

Report to:

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Relevant Officer:

Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Childrens Services

Date of Meeting

7 June 2018

CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Scrutiny Committee of the work undertaken by Children's Services on a day-to-day basis and to update on the progress and implementation of developments.

2.0 Recommendation:

- 2.1 To consider the contents of the report, provide challenge and identify any issues for further scrutiny.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

- 3.1 For Members of the Scrutiny Committee to be fully informed as to the day to day work of the Children's Services Directorate and have assurance that Blackpool is continuing to meet its statutory obligations for future inspection requirements.

- 3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

- 3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

- 3.3 Other alternative options considered:

Not applicable.

4.0 Council Priority:

- 4.1 The relevant Council Priority is "Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience."

5.0 Background Information

5.1 School Inclusion Strategy

The necessary focus on inclusion and the inclusion plan has resulted in two project outlines being submitted to the Opportunity Area Board that have been approved. The focus of these projects is upon improving support for families through the school family groups and on considering the devolution of High Needs Block funding to schools so that they can commission high quality alternative provision and support for pupils who are close to exclusion, or who have unmet needs.

These plans will improve attendance, reduce exclusions, reduce costs associated with Council alternative provision (Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)) and reduce numbers in the PRU. Targets of a 20% reduction in permanent exclusions, a reduction in PRU places by 2021 to 200 and a reduction in the high needs budget that is allocated to alternative provision, cancelling out the forecast deficit have been set.

These approaches will build upon the successful introduction of a revised in year fair access panel, a reduction in PRU numbers this year of around 40 pupils at comparative points between 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 and an increase in attendance across Blackpool schools.

5.2 HeadStart

The last year has been a quick paced, intensive period for the HeadStart programme. Implementation of a town wide strategy that embeds new, ground breaking, co-productive activity not previously tested on this scale has proved to be a considerable challenge. However, the partnership has embraced and thrived upon it.

Whilst activity data is providing a degree of accountability and learning, it is still early days for a programme of this size and complexity to be reporting on impact and outcomes, however the “so what” question is firmly at the forefront of our minds. The recently established collaboration with the University of Brighton and the additional resources enlisted for the research and evaluation work will create an excellent position to have a wealth of data and evidence to share. It will also provide the basis for others, in the UK and globally, to learn from the Resilience Revolution and mechanisms are being developed to support the dissemination of learning across the globe including developing web resources and publications.

There has been significant learning for the programme on how to structure and embed a social justice approach to the work. Learning taken from eminent inequalities research has been utilised to develop the concept of the Resilience Revolution. Offering the whole community an opportunity to benefit from the programme is cognisant with Marmot’s review of health inequalities, proposing that

targeting support to small cohorts of people has limited impact on population indicators of health inequalities. The Resilience Revolution is HeadStart's strategy for embedding a social justice lens on the work, ensuring that the inequalities that are the root of issues such as mental ill health are starting to be addressed within the community.

Since the development of the phase 3 bid, the programme has grown from a collection of 16 different and separate projects to a cohesive and coherent town wide programme under the banner of the "Resilience Revolution". There is tangible evidence of Hart and collaborator's Resilience Framework being the "glue" that enables all aspects of this multi-layered programme to connect. There is also a strong sense of local ownership of the Resilience Framework with, for example, a local version being co-produced by school children and a Polish version translated by one of the young apprentices. Young people are reporting that they are learning about the framework in multiple environments including staff in school, social workers, Voluntary and Community Sector staff, parents/carers, other young people, digitally and of course from programme staff themselves.

The Resilience Revolution is allowing everyone who lives, works or volunteers in Blackpool to get involved. Learning from key inequalities publications such as the Marmot Review and The Spirit Level are being used to address the inequalities that weigh heavily on communities' mental health and resilience.

5.3 Children's Social Care

The high demand for services, which are amongst the highest in the country continue to be addressed. Blackpool has a high rate of referrals, assessments, Section 47 Enquiries, Child Protection (CP) Plans and children looked after per 10,000 population. As outlined in previous reports social work practices have been reviewed to ensure reductions are managed safely. The risk sensible operating model is beginning to be embedded into practice and more effective management of risk is being seen. In addition, the care planning process is more robust in respect to management and decision-making. The Council continues to work with partners via the Improvement Board to monitor the effectiveness of plans to manage demand and through the Board, challenging targets remain in place to bring Blackpool more in line with the national, regional and statistical neighbour picture; this is starting to occur.

As requested the following outlines our performance against key indicators in respect to looked after children and child protection. This gives an indication of progress against targets and this in conjunction with audit findings gives a holistic picture of quantitative and qualitative outcomes.

5.4 Child Protection

Children become subject to Child Protection (CP) Plans following a Section 47 enquiry having established a child(ren) is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm and is in need of protection via a CP Plan. Not all Section 47 enquiries result in the need for a child(ren) to become subject to a CP Plan.

- The number of Section 47s remains high, but there has been a significant reduction of 62% from a high in May 2017 (181) to the lowest in March 2018 (68).
- The number of children and young people subject to a CP Plan has again reduced to 276 in March 2018 from a high of 388 in August 2017. This is the lowest figure for some years and is a 29% decrease.
- The percentage of CP plans 3 months or less has also reduced and remains around 12% over the last 3 months which is a significant reduction and below most local authorities in the region.

5.4.1 Child Protection Plan Statutory Visits

All children subject to a CP Plan should receive a visit every 4 weeks. The average per month visited is 94%. Where visits have not taken place within the timescale these are followed up by team managers and explanations provided to the monthly performance Improvement meetings.

5.5 Looked After Children

The number of children and young people entering care had remained stable at 15/16 per month, but there was a big increase in March with 32 children entering care.

The number exiting care had slowed in recent months, but again March saw an increase with 21 children ceasing to be looked after. A discharge plan is in place looking at the discharge of care orders for those children in placements with parents or looked after children who are in long-term foster care who could secure permanence via a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).

In addition to those who are subject to a care order, children who are presently subject to care proceedings are being considered and, where appropriate to do so, a disposal of an SGO or plan for adoption is being recommended. The Council is projecting that 80-100 children and young people will exit care in the next 3-12 months through any of the above routes. This will provide a secure and permanent

placement for these children.

- The total number of looked after children fell in February (548 in June 2017 – 526 in February 2018 (22 less), but there was as outlined above a slight increase in March to 533. This was impacted by two large families having to come into care.
- Placement stability of children and young people experiencing three or more placements remains a challenge. This is due to the availability of placements for adolescents exhibiting challenging behaviour.

5.5.1 LAC Statutory Visits

All looked after children should receive a statutory visit. These visits vary in frequency depending upon their length of time in care and stability of placement. As outlined previously there have been challenges within the permanence team, who hold the majority of looked after children cases, which has impacted on performance. Work has been undertaken to address this and we are beginning to see improvements in the timeliness of these visits taking place; monthly average is 89% in timescale.

5.5.2 Open Cases

- The number of cases open (including Child Protection and LAC) has decreased by 10.5% from a high in April (2,092) to (1,872) in March. This represented 220 less cases open.
- Excluding CP and LAC there has been a 15.3% decrease (184 less) in open cases from a high in April 1,200 to a low in January of 1016. The March figure presently stands at 1,076. Some of these cases are cases stepping down from a child protection plan to a child in need plan.

5.5.3 Personal Education Plan (PEP)

Every looked after child should have a Personal Education Plan which is reviewed on a termly basis between the school, social worker, carer and young person. Performance in this area has dropped significantly below expectations. This has been due to difficulties encountered particularly within the permanence team. Work has been put in place to address this and there have been signs of improvement. In addition, the Headteacher for the Virtual School is reviewing the present PEP system to make it easier to use and again increase performance in this area.

5.6 Neglect Update

Subsequent to the report prepared for Scrutiny Committee last autumn Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) has continued to provide multi-agency training in the use of the neglect evaluation tools. A total of 101 practitioners have attended this training in the last eight months, bringing the total number trained to 339, including 92 from Children's Social Care, 70 from schools and 59 from health agencies. Having trained a significant number of professionals uptake and delivery of the training has understandably reduced in recent months, although it is understood that Children's Social Care intend to make completion of the course mandatory which will further boost this number.

As part of its preparation for a potential Joint Targeted Area Inspection under the neglect theme, BSCB undertook a multi-agency audit in September 2017 of five cases in which children were subject to child protection plans under the category of neglect. This audit was a follow up to one completed in January 2017 and identified better multi-agency working and interaction, together with evidence of considerable interventions being provided for the children. However, this did not always translate into good outcomes. A number of the issues identified by the audit in respect of the quality of child protection plans were already known and are subject to actions under the Continuous Improvement Board.

The Graded Care Profile 2 (this is the most in depth general assessment of neglect in the suite of tools) had only been used in one case audited, as a result of which BSCB surveyed practitioners who had completed neglect assessment tool training in November 2017. Of the 81 respondents, 61 had not used the tool, although the most common reason cited for this was that the need had not arisen. Respondents who had used the tool primarily came from Children's Social Care and schools and were more likely to have used the tool as part of an early help intervention, as opposed to at a statutory level. The majority of respondents reported positive outcomes for the children and families they had worked with including:

"The family were able to see that they needed to make improvements and were clear where these areas were due to the Graded Care Profile as it clearly identifies areas of need"

"Home environment and meeting the children's needs has improved, also parents awareness of the impact on their children"

The survey also included more practical feedback as to the use of the tools, which has been incorporated into the training. It is intended to repeat this survey in

forthcoming months to further evidence the use of the tools and to assist understanding of the challenges that practitioners face in identifying and managing neglect.

BSCB promotes the use of the neglect assessment tools throughout its publications and activities. The assessment tools are referenced within the BSCB thresholds document, *Keeping Children Safe In Blackpool*, the Early Help Assessment form and the BSCB *Multi-Agency Standards for Safeguarding*, which will be published this month. These form the key reference documents for working with children across the Continuum of Need and therefore encourage practitioners to be aware of and assess neglect with all children they work with. The use of the tools has also been referenced in practitioner briefings in respect of serious case reviews and is included throughout the Board's training programme. Strategic Board members are expected to promote the use of the tools within their own agencies.

5.7 Care Leavers

All care leavers should be kept in touch with at least every three months. In order to ensure the quality of these keep in touch meetings it is insisted that these should be face-to-face meetings unless there is good reason for this not to take place. This has impacted on previous performance data in which any form of contact e.g. telephone, text was being counted. More recent performance shows a vast improvement with 94% (May 2018) of care leavers now receiving face-to-face contact.

Work continues to provide care leavers with opportunities for Education, Training or Employment. A total of 21 care leavers are being supported through university which is excellent performance. In addition, there are three care leavers in apprenticeship positions within the Council, one within the Chief Executive Office, one as a Children's Participation Officer and one in Adults' Commissioning. Work continues to look at increasing these opportunities and systems have been put in place to alert care leavers to vacancies within the Council through the Greater Jobs website.

Currently there are 49.4% of care leavers in employment, education or training.

The Council continues to look to secure, suitable accommodation for care leavers and is working with Blackpool Coastal Housing and others to look at appropriate suitable accommodation. The Blackpool Young People's Service (BYPS) is a member of the Positive Transitions Group who lead on this work. A review of the plan is taking place to look at how a range of accommodation options can be provided. Unfortunately, some care leavers are presently in custody which impacts on the overall percentage in suitable accommodation. In May 2018, 18 care leavers were deemed to be in

unsuitable accommodation, 13 of these being in custody.

5.8 Blackpool Opportunity Area – Allocation of Funding to date

Background

- The Blackpool Opportunity Area programme is led by the Department for Education in partnership with a local Partnership Board on which Blackpool Council is represented.
- The Blackpool Opportunity Area Delivery Plan was published in October 2017 and summarises proposed action under three priorities underpinned by an overarching theme.

Priority 1 – Raise Attainment And Progress In Schools

- Raise attainment at Key Stage 2
- Raise attainment and increase progress at Key Stage 4
- Improve transition of pupils between all phases of education

Priority 2 - Support For Vulnerable Children And Families To Improve Attendance And Outcomes And Reduce Exclusions From School

- Support schools to reduce the number of children excluded
- Improve the pastoral support to Blackpool's neediest children

Priority 3 - Improve Advice And Support For Young People When Moving Between Schools/Colleges And Into Work

- Building connections with employers and embed careers education in schools
- Increasing the percentage of young people in a sustained education, employment or training destination
- Reduce NEET amongst vulnerable groups

Overarching theme - Building Local Capacity To Coordinate And Manage Initiatives

- Build local capacity to co-ordinate and strategically manage interventions

5.8.1 Progress and Investment to date

2017/2018

Over £1 million allocated on the following projects :-

- **Primary to Secondary School transition** – a project to improve transition between primary and secondary phases and to foster collegiate working within families of schools.
- **English Key Stage 4 Programme** – a project involving all Blackpool secondary schools and the Pupil Referral Unit to improve outcomes in Key Stage 4 English for up to 2,500 students.
- **Community Wide Assessment** – review of all social mobility data across Blackpool

and evidence on “what works” to ensure any investment is targeted on what is needed.

- **“Our Future Our Choice” careers event** – co-funded the event attended by over 1,600 pupils in Year8/9 from across Blackpool to help them with their option choices.

In addition, Blackpool will be receiving just over £1 million over two years for the new Essential Life Skills programme. There is evidence that a lack of opportunity for children and young people to participate in extra curricula activities is a social mobility barrier. Each school and college has been allocated funding to provide extra curricula activities for children and young people who do not usually participate and a directory of potential providers has been produced to assist schools and colleges. A number of schools have started delivering activities and it is anticipated that the programme will be fully implemented from September 2018.

5.8.2 2018/2019 – 2019/2020

- In April 2018, the Blackpool Opportunity Area Board held a meeting to take stock of investment to date and review plans for the remaining two years of the programme.
- This provided an opportunity to review “Pipeline Projects” – programmes which are at various stages of development with a view to launching over the next two years.

Pipeline projects include :-

Priority 1 – building on the English Key Stage 4 programme to deliver a broader literacy programme at Key Stage 3, teacher recruitment and retention, pupil tracking system and supporting school improvement.

Priority 2 – Inclusion support package covering wrap around support in schools for pupils to provide early intervention, support for pupils who arrive new into Blackpool and developing an alternative curriculum offer for pupils. Smaller projects include workforce training to support pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the expansion of family learning.

Priority 3 – establish a Careers hub, targeted support for young people in the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) group, expanding careers activities in primary schools through the Primary Futures project and enabling young people to become involved in the Opportunity Area programme through a youth participation project.

A consultation on social mobility barriers within the local community is currently being undertaken. The results of which will be used to review and shape activity funded through the Opportunity Area programme.

5.9 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Update

- **Highfurlong School** has appointed a new Headteacher called Neil Oldham; Neil is currently a Senior Leader and Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in a Blackpool mainstream high school, he starts in September 2018.
- **Woodlands School** has also successfully appointed a new Headteacher called Karen Haworth and she starts in September 2018. Karen is currently a Deputy Headteacher of a special school in Oldham.
- The Local Authority and the Department for Education (DFE) have appointed a sponsor for the Social, Emotional Mental Health Needs (SEMH) Free School. Blackburn Central High school with Crosshill School have been appointed. The Local Authority will work with the new sponsors and the Department for Education to design and build the new school with a plan to open it for September 2019. The school will cater for young people aged 10-16 with Social, Emotional Mental Health Needs and will be located on Langdale Road (Old Adult Services building site).
- The Local Authority is also planning a commission review of the short breaks provision for children aged 0-19. A copy of the review document and survey are being sent out to parents who access this provision in the next few days.
- Special Educational Needs transport - parents and carers are being asked to reapply for transport so that required capacity for September can be planned and to ensure that the right transport assistance is being provided to eligible people. This has caused some concern for people, as this exercise has never been undertaken before. Legally, transport provision should be reviewed every four years but Blackpool Council has not carried out the exercise for at least the last four years.

5.10 Journey of the Child

Attached at Appendix 8(a) is the presentation shared with employees and partners that facilitates consultation with regard to potential changes to the service delivery model. Mrs Diane Booth will take Scrutiny members through the specifics during the course of the meeting.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

Appendix 8(a) Journey of the Child Consultation Presentation

8.0 Legal considerations:

8.1 None

9.0 Human Resources considerations:

9.1 None

10.0 Equalities considerations:

10.1 None

11.0 Financial considerations:

11.1 None

12.0 Risk management considerations:

12.1 None

13.0 Ethical considerations:

13.1 None

14.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

14.1 None

15.0 Background papers:

15.1 None