

**MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING - THURSDAY, 26
JANUARY 2017**

Present:

Councillor D Coleman (in the Chair)

Councillors

Collett	O'Hara	Scott	T Williams
Mitchell	Owen	Stansfield	

Mrs Frances McErlane, Co-optee (Parent Governor)

In Attendance:

Councillor Graham Cain, Cabinet Secretary (Resilient Communities)
Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning
Councillor Maria Kirkland, Cabinet Member for Third Sector Engagement and Leisure Services

Mr Neil Jack, Chief Executive
Ms Delyth Curtis, Director of People
Ms Amanda Hatton, Deputy Director of People
Mr Graham Cowley, Vice Chairman of Lancashire Economic Partnership
Ms Merle Davies, Director for Blackpool Centre for Early Child Development
Mr Simon Fisher, Service Manager, Children's Social Care
Ms Moya Foster, Senior Service Manager, Families in Need
Mr Andrew Lowe, Youth Offending Team Manager
Mr Steve Sienkiewicz, Clerk to the Committee.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 8 DECEMBER 2016

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting held on 8 December 2016 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Committee noted that there were no applications from members of the public to speak at the meeting.

4 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

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The Committee considered the Executive and Cabinet Member decisions within its remit, taken since the last meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Cain, Cabinet Secretary (Resilient Communities) responded to questions from the Committee about decision no. EX/56/2016 'Pan-Lancashire Health and Wellbeing Governance Arrangements'. He confirmed that future reports on the Health and Wellbeing Board would be directed to the Health Scrutiny Committee. He added that Blackpool would form part of the pan-Lancashire Health and Wellbeing Board, underneath which would be five health and wellbeing partnerships. Blackpool would be a member of the Fylde Coast Partnership arrangement.

The Committee expressed concerns that the local impact of health economy arrangements would be reduced as a result of the new Health and Wellbeing Board plans. Councillor Cain explained that meetings had taken place with the current Health and Wellbeing Board Chairmen and there had been consistent dialogue between the various boards. He agreed to supply further detailed information to the Committee Members via email.

In connection with decision no. EX/58/2016 'Domestic Abuse and Interpersonal Violence Partnership Strategy 2016/2020', Councillor Cain confirmed that regular updates would be provided to the Resilient Communities Scrutiny Committee going forward.

The Committee agreed to note the Executive and Cabinet Member decisions.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the item contained within the Forward Plan, January 2017 – April 2017, that related to the portfolio of the Cabinet Secretary.

The Committee questioned whether decision ref. 7/2016 'Headstart Round Three Funding Bid Result and Future Action' should still be on the Forward Plan. Councillor Cain explained that the funding arrangements and future actions were now in place and he believed the item should no longer appear on the Forward Plan. He did however recommend that it be placed on the future workplan for the Resilient Communities Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee agreed to note the Forward Plan item and to query with Democratic Governance why it was still appearing on the Forward Plan.

6 CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW REPORT

The Committee considered a report which provided an overview of the recent work undertaken by the Children's Services department, together with an update on the progress and implementation of developments within the area.

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The report was introduced by Mrs Curtis, Director of People and Councillor Cain, Cabinet Secretary (Resilient Communities), who responded to questions from the Committee on the content of the report.

The Committee expressed its praise for the statistics reported in relation to the work carried out by Connexions and the Virtual School, which taken collectively amounted to approximately 60% of the 16-24 year old looked after children finding either employment, further training or volunteering opportunities during the 2016/17 academic year. Members questioned what became of the 40% that were outside of those statistics, to which Mrs Curtis confirmed they were still tracked and agreed to provide a more detailed report to the Committee on the outcomes at a future meeting.

With regards to High Needs Block Funding, the report suggested that the proposed funding figures for each local authority would mean that Blackpool's funding would not be increased, despite a rising need within the town. Responding to questions from the Committee, Mrs Curtis confirmed that situation, explaining that the initial feedback received indicated that Blackpool did not meet the criteria for funding increase. She further explained that this did not necessarily mean that Blackpool would lose out, due to a funding cap that was in place.

The Committee raised questions about the work of the School Improvement Board, specifically about work being undertaken to improve the statistics that indicated a big dropout rate between school years 6 and 7. Mrs Curtis acknowledged that the figures were challenging and spoke of the pilot pieces of work underway with a view to improving the situation. These included various initiatives underway to work closely with the children involved and also the carry over of some teachers that would transition from years 6 to 7 at the same time as the pupils to maintain a degree of continuity. Councillor Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning added that she had recently attended a meeting of the School Improvement Board, where a great deal of discussion had taken place around transition, the results of which were encouraging.

The Committee asked for more information on the bid for the special free school which had been submitted to the Department for Education (DfE), to provide 48 places for pupils aged 10-16 years with social, emotional and mental health needs. Mrs Curtis explained that following submission of the bid, the Department for Education had responded by requesting more information, together with a feasibility report on possible site locations. This information was currently being prepared, with options on sites also being discussed.

In connection with the section of the report on Inspections, Members asked for more details on the Spire Academy, which was reported as requiring improvement. Mrs Curtis pointed out that whilst the academy was outside of the direct influence of the Council, a full and detailed report was available to access on the Ofsted website.

Mr Jack, Chief Executive, updated the Committee concerning the recruitment arrangements for the position of Director of Children's Services and Deputy Director of Children's Services, both of which would become vacant in the near future. He confirmed that following a

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rigorous process, an appointment had been made to the Director position and that the formal reference process was now being undertaken. Due to the notice period that would apply, it would be necessary to apply interim arrangements and Mr Jack confirmed the details that had been put in place with regards to this. He also confirmed the interim arrangements that would be applied in relation to the Deputy Director position.

Mr Cowley, Vice-Chairman of the Lancashire Economic Partnership, attended the meeting to report on progress in relation to the New Opportunities Area. The Committee was informed that Blackpool had been one of six areas selected for the scheme, to receive funding to promote social mobility, supporting schools and links with employers. Mr Cowley reported that plans were being developed to ensure that pupils would get the best start in life, regardless of background. These included engaging in dialogue with colleagues from the Department for Education to determine required outcomes, as well as mapping out with the School Improvement Board as to what was already happening. The intention was for the plans to be finalised by the end of March 2017.

Responding to questions from the Committee, Mr Cowley confirmed that Blackpool would receive £6m of funding in relation to the scheme. The Committee raised concerns about the amount of funding that might be taken up in administration and staffing arrangements. Mr Cowley assured the Committee that everyone involved was keen to avoid bureaucracy and that as much money as possible would go to the route of the issue. He added that all monies would be invested in an evidence based way and that lots of data was available to support the planned initiatives. In connection with data sharing with the other areas involved in the scheme, Mr Cowley confirmed that in terms of demographic data, Blackpool was closely linked with Oldham, although acknowledged that Blackpool had its own unique problems. He added that the Department for Education would be sharing information across all of the six areas.

Members asked about the age range for eligibility for the scheme and Mr Cowley confirmed that this would be from pre-school early years, through to early adulthood. Asked which of the partner bodies would ultimately be responsible for the project, he confirmed that a senior civil servant would be taking ultimate responsibility, although locally a network of partnership initiatives would be key to its success. Mr Jack confirmed that the Council would be closely involved and would be the formal accountable body responsible for the project's finances.

Ms Foster, Senior Service Manager, Families in Need and Mr Lowe, Youth Offending Team Manager presented the Committee with an update regarding the Vulnerable Adolescent Hub, the aim of which was to integrate services and systems to provide better support for vulnerable young people and to impact positively on looked after children. Ms Foster reported that good progress was now being made, with the management structure having been agreed and appointed to, and a change management team was now in place to ensure implementation and delivery. A full implementation plan was being worked on with an anticipated start date of April 2017. It was anticipated that by bringing five to six services together, duplication would be reduced and young people would have a single point of

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contact and access. The Committee requested a further update be provided upon implementation of the project.

Ms Davis, Director for Blackpool Centre for Early Child Development, then presented the Committee with an update on the PAUSE project. It was reported that the project had been commissioned by the NSPCC via the Better Start Programme to carry out a detailed data analysis of repeat removals of children into care in Blackpool, with a view to securing funding locally to set up a Pause Practice. It was explained that PAUSE was designed to offer long term contraception, as well as mental health, drug and alcohol interventions to women who were most at risk at having children taken into care. It was reported that between 2013 and 2016, of the 422 women in Blackpool who had children removed, 104 would now be assessed as meeting the PAUSE criteria, for which excellent evidence based outcomes were predicted, based upon a similar scheme in place in Hackney.

Ms Davies responded to a number of questions from the Committee. In doing so, she confirmed that the scheme was aimed squarely at pregnant women and therefore, men were not included directly in the scope. Members discussed the generational failures that appeared to occur time and again within the same family units. Ms Davies pointed out that the various programmes of the scheme would help to break that cycle. She added that the continuous support offered by the staff during the project was also anticipated to make a difference.

The Committee asked about the funding arrangements for the PAUSE project. Councillor Cain confirmed that out of the £380,000 overall cost, £200,000 would be provided via Council funding, with the remainder coming from other funding sources. It was anticipated that the cost of the scheme, based upon its scoped success criteria would ultimately lead to financial savings within Children's Services.

Members discussed the success of the similar project in Hackney, but expressed concern that projects which work in other areas, do not necessarily map across elsewhere. Mr Jack responded by explaining that the issues in Blackpool that would be focussed on by PAUSE were the same as those in Hackney and that the project was aimed at the same cohort. Therefore, there was every confidence that the project would be a success.

The final section of the Children's Services report on special projects considered by the Committee was in connection with the Edge of Care model and was presented by Mr. Fisher, Service Manager, Children's Social Care. He explained that the Argosy Children's Home was now nearing the end of a significant service redesign, after which it would become a four bedded respite unit for 11-17 year olds who were considered to be at risk of coming into care. The aim of the new model would be to prevent placements at home breaking down and thus to reduce the risk of those children being admitted into the full time care system. Mr Fisher explained that referrals would be planned and considered by a panel for suitability and the aim was for the project to commence in April 2017.

Responding to questions from the Committee, Mr Fisher explained that part of the assessment criteria would be to assess both the child and family circumstances, which

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would define the work that was needed in connection with both the family and the individual child. The Committee asked about the possibility of physical interventions within the home, such as tidying up garden space in order to improve the immediate family environment. Mr Fisher explained that the Edge of Care model was based upon resilience therapy, of which physical interventions would form a part. The model would work closely with Headstart to promote the use of volunteers to undertake physical works where this was deemed appropriate.

The Committee expressed its concern about the high numbers of looked after children in Blackpool, along with the associated costs. Mrs Curtis and Mr Jack explained that the plan was to reduce the current numbers of around 500 to 450 within three years and that those reductions in numbers would largely depend on the success of the initiatives that had been reported upon during the current Committee meeting.

The Committee discussed the range of ages of the children in care and Mrs Curtis agreed to provide more information on the breakdown of ages at a future meeting. A discussion also took place about the possible benefits of early intervention social work within schools. Mrs Curtis explained that a pilot scheme was currently underway with the safeguarding boards where social workers were having conversations with schools about ways of future integration and interventions. The Headstart programme also had a direct link into social care.

The Committee agreed:

1. To note the report.
2. To request a more detailed report on the outcomes of the 16-24 year olds who were outside of the success criteria for the Connexions and Virtual School projects.
3. To request an early update report on progress relating to the New Opportunities Area, the Vulnerable Adolescent Hub, The PAUSE project and the Edge of Care model as soon as the projects had gone live.
4. To request a more detailed report on the age ranges of children in care at a future meeting.

Background papers: None.

7 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee considered its Workplan for the remainder of the current Municipal Year and the Chairman invited suggestions from Committee Members as to possible Workplan items.

Councillor Owen referred to a report in the Health Journal, dated 23 January 2017, claiming that elderly people being looked after in their own homes were being forced into care by Clinical Commissioning Groups (of which Blackpool was one of those cited) because of a 40% rise in fees for home care.

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The Committee agreed that the matter should be investigated further and that it would be a suitable topic for scrutiny, possibly to be undertaken jointly with the Health Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee agreed:

1. To note the Workplan and scrutiny recommendations report.
2. To request that the Scrutiny Manager obtains more information on the report referred to by Councillor Owen, with a view to determining the suitability for the allocation of work to a scrutiny committee.

Background papers: None.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee agreed to note the date of the next meeting as Thursday 9 March 2017, at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 19:40)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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