

A Better Start – A Better Future for Blackpool's Children

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overall aim of Blackpool Better Start is simple – to give every new baby in Blackpool a better start in life.

The benefit will be felt by all children of 3 and under in Blackpool: Lottery funding will enable us to focus on seven priority wards, whilst leveraged funding will spread the benefit across the whole town.

Children growing up in Blackpool face some of the toughest challenges seen anywhere in the country. Blackpool is the sixth most deprived local authority in England, with a low-skill, low-pay economy based on a seasonal tourist trade. Thirty per cent of babies born in Blackpool experience poverty. And we have the highest levels of looked after children in the country.

There are high rates of teenage pregnancy and incidence of unhealthy gestation and birth. Large numbers of babies are exposed to parental problems of mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse and domestic abuse. 30% of mothers continue to smoke, while only 56% of mothers try breastfeeding and only half of those continue after 6-8 weeks. Not surprisingly, child development outcomes are poor and many children start school ill-equipped to learn.

We want to achieve a generational shift, ensuring that today's babies enjoy the early care and nurture they need for healthy development and to be ready for school. And that in turn, as they grow up and become parents themselves, they will pass on the Better Start legacy to the next generation.

OUR BLUEPRINT FOR CHANGE HAS FOUR PARTS

- **A public health approach**, 'shifting the curve' for the whole population
- **Evidence based interventions**, providing more intensive help for those who need it
- **System transformation**, building shared understanding and shared action
- **Building and sharing learning**, creating Blackpool Centre for Early Child Development

Throughout our programme, we will focus on what we know about the particular challenges in Blackpool, and what research tells us about the most important risk and protective factors for us to address:

- *Tackling key risks:* drugs and alcohol, mental ill-health, relationship conflict and domestic abuse, and social isolation
- *Empowering parents and communities:* promoting good parenting, healthy parent-child relationships, self-efficacy and social cohesion.

1. A public health approach

At the universal level we aim to address factors that most influence children's outcomes, and to build a sense of collective responsibility for their wellbeing.

We will measure success against key developmental outcomes: *healthy gestation and birth*; and *readiness for school*. Social and emotional development; healthy and nutrition; and language and communication skills are 'golden threads' that run throughout our programme.

Our public health activity will have two prongs:

- *Rolling out universally resources and programmes of proven effectiveness*, including those that promote physical health, diet and nutrition, social and emotional development, and language and communications skills
- *Creating a series of parent education campaigns* focussed on risk factors evident in Blackpool. The first will be on the impacts of parental alcohol misuse.

2. Evidence based interventions

We will deploy evidence-based and science-based interventions to bring about change for those children and parents with additional or specialist needs.

The centre-piece of our portfolio will be the expansion of the *Family Nurse Partnership*, a proven nurse-led home visiting programme, to all parents under 20.

Among other interventions will be *Parents Under Pressure*, a 20-week intensive programme for parents in receipt of drug or alcohol treatment; and *Baby Steps*, supporting people in the transition to parenthood, nurturing healthy relationships and promoting child development.

We will also research and develop new interventions designed to address critical gaps in current support, such as our work on domestic abuse in pregnancy and infancy.

3. System transformation

We are going to bring about the changes needed throughout local service provision, underpinned by a shared understanding of the problem and a cohesive approach that unites community and professionals from all agencies.

Our partnership brings together all players – voluntary, community, private and public - who can make a difference. We have a strong track record of partnership working, but now we need to develop shared core values, common understanding and a shared language, build local capabilities and share what we learn. So we will deliver an integrated *cross-workforce* training and development programme.

We will actively engage *families and communities*, giving them a formal voice and power. We will recruit and train volunteers to act as community champions, and build on the success of the Family

Nurse Partnership with a new mentoring service provided by those who have been through the programme themselves.

We will make our services more *accessible*, in places like GP clinics and at convenient times of day. We will target known weaknesses in service take-up, including engagement with dads and take-up of free nursery places for 2 year olds.

The partnership on the ground will be underpinned by a *ring-fenced fund* comprising the Big Lottery grant and a further £30 million of funds leveraged from local partners, and managed through an integrated commissioning framework.

We will also ensure that *other policies* (such as transport, environment, housing and welfare) are carefully aligned with the goals of *A Better Start*.

4. Building and sharing learning

We will establish the *Blackpool Centre for Early Child Development*, to help build local capacity and expertise.

The Centre will provide leadership and strategic direction for Blackpool Better Start, planning and implementing campaigns and interventions, carrying out research, evaluating outcomes, supporting the workforce and sharing learning.

A dedicated and expert local team will enjoy a close relationship with the NSPCC's national programme on pregnancy and babyhood. As part of a wider community of learning that includes other successful Better Start areas across the country, the Early Intervention Foundation, Dartington Social Research Unit and WAVE Trust, it will become an internationally-renowned centre of expertise.