

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2020**

Present:

Councillor Hugo (in the Chair)

Councillors

Clapham	Mitchell	Stansfield
Critchley	Owen	Wing

Dr Elaine Allen, Roman Catholic Co-opted Member

Ms Helen Sage, Diocesan Co-opted Member

In Attendance:

Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools, Education and Aspiration

Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council (Children)

Councillor Maxine Callow JP, Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Board

Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services

Ms Moya Foster, Head of Targeted Intervention Services

Ms Kara Haskayne, Head of Safeguarding and Principal Social Worker

Ms Jeanette Richards, Assistant Director of Children's Services

Mrs Elaine Ireland, Senior Democratic Governance Advisor

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Stansfield declared a personal interest in Item 5 'Executive and Cabinet Member Decisions' and Item 6 'Youth Offending Team Improvement', the nature of the interest being that he was employed by a residential children's home.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY 2020

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting held on 13 February 2020 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record subject to the following amendment: Councillor Maxine Callow's attendance at the meeting as Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Board to be recorded.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Committee noted that there were no applications to speak by members of the public on this occasion.

4 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan, September to December 2020 relating to the portfolio of the Leader of the Council (Children) and the Cabinet Member for Schools, Education and Aspiration. Members noted that the Forward Plan contained one decision relevant to the Committee: 'To progress the acquisition of the former Job Centre Plus building at 43 Queens Street to accommodate Children's Services in a single location, in

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2020**

line with the preferred delivery model following the Ofsted review.'

Members questioned how the proposed purchase of the building was progressing and whether an alternative plan had been formulated in the event of the purchase not being successful. Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council (Children) informed the Committee that the property had not reached its reserve price when auctioned for sale and the Council would continue negotiations with the vendor to attempt to secure the property for an appropriate price. Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services confirmed that negotiations were still ongoing and that an alternative venue for Children's Services had not been identified.

5 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

The Committee noted that three Executive decisions had been taken within the remit of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee since the previous meeting.

Members asked a number of questions pertaining to EX12/2020 'Review of Children's Home Provision' and in response Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council (Children) clarified that the permanent closure of the residential provision at 331 Bispham Road was as a result of the previous facility not adequately meeting the needs of the children housed there. The property, Councillor Williams explained, was still empty and being maintained by Property Services until such a time as a suitable alternative use had been identified. In response to further questions regarding the possibility of whether the premises could potentially be used by a privately owned company to house children from outside Blackpool, Councillor Williams stated that there was no intention for this outcome as the building was not suitable for such a use. Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services clarified that six-bedded units were not suitable to meet the needs of children and that more homely, smaller units were required.

Councillor Mrs Callow, in her capacity as Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Board stated that residents living in the vicinity of residential children's homes felt abandoned by the Council regarding their concerns and complaints of antisocial behaviour in the properties. A further question was asked by the Committee on whether the Council planned to create its own smaller residential children's homes or if the intention was for private companies to manage them. Councillor Williams explained that the long-term plan was for the future development of more suitable options for Blackpool's children other than placement within residential children's homes, such as fostering and adoption, reminding Members that as Corporate Parents it was everyone's role to help create and support a positive culture around the needs of our Looked After Children and their future aspirations and potential.

The Committee sought further details of EX16/2020 'Implementation of the Lancashire and Blackpool Regional Adoption Agency'. The Committee raised concerns that the relocation of the adoption agency may cause barriers to Blackpool residents who wanted to access its services. Councillor Williams explained that although the central office would be located in Preston, an outreach service to Blackpool had been implemented. Mrs Booth assured Members that the needs of Blackpool would be included in the focus of the agency and that in her position as Chair of the adoption panel she would be ensuring that Blackpool was equally represented.

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2020**

Clarification was requested around EX31/2020 'Updated Children's Services Medium Term Financial Strategy' and Mrs Jeanette Richards, Assistant Director of Children's Services provided further details of the therapeutic children's home project which would be receiving funding of £1.2 million per year for two years. The Committee was informed that the project aimed to reduce the need for residential children's placements via the use of specialist foster placements and formed part of an ambitious five-year strategy to reduce spending in Children's Social Care by 33 per cent.

6 YOUTH OFFENDING TEAM IMPROVEMENT

Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services updated the Committee on the progress of the Blackpool Youth Justice Service Improvement Plan theme areas of 'Out of Court' and 'In Court'. She informed Members that a re-inspection of the service had been due in July 2020 but that this had been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The inspectorate had since recommenced inspections and Mrs Booth anticipated that Blackpool Youth Offending Team (YOT) would be re-inspected imminently.

Members reviewed the figures provided for youth custody rates, with the fall in rates for Blackpool noted and commended. Clarification was sought on the term 'bounce backs', which Ms Moya Foster, Head of Targeted Intervention Services explained was a term which referred to youths who went straight into the court system without first entering the YOT system and who thereby bypassed the opportunity for suitable interventions. She further explained that the issue of 'bounce backs' had arisen largely as a result of the reduced youth courts because of Covid-19 and it was therefore hoped to be a temporary occurrence.

The Committee noted that incidents of antisocial behaviour by young people were widely reported and whilst the decriminalisation of young people was supported, Members asked what was being done to reassure the victims of such behaviour. Ms Foster informed the Committee that work around tackling antisocial behaviour was underway along with the police and the community safety partnership in a bid to improve community cohesion. Restorative Justice conferences were in place as well as support from the police to help victims and the provision of appropriate support for the young people and their families.

With regards to the Peer Review completed in February 2020, Members questioned which resulting recommendations had been fully implemented. Ms Foster outlined a number of areas where improvements had been applied, particularly around the service's governance arrangements. In addition, visits had been made to YOT services around the country which had been rated as outstanding in order to gather examples of good practice.

The Committee requested if Member representation from the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee could be made on the dedicated Blackpool Out of Court Disposal Panel which was in the process of being formulated, in order that updates could be provided to the rest of the Committee. Mrs Booth responded that she would need to seek advice on the governance arrangements of the panel and would notify the Committee of the outcome.

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2020**

The pleasing progress and hard work of the Youth Offending Team was recognised by the Committee and Members expressed thanks to all those involved in the improvement journey.

The Committee agreed: That the full Peer Review report be requested for circulation to Committee Members.

7 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE - RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The Committee considered an update of Children's Social Care Improvement in relation to the recruitment and retention of Children's Social Care staff. Ms Kara Haskayne, Head of Safeguarding and Principal Social Worker provided a summary of the measures in place aimed at improving workforce capacity within Children's Social Care as well as outlining the permanent vacancies which had been successfully filled.

The Committee noted the relatively high number of leavers from the service and questioned whether reasons for leaving had been ascertained via the use of exit interviews. Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services reported that retention of social work staff, particularly in relation to Children's Social Care, was a regional and national problem and that Blackpool had been performing favourably in comparison to other areas. With regards to specific reasons for leaving the service, Ms Haskayne informed the Committee that some leavers were due to personal reasons such as relocation to another part of the country, whilst others were as a result of the desire to take the experience they had gained at Blackpool to another authority.

A question was raised regarding the recruitment costs to the service, with Mrs Booth confirming that the recruitment drive was within the agreed allocated staffing budget.

Ms Haskayne reiterated that the recruitment of suitable Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) candidates was integral to the long term improvement journey of the service and outlined the programme in place to guide and support the ASYE employees through their journey of progression, with a support package in place to encourage them to remain at the Authority once fully qualified.

The teaching partnership programme being undertaken in collaboration with universities was explained to the Committee, with Ms Haskayne reporting that the programme aimed to ensure that students were being adequately prepared for the reality of the job, as well as her involvement on the Curriculum Panel to steer the direction of curriculum changes to ensure a high quality of training. In addition, Ms Haskayne informed the Committee that an accredited course was being developed in conjunction with the University of Central Lancashire, aimed at supporting more experienced social workers to become accredited Practice Educators. She explained that this would improve the Council's ability to provide student placements and increase recruitment possibilities. Ms Haskayne informed Members that the post-qualifying development of the workforce would also support experienced social worker retention and the Council's future leadership sufficiency.

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2020**

8 INCLUSION IN EDUCATION SCRUTINY REVIEW FINAL REPORT

Councillor Stansfield, as Lead Member of the Scrutiny review of Inclusion in Education expressed thanks to the members of the working group for their valuable input, as well as to the Council Officers and Headteachers for their time and contributions.

Further review of the recommendations was agreed between Councillor Benson as Cabinet Member for Schools, Education and Aspiration, Councillor Stansfield and Mr Paul Turner, Head of Schools Standards, Safeguarding and Inclusion, with the report then to be considered by the Executive.

The Committee agreed: To approve the Inclusion in Education Scrutiny report for submission to the Executive.

9 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN 2020-2021

The Committee reviewed the contents of the Workplan for 2020/2021 as well as considering the proposed scoping document for the Schools' Responses to Covid-19 scrutiny review.

Within the Implementation of Recommendations/Actions table, Members noted that the provision of key performance data in relation to A Better Start appeared to be overdue and requested that the data be provided as soon as possible. Mrs Diane Booth, Head of Children's Services advised that she would request the information from Ms Merle Davies, Director of the Blackpool Centre for Early Child Development. Members also requested that the proposed scrutiny review of A Better Start be prioritised within the Workplan.

The Committee agreed:

1. To approve the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee Workplan for 2020/2021;
2. To approve the Schools' Responses to Covid-19 Review Scoping Document.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as Thursday 19 November 2020, commencing at 6pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.10pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
Elaine Ireland, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser
Tel: 01253 477255, E-mail: Elaine.ireland@blackpool.gov.uk