

**MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - THURSDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2017**

Present:

Councillor Rowson (in the Chair)

Councillors

Collett

O'Hara

Mrs Scott

L Taylor

Critchley

D Scott

Stansfield

In Attendance:

Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services

Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services

Mr John Hawkin, Head of Leisure and Catering Services

Mr Scott Butterfield, Transformation Manager, Corporate Delivery Unit

Mrs Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager

Councillor Graham Cain, Cabinet Secretary for Resilient Communities

Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning

Councillor Maria Kirkland, Cabinet Member for Third Sector Engagement and Leisure Services

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 19 OCTOBER 2017

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting of the Resilient Communities and Children's Scrutiny Committee held on 19 October 2017 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Committee noted that there were no applications from members of the public to speak at the meeting.

4 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the item contained within the Forward Plan, December 2017 – April 2018, that related to the portfolio of the Cabinet Secretary. Members queried if the 'Development Proposals for Improvements at Carleton Cemetery' included an increase to the capacity of the crematorium. In response, Councillor Cain advised that the main purpose of the proposed decision to be taken related to a proposed extension to the burial ground at this stage and that the required notice had been given to the tenant.

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5 CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE REPORT

The Chairman invited Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services to highlight key information contained within the report.

Mrs Booth drew the Committee's attention to the School Improvement Actions and the Appendix setting out the School Families, Priority Leads and Governance arrangements. She reported that the School Improvement Board had made little progress in the previous 12 months, however, the need for a school led system had been agreed and schools had formed themselves into seven families. All funding for school improvement would be filtered through the school families, which had not necessarily been based on geographical area. She added that schools were sharing good practice and experience and that the families were challenging and supporting each other in development.

It was noted that schools could move family; however, it was important to maintain stability where possible.

The Committee discussed School Improvement priorities in detail and queried how they had been developed. Mrs Booth advised that the priorities had been developed from a number of sources such as inclusion data citing that the Educational Diversity offer in Blackpool was the largest in Europe, attainment (in particular Key Stage 4 English and Maths results) and horizon scanning for general improvement.

In response to a question, Mrs Booth advised that the School Improvement Board had developed a short term tactical response and a long term strategical response. There would be limited short term impact on attainment in 2018 and the long term response sought improvement in two to three years.

The Committee considered the Children's Services new audit framework and had ascertained from the report that there had been issues with the setting of SMART targets. Members queried the changes required to ensure future target setting was appropriate and achievable. Mrs Booth advised that one concern was misunderstanding the difference between 'need' and 'risk'. It was a key aspect of Social Workers to mitigate risk and risk sensible practice informed SMART planning. Previously, 'need' had also been targeted resulting in an overlap with universal service provision.

Following further consideration of the report, Members queried why the work to reduce the number of Looked After Children by identifying children and young people able to leave care was behind schedule. In response, Mrs Booth highlighted the high workload of Social Workers and advised that agency staff would be utilised in the short term to undertake administrative tasks in order to release capacity in permanent social workers to safely discharge children.

The Committee noted that historical data suggested that the number of Looked After Children increased around Christmas and was informed by Mrs Booth that an increase due to the time of year should not be usual. She added that children must not be taken into care simply because there were not enough Social Workers available over the Christmas period to manage risk or support struggling parents. In order to ensure there was no seasonal increase, preventative measures had already been put in place to

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support the community such as food parcels and a rota of when Senior Managers would be on duty over Christmas. Mrs Booth noted that she could not guarantee that there would be no increase as a child would be taken into care if there was a need.

Members discussed the National Anti-Bullying Week and considered whether a town wide bullying strategy was achievable. Concern was expressed by Members that bullying was of high priority and that was not always reflected in the attitude of some school headteachers. Mrs Booth agreed with the Committee regarding the importance of addressing bullying and highlighted the ongoing work she had been undertaking in order to achieve a suitable response to bullying. She commented that it had taken time to build relationships with schools and that she would develop a strategic plan regarding bullying to roll out across the town.

The Committee further discussed internet bullying and were advised that some schools had blocked access to social media in the school. However, that did not tackle any bullying that may occur on the internet outside of school. It was considered that any anti-bullying strategy would need to include parents.

Members challenged Mrs Booth to provide assurance regarding how she would ensure bullying was recognised by all headteachers. In response, she advised that it was her intention to be very firm with headteachers, to make sure they understood their responsibility in dealing with bullying, to use any warning letters available to her if necessary and to ultimately contact the Regional Schools Commissioner and Ofsted if a headteacher of an academy was still not responding appropriately to bullying as ultimately it was a safeguarding concern.

6 COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT 2017/2018

The Committee considered a report which detailed performance against priorities in the Council Plan 2015 – 2020, and focussed on the performance of the priorities relating to Safeguarding Children. Mr Scott Butterfield, Priority Lead, Strategic Evidence and Evaluation Team introduced the report and highlighted that work was ongoing to improve data collection and the way in which information was presented to Members.

Members considered the Key Performance Indicator Summary in detail and asked a number of questions relating to the lack of targets and the comparison of performance data between 2017/2018 and previous years. In response, Mrs Booth advised that 12 week targets had since been developed and would be provided to Members at the next meeting of the Committee. She added that it was difficult to compare current data with that of previous years without also considering current circumstance. As an example, she highlighted that over recent years absence from schools had increased.

Members went on to consider the two performance indicators that had deteriorated, when compared nationally. The two indicators were noted as the Number of Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan and the Number of Current Children in Need. In response to questioning, Mrs Booth advised that it was difficult to determine why performance against the two indicators had deteriorated and that there was a need to ensure the whole system was stable.

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In response to questioning regarding 'statistical neighbours' Mrs Booth advised that comparisons were undertaken both against other authorities within the region, and against authorities selected on the basis of the most similar authorities determined by a number of common characteristics. However, she commented that no other authority was truly similar to Blackpool and that rather than comparing generally, she compared Blackpool with different authorities on individual issues. An example of that approach was comparing the Council with Grimsby in relation to Looked After Children numbers and Halton when considering inclusion issues relating to white boys in schools.

Following a discussion on the number of current children in need per 10,000 population, Members were advised that the way in which data for the indicator was measured had changed. As a result, the Committee requested that a clear explanation be provided on what was being reported and how that differed to the information previously presented. Mrs Booth agreed to present the current performance scorecard to the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee agreed:

To receive the new targets agreed for the Key Performance Indicators and the current performance scorecard at the next meeting of the Committee.

7 LEISURE SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT

Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services presented an overview of the performance of Leisure Services with an emphasis on the robust performance management system, improved facilities and increasing patronage. He highlighted that a key concern for the Service was balancing commercial marketing and profitability with inclusion and access for all.

The Committee considered the net cost to the Council of £699,000 to provide Leisure Services and questioned whether it could be reduced and if the costs were sustainable moving forward. In response, Mr Blackledge advised that when considering the net cost it was important to also consider that more than one million attendances were made to activities and facilities provided across Blackpool and the health benefits of the visits. He added that despite the large budget cuts made over the previous years, the value of Leisure provision had ensured the continuation of services. Furthermore, the Council was continuing to increase income in order to reduce costs.

Members queried whether, due to the positive impact upon health from participating in sport and leisure activities, a contribution to costs was sought from the NHS. Mr Blackledge advised that no direct contribution was made, however, the NHS often referred patients to specific leisure programmes, which people continued once the referral period had been completed. Mr John Hawkin, Head of Leisure and Catering Services added that due to a change in the way VAT was calculated, the Council was expecting costs to reduce by approximately £250,000 next year and to receive a rebate of previous tax paid up to a total of £500,000.

The quality of amateur sports teams in Blackpool was noted and Members queried whether the Council demonstrated the quality of teams when applying for funding from Sports England and other funding organisations. Mr Blackledge advised that the town had

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been very successful in obtaining external funding for facilities and teams and cited the £4.395 million Lottery Funding for the development of Palatine Leisure Centre as one example. Mr Hawkin added that a number of small grant applications had recently been made including a bid to the Lancashire Football Association for a new 3G pitch at Stanley Park.

The Committee noted the 9% decline in patronage in 2017 of the Health and Fitness services and raised concerns that new commercial gyms had enhanced facilities. In reply, Mr Blackledge informed Members that work was ongoing with Big Wave Media who specialised in supporting local authority leisure providers in commercial aspects of the business. He advised that the skills of managers were being increased and the decline in patronage had resulted in reduced retention rather than a reduction in new patrons.

Discussions were also held by the Committee on the Active Blackpool programme, Learn to Swim, the Feel Good Factory and Outdoor Activities. It was noted that the swim programme continued to grow and that additional outdoor activities were being considered such as sailing in Stanley Park. In response to a question, Mr Blackledge advised that the beach was a resource and an opportunity, however, events needed to be scheduled around the tide which limited the ability to hold regular sessions.

Members considered the challenge to the service of the aging condition of the buildings and facilities on offer, in particular, facilities such as changing rooms and toilets which must be of a high standard in order to compete with commercial providers. Mr Blackledge advised that it was hoped some of the £500,000 VAT rebate could be used to invest in facilities. The Council was also in discussion with Sport England regarding work required and investment planning.

The Committee discussed the extensive investment in facilities at Stanley Park and recorded a vote of thanks to Parks staff for the recent commendation it had received. Concern was expressed that other parks did not receive investment to the same extent, however, the Committee noted the excellent job undertaken by the Friends of Parks Associations in Blackpool. It was also noted that Stanley Park was a fantastic facility widely used by the community.

The Committee agreed to receive a report in six months focussing on income generation (including funding applications), maintenance of equipment and facilities and patronage.

8 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered its Workplan for the remainder of the current Municipal Year and discussed the 'Implementation of Recommendations' in detail.

The Committee agreed to note the Workplan and to update the 'Implementation of Recommendations' as follows:

- To mark the recommendation to receive actions developed from Serious Case Reviews as complete following receipt of the Blackpool Children's Safeguarding Board Annual Report at the last meeting of the Committee.

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- To delete the action to receive a report on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) following the Ofsted inspection. It was noted that the Council had predicted an Ofsted inspection on CSE, which had never happened.
- To amend the action to request a precis of school Ofsted reports be sent to Members outside of Committee meetings.
- To note that updates would be provided on the Opportunity Area Plan and Mrs Booth's meeting with newly qualified teachers at the next meeting of the Committee.
- To amend the action to receive information on MASH performance by adding in that updates would be requested for every other meeting.

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee agreed to note the date of the next meeting as Thursday 8 February 2018, commencing at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 19.56)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

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