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MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - THURSDAY, 12 APRIL 2018

Present:

Councillor Rowson (in the Chair)

Councillors

Collett

Hutton

D Scott

Stansfield

Critchley

O'Hara

Mrs Scott

Ms Frances McErlane, Co-opted Member

In Attendance:

Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services

Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services

Ms Liz Petch, Consultant in Public Health

Ms Julie McClements, Service Manager LAC

Ms Cindy Hunter, Service Manager, Children's Social Care

Ms Lisa Arnold, Leisure Services Manager

Ms Chloe Shore, Community Engagement and Partnerships Manager

Mr Scott Butterfield, Transformation Manager

Mrs Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager

Councillor Graham Cain, Cabinet Secretary

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 08 FEBRUARY 2018

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting of the Resilient Communities and Children's Scrutiny Committee held on 8 February 2018 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 noted that a number of decisions had been taken within the portfolio of the Cabinet Secretary and asked a series of questions in relation to EX15/2018 'Special School Provision Next Steps'. In response, Councillor Cain, Cabinet Secretary advised that the school would be an academy and that the Council was working with the Regional

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Schools Commissioner and the Department for Education to identify an appropriate site for the school. He advised that analysis had been undertaken to identify the need for such a school in Blackpool, which had been recognised nationally and the funding was being provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Councillor Cain reported that the new school would be a through school and would ensure fewer children with additional emotional and mental health needs were educated out of borough. He added that places would be allocated through a referral system and suggested that regular progress updates be provided through the Children's Services Update Report submitted to each meeting of the Committee.

In response to further questions, Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services advised that she would be meeting with the proposed provider to ensure that enough staff would be employed to meet the needs of the children. She added that the school was targeting an opening date of September 2019.

Members went on to consider PH19/2018 'Fees and Charges for Leisure and Parks Services 2018/2019' and queried if the review of the pricing model for sports pitches would ensure that all pitches were maintained and whether enough income would be generated to ensure adequate maintenance. Councillor Maria Kirkland, Cabinet Member for Third Sector Engagement and Leisure Services advised that a comparison had been undertaken with other areas to ensure an appropriate level of fees and added that the intention of the service was not to make a profit.

Ms Lisa Arnold, Leisure Services Manager reported that funding had been received from the football foundation and 3G pitches would be incorporated into some venues in Blackpool. She added that work was ongoing regarding provision for other sports.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan, April 2018 – July 2018 relating to the portfolio of the Cabinet Secretary and noted that it contained one item 'Youth Justice Plan'. The Youth Justice Plan would form part of the item to be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on Youth Justice.

6 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered its Workplan for 2018/2019. Members noted that use of plastic was currently a prominent topic and queried the level of non-recyclable plastic products used by the Council. It was suggested that use of plastic products and identification of alternatives be investigated as part of a scrutiny review and it was noted that the subject matter fell within the remit of the Tourism, Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee agreed to forward a request for a scrutiny review to be undertaken into the use of plastic products by the Council and identification of alternatives to the Tourism, Economy and Resources Committee for consideration.

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7 KEY PRIORITY REPORT: COMMUNITY

Mr Scott Butterfield, Transformation Manager reported that there were two indicators within the performance basket for Community, the number of volunteer hours in parks and open spaces and the total patronage of leisure facilities. He advised that the overall performance was positive.

Ms Lisa Arnold, Leisure Services Manager provided up to date figures containing performance over the previous 12 months and highlighted that the number of volunteer hours had exceeded the target set. She added that there had been over one million visits to leisure centres, which was a significant increase on the previous year.

The Committee queried how volunteer hours were recorded and was informed that the friends of parks groups frequently submitted data and that it was a self-reporting process. In response to further questions, it was noted that data collection methods had been improved and that the total number of volunteers had also increased. Councillor Maria Kirkland, Cabinet Member for Third Sector Engagement and Leisure Services added that volunteers provided a valuable service and that work had been undertaken to identify and promote the positive impact of volunteering to volunteers.

Members went on to consider the leisure services budget and noted that the service was making a loss that was within budget. It was queried whether the increase in patronage was having a positive impact on the budget and reducing the deficit. In response, Ms Arnold advised that the deficit was being reduced and highlighted the increased use of digital platforms including online bookings and the leisure facilities app as contributors to the increase in patronage.

8 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Ms Liz Petch, Consultant in Public Health highlighted the changes to Community Engagement within the Council structure and introduced the new Community Engagement and Partnership Manager, Ms Chloe Shore.

Ms Shore advised that community engagement would be undertaken more strategically and services would be encouraged to work in a consistent way. She advised that currently engagement was undertaken on an ad hoc basis and that a toolkit was in development to address the inconsistency. In response to a question, she added that there were currently no key performance indicators relating to community engagement.

Members were informed that the ambition was to involve the public in the shaping of ideas, increase the numbers of residents working with the Council and to take a co-production approach. In order to achieve the changes, each service would be expected to provide a basic standard of engagement and to identify who to consult and when as part of project planning.

Councillor Maria Kirkland, Cabinet Member for Third Sector Engagement and Development noted that community engagement and volunteering were closely linked and the Committee had previously discussed the possibility of introducing a Volunteer Strategy. She advised that it had been determined that a strategy was too formal and that

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the toolkit being developed would provide guidance to volunteer groups as well as Council services.

The Committee noted the important role of Councillors within community engagement and queried how Councillors could become more involved. It was noted that social media was an important tool for engagement and that training would be provided to Councillors in due course.

In response to questions, Councillor Kirkland advised that mapping of volunteers and service provision was being undertaken, that 'FYI' the health directory was able to be used as a directory of volunteers and that the Blackpool Volunteer Centre was a hub for volunteer opportunities.

Members queried the criteria that the Council had had to meet and how it had been met in order to achieve Dementia Friendly Town Status. It was agreed that the information would be circulated following the meeting. Ms Shore added that press releases would be made reporting of the achievement during Dementia Awareness Week.

The Committee agreed to receive the criteria and how the criteria had been met in order to achieve Dementia Friendly Town Status following the meeting.

9 CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE REPORT

Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services reported that the 'Journey of the Child' work had been concluded and that staff within Children's Services and children and young people were being consulted on the outcomes. She agreed to report back to the Committee in detail at the next meeting.

Members noted the significant reduction in referrals to the 'front door' and questioned whether the required improvements had been made. In response, Mrs Booth advised that further reductions could be made and that work was ongoing with the partners to reduce the number of referrals further. She added that secondary schools also presented a number of challenges requiring reflection on the thresholds and how cases were dealt with, but were cooperative and supporting a changing agenda.

Mrs Booth reported that in order to reduce the number of referrals made, the service was offering reflective discussions which were documented and followed up. The introduction of the discussions had taken extra resource, however, the benefits had already been seen with partners demonstrating increased confidence in decision making, the reduction in referrals and, although it was early days, subsequently a reduction in the number of reflective discussions with no corresponding increase in referrals.

The Committee discussed the progress of Head Start and queried whether any outcomes could be documented. In response, Mrs Booth advised that successes had been identified including equine therapy and walk and talk counselling. A number of the initiatives were long term and outcomes were not expected until 2019. She added that she shared the Committee's concern that outcomes were not visible and advised that a report was expected at the next meeting of the Head Start Board to provide further information on outcomes.

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In response to questioning regarding the Opportunity Areas funding, Mrs Booth reported that a large proportion of the £6 million Department for Education funding pot remained unallocated. She reported that the funding must be bid for and spent by schools around three priorities. It was agreed that a more detailed report on how the funding had been allocated to date and how the remainder would be bid for within the next two years would be provided to the next meeting of the Committee. The Opportunity Area Plan would also be circulated.

Members noted the positive news that more pupils would be staying within Blackpool for their secondary education and queried if less cross boarder drift demonstrated an increased confidence in Blackpool's schools. Mrs Booth reported that she believed three of the seven Blackpool Secondary Schools would realise improved academic performance in 2018. She added that she was proud of the achievement of schools in reducing the number of exclusions. Rather than excluding pupils, schools were focussing on teaching them.

The Committee agreed:

1. To receive a detailed report on the outcome of the 'Journey of the Child' work to the next meeting.
2. To receive a report back on Head Start outcomes.
3. To receive the Opportunity Area Plan and a detailed report on how funding had been spent to date to the next meeting.

10 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CHILD PROTECTION

Ms Julie McClements, Service Manager LAC reported that 422 cases had been reviewed in order to develop a forward plan of action. She advised that a number of children had been identified as suitable to be considered for adoption and others identified as ready for discharge from services. The review had created a clear picture that could be translated into work.

Members noted that the workforce had stabilised and Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services reported that the service had gone back to basics and was focussing on making good decisions early on, undertaking smart assessments in a timely manner and revisiting cases frequently to challenge whether the original course of action was still the right course of action. An emphasis was also being placed on safe and appropriate discharges from care. Ms McClements added that the impact on numbers of looked after children would be seen once the backlog of cases had been reduced. It was noted that the number of children being taken into care was still high but had been significantly reduced, although large sibling groups requiring care continued to contribute to large increases on occasion.

In response to questioning, Mrs Cindy Hunter, Service Manager, Children's Social Care advised that the adoption service performed well and that 21% of looked after children exited care through adoption. She reported that in 2017/2018, 38 children had been adopted and that the service was focussing on moving children through the process more quickly to achieve permanence at a younger age. It was noted that the majority of children adopted were aged five and under, however, the service was also identifying

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appropriate older children suitable for adoption.

The Committee discussed the foster service and noted that previously recruitment and retention rates of foster carers had been high. Mrs Booth reported that a large amount of work was undertaken to ensure that the right foster carers were picked and supported, however, the service had struggled in the previous year to maintain recruitment and retention rates. She advised that the decrease had caused concern and was being analysed. It was agreed that the results of the analysis would be submitted to the Committee at the next meeting.

Members queried the development of the placement sufficiency strategy and in response, Mrs Booth advised that the strategy would be finalised in September 2018, following further analysis of placements, consideration of long term provision and after ensuring the full picture of placement requirements was understood. She added that the strategy would be submitted to the Committee in late 2018 for consideration.

The Committee agreed:

1. To receive the analysis of foster carers to the next meeting.
2. To receive the Placement Sufficiency Strategy in late 2018.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee agreed to note the date of the next meeting as Thursday, 7 June 2018, commencing at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.33 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

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