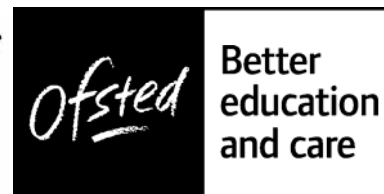


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Making Social Care
Better for People



24 January 2006

Mr Harry Catherall
Executive Director – Community and Personal Services
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Town Hall
Blackburn
Lancashire BB1 7DY

Dear Mr Catherall

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN BOROUGH COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 3 October 2005 and subsequent procedures to assess the performance of the education and social care services within your authority. We are grateful for the information that you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Being healthy

Outcomes for children and young people in this area are good overall. Schools are engaging positively with the national agenda for promoting the health of children in all areas and levels of participation in sport are good. The council also promotes sports provision in a variety of extra curricular activities. The council is a flagship for integrated children's centres where health professionals make a vital contribution. Partnership work between agencies in the Early Years Trust is strong. Parents, children and young people receive very good information advice and support and the wrap around service ensures that health needs are identified at an early stage. All children have their first development check at the appropriate time. Early Years provision for children with specific needs is well coordinated.

The rate of teenage pregnancies continues to fall and the council expects to meet its local public service agreement (LPSA) target. Infant mortality rates are high and low birth weight is of concern. The council is attempting to address these issues by the introduction of a smoking cessation service and local initiatives to encourage breast-feeding. However the council is aware that more work remains to be done to encourage mothers to maintain breast-feeding for the recommended period of time. The council has trained local women including those from the South Asian communities to act as

community food workers. They provide advice and guidance on healthy eating, weaning and infant nutrition to families in their own neighbourhood. Similarly young people have been trained to provide sex and relationships education to their peers in school and community settings.

The numbers of looked-after children receiving an annual dental and health assessment are high and improving and compare favourably with the council's statistical neighbours. The council has increased financial investment in order to establish social worker and psychologist posts to support further the mental health needs of looked-after children.

Referral paths for children and young people with mental health problems and their carers can be confusing and the council is currently engaged with National Health Service partners in order to improve this situation. The secondment of a worker from the child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to the Youth Offending Team has contributed to the council's good performance on timely referrals of those young people to the CAMHS team. A shortage of specialist mental health provision for 16-19 year olds has been recently identified and the council, the Primary Care Trust and the East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust are working to ensure that provision for this group meets their particular needs more appropriately.

Staying safe

Outcomes for children and young people in the Blackburn with Darwen area are satisfactory overall. Nevertheless, within the overall judgement there is a mixed picture. In special schools, provision for pupil's care, welfare, health and safety is satisfactory to good, and sometimes very good.

For looked-after children, stability of placements within a 12-month period is good despite the increased movement due to a policy of bringing children into the borough from external placements. The long-term stability of looked-after children's placements, as measured by the current performance indicator, is poor. However, the explanation behind this statistic is that the council has been successful in moving children from long term foster care to adoption placements which is clearly in their best interest. The council has received agreement from government office to adjust their LPSA to reflect this situation. There is good performance on the number of looked-after children under 10 who are placed for adoption and also those placed within 12 months of the decision about a placement that is in the best interests of the child.

A high proportion of looked-after children are placed with their parents and the council needs to be confident that this is the best possible outcome for each child and that the looked after status is still required. The number of looked-after children with a named social worker has decreased from 99% in 2003/4 to 76% in 2004/5. The council has acknowledged this emerging weakness and has put in place interim measures to remedy the situation. Nonetheless the council must ensure that its alternative methods of supporting children in the interim period, and for the future, are supported by secure risk assessment.

A lower proportion of children than the national average are on the child protection register. There has been a significant reduction in the number of new cases being registered as well as a marked increase in the number of cases that have been removed from the register. This improved performance is largely because the increased investment in preventive services for children and their families, which has been taking place since 1998, has filtered through. There is 100% compliance with child protection procedures in schools and 100% of reviews of children on the child protection register have been carried out.

It is unsatisfactory that there is deteriorating performance on the percentage of initial assessments undertaken within seven working days. In addition the council's performance on completing core assessments within 35 days has not improved sufficiently and remains comparatively poor. Although the council has an admirable preventive strategy in place to meet the needs of children and young people, there are some operational weaknesses. Managers must ensure that frontline staff are clear about the thresholds and criteria for action when prevention is not working and that they carry out the subsequent processes and procedures that are essential for safeguarding children efficiently. The council has taken swift remedial action to address these issues by providing two additional posts to ensure practice improvement and compliance monitoring. The front of house service has also been relocated and reorganised recently as part of the restructuring of children's services. These actions appear to have significantly reduced the possibility of inappropriate delays occurring in taking action on referrals.

The council has recently begun to address concerns about the functioning of the Area Child Protection Committee by initiating a review of all safeguarding procedures, an activity which will take them into April 2006 and most importantly, by actively consulting with partners on the setting up of a local safeguarding board in line with government requirements.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good. Inspections have indicated that the quality of provision for the development and education of children in their early years is very good though the number of actions required of some of the providers, at the time of registration in relation to the appointment of suitable adults, have been high. The local authority has a history of gradual and sustained improvement in standards of attainment in schools in a context of overall low performance. Schools consistently achieve results that are better than those in similar authorities but the standards remain stubbornly below national averages. In Key Stage 3 however, this short-fall is small and, overall, the gap between the national picture is narrowing in both primary and secondary schools. The degree to which schools in the borough enable pupils to make progress is in line with national averages, they are doing a good job in gradually raising expectations and standards.

In Key Stage 1 only mathematics is in line with the national average, with English and science below this level. However, attainment in all three subjects is equal to or better than similar authorities. At Key Stage 2 in English, mathematics and science children do as well as their peers in comparable authorities but their performance is well below the national average in English and science and below national averages in mathematics. At Key Stage 3 standards begin to rise; in mathematics, they are approaching the national average and results in all three subjects are equal to or better than those of similar authorities. However this improvement is only sustained into Key Stage 4 in relation to the lower achievement measure of one or more grades at GCSE which are above the national average. The number of students gaining five or more GCSE grades at A* to C is below the national average. The main weaknesses when compared with national averages are in English particularly at Key Stage 2 and in the attainment of particular groups of pupils especially boys, children of Pakistani heritage and traveller children. Nonetheless when compared with similar authorities boys, pupils of Pakistani heritage and those of deprived white heritage outperform their peers.

The local authority has a good record of supporting the high number of schools that, over time, have been placed by Ofsted inspections in special measures, serious weaknesses or have been deemed to be underachieving. Currently only one school remains in the special measures category and this is a good outcome. Inspections in the past year indicated that most schools ensure good pupil attitudes to work and provide good opportunities for enrichment in the curriculum. Generally the quality of learning is better in primary schools than in secondary schools.

Authorised absence is well above the national average in primary schools. It was well above the national figure in secondary schools in 2003/04, a marked increase on previous figures that the local authority believes is a result of a belated but more rigorous monitoring system in schools. Primary school unauthorised absences are in line with similar authorities whilst those in secondary schools are below comparable authorities.

The number of pupils excluded is well above the national average in primary, special and secondary schools. These figures are recognised by the local authority as a significant weakness that is being addressed by the provision of mentors and support workers for identified groups of pupils. Upon exclusion these pupils receive alternative provision and those who attend the secondary pupil referral unit do comparatively well. In general pupils excluded return to mainstream school more quickly than is the case nationally.

The attainment of children looked after by the local authority presents a mixed picture. The percentage of young people leaving care at 16 with at least one GCSE is above the national average but their attainment is below national averages at the higher levels of 5 A*-C passes. The attendance of looked after children in secondary schools is often high, but so are their exclusions from school. A recent appointment of a specialist worker for this group of young people and efforts to improve the stability of their care placements are promising developments. When asked about the quality of the services provided for them by the local authority an above average number of looked after children said that they were satisfied with their support and care.

The progress and achievement of children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is below the authority's expectations though there are signs that in key stages 3 and 4 they make greater progress. The new SEN strategy is raising the profile and implementation of greater inclusion for pupils with SEN. The number of statements of special educational need have reduced to the national average and, of those, 94% are completed within the required 18 weeks. The local authority has effective means of monitoring the progress of individual pupils with SEN so that the data can be used to inform future strategy.

Making a positive contribution

This outcome is broadly good, the local authority and its partners work well together to achieve community cohesion, one of their key priorities. Children and young people are given many local and borough-wide opportunities to become involved in change and development on a small or large scale. The council, schools and the youth service encourage young people, from an early age, to be involved in democratic processes. This is achieved in school councils, currently in 80% of schools, a Youth Parliament, the 'Can Vote! Will Vote!' project and representation on council strategic groups for example in the development of the Children and Young People's Plan. They have the opportunity to bring forward their views, contribute to decisions and occasionally represent the borough both regionally and abroad. The Youth Parliament in the borough has grown in popularity and over 3000 young people voted in its local election in March 2005.

Many young people take advantage of the out of school and youth activities that are provided through culture, leisure and sports programmes; fifty young people are now community sports leaders. An increasing number of opportunities are given for young people to make decisions about the services provided for them. These include youth fora and advisory groups, a large number of local activity groups, peer mentoring, an anti-bullying project, the design of a new school and many more.

Impressive also is the range of provision made for young people in the most vulnerable groups and those that have disabilities. A sensory impairment club, disability football club and specialist holiday provision are included. For those young people involved with the youth offending team there are inclusion projects for the 8-13 and 13-16 age groups that use a problem solving approach to the issues presented. There is also an intensive supervision and surveillance programme but the rate of re-offending is above the national average. More encouraging is the fact that the number of first time offenders dropped in 2004 and there has been a recent, year on year, reduction in two of the key locations in the borough.

Unfortunately the extent to which all young people take up these opportunities or recognise them as a contribution to their community is less secure. This is indicated through discussion with them and from some responses to surveys and questionnaires. Nonetheless the chances offered and the breadth of opportunity are good. The challenge for the authority is to ensure that the contributions that young people make are publicly recognised and celebrated and that their views and ideas are acted upon where appropriate and the reasons for decisions fed back regularly.

More specifically in relation to the contributions made by young people, there are shortcomings in the extent to which the most vulnerable contribute to their reviews and action plans. This is particularly evident in the case of looked after children.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. The strategies for 14-19 education in Blackburn with Darwen are satisfactory and the four priorities of raising aspirations, re-engaging parents, increasing employment and housing renewal are highly relevant. However the council, with its partners, has been slow in recognising and providing clear leadership for the co-ordination of the complex development needs in this area of work. To date the collaboration between the council, the local Learning and Skills Council, the Connexions service, the Education Business Partnership, Blackburn College of Further Education and training providers, has been effective in many specific projects. What has been less secure until recently is the coordination of the operational planning required. The recent appointment of a manager responsible for 14-19 co-ordination indicates potential for greater progress with the strategic priorities and thereafter improved outcomes for young people. Already there is a developing framework for action with key partners that includes furthering the vocational curriculum, re-engaging students and establishing a more holistic advice and guidance provision.

14-19 participation and achievement presents a very mixed picture. After 16 the number of young people in Blackburn with Darwen who stay in education is just below the national average, at 83% in 2004. This falls significantly at the age of 17 and 18 and the proportion entering higher education is well below the national level. There are more young people from minority ethnic groups entering higher education than their white peers. Standards in advanced level examinations at the one school sixth form are in line with national averages as are the advanced level results of other providers in the borough. Achievement in vocational courses both pre and post 16 has improved and the number of courses on offer is growing. The school sixth form, the college of further education and training providers have all been judged in recent inspections to be offering a good education to students. The success rate in vocational GCSE and in work based learning programmes is good and improving and this includes a higher than national proportion of young people with learning disabilities. The percentage of young people able to hold down a job is increasing. Regrettably, after a good three year record of above average numbers of care leavers in education employment and training the figure dropped significantly in 2004.

Young people are, in the main, well supported at key points of transfer when they move into further education, employment and training. The brighter futures programme and an enterprise adviser are available for guidance and support together with opportunities for work placements and the advice of schools-industry co-ordinators. Nine schools and the post 16 providers are involved in the 14-16 increased flexibility project that is providing school students with a more varied and better focused work based curriculum at Key Stage 4.

The proportion of looked after children in education after the age of 16 is above the national average and they are effectively supported at points of transfer by school based education workers. Joint work between the youth offending team and looked after children teams has given these vulnerable young people effective enhanced support and, despite the recent drop in the figures for looked after children in education employment and training, the same outcomes for young offenders are improving.

Summary

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • early years trust partnership work • health needs of looked-after children • all standards met in regulated settings • strong focus on involvement of all children in sport • teenage conception rates • imaginative initiatives e.g. using local people as community workers • timely response from Child and Adolescent Mental Health service (CAMHS). 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clarification of the relative roles and criteria used for referral to specialist CAMHS support • better match of provision for 16-19 year olds to their particular needs.
<p><i>Staying Safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stability of placements of looked-after children • meeting statutory duties in respect of child protection cases and reviews • significant increase in placement choice. 	<p><i>Staying Safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • re-provisioning of current ACPC arrangements • increase numbers of children receiving a core assessment within the statutory timescale • reduce the number of looked-after children living with parents • improve referral processes and review and clarify threshold criteria.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overall satisfaction rating for children in need • early years and primary education • improvements in the support for SEN through the new policy and greater inclusion. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attainment in all key stages especially in English • attainment of boys, ethnic minority pupils and travellers • attendance and rates of exclusion of all pupils and especially looked after children.

<p>Making a positive contribution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • breadth of opportunities for children and young people to contribute • very positive involvement of many partners • provision for the most vulnerable and disabled young people to contribute. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • numbers of looked • after children contributing to their own review • final warnings and reprimands of looked-after children • young peoples' understanding of the value of their contributions.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good quality teaching and learning post 16 • provision of and achievement in vocational education • proportion of young offenders in education, employment and training • post-16 preparation for the world of work and for higher education. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14-19 strategies, planning and co-ordination to improve outcomes for all young people • attainment and achievement of all 14-19 students • percentage of young people and especially care leavers in education, employment and training • participation rates post 17.

Service management

The council is currently developing its new management structures for children's services that were initiated in May 2005 and procedures for the necessary changes are clear. Service management is satisfactory overall and the council's performance management strategy is good. The priorities of Blackburn with Darwen give attention to the full range of equality and diversity issues and this is a strength of the council.

The council demonstrates good strategic leadership, has specified clear ambitions for the area and local needs have been well mapped and analysed. Overall the correct high level priorities have been set for children's services and these are clearly reflected in the budget. The council knows what it needs to do, the key priorities are shared by the council's partners and the partners' individual plans bear this out. The forecasting for social care is very good. In so far as the council's priorities relate to weaknesses in outcomes, they are the right ones. However, they are not always adequately matched to the evidence in working practices and senior officers recognise that, in a few cases, frontline services have weaknesses; for example, the council's strategy for developing a strong 14-19 framework has been slow. There is a need for the council to re-assess the focus of some of its priorities. Recent important new appointments have been made that can address the shortcomings identified.

In the main, the council's strategies and service management plans are strong and implemented effectively, for example the development of children's centres, the improvements and positive effects of the revised SEN policy and the intention to deal with the weaknesses in the attainment of boys and minority ethnic pupils in schools. In other instances the outcomes intended from effective plans are not yet evident, for example, the council's determination to improve access to social care services for

minority ethnic young people is not in doubt but there is no evidence that current strategies are having any impact. The recent analysis of needs has rightly re-focused the action on children centres and community provision.

The council must ensure that monitoring and evaluation are robust in all services. Though the details are imprecise in the council's self evaluation, senior officers are very clear about their requirements of all managers both in terms of the frequency and rigour needed when monitoring the quality of services. All 900 staff have recently received additional guidance on their monitoring responsibilities and two new roles have been established to ensure compliance and the improvement of practice. The new children's service directorate and its public office have a centrally located cross service team that is now in a better position to provide improved co-ordination and accountability. This has the potential to ensure the highest quality for the safety and progress of all children and young people.

The management of services is efficient, financial management is good and expenditure is above the national average in a number of these services. Staff recruitment and retention is effective. In relation to the provision of social work professionals, the proportionate numbers are in line with or better than those nationally both for recruitment, vacancies and sickness records. For teachers the data is also positive with the number leaving posts in line with national figures and the number of unfilled vacancies below the national average. Overall the council demonstrates that it has good capacity to further improve its services for children and young people.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Action is taken to promote children and young people's mental health:

- clarity about the relative roles and criteria used for referral to specialist CAMHS support.

Healthy life styles are promoted for children and young people:

- the match of provision for 16-19 year olds to their particular needs.

Staying safe

Agencies collaborate to safeguard children according to the requirements of current government guidance:

- revised arrangements for the Safeguarding Committee (re previous ACPC)
- the number of children receiving assessment/services as a result of initial referrals
- the number of children receiving a core assessment within the statutory timescale
- the number of looked-after children living with parents
- the precision of referral processes and clarity of revised threshold criteria.

Enjoying and achieving

Children and young people are enabled and encouraged to attend and enjoy school and to achieve highly:

- standards of attainment in all key stages, especially in English
- attendance and exclusion rates in primary, special and secondary schools
- continued focus on strategies for raising the attainment of boys, pupils of Pakistani heritage and traveller children.

Making a positive contribution

Children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision making and in supporting the community:

- numbers of young people, especially looked after children, contributing to their own reviews and action plans
- increased recognition by young people of the value of their contributions to the community.

Action is taken to prevent offending and reduce re-offending by children and young people:

- final warnings and reprimands of looked after children

Achieving economic well-being

Action is taken to ensure that 14-19 education and training is planned and delivered in a coordinated way, and to ensure that education and training (16-19) is of good quality:

- strategies, planning and co-ordination to improve outcomes for all young people 14-19
- the attainment and achievement of all 14-19 students and particularly care leavers and children in need who are not looked after.

Final judgements

Please see your final annual performance assessment judgements attached at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY
Divisional Manager
Office for Standards in Education



JONATHAN PHILLIPS
Director – Quality, Performance and Methods
Commission for Social Care Inspection

CC: Peter Morgan - Director of Education and Lifelong Learning
CC: Stephen Sloss - Director of Social Services

APA final judgements 2005: Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

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

¹ Social Care judgements use CSCI's descriptors as follows:

LSIF Ratings	Local Services Inspectorate Forum (LSIF) Descriptors	CSCI RATINGS Serving People Well	CAPACITY TO IMPROVE DESCRIPTOR
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Overall serving people well	Very good
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Serving most people well	Good/promising
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Serving some people well	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Not serving people well	Inadequate