

**MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - THURSDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2017**

Present:

Councillor Stansfield (in the Chair)

Councillors

Collett	O'Hara	D Scott	L Taylor
Critchley	Owen	Mrs Scott	

Frances McErlane, Co-optee.

In Attendance:

Councillor Graham Cain, Cabinet Secretary (Resilient Communities)

Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning

Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services

Dr David Sanders, Chair of Blackpool Children's Safeguarding Board

Paul Turner, School Safeguarding Advisor

Val Watson, Delivery Development Officer, Blackpool Council

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 7 SEPTEMBER 2017

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting of the Resilient Communities and Children's Scrutiny Committee held on 7 September 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 COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT 2017/2018 - YOUNG PEOPLE

The Committee considered a report which detailed performance against the priorities in the Council Plan 2015 – 2020. The report contained seven indicators from the Headstart programme and ten indicators based on young people. The report was presented by Mrs Val Watson, Delivery Development Officer, who explained that it was the first report of its type to be presented to the Committee and would be developed further in the future.

**MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - THURSDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2017**

The Committee asked whether the indicator referring to the number of young people benefitting directly from Head Start Universal Support, referred to those enrolled on the programme or actually deriving benefit from it, and were it the latter, how that was quantified. Mrs Watson agreed to explore the matter further and report back in due course.

The Committee raised questions around the indicator concerned with the number of pupils on the Elective Home Education Register, pointing out that despite showing significant increases in numbers since 2015/2016, it was indicating green in terms of performance. Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services, explained that the indicator referred to an improvement in performance between quarter 1 and quarter 2 of 2017/2018. She acknowledged however that more needed to be understood about the reasons why children were being educated at home and that Children's Services was part way through developing a full Inclusion Strategy, which she offered to present at the next meeting of the Committee. She further explained that part of the Strategy would be around elective education, but also about the wrap around support that was available.

The Committee asked whether checks were made as to whether children were being properly educated at home. Mrs Booth explained that a robust system of monitoring was in place and that this was part of the Inclusion review being carried out.

In response to questions regarding the figures appertaining to non-attendance at school, Mrs Booth confirmed that pupil referral numbers did not affect those figures. She agreed to bring further information about the Blackpool Led Improvements System to the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee pointed out that the numbers of permanent exclusions had risen and asked why this was the case. Mrs Booth explained that the statistics related to individual schools and that inclusion workshops being held on 9 and 10 November 2017 would examine this in more detail. She pointed out the need to look at the individual requirements of each school and provide appropriate wrap around services to support them.

The Committee discussed the indicator relating to the rate of hospital admissions for self-harm and the higher numbers referring to the 10-24 age group. Members queried how the figures were accumulated and pointed out that (an unknown) proportion might well relate to people from outside of Blackpool. Mrs Booth acknowledged the question and agreed to query this further and report back in due course.

The Committee agreed to defer any questions from Members concerning the numbers of looked after children until the next agenda item.

The Committee agreed to note the report and to receive further information on both the Inclusion Strategy and the Blackpool Led Improvements System at the next meeting.

Background papers: None.

**MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - THURSDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2017**

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 Mrs Booth, Director of Children's Services, who began by providing a verbal summary of the main content of the report under the following headings:

- Self-View Pilot
- Blackpool Young People's Service
- Improvement Board
- Staffing
- Partnership working – White Ribbon Accreditation.

Mrs Booth then responded to comments and questions from the Committee in relation to the content of the report and the summary she had provided.

With regards to the numbers of looked after children, the Committee questioned why Blackpool was above average in comparison with other local authorities with similar deprivation levels and demographics. Mrs Booth acknowledged the situation and explained that it was part of a whole system issue, based upon the following main points;

- Partners requiring more support
- How the threshold around social care was managed
- Funding pressures.

Mrs Booth went on to explain that the needs of children continued to be at the forefront of everyone's mind and that should a child need to be placed in to care, that would happen. However, a change of culture was required, together with different ways of doing things. Early intervention was a key element in reducing the numbers of children in care.

Members pointed out that there appeared to be a degree of propensity in taking children into care and questioned whether Blackpool had been too keen to resort to those measures to date. Mrs Booth acknowledged that a change of approach was needed, which had now commenced. There was a need to ensure that thresholds were embedded to ensure that only the right children came into care.

Members asked whether set procedures were being changed in order to achieve the change of approach that was referred to. Mrs Booth explained that changes had been made to the scheme of delegation in relation to looked after children. There were also two Priority 2 plans, one relating to looked after children and the other to educational attainment, as well as the Social Care Improvement Plan, all of which would be brought to the Committee, going forward.

The Committee discussed the implications and concerns for staff relating to making mistakes, or making a wrong decision. Mrs Booth explained that she would always support a decision that was made for the right reasons, based upon the available information at the time, although it had to be acknowledged that situations could

**MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - THURSDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2017**

sometimes change very quickly. Where possible, decisions made by staff were checked by supervisors and recent feedback from staff events had been largely positive.

The Committee suggested that it might be helpful for Members to have access to case studies and Mrs Booth agreed that this would be arranged.

In connection with information sharing and whether this could be done more effectively between agencies, Mrs Booth acknowledged that improvement was needed in this area and was currently being looked at. She added that the majority of serious case reviews highlighted insufficient sharing of information. The Committee asked about new restrictions on data sharing that were coming into place, to which Mrs Booth agreed to provide more information at the next meeting of the Committee, following a briefing that she was due to attend on 20 October 2017.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None.

6 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT UPDATE REPORT

The Committee considered a report which provided details of educational attainment in Blackpool in 2016/2017. The report was presented by Mrs Booth, Director of Children's Services, who responded to questions from the Committee in relation to its content.

The Committee asked about choices in relation to the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) performance measure and whether there was a compulsory element to this. Mrs Booth confirmed that both schools and children would need to choose and select this, should they wish to take part in it.

Members discussed statistics relating to the Pupil Premium and the disappointing results in the area. Responding to questions relating Pupil Premium funding, Mrs Booth confirmed that the funding would follow a child through their school life. She explained that the issues around the statistical gap between Pupil Premium and non-Pupil Premium were mainly connected to aspiration. Efforts were now being made to challenge the lack of aspirational behaviour via the School Led Improvement System.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None.

7 BLACKPOOL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered the Blackpool Safeguarding Children Annual Report for the year to 31 March 2017, presented by Dr David Sanders, Independent Chair of the Board.

Dr Sanders introduced the report by highlighting a number of headline areas, as follows:

**MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - THURSDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2017**

- Since the arrival of Mrs Booth as Director of Children's Services, there had been a much closer focus on what was happening in terms of looked after children and children in need. As such, there was a high degree of confidence that the numbers of looked after children would reduce over the next 18 months to two years.
- The response to child sexual exploitation in Blackpool was of high quality and high order. Strong multi-disciplinary support was in place across the Safeguarding Board.
- The Board had concentrated significantly on early help provision. Membership of the Board had improved and relationships with schools had also seen improvement.
- Data analysis methods had improved.
- The development of the Pupil Voice Group had made a significant contribution to the work of the Board.
- Training capacity had seen major developments and improvements, with a multi-agency training programme now in place.

The Committee acknowledged that Dr Sanders was leaving the Board at the end of October and asked what was being done to ensure a level of continuity in the position of Chair, going forward. Dr Sanders explained that his successor had already been appointed and there would be a properly facilitated handover of the post. Dr Sanders indicated his continued willingness to work with the Director of Children's Services in the future.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None.

8 CORPORATE PARENT PANEL ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered the Corporate Parent Panel Annual Report, covering the period from April 2016 to March 2017. The report was presented by Mrs Booth, Director of Children's Services, who highlighted the main areas of the report and aspirations for the future. She spoke about plans to increase the involvement of children and young people going forward and for them to be consulted more, outside of the Corporate Parent Panel meetings. Speaking about the continued drive to ensure that the children got what they required, she informed the Committee of their involvement in some of the Council 'takeover' meetings they had taken part in and the good ideas that had been generated as a result of those meetings.

The Committee asked about the proportion of looked after children who were proactively involved in saying what they want from the Council. Mrs Booth explained the various forums that were in place to facilitate such communication, including the Headstart forum (approximately 45 children) and Care Leavers group, which ranged between six and

**MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - THURSDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2017**

20 young people being involved. Mrs Booth acknowledged that the Council needed to think more innovatively about communications with children and young people and to apply processes to ensure that people who did not normally speak up, had the opportunity to do so.

The Committee questioned Mrs Booth about the current numbers of looked after children in Blackpool (530) and the target figure of 440. Asked whether the target figure was realistically achievable, Mrs Booth spoke of the importance of trying to achieve the target in a safe way, by ensuring that the right children continued to be placed into care, whilst at the same time providing alternative support methods where appropriate. The target figure was comparable with that of other local authorities with a similar demographic to Blackpool and she believed that with the measures that were being applied, the figure was achievable. Councillor Cain, Cabinet Secretary (Resilient Communities), added his support to that sentiment.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

Background papers: None.

9 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered its Workplan for the remainder of the current Municipal Year.

The Committee agreed to note the Workplan.

Background papers: None.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 19:10)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
Chris Kelly, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser (Scrutiny)
Tel: 01253 477164
E-mail: chris.kelly@blackpool.gov.uk