

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL (CHILDREN) AND STATUTORY LEAD MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICE – COUNCILLOR GRAHAM CAIN

The 'People' area covers my portfolio and those of:

- Councillor Kathryn Benson (Schools, Education and Aspiration)

The full details of the portfolio areas can be found on the Council's website at
<https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Your-councillors/Executive-members.aspx>

Corporate Issues

I am mindful that significant time has passed since my last report in January. I therefore wish to provide Members with a comprehensive update on the work that has taken place since the OFSTED judgement on Children's Services earlier this year.

OFSTED/ Commissioner Update

As Members are aware, in response to the OFSTED findings the Department for Education appointed an independent Commissioner to assess our capacity to continue to drive improvements in social care. The Commissioner was appointed in March 2019 and under the direction from the Secretary of State has been working with the service for the past 12 weeks. The Commissioner and their team have been in Blackpool for sustained periods, meeting with leaders, managers, staff, partners and young people to gain an in-depth understanding of the current picture and the Council capacity for leading and delivering change.

The Commissioner will shortly make a recommendation on the future of Children's Services in Blackpool and share this with the Secretary of State. The outcome and recommendation will be formally reported to the Council when the Secretary of State has considered and made their decision. Alongside the work the Commissioner has undertaken to evaluate our leadership capacity for the long term, the service is supporting ongoing scrutiny and attention around progress toward improvement from both OFSTED, who will revisit for their first formal monitoring visit in late summer, and the Department for Education (DfE), who have a nominated intervention lead for Blackpool.

Delivery of our Improvement Plan

Following the publication of the OFSTED inspection report, the service has been working to a nine-month improvement plan, focused on the 11 key recommendations identified. The change management plan runs alongside the activity to support the Commissioner's enquiries. Having delivered on many of the operational actions that were committed to within the first

twelve weeks, the plan is now more strategic and is directed at ensuring that the scaffolding for long term sustained improvement is in place.

Recruitment and Retention

Our improvement plan has been supported by significant additional investment to recruit qualified social workers to the service. The plan has also led to the development of a new service design, which builds on the work already underway prior to the inspection to address concerns about our service to children and families. There is a recruitment campaign running across social media, in sector-focused publications and we have an incentive scheme for staff for introducing friends who go on to work with us. So far, 33 new appointments have been made to permanent qualified roles; furthermore, vacancies and long-term absences in essential roles are now covered by agency staff to ensure that teams are resilient to the current demand.

Key to the delivery of a different way of working more family focused and with more purposeful direct work to support families through change is having the right number of experienced and confident workers in the right places. A demand management plan has been developed, which uses a tool coproduced with Dartington Social Research Lab to ensure resource is deployed effectively to achieve the most impact on outcomes.

We are assured that commitment from the workforce is high. We have not seen significant numbers of experienced staff leaving the service even though there is no doubt those caseloads are higher than we would like them to be now. A commitment to the workforce has been shared with all our staff and is part of our extensive recruitment campaign.

It is fair to say that finding the right staff to support our journey of improvement is a challenge and our teams have and will maintain high expectations for the quality of workers we employ to work with our children and families. It will take time and sustained attention to get to a position where we have the right balance of permanent and agency workers and where we can be confident that the quality of practice across the service is consistently good or better.

Performance in Children's Social Care

I would like to share with Members some key features of the current performance picture:

- Immediately following the inspection outcome the amount of new work for children's social care rose significantly. Over recent weeks, this demand has started to decrease, with lower numbers of referrals being taken by the Council and less child protection enquires being undertaken in April and May than in preceding months. It is usual for a poor inspection outcome to deliver a "shock" to a system in this way.
- Decreasing demand, together with additional investment in and reconfiguration how the front door of children's social care works, has now brought the front-end of the social care system into equilibrium. On average, the amount of work being completed on a weekly basis is at least equal to the new presenting issues that require social care assessment during that week.

- Investment in the service has ensured that the number of children on each social worker's caseload, while still higher than optimal levels for the effectiveness of social work intervention, are not excessively high.
- As at 14 June 2019, there were 579 children in our care.
- The presenting level of demand and referral, assessment and child protection activity being undertaken remains substantially higher than in any similar local authority. For example, the number of referrals taken by the service would need to fall by a further 25% to be close to the upper quartile rate of similar local authorities.
- Even though the total amount of incoming work is diminishing and the total number of children and young people open to Children's Social Care is starting to fall, the number of children in care and subject to child protection plans continues to rise. This is due partly to high numbers of children entering care and becoming subject to a child protection plan (compared to other similar local authorities, although not compared to previous Blackpool rates), but mainly because fewer children are leaving care or ceasing being subject to a child protection plan. In particular, over the past year there have been fewer children stepping down from child protection plans to become children in need or closing to children's social care entirely.
- Audit activity has been intensive since the inspection and has focused on supporting a learning culture, where staff are supported to recognise what good practice looks like and evidence of strong practice is recognised and shared as well as areas for development identified and actioned. Audit activity, which is externally moderated, is showing an improving picture over time. Where themes are emerging for practice development these are contributing to the priorities for action in the improvement plan.

Turning Analysis into Effective Service Design

Work continues to redesign the Council's approach to children's social care, with particular emphasis on enabling more direct work by social workers with children and families, supporting children to remain with their families wherever possible. We are also redoubling the focus of our work with partner agencies to ensure that children and families are effectively supported by inclusive mainstream services and therefore do not require more expensive, specialist services.

The message from comparative analysis of service data is clear: too often in Blackpool, across children's and young people's services and schools, support for children escalates towards specialist, statutory services. Blackpool has the highest levels of social care involvement in the country by a distance. In addition, we also have the highest proportion of students supported in alternative education (pupil referral units), or in special schools. We also have high numbers of first time entrants into the criminal justice system.

Given the level of need in the local population, we would expect to be higher than the national average in our use of specialist support services. However, we would not expect to be such a major outlier amongst other similarly deprived coastal areas. This is not a situation that has developed overnight and it reflects the decisions, behaviours and actions of the Council and its partners over years if not several decades. The Council, local schools, especially secondary schools, the police and health colleagues need to reconsider how we work best together to address the challenges faced by local children and families and to improve their outcomes. This work is underway and partnership improvement is a key objective for the Safeguarding Children's Board. New pan-Lancashire partnership arrangements are being developed, which will support a stronger approach to delivering change to common causes of concern with organisations who span the Lancashire footprint, such as the Police.

Youth Offending Team

In November 2018, the Youth Offending Service in Blackpool was inspected and found to be inadequate. The service has responded positively to the inspection outcomes and across the partnership, there has been significant positive change in support of an improved approach to coordinating and delivering support. There has been a refresh of the Youth Offending Service Board with a clear expectation of participation and engagement and consistency of attendance from members. There is a twelve-month partnership improvement plan, which is built around the new standards that have been introduced in the sector; each standard is owned by a senior leader from across the organisations who are key to effective service delivery including the Police, Local Authority and Probation. At our invitation, the Youth Justice Board provide an independent chair for the Executive and give an informed, but impartial, challenge to progress. A specialist Service Manager has been recruited and has now started in post. Other key posts are currently being recruited to which will support the management of and pace of change to deliver improved outcomes.

Transforming Services

Headstart: Young People Paving Their Way To A Brighter Future

Headstart is our five year £11m National Lottery Community Fund programme to deliver a whole-town approach to addressing the inequalities that affect young people and the wider community in relation to their mental health. The HeadStart team, comprising apprentices, young people and staff, alongside a range of community partners and organisations are catalysing Blackpool's 'Resilience Revolution', a grass roots movement that gives the whole community a chance to learn more about resilience, put it into practice in their daily lives and crucially, challenge the root causes of the challenges they face.

I am delighted to report that as part of the resilience revolution Talbot Road has been named as the country's first ever Resilience Pathway! Leading from Bickerstaffe Square to the Promenade, the pavement has been decorated with a series of hand-made paving stones. Each paving stone illustrates a resilient "move" – an idea or suggestion - to help young people, their families and friends find a sense of belonging, cope with any problems they may face and find out more about themselves and those around them. Together the 42 'moves' make up the

Resilience Framework, which is part of the wider Blackpool 'Resilience Revolution – a major initiative focused on looking at how to make challenging and stressful situations better for everyone and not just individuals.

Young people in the town conceived and designed the Blackpool's Resilience Pathway to provide a creative way to communicate their passion for building resilience and promote care for everyone within their community. The paving stones were moulded and produced in Amsterdam and laid by John Sisk & Son, the contractors managing the construction of the new tramway development on Talbot Road. A guide explaining the pathway is featured on prominent signage at both ends of the Pathway. The young people responsible for the project set up their own fundraising campaign to turn their idea into reality. With a mixture of donations, sponsored events, fundraising presentations outlining their vision, including one to over 100 members of Blackpool Business Leaders Group, they have funded what promises to be an eye-catching addition to the town.

Individuals are now signposted to a brand-new website, which went live on the official launch day, Tuesday 11 June. The website will provide a further breakdown of all 42 resilience moves and offers advice and guidance for the whole town. People will also find help to new links and read the weekly blog, co-produced by the young people of Blackpool.

Working with Partners

Early Years Development: Dad's Conference

I am pleased to report to Members that Blackpool Centre for Early Child Development (CECD) hosted a national Dad's conference on Monday 17 June, the day after Father's Day, to build on the messages of Men's Health Week. The conference focused on the importance of dads and male role models in early child development, families and wider community life. It also brought together leading national experts in the field of early child development including the conference's chair Professor Paul Ramchandani, University of Cambridge and Mark Williams, author of 'Daddy Blues', to provide a national and international perspective on the innovative work surrounding the role of dads and that of men's mental health and wellbeing.

The Blackpool CECD designed the event to bring together an audience of local and national practitioners and academics to discuss and find out more about what works for dads. The format included workshop sessions, which involved innovative dads' projects as well as a range of speakers. All five A Better Start (ABS) sites promoted the dads work taking place in their areas that are being established across the country, working towards improving family health and fitness, literacy and relationships. The Conference was free to anyone working in Blackpool or in any of the other ABS areas.

Blackpool Opportunity Area Programme

The Blackpool Opportunity Area Programme is a three year £6m social mobility programme, funded by the Department for Education and delivered through a local partnership. The programme is now reaching the end of the second year of delivery and I can share some highlights of progress against all three programme priorities below.

Priority 1: Raise attainment and progress in schools

- Primary to secondary transition. Town wide cross-phase curricular planning has now been undertaken, alongside common assessment systems, aiming to reduce the dip experienced in Key Stage 3. The project also funds activities to support transition, such as a transition week where all Year 6 pupils spend a week in secondary school.
- Reading project to enhance systematically the reading abilities of students in Key Stage 3. Research Lead training and Literacy and Leading Learning training has now been completed resulting in named leads within each school. Interventions are underway in all secondary schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRU's). Early progression impacts are anticipated following next baseline (post June/ July 2019).

Priority 2: Support for vulnerable children and families

- Team Around School. This project is designed to help keep children in mainstream education by providing inclusion and parental engagement workers to support secondary schools. The first cohort has now been identified, with 67 pupils currently being supported.

Priority 3: Improve advice and support for young people when moving between schools/ colleges and into work

- Post 16 Transition. This project provides additional advice on Post 16 course pathways to school leavers and parents/ carers alongside targeting students in five secondary schools who are capable of Level 3 qualifications, but are currently under achieving. Led by Blackpool Sixth Form College and Blackpool and the Fylde College, the Post 16 pathways publication is now available and all schools have been supported with GCSE skills sessions.
- Start Blackpool is a bespoke careers platform to promote future local employment opportunities to school and college leavers. The prototype is being piloted in three secondary schools and businesses are being engaged to promote opportunities ready for the full launch September 2019.