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**Mapping and gapping services for children,
young people and families in Blacon**

Executive Summary

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November 2009

Executive Summary

Background

Blacon is located in the local authority area of Cheshire West and Chester and covers the two wards of Blacon Hall and Blacon Lodge. Included in the total population of 13,240 are approximately 800 children aged 0 to 4 years, 2,030 aged 5 to 15 years and 700 young people who are 16 to 19 years old. The 2008 Ward Profile for the area indicates that 29% of pupils are eligible for free school meals.

Blacon Education Village commissioned the Centre for Public Health Research to:

- provide a map of services available to support children and families in Blacon;
- explore whether, from the perspectives of children, families and service providers, there were gaps or duplication in the provision of services to support children and families.

Study design

In order to provide a comprehensive picture of support services in Blacon, the study adopted a pluralistic approach. This brought together the perspectives of a number of 'stakeholders' – the children and young people, parents and carers, as well as service providers. The mapping exercise drew on both qualitative and quantitative information provided by all of the stakeholders, and on data from secondary sources. However, the approach was predominantly qualitative: that is an approach which studies individuals in their natural settings, is concerned with words rather than numbers, and with a commitment to describing and explaining the world from the point of view of those being studied. During the course of the research, 59 children and young people took part in focus groups, and 49 parents/carers and 22 service providers were interviewed. In addition, two service providers filled in self-completion questionnaires.

As the timescales for the research meant that every service provider in the Blacon area could not be interviewed, the organisations involved were selected by the Steering Group for the project. Whilst the researchers were able to contact the majority of the identified service providers, there were instances of non-response. This unfortunately included some organisations that were considered to be key service providers. Their lack of involvement is a gap in the research and the implications are evident in some of the report's conclusions.

Key findings

A range of support services for children, young people and families were available to, and accessed by, Blacon residents. As some agencies were unable to provide activity data and the information that was provided varied in comprehensiveness and detail, the report was able to present a partial picture of local involvement with these services.

- **Pre-school aged children**

Blacon was seen as being an area where families with babies and young children were relatively well provided for, particularly through services delivered from the Children's Centre. The general perception was of a wide range of services that were accessible for local families, although some people found it difficult, through a lack of knowledge or confidence, to approach a service for the first time. Some of the gaps in provision that were identified were: a lack of flexible child care; full-time speech and language provision; and open-access family learning activities. There was also some concern about duplication in the provision of family support by different agencies.

- **Children aged 5 to 13 years**

The children and young people aged 5 to 13 who took part in the focus groups spoke in detail about their leisure time interests and things that they would prefer to do in their spare time. Overwhelmingly, they were interested in keeping active through activities such as sport, outdoor pursuits and dance. Creative pastimes such as art, cooking and performing were also popular. Positive comments about support services for this age group included those relating to the Youth Inclusion Project, the counsellor based at the High School, learning mentors in the primary schools and after-school care. The gaps that were highlighted were in the Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education syllabus, support during the Special Educational Needs Statementing process, the level of support from CAMHS and leisure activities. Concerns were also raised about the limitations on children's play imposed by anti-social behaviour and unsafe play areas.

- **Young people aged 14 to 17 years**

The findings of the research suggested that family support, community-based health services and leisure opportunities were the largest gaps in services for young people age 14 to 17 years in Blacon. The discussions indicated that the support services people were most positive about for this age group were the Building Young People's Potential project and Connexions.

- **Inter-agency working**

The research found that inter-agency working was an important feature of the mode of operation adopted by many of the services in Blacon. This was facilitated by contacts in a range of spheres, including casework with individual children, young people or families, joint service delivery, service planning and the strategic forum.

- **Geography**

Although a map of Blacon shows a cluster of services in the northern part of the area, only a small number of parents and service providers suggested that the location of current provision was of concern to them. The issue of a territorial '*divide*' in Blacon was mentioned by three participants: the more dominant view was that the services that were available could be accessed by residents wherever they lived.

Conclusions

This research identified a range of support services that were available to, and accessed by, children, young people and families in Blacon. It also demonstrated that whilst generally, the services provided and the extent of inter-agency working in the area were good, there were some specific gaps in services. A number of issues for further consideration in relation to these findings were identified and are presented under the headings of: data; early learning and childcare; health advice and Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education; family support; emotional wellbeing and mental health; communication and inter-agency working; Special Educational Needs; leisure and social opportunities; co-ordination of new services; and enabling access. Where appropriate, the core expectations in the Cheshire Children and Young People's Plan and the six Local Area Agreement targets which these options relate to are indicated.

Data

Some organisations would benefit from assistance to establish systems for the collection and collation of activity data if it is to be used to full effect both internally and for broader service planning.

If a core data set, containing information from a number of agencies, is required for strategic planning or service development purposes, a separate exercise would need to be undertaken to collect and collate this, with co-operation from all of the agencies concerned.

(Core expectation: integrated strategy)

Early learning and childcare

The demand for, and provision of, childcare places, particularly those for babies and children under the age of two years, should be reviewed. If parents are to be able to attend appointments, then having access to flexible child care arrangements for short periods is important. It would be beneficial to explore how this could be facilitated.

The balance between universal and targeted provision of services designed to facilitate learning and development of babies and pre-school children warrants further consideration. The impact of the involvement of children in need on both universal and targeted activities could be monitored to ascertain the relative value of each service.

(Core expectation: child-centred, outcome led vision)

Health advice and PSHCE

Having more than one easy point of access to health, sexual health and counselling services for young people would expand provision in this important area. Whilst school-based provision may be appropriate for the majority, young people who do not attend the High School, those who are worried about confidentiality or those who need to speak to someone outside school hours require a well advertised alternative.

It would be beneficial to implement the updated PSHCE curriculum in local schools as soon as possible.

(Local Area Agreement target: under 18 conception rate)

(Core expectation: child-centred, outcome led vision, integrated front-line delivery)

Family support

Family support for teenagers and their parents was identified as a major gap in provision. Better co-ordination of all family support services might help address identified gaps and clarify areas where there might be duplication.

(Local Area Agreement target: first time entrants to the youth justice system, young people who are NEET)

(Core expectation: child-centred, outcome led vision, integrated front-line delivery, integrated processes)

Emotional wellbeing and mental health

The researchers were unable to speak to CAMHS about their provision in the locality. It is recommended that the commissioners of the research approach this service for further information.

It would be beneficial to consider how children under the age of 13 years receive advice, information and support about drug and alcohol misuse.

(Local Area Agreement targets: substance misuse by young people, first time entrants to the youth justice system, young people who are NEET)

(Core expectation: child-centred, outcome led vision, integrated front-line delivery)

Communication and inter-agency working

It would be beneficial to develop further two-way communication with specialist providers so that generic workers understand what provision is available and can also communicate, through their work on the ground, their awareness of gaps in existing services.

Front-line staff value the communication channels that have been developed to enhance multi-agency working. Effective joint meetings and other forums could be a vehicle for enhancing communication as well as making it more likely that they would be well attended.

Staff who regularly use the CAF or MARAC could act as mentors to other front-line staff to encourage them to initiate these assessments when they are needed.

(Core expectation: child-centred, outcome led vision, integrated front-line delivery, integrated processes)

Special educational needs

Parents could be signposted to organisations such as the Parent Partnership Service, so that they can access support and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the SEN Statement process.

(Core expectation: child-centred, outcome led vision)

Leisure and social opportunities

Children and young people were interested in a range of leisure activities but their access was limited by the lack of local provision, transport to provision elsewhere and concerns about anti-social behaviour. It would be beneficial to consider how the range of leisure opportunities could be expanded for young people, particularly those aged 10 years and over.

(Local Area Agreement target: young people's participation in positive activities)

Co-ordination of new services

Establishing a dialogue between service providers may be a vehicle for ensuring that new provision does not duplicate or conflict with existing services. It might also enable the identification of the best placed organisation(s) to take forward new developments. Existing forums might take on this co-ordinating role.

(Core expectation: integrated strategy)

Enabling access

Service providers might consider an expansion of the practice of accompanying new users to local services.

Offering activities at different venues and providing transport to and from specific leisure activities could be beneficial in increasing children and young people's access to a wider diversity of leisure activities. If transport is provided, some of the travelling time could be used constructively by staff to further engage potential service users in other activities.

(Local Area Agreement target: young people's participation in positive activities)
(Core expectation: child-centred, outcome led vision)