

PRIORITY 1

TACKLE CHILD POVERTY, RAISE ASPIRATIONS AND IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Lead Member / Lead Officer – Cllr Ivan Taylor & Delyth Curtis

In **Priority 1** we say that we will **tackle child poverty, raise aspirations and improve educational achievement**. This means that we will have happy, healthy children who achieve well at school.

Challenges 2014/15

Our focus this year will be to:

- Keep children safe in Blackpool;
- Ensure children are school ready by reconfiguring services for 0 – 3 year olds;
- Ensure there are more Good and Outstanding schools in Blackpool;
- Improve children’s achievement at every stage of education;
- Secure apprenticeships and relevant work experience programmes for 16 – 25 year olds; and
- Work in partnership with parents to develop pathways into work, therefore tackling child poverty.

Current Activity

Keep children safe:

The Council has a Children’s Services Improvement Board which oversees the progress of our action plan to secure improvement in the quality of our safeguarding procedures. The action plan is in place and has secured improvements as recognised by the Department for Education (DfE). Key performance indicators for this plan include:

- Reducing the numbers of children looked after where it is safe to do so;
- Reducing the numbers of referrals into Social Care; and
- Reducing the numbers of children requiring a child protection plan.

Progress against this plan is also monitored by the Children’s Social Care Scrutiny Review Panel.

The Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) has a key role in keeping children safe in the town. All agencies working with Blackpool children are represented on the board. Areas of focus for the BSCB are the neglect of children, looked after children, child sexual exploitation and information sharing. Work has been ongoing to implement the Transition Plan which was developed to embed the actions from the initial Ofsted Improvement Plan. Aspects of this plan include:

- **Getting It Right** - As part of the improvement journey considerable work has been underway with partners to embed the Getting it Right framework which sets out a definition of early support, revised safeguarding thresholds and identified three

central principles – using data more effectively, creating one single route into services (the Children’s Referral Service) and keeping children safely at home.

- **Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)** - The MASH allows participating agencies to share information in a timely and secure manner and enables managers to decide on appropriate referral pathways into services for vulnerable people. Nationally, there has been recognition of weaknesses in the way that individuals and agencies have been in contact independently with persons at risk and the limitations which can arise when pertinent information is not shared (The Laming Review 2009 and Munro Review 2011). Our Vision for the MASH is to identify and make safe all vulnerable people in our communities at the earliest opportunity by sharing information and making referrals into pathways across the safeguarding partnership. A key benefit of the Blackpool MASH will be as an enabler for Early Action, which will minimise the potential for re-referral to statutory services. Early Action is a key priority for the MASH with the principle benefits of breaking cycles of risk and vulnerability by intervening earlier and therefore reducing the harm.

In July 2014, Ofsted undertook an inspection of the authority’s services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after and care leavers; and a review of the Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board. Ofsted will publish its report on 8th September 2014, which will evidence the improvements the Council has made since the last inspection and make recommendations for further improvement.

Ensure children are school ready:

Blackpool has been chosen as one of five locations in the UK to receive £45 million in funding from the Big Lottery Better Start programme. The successful bid was made by the Blackpool Better Start partnership, led by the NSPCC working with Blackpool Council, NHS health organisations in Blackpool, and a number of local parents and community organisations.

The aim of the programme is to improve the life chances of children by investing in their earliest years and achieve positive outcomes in three main areas of child development – communication and language development, social and emotional development, and diet and nutrition. This will mean more specialist services to support the most vulnerable families with babies across seven key wards in Blackpool (Claremont, Talbot, Brunswick, Bloomfield, Park, Victoria, Clifton), as well as improving public spaces for the benefit of all families in Blackpool.

The partnership will work together with the public, local communities and voluntary organisations to reduce parental use of drugs and alcohol, address issues of mental ill health, prevent domestic abuse, alleviate social isolation, improve parenting knowledge and skills, encourage parent-child relationships and attachment, and foster healthy caring relationships.

The money will be invested over ten years and will be used to fund programmes that have been researched, tested and are proven to make a difference for children’s wellbeing. Some of the first services to be newly introduced or enhanced in Blackpool include:

- **Star Buddies** - volunteer breastfeeding champions will support new mums in hospital and at home to initiate and continue breastfeeding. Since the introduction of this initiative in 2007/08 initiation rates have gone up from 15% to 25%. This scheme will be rolled out more widely across Blackpool.
- **Family Nurse Partnership** - a proven nurse-led home visiting programme will be expanded to reach all parents under 20 in Blackpool.

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

In addition, a group of local parents and community members called Community Voice are already working alongside the Better Start Partnership to help decide how best to invest the money. The group was actively involved in the application for funding and will continue to represent the interests of local people about how best to invest the money. Some initiatives that are already being planned include:

- **Blackpool Beach School** - a project to provide outdoor play and learning on the shore.
- **Improving safe spaces and play** - community consultation has already taken place about the development of green spaces in Blackpool to enable young children and their families to enjoy the outdoors and encourage physical exercise.
- **Food Dudes** – a project to increase the consumption of fruit and vegetables in early years and give parents tips to enable them to provide a healthy diet at home.

Ensure there are more Good and Outstanding schools and improve children's achievement:

The School Improvement Plan sets out how the Council plans to ensure that more schools make the transition to Good or Outstanding and that improvements are seen in children's achievement.

The improvement plan is structured around six themes. Actions which have been progressed during this period include:

- **Theme - Performance Management:**
The development of School Profiles is on track which will enable School Improvement Partners to better hold schools to account for educational outcomes and principles have been agreed for the School Organisation Strategy which will deliver a 5 year plan for outstanding learning spaces.
- **Theme - Quality Assurance:**
Revised School Improvement Service Protocols are to be implemented from September in light of changing educational provision and new guidance from the Department for Education.
- **Theme - Improving Frontline Services:**
A Teacher Recruitment Strategy is being developed to attract high quality teaching staff to Blackpool schools and the implementation of the Special Educational Needs aspects of the Children and Families Act / Code of Practice is underway.
- **Theme - Partnership Working:**
Actions within this theme include building capacity through local authority peer support to increase the pace of improvement, brokering school to school partnerships to share good practice and increased professional development offer to improve the quality of teaching.
- **Theme - Scrutiny:**
The School Improvement Plan is scrutinised and monitored at the School Improvement Board which includes representation from academy sponsors, and at the Education Scrutiny Review Panel.

- **Theme - Communications:**

The School Improvement website is being developed to increase access to school improvement information for schools and parents.

Secure apprenticeships and work experience programmes:

A great deal of work is underway to increase the numbers of young people entering into employment through apprenticeships, with the number of apprenticeship starts in Blackpool increasing from 940 in 2008/09 to 2,000 in 2012/13. However, more needs to be done.

The Journey to Work action plan sets out how the Council will support young people into work. The plan has nine strands of work, covering a range of areas such as preparation and transition for 14 – 16 year olds, enterprise and self-employment, the long term and vulnerable unemployed etc. Strand 5 focuses specifically on increasing access to job opportunities including apprenticeships.

A Steering Group meets every 2 months to oversee the progress made in delivering the actions within the plan, with task and finish groups undertaking specific pieces of work as and when required. For example, the Pathway to Apprenticeships Group, which includes partners from the public and voluntary sectors, colleges and training providers, was formed to help create a smoother pathway for vulnerable unemployed young people. The group's first task was to pull together the Pathway to Apprenticeships Programme, a directory of opportunities of first steps back into learning and employment from a range of providers across Blackpool.

Over the last 12 months the Council has facilitated the establishment of the Blackpool Provider Group, a partnership of colleges and training providers who deliver significant numbers of apprenticeships in Blackpool, to promote apprenticeship pathways. The Group has committed to the Apprenticeship Growth Plan to tackle youth unemployment. The Council is also currently working with Blackpool and the Fylde College to reduce the numbers of young people who are not in education or training by introducing a more flexible roll on roll off curriculum.

The Council has developed a Youthability Hub to provide a more comprehensive pathway into employment, education and training for 16-24 year olds. The Hub operates as a weekly drop-in centre based at Connexions and brings together a wide range of services. A range of training providers and employers attend the Hub on a rotating basis so that young people can find out directly about employment, education and training opportunities. In addition to this, several services attend the weekly sessions to address the barriers that young people face when entering into employment, education or training. For example, poor job search skills, low self-esteem/confidence, emotional and/or psychological problems, benefit/funding queries and substance misuse issues.

Bringing together services in an accessible, young person friendly one stop shop, the service aims to provide a more holistic model of support with more young people accessing opportunities for employment, education and training as a result. An evaluation of the service published in June 2014 shows that there is a high level of satisfaction with the Hub with 94% of service users interviewed rating the service as 'very good' or 'good'. The majority of service users (95%) also felt that the support provided at the Hub would have a positive impact on their chances of finding a job.

Develop pathways into work for parents:

The children's centre Learning Passport initiative is used to provide both the parent and the centre with a tool to record the successes that have been achieved. Parents receive information, advice and guidance from a qualified careers specialist who will plan a pathway of learning for that person to follow and aspire to.

The opening doors model uses a variety of low level courses to firstly engage the individual in some form of learning. The parent will then, hopefully, progress with further learning onto Life Skills, Basic Skills and Vocational and or Work Skills courses. This provides the centre with a coherent route for parents to utilize, thereby building up a more socially included and skilled individual, who upon completion and at the opportune time in their life, will access a progression pathway either to further training and/or employment.

Over the last year, we have seen a number of parents taking advantage of the Learning Passport, with at least 10 from each centre utilising this to plot a pathway that is suitable for them at that given time. Examples of courses undertaken include Family First Aid, Budgeting, Understanding Volunteering, Physical Care of Babies and Toddlers, Information Technology, Employability Courses and Working as Part of a Group. These courses have helped to develop a variety of skills which allow the bond to develop between parent and child; increases the understanding and awareness of money matters amongst parents; and develops employability and social skills. Some parents have used the skills they have gained through volunteering and group work to participate in initiatives in their local communities, such as raising money for charity.

Other Activity:

Blackpool is one of twenty places working with the Early Intervention Foundation to drive improvements in children's outcomes and break intergenerational patterns of disadvantage and dysfunction. Between January and May 2014 the Council undertook an exercise with partners to consider how developed our early intervention offer is. The Maturity Matrix supported the development of an action plan, which provides the key actions and milestones for delivery that partners are signed up to. These actions along with the draft Early Support Strategy will deliver the improvement required.

Blackpool Children's Trust is made up of partner agencies working with children in Blackpool with the aim of keeping children safe; ensuring children are healthy and emotionally resilient; and ensuring children achieve good educational outcomes. In view of the changes to governance arrangements in the Council around Children's Services, a review of the Trust was undertaken in May 2014. The remit of the review included the:

- Effectiveness of the Trust;
- Potential purpose and responsibilities of the Trust and its board members;
- Appropriateness of the governance and operational arrangements; and
- Relationships between the Trust and other boards / working groups.

A number of opportunities were identified during the review which an adapted Trust would be best placed to take advantage of. These included:

- The need to take a strategic approach to children's health and for strong partnership working around health and social care;
- The lack of a high-level strategic group addressing the issues underlying children's general wellbeing;
- Strong existing partnership arrangements forged around the Getting It Right agenda;

- The Council’s drive to implement a strategic approach to ‘upstreaming’ work which contributes to positive outcomes for children;
- The need to develop a mechanism ensuring that children’s issues are considered throughout the development process of all relevant council strategies;
- The need to identify and address gaps in services in a systematic and strategic way;
- The opportunity to strengthen the strategic approach to initiatives such as MASH and Springboard which already align partner budgets;
- A vehicle to identify and consider evidence-based approaches; and
- Providing a coherent voice to influence the commissioning process.

Work is now underway to develop new terms of reference for the Trust, revise the membership and develop a forward plan of activity over the coming months.

Challenges 2015/16

Our focus next year will be to:

- Embed the positive changes in Children’s Services;
- Embed Council and Blackpool Safeguarding Children’s Board monitoring arrangements to secure improvement once the Improvement Notice is lifted;
- Maintain the pace of improvement and delivery of our plans to ensure we:
 - Keep children safe in Blackpool;
 - Ensure children are school ready by reconfiguring services for 0 – 3 year olds;
 - Ensure there are more Good and Outstanding schools in Blackpool;
 - Improve children’s achievement at every stage of education;
 - Secure apprenticeships and relevant work experience programmes for 16 – 25 year olds; and
 - Work in partnership with parents to develop pathways into work, therefore tackling child poverty.

Strategic Risks Related to this Priority

The following risks are being monitored through the Strategic Risk Register to ensure that the necessary controls are put in place to effectively manage each risk.

Strategic Risk	Type	Risk Level
Economic recession	National	High
Change in political priorities	National	High
Failure to protect vulnerable children and adults	Local	High

Details of the specific actions being taken to mitigate these risks can be found in the Strategic Risk Register.


Key Actions & Performance Indicators for this Priority


Details of the key actions and performance indicators for this priority can be found below.





Priority 1 Key Actions

Key – Overall Progress:

 On track

 Not on track but being managed by the department to bring back on track

 Not on track and needs support from outside the department to bring back on track

Objective	Key Action	Milestones	Deadline	Dept	Lead Officer	Overall Progress
Keep children safe	Delivery of the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan	Monitor and review progress against the plan through Management Team / CIB / BCSB / Scrutiny / Report to Department for Education	Ongoing	CS	All managers	
		Write a new 12 month improvement plan	Dec 2014			
		Draft action plan for 2015/16				
	Deliver the Safeguarding Action Plan	Monitor and review progress against the plan through Management Team / CIB / BCSB / Scrutiny / Report to Department for Education	Ongoing	CS	Dominic Tumelty	
		Review plan following outcome of Ofsted inspection	Sept 2014			
Ensure children are school ready	Deliver the Better Start Strategy	Commence work on identified projects / initiatives	Nov 2014	CS	Merle Davies	
School improvement & educational achievement	Delivery of School Improvement Plan	Monitor and review progress against the plan through Management Team / CIB / BCSB / Scrutiny / Report to Department for Education	Ongoing	CS	Carl Baker / Charlotte Clarke	
		Respond and act on actions arising from the plan	Ongoing			
		Review 2013 – 15 School Improvement Plan	Jun 2014			
		Ofsted recommendations action plan 2014-16				
	Inspection	Revise LA self-evaluation prior to re-inspection	Sept 2014	CS	Carl Baker	
		Implement Ofsted recommendations	Jan 2015			
	Challenge and support	School improvement peer challenge	Jun 2014	CS	Carl Baker / Charlotte Clarke	
		LA to LA support review				
		School Improvement Plan audit review				
	School Improvement Plan value for money audit review	Sept 2014				
Apprenticeships &	Deliver the Journey To Work Action Plan	Review action plan and progress achieved to date	Mar 2015	CS / P	Mike	

Objective	Key Action	Milestones	Deadline	Dept	Lead Officer	Overall Progress
work experience for 16 – 25 year olds					Taplin / Peter Legg	
Pathways into work for parents	Adult learning	Ensure all provision is developed through a community engagement process	Aug 2014	CS	Mike Taplin	
		Review the Learning Passport initiative and deliver the programme in light of regular review	Jan 2015			

Priority 1 Performance Indicators

Performance for the key actions for Priority 1 will be monitored as part of the performance management arrangements in place for each strategy / action plan:

Objective	Performance Indicators	Dept	Lead Officer	Reviewed By
Keep children safe	Safeguarding Action Plan performance indicators	CS	Dominic Tumelty	Safeguarding Board
Ensure children are school ready	Better Start Strategy performance indicators	CS	Merle Davies	Better Start Board / Children's Trust
School improvement & educational achievement	School Improvement Plan performance indicators	CS	Carl Baker	Education Scrutiny Review Panel
Apprenticeships & work experience for 16 – 25 year olds	Journey to Work Plan performance indicators	CS / RTC	Mike Taplin / Peter Legg	Education Scrutiny Review Panel
Pathways into work for parents	Adult Learning Plan indicators	CS	Mike Taplin / Merle Davies	Children's Trust