November 2025

Dear Candidate

I am writing to thank you for your interest in becoming the next DCS in Knowsley. Knowsley had a poor ILACS inspection in November 2024 and following receipt of an Improvement Notice from the DfE, I was appointed as their DfE Improvement Adviser.

It is almost a year since then and Knowsley Children’s Services is unrecognisable from the way it was. The Council immediately took responsibility and made the improvement of children’s services its top priority. Money was set aside to fund all of the improvements needed in children’s social care. A seasoned and inspirational interim Executive Director, Hilary Brooks, was appointed and Hilary has overseen a dramatic turnaround in the services children and young people receive as well as in the morale of the staff teams who provide those services.

Hilary is planning to retire in March 2026, hence the recruitment process for a new permanent Executive Director. This role is a crucial building block for long-term improvement. You would be building on the stabilisation and recovery process that Hilary has introduced and managed successfully, and you will be taking over a stable set of services where the main improvements now needed are in the quality of practice.

Knowsley kept its core of permanent staff despite its adverse inspection outcome so has not become dependent on agency staff – the opposite is the case so one of the crucial building blocks of improvement, an experienced permanent workforce, is in place already. Practitioners and managers are benefiting from the safe, sound and kind leadership in place at all levels so the new DCS has a capable and supportive infrastructure for practice improvement.

Knowsley Council excels at most of its services and the fact that systemic weaknesses in its children’s social care services are being addressed, is bringing that service into line with the bulk of services in the Borough. The DCS role is just as much about SEND and Education services and both sets of services are well-run and also improving.

The Council is rightly proud of what it is now starting to achieve. There is a long way to go but they have made a positive start, and they have created the conditions for continued success. For myself, it has been a pleasure working with Knowsley. They are an open, welcoming, supportive and down-to-earth professional family. They like to do what is needed without a fuss.

Do think seriously about coming to join Knowsley. The improvement journey will stretch you, but it is manageable, and you will be taking over a Department where Hilary has already done much of the heavy lifting needed. I do hope you decide to apply and consider coming to work together with some dedicated and child-centred staff at all levels of the organisation.

Best wishes

Anthony Douglas CBE

Anthony Douglas CBE, Knowsley Improvement Adviser

