet in place. Looked after children were all allocated to qualified social workers in 2002/03, but around 30 children (10%) are now allocated to unqualified staff. While effective oversight arrangements are in place, improvement is required in the longer term to conform with national guidance. There is good performance in relation to reviewing the plans for looked after children with all the reviews taking place within the timescale. The percentage of looked after children placed for adoption is good and there is very good performance in relation to the speed of decision-making and placement with prospective adopters.

60. Arrangements for the safeguarding of children with disabilities are adequate. The social care services for children with disabilities are traditional and delivered through a specialist team, which is not multidisciplinary. A best value review undertaken in 2003 highlighted the need for more integrated services to improve responses to children and families. This has led to some changes and an improvement in the way respite care was being provided. The council has allocated extra resources for a new build but these plans are in development. There is a pilot Early Support Service being implemented that is aimed at providing multi-agency diagnosis and assessment of needs to tailor individual packages of support. However, the impact on outcomes is too early to assess.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

**61. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good.**

62. There is an extensive range of good-quality support for parents and carers who wish to help their children to enjoy school and to achieve. There is a clear focus on those parents who live in the most deprived areas or face the greatest challenges. This includes some innovative work within the Sure Start centre in the Talbot and Brunswick area and in the early excellence centre at Claremont school. There are innovative plans to target families facing the greatest difficulties through a multi-agency programme. Support for parents with children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is effective and is greatly valued by them.

63. There is a clear strategy for early years provision that incorporates an effective workforce development strategy and a well-developed programme of monitoring, support and challenge. Information is readily available to parents seeking childcare and there is accessible provision for those parents who require it. The overall quality of nursery education is good and supports pupils well in making progress towards the early learning goals. The identification of and support for young children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is effective.

64. The planning for school places is thorough and ensures there are sufficient places available to meet demand. An appropriate strategy has been implemented successfully to address surplus places in the primary sector. Parents receive clear guidance on admission procedures to schools and appropriate attention is paid in the admission criteria to the needs of the most vulnerable young people. Innovative capital investment in school premises has enhanced the quality of provision across the borough.

65. The large majority of schools inspected are judged to be good or very good. A team of link advisers provides effective support to help schools to plan for improvement. Data is used effectively to identify underachievement and to target support at individual schools. The team of consultants delivering the national strategies provides targeted support which is raising standards in schools, although not yet consistently. The initiatives to raise attainment in secondary schools are succeeding but have yet to consistently impact on achievement. Despite this, the headteachers value the support for school improvement and the credibility of the teams is high. There are clear and effective procedures for identifying and supporting schools causing concern to the authority. There are now only two schools in an Ofsted category of concern. This is a significant improvement in recent years.

66. The attendance of pupils is below that found nationally, but is improving steadily at a rate above that found nationally. The pupil welfare service is effective and makes good use of a range of initiatives to address poor attendance, including appropriate use of prosecution, truancy sweeps and multi-agency concern meetings to develop agreed strategies with families. There are effective sponsorship links with the community to reward good attendance. The missing and vulnerable children's team effectively manages the tracing and monitoring of transient pupils who are not on a school register.

67. Overall support for behaviour is satisfactory. The behaviour improvement programme has been successful in targeted primary schools. The behaviour education support team provides an effective multi-agency approach to addressing issues. The coordination of behaviour support across the authority has been inconsistent, but this is now being addressed. Permanent exclusions have fallen in the primary sector and are now below the national level. However, permanent exclusions in secondary schools increased significantly in 2004/05 and were well above the national level. Strategies are beginning to make an impact in secondary schools and the rate of exclusion has fallen in the autumn term 2005 compared with 2004.

68. The provision for pupils permanently excluded from schools has been unsatisfactory. The situation has been partially addressed and provision now meets the statutory requirements. However, rates of reintegration remain too low. The quality of provision remains an area requiring improvement, but there is a robust plan to address this and the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A\*–G is already above that found nationally.

69. The vast majority of schools offer good support for enrichment through extensive extra-curricular activities. There is a well-developed music service that is effectively supporting cultural involvement as do a number of borough-wide festivals. In addition, the youth service is engaging an increasing proportion of young people in a range of meaningful activities. There has been significant investment in sports facilities, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas within the borough. The local authority provides free access to swimming and other leisure activities including during the summer holidays for the most disadvantaged young people, including those looked after by the authority. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have access to specific leisure opportunities to address their needs, for example swimming for disabled young people and a summer school for autistic children.

70. School inspections indicate that children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well in all schools. The provision in maintained special schools is very good and is greatly valued by young people and their parents. The council is committed to inclusion and there is effective support for all schools to include young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The provision of special educational resource facilities in primary and secondary schools supports the retention of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities within schools. There are effective links between special and mainstream schools to enhance the education of young people in special schools and to support inclusion. The proportion of pupils with statements is in line with that found nationally and the number of statements is falling. The level of placement in provision that is not maintained by the borough is high but the costs per placement are below those found nationally.

71. There is an appropriate range of support for looked after children. This is coordinated by the virtual school team that maintains a detailed database of young people in the care of the authority. The vast majority of young people in care have a personal education plan, their progress is monitored closely in collaboration with the schools and they receive effective support when required. The attendance of looked after young people is in line with that found nationally and the proportion that attains one or more GCSE at grades A\*–G is above that found nationally. The proportion gaining five or more A\*–C grades at GCSE was above the national rate in 2004. The dip in 2005 reflects variations in the cohort, when only one young person was in the cohort. There has been no permanent exclusion of a looked after child in the last year.

## **Making a positive contribution**

### **72. The work of all local services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good.**

73. Children's social and emotional development is generally promoted well in the area with childcare and nursery education contributing strongly. A range of peer-mentoring initiatives, including training, provides good support for more vulnerable young people. Teenage mothers are helped through an imaginative scheme to develop parenting skills and build positive relationships with their children. An ambitious programme to boost the aspirations and self-esteem of young women in schools has recently been launched by the council and its partners.

74. The involvement of young people in decision-making is a high priority for the council. There is a strong sense of momentum among the council and its partners on this issue. The council in drawing up its Children and Young People's Plan undertook effective consultation. Over 500 young people, including those in hard-to-reach groups, were involved in various consultation events. The plan now reflects their views and priorities very well. There is a strong focus on extending the opportunities for young people to contribute their views more broadly such as through the Blackpool Young Persons Council (BYPC). Good progress has been made in rebuilding the BYPC as a proper democratic forum. Many services and agencies such as Streetlife and NHS Connect respond well in listening to young people's views and take account of their ideas and ensure that these are reflected in service planning and delivery.

75. Inspection activities confirmed the view of young people identified by the council itself that bullying is one of their most serious concerns. A coordinator is in place and some work to review the council's policy is nearly complete. Some schools have taken thorough and innovative steps to address bullying. However, good practice is not shared sufficiently between schools. The council has not completed work to clearly identify the scale of the problem. Young people feel that teachers, particularly in some secondary schools do not act consistently enough in recognising what constitutes bullying or how they should respond.

76. The council approved the Hear by Right standard in October 2004. The youth service is leading a mapping exercise of public and voluntary organisations providing services for young people against this standard. This is in the early stages of completion. School councils are well established in many schools and are highly valued by young people, particularly where they result in a positive response from adults. For example, one school has agreed to the use of MP3 players during some private study at the council's suggestion. Special school pupils participate in their own councils and attend BYPC. The councils have been well supported by the youth service in making themselves more open and effective.



77. Looked after children generally have good opportunities to contribute to their statutory reviews. There is a well-used advocacy service with clear, child-friendly information leaflets providing information on what is available and how to access it. Although they know how to make individual complaints, there is no suitable forum for looked after children to express their views on the services they receive.

78. There are very good arrangements to ensure that children and young people moving into new settings and those who have experienced traumatic events are effectively supported. Sound induction arrangements in schools include a Wyse Up project to assist children with anxieties about moving into secondary schools, and the Stepping Stones project to support young people moving into Blackpool who have been out of education for some time. The Connexions service works closely with other agencies to provide good support to young women particularly at risk of becoming pregnant. Very good support is provided to young victims of sexual exploitation through a comprehensive interagency Awaken Project. Young carers have access to some services but, overall, more could be done to step up the rate of service development to increase the range of services available.

79. The council has made good progress with its strategic aim of extending the leisure and youth activities available to young people particularly in the more deprived areas. A 'Dream Scheme' is involving increasing numbers of young people across the town in community activities. It offers highly valued 'rewards' such as a residential in a Lake District outdoor activity centre. A wide range of action is being taken to reduce anti-social behaviour. Action to reduce re-offending is not yet significantly impacting; the re-offending rates increased by 7.6% in 2002/03 but only showed a slight decrease in 2003/04.

80. Support provided to young people who have been the subject of custodial sentences is generally good. New funding had recently been identified to make this support more tailored to individual needs. The percentage of young offenders in full-time education, employment or training has been improving and this is now around the national average. However, over a third of young offenders over 16 are unemployed. Links between the YOT and post-16 education and training providers are not well developed and there is insufficient suitable provision. As a result, some young offenders are not receiving the education they need, including opportunities which they need to develop basic and vocational skills.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

**81. The work of all local services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good.**

82. Parents and carers are well informed about the wide range of childcare facilities and activities. The Childcare Information Service provides parents with an appropriate range of accessible information about childcare information and opportunities for development. There is good take-up of provision. Local,

accessible family learning is beginning to develop the skills of many parents, helping them to support their child's learning and to increase their employability.

83. Most young people receive good help to prepare for working life. Work-related learning and work experience opportunities are provided in all schools at Key Stage 4. The Education Business Partnership provides good support in ensuring that all young people have good access to work placements. Special schools are actively encouraging their students to participate in work-related learning.

84. The Connexions service makes available impartial advice and good guidance to all young people, in particular for targeted groups such as young offenders and those not in education, training or employment. Links between the Connexions service and the schools are improving. Most young people are receiving careers advice with around 76% of young people having individual interviews with a Connexions personal adviser.

85. Support to enable young people to overcome personal and social barriers and to progress is good in many settings. The Connexions service has been effective in seconding personal advisers to specific services such as the leaving care team. In addition, the service funds two half-time midwives to work with young parents, in particular teenage mothers who are well supported to access education and training. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and looked after children receive effective support at transition and are involved in this planning. Transitions are well planned and managed through a multi-agency approach. Good use is made of local voluntary organisations to inform young people with disabilities about the range of opportunities available to them post-16 and to offer them practical support in accessing this provision. Jobcentre Plus provision is effective in helping young people to find employment. Access to and information about the Workstep programme for young people with disabilities is good as it has enabled young people to be better informed about training and work placements, which they can take up if they so choose.

86. The youth service, in collaboration with the YOT and the Connexions service, has established some well-focused initiatives to help young people develop personal and work-related skills and confidence. The number of young people not in education, training and employment has reduced significantly and is now in line with statistical neighbours and just above national benchmarks. A high proportion of looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are in post-16 education and training, although the numbers of young offenders and young mothers in post-16 education are low. The Connexions service is in contact with 92% of young mothers, a much higher figure than the rest of the country. Success rates in further education are improving and are broadly in line with national averages. The achievements of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are above the national average. Success rates for advanced apprentices are significantly above national averages. However, for apprentices they are low and below the

national average. The numbers of young people aged 17 and 18 moving into employment without training are high.

87. Following a slow start, strategic working between the local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC), the local authority, the Connexions service and Jobcentre Plus is now developing well. The joint funding by the local authority and the LLSC of 14–19 coordinators has helped to improve collaboration among partners. A 14–19 strategy and learner entitlement has been agreed with all key stakeholders. However, there has been slow progress in developing a comprehensive 14–19 curriculum to maximise use of resources and to overcome duplication or curriculum gaps. The curriculum includes limited pre-16 vocational opportunities which are targeted at less academically able young people.

88. There is an increasing focus on regeneration activities in the area. Good progress has been made in developing a community strategy to tackle social disadvantage. There is a strong focus on staying safe and improving access to leisure activities for young people. Community regeneration initiatives include action to address the needs of children, young people and their families and there is increasing involvement of children, young people and their families in these initiatives. Regeneration of the Queens Park estate won the council an award for the improvements and this success is currently being implemented in three other deprived wards in the town.

89. Supplies of adequate housing are limited. The length of stay in hostels is currently higher than the national picture. Market analysis has identified a lack of homes unsuitable for children and families. However, positive action has been taken in targeted areas and investment has been made in the development of some of the most deprived areas where housing stock has been redeveloped such as Talbot and Brunswick and Grange Park. A young residents' association has been effective in improving the local environment. Despite limited housing, the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation has increased significantly from 78.9% in 2003/04 to 93.8% in 2004/05. This represents good performance.

90. Young parents have access to two schemes in the area that provide accommodation and support to enable them to access education, employment and training. The Supporting People programme has recently been established to provide support to vulnerable people in maintaining their home. It is too early to judge the impact of the scheme. However, a few stakeholders are unaware of the schemes existence. Suitable accommodation for young offenders is limited. The long-term absence of the accommodation officer for the youth offending service has led to a decline in the availability of suitable, safe accommodation.

### **Service management**

91. **The management of services for children and young people is good.**

92. The ambition of the council and its partners for children and young people is good. There is a clear understanding that the challenges of high levels of deprivation, low educational attainment and poor health require radical and concerted action over the long term. This understanding is based on a thorough and detailed analysis of need, using the accumulated intelligence from the council and its partners.

93. Far-reaching ambitions for the transformation of the town as a whole are brought together in the Master Plan. Those for children and young people more specifically are well set out in the new Children and Young People's Plan. At present the links between the two are not fully developed and the social implications of the Master Plan are not as well considered as its physical and economic features. These elements are being addressed more deliberately in the council's recent Local Area Agreement. Consultation with children and young people on the Children and Young People's Plan has been impressive and mechanisms are in place to ensure their voice is heard as the plan develops. There has clearly been a cultural shift over the past three years and an appreciation of the importance of listening to young people is beginning to permeate services.

94. Prioritisation is adequate. The ambitions in the Children and Young People's Plan have been successfully translated into nine key strategic priorities. The strategy to deliver these priorities is not yet developed, although the partnership is clear about the next steps in drawing up delivery plans. These will be supported by the priorities in the Local Area Agreement. A comprehensive change management programme provides a sound framework for delivering these priorities through integrated service delivery. Progress towards the integration of services has been measured, confined largely to structural change at senior management level. This approach has been beneficial in maintaining relatively high staff morale, but many frontline staff are unclear how the changes implicit in the Every Child Matters agenda will be delivered.

95. Services for children and young people are a high priority for the council. This is clearly understood by elected members and stakeholders, although the articulation of this in the high-level strategic plans is unclear. This high priority is amply demonstrated by decisions on the allocation of resources. Funding for education has been systematically increased to the level of the Formula Spending Share (FSS) and maintained at that level and spending on children's social care is well above FSS. Within services, the council has redirected resources to particular priority areas, for example to support efforts to improve attainment at Key Stage 4, where performance is worst in comparison with other areas.

96. The track record on service planning is mixed. Some key plans, such as the Educational Development Plan, are very sound and provide a good basis for taking forward the partnership's agenda. Others, such as the service plan for children's social care, are less helpful and provide insufficient detail on responsibilities, success criteria and resource implications.

97. The capacity of the council and its partners to achieve their priorities is good overall, and the capacity of both to improve is good. The energy and commitment of members and officers across the partnership is striking and a real strength. Relationships are good at all levels, between partners, including the voluntary sector, between elected members and between departments. Responsibilities are clearly defined and understood. The fundamental restructuring of the council over the past two years has placed the council in a stronger position to deliver its priorities for children and young people. Strategic capacity has been enhanced, along with the potential for more integration of service delivery. The director of children's services and his management team have a clear focus on outcomes for children and are not distracted by other issues. Headteachers are exceptionally supportive of the work of the department and the support they receive.

98. There is a strong culture of partnership working evident in most areas, although the 14–19 partnership has been slower to get off the ground. This culture has led to joint resources being applied to develop creative solutions to a wide range of challenges. For example, the 'Awaken' project, a multi-agency team involving social workers, education and police officers, health and the NSPCC, works with children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation and, after its first year, has already made a significant impact in terms of arrests and safeguarding. Budgets are simply aligned in a number of areas rather than pooled, but this cautious approach has not hampered effective partnership working.

99. Resource management is generally sound. Within the council there are robust systems for budget monitoring, based on a clear risk assessment, as well as good support for budget holders. Effective use is made of a wide range of external funding. Where budgets are under pressure, action has been taken to address the problem. For example, contracts for out-of-borough childcare and agency placements have been renegotiated and unit costs have been brought down. However, contracts and service level agreements are not all properly in place. Moreover, the broader strategic approach is underdeveloped. No overall commissioning strategy has been formally agreed and opportunities to integrate commissioning across the whole area of children's services have not yet been taken. School balances are considerably higher than average, although reducing, despite the council requiring schools to account for the level of their balances and taking them into consideration when making decisions on discretionary funding.

100. Overall the council provides good value for money. On most measures spending is not significantly out of line with comparator authorities and, where it is, there is a reasonable explanation. Spending on independent special school places is substantially above average, but the cost per place is significantly lower than average. The council compares its costs and performance against other councils. The Services to Schools Procurement Board, involving headteachers, is a successful mechanism for holding council service providers to account by requiring them to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of services.

Service managers generally have a fair understanding of what constitutes value for money, but the focus on value for money is not explicit and there are no systematic mechanisms for ensuring that it is being delivered in practice.

101. Risk management is based on a good set of corporate procedures, but it is not yet established as a routine management process. The quality of ICT systems is variable, although a new integrated system for children's services is being developed. The council's workforce development strategy for children and young people is very recent and not complete. It is not yet a collaborative exercise, taking in the needs and contributions of partner organisations. However, there have been important achievements in workforce development. Training is generally well organised and well received. The council has been particularly successful in recruiting social workers, moving from only 55% of posts filled to 95% over two years. This has been achieved through innovative action, involving the use of a career structure for non-qualified staff, overseas recruitment and an emphasis on retention through the careful management of caseloads.

102. The way the council and its partners manage performance is adequate. Although the involvement of children and young people is limited in this respect, the council has otherwise sound systems for performance monitoring and reporting. The use of a special software system provides a good basis for data collection and analysis. Performance appraisal, including 360-degree appraisal for senior officers, is established, although full implementation has been relatively recent. Good use is made of a variety of approaches to analyse the causes of poor performance and seek appropriate remedies. A 'performance clinic', for example on Key Stage 4 performance, helpfully concentrated minds on action to tackle low achievement. However, performance management is not firmly established across the whole of the children's services department. Some teams, particularly within children's social care, demonstrate only a limited understanding of and commitment to the concept. As far as the partnership as a whole is concerned, agreement has been achieved on key shared performance indicators as a first step to developing a new regime to drive improvement.

103. The council's scrutiny arrangements in respect of children and young people are adequate and, in common with scrutiny across the board, have recently been revamped with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness of the function. An opposition member now takes the chair for the first time. Previously a scrutiny review of youth services resulted in helpful changes, but generally scrutiny has had limited impact.

## **Annex: the children and young people's section of the corporate assessment report**

1. Support for children, young people and their families is a key priority for the council and its partners. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, acting as a Children's Trust, has clear and ambitious priorities for improving outcomes for children and young people in the borough. There is a history of effective joint working within the area and this has led to a number of well-targeted services to the most vulnerable young people.
2. Management of the council's services for children is good. Financial and resource management is generally good. The track record on service planning is mixed and some plans and strategies are not yet fully developed to demonstrate how priorities will be achieved. Interagency work is a strong feature of the area and the capacity to achieve priorities is good. The council's contribution to achieving outcomes for children and young people is good. Some areas remain a challenge and these include reducing the numbers of children looked after and the rate of child protection registrations.
3. The director of children's services and lead member have been in place for over 18 months. As yet there have been no significant moves towards an integrated structure or pooled budgets. This is due to the council and its partners having taken a measured approach to implementing the new structure for delivering the Every Child Matters agenda. This is the best way forward as it enables a change in culture which is sustainable and which gives a firm foundation on which to successfully integrate services and structures. Arrangements are in place at senior management level to lead on the implementation of the Every Child Matters programme, but not all staff have a clear picture of the route to achieving this.
4. The council works well with its partners and has secured good health outcomes for the majority of children in Blackpool. There is a range of programmes, which are impacting on healthy lifestyles, but some areas remain a challenge for the partners despite specific initiatives. These include the high incidence of asthma, smoking in pregnancy, low birth weight babies and lower than average breastfeeding rates. Access to treatment at CAMHS Tier 3 is problematic and children are experiencing long delays in accessing the service. However, specific investment is being targeted to reduce waiting times. The level of teenage pregnancies remains high but recent figures show a significant reduction on the 2004 figures. There is well-targeted health and education support to young mothers.
5. On the evidence gathered by the joint area review, arrangements to safeguard children are adequate and children and young people appear safe. Child protection work is effectively managed and agencies work well to support children. There is some very good work to support children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation and to prevent them from putting themselves at

risk. Initial response arrangements are well managed but too many children enter the looked after and child protection system. Not all looked after children are allocated to a qualified worker but they are supported well and have their views listened to. Children are placed for adoption within good timescales. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported by a specialist team but there is fragmentation of services across agencies. While there is a number of effective family support services, more needs to be done to bring these together under a preventive strategy to ensure there is more focus on early support to families in need before a crisis occurs.

6. Education achievement is adequate but the impact of services in a number of areas is good. Most children and young people attend school and enjoy their education. Children generally enter education with a level of skills well below average, but the educational standards achieved in primary school are broadly in line with comparator councils and the rates of improvement are above the national average. Some of the best value-added scores are achieved in some primary and secondary schools in the most deprived areas of Blackpool. Attendance is below the national average and levels of permanent exclusions have fallen in primary school but remain high in the secondary sector. The quality of provision for children excluded needs addressing and more needs to be done to reintegrate them back into mainstream education. Looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported to achieve well.

7. The council places a high priority on involving young people in decision-making. The Children and Young People's Plan reflects children's views and many services have taken young people's views into account in shaping service delivery. Young people are aware of the Master Plan but some feel they have not been adequately consulted and have concerns about what benefit regeneration will offer them. Strategies are in place to address bullying and some schools have taken innovative steps to deal with the problem. However, young people remain seriously concerned about bullying because they experience a lack of consistency in the way some teachers are responding to the problem. A range of activities is available to redirect young people away from anti-social behaviour including access to leisure and volunteering. Looked after young people have access to advocacy and complaints processes. However, they do not have a forum to bring them together to make their views known to the council as a corporate parent.

8. Local services are making a good contribution to the economic well-being of young people. Most children are prepared well for working life and have access to advice about the different routes available to them. They have good access to work placements. There is good support to young people looked after and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to help them access provision. The number of young people not in education, training and employment has reduced significantly and is just above national benchmarks. Success rates in further education are in line with national averages. There has been slow progress in developing a comprehensive 14–19 curriculum to



maximise the use of resources and to overcome duplication or gaps in provision. Supplies of adequate housing are limited and the length of stays in hostels is higher than the national average. However, regeneration initiatives have been targeted at some of the most deprived areas to redevelop housing stock.