

**MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - THURSDAY, 29 JUNE 2017**

Present:

Councillor Rowson (in the Chair)

Councillors

D Coleman
Collett

Critchley
Galley

Maycock
O'Hara

Stansfield

In Attendance:

Councillor Graham Cain, Cabinet Secretary (Resilient Communities)

Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning

Ms Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services

Ms Val Watson, Delivery Development Officer

Mr Steve Sienkiewicz, Clerk to the Committee.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 27 APRIL 2017

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting of the Resilient Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 27 April 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 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Executive and Cabinet Member decisions within its remit, taken since the last meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning responded to questions from the Committee in connection with decision number PH35/2017 'Development Scheme at Woodlands School'. Asked if it was intended for a sprinkler system to be installed, she explained her understanding that current regulations stipulated that such an installation was necessary and would be carried out. She agreed to confirm the details and respond back in due course.

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The Committee expressed concern that the cost of the development had risen substantially, pointing out an increase from the original estimate of £1.5m to the current figure of £2.1m. Councillor Benson responded by explaining that the previous estimated budget had proved to be insufficient in order to achieve what was required for a school of this type, which educated children with a range of complex and challenging needs. The building was in a poor state and a recent survey had highlighted the requirement for additional works including electrics, gas mains, pipes and other infrastructure. In addition, a new road was being constructed into and out of the building that would enable easier and improved access. Councillor Benson added that a full consultation had been carried out and the outcomes were fully supported by the respondents and stakeholders. Following a request from a Committee Member whose Ward encompassed Woodlands School, Councillor Benson agreed that she would distribute the results of the consultation to the Committee.

The Committee expressed its support for the scheme, but at the same time challenged why the initial survey had proved inadequate, leading to the requirement for additional works and a substantial increase in costs. Councillor Benson explained that initially the improvement works were not as ambitious, although it became apparent as things developed that the children needed more in order for the full potential of the school to be realised. In the past, the school had been added to in a piecemeal fashion and the current scheme would make it fully fit for purpose well into the future. The development would include extensive works to corridors and other spaces in order to meet the complex needs of the children.

The Committee agreed to note the Executive and Cabinet Member decisions.

5 CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE REPORT

The Committee considered a report which highlighted key areas of work and progress within the Children's Services Directorate. The report was presented by Ms Booth, Director of Children's Services, who began by providing a summary of the main content of the report. She explained that currently, the service was experiencing high levels of demand across all of its areas. This was described as a cause for concern on a number of counts, including the additional levels of scrutiny that such demand attracted from Ofsted and the Department of Education, as well as concerns around children currently placed in care, some of whom it was considered need not be there. In terms of overall numbers of looked after children, the number stood at 571 at its peak earlier this year, but had now reduced to the current figure of 546. Ms Booth explained some of the detail around the current Improvement Programme that was underway, including the need for decisions to be made timely, the discharging of children from care and the stepping down of children from care. Considerable efforts were also underway to return children currently placed in care outside of Blackpool, to more appropriate arrangements within the town.

Ms Booth responded to a number of questions from the Committee. Asked to explain more about the Review of High Needs Provision that would be undertaken, she explained that children within the category had a number of different needs and requirements. The review would be carried out independently and would consider questions around the possibility of offering services in a different way.

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In relation to the high levels of demand across Children's Social Care, the Committee questioned the apparent reasons given to scrutiny in the past for the levels being as high as they were, quoting 'children with complex needs' as the usual answer that had been given. The Committee suggested that the organisational support should be adequate to deal with the situation and questioned whether the current approach adopted within the Directorate was correct. Ms Booth responded that the end to end review that was currently underway would be completed by the end of the first week in July. Following that, a plan for operational change would be developed that would be considered by the Priority 2 Board. It would then be made available for scrutiny by the Resilient Communities and Children's Scrutiny Committee. She stressed the importance of the scrutiny process and welcomed the input that the Committee could provide.

The Committee asked for details as to the areas within Blackpool where the greatest numbers of looked after children originated from. Ms Booth explained that a piece of work had been commissioned to determine that. A 'heat map' would be produced that would also indicate:

- 1) The numbers of children in need
- 2) The numbers of children subject to Child Protection Plans
- 3) The numbers of children being looked after
- 4) The numbers of children subject to youth offending reports
- 5) The numbers of children subject to family support plans
- 6) The challenges faced by schools.

Ms Booth went on to explain that the intention was to think about social work in a different way, with the work being designed around the needs of the communities and schools. She emphasised that the views of elected members would be sought during this process.

The Committee discussed further the assertion made that not all children currently in care needed to be there and also asked whether schools were doing enough in terms of the support that they provided. Ms Booth explained the desire to deliver more services at family support level and that in future, no child would be admitted to care without her express authority. She further explained that every effort was being made to influence the work carried out within schools and that a school led improvement plan was now in place that covered five key areas.

Members queried the difference in costs between a child placed in care outside of Blackpool, against alternative support services that might be provided closer to home. Ms Booth explained that on average, it cost approximately £3,000 per week to place a child in care in (for example) Cumbria. There could often be additional costs involving other agencies that might increase the total cost to £10,000 per week and possibly even more. She stressed that it was necessary to tailor individual plans for each child but there was no doubt that it was far more cost effective to provide care packages around the home where possible.

The Committee asked about the possibility of creating a residential property within Blackpool for children with extremely challenging behaviour. Ms Booth explained the

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danger in such an approach, being that it was likely to fill up very quickly and was not necessarily the best solution. Instead, an efficiency approach would be developed in line with future needs.

Asked about the administration process for school places, Ms Booth explained that this process was carried out by the Council who were in full control of it. She agreed to provide an update on the outcome of the school appeals process at the next meeting.

The Committee pointed out that in the past, there had been a number of problems relating to the transition of children from junior to senior schools and requested an update on the current situation. Ms Booth explained that a number of transition days would be taking place during the next few weeks. A transition sub-group had been established which was looking at the production of a passport scheme, which would contain all relevant details of the child to aid the transition process.

The discussion around schools moved onto the topic of inclusion, with Members asking about what happened in relation to certain schools which decided they would no longer provide certain services, particularly in relation to more challenging pupils, resulting in other schools taking a higher proportion of pupils from that category. Ms Booth explained that an Inclusion Strategy was being developed and there would be consequences for schools that were not acting in an inclusive and fair way. Additionally, an in-year access poll was being established regarding children that had been excluded from school in order to determine a fair and equitable approach across all schools, including academies.

The Committee requested that a shortened version of school Ofsted reports be attached to the Children's Services update report at future Committee meetings.

The Committee agreed:

1. To note the report.
2. To request an update on the outcome of the school appeals process at the next meeting.
3. To request that a shortened version of school Ofsted reports be attached to the Children's Services update report at future Committee meetings.

Background papers: None.

6 COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT 2016/2017

The Committee considered a report which detailed performance against the Council Plan 2015-2020 for the period 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017.

The report was presented by Ms Watson, Delivery Development Officer, who explained that there were 13 indicators within the performance basket for Resilient Communities and 8 indicators within the performance basket for Children's Scrutiny. She pointed out that information on the indicators where performance was below target or where performance had deteriorated compared with 2015/2016, could be found in Appendix 6(b) of the report.

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Ms Watson went on to explain that the Corporate Delivery Unit was working on a revised set of indicators that would better reflect the Council's priorities. It was proposed that the new basket of indicators be reported to the Committee for the 2017/2018 reporting year.

It was further explained that to allow Members to receive more timely and appropriate performance information, it was proposed that performance reports in 2017/2018 be aligned to the future workplan for the Committee, with a full break down of indicator performance reported as an overview report at year end. It was hoped that this would equip Members with more relevant performance information reported at the same time and topic as future scrutiny reports. The reports would be focussed and more in-depth than the current reporting arrangements and would give Members more insight and narrative to current performance issues. Furthermore, the Corporate Delivery Unit would work closely with the Democratic Governance Team and relevant departments to ensure that the reports be as insightful as possible.

Ms Watson, Ms Booth and Councillor Cain then responded to a number of questions from the Committee on the content of the report.

The Committee asked about the below target figures for the death to service time for cremations and whether family preferences were taken into account. Councillor Cain explained that family requests and funeral directors' requests were taken into account. Also, the times offered for services might not always be convenient. It was pointed out that the factors could skew the figures. Councillor Cain stressed that the service was trying to be as flexible as possible to accommodate family needs and preferences.

Regarding the performance indicators that were included in the report, in response to questions from the Committee, Ms Watson explained that some of the indicators were as a result of statutory requirements and some were not.

Members asked that in future, if it would be possible to include an indicator that related to children discharged from care, who were subsequently re-admitted after a certain period of time. Ms Booth explained that a major part of the current improvement plan was to develop a performance plan that was fit for purpose. Some measures would be included as a result of statutory requirements and some for comparison purposes with other local authorities. It was envisaged that the performance plan would include, in relation to children:

- 1) How many came into care
- 2) How many are discharged from care
- 3) How long they remained out of care.

Ms Booth also pointed out that the information collated for the performance plan would be the kind of data that was important for first line managers in their day to day work.

The Committee pointed out that in the past, there had been a plethora of key performance indicators and quoted the 'purple book' and other sources as examples. Asked if it was possible to better collate the data, Ms Booth explained that it was intended to adopt a monthly scorecard approach, showing changes within the service.

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The scorecard would concentrate on exception reporting, so it could readily be seen where key changes had occurred.

In response to questions from Members, Ms Booth confirmed that in relation to children who were subject to home education facilities, they were included in all of the reported statistics.

The Committee discussed the issue relating to mandatory requirements for schools to take on challenging pupils and questioned how that correlated with the push to raise school standards. Ms Booth acknowledged that the two factors created a conflict. She pointed out that the quality of teaching was a key issue and that three school improvement bids were currently in place. There would be more support provided and the aim was for each school to have a plan that would detail improvements around behaviour, attainment and attendance. The Committee went on to discuss the challenges around recruiting and retaining high quality teachers and asked what was being done to achieve this. Ms Booth explained that a Communications Strategy was being developed as part of the overall Improvement Plan. Part of this would be to hold events that would celebrate the work of the good schools and help to attract good quality staff. She explained that a great deal of work was already taking place to attract good quality teaching staff. Encouraging self belief formed a big part of this and the celebratory events would add to the initiatives underway. Ms Booth also pointed out that Blackpool was linked with Blackburn with Darwen, Lancashire and Cumbria within a regional school improvement approach.

Regarding a section of the report which indicated that Blackpool Children's Safeguarding Board had invested in rolling out training on the Graded Profile of Neglect Tool across all agencies, the Committee requested further details. Ms Booth explained that it would support partner agencies with identifying areas that families need support with and enable them to target support where it was required. She added that a risk sensible model would be rolled out and would be one of the tools available within that package.

The Committee asked about the Headstart scheme and when outcomes from this would be able to be measured. Ms Booth explained that an outcomes framework was being sought from Headstart, but seeing as it was a longer term model, it was not possible to suggest a date for this as yet. As to its longer term viability, Ms Booth suggested that in the fullness of time, it would be right to question whether the model was actually providing the required results and question if it was actually working.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None.

7 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered its Workplan for the remainder of the current Municipal Year and the Chairman invited suggestions from Committee Members as to possible Workplan items. She also suggested that it be requested that the Blackpool Safeguarding Children's Board Business Plan be sent out to all members of the Committee.

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The Committee agreed:

- 1) To note the Workplan
- 2) To request that the Blackpool Safeguarding Children's Board Business Plan be sent out to all members of the Committee.

Background papers: None.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee agreed to note the date of the next meeting as Thursday 7 September 2017, at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.15 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

Chris Kelly, Acting Scrutiny Manager

Tel: 01253 477164

E-mail: chris.kelly@blackpool.gov.uk