

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231  
**Textphone** 0161 618 8524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



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Victoria Gent  
Director of Children's Services  
Children's Services Directorate  
Blackpool Council  
Number One  
Bickerstaffe Square  
Blackpool  
FY1 3AH

Dear Ms Gent

### **Focused visit to Blackpool children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Blackpool children's services on 7 and 8 October 2025. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Rachel Fairhurst and Rebekah Tucker.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for children in need and those children subject to a child protection plan.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

### **Headline findings**

Leaders have sustained a culture of continuous improvement in much of this practice area since the last inspection. They have been adaptive and responsive to the increasing demands on the service while maintaining a consistent focus on the safety and welfare of children. The quality of child in need assessments has improved and prompt action is taken where there are immediate risks to children. While assessment quality has improved, inconsistency in the quality of some children's plans is leading to drift and delay in their plans being progressed.

Focused work has been undertaken to stabilise the workforce and provide high-quality training to equip staff to carry out their roles successfully. Staff are very positive about working in Blackpool. They receive regular supervision and support from line managers, but the quality and impact of social work practice are inconsistent. Supervision is not sufficiently identifying weaknesses or progressing child in need and child protection plans when drift and delay are occurring.

## **What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?<sup>1</sup>**

- The consistency and quality of safety planning for children, including proactively involving children's wider family networks. (Outcome 3, national framework)
- The quality of supervision and management oversight, ensuring that actions and timescales are recorded and tracked to prevent drift and delay. (Enabler 3, national framework)
- The consistency and quality of decision-making for families in pre-proceedings to reduce drift and delay, including the quality of letters before proceedings. (Outcome 3, national framework)

## **Main findings**

The request for support hub ensures that when children need help or protection, referrals to children's social care progress into the assessment teams without delay. Management oversight is present on children's records and gives clear direction to the assessment teams as to the level of risk and presenting needs.

Most assessments are timely and thorough, and contain a detailed analysis of the family history, including any previous referrals and interventions by children's social care or early help teams. Social workers visit children in line with their assessed needs. These visits capture children's voices and demonstrate purposeful direct work where appropriate. This helps social workers to get to know their children well. Risk and harm are well understood, and most assessments result in appropriate recommendations to better safeguard children and support families and carers.

Family support workers build effective relationships with families, working with them in a variety of bespoke ways. Examples include support with parenting skills, implementing routines, budgeting and helping families to improve home conditions. Addiction support and domestic abuse practitioners are also accessible to families. These interventions are helping to increase parents' awareness of the impact of domestic abuse and addiction on their children, and supporting them to make changes where possible.

Senior leaders are currently developing a coordinated approach with adult services and a cross-council plan to better identify and support young carers. They recognise that not all children who help to look after a family member have their needs fully understood within assessments.

Since the last inspection, children's plans show an increasing focus on parental coproduction. However, some plans miss the opportunity to engage with wider family networks and engage multi-agency partners. This lack of engagement means some children remain subject to child in need plans for too long, with limited evidence of

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<sup>1</sup> The areas for improvement have been cross-referenced with the outcomes, enablers or principles in the [Children's Social Care: National Framework](#). This statutory guidance sets out the purpose, principles for practice and expected outcomes of children's social care.

sustained change in the care they receive. Front line management oversight, while supportive to social workers, is not consistently providing enough oversight or direction to help social workers prevent drift and delay in progressing children's plans.

When concerns and risk escalate, safeguarding practice is effective. Decisions to progress to strategy meetings are made swiftly and appropriately, although the rationale for convening strategy meetings is not always clearly recorded on children's records. Regular partner attendance at strategy meetings and effective information-sharing ensure child-focused, timely and thorough section 47 investigations. These lead to appropriate actions to ensure children's immediate safety and well-being.

Initial child protection conferences facilitate effective information-sharing which informs decision-making. Conferences are well attended by the multi-agency partnership, although not all conferences are convened in a timely way. As a result, there is delay for some children in receiving multi-agency interventions and in child protection plans starting.

Following initial child protection conferences, some safety planning builds on the family's strengths, while firmly addressing risks to children. These plans are coproduced with families. They are also written in a child-friendly format to help children understand their plan and, importantly, what parents need to do to improve their children's safety and well-being. However, not all safety plans are kept up to date when children's or the family's circumstances change. For a very small number of children, while social work interventions and family support are happening, written safety plans are not put in place following their conference.

When children are made subject to child protection plans, core groups are well attended by partner agencies who contribute effectively to the review of children's progress and safety. Most child protection plans seen by inspectors consider risks and children's needs very well. Planned services and interventions are appropriate but some lack measurable targets and timescales for progress to be achieved. In a small number of disabled children's plans, while risks and need are clearly identified, they do not specifically address any additional vulnerabilities associated with the child's disability or family pressures.

When risks increase for children, social workers appropriately escalate their concerns to senior managers to trigger the pre-proceedings stage. The response to pre-proceedings arrangements in Blackpool has improved since the last inspection. Increased senior management oversight and robust tracking through panels supported by legal representation have improved leaders' ability to monitor these arrangements. This is beginning to expedite children's plans for safety when their circumstances do not improve. However, letters before proceedings do not set out clearly enough the concerns and the necessary changes for parents to make. Some children still experience drift and delay, with these arrangements going on for too

long when parents have been unable to make the necessary agreed changes to reduce the local authority's concerns.

Social workers receive regular supervision, which is evident on most children's records. Some records show how social workers are supported to reflect on their practice and the impact they are having on children's lives. Social workers told inspectors that they find having theoretical discussions with their managers helps them to review children's progress and understand children's needs better. This positive practice is, however, undermined as managers are not consistently setting actions and timescales for social workers to follow. Leaders were already aware of these shortfalls before this visit and have committed to providing bespoke training and learning opportunities to meet the needs of frontline managers as an improvement priority.

The senior leadership team is permanent and stable. It is well supported by the corporate executive and council members who share a vision and overarching strategic priority to improve the lives of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in Blackpool.

Leaders use detailed analysis of performance and quality assurance information to understand their service strengths and where improvement is needed. Leaders are outward looking and actively seek peer reviews from local authority partners to support their culture of continuous learning and improvement. 'Blackpool Families Rock' is a series of principles underpinned by a practice model that guides leaders and staff to deliver a strengths-based and coproduction approach to safeguarding and working with children and their families. This approach is well embedded and understood by workers.

Since the last inspection, leaders have taken positive action to ensure that staff feel valued and that workloads are more manageable. There has been a strong focus on recruitment and retention. A comprehensive training and support offer to staff, and positive partnerships with universities, are encouraging social work students to train and work in Blackpool. There is improved access to specialist domestic abuse and addiction support services for parents, and staff say they have increasing confidence in their knowledge and practice through access to professional consultation and advice from these service professionals.

While recruitment and retention are an improving picture, and reliance on agency staff is low, caseloads remain too high for some workers. The constant high level of demand in this practice area and the complexity of some children's needs means that social workers and family support workers do not always have the time they need to do their best work for their children. Despite these pressures, social workers are positive about the support they receive from their managers and from leaders. Unanimously workers spoke with pride about, and a commitment to, working in Blackpool. They said they feel well supported and safe to practice. Workers were also

able to articulate their positive experience of the service improvements achieved since the last inspection.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning the next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Fairhurst  
**His Majesty's Inspector**