

# Joint area review

**Blackburn with Darwen Children's Services Authority Area**

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Review of services for children and young people

Audit Commission  
Healthcare Commission  
HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate  
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary  
HM Inspectorate of Prisons  
HM Inspectorate of Probation  
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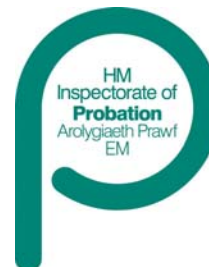
**Age group:** All

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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Main findings</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Grades</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Areas for investigation through fieldwork during the joint area review</b>	
1. Safeguarding	6
2. Looked after children and young people	9
3. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	12
4. Additional investigations	17
5. Service management	22
6. Capacity to improve	23
<b>Annex A: The APA letter</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Annex B: Summary of the Enhanced Youth Inspection Report</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Annex C: Children and young people's section of the corporate assessment report</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Annex D: Summary of joint area review and annual performance assessment arrangements</b>	<b>33</b>

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## Introduction

1. The 2007 Annual Performance Assessment (APA) for Blackburn with Darwen judged the council's children's services as good, and its capacity to improve as good.
2. This report assesses the contribution of local services in ensuring that children and young people:
  - at risk, or requiring safeguarding are effectively cared for
  - who are looked after achieve the best possible outcomes
  - with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve the best possible outcomes.
3. The following investigations were also carried out:
  - the impact of the partners' strategy on improving the provision of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)
  - the effectiveness of strategies to improve community cohesion.

## Context

4. Blackburn with Darwen has a population of approximately 140,000. A comparatively high proportion (just over 40,000) is aged 0–19. About one quarter of the population comprises members of minority ethnic communities. The proportion of the school population with Pakistani and Indian heritage is about one third. This rises to over 40% in some year groups of primary school age.
5. The majority of the population live in the two urban areas of Blackburn and Darwen. The nature of the locality is one of local pride and identity, with two major local communities from different backgrounds – one predominantly a White British working class community and the other of predominantly Asian heritage.
6. Blackburn with Darwen is one of the 10% most deprived councils in England. Over 60% of local children and young people live in the most deprived 20% of areas nationally. The past three years has seen the completion of a network of 13 children's centres across the borough based in areas of acute deprivation but serving the whole community.
7. There are 10 secondary schools, four voluntary-aided and six community schools. One secondary school has a sixth form and there are two further education colleges. The borough has 56 primary schools, including six infant schools and six junior schools, 29 voluntary aided schools and one foundation school. There are two pupil referral units, four special schools and nine nursery

schools. Work-based learning is delivered through two major providers: Training 2000 and Blackburn College.

8. Primary care is provided by NHS Blackburn with Darwen, which is coterminous with the council area. The main provider of children's acute services is East Lancashire Hospital Trust. Other services, including CAMHS, are provided by East Lancashire Hospitals Trust and Lancashire Care Trust. Children's social care services are provided through 118 foster carers, four children's residential care homes and family support teams across the network of children's centres. There are no young offender institutions in the area. Services to children and young people who are at risk of offending or have offended are provided through the Blackburn with Darwen Youth Offending Team managed within the Children's Services Directorate. Children's services in the area are overseen by the Children and Young People's Trust with representatives from all key partners at both board and sub-group level.

9. A new strategy, 're:fresh', has been created to help people improve their health and well-being. Re:refresh gives the people of Blackburn with Darwen the opportunity to access a range of free leisure facilities, including health and dietary advice.

## Main Findings

10. The main findings of this joint area review are as follows:

- The contribution of services to safeguarding arrangements is good. There is some outstanding practice, including preventative work organised through the children's centres. Partnership working is very strong and reflected in the good Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), in the provision of good joint services, and in the effective assessment and planning arrangements. However, communication between the youth offending service and multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) is inconsistent.
- The contribution of services to improving outcomes for looked after children and young people is good. There is effective coordinated action to help children and young people enjoy and achieve well at school, with strong improvement in educational achievement and good opportunities in education, employment or training for care leavers. Not all, however, participate fully in reviews of their care plans, and their views are not consistently recorded.
- The contribution of services to outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. There is a clear vision and strong commitment to providing the highest quality services, and this is achieved through very strong collaborative multi-professional working that ensures the needs of all children and young people are met as quickly and effectively as

possible. Achievement and progress are judged to be good or better in the vast majority of Ofsted school inspections over the past three years.

- The contribution of services to outcomes for children and young people with mental health needs is good. There has been a significant improvement in CAMHS over the past year, notably in the organisation of early intervention work provided by a wide range of agencies. The development of locally-based services has resulted in significant improvements in the quality and availability of services. However, some young people aged 16 and 17 are still being treated on adult mental health wards.
- The contribution of services in promoting community cohesion is good. The leadership of senior officers in this area of work is strong. Excellent partnership working and well-considered initiatives, projects and events foster a sense of belonging and give children and young people good opportunities to contribute to debate and decision-making at all levels and to develop their understanding of different cultures and faiths. Attainment by young people continues to improve, in particular amongst underachieving groups.
- Service management and capacity to improve are good, with excellent leadership and partnership working. IT service development is not keeping pace with the demanding business requirements of children's services. There is a good track record of improvement in outcomes for children and young people, and a clear understanding of areas for development.

## Grades

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

	<b>Local services overall</b>
<b>Safeguarding</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Looked after children</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Learning difficulties and/or disabilities</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Service management</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>3</b>

## Recommendations

### For immediate action

The local partnership should:

- ensure that an appropriate way is found for the successful dissemination of the findings of this report to children and young people in the area
- improve communication between the youth offending service and MAPPA so that lines of responsibility are more clearly defined
- improve arrangements for the placement of looked after children with family and friends in emergencies.

### For action over the next six months

- Ensure all young people with mental health needs who are admitted to hospital are treated on appropriate wards and are not placed inappropriately on adult psychiatric wards.
- Improve the quality of analysis and evaluation in social care case records and ensure any findings are included within the electronic case recording system.
- Ensure all looked after children are able to make a full and meaningful contribution to their reviews.

## Equality and diversity

11. The Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates a strong commitment to narrowing the gap for those in the community who suffer from social deprivation and poverty. Equality and diversity issues effectively underpin the priorities of the Children and Young People's Trust and are evident in collaborative partnership working. Commitment to social inclusion by all partners is demonstrated through the broad and innovative range of programmes and activities that sensitively target the most vulnerable children and their families. Early intervention and preventative services through multi-agency assessment and support are of good quality and partners strive to ensure parity and equity of provision, well demonstrated, for example, across the 13 children's centres. There has been a continuous trend of improvement in educational attainment, and well-targeted work in schools has brought about significant improvements for some of the most vulnerable groups, for example those of Pakistani heritage and White British boys eligible for free school meals. Looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve very well and there are effective arrangements in place for transition to adult life.

12. Effective partnerships are helping to promote good community cohesion. Very good attention is given to ensuring the most vulnerable groups, such as new arrivals from Eastern Europe and Traveller communities, receive timely and culturally sensitive support to help them settle in and contribute to the community. Successful joint working between health services and partners has enhanced services to support the emotional health and well-being of children and young people. Good progress has been made in ensuring all aspects of safeguarding and child protection work are well supported by robust multi-agency procedures.

## Safeguarding



13. **The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for children and young people at risk, or requiring safeguarding is good.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Outstanding arrangements to respond to domestic violence and to focus on the needs of children caught up in such violence.</p> <p>Strong performance across a range of safeguarding performance indicators.</p> <p>Outstanding development of preventative provision including 13 children's centres, early years provision, common assessment framework (CAF) and Continuum of Need and Response.</p> <p>Well-organised LSCB providing effective leadership and appropriate challenge.</p> <p>The Engage project is exemplary in safeguarding young people at risk of sexual exploitation.</p>	<p>Communication between the youth offending service and MAPPA is inconsistent.</p> <p>Case analysis, particularly following initial and core assessments, is not routinely recorded.</p> <p>Awareness of private fostering is limited and associated registration rates are comparatively low.</p>

14. The partnership is making good progress in improving safeguarding arrangements, with a clear focus on child protection responsibilities. This work is guided by up-to-date multi-agency procedures and through a series of sub-groups including e-safety. The LSCB provides strong leadership, is



independently chaired and holds contributing agencies to account in respect of all safeguarding matters, including lessons learned from serious case reviews. Safeguarding performance is good against key indicators. Accuracy of initial assessments and planning has led to very good performance in respect of reduced rates of re-referrals to the child protection system. Initial child protection conference rates at 27 per 10,000 are slightly below the England average at 36 but this is due to increased capacity to safely divert cases at earlier stages. Conference processes are well managed by experienced chairpersons and all child protection reviews are held on time.

15. The referral and assessment team has been completely restructured. It is well managed and referral and assessment processes are clearly defined, with good systems for the transfer of relevant information. The proportion of initial assessments completed within seven days, at 82%, is higher than the average for comparable areas and nationally. The rate of core assessments per 10,000 population has increased from 49 in 2005–06 to 84 in 2007–08 and is now in line with comparator areas. Timing of core assessments is very good. The emergency duty team is similarly well managed and communicates effectively with the referral and assessment team. All incoming work to social care services is quickly processed with no unallocated cases. Decision-making on levels of need, risk and types of intervention is good. The team includes a full-time domestic violence worker, a jointly funded health worker, an education welfare post and attendance by a member of the police public protection unit one day each week. This integration has facilitated very effective communication. A new information management system is in place, which is being well used by staff. This provides a mailbox for police domestic abuse referrals. However, the system does not currently fully support case analysis and it is difficult to track the reasons for decisions and actions in some cases. It is recognised that this is an area for further development, particularly in respect of initial and core assessments.

16. Implementation of the CAF, with almost 800 assessments completed since 2006, and the introduction of an innovative 'Continuum of Need and Response' model to determine joint responses to need, has been outstanding. Combined with the establishment of an extensive network of 13 well-managed children's centres, extended schools and family regeneration initiatives it has been possible to provide more flexible services to children and families at earlier stages. This has led to a significant and carefully evaluated shift in the referral pattern. In 2005-06, the number of referrals to the child protection system was higher than the national and regional averages at 814 per 10,000 population. This has now reduced significantly below these averages to 395. The range and quality of services within the children's centres is impressive and includes social care, health, education and voluntary sector provision. These joint services are ensuring early access to support services for parents and children. The engagement of the voluntary, community and faith sector in safeguarding is good. An effective network of centre managers is facilitating innovative developments and joint working. Ideas and learning are shared well across the network. The centres are responsive to local need and management boards

include community representation. Access to the centres by minority groups is good and demonstrates an increasing level of trust and confidence. High quality training on CAF and on the Continuum of Need and Response model is being systematically provided to all partners. The LSCB also provides high quality training programmes for the full range of partners and these have been consistently praised by all agencies and are well attended.

17. Most children and young people in the borough say they feel safe. Gaining the views of children and young people in all settings in respect of feeling safe is a strong feature of partnership working and there is particularly imaginative work within the children's centres to find ways to work directly with young children and families on safeguarding issues. Demanding targets have been set for road safety and accident reduction, and the strategy is fully supported by the emergency services. Good progress has been made in reducing road traffic accidents and accidents in the home. The baseline for road traffic accidents involving children set in 1998 has now been successfully reduced by 66% to an annual average of 10. This decline is significantly better than the national average. An impressive example of action to reduce road traffic accidents has been the Mosque marshalling scheme whereby members of the Asian community are trained to escort children attending Mosques. The LSCB website provides a good source of safeguarding information for the public and professionals, and helpful and accessible safeguarding information is available at all children's venues. Work has been undertaken to raise awareness about private fostering in order to increase registration rates but this has not had the desired impact. The LSCB is planning to identify the extent of the gap between the estimated and actual number of registrations for this area in order to re-target campaigns.

18. Access to CAMHS for priority groups is good and the partnership has increased capacity for earlier forms of support and the promotion of health and emotional well-being. Emotional well-being is a core dimension in all children's settings and in common assessments, and agencies employ a very effective 'graded risk profile' tool to measure the impact of neglect and outcomes resulting from intervention and support. There are good links between CAF and the Drug and Alcohol Misuse team.

19. Arrangements to reduce bullying are adequate. There are successful examples of practice to reduce bullying which comply with legal requirements and current guidance, including peer mentoring, school councils and other support arrangements, but reporting of bullying incidents by schools is inconsistent. The overarching strategy is relatively new and has yet to realise its full impact.

20. Arrangements to monitor the whereabouts of children and to respond to missing children are good. The police public protection unit collaborates well with social care services to identify children and young people most at risk. An effective early warning system is in place in residential homes and there is good awareness of the importance of identifying and supporting children who may go

missing from education. The Engage project, which focuses on young people who have been subject to, or at risk of sexual exploitation, is exemplary and is achieving excellent outcomes for very vulnerable young people. The LSCB has also highlighted issues associated with 'forced' marriage and established good protocols within all partner agencies to safeguard young women.

21. Progress to reduce anti-social behaviour is adequate. The number of first timers to the youth justice system is below comparable authorities and rates of re-offending are in line with these averages. Although anti-social and offending behaviour is included in joint assessment processes, the profile is insufficiently high. There are good structures in place in respect of MAPPA, and multi-agency risk assessment conferences but links between the youth offending service and public protection arrangements are not sufficiently well formalised. Arrangements to monitor and track adults who may be a risk to children are robust and work effectively.

22. Arrangements to identify and respond to domestic violence are outstanding. The Sanctuary scheme, whereby victims are able to remain living in the community with their children, is an outstanding and cost-effective example of joint working to promote the welfare of children. The levels of domestic violence reported and re-reported are high. This is seen as positive and a reflection of increased awareness and confidence in the way partners are responding to this need. It also reflects the positive engagement of Asian heritage mothers and children through the children's centres.

23. Policies and procedures and guidance for safe staff recruitment are robust. All agencies and the voluntary sector give high priority to safe recruitment arrangements. The organisation of council personnel files is adequate, although current arrangements make it difficult to readily monitor vetting documentation.

## Looked after children and young people



24. **The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for looked after children and young people is good.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Strong improvement in education outcomes.</p> <p>No permanent exclusions in the past two years.</p>	<p>Records of social worker visits to children do not demonstrate sufficiently clearly how plans are being carried out.</p>

<p>Outstanding services for care leavers.</p> <p>A good range of placements for children and young people are available within the borough.</p> <p>Children and young people's day-to-day experience with foster carers and in residential placements is good.</p> <p>Children and young people benefit from a wide range of leisure activities they are encouraged to take part in.</p>	<p>Children and young people are not participating fully in the review process, and their views are not consistently recorded.</p> <p>Arrangements for placements with family and friends carers in emergencies.</p>
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25. Excellent working relationships and common goals shared by partners are contributing to good and improving outcomes for looked after children and young people. Good quality schools in the borough provide appropriate additional support for looked after children in conjunction with effective coordinated support from carers to help them achieve. When children become looked after or change placements there are effective arrangements for them to continue to attend their current school, and they benefit from careful planning for important transitions. Attendance by looked after children is better than in similar councils, and there have been no permanent exclusions in the past two years. Attainment of looked after children has been on an upward trajectory from 2005, and at all key stages the results achieved are substantially better than the national average. For example, the proportion achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C in 2007 was 21% compared with 13% nationally.

26. Partnership working to promote the health of children is good. The proportion of health assessments carried out within timescales is high and vaccination levels are better than in similar areas. Comprehensive advice and guidance on health issues is available. Inspectors observed good examples of vulnerable children being kept safe through the provision of high quality services to protect their sexual health. There is a broad range of effective services to promote emotional health and well-being with good access for this group.

27. Resourceful preventative services provide timely support for young people in the community which significantly reduce the need for them to become looked after. For example, the Adolescent Support Unit at Lytham Road offers a range of sessional and residential support which successfully prevents those young people involved from entering the care system. There is a weekly resource panel held by managers to coordinate support, and decisions for children to become looked after are taken at an appropriately senior level. The council continues to have high numbers of looked after children when compared with similar councils, and reducing this number was a target in the Children and Young People's Plan which has not yet been achieved. The relatively high levels of deprivation in the borough and recent work focusing on the impact of neglect have contributed to an increase in these numbers. A

comparatively high proportion of looked after children are placed with parents. This has reduced since March 2007 but remains a focus of management attention.

28. The council has been very successful in ensuring children stay within the borough wherever appropriate and benefit from the good quality services available locally. There is a wide range of fostering and residential placements. Good support is offered to the few children living outside the borough, including planning for when they return. The quality of day-to-day care in residential placements is good with some outstanding features, for example in encouraging children's participation through consultation on running units, and future planning. Young people express a high degree of satisfaction with their day-to-day care in fostering placements and foster carers feel well supported by professionals. The fostering panel has on occasions not been quorate, and panel systems for monitoring progress of checks, when children have been placed with family and friends following initial police checks, are not sufficiently robust. The fostering service has taken steps to address these points.

29. A very high proportion of reviews are completed within timescales and additional reviews are held as necessary. There is a good level of attendance at reviews by professionals such as health workers, and there are arrangements to ensure input from schools for reviews held during school holidays. However, the quality of some review records is poor. Inspectors saw case files in which reviews attended by children had no record of their wishes or feelings and no up-to-date contribution by the social worker. Some children commented on their lack of involvement in the review discussions, which they described as boring and centred on adults discussing issues among themselves. Statutory visits are almost always at an appropriate frequency but case records often lack clear purpose for or analysis of the outcome of the visit.

30. Looked after children and young people are positive about opportunities to participate in a wide range of activities, including free leisure facilities through the re:refresh scheme. Some of these are group activities but children also receive very good support in pursuing individual interests such as learning a musical instrument or driving lessons.

31. There are positive examples of the participation of young people in services which affect them, for instance through input to foster carer reviews. Carefully considered plans for a Child in our Care Council (CIOCC) are progressing well. While the CIOCC is intended to provide a forum for discussion on policies and procedures, there is a lack of participation by young people in the recruitment of high level staff and other processes. The proportion of looked after young people given a final warning or convicted of an offence is higher than the average for similar councils, although the actual numbers involved are small. Individual interventions with looked after children who offend are good, but there is no restorative justice approach in use in children's homes. There are, however, plans to introduce restorative justice and some residential workers have been trained.

32. The Leaving Care Service has benefited from reorganisation and relocation. The premises were designed with the help of young people and contact rates with those who have left care are high. Staff caseloads are low, which allows very good levels of support to young people, and feedback about the service from young people is very positive. Young people have appropriately high aspirations of what they can achieve and opportunities are plentiful, for instance through further education at Blackburn College, and higher education, with 11 care leavers currently studying at university. All care leavers have pathway plans and a high proportion is in education, employment or training. The council offers a number of apprenticeships to facilitate young people's entry into work. There is a good range of high quality accommodation available for those leaving care, and all care leavers are living in suitable accommodation at age 19. The council works successfully with partners in the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) to provide supported tenancies for young people leaving care. Overall, leaving care services are outstanding.

33. A mentoring scheme for looked after children has been set up, which includes face-to-face contact but also an innovative e-mentoring facility whereby care leavers can support those preparing to leave, particularly those who will access higher education. The scheme has received positive feedback from young people and good outcomes are also reported by professionals, with young people's confidence and self-esteem increasing. Young people also value and benefit from a befriending scheme in which adult volunteers offer a range of enjoyable activities.

34. Looked after children regularly receive a user-friendly leaflet to encourage comments, and the complaints system is accessible through a variety of methods. A high number of complaints are resolved informally and this demonstrates good practice. However, there is a lack of systematic organisational learning from complaints regarding looked after children.

35. Corporate parenting is good. There is a strong culture of commitment and common goals among councillors supported by activities such as regular visits to children's homes. Young people have a good level of contact with elected members and senior officers across the partnership. The council goes well beyond its statutory responsibilities for young people who have left care in order to promote their welfare, for instance supporting young people well after they have left university. Looked after children and young people feel well cared for and confident that the council's support will continue as they approach adulthood.

## Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Inadequate



Adequate



Good



Outstanding



**36. The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>High quality services for all children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.</p> <p>Excellent early identification, integration and intervention work.</p> <p>Outstanding multi-professional working demonstrating strong commitment to, and responsibility for, inclusion.</p> <p>Excellent tracking of data on pupils' attainment and progress through effective provision mapping by all schools, and very robust monitoring, challenge and support for schools by the council.</p> <p>High expectations for attainment, including two levels of progress per key stage for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.</p> <p>Effective transition arrangements at early years and post-16 into adult services.</p>	

37. The Children and Young People's Trust sets out a clear vision for services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the inclusion strategy, and partners share a very strong commitment to ensuring services are of the highest quality, equitable and focused on improving outcomes. The powerful emphasis on early assessment and intervention through the children's centres and Broadlands Virtual Special School, and through exceptionally effective multi-agency working, is ensuring that these children receive the necessary specialist services at the right time to improve their quality of life.

38. Parents are effectively involved in helping to shape policy through the parents' forum and other strategy groups including the Parent Partnership Service whose work is greatly valued. The work of the Parent Consultant provides a clear steer on areas for improvement such as the introduction of a designated telephone information system for parents and carers. Feedback

from parents and carers is that access to specialist health services is prompt and of very good quality. Schools work exceptionally well together and with partners to improve outcomes for children and young people. School budgets are 'top-sliced' to fund non-statutory elements of provision such as the rapid response special support assistants, specialist teachers and collaborative work with the pupil referral units. Headteachers believe this preventative work has been effective in reducing the numbers of fixed-term exclusions in the last year.

39. Early intervention through multi-agency assessment and support panels for young children is outstanding. Children requiring early intervention are identified pre-birth and a care plan is established to support parents once the child is born. Available support includes an excellent portage scheme where, with parents' consent, DVDs plot the child's progress over a 20-week programme, and, through on-going evaluation, appropriate short and longer term interventions are identified. Children's centres are located for optimum reach across the borough offering parity and equity of provision. Parents can access any of the centres for information or support. The two children's centre 'super hubs' at Shadsworth and Livesey provide outstanding additional support for children with complex needs. Rigorous monitoring procedures demonstrate that integrated working at these locations is having a significant impact on children's enjoyment and achievement, particularly through effective planning around the child. Agencies are well represented in the centres and on the Early Support Multi Agency Panel. Intervention programmes are regularly evaluated and are responsive to children's changing needs. Children's centres also offer ante-natal support delivered through East Lancashire Hospitals Maternity Services, recently evaluated as highly effective by the local NHS Trust and the University of Central Lancashire. This work includes a strong emphasis on supporting fathers.

40. The CAF is well embedded in practice, and parents and carers have confidence in the process, describing excellent access to services such as speech and language therapy and occupational health. Referrals are dealt with promptly and schools speak highly of the rapid response of the pupil, schools and families team to prevent exclusion and of the 'Assisted Foundation Stage': supportive transition arrangements whereby a nursery worker accompanies a child with special needs to the reception class for a period and trains staff with the appropriate skills to meet the child's needs. These approaches contribute significantly to building capacity in schools to ensure that children's needs are met and improvements are sustainable.

41. The total number of special educational needs (SEN) statements has fallen since 2005 with the percentage now well below the national average. The establishment of an Individual Pupil Resource Allocation (IPRA) ensures resources are fast tracked to meet needs. This has attracted national interest and additional funds have been gained via the Lamb Inquiry to evaluate further



the impact of IPRA.<sup>1</sup> There is consistent understanding in schools and with partners of thresholds for children moving from School Action to School Action Plus, and when the IPRA or statementing process should be started.

42. There are good arrangements in place to safeguard children and young people and to support their families. The referral system is very robust and there is a clear protocol defining the respective roles and responsibilities of all partners. Good quality child protection training with a focus on work with children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is available and delivered across all agencies. Advocacy arrangements for children and young people are well provided through Family Support Workers and Connexions (CXL).

43. Access to respite care is good. A new purpose-built respite centre has recently opened with capacity for 52 children aged 5–18 attending on a weekly basis and further provision for stays of two nights per week and weekends. Leisure and short break opportunities, as well as longer residential experiences, are well used, particularly by families from minority ethnic backgrounds. There is outstanding work with VCFS organisations commissioned by the complex needs teams to provide respite, for example one-to-one support and respite care for severely autistic young people. Carer assessments are fully in place and include a detailed risk assessment as well as comprehensive information about the carer's background and needs.

44. Systems to track the academic progress of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very robust. Schools use P scales alongside other commercial assessment tools to measure the progress of pupils for whom the early levels of the National Curriculum are not appropriate.<sup>2</sup> School profile data are used very effectively by school improvement partners to support and challenge schools. The provision mapping tool developed locally is used by every school and is regarded as good practice by the Audit Commission. SEN coordinators and headteachers report that it is invaluable in monitoring allocation and effectiveness of resources.

45. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve very well. A high proportion of schools inspected between September 2005 and September 2008 were judged to be good or outstanding for provision, achievement and progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are excellent examples of school-based projects that have significantly narrowed the attainment gap for these children. The Language for Life Project introduced in 2006 in the most challenging primary schools has shown outstanding improvements in attainment and progress from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 2, significantly bridging the gap between pupils with SEN and all pupils. For example, the number of pupils on School Action in mathematics attaining Level 4 and above increased by 28% between 2005 and 2007. In English during the

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<sup>1</sup> The Lamb Inquiry was established as part of the Government's response to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee Report *Special Educational Needs: Assessment and Funding*, to investigate a range of ways in which parental confidence in the SEN assessment process might be improved.

<sup>2</sup> P scales: a national scheme used in schools to recognise and assess small steps in learning made by pupils with more severe and complex special educational needs who work below National Curriculum Level 1.

same period those attaining Level 4 and above increased by 16%. Similar success rates have been recorded for those pupils on School Action Plus and with an IPRA or statement of SEN. Unvalidated data for 2008 show further improvements, indicating that progress is sustained. One-to-one interventions by speech therapists have also significantly raised standards and achievement and improved progress for children. The Language for Life Project has been implemented in all Intensive Support schools.

46. There are outstanding examples of inclusive arrangements. Excellent support packages are available in both mainstream and special schools. Headteachers speak very highly of the 'joined up-ness' of services across the borough. There have been no exclusions of statemented or IPRA children for the last four years and fixed-term exclusions for children on School Action and School Action Plus in all schools have dropped by almost 40% between 2006-07 and 2007-08. Successful strategies were introduced both to support pupils in accessing education and learning and to prevent exclusion. Action taken includes appointing rapid response special support assistants and collaborative work with the Sunnyhurst Centre and St Thomas's Pupil Referral Unit. These improvements have been sustained. The outstanding commitment to the inclusion agenda by partners is well illustrated by the wide range of commissioned projects contributing to service improvements, for example joint working between East Lancashire Deaf Society and children's services to improve social inclusion for children and young people with a hearing impairment who live in the borough.

47. There is a wide range of leisure and recreation facilities available. Extended school programmes are open to children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a range of holiday provision and residential experiences are tailored to meet their needs. Activities more generally on offer are open to all children and young people, and are provided free of charge and with transport if required. Facilities are very well used.

48. Transition arrangements from early years to Foundation Stage are outstanding. One parent spoke about the excellent start her child has had in Reception and how seamless the transition from nursery has been. Transition at age 16 is also very good, with robust planning and excellent partnership working. Young people on a pre-entry level programme at Blackburn College spoke very enthusiastically about the excellent support they were receiving for transition from learning mentors and in moving into supported housing. Work to improve transition between Year 6 to Year 7 is underway in response to concerns expressed by some parents. The Moving on to High School (MOTHS) project is one example of the successful initiatives. Evaluations show this has reduced exclusions in Year 7 and as a result a roll out programme has been devised so that all schools can benefit from its success.

49. Young people are given outstanding support in moving to independence through good access to supported education, employment and training, direct payments and appropriate independent and supported housing. The provision

for inclusion at further education colleges, as reflected in inspection reports, is outstanding. The range of education, employment or training opportunities is good and increasing, including access to work experience opportunities. The proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in work-based learning is consistently well above average and in 2007 was 19.7% compared with the national average of 15.2%. At one special school, out of 14 leavers last year, 13 are in education, employment or training.

50. The contribution made by children and young people to their communities is good. They participate well in their statements and reviews and are very well supported. Connexions personal advisers have pre-review meetings which are greatly appreciated by young people with complex needs. Special schools and pupil referral units have school councils and the young people show great confidence in expressing their views and achieving positive outcomes. The Children and Young People's Plan outlines the borough's commitment to including all children and young people's views in shaping services. Young people have been actively involved in the Building Schools for the Future project work advising on access issues and the types of facilities they would like to make their day-to-day experiences more manageable. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are involved in local youth forums and the Youth Parliament, Blackburn College's Student Voice and in shaping the Connexions service.

## Other issues identified for further investigation

### The impact of the partners' strategy on improving the provision of CAMHS

51. The impact of the partners' strategy on improving the provision of CAMHS is good.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Significant recent improvements in quality of service and access to CAMHS.</p> <p>Strong early intervention work provided by multi-agency staff.</p> <p>Very short waiting times from referral to assessment.</p> <p>Good 24-hour provision and coordination of care provided at tier 3 and the intensive support team (IST).</p> <p>Good provision of treatment and care at the Junction.</p>	<p>Insufficient capacity means that young people aged 16 and 17 years are occasionally admitted to adult mental health wards.</p> <p>Transition protocol between CAMHS and adult mental health services is still to be formalised.</p>

52. CAMHS provision was an area for development in the 2007 APA. The council has worked effectively with partners to address identified weaknesses. Much has been achieved, although a few areas of the service remain in need of continuing development.

53. The East Lancashire CAMHS strategic overview and action plan are now in place, underpinned by a comprehensive health needs analysis clearly linked to the Children and Young People's Plan. The pooling of budgets has significantly increased the range and capacity of services available and demonstrates the high priority given to this area of work by many local partners during the past year. The commissioning of Investors in Children to ensure the views of young people and key stakeholders are taken fully into account in service development is also a positive step but it is too early to evaluate impact.

54. Parents and carers receive good information and support to promote emotional health and well-being (EHWB) of their children from a range of statutory and voluntary agencies including the network of children's centres, Connexions (CXL), Barnados and ChildLine. Better access to information at a local level and effective intervention have ensured that potential mental health issues are identified earlier and more appropriate services are signposted or referred on to if necessary.

55. Effective reorganisation of services has raised awareness of CAMHS, and has improved understanding of tier 1<sup>3</sup> and tier 2 services. It has also provided good strategic direction for multi-agency working in preventative and non-specialist work at this level. The benefits can be seen in more appropriate referrals being made to specialist CAMHS. Well-attended cross sector training sessions on mental health, the robust service level agreement at tier 3, improved capacity and the performance framework are all bringing about improvements in service delivery. The use of CAF is well embedded and local data demonstrate that waiting times are now excellent with 80% of referrals being assessed in less than one week. The recent appointment of an EHWB coordinator further demonstrates the management commitment to improving services locally.

56. Access to CAMHS at tier 3 for vulnerable groups has improved through the appointment of mental health practitioner posts within key teams including the youth offending team, and youth workers have been appointed to work with young people aged between 19 and 25 years in a preventative capacity. Early indications are that these roles are having a positive impact. The paediatric liaison service, self-harm response team and the Engage team, which works with children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation, provide

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<sup>3</sup> CAMHS delivers services to a national 4-tier framework. Most children and young people experiencing mental health problems will be seen at tier 1. This level of service is provided by practitioners who are not mental health specialists such as GPs, health visitors, school nurses and teachers. At tier 2 practitioners tend to be CAMHS specialists such as primary care workers, psychologists and counsellors. At tier 3 practitioners are specialised workers such as community health workers child psychologists or psychiatry out-patient services for more complex and persistent disorders. Tier 4 services are provided for young people with the most serious problems through for example highly specialised out-patient and in-patient units.

confidential support and intensive counselling to some of the most vulnerable young people.

57. Good progress has been made to improve CAMHS for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, with three dedicated practitioners appointed to the CAMHS team. Greater integration of psychology services and specialist CAMHS has considerably improved the referral process through joint interventions with the community nursing team and clinical psychologist. Looked after children and young people are well supported by the targeted service 'Supporting carers and young people who are looked after – together'. This innovative programme provides advice and support directly to foster carers and residential workers via speedy direct access facilitating the stability of placements. Feedback from young people and carers has indicated that an excellent service is being offered.

58. Tier 3 services are delivered effectively. Children and young people are routinely seen in venues within their communities, which they find more accessible and user friendly. The IST is an innovative service that straddles tier 3 and tier 4 services. Positive integrated working ensures children and young people receive the care package relevant to their needs either on an out-patient basis managed by the tier 3 team or alternatively with care provided by the IST. CAMHS is successfully increasing access to services by minority ethnic groups through information sessions, appointing a support worker on the IST, and providing cultural competency training for all CAMHS staff. Twenty-four hour access to CAMHS advice and support is efficiently provided by the IST. This cost-effective service is based on a non-medical model, although advice from a psychiatrist is available if necessary.

59. The Mary Burberry Unit offers very good outreach support and day-care facilities on a full or part-time basis as a positive alternative to tier 4 in-patient provision. The unit is well equipped to meet the needs of children and young people, providing teaching in core subjects and therapeutic interventions. For children and young people who require a more intense tier 4 service, good quality treatment and care is provided at the Junction in Lancaster. This eight-bedded unit provides specialist acute in-patient service for 12 to 16 year olds. The IST supports admission and discharge from the unit and the risk sharing agreement facilitates equity of access.

60. Recent data indicate that young people aged 16 and 17 years are occasionally admitted to adult mental health wards due to the limited number of specialist beds. This is unsatisfactory. CAMHS staff work closely with the adult mental health team in these circumstances, but the transition process into adult mental health is still to be formalised. Some children and young people are admitted to tier 4 beds out of area and this creates additional problems over contact with parents and carers. There are, however, some good systems to help parents and carers to maintain contact with children and young people when this occurs. The partners acknowledge that services need to be

strengthened for adolescents to prevent the inappropriate admission via accident and emergency to paediatric wards.

## The effectiveness of strategies to improve community cohesion

61. The effectiveness of strategies to improve community cohesion is good.

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Strong leadership in promoting community cohesion.</p> <p>Well-considered community cohesion initiatives, projects and consultation events that fully involve young people.</p> <p>Excellent partnership working to promote community cohesion.</p> <p>Good improvement in young people's progress and attainment in schools in particular by underachieving groups.</p>	<p>Monitoring and evaluation of community cohesion initiatives do not give sufficient overview of progress.</p>

62. The council provides strong leadership in promoting community cohesion. It gives a high priority to establishing a common vision and sense of belonging, valuing diversity and providing fair and inclusive services that make similar life opportunities available for all. Improving community cohesion has been an integral part of the work of the council and its partners at all levels for some time. Several initiatives such as the Belonging Campaign and the Community Cohesion Toolkit used in schools have been recognised as good practice locally and nationally. The Strategic Director of Children's Services provides a very strong lead. The Children and Young People's Trust has published a statement for promoting community cohesion drawing on the Neighbourhood Voices and Community Cohesion Action Plan. Staff at all levels are alert to the issues. The Children and Young People's Plan asserts that tackling the results of deprivation and raising aspirations are key to improving the lives of children and young people.

63. There are many examples of well-considered initiatives and projects to promote community cohesion and mutual understanding between different groups and communities. The Belonging Campaign Charter was signed by schools and many partners. The many twinning projects between schools such as the Fantastic Friendship Day, Meet Your Neighbours and Together as One bring young people from different communities together to help develop their understanding of different faiths and cultures and celebrate their differences and similarities. Promotion of equality and diversity and social and educational

inclusion in the colleges is outstanding. There has been an increase in the proportion of school governors from minority ethnic groups following support and training provided by the council. The proportion is now in line with the profile in the borough as a whole, as is the proportion of elected members. The proportion in the council workforce of minority ethnic staff rose to 13% in 2007, on track to achieve the target of 15%, although there are few appointments at a senior level.

64. There is extensive engagement with residents about community cohesion through cross-borough events such as 100 Voices and the recent Neighbourhood Voices consultation and dialogue within localities continues. Views expressed are reflected in the Neighbourhood Voices and Community Cohesion Action Plan and in the five area plans. Consultation and involvement at a local level has helped develop responsive, culturally sensitive services for children and families such as those provided through the children's centres. CAMHS and the youth offending team respond well to diversity. The police have worked closely with local organisations and the community developing effective protocols to minimise tension when dealing with sensitive situations.

65. Children and young people are involved well in debate and decision-making. They have good opportunities to have their say and are listened to. The Youth Forum and school councils provide formal groups for young people to discuss matters of importance to them and influence decisions. Elections to the UK Youth Parliament are well supported. Young people have been involved in a national project to develop leadership skills amongst young Muslims and give them a voice. Members of the Youth Parliament took part in the Great Debate on national security held at the United States Embassy in London, stimulating discussion locally. They have contributed to Neighbourhood Voices events and are routinely included in groups at all levels planning services for children and young people. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and looked after children have many opportunities to have their say. Young people give presentations to formal groups such as the Local Strategic Partnership's People and Communities Forum sharing their views and experiences of activities to promote community cohesion.

66. Excellent partnerships at all levels help promote community cohesion. The voluntary, community and faith sectors are equal partners in planning and delivering services and have good access to senior managers through formal and informal channels. However, a minority consider better use could be made at a strategic level of their organisations' understanding of local communities. There are many examples of joint working that benefit children and young people. The Pakistani Learners' Forum has engaged the local Mosque and parents and pupils from Beardwood and Pleckgate schools in working together successfully to raise aspirations and achievement. Blackburn College and the Tauheedal Islam Girls High School have developed GCE A/AS level provision in a culturally sensitive way to suit young women's needs. The Support for Ethnic Minority Achievement service works effectively with schools and local services to support children and families of migrant workers, asylum seekers and Gypsy,

Roma and Traveller communities, helping children settle in and make good progress in their learning.

67. Improvement in attainment is good overall and outstanding for young people of Pakistani heritage and White British boys eligible for free school meals, in particular at Key Stages 2 and 4. In 2007, the proportion of young people achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A\* to C was in line with the national figure but significantly above that found in similar areas nationally. Local data identify further significant increases in GCSE results in 2008. At Key Stage 3, the improvement trend for the achievement of Level 5 and above in English, maths and science continues to be better than that found nationally. There is little doubt that the gap is closing between the achievement of some important vulnerable groups and the majority. Well-targeted work with schools is bringing about substantial improvements in children's learning, for example in those schools taking part in the Intensive Support Programme and amongst children receiving language support. Looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve very well. The attainment of those who are looked after continues to improve. The proportion of young people aged 16 to 18 who are not in education, employment or training continues to decline and vulnerable young people receive good support to help them progress into employment or education. The proportion of young offenders who have served a custodial sentence and are now in education, employment or training is good. Achievement and standards are outstanding at Blackburn College and good at St Mary's College.

68. Anti-social behaviour is a matter of concern to young people. Work with individual families, parents' groups and young people has helped reduce incidents within particular neighbourhoods. Exclusions from schools have reduced and attendance improved. The Young People's Service provides safe meeting places, although attendance by young people at youth centres is often low. There has been good progress in reducing the proportion of young people offending and re-offending. However, the support for young people at risk of offending is not consistently of a high quality.

69. Performance management is good. The People and Communities Forum reports on a range of relevant indicators and has made good progress in meeting most of its targets. Specific community cohesion initiatives and events are monitored locally by schools, partners or neighbourhood teams. The Children and Young People's Plan is reviewed annually. However, there is no comprehensive analysis to give partners and the community an overview of progress in promoting community cohesion or to identify areas of concern and good practice. The authority recognises this and has commissioned an external review of the effectiveness of its strategies.

## Service Management

Inadequate

Adequate

Good

Outstanding



## Capacity to improve



70. **The management of services for children and young people is good. Capacity to improve further is good.**

Major strengths	Important weaknesses
<p>Excellent political and managerial commitment supported by many effective staff.</p> <p>Very good engagement with all children, young people, parents and carers.</p> <p>Outstanding partnership working.</p> <p>Good focus on diversity, equalities and community cohesion.</p> <p>Good strategic planning and project management supported by effective financial and budgetary control.</p> <p>Good performance management has transformed the rate of improvement.</p>	<p>The speed of improvement of information technology (IT).</p> <p>The percentage of staff appraised is not reported.</p> <p>The quality of leadership and management in the youth service (the Young People's Service).</p>

71. Ambition is outstanding. The council has very high ambitions for children and young people. There is effective leadership with enthusiastic ambition and determination to champion the needs of children and young people. Good quality senior officers provide a strong, creative and innovative approach to service delivery. The Children and Young People's Trust provides a strong and challenging lead for children and young people. The needs of local people have been well analysed and are understood by partners. The youth offending team board has good representation from across the council and its partners at a senior level. Partners and the Children and Young People's Trust are very involved in developing services for children and young people. This is well illustrated in the 13 children's centres which all operate extremely well, offering a wide range of services for local children, young people and their families from agencies across the public, voluntary, community and faith sectors. Another example is the Engage project which has focused on targeting children at risk of sexual exploitation, achieving excellent outcomes. Clear links exist between the community strategy, council corporate documents and the directorate's Children and Young People's Plan, delivery plans and operational plans.

72. Engagement and consultation with children, young people, parents and carers is good. Data and needs analysis are used well and these underpin and inform the Children and Young People's Plan. There are several forums for children and young people to express their views and influence decision-making, for example through representation on the Youth Parliament and representation on the Children and Young People's Trust. Services comply with statutory requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 in terms of anti-discriminatory practice.

73. Prioritisation is good. The Children and Young People's Plan clearly articulates the priorities for children and young people and action plans supporting it are specific, measurable, achievable and time bound. The Children and Young People's Plan is underpinned by comprehensive delivery plans and these inform the operational plans which make a reality of the priorities set out. Good project management underpins each priority. For example, Building Schools for the Future has made good progress and is well managed through a joint strategic project with Bolton Council. Partnership working is outstanding. There are strong and productive partnerships in place within the Children and Young People's Trust and across the voluntary, private and independent sector. There are also well-developed partnerships in place within the youth offending service. Partners clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. Auditing of need is well understood and good strategic planning is effective in shaping priorities that are shared by partners.

74. Equality, diversity and inclusion have a high profile, promoting good cultural, faith and community relations, and children's services have contributed well to community cohesion in the borough and to the council's achievement of the Level 3 Equality Standard. Young people, including those from minority ethnic groups and potentially vulnerable groups, are fully involved in initiatives to promote community cohesion. A toolkit to challenge pre-conceived ideas and prejudice and promote community cohesion is used widely in schools. This has been produced in association with local and national partners and is recognised nationally. There are good links between service strategies and the medium-term financial strategy. Budgets clearly follow priorities; a good example of this is in the provision of a mapping tool for children and young people with special needs leading to better targeting of resources and improved outcomes.

75. Capacity is good. The service greatly benefits from effective leadership, strong strategic capability and good risk management. The leadership of the youth service is less effective than the overall leadership of children's services. Overall, the council manages its children's services well and has established strong and productive partnerships. Inter-agency arrangements for the Children and Young People's Trust are good and representatives have established clear roles and responsibilities and show good governance. Scrutiny arrangements are effective. Financial planning and budget management are good with a focused approach to value for money through good commissioning arrangements. For example, in 2007–08, the service achieved £3.6m of efficiency savings.

76. Commissioning is widespread and supports capacity building. A useful joint commissioning handbook is used by partners. There are many examples of joint commissioning across a range of providers from the private, voluntary and independent sectors that include the well-regarded breastfeeding support service and the sexual health service for 13–25 year olds. The capacity of the service to deliver its priorities is increased well through active engagement with private, voluntary and community organisations. The council has the people and skills in place to deliver its current priorities within its current resources. Human resources services are effective and workforce planning is good. There is an increasing strategic approach to fully address the future needs of services. For example, the schools and families team has undertaken good work in modelling the future workforce. Corporate parenting is good. The recommendations from the 2007 APA have been implemented. However IT service development is not keeping pace with the demanding business requirements and the high aspirations the children's services leadership has for IT.

77. The Young People's Service is under the Directorate of Culture, Leisure and Sport. Youth work is delivered under a Youth Support Services commission from children's services. Whilst the Children's Services Directorate has clear priorities for young people, the link between strategy and implementation within the Young People's Service is less strong. In the Young People's Service, leadership and management are inadequate and have insufficient strength to drive change and steer the service to improve youth work practice.

78. Performance management is good overall. It is well understood by councillors and staff. There is a clear audit trail from the community strategy, to the Children and Young People's Plan, through to individual staff targets. Councillors scrutinise the work of the services well and challenge portfolio holders and officers to improve performance. Good use is made of staff appraisals, but the service does not know at any one time the percentage of staff who have been appraised. Young people are involved in reviews and feel able to challenge the quality of the services they receive. Service performance is regularly monitored and reviewed. There is good knowledge of strengths and weaknesses and overall prompt action to remedy slippage. Performance information within the youth offending service informs local planning and commissioning and is used to hold management to account and monitor progress. Within the Young People's Service, however, the quality assurance processes and performance management systems are insufficiently robust to ensure practice is of a consistently good standard. Good use is made of internal and external evaluation and benchmarking. Individual staff performance is managed well. Complaints and comments are used well to inform service improvement overall, however this is not sufficiently robust in the looked after children's service.

79. Capacity for further improvement is good. Partnerships are outstanding. There is a good track record of improvement, for example increases in educational achievement, reductions in teenage conceptions and reductions in the number of children referred to child protection services. The Strategic

Director has a clear understanding of strengths and areas for improvement. Good financial management, project management, performance management and an improving focus on strategic workforce planning demonstrates the service's capacity to improve further. However, IT improvements are not keeping pace with the Directorate's aspirations for IT. The Children and Young People's Trust, Strategic Director and senior leadership team provide a strong direction and an ongoing commitment to children and young people, all of which gives confidence to the good judgement on capacity to improve.

## Annex A

### **MOST RECENTLY PUBLISHED ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN**

The full annual performance assessment for 2008, which was published on 17 December 2008, can be found at:

[http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare\\_providers/la\\_download/\(id\)/4793/\(as\)/APA/a\\_pa\\_2008\\_889.pdf](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare_providers/la_download/(id)/4793/(as)/APA/a_pa_2008_889.pdf)

## Annex B: Summary of the Enhanced Youth Inspection Report

### Main findings

1. Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council sufficiently secures the provision of youth work. Young people are served adequately by YPS which provides a satisfactory range of activities to support their personal and social development. Young people's achievement is satisfactory overall with some being good. The service engages some of the borough's most vulnerable groups albeit that, more generally, participation rates of young people engaged in youth work activities are low. The quality of youth work practice is adequate, with a satisfactory understanding of the curriculum demonstrated by the majority of workers. Accreditation is not always used to best effect and young people are not always sufficiently challenged by workers. This limits young people's achievement. Youth forum members make an excellent contribution to civic life and political decision-making, although young people's involvement in day-to-day planning and evaluation of youth work is not as strong. Youth work is not sufficiently well led to secure the delivery of good practice in all provision. The quality of area and unit planning is variable, targets are not always well conceived or measurable, and quality assurance is weak. The YPS is involved in a number of successful partnership programmes and voluntary sector partners enjoy a very positive relationship with the local authority. Arrangements for the provision of youth work has undergone significant change since April 2007 but the implementation of integrated youth support remains at a very early stage.

### Key aspect inspection grades

Key Aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	2
	Quality of youth work practice	2
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	2
3	Leadership and management	1

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

### Strengths

- There are examples of good standards of achievement by young people much of which is accredited.

- A high proportion of staff are qualified with appropriate professionally recognised qualifications.
- Partnership arrangements between the voluntary sector and local authority are good.

### **Areas for development**

- Increase the numbers of young people engaged in youth work.
- Increase the active involvement by young people in the planning, development and quality assurance of youth work at all levels.
- Improve the capacity and quality of leadership and management.
- Ensure there are effective quality assurance and performance management systems in place.
- Communicate the strategy more effectively to establish the role and relationship of the YPS in the development of integrated youth support.

## Annex C

### CORPORATE ASSESSMENT ACHIEVEMENT – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE<sup>4</sup>

1. Outcomes for children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen are good and improving and many are better than in similar areas. Health outcomes have significantly improved in prioritised areas such as emotional health and well-being. The majority of children are provided with a safe environment through good preventative services. There is a strong track record of improvement in education outcomes and the gap between outcomes for the most vulnerable and those for all children is narrowing. Those who are most vulnerable are increasingly benefiting from targeted services aimed at reducing inequalities and promoting inclusion. The effectiveness of strategies to improve community cohesion is good. High priority is given to establishing a common vision and sense of belonging, valuing diversity and providing services that make similar life opportunities available for all.

2. Service management in Blackburn with Darwen is good. Leadership is strong and decisive. The views of children and young people are consistently sought and the Children and Young People's Plan clearly articulates priorities with a strong social inclusion ethos that adds to the well-targeted preventative agenda. Outstanding partnership working is increasing capacity and the needs of the most vulnerable groups are routinely considered. Resources are well targeted with effective use of data to monitor and track progress. The strategy for information technology is an area for improvement.

3. The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good. The new Re:refresh initiative has enhanced access to leisure, health and dietary activities for children and young people through additional family focused programmes. The proportion of schools that have achieved the National Healthy Schools Standard is higher than average. CAMHS provides good support to the most vulnerable groups, including looked after children and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but adolescents are still sometimes treated on adult mental health wards. Teenage conception rates are lower than the average for similar councils and the reduction since the 1998 baseline is better than the national average. Immunisation rates and levels of breastfeeding are higher than in similar councils but levels of dental decay among children are among the worst nationally. Smoking is a significant problem in the borough and the focus of targeted action.

4. Children and young people appear safe and services to ensure this are given high priority. The LSCB is providing effective leadership on all aspects of safeguarding. Training programmes are highly regarded and include learning

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<sup>4</sup> Judgements contained in the corporate assessment of children's services are based on a combination of the outcomes of the joint area review and the latest published annual performance assessment report (APA 2007) available at the time of the inspection.



from serious case reviews. Collaboration between agencies working with children and young people is good with highly effective practice in respect of young people at risk of sexual exploitation and domestic violence, and the provision of local services to reduce risk and support vulnerable families. A wide range of high quality services is delivered through the 13 children's centres across the borough by partners including many from the voluntary, community and faith sector. Arrangements for referral, initial assessment and protection planning are good and underpinned by comprehensive and up-to-date procedures. Performance against the key indicators in respect of safeguarding is also good. The council's engagement with MAPPA through the youth offending team is, however, an area requiring further improvement.

5. The impact of all local services in helping children and young people to enjoy their education and to achieve well is good. The vast majority of schools are judged by Ofsted to be good or better and, overall, children and young people are positive about their schooling. Support to schools is good and focused on aspects where there are particular needs or difficulties. From starting points that are often very low, most children and young people make better progress than expected. Progress measures across the key stages are favourable with Key Stages 2 to 4 above that found nationally. Children and young people who are looked after and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve very well. Parents and carers receive outstanding support in helping their children to enjoy school and there is good cooperation and coordination to enable children and young people to enjoy their leisure time.

6. The impact of all services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. Children and young people were widely consulted about the priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan and have participated in planning services, including the Building Schools for the Future programme. Children and young people with disabilities are involved well in decisions that affect their lives, but arrangements to enable looked after children and young people to participate fully in the review process are not fully effective. Children and young people have good access to councillors and senior officers. The provision of youth work and the quality of youth work practice is adequate.

7. The impact of services in helping children and young people achieve economic well-being is good. A wide range of childcare provision is available. There is good access to effective programmes of adult and community learning and family learning through the children's centres and a number of secondary schools. Employment opportunities in the borough are improving and a key success of the council is the reduction in young people not in education, employment or training. This has declined over a three-year period and is below that found nationally and in similar councils. Vulnerable young people receive particular attention.

8. The capacity of council services to improve is good. Partnerships are outstanding. There is a good track record of improvement in most services and outcomes for children and young people have been transformed in recent years. The Strategic Director of Children's Services has a clear understanding of strengths and areas for improvement. Good financial management, project management, performance management and an improving focus on strategic workforce planning demonstrate the service's capacity to improve further.

## Annex D

### SUMMARY OF JOINT AREA REVIEW AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS

1. This joint area review was conducted using the arrangements required under Section 20 of the Children Act 2004. It was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of inspectors from Ofsted, the Healthcare Commission and the Audit Commission. 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 these findings plus aspects of the most recent Annual Performance Assessment are represented in the relevant part of the corporate assessment report.

3. This review describes the outcomes achieved by children and young people growing up in Blackburn with Darwen and evaluates the way local services, taken together, contribute to their well-being. Together with the Annual Performance Assessment of Children's Services, 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. This review explores these issues by focusing on children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, children who are looked after and children at risk or requiring safeguarding and a few additional investigations. It evaluates the collective contribution made by all relevant children's services to outcomes for these children and young people.

4. The review took place in two stages consisting of an analysis stage (where recorded evidence was scrutinised) and a two week fieldwork stage (where inspectors met children and young people and those who deliver services for them).