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MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING - THURSDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2019

Present:

Councillor M Mitchell (in the Chair)

Councillors

D Coleman
Collett

Humphreys
Mitchello'Hara

Owen
D Scott

Mrs Scott

In Attendance:

Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services

Ms Kara Haskayne, Head of Safeguarding and Principal Social Worker

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

Mr Philip Thompson, Head of SEND

Mrs Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager

Councillor Simon Blackburn, Leader of the Council

Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

In the absence of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee a nomination was sought for a Chairman for the meeting.

The Committee unanimously resolved that Councillor Martin Mitchell be appointed as Chairman for the meeting.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Debbie Coleman declared a personal interest in Item 7 'Special Educational Needs Update', the nature of the interest that she worked for an early years provider.

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 15 NOVEMBER 2018

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2018, be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

4 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Committee noted that there had been no requests from members of the public to speak at the meeting.

5 EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Portfolio Holder Decision taken since its previous meeting, PH75/2018 'Stanley Park Golf Course' and questioned the reasons for the decision. Councillor Simon Blackburn, Leader of the Council advised that a tender had been

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awarded approximately 11 years ago to Mack Trading (International) Limited to operate the golf course, which had subsequently been renegotiated twice due to changes in the market. The golf course had continued to be unprofitable, with the number of members reducing significantly due to the level of competition in the area and Mack Trading and relinquished the lease. A number of options for the future of the golf course were being considered fully before any further decisions were taken.

6 CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE REPORT OF RECENT INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services reported that the Council had been subject to two recent inspections: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) Inspection of the Blackpool Youth Offending Service and the Ofsted Inspection of Blackpool Children's Social Care Services. The overall judgement of both inspections had been inadequate. It was noted that the response to the Inspection of the Youth Offending Service was more developed to that of the Ofsted Inspection and that the full feedback from the Ofsted Inspection had not yet been received.

The Committee referred to the Youth Justice Report received at its meeting in September 2018, and raised concerns that that report had not accurately reflected the position of the Youth Offending Service, demonstrated by the inspection judgement two months later. Mrs Booth advised that a number of perceived inaccuracies in the inspection report had been challenged but not accepted with the inspectorate and that the Service recognised the significant challenges posed.

In relation to the nine recommendations made in the HMIP Inspection Report, Members queried the role of partners in ensuring improvement. In response, Mrs Booth advised that the role of partners was key and that the governance arrangements of the Youth Offending Service had been refreshed and now included higher level leadership from all partners. Councillor Blackburn, Leader of the Council added that a series of meetings had been held with partners and expectations with regards to improvement had been made clear. He also highlighted the involvement and support of the Youth Justice Board and the work being carried out with staff in the Service to map skills and identify training requirements.

Members discussed the importance of staff morale and the ability of the Council to attract good quality staff to key roles in Children's Services. It was considered that the judgement of staff morale was subjective and could vary dependent on the staff member interviewed by the inspectorate. However, it was important to ensure that all staff were supported and had good leadership.

The Committee went on to consider the point at which it was determined that a young person could no longer be kept out of the criminal justice system. Councillor Blackburn advised that the Minister of Justice had not been persuaded that the Police had been doing everything possible to keep young people out of the criminal justice system and that increased engagement with the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire was being sought with the aim of increasing the number of diversionary projects on offer and improving the recording of rapid assessments made by Police Officers when disposing of a reported crime. It was noted that once a young person had a criminal record, they were more at risk of becoming a victim.

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In reference to the Ofsted Inspection of Children's Social Services, Members queried the next steps. Mrs Booth advised that an Independent Commissioner would be appointed to work with services in Blackpool over a period of 12 weeks in order to make an assessment about the ability of services to improve quickly and sustain that improvement. She referred to the additional funding of £1.2 million that had been made available to provide rapid and longer term interventions. A number of additional posts had been created, however, the challenge would be filling those positions with suitable candidates.

Councillor Blackburn highlighted that a number of inaccuracies within the Ofsted report had been challenged, with some accepted by the inspectorate. He advised that he had not been interviewed as part of the process, but that the political leadership had still been found to be inadequate. He also highlighted that key partners had not been interviewed as part of the inspection. It had therefore been difficult to evidence some aspects of the inspection framework.

In addition, Ms Kara Haskayne, Head of Safeguarding and Principal Social Worker highlighted the recent introduction of a new quality assurance framework alongside appropriate training. Members raised concern that a basic standard of recording and demonstrating impact was looking at how services had made a difference to the life of the young person being supported. In response, it was noted that impact on a life had also been considered, but the new framework ensured that information was now being recorded in an auditable and evidenced form.

It was reported that a 12 week plan had been developed in order to immediately commence work on improvements and that the Council had not wished to delay work to wait for the full Ofsted report. Once all the information behind the judgements was known, the plan for improvement could be revisited. Councillor Blackburn added that following the inspection, officers had undertaken additional auditing on additional cases in order to ensure no child was at risk of harm. He added that the full plan for improvement would be made available to the Committee once it had been completed.

The Committee specifically referred to the previous necessary interventions of the Director of Children's Services in individual cases and queried if these interventions had prevented focus on more strategic issues. In response, Mrs Booth advised that the number of individual cases she had input into had significantly reduced due to the appointment to a number of Head of Service positions. She advised that she still undertook random auditing, but had delegated appropriate work to capable managers, ensuring that sufficient time was available to lead whole system and strategic improvement.

In response to a question, Mrs Booth advised that she considered it the role of the Scrutiny Committee to continue to seek information on improvements being made and to use the completed improvement plan to shape the work undertaken, avoiding duplication with the Children's Improvement Board. She added that the Shadow Improvement Board had welcomed the visit from Members of the Committee and suggested that Members continue to play a vital role in ensure staff felt supported by meeting with the Board on a regular basis.

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The Committee agreed:

To receive the Improvement Plan when completed and use it to inform the workplan of the Committee for the 2019/2020 Municipal Year.

7 INCLUSION UPDATE

Mr Paul Turner, Head of Service for School Standards, Safeguarding and Inclusion provided an update on the implementation of the Inclusion Policy and number of fixed term and permanent exclusions made by schools in 2018/2019.

In response to questions, Mr Turner advised that some schools were co-operating more than others, however, the majority did support the aims of inclusion and were more willing and capable of providing support and education to children and young people than might have previously been excluded.

The Committee highlighted the increasing number of parents choosing to home educate their children as an area of concern. Mr Turner concurred that elective home education was a major worry and advised that the majority of parents had indicated that they had chosen to home educate due to concerns that their child was not receiving appropriate and high quality mainstream education. Members further noted that whilst the number of fixed term and permanent exclusions in some schools had decreased, it was in those same schools that the number of children leaving to be home educated had increased. It was noted that there was no evidence to prove a link, however, it was important to note the relationship between the two figures.

Members went on to consider safeguarding concerns relating to absence from schools and queried whether partners were working together sufficiently to deal with pupil absence. Mr Turner advised that processes were in place to pass information from the Police to schools and that the links between school absence and anti-social behaviour had been noted. Key concerns regarding the number of pupils attending school on a part-time basis were also noted. It was reported that the sharing of data had improved in addition to the quality of data.

The reduction in pastoral care provided by schools was discussed and it was considered that care and support was an area for improvement. It was noted that unaddressed issues with bullying were often cited as a reason for poor attendance at school and influenced parents in choosing to home educate their child. The Council worked with parents as much as possible, however, was limited in its role. Educational attendance orders were considered when appropriate.

Mr Turner referred to the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and noted that numbers remained high, however, there had been a reduction in numbers and over 100 children were in the current Year 11 and would therefore be leaving shortly. It was considered that further support for schools provided by an additional Inclusion Officer would reduce the number of children and young people in the PRU further and ensure that the children who did attend were appropriately attending. It was further noted that schools were improving their understanding regarding the current needs of children and young people.

In response to a question, Mr Philip Thompson, Head of SEND advised that a temporary

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special educational mental health (SEMH) school had been established within the PRU whilst the completion of the new SEMH free school was awaited, which had resulted in the appearance of a large number of children with special needs currently in the PRU. It was noted that there had been delays in the opening of the new school and when opened it would provide 48 places.

The Committee agreed to receive a further update on Inclusion in approximately six months.

8 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS UPDATE

Mr Philip Thompson, Head of SEND advised that the draft Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Strategy had been out to consultation and received mainly positive feedback. He highlighted that it was a challenging strategy and the action plan to achieve the strategy was still being developed.

In response to questions, Mr Thompson advised that 137 children with additional needs were currently educated out of borough. The new free school would provide places for approximately 48 children, with the further 90 remaining in special schools across Lancashire. It was noted that the cost of educating a child out of borough varied between £38,000 and £60,000 dependent on the needs of the child plus transport costs, which were funded by the local authority. It was noted that the numbers were in line with national averages. The total current spend was £3.7 million on education from the Dedicated Schools Grant plus transport costs and additional social care requirements from the local authority's budget.

It was noted that in addition to the new free school, the strategy aimed to reduce the number of children educated out of borough by increasing support in mainstream schools. Once a child had been removed from a mainstream setting it was difficult to implement a return and therefore emphasis was being placed on keeping the child in full time mainstream schooling. Mrs Booth reported that further emphasis was being placed on identifying special educational needs earlier and building confidence in parents that a mainstream school could provide the support their child requires. The SEND Strategy strongly linked to the new draft Early Years Strategy in seeking earlier interventions.

In reference to the draft Early Years Strategy, it was noted that a delivery plan would be produced following the end of the consultation period. It was agreed that all service and strategy delivery plans would be made available for Scrutiny Members when completed to allow appropriate identification of themes for future workplanning.

The Committee agreed:

To receive all service and strategy delivery plans as part of the workplanning process for the Committee following the election in May 2019.

9 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered its workplan for 2018/2019 and noted that the meeting was the final meeting of the Committee calendar for the municipal year. It was agreed that the workplan be carried over into 2019/2020, but noted that it was subject to change

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dependent on the make-up of the Committee following Annual Council and the workplanning to be carried out by the membership of the Committee.

Members noted that consideration of the Placement Sufficiency Strategy remained outstanding and questioned Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services on its expected completion date. Mrs Booth advised that production of the Strategy had been delayed by the Ofsted Inspection and that it would be available in draft form for the next meeting of the Committee.

The outcomes of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy Scrutiny Review were also considered and it was noted that the majority of comments made by Members of the review had been incorporated into the final strategy. All three Scrutiny Committees had been consulted regarding the development of the Strategy as a cross-cutting issue, however, it had been determined that the Resilient Communities and Scrutiny Committee would be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Strategy going forward. Members commended the approach taken to the development of the Strategy and suggested it be used as a view of best practice for future Strategy development.

10 SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee considered the report on the piece of work carried out into the support provided to the Children's Services' workforce. It was reported that the process had been positive and had provided an additional point of view from front line staff on service provision and the support received. Members considered that, in light of earlier discussions regarding the Ofsted inspection of Children's Social Care Services, it would be useful for representatives of the Committee to meet with the Shadow Improvement Board on a regular basis.

The Committee agreed:

1. To note the outcomes of the piece of work on Supporting the Workforce.
2. To meet with the Shadow Improvement Board on a regular basis.

11 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted the date and time of the next meeting as Thursday, 20 June 2019, subject to confirmation at Annual Council.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.00 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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