

Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee Informal Meeting 22 March 2021

Literacy for Life Strategy Review Meeting

Attendance

Cllr Don Clapham
Cllr Kim Critchley
Cllr Jane Hugo
Cllr Martin Mitchell
Cllr Andrew Stansfield
Cllr John Wing
Ms Helen Sage

Representatives of the Children and Young People's (CYP) Scrutiny Committee attended a briefing session with Mr Paul Turner, Head of School Standards, Safeguarding and Inclusion to review the amended draft of the Literacy for Life Strategy. Mr Turner advised that he was still in the process of making additions to the strategy based on feedback received and he anticipated the completed version of the strategy to be available for final review by mid-April.

Consideration was given to the list of suggestions which had been emailed to Mr Turner by Ms Helen Sage. Mr Turner addressed each in turn and thanked Ms Sage for her input and comments, agreeing in the most part to include her suggested amendments. Ms Sage was in agreement with Mr Turner's assertion of the importance of avoiding making the document too operational in content. He agreed that KS4 required additional focus within the strategy and was in the process of adding further information to this effect. With regards to Ms Sages' request that special schools be included, Mr Turner reported that he had received similar feedback from colleagues within Health Services and was working with them to add a relevant section to address this area.

With regards to the Committee's previous suggestion of the inclusion of greater links to Blackpool Better Start and their work with Early Years, Mr Turner confirmed that he had met with Ms Merle Davies, Centre for Early Child Development Director and Ms Clare Law, Centre for Early Child Development Deputy Director and they were in discussions on how best to weave their Early Years support work into the strategy.

Members questioned how Councillors could help to support parents within their wards to encourage reading and help address issues of adult literacy. Mr Turner reported that the Department for Education's Opportunity Area was funding a town-wide Literacy Officer and the intention was for them to approach ward Councillors to seek suggestions and support on how best to improve literacy across the town. He explained that in order to ensure that any interventions were suitable for Blackpool's specific needs, Councillors' input and guidance would be a valuable tool.

Reference within the strategy to Literary Canons was noted and further explanation requested of its meaning. Mr Turner described a Literary Canon as being a selection of books given to children during their time within education as selected by their school. It would be a selected reading list of a range of genres deemed to be good quality and age appropriate reading. The Committee discussed the potential drawbacks of imposing specific reading material onto pupils, with the risk of disengagement being raised as a concern and the importance of encouraging a love of reading being noted. Members requested that consideration be given to asking young people what their reading recommendations would be and for these to be included within the strategy.

In response to a question of what GL stood for within the document, Mr Turner advised that this was essentially a brand name for a company who provided Cognitive Ability Tests and he agreed to add this explanation to the strategy's glossary for clarity.

Members requested that consideration be given to the choice of photographs used within the strategy, noting that the current images reflected families with older parents and questioned whether this was reflective of Blackpool families. Mr Turner agreed that more suitable replacements would be identified and included. Committee Members also requested that the images and language used within the strategy reflected the diverse population of the town.

Following a question on whether schools had sufficient resources to provide enough good quality reading material for pupils, Mr Turner advised that whilst in previous years funding may have been an issue this was no longer the case. However, he reported that space within schools to provide sufficiently large library areas was an issue and that some schools struggled to find space to accommodate the necessary volumes of books as well as funding to employ a dedicated librarian.

With regards to the layout of the revised version of the strategy, Mr Turner noted that a number of the charts and tables previously included within the body of the document had now been moved to the appendices for ease of reference. In addition he advised that consultation with Blackpool's young people would be undertaken via the JustUz group and Headstart.

It was agreed:

1. That as part of the consultation with young people consideration be given to asking them what their reading recommendations would be and for these to be included within the strategy;
2. That an explanation of GL be added to the glossary;
3. That a link to the Early Years work undertaken by Blackpool Better Start be incorporated into the strategy;
4. That the images and language used within the strategy should reflect the diverse population of the town with consideration being given to the age of parents;
5. That Mr Turner would circulate to Committee Members the updated version of the strategy showing marked/highlighted changes for their comments;

6. That following approval by the Corporate Leadership Team, the finalised version of the strategy would be considered by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in April 2021 before consideration by the Executive.