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MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - THURSDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2018

Present:

Councillor Stansfield (in the Chair)

Councillors

Collett
Mitchell

O'Hara
Owen

D Scott
Mrs Scott

L Taylor

In Attendance:

Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services

Mr Paul Turner, Head of School Standards, Safeguarding and Inclusion

Mr John Hawkin, Head of Leisure Services

Mr Tony Morrissey, Interim Head of Safeguarding and Principal Social Worker

Mr Mike Taplin, Head of Adult Learning

Ms Judith Mills, Consultant in Public Health

Mr Paul Threlfall, Business Development Manager, Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board

Mrs Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager

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

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Mrs Scott and Stansfield declared personal interests in relation to Item 9 'Children's Services Update Report', the nature of the interests that they were members of the Corporate Parent Panel.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 13 SEPTEMBER 2018

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting held on 13 September 2018, be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no requests by members of the public to speak on this occasion.

4 EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Committee noted the Executive decisions taken since the last meeting of the Committee.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan December 2018 – March 2019 and noted the decisions to be taken relating to the portfolio of the Cabinet Secretary (Resilient Communities).

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6 GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

Mr John Hawkin, Head of Leisure Services advised that the development of a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy had been deemed necessary following the results of a mapping exercise that demonstrated that Blackpool had the lowest tree canopy cover in England, was intensely urban and that 5,000 people less than the national average used the outdoor environment each week.

He highlighted that evidence suggested that green and blue infrastructure reduced surface water and flooding and therefore seawater quality, encouraged people to play, walk and cycle, increased employee productivity and improved the mental health of adults and children.

The Committee noted that there were a number of identified key recommendations to build green and blue infrastructure and, that in order to be successful in making improvements, the creation of the Strategy must be incorporated into the Town Centre Strategy, the Leisure Quarter Masterplan and the Enterprise Zone Masterplan, as well as all other significant new developments. It was commented that in order to achieve this, the green and blue implications of all decisions taken must be considered.

Members raised concerns that some wards that were very low on green space had not been addressed within the Strategy. In response, Mrs Judith Mills, Consultant in Public Health advised that a series of consultation events were being held in order to identify specific areas requiring improved green infrastructure and in order to determine if the strategy was correctly balanced.

The proposal within the Strategy to work with individual businesses and public sector organisations was considered and it was suggested that the Council must ensure that other policies were not contravened in the bid to create an attractive setting. Members raised particular concerns regarding the potential use of takeaway food outlets and establishments selling alcohol to provide items such as tree skirts and planting boxes that would advertise their business.

Further concerns were raised regarding the maintenance costs relating to an increased number of green spaces and the need to ensure infrastructure was carefully managed. Despite the potential costs, which would need to be carefully considered, Members considered that there was a need to improve the offer of green spaces, particularly in areas such as the Promenade, which had been designed with a focus on sea defence.

The Committee commented that the Strategy was inspirational and the emphasis on partnership was important given the costs associated with creating and maintaining green spaces. It was noted that the Tourism, Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee had resolved to establish a cross- Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group to consider the Strategy further and Members of the Resilient Communities and Children's Scrutiny Committee agreed that further input and development was required.

The Committee agreed:

- 1) To establish a Task and Finish Group in conjunction with the other Scrutiny Committees to feed into the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy in more detail.

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- 2) To appoint Councillors O'Hara, Owen and Mrs Scott to the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy Task and Finish Group.
- 3) To forward the following considerations to the Task and Finish Group:
 - a. That the Council must not contradict other policies including those on alcohol advertising and fast food advertising in the pursuit of achieving the aims set out in the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.
 - b. That the Green and Blue Implications of decisions taken be considered and clearly set out within reports.

7 BLACKPOOL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD ANNUAL REPORT

Mr Paul Threlfall, Business Development Manager, Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) presented the Annual Report of the Board to the Committee for consideration.

Members expressed concerns relating to the attendance statistics contained within the report noting that some partners had particularly low attendance rates. In response, Mr Threlfall advised that the statistics only reflected the attendance of the named representative and did not show that a deputy of an appropriate level from the organisation was often present. He added that non-attendance was challenged on an ongoing basis and the Independent Chair had targeted improved attendance over the year, citing schools as an example where attendance had significantly improved.

Upon consideration of the response provided by Mr Threlfall, Members considered that the attendance statistics in the annual report were not a true representation and it was requested that an alternative way to demonstrate attendance be considered for future reporting.

In response to further questions, Mr Threlfall advised that engagement with schools was good and that regular 'Twilight' meetings were held. He also reported that there were a number of areas that the Committee might wish to seek further assurance on during the next year, highlighting ongoing work around early help, child criminal exploitation, neglect and the response to children 'missing from home'.

The Committee went on to consider partnership working and the challenge offered to partner organisations through the BSCB. Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services advised that collective decision making was often necessary and that constant challenge of partners was required. She also highlighted that the remit of the Awaken Team would be extended to cover all forms of child exploitation and it was agreed that an update on the changes would be provided to the next meeting of the Committee.

Members noted that there had been a large number of Serious Case Reviews in 2017/2018 and requested further information relating to key themes. In response, Mr Threlfall advised that there had been a dramatic reduction in the number of reviews following the period covered in the annual report. He advised that there were no particular themes running through the reviews, however, noted that a number of reviews had related to babies. He added that a large amount of work had been undertaken to strengthen pre-birth processes.

The key changes to the Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board brought about by the

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revised statutory guidance 'Working Together 2018' were noted. Mr Threlfall advised that the primary change was the move away from the Board being hosted solely by the Local Authority to a partnership which would be hosted by the local Clinical Commissioning Group, Lancashire Constabulary and the Local Authority together. It was noted that there was no reference to Scrutiny oversight within the guidance and that local arrangements would need to be considered in due course.

The Committee agreed to add consideration of the changes to Awaken to their next meeting.

8 EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES AND IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY

The Committee considered the educational outcomes of Blackpool schools for 2017/2018 and noted that the data provided in relation to absence and exclusion was constantly changing.

Members noted that the absence of pupils in secondary schools in Blackpool in 2017/2018 was significantly higher than the national average and queried if any improvements had been made. Mr Paul Turner, Head of Service for School Standards, Safeguarding and Inclusion advised that improvement was slow and that statistics for absence varied significantly across schools. He reported that schools were purchasing more support from the Council's Pupil Welfare Service and that the 'first day of term protocol' put in place to reduce transience across Blackpool's schools had had an impact.

In response to a question, Mr Turner advised that, although the reduction in fixed term exclusions from 2016/2017 to 2017/2018 had been small, there had been a significant reduction since the start of the 2018/2019 school year demonstrating that the work with schools on inclusion was having an impact. Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services added that schools had been challenged regarding the number of exclusions and partnership working had improved.

It was noted that there were concerns regarding the reading level of children at both key stages one and two and that a number of initiatives had been put in place to improve reading ability. Members noted the links of literacy to schools readiness, early help and also adult/parental literacy. Mr Mike Taplin, Head of Adult Learning advised that adult literacy was a priority and was a key feature of the support provided by his Team. The importance of the developing Early Years Strategy in increasing school readiness was noted and it was agreed that the Strategy be considered by the Committee at a future meeting, in addition to the related Special Educational Needs Strategy.

The Committee went on to consider Maths attainment and noted that achievement at primary schools was high. It had been recognised that the quality of teaching in secondary schools was not as high and that there were a number of schools who did not have dedicated Maths teachers. Another key area for development had been the transition between primary and secondary schools and it had been identified that secondary schools were not building on primary school learning in Year 7. Improved relationships between primary and secondary schools had resulted in a transition curriculum which was providing more challenging material for children in Year 7.

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Members also considered the increasing number of parents choosing to home educate their children. Mr Turner advised that the increase was indicative of a national trend and that a number of reasons for the increase had been identified including quality of teaching and schools and an increase in the enforcement around pupil unauthorised absence. It was noted that it was a parent's right to choose to home educate and that many parents took the role seriously. Members also queried potential courses of action should safeguarding issues arise and Mr Turner advised that if evidenced safeguarding concerns were raised then a School Attendance Order could be issued.

In response to questions, it was noted that although the performance of the one free school in Blackpool had been considered to be 'good' by Ofsted, the local authority might consider the standards at the school to be inadequate. Members raised significant concerns relating to the education of the children in the school and queried the role of the Scrutiny Committee in monitoring the individual performance of schools. Mr Turner advised that he had met with the school and the Regional Schools Commissioner, who was ultimately responsible for free schools and academies. The Committee was also advised that different legislation governed free schools and academies and noted that teachers at free schools and academies did not need to be qualified and might be paid significantly less money than teachers at maintained schools.

The Committee agreed to consider the Early Years Strategy development and the Special Educational Needs Strategy at a future meeting.

9 CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE REPORT

Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services presented the Children's Services Update Report noting that it focussed on care leavers, the change from the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) to the multi-agency triage hub (MATH) and also included the Corporate Parent Panel Annual Report.

Members raised concerns regarding the number of care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET) and the plans in place to reduce the number. Mrs Booth advised that Opportunity Area funding would be used to replicate Project Search for care leavers. She highlighted that the Council now employed a number of care leavers and that there were opportunities available. It was considered important to provide wrap around support to care leavers to help them to fulfil their roles and succeed in the position they had been appointed to.

It was reported that a workshop had been held with Members of the Resilient Communities and Children's Scrutiny Committee, as agreed at the last meeting, to create a Children's Services Dashboard. Mr Tony Morrissey, Interim Head of Safeguarding and Principal Social Worker advised that the dashboard would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee for consideration.

Members noted the value provided by attendance at Regulation 44 visits and thanked Mrs Booth and her Team for the opportunity to participate. Mrs Booth returned the thanks for Members' involvement, highlighting that the involvement of Members offered an additional check and balance to care homes and noted that the next step would be to involve young people in the visits.

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10 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee noted its workplan and agreed to incorporate the additional items identified during the course of the meeting into it.

11 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The date and time of the next meeting was noted as Thursday, 7 February 2019, commencing at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.45 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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