



**PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT SCRUTINY REVIEW
FINAL REPORT**

CONTENTS

1.0 Foreword by Chairman

2.0 Summary of Recommendations

3.0 Background Information

4.0 Methodology

5.0 Detailed Findings

- The reasons why children are in the Pupil Referral Unit
- Why the number of children in the Pupil Referral Unit is so high
- What is being done to keep children in mainstream education
- Why children make progress in the Pupil Referral Unit when they do not in their predecessor school
- Educational outcomes for Looked After Children at the Pupil Referral Unit
- The transition from the Pupil Referral Unit back to mainstream education
- Safeguarding Concerns
- Conclusions

6.0 Financial and Legal Considerations

1.0 Foreword

- 1.1 The Resilient Communities Scrutiny Committee highlighted a number of concerns including the high number of children and young people attending the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) making the Unit in Blackpool the largest in the country. As a result of discussions at that meeting I felt it was important that Members considered the PRU in more detail and requested that a review panel be established to do just that.
- 1.2 What has become apparent during the review is the time and effort officers within Educational Diversity put in to ensure all children at the Pupil Referral Unit are safe and receive an education that is suited to their needs. I would like to acknowledge the good work that takes place within the Pupil Referral Unit and commend the 'good' Ofsted inspection received in 2012.
- 1.3 A number of significant concerns did become apparent during the course of this review and the Panel has made a number of recommendations to try and address these concerns. I accept that providing a consistent approach to exclusions and educational diversity across all Blackpool schools will take time but firmly believe a consistency of approach could only be positive for children in Blackpool.
- 1.4 I would like to thank all my fellow Councillors who participated in this review and the Officers who willingly provided frank and honest answers to the questions we asked.

Councillor Benson
Chairman, Pupil Referral Unit Scrutiny Review Panel

2.0 Summary of Recommendations

	Timescale
<p>Recommendation One</p> <p>a) That the Resilient Communities Scrutiny Committee supports the Blackpool Challenge Board in its objective to provide a consistent approach to exclusion across all schools and reduce the number of referrals to the Pupil Referral Unit through the introduction of the Behaviour and Attendance Partnership and Inclusion Board.</p> <p>b) In order to measure performance against this objective, the Committee to receive regular updates on the number of exclusions and admissions to the PRU with a view to making further recommendations if sufficient progress is not demonstrated.</p>	Ongoing commencing immediately.
<p>Recommendation Two</p> <p>a) That the Blackpool Challenge Board be requested to adopt as an action 'to assess the feasibility of introducing an appropriate educational diversity module within every school in Blackpool in order to provide consistent early intervention and help address the causes of any behavioural problems before they escalate'.</p> <p>b) That the Blackpool Challenge Board report to the Resilient Communities Scrutiny Committee regarding the implementation of this recommendation in June 2016.</p>	Request to be sent immediately to Challenge Board. June 2016
<p>Recommendation Three</p> <p>a) That the Inclusion Board be requested to consider the concerns of the Panel regarding the reintegration of students back into mainstream education from the PRU and consider introducing a mechanism to effectively review the needs of children to be reintegrated and the wraparound of support to prevent future breakdown of reintegration.</p> <p>b) That the Inclusion Board report to the Resilient Communities Scrutiny Committee regarding the implementation of this recommendation in June 2016.</p>	Request to be sent immediately to Inclusion Board. June 2016
<p>Recommendation Four</p> <p>a) That the Panel supports the proposed bid for external funding to the Department for Education Transformational Fund to provide wrap around social care and early help around clusters of schools to help address student behaviour and resilience. If the bid is successful it would result in a social worker being placed to work with a cluster of linked schools.</p> <p>b) If the bid is unsuccessful, the Panel supports the Director of People in her aim to provide a more joined up approach to service provision by introducing improved links between the Family in Need Service and Pupil Welfare Team.</p> <p>c) The Director of People to report to the Resilient Communities Scrutiny Committee regarding the progress made in relation to the bid in June 2016.</p>	June 2016

3.0 Background Information

- 3.1 At the Resilient Communities Scrutiny Committee on 2 July 2015, Members discussed the high level of admissions to the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and asked a number of questions, noting the safeguarding risks attached to children not in full time education, the number of Our Children in the PRU and the work being undertaken to reduce the number of admissions. It was noted at the meeting that the Unit was the largest in the country. Subsequently, a request was submitted to the Committee on 17 September 2015 to review the Pupil Referral Unit in more detail and it was agreed to establish an 'in a day' review of the Unit.
- 3.2 The Scrutiny Review Panel comprised of Councillors Benson (Chairman), O'Hara, Humphries, Hunter, Maycock and T Williams.
- 3.3 A pre meeting was held to scope the review and the following key areas for consideration were identified:
- The reasons why children are in the PRU
 - Why the number of children in the Pupil Referral Unit is so high
 - Why children make progress in the PRU when they do not in their predecessor school
 - What is being done to prevent admission to the unit, to keep children in school (and what the Council can do)/why are children excluded from their school
 - Educational outcomes for Looked After Children at the Pupil Referral Unit and if these can be improved
 - The transition from the PRU back to mainstream education
 - Safeguarding Concerns
- 3.4 This review relates to the following priority of the Council:
- Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience.

4.0 Methodology

- 4.1 The Panel adopted an 'in a day' approach for the scrutiny review and held one meeting to consider all evidence and speak to witnesses. This meeting followed an initial scoping meeting. Details of the meetings are as follows:

Date	Attendees	Purpose
27 October 2015	Councillors Benson (Chairman), O'Hara, Humphries, Hunter, Maycock, Singleton and T Williams. Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager (Blackpool Council)	To elect a Chairman and agree the scope for the review.
13 November 2015	Councillors Benson (Chairman), O'Hara, Humphries, Hunter, Maycock and T Williams. Del Curtis, Director of People Carl Baker, Deputy Director of People Amanda Hatton, Deputy Director Early Help and Social Care Wendy Casson, Headteacher, Educational Diversity Jane Gray, Head of Access and Inclusion Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager (All Blackpool Council)	To gather evidence and draw conclusions.

5.0 Detailed Findings and Recommendation

5.1 The reasons why children are in the Pupil Referral Unit

- 5.1.1 The Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in Blackpool is the largest in the country and currently operates from a number of sites, supporting children from key stage 2 to key stage 4. The number of children in the Unit changes frequently and there are a variety of reasons why a child might need to access education through the Unit such as specific behavioural, social, emotional or medical needs.
- 5.1.2 The majority of students in the Unit have either been permanently excluded from their mainstream school or it has been agreed with parents / carers that they transfer to the PRU as the child's mainstream school felt unable to meet their individual needs. The Unit includes provision at Blackpool Victoria Hospital for children with long term illnesses and provides access to home tuition for children who are too poorly to attend school (this is usually as a dual registration along with their mainstream school). In addition there is a separate centre for offenders that require isolation.
- 5.1.3 A key reason for exclusion from mainstream education and subsequently admission to the PRU was behaviour, however, poor behaviour was often a presentation of an underlying issue. It was considered that these issues started at primary school, but manifested at high school resulting in the majority of exclusions occurring during high school when poor behaviour was coupled with the pressure of attainment. Generally, young people at key stage 3 were harder to manage and more physically challenging to teachers than other age groups and this was a key stage when managing the behaviour of children.
- 5.1.4 The Panel discussed the proportion of non-English language speakers in the PRU and noted that it was very low. Members were informed that schools were able to make assessments of language and provide a holistic immersion into the mainstream school system. The majority of schools also had a Special Educational Needs Coordinator.

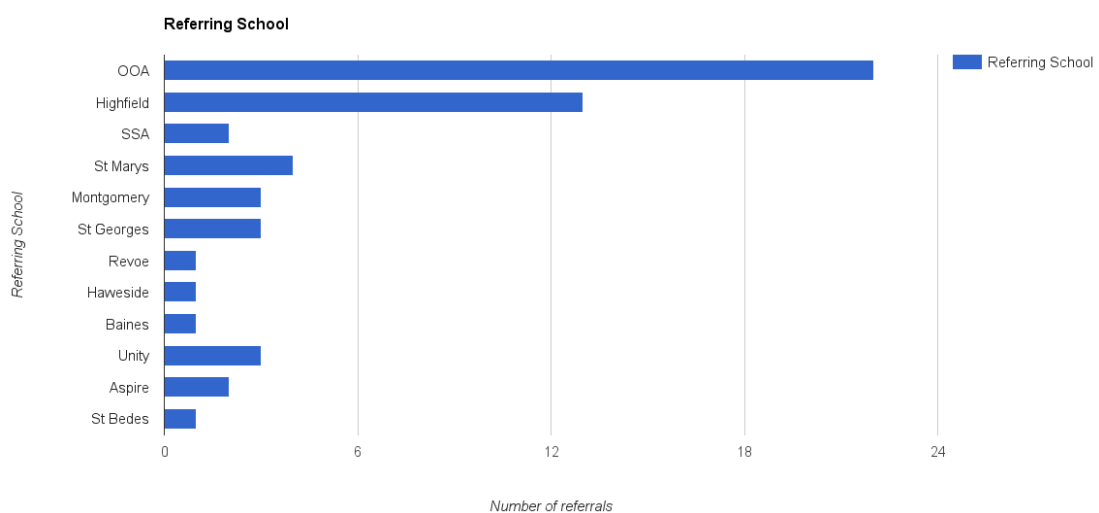
5.2 Why the number of children in the Pupil Referral Unit is so high

- 5.2.1 All children in Blackpool have an equal access and right to education and are monitored in order to ensure they are in a form of education. Children and young people are recorded in four categories – in school, out of school (out of area or moving), in educational diversity or elective home education registered. Tools are in place to ensure the movement of all young people can be tracked in order to minimise the amount of time spent outside of school.
- 5.2.2 Previously, the Headteacher of the PRU aimed to prevent exclusions from mainstream education by working with the school and family to allow a transfer into the Unit to meet the child's needs. As a result, in 2013 no exclusions were made from Blackpool schools. However, it has been acknowledged that this contributed to the increase in size of the PRU and that this increase was unsustainable. In order to address the increase it was agreed in 2014 that the PRU would only accept children and young people who had been permanently excluded. The Panel was informed that, as a result, in 2014 the highest number of permanent exclusions had been recorded to date. Measures were being put in

place through the Blackpool Challenge Board to reinstate the Behaviour and Attendance Partnership, which would provide a check and balance to Headteachers when excluding students and reduce the number of permanent exclusions.

- 5.2.3 It was suggested that there were a number of other reasons for the increase in the number of permanent exclusions and therefore the number of children in the Unit, including the cessation of learning support units within schools due to decreased funding and the pressures of Ofsted focus on attainment. However, the work of the Challenge Board in reintroducing the Behaviour and Attendance Partnership had made an impact through the introduction of a new protocol to uniformly address the issue and as a result the number of exclusions had reduced from nearly all schools.
- 5.2.4 Ofsted inspections had changed significantly in recent history and placed a significant emphasis on attainment and progress of children. Schools were required to demonstrate that they had made an impact on the performance and ability of the young person and that was lessening the capacity of teachers and school leaders to focus on emotional needs and pastoral care.
- 5.2.5 The Panel received information demonstrating the number of referrals from each high school in Blackpool to the Pupil Referral Unit and noted the significant number of referrals from Out of Area (OOA). The transience of people moving into and out of Blackpool had a significant impact upon the number of young people in the PRU and unfortunately no action could be taken to reduce this impact. It was considered that often families moved to Blackpool with a number of significant issues already apparent and many children had to be admitted to the PRU rather than being placed in mainstream education. In addition a large number of looked after children from outside the area were placed in Blackpool in private fostering homes many of whom may have additional needs that could not be met in mainstream education.

Table 1: The number of children referred to the Blackpool Pupil Referral Unit



5.3 What is being done to keep children in mainstream education

- 5.3.1 The Challenge Board had brought all schools and academy sponsors together in order to address the key education issues in Blackpool. It was reported that there were signs that the number of exclusions from most high schools had reduced and that measures were being put in place to keep children and young people in mainstream education, wherever possible. It was recognised that it was a challenge to ensure a consistent approach across all schools in Blackpool, however, the Board was trying to uniformly address issues.
- 5.3.2 A key issue had been identified as the transition of students from primary school to high school and a pilot Transition Project had been established to work with 12 young people in Year 5 at Revoe, Thames and Mereside Primary Schools on their transition to South Shore Academy. The young people had been specifically targeted due to visible indicators and the project would include family support, opportunities to attend high school throughout the student's remaining years at primary school and links to teachers to provide additional continuity. If the pilot was considered successful then it would be rolled out across the town.
- 5.3.3 The Blackpool Challenge Board had also commissioned a tool to assess resilience of children and young people in high schools in Blackpool. The tool would measure resilience in years seven, nine and 11 and had already been utilised at Apsire. The results highlighted that a high number of the children and young people at the school had demonstrated feelings of anxiety or strong concerns. It was recognised that children from the most deprived communities in Blackpool found it harder to learn and had lower resilience than those in the least deprived. The Panel considered that resilience contributed to the ability of young people to cope, which subsequently had a significant impact upon behaviour. It was hoped that, using this tool, schools could identify students with additional needs and put in place measures to support and build resilience and emotional capability before a significant impact on behaviour, ultimately resulting in fewer exclusions. The Panel noted that the HeadStart initiative was also putting a number of arrangements in place to increase resilience of children and young people across Blackpool.
- 5.3.4 The Panel discussed the possibility of having an educational diversity model within every high school and noted that South Shore had introduced a pilot to develop in house solutions to individual needs. There had, however, been more reluctance from other schools to the suggested introduction of similar models. The Panel felt strongly that the cessation of learning support units at schools had contributed to an increase in behavioural problems in schools and that additional support for educational diversity was paramount.
- 5.3.5 The recent introduction of the Behaviour and Attendance Partnership would provide a liaison point for schools and if the needs of a child could not be met within one high school, but could be met within another, the Partnership could facilitate the transition and prevent the need for the child to be excluded and therefore admitted to the PRU. Additionally, the Inclusion Board would allow for a child led process and also reintroduce the right of appeal for parents of excluded children. Members were alerted to two recent examples where a high school had been challenged regarding the exclusion of two students and both exclusions had been overturned as a result.

5.4 Why children make progress in the PRU when they do not in their predecessor school

- 5.4.1 Students' prior attainment is generally very low across the school, often due to students' complex needs, gaps in education due to exclusion, non-attendance and lack of engagement in learning within mainstream settings. It was noted that often students arrived in Educational Diversity with an inflated picture of prior attainment and rigorous assessments on induction had been introduced to assess this. As a result Educational Diversity has a true picture of a student's academic level and most importantly whether there are any underlying issues around behaviour or speech, language and communication that are presenting as barriers to learning. Through standardised assessments completed at key points during the year, Educational Diversity is able to map out a student's learning journey.
- 5.4.2 The Headteacher of Educational Diversity advised the Panel that the approach to teaching at the PRU was more flexible than mainstream education and that, rather than excluding students when one approach was not suitable, a different approach was utilised to try and engage the young person such as photography, cookery or hair and beauty tuition, where possible. A similar approach was not always possible in mainstream education. The PRU also used animal therapy and had a resident dog and was always looking to enrich its programme through alternative methods including equine therapy.
- 5.4.3 The PRU was also able to hire translators where necessary and was a communication friendly school.
- 5.4.4 The previous Ofsted inspection of Educational Diversity dated September 2012 had rated the school as 'good' and the Panel was informed that should a reassessment take place the expectation was that a rating of at least 'good' would be received again as it was believed the school was operating as well as it had ever been. Members were advised that quality of teaching was monitored on a regular basis and poor teaching was challenged.
- 5.4.5 It was noted that since 2012 whilst the Educational Diversity Unit had been rated 'good' all mainstream high schools had received poor performance ratings and had been placed into categories resulting in acadamisation. One of the reasons considered by Ofsted was behaviour management and it was reported that often children and young people were not given boundaries and were allowed to behave very poorly in some schools resulting in disciplinary procedures being put in place and ultimately exclusion from mainstream education. When the young person entered the PRU they were immediately faced with new boundaries and poor behaviour was challenged. Whilst not the sole reason for improved performance of students in the PRU, the poor performance of some of the mainstream high schools must be considered to be an influencing factor.
- 5.4.6 The Panel was informed that often the causes of poor behaviour were undiagnosed. Rather than trying to address triggers and put in a package of support for the young person in order to address the underlying issues, schools responded to the symptoms (usually poor behaviour). It was considered that teaching and learning must be improved in order to address the causes of the behaviour. The Deputy Director of People advised that a number of measures had been put in place in addition to the Blackpool Challenge

Board to aid improvements in quality of teaching including the roll out of a free Neuro Linguistics Programme Outreach Team.

- 5.4.7 It was also important that learning was pitched at the right level and met the needs of the young people. If a child was not challenged or bored this could also be a trigger for poor behaviour. The right pitching of learning was considered to be more difficult in mainstream secondary schools due to the large number of students in attendance. With such a large number of students it was much easier to provide generic learning rather than learning designed to meet individual needs.

5.5 Educational outcomes for Our Children at the Pupil Referral Unit

- 5.5.1 Our Children were individually tracked throughout their education by the Virtual School to try and ensure all obtained a recognised qualification. Support was given to Our Children to obtain a range of qualifications including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Additional support was provided to Our Children with a tailored programme provided to ensure both educational and pastoral needs were met.
- 5.5.2 The Panel was advised that of 15 looked after children in Year 11 of the PRU in 2015, 13 had achieved a qualification. It was considered that compared with a young person in mainstream education the results did not look favourable, however, it must be noted that, although it couldn't be evidenced, the child was unlikely to achieve at all if still in mainstream education.
- 5.5.3 In order to improve outcomes for Our Children, whether in attendance at the PRU or in mainstream education, the Virtual School was currently being reviewed with a view to provide additional support and make the school less 'virtual' through the introduction of a Governing Body in order to ensure the school was hard hitting and accountable.
- 5.5.4 The Panel noted that all looked after children should attend a school Ofsted graded 'good' or 'outstanding'. In some circumstances, such as when the child required stability, it might be considered more appropriate to stay in a school that Ofsted had not judged to be 'good' or better. There were currently 15 of Our Children attending the PRU with a further four students 'pending'. This number was significantly higher than at the same time last year. The Panel discussed the importance of ensuring all looked after children received a good education and noted that if a looked after child was not placed within a good school a statement setting out the reasons why must be completed.
- 5.5.5 All looked after children have a Personal Education Plan and these must be completed in a timely fashion. The Panel also discussed the use of Pupil Premium by schools and noted that whilst this could be spent providing targeted support, how it was spent was at the discretion of each school.

5.6 The transition from the PRU back to mainstream education

- 5.6.1 The Panel was advised that there had been limited success in reintegrating children and young people back into mainstream education from the Pupil Referral Unit. It was considered that there was a specific 'window of opportunity' for reintegration and that

- despite support being put in place around the child invariably it was unsuccessful in the longer term.
- 5.6.2 A number of case studies were provided to Members regarding the reintegration of three looked after children. Of the three, one child was successfully reintegrated until a breakdown in relationship with foster parents and the two remaining continued to be supported in their new schools. The Panel discussed the level of support provided to children and young people who had been reintegrated into mainstream education and noted that this varied dependent on need.
- 5.6.3 It was noted that one of the reasons for the establishment of the prior mentioned Inclusion Board was to assist with the reintegration of students from the Pupil Referral Unit to mainstream education. The Board would be chaired by Councillor John Jones, Cabinet Member for School Improvement and Children's Safeguarding.
- 5.7 Safeguarding Concerns**
- 5.7.1 The school ensured that all students were safe and maintained regular contact throughout. A new Schools Safeguarding Officer had been employed by the Council to work with all schools in order to ensure safeguarding policies and procedures were fit for purpose. The Headteacher of Educational Diversity had met with the School Safeguarding Officer on a number of occasions and would continue to seek support in order to ensure compliance with legislation.
- 5.7.2 The Panel noted that there were safeguarding concerns relating to children not in full time education. The majority of young people attending the Pupil Referral Unit were not attending on a full time basis and therefore there was a question mark regarding what they were doing when they were not at school. It was noted that it was not always right for the child to attend school full time, but the PRU worked with children and young people in order to gradually increase the amount of time spent at school each day. It was considered that this was an issue relating to all schools and not just the Pupil Referral Unit.
- 5.7.3 The Deputy Director Early Help and Social Care advised that the service actively monitored educational attendance for all children subject to a Child Protection Plan and considered the risks of those not in full time education and if they could be integrated further. Weekly meetings were also held to consider children at risk of being subject to Child Sexual Exploitation and those who were persistently missing from school to provide a more detailed response.
- 5.7.4 There were a high number of children 'at risk' in Blackpool with 761 open cases currently being considered by Social Care, some, but not all, related to children in the Pupil Referral Unit.

5.8 Conclusions

- 5.8.1 The Panel was pleased to note the ongoing work of the Blackpool Challenge Board to develop a consistent approach across schools in Blackpool and improve relationships between all schools, (maintained and academy). Members determined that a uniform approach to systems, protocols and procedures could only be beneficial for the children and young people in the town.
- 5.8.2 Members were ultimately concerned that no learning support/educational diversity was provided in the majority of schools and considered that the emotional and pastoral needs of children were not always being met and made recommendations pertaining to these concerns. The Panel considered that the BetterStart and HeadStart initiatives were providing a number of projects to target the most vulnerable and increase resilience of children in Blackpool.
- 5.8.3 The Panel was concerned that resilience and ability to cope was a significant issue for young people in Blackpool and the Director of People highlighted a potential funding bid to the Department for Education Transformational Fund that would provide wrap around social care and early help around clusters of schools if successful. It was considered that social work support for schools would assist schools to help address behaviour and resilience. If the bid was successful it would result in each social worker funded placed to work with a cluster of linked schools. It was noted that if the bid was unsuccessful there was not sufficient internal funding to allow for a similar scheme, but that current services provided by the Council could be further linked to increase support provided to schools and children.
- 5.8.4 In addition, it was noted that three social work student placements were due to commence in January and the Director of Early Help and Social Care and the Headteacher, Educational Diversity would discuss the possibility of providing social work support and additional family support to the PRU through these positions.
- 5.8.5 The Panel also highlighted serious concerns regarding the reintegration of children from the Pupil Referral Unit back into mainstream education and the support provided to children to ensure they could remain in mainstream education and developed a recommendation to try and address these concerns.

6.0 Financial and Legal Considerations

6.1 Financial

- 6.1.1 The bid for external funding to provide social workers in schools, if successful may impact upon the financial position of the Council.
- 6.1.2 Support to be provided for reintegration of students from the Pupil Referral Unit to mainstream education may have additional costs attached, which would be funded from existing budgets.
- 6.1.3 The Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) receives base funding of £10,000 per pupil from the start of the academic year based on the number of places commissioned by the local authority, which currently stands at 250. In addition to this the school also receives top up funding of £5,250 per pupil based on actual pupil numbers. Therefore, the financial impact of increasing pupil numbers within the PRU is mitigated by an increased allocation from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). However, the DSG is a limited pot of funding and there are other emerging pressures on these non-council funded services which the Schools Forum is currently addressing in advance of setting a balanced budget for 2016-17.

6.2 Legal

- 6.2.1 There are no legal considerations.

Pupil Referral Unit Scrutiny Action Plan

Recommendation	Cabinet Member's Comments	Rec Accepted by Executive?	Target Date for Action	Lead Officer	Committee Update	Notes
<p>Recommendation One</p> <p>a) That the Resilient Communities Scrutiny Committee supports the Blackpool Challenge Board in its objective to provide a consistent approach to exclusion across all schools and reduce the number of referrals to the Pupil Referral Unit through the introduction of the Behaviour and Attendance Partnership and Inclusion Board.</p> <p>b) In order to measure performance against this objective, the Committee to receive regular updates on the number of exclusions and admissions to the PRU with a view to making further recommendations if sufficient progress is not demonstrated.</p>	<p>I am happy to take this report and all of its recommendations to the next appropriate Cabinet meeting.</p> <p>The recommendations are wise, carefully considered and wide ranging.</p> <p>They provide a useful contribution towards the single objective of supporting each pupil to achieve their own, full potential.</p>		<p>Ongoing commencing immediately.</p>	<p>Del Curtis</p>		

<p>Recommendation Four</p> <p>a) That the Panel supports the proposed bid for external funding to the Department for Education Transformational Fund to provide wrap around social care and early help around clusters of schools to help address student behaviour and resilience. If the bid is successful it would result in a social worker being placed to work with a cluster of linked schools.</p> <p>b) If the bid is unsuccessful, the Panel supports the Director of People in her aim to provide a more joined up approach to service provision by introducing improved links between the Family in Need Service and Pupil Welfare Team.</p> <p>c) The Director of People to report to the Resilient Communities Scrutiny Committee regarding the progress made in relation to the bid in June 2016.</p>	<p>As above.</p>		<p>June 2016</p>	<p>Del Curtis</p> <p>Del Curtis</p>		
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