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**MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING - THURSDAY, 7 JUNE 2018**

**Present:**

Councillor Rowson (in the Chair)

Councillors

Collett

O'Hara

D Scott

L Taylor

Critchley

Owen

Stansfield

T Williams

**In Attendance:**

Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services

Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services

Ms Kate Aldridge, Head of Delivery and Performance

Mr Paul Jones, Head of Property Services

Mrs Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager

Councillor Graham Cain, Cabinet Secretary (Resilient Communities)

Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning

Councillor Maria Kirkland, Cabinet Member for Third Sector Engagement and Leisure Services

**1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Kath Rowson declared a personal interest in Item 9 'Leisure Services Update Report' as she was a member of the Friends of Stanley Park.

**2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 12 APRIL 2018**

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting of the Resilient Communities and Children's Scrutiny Committee held on 12 April 2018 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

**3 APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTees**

The Committee agreed to approve the appointment of Mr Sam Johnson as a diocesan co-opted member to the Committee and Ms Frances McErlane as a parent governor co-opted member of the Committee.

**4 PUBLIC SPEAKING**

The Committee noted that there were no applications from members of the public to speak at the meeting.

**5 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS**

The Committee noted that one Executive decision had been taken within the remit of the Resilient Communities and Children's Scrutiny Committee since the previous meeting.

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Members asked a number of questions pertaining to PH35/2018 'Payment to Park Academy', and in response, Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning advised that the expansion of Park Community Academy would provide much needed Special Educational Needs places within Blackpool. She added that funding for the building work had been jointly provided by the local authority and the Department for Education.

## **6 FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the Forward Plan, June 2018 – September 2018 relating to the portfolio of the Cabinet Secretary and noted that it contained one item, 'Youth Justice Plan'. Councillor Cain, Cabinet Secretary (Resilient Communities) reported that a consultation had recently concluded on the Youth Justice Plan and a full report would be provided to the next meeting of the Committee. In response to a question, Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services advised that national changes to youth justice boards had already been considered and a number of services would be brought together locally to provide a more joined up approach.

## **7 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN**

The Committee considered its Workplan for 2018/2019. It was noted that at the previous meeting of the Committee, Members had requested additional information on the Opportunity Areas funding. A summary of projects had been included in the Children's Services Update Report to be considered at Item 8, however, Members requested that the full Opportunity Areas Plan be circulated following the meeting.

The Committee agreed to receive a copy of the Opportunity Areas Plan following the meeting.

## **8 CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE REPORT**

Ms Kate Aldridge, Head of Delivery and Performance presented the work undertaken to date regarding the 'Journey of the Child'. She advised that all systems and processes within Children's Services had been reviewed from the front door to the permanence teams. The terminology 'Journey of the Child' was being used to symbolise change across the service, which would ensure the experiences of the children and young people supported was positive and outcome focussed.

In order to determine what outcomes should be, children and young people had been involved and had given clear direction on the vision, highlighting good outcomes as being safe, happy, healthy, to do well in school, to get a good job and to have a voice and have it listened to.

Ms Aldridge reported that a large amount of change had already occurred, citing a new approach to Protecting Vulnerable People, audit work feeding learning and development and the implementation of a risk sensible model. Real progress had already been made through the changes implemented and four key projects had been identified. The key project areas were 'the front door', children with additional needs and special educational needs, preventing exploitation and the relationship between Families in Need

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and Children in Need.

Members noted that there had previously been concerns raised regarding the number of referrals made to the front door by the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and how appropriate the referrals were. It was queried if the Journey of the Child work had had an impact on MASH referrals. In response, Ms Aldridge advised that a significant change had been made, with MASH colleagues using the risk sensible approach to referrals resulting in a reduction in demand generated and a more appropriate level of referral. She added that partners were engaged in the process and that further improvements could be made.

Members also queried the level of school involvement in the work and Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services advised that time had been spent improving relationships with schools. As a result, schools were more involved, collaborative, engaged and supportive of work taking place. In response to further questions, Mrs Booth advised that a large amount of work was ongoing relating to school improvement and schools were supporting each other in order to improve the quality of teaching and education in Blackpool.

It was noted that not all children were academic and that an aspiration could be that 'every child reached their own full potential', thereby recognising that every child was an individual.

The Committee discussed the potential for social workers to be clustered around communities and schools. Mrs Booth advised that such an ambition was being worked towards, however, it was not a quick process as social workers supporting children should not be changed unless it was necessary. She added that the process had been started to allocate new cases in certain schools to certain social workers. In addition, teams of care would be created in communities.

In response to questioning, Mrs Booth advised that in her tenure at Blackpool a child in care had never been placed in a caravan park. She noted that the case referred to in the local press was not a Blackpool child.

It was reported that the recruitment and retention of quality teachers was a national concern and Members queried the work ongoing locally to address the concern. Mrs Booth advised that funding provided by Opportunity Areas and the strategic school improvement fund was being used to support teachers, develop career paths and ensure that the right leadership was available in schools. She added that although she did not have a full set of information owing to the academy system, the turnover of teachers appeared to be slowing down.

It was reported that Children in Need were children that did not meet thresholds for Child Protection Plans or to be taken into care but required support to be put in place to ensure there was no escalation. Following a discussion by the Committee, Mrs Booth advised that interventions could not take place if children did not meet the thresholds for risk. It was noted that prevention was important, but that children and young people must be communicated with rather than assumptions being made. She added that place based delivery through a hub had been trialled in Talbot and Brunswick wards with some

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success. It was hoped that a similar provision could be rolled out across Blackpool in time.

Members raised concerns that Head Start had not met targets in place and that outcomes had not been reported on. Mrs Booth reported that she shared the Committee's concerns and was expecting to receive the outcomes framework in due course. She added that Head Start was a research project and that an evaluation was being supported by Brighton University.

The Committee discussed the number of children in care and noted that there had been a large increase in March 2018. Mrs Booth advised that the Council would not stop taking children into care who required care. She reported that the work to discharge children who no longer required care had not been as quick as predicted, however, the discharge process must be undertaken safely. It was also important to ensure social workers felt safe in their decision making. Rather than focussing on the total number of children in care, it was important to focus on ensuring the right children were in care and processes were safe. Members acknowledged the importance of ensuring all children were safe, but raised further concerns relating to the budget and the extent to which the Council could cope financially with the number of children in care.

Mrs Booth reported that the Sufficiency Strategy was in development and would look at the costs of care, the provision of services internally and the sourcing and commissioning of external placements. She added that a balance between internal and external places was needed and commissioning processes would be fully reviewed to ensure value for money. Members requested that a breakdown of the reasons why children were placed out of town be provided to the next meeting and it was agreed that the information could be provided as part of a wider look at care options.

Members discussed care leavers in detail and noted that there were four legal categories of care leaver. The category a young person was given indicated the level of support provided. A number of concerns were raised relating to the care leavers living in unsuitable accommodation and the number of care leavers in custody. It was queried whether more support could have been provided to the care leavers to ensure they were more prepared to transition out of care. In response, Mrs Booth advised that once a young person had left care they could make the choice to not engage with services and the Council had no legal ability to interfere in their lives. She acknowledged that work was required on the care leaver offer and advised that the Corporate Parent Panel was undertaking an exercise to make improvements. She added that improvements to the whole care system would result in young people being more ready to leave care, citing stability in placements as key in teaching independence.

The Committee agreed to receive a report to the next meeting of the Committee looking at the results from the review of foster carers, the reasons why children were placed out of borough and the options for residential care.

**9 LEISURE SERVICES UPDATE REPORT**

Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services highlighted the key achievements of Leisure Services citing the one million visits to all facilities and the accessibility and inclusive nature of service provision. He also noted the key challenges to the service acknowledging the increase in energy costs and the maintenance required of

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the three main leisure facilities.

Mr Blackledge also reported that the Council had entered into a marketing arrangement with Big Wave Media which had had an immediate impact and resulted in an increase in usage in the final quarter of the year and the significant increase in the number of participants in the Learn to Swim programme. He added that customer satisfaction was measured through the Net Promoter Score and should a member of the public return a satisfaction rate lower than seven, a member of the Leisure Services team would contact the individual to discuss improvements required.

The Committee raised concerns that the issues relating to the required maintenance of the three main leisure facilities had not been addressed and that the quality of provision could start to impact upon return business. In response, Mr Blackledge advised that overall the customer satisfaction across the three leisure centres was above average but acknowledged that some facilities required improvements. He added that grant funding was not as frequently available for improvements to leisure centres as previously and that the budget was limited.

Members considered the Palatine Leisure Centre in detail. Mr Paul Jones, Head of Property Services advised that the budget had recently been spent in ensuring that Palatine Leisure Centre was health and safety compliant, which had resulted in the front of house provision receiving limited work. He added that all back of house facilities were now up to date and future funding could be allocated to prioritising improvements to customer facilities.

The Committee also raised concerns regarding the falling numbers of leisure centre attendances and requested more details on the marketing partnership entered into with Big Wave Media. Mr Blackledge advised that he would confirm the exact cost of the partnership following the meeting. He reported that since starting work with the marketing company attendances had increased turning around what was a decreasing number. He added that managers were receiving marketing and sales training through the partnership, which was a flexible partnership that could be terminated at any time if it was not considered to be value for money.

A Member of the Committee suggested that Leisure Services consider charging for parking at parks and facilities and the potential introduction of secondary income streams in leisure centres such as retail outlets and an improved catering offer in order to increase income.

The ongoing work and improvements made to Stanley Park and the achievement of the park in becoming the UK park of the year was noted. The Committee recorded their thanks to Carol Thor, among others who volunteered at the park, for the provision of musical entertainment at the bandstand within the park.

The Committee questioned Leisure Services compliance with the new General Data Protection Regulations and was advised that compliance was a challenge and that a large amount of work had been undertaken to date, which was ongoing.

The Committee also questioned the end of year financials and the budget for 2018/2019

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and Mr Blackledge advised that the target budget saving for the financial year was £85,000, which would be achieved through increased income. He added that the service would continue to balance commercial targets with inclusion.

**10 ANNUAL COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT 2017/2018**

The Committee raised concerns regarding the content and presentation of the report citing that the chart provided to demonstrate performance against targets was not applicable to 87% of indicators. Ms Kate Aldridge, Head of Delivery and Performance advised that the way in which data and performance was collected and monitored was changing and would focus on a smaller number of Key Performance Indicators which were more relevant in order to provide a more rigorous look at performance. Future reporting would also include more detail on individual areas and services would be supported to collect accurate and meaningful data.

Members also raised concerns that a large number of indicators did not have targets and queried how performance could be successfully monitored when no target was provided. In response, Ms Aldridge advised that each indicator should have an expected level of performance if a target could not be provided in order to put performance into context.

The Committee agreed that Ms Aldridge provide a response following the meeting regarding the difference between 'close to meeting a target' and 'not meeting a target'.

**11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Committee agreed to note the date of the next meeting as Thursday, 13 September 2018, commencing at 6pm.

**Chairman**

(The meeting ended at 19.59)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:  
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