

Report to:

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Relevant Officer:

Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services

Date of Meeting:

15 November 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 within the service.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

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 obligations.

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:

Services are subject to national and statutory frameworks.

4.0 Council Priority:

4.1 The relevant Council Priority is:

- Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience.

5.0 Background Information

- 5.1 As per previous reports the high demand for services, which are amongst the highest in the country continue to be addressed. The North West Regional Information Group recently published its end of year (2017/2018) report which provided the following positive analysis.
- 5.2 Blackpool – in terms of data trends, 2017/2018 has been a remarkable year in Blackpool. Numbers of contacts, referrals, s47 enquiries and Early Help Assessments have each fallen by at least a fifth on the previous year. With open cases down -12% and CP plans reduced by almost a quarter, it is clear that planned, coordinated action has been undertaken to respond to demand differently in the borough.
- 5.3 In a context where the outlier status of the LA had become increasingly distant in recent years, this significant shift brings Blackpool into a more comparable level of activity, albeit often higher than all other NW LAs. Whilst arguably demonstrating clearer and more appropriate application of thresholds for intervention, there are some indications of a system which is still adjusting. Conversion rates from contact to referral, at 28% across the year as a whole are in line with North West averages.
- 5.4 This masks, however, a significant uptick in the latter part of 2017/18 suggesting some testing of thresholds within the partnership. Similarly with re-referrals, assessments resulting in No Further Action and repeat CP plans all remaining at levels above NW and England averages, there appears to be further work required for the whole partnership to support a less interventionist approach.
- 5.5 Given the shift in volumes of activity, it is likely that the quality and effectiveness of statutory intervention will be brought into sharper focus for scrutiny. With demand falling to more manageable levels, leaders across the partnership may well raise expectations of the improved impact of services in improving outcomes. Of some concern in this context may be the continued increase in numbers of Looked After Children, albeit of 2% - well below the regional increase.
- 5.6 Whilst numbers of children becoming Looked After have fallen by 20%, a gap remains with numbers ceasing to be LAC by achieving permanence or leaving care. For those who remain Looked After, placement stability has worsened from an already challenging position with 14.4% (77 children) experiencing 3 or more placements in the year. As the authority moves forward, demonstrating purposeful intervention and positive impact on children's lived experience is likely to be its most pressing challenge as it seeks to establish a sustainable future.
- 5.7 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. In addition the Improvement Board is moving its focus on measuring impact and outcomes which aligns to the NW Regional

Information Group narrative.

- 5.8 The Committee asked for further information following the completion of the journey of the child work on the changes to the front door being planned, namely our move from a MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) to a MATH (Multi-Agency Triage Hub) and this can be found later in this report.
- 5.9 The following outlines performance against key indicators in respect to demand, child protection and looked after children. This gives an indication of progress against targets and this, in conjunction with audit findings, gives a holistic picture of quantitative and qualitative outcomes. Plans are also in place to meet with Committee Members to agree a performance dashboard which the Committee can scrutinise/monitor at each meeting. In addition the Committee was also encouraged to ascertain frontline practitioners feedback on the changes being made and support they were receiving. Arrangements have been made for Members to meet with the shadow improvement board to facilitate this.
- 5.10 In addition to performance information the committee also asked for information on a number of other areas, including information regarding an update on the Children Centre proposals and an update on the work of the Opportunity areas work programme. An outline on all these areas is included below. Our sufficiency plans will be submitted to next committee.
- 5.11 **Front Door Demand**
- There continues to be a decrease in the number of referrals being made to Children's Social Care (CSC). In the second quarter of 2018/2019 there were a total of 574 referrals, which is 86 less referrals than in Quarter 1. The percentage of the referrals that are repeat referrals has remained similar to Quarter 1 at 19%.
- 5.12 Positively we are seeing the conversion of referrals to assessment increase with this quarter seeing 88% of referrals progressing to a Children's Social Care assessment. 5% higher than last quarter.
- 5.13 **Child Protection**
- Children become subject to Child Protection (CP) Plans following a Section 47 enquiry having established a child(ren) are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm and are 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 CP Plans.
- 5.14 The number of Section 47s undertaken has decreased in Quarter 2 by 19 on Quarter 1, but the figure remains high against national and statistical neighbours.
- 5.15 The number of children and young people subject to a CP Plan has increased to 304 in September 2018. This is 37 more children subject to a CP Plan than in June 2018. This in part has been due to a number of large families becoming subject to CP

Plans and a number being transfer-in cases from other local authorities.

5.16 CP Statutory Visits

All children subject to a CP Plan should receive a visit every four weeks. The average visited for the second quarter was 88%.

5.17 This is a slight increase (1.5%) on previous performance in Quarter 1. Work is undertaken with Team Managers to understand why visits are not completed in time and explanations are provided to the monthly performance improvement meetings. The majority of visits out of timescale are due to no access visits, but further visits are undertaken and the child(ren) seen within a short timeframe.

5.18 Open Cases

The number of cases open (including CP and Looked After Children (LAC)) has increased to 1,690 in September 2018 from 1,649 in June. There were fluctuations in the second quarter months, with September being less than in August which was 1,709

5.19 As expected in line with the above a similar pattern emerged for open cases (excluding CP and LAC) with the number in September being 842, lower than the March figure of 952. As outlined in previous reports some of these cases are cases stepping down from a child protection plan to a child in need plan and also includes open assessments.

5.20 Looked After Children

The total number of children looked after has decreased slightly to 552 in September from 566 in July 2108. This is 14 less children than at the end of July 2018.

The number of children and young people entering care reduced during the second Quarter, with it being (1) in July, (9) in August and (13) in September 2018.

The number exiting care showed an increase in the second Quarter with the figure being (8) in July, (21) in August and (15) in September 2018.

5.21 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. These visits are completed by all teams with the Permanence Team having the majority of cases. The performance at the end of the second Quarter was that 96%

of visits were completed within the timescale. This is an increase of 4% on the first Quarter. All cases that did not meet the timescale are discussed at the monthly performance improvement meetings and Team Managers are able to explain the reason for any outside of the statutory timescale.

5.22 **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 we have insisted that these should be face to face meetings unless there is good reason for this not to take place. Recent performance shows 89.5% of care leavers received face to face contact as at 12th October 2018. This means that 19 out of 181 had not had face to face contact. Reasons for those not in contact include young people having moved and not passed on details and young people expressing a wish not to be contacted.

5.23 Work continues to provide care leavers with opportunities for Education, Training or Employment. The Council is presently supporting 19 care leavers through university which is excellent performance. There are three care leavers in apprenticeship/positions within the Council, one within the Chief Executive Office, one as a Children's Engagement Officer, one in Children's Commissioning. The Council 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. At the 12 October 2018 we had 48.8% of care leavers in employment, education or training.

5.24 Work to look to secure suitable accommodation for our care leavers with Blackpool Coastal Housing, Blackpool Housing Company and others continues. The Blackpool Young People's Service (BYPS) is a member of the Positive Transitions Group which leads on this work. A review of the plan has taken place to look at how we can ensure a range of accommodation options. In addition a further meeting has taken place with Blackpool Coastal Housing and Blackpool Housing Company to look at future projections to ensure suitable accommodation is made available to post 18 year olds.

5.25 Unfortunately some care leavers are presently in custody which impacts on the overall percentage in suitable accommodation. As at 12 October 2018, 92% were in suitable accommodation. 13 care leavers were deemed to be in unsuitable accommodation, 9 of which was due to them being in custody.

5.26 **MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) to MATH (Multi-Agency Triage Hub)**

As part of the journey of the child work the Council has reviewed with partners the multi-agency team at the front door and moved from a MASH to a MATH. As a

result the new front door in to children's services will be a MATH working together to ensure that only contacts and referrals that meet the threshold for preventative or statutory intervention will be referred onto Family Hubs or Children's Social Care Assessment and Planning Teams for an immediate planned response. This will reduce demand on children's services and ensure that interventions in family life only occur when absolutely necessary.

5.27 This is because there are some key changes happening in MATH which differs from the current MASH team:

- MATH will be a team of dedicated social workers, key workers, an admin support officer and a Team Manager completing triage, screening, support and advice in conjunction with the police, and health colleagues to communicate to agencies and members of the public concerned about children. This is a significant increase in resources targeted to ensure thresholds through to services are consistent and considered against the continuum of need (CoN)
- The demand will not be only the police work but all information and work coming to children's services where there is a perceived need of support or a safeguarding concern.

5.28 This means the Council will have a team of people with the time and focus to create chronologies, undertake in depth screening, and have relationship based conversations with other agencies in order to develop shared understandings of threshold as set out in the continuum of need.

The role of the team in detail will be to receive information about families and children who are considered a concern, to consider this information, share as appropriate and utilise a shared screening tool to apply the CoN before either –

1. Exploring the concern with the referrer and providing reflective conversations where necessary.
2. Supportively directing work back to the referring or another agency already involved with the family for early intervention at level 2 of the CoN.
3. Directing work that is identified as appropriate to our Targeted Intervention Services
4. Directing work that is identified as appropriate that requires a statutory assessment to our Children's Social Care Assessment and Planning Teams
5. Directing work that is identified as appropriate to other Children's Social Care teams e.g. safeguarding teams preventing unnecessary handovers
6. Provide oversight of trends and themes and supporting targeted action where

required.

7. If following application of the CoN the case requires a section 47 child protection enquiry this will be allocated to the appropriate Children's Social Care team
8. For cases where there is no informed consent and no significant harm issues the case cannot be accepted into the LA statutory assessment or early help and prevention process
9. For cases where there is no consent but the referring agency requires a case discussion to share information to ensure appropriate application of threshold consent **is not** required at this stage and the characteristics of the case can be discussed anonymously
10. Following information sharing and application of CoN it is identified that the child and family may benefit from LA early help and prevention services the case cannot be accepted by the LA until the referring agency has gained informed consent

5.29 **Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report**

The corporate Parenting Panel receives an annual report which outlines the work of the panel and its successes. Below is a summary of the full report which can be found in Appendix 9(a).

- 5.30 There are five Corporate Parent Panel meetings held annually, one of which is a 'Take Over' by members of the Justuz Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum. Young people chair this meeting and set the agenda.
- 5.31 The Corporate Parent Panel is chaired by Cllr Graham Cain and members include Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services, Service Managers from Children Services, Blackpool Young People's Service, Early Help and representatives from Health, Headstart, Commissioning, Virtual School, Justuz and Fostering.
- 5.32 All reports that are presented at panel have been scrutinised by panel members and the Justuz Children in Care Council. There is an expectation that all reports submitted to the panel will have had consultation with our children and young people and their views incorporated into the findings.
- 5.33 Reports are discussed and any actions agreed are added to an Action Tracker which can result in development of action plans which are then reviewed at each meeting until completed.
- 5.34 There are set agenda items which include housing, communication, the action

tracker, feedback from Justuz Children in Care Council which informs the panel of any ongoing work, consultations and general feedback.

5.35 Examples of work that has been actioned through Corporate Parent Panel:

- 16/17 yr old Positive Transitions Support and Accommodation Pathway
- Council Opportunities for Young People
- Developed a new leaflet called 'Have your say' – a customer relations feedback form
- Use of language and terminology to be more in line with young people's understanding
- Carer profiles to be updated to include who currently lives in the house including other children.
- A Family Profile template has been developed and is updated before a young person is placed.
- Child friendly minutes are now being documented by IRO's and sent to children following review
- Foster Carer reviews improved through consultation with carers
- Recruitment of Care Leavers into internal vacancies
- Involvement of young people in the recruitment process for Children's Service staff
- Young people being actively involved in delivery of training to staff and foster carers'

5.36 Ongoing work by the Justuz Children in Care Council

- Developing information packs for any young person who becomes looked after
- Pocket money policy
- Consultation on Contact – how they see their families
- Consultation on the Pledge
- Creation of a Jargon Buster
- Involvement in the co-production of our Care Leaver Offer through the Care Leaver forum
- Use of Social Media/technology for better communication between young people and their workers
- Development of a version of The Pledge which is more 'user friendly' for our younger children aged eight and under

5.37 Children’s Centre Review update

The £1million contribution from the Department for Education via the Dedicated School Grant which contributes to Blackpool School Based Children’s Centre’s is unwinding. A review and consultation have been undertaken, to support Schools and Academies, to find a way forward without reliance on the grant and in order to enhance delivery using a Family Hub model. The proposed Family Hub model consists of an enhanced offer, including evening and weekend delivery, with a full range of services for residents of all ages. The Family Hub model will be led by the needs in each locality, shaped by the community and will evolve over time. The Family Hub approach has been trialed within Talbot and Brunswick Children's Centre which serves two of the most deprived wards in the country and has seen improved outcomes for local children, young people and their families. A wealth of partners, across services and sectors are working together to remove barriers for families to support access to Prevention and Early Intervention services within the Family Hub in their neighbourhood. The consultation details and a proposed way forward are still under consideration.

5.38 Blackpool Opportunity Area Programme Update

The Blackpool Opportunity Area Programme is a three year Social Mobility programme, funded by the Department for Education and delivered through a local partnership involving the Department for Education and key organisations including Blackpool Council. The three year Delivery Plan has three main priorities –

- Priority 1 Raise attainment and progress
- Priority 2 Support for vulnerable children and families
- Priority 3 Improve advice and support for young people when moving between schools/colleges and into work

5.39 The programme is now in its second year of delivery with the following activity underway:-

- The transition of pupils between primary and secondary phases has been improved through a collaborative approach working within families of schools.
- English practice in Key Stage (KS) 4 in all Blackpool’s secondary schools and the Pupil Referral Unit has been reviewed which was followed up by the delivery of packages of support tailored to each school to improve English outcomes in 2018 and 2019.
- KS 3 reading project has just been launched which will systematically enhance the reading abilities of students in Key Stage 3.

- Two Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF) projects are underway focused on Maths, and Leadership and Governance. Over 114 fully-funded aspiring leaders have applied to undertake a National Professional Qualification funded by the Teaching and Leadership Innovation fund (TLIF).
- Enterprise Advisers are working in all secondary schools, 6th forms and colleges to ensure that all young people are receiving four high quality experiences of the world of work. In 2017/18, 26, 337 encounters have been achieved against a target of 14,000.
- Community consultation has been completed to understand the views of the Blackpool community on what works and what doesn't work in Blackpool and what they believe are the burning issues we need to address to improve social mobility across the town. The recommendations have been cross checked against the existing Delivery Plan.

5.40 Future plans include the development of a literacy strategy, the roll out of a ground breaking inclusion package which will seek to reduce the number of young people not in mainstream education and in partnership with Lancashire Enterprise Partnership, the delivery of a Careers Hub which will support schools develop good careers guidance for young people using nationally recognised benchmarks.

6.0 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

Appendix 9(a): Corporate Parent Panel Annual Report

8.0 Legal considerations:

8.1 There are no legal issues to consider.

9.0 Human Resources considerations:

9.1 There are no Human Resources issue to consider.

10.0 Equalities considerations:

10.1 Planning for every child is at an individual level and based on analysis of risk and need.

11.0 Financial considerations:

11.1 There is a financial pressure on children's services budget which is predominantly linked to placements.

12.0 Risk management considerations:

12.1 Planning and demand brings with it a level of risk relating to predictions. It is not possible to taken into consideration every eventuality.

13.0 Ethical considerations:

13.1 This update does not contravene any of the Council's values, morals or beliefs.

14.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

14.1 None

15.0 Background papers:

15.1 None