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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Mr Morgan

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment (APA) process for your local authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Summary

Areas for judgement	Grade awarded ¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	3
The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people	3
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	2

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Grade	Service descriptors	Capacity to improve descriptors
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Excellent / outstanding
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate ¹

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council consistently delivers above the minimum requirements for children and young people. As a result, the majority of services demonstrate how they are improving the achievement and well-being of these groups.

Partnership working is a strength of the council. Consultation with children and young people and their families is embedded in the council's planning and in its approach to improving services. The areas identified in last year's APA have led to carefully targeted action which has led to improved performance in a number of areas. The Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) contains a thorough and accurate needs analysis compiled together with key partners. This plan demonstrates that the council has a clear view of its own strengths and weaknesses. The council makes a significant investment in children's services and this, together with its track record of improvement and demonstrable skills in partnership working, indicates good capacity for further improvement.

Being healthy

The council makes a good contribution towards improving the health of children and young people in the area. It works closely with health and other partners to collect a range of local data and information that provides a clear view of the challenge of addressing the full range of health needs. Sure Start or children's centres are a base for a range of professionals to offer advice and support to children and their families from earliest childhood.

The council has good systems for ensuring that the health needs of looked after children are met. These include sensitive handling of annual health assessments, a looked after children's nurse who provides advice and support to foster carers as well as following up any missed appointments and good attention to the health needs of children in residential care. Schools are well engaged with the health and well-being agenda with a range of initiatives in relation to physical activity, healthy eating and smoking cessation. A particular strength is the council's approach to accident prevention; for example, a specialist road safety programme to reduce the number of accidents arising when children attend Madrassas in the evening. The council recognises it needs to make further progress in achieving Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for children with learning disabilities. Information about the rate of teenage pregnancies continues to show a reduction against the 1998 baseline, but an increase in 2004 against the previous year indicates that the council will need to achieve a sustainable approach to continued reduction. The overall figure of 52.1% is slightly below the Institute of Public Finance (IPF) comparator average of 53.6%, but well above the national average of 44.4%.

Staying safe

Overall, the council adequately promotes and secures the safety of children and young people. There are significant areas of good practice, such as: the operation of child protection systems; the development of quality assurance; arrangements to safeguard children who are privately fostered; and the proportion of children placed locally. The council has demonstrated its capacity to improve its approach to the assessment of children in need in terms of the timing of initial and core assessments, but the rate of re-referrals continues to suggest that not all referrals receive appropriate attention first time

around. Referral rates are high at 799 for each 10,000 of the population under 18. This is the highest in the relevant comparator group which has an average of 540.3 and compares with a council target of 650. Preventative services and partnership work have not to date succeeded in addressing this area and this should be a key area for improvement. The council has plans for the continuing development of family support activity and has obtained funding to create an additional six children's centres by the end of 2006.

The needs of looked after children are addressed by good quality residential and foster care, and through timely statutory reviews. The high proportion of children (over 25%) who have not had an allocated qualified social worker is a cause for concern, although systems have been put in place to manage this appropriately. The council recognises this as a key area for improvement in its self-assessment and needs to engage in proactive workforce planning to address this issue in a sustainable way. A further area of concern is the decline (from 95.5% to 61.5%) in the proportion of care leavers identified as living in suitable accommodation. This calls into question the effectiveness of the pathway plans and personal advisers which are in place for 100% of care leavers. The self-assessment indicates that a full review of leaving care services commenced in January 2006 and will report in June 2006. Last year's APA highlighted the high proportion of looked after children who are placed with their parents. A consultant has been engaged to explore the reasons for this. The council has taken steps to ensure that family and friends carers receive appropriate training in good care practice.

The ratio of black and minority ethnic children on the Child Protection Register compared to the local population has improved but there is still under-representation. This suggests that further work is needed to ensure effective child protection systems in these sections of the community. The Local Safeguarding Children Board was established in April 2006; this being within required timescales.

Enjoying and achieving

The council makes a good contribution to ensuring children and young people achieve at schools and enjoy their education and leisure activities.

Good progress has been made to develop children's centres. The council is well ahead of its timescale on delivery and clear and challenging ambitions for provision in this area are shared by local services. Early years childcare and education provision is good and effectively promotes children's development. Although attainment on entry to schools remains very low, the good provision children receive enables them to make effective progress in meeting early learning goals.

From these very low starting points pupils make good progress so that overall attainment is in line with its statistical neighbours at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4 and above at Key Stage 3. Trends are improving at Key Stages 2 to 4.

The performance of young people in secondary schools is improving faster than in primary schools, particularly at Key Stage 3. In 2005, there was an improvement in the percentage of pupils attaining Level 5 and above (the national expectation) in English, mathematics

and science. The council is now performing above its statistical neighbours in these subjects and in line with national averages in mathematics and science. Performance at Key Stage 4 has improved. In 2005, nearly 48% of pupils achieved 5 or more A* to C grades at GCSE, a 3.5% rise on the previous year, and while there was a slight dip in the percentage gaining at least one A* to G GCSE grade to 96.8%, this is above the statistical neighbours' figures and in line with the national average.

The educational performance of care leavers is improving; for example, 68% are achieving at least 1 GCSE grade A* to G. The council recognises that not all pupils of Pakistani heritage achieve as well in GCSE examinations. However, evidence from the Intensive Support Programme (ISP) and ambitious work at Blakewater College point to clear trends of improvement in the performance of this group.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The council is successful in raising the percentage of statements of special educational need prepared within the 18 weeks timescale; it performs better than most councils in this respect.

The council maintains its good record in supporting schools and offers a bespoke service of improvement. Secondary schools are effectively supported and challenged by school improvement partners and consultants who, like the primary adviser and consultant colleagues, undertake a detailed analysis of each school's performance. The success of the ISP is illustrated by the improvement primary schools involved in 2005 made in English, mathematics and science. These improvements were above the rate of other schools in the council area. Inspection reports up to March 2006 highlight, in the main, at least good performance of schools in each of the key areas inspected. However, the small sample of inspection reports from January 2006 suggests a growing incidence of satisfactory judgements. Since September 2005, one special school has been given a notice to improve. The council responded with a comprehensive action plan for improvement. Challenge and support from the council assisted in a secondary school subject to special measures being removed from this category and given a notice to improve.

The council has worked hard to raise levels of attendance. Rates for primary and secondary schools in 2005 were in line with statistical neighbours, as were the rates for unauthorised absence. However, authorised absence rates are skewed by religious holidays and extended leave taken to visit relatives abroad. These factors depress the overall figures. The council works hard and effectively with pupils and parents to counter the negative effect such leave can have. It has received national recognition for its work; for example, in using extended leave packs, e-tracking and the use of mobile phones to send reminders of agreed return dates.

Exclusion rates are in line with statistical neighbours and national averages although permanent exclusions in the secondary sector are above the national rate. The council has behaviour improvement plans in place and provides good support for 97.1% of excluded pupils through alternative education of 20+ hours per week. This performance is better than most other councils.

The local council provides a good range of activities to develop creative and recreational access. Previous work within the primary strategy has successfully promoted creativity in

the curriculum, for example music, sports and performing arts. There has been an increasing number and range of musical ensembles and projects developed across the borough from steel pans and Bhangra to classical string groups. The development of the borough's Play strategy through the Little Chat 2 workshop and successful Summer Slam programme has seen a well established programme of summer holiday activities offering different types of activities to many children and young people across the borough.

Making a positive contribution

Performance in this outcome area is good. The council works with partners on a range of initiatives designed to support children and young people in making a positive contribution.

Inspections of schools indicate that most children are well supported in developing socially and emotionally. The Moving Over to High School (MOTHS) project identifies vulnerable children for additional support in making the transition to secondary school. Young people identified at risk of truancy, social exclusion or unemployment at the end of Year 11 also receive support from a school-based programme.

Over 80% of schools operate school councils and a youth council operates within Blackburn College. The council has a borough-wide youth forum linked to the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. The council has had a systematic approach to the involvement of young people in service planning initially through a questionnaire-based approach and continued through focus group activity. Young people's increasing involvement in the borough has been evidenced by improved turnout of voters in the youth MP election. A further example of the council's approach to involvement is the Stamp Out Bullying conference organised and hosted by young people which has helped raise and identify issues to be taken forward by the anti-bullying forum and which are also included in the CYPP.

The council takes action to reduce anti-social behaviour by monitoring racist incidents and encouraging community cohesion; for example, the involvement of young people from different sections of the community in the My Hometown project. The council also supports community liaison police officers attached to schools. All childcare settings within the council are assessed as being above average for their work on equal opportunities and good behaviour. However, success in reducing anti-social behaviour is not at present clearly evidenced. The council accepts that rates of re-offending give some cause for concern and is working to address this.

Careful monitoring of children with statements of special educational need has resulted in action which has reduced exclusions in this group.

The council has significantly improved its performance in the involvement of looked after children in their reviews and has achieved this partly through engaging with young people in identifying the barriers to their participation.

The council provides good support to young carers but the service does not appear to offer sufficient support to Asian heritage young carers.

Achieving economic well-being

The council's contribution to this outcome is good.

The council has identified young people not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) as a priority. There has been focused work in this area, including support for learners in the choices they make and the Teenagers to Work Project. As a result there has been a reduction in the proportion of NEET. However, the number of care leavers in education, employment or training is below national averages.

The council works well with Connexions and the Learning and Skills Council. This ensures most young people receive sound advice regarding options available to them, particularly at key transition points. Connexions extend their knowledge and understanding of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through attending and contribution to all reviews of those in this group. Through the work of the newly appointed What Makes the Difference Worker, there is evidence of coordination between the different agencies. However, because of newness to post and the draft nature of the special educational needs (SEN) Transition Protocol, the impact of measures to support vulnerable young people cannot yet be assessed.

Information about the high proportion of care leavers living in unsuitable accommodation raises concerns about the assistance this vulnerable group receives in managing change, but small numbers are involved.

There are increasing strengths in the development of the 14–19 strategy and the work of the council's coordinator for this area is beginning to have a positive impact on outcomes. From the full 14–19 Partnership event held in November 2005, a series of sub-groups addressing the priority areas of: achievement; access and participation; and curriculum and information, and advice and guidance have been produced and implemented. Good working relationships exist between partners and there is now a clear understanding of priorities to improve provision in this area. There is an increasing range of vocational courses at Key Stage 4 and post-16, with others to begin in September 2006. There is good support for learners and high pass and retention rates at post 16. The effectiveness and efficiency of education and training across the area are meeting the needs of most learners, employers and the community, with links to businesses increasingly well established. Strengths in 16–19 provision include good quality teaching and learning for post-16s, including preparation for the world of work and higher education.

The council's management of its services for children and young people, including its capacity to improve them further

In relation to the overall management of services for children and young people, the council has, through its children and young people's strategic partnership, collaborated closely with relevant partners to analyse need and set appropriate and ambitious targets for improvement. The council can provide examples of creative approaches to the involvement of young people in service planning.

The CYPP provides evidence of a clear focus on the outcomes the council aims to achieve and also sets out clearly the structure of its current partnership arrangements and links to other plans. The self-assessment undertaken for the APA demonstrates that the council has a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development.

The self-assessment indicates that the council has a good understanding of its community leadership role, and the successful operation of the early years partnership as a pilot trust is a model the council can build on in the further development of partnership work. There are, however, a number of areas such as development issues in relation to the CAMHS services where, although steady progress has been made, it is too early to see results in terms of improved outcomes.

The council's higher than average spend on family support is clearly in line with its strategic priorities. The Audit Commission confirm that the council is assessed as performing well on its use of resources (level 3).

Looking specifically at social care services, the council has made clear progress on some of the areas identified in last year's APA (such as timescales of assessments and the development of effective quality assurance monitoring) and this demonstrates its capacity for improvement. There is evidence of a strategic approach to commissioning of services; for example, the need for an increase in local family placements was identified and addressed. An example of value for money provided by the council is that although its spending on adoption services is higher than comparators its performance is also good.

Indicators in relation to the social care workforce, such as sickness and retention rates, indicate that the council is in a good position, as does the low vacancy rate. However, shortages of qualified social workers for looked after children and appropriately qualified staff for children in need create a risk in relation to plans for these groups. The council has recently taken steps to address this and intends to develop a long-term Human Resources strategy. A shortage of appropriately trained staff together with comparatively low expenditure on training, make this an appropriate priority in order to secure sustainable improvement.

The council's capacity for improvement is strengthened by its good use of performance information to monitor strengths and development needs and for organisational learning. The CYPP sets out plans for annual service or thematic reviews following the completion of an overall review of the council's children's services in 2006/07. All service areas will also be monitored annually within a corporate performance management framework with the potential to trigger a corporate review. The level of self-knowledge demonstrated by the

council is good, with all service areas using both national performance information and local data to good effect. The council is effective in accessing resources from a range of funding streams.

Overall, the council has good capacity to make further improvements.

Key strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths	Key areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partnership working • meeting the health needs of looked after children • engagement of schools in health and well-being agenda • accident prevention. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain progress and demonstrate outcomes from developments in relation to the CAMHS service.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • operation of child protection systems • family support/progress on children's centre • quality assurance. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain progress in improving performance of assessment systems • reducing the very high numbers of referrals including re-referrals per 10,000 population • improve outcomes for care leavers.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • progress towards achieving attainment in line with statutory neighbours • levels of challenge and support provided by school improvement officers, consultants and the Intensive Support Programme • support for excluded pupils through alternative education • participation and involvement of young people in creative and recreational activities. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve attendance rates of looked after children • translating existing progress of pupils of Pakistani heritage into attainment at GCSE level.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • multi-agency working • support for social and emotional development • involvement of children and young people in service planning and evaluation • monitoring of children with statements of special educational need to minimise exclusions • involvement of looked after children in reviews. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve availability of young carers' support to Asian heritage groups • address rates of re-offending.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14–19 multi-agency work • impact of 14–19 coordinator • decline in young people not in education training or employment • overall 16–19 provision. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure ongoing development work in relation to SEN transition protocol • number of care leavers in employment, training or education • assessing the impact of the making a difference worker.
<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • management and performance information is used effectively for learning and monitoring • the CYPP outcome is clearly focused and based on appropriate consultation. 	<p><i>Management of children's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development of a long-term Human Resource strategy.

Aspects for focus in a future joint area review or the next APA

- The overall operation of referral and assessment systems.
- How well the council contributes to positive outcomes for the following groups:
 - care leavers
 - young people from Asian heritage communities.
- Continuing implementation of the development of CAMHS and the delivery of positive outcomes.
- Ongoing development and operation of SEN transition protocol.

We confirm that the children's services grade will provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) and will be published to the Audit Commission. The social care judgement is for CSCI information only.

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY

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