

Report to:	RESILIENT COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Relevant Officer:	Delyth Curtis, Director of People
Date of Meeting	4 February 2016

CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT REPORT

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 To inform scrutiny of the work undertaken by Children's Services on a day to day basis and to update on the progress and implementation of developments within the area to allow effective scrutiny of services.

2.0 Recommendations:

- 2.1 To note the contents of the report and to ensure that current work continues to meet statutory obligations and that work to prepare for external inspections continues.
- 2.2 To assist the Council to continue to meet statutory monitoring, challenge and support obligations.
- 2.3 To work with schools to support improvement and preparation for external scrutiny and support the work of the Blackpool Challenge Board in order to improve the progress and attainment of Blackpool Children especially at KS3 and KS4

3.0 Reasons for recommendations:

- 3.1 For Members of the Scrutiny Committee to be fully informed as to the day to day work of the Children's Services Directorate to allow effective scrutiny and have assurance that Blackpool is continuing to meet its statutory obligations for future inspection requirements. The LA remains retains a statutory responsibility to monitor all schools in order to support improvement and raise the attainment and progress for all children in the Local Authority Area.

- 3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No
- 3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

Services are subject to national and statutory frameworks.

4.0 Council Priority:

4.1 The relevant Council Priority is Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience.

5.0 Update Reports

5.1 School Improvement Processes

The School Improvement team has carried out Autumn Term visits to maintained primary and special schools, which followed on from categorisation at the beginning of the autumn term and provided an opportunity for school priorities to be challenged and supported appropriately from a Local Authority perspective.

At the beginning of this term, School Improvement carried out an informal review of existing school categories to consider whether any new evidence would impact upon the category agreed last term. Where this may have been a consideration, a further meeting between School Improvement and both the Headteacher and Chair of Governors to carry out a joint evaluation would have been scheduled. The outcome of this desktop suggests that the categories agreed in the autumn term will remain the same until the exercise is carried out again in the summer term.

5.2 School Inspection Outcomes

HMI Monitoring Visits:

- **Montgomery Academy** received a HMI Monitoring Visit on 8th December. The full report has now been published. The outcome of this visit suggested that: 'leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of Special Measures'.
- **South Shore Academy** received a HMI Monitoring Visit on 1st December. The full report has now been published. The outcomes of this visit suggested that: 'leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of Special Measures' and that 'the Trust's Statement of Action was fit for purpose' and the 'Academy's improvement plan was fit for purpose'. In addition, the report states that 'the academy sponsor and the Local Authority are working together effectively to support the academy'.

Full Inspections:

There has only been one inspection carried out under the new framework to date, which is:

- **St John's C of E Primary School.** The report has now been published. The outcomes of this visit suggests: 'The school continues to be good'.

5.3 Attendance

Comparisons using the live Education Management System's data for Blackpool schools demonstrates that attendance at half term 2 (Christmas) was better than the previous year at the same point for primary and secondary. For special schools this was not the case. Due to the governmental changes to persistent absence (PA), the threshold comparisons for this area need to be treated with caution. Blackpool continues to focus on narrowing the gap between local and national data.

Clarity is in place regarding the core duties that help the council meet the statutory requirements and the buy-back and pupil welfare service offer is thriving. The service specification for next years buy back is completed and available to schools. Increased use of initiatives to deal with attendance have been noted as more schools begin to use Penalty Notices, following a period of notification to parents through school newsletters and policies. Higher expectations around attendance are putting pressure on the need for medical clarification resulting in more requests to health colleagues. Work will continue to try and find effective solutions and good working together to make best use of resources for all agencies.

5.4 Early Years – Ofsted Inspections

Six inspection reports have been published since the last report to Committee, three childminders and three full day care settings. All three childminders and two of the settings were judged to be Good; one setting has improved from their previous grading of Requires Improvement. Unfortunately the third setting was found to require improvement. This was their first inspection since they registered, and we will be meeting with the registered provider in order to put together an action and support plan to secure the necessary improvements.

Based on published reports, the overall percentage of settings and childminders with Ofsted gradings of good or outstanding is 88.7%, with 92% of childminders and 84.2% of group childcare settings including registered out of school clubs. Group childcare provision for our youngest children is of higher quality, with 88.5% of full day and sessional care for under 5s being judged as good or outstanding. This compares to national figures (as at 31 August 2015, which is the most recent data available) of 85% overall, 84% of childminders, and 86% of group settings (this overall national figure also includes childcare on domestic premises, of which we

have none in Blackpool).

5.5 Early Help

The Children’s Centres are increasing their early help offer through the delivery of BetterStart services. One area of work under consideration is a Pause project. This programme aims to reduce the volume of babies coming into the care system by providing intensive support pre pregnancy to high risk parents. We currently have 82 unborn babies open to services and have significant numbers of families where multiple babies are removed in succession. National research published in December 2015 indicated 13,248 babies were subject to care proceedings at birth or soon afterwards from 2007—2014, of which nearly 50 % linked to “repeat mothers” and around a third linked to mothers who were teenagers at the time of their first baby.

New findings from Lancaster University demonstrate that one in four women who have already had a child taken into care will have further children removed from them by the Family Court. When the mother is a teenager, this becomes a one-in-three chance.

Pause works with women who have experienced, or are at risk of, repeat removals of children from their care. Through an intense programme of support, it aims to break this cycle and give women the opportunity to reflect, tackle destructive patterns of behaviour, and to develop new skills and responses that can help them create a more positive future.

Some initial outcomes from Hackney Pause

There have been *no pregnancies* in the **18 month** pilot period

10 women supported to secure stable housing

7 women identified and supported into mental health services

8 supported into the Domestic Violence team

5 women supported to pursue volunteer work

2 started part time work

3 received support to work on a CV

1 started a business plan with the Prince’s Trust

8 women supported into literacy, numeracy and ICT assessments

4 women have re-engaged in letter box contact with existing children

12 women have been given one-to-one support post-permanency

Financial modelling from the pilot projects suggest that 100 women, with a similar profile to those currently on Pause, over a 5 year period with no intervention, could potentially have 264 children removed into care at a cost of almost £20million. These are primarily the costs of taking the 264 children into care and do not account for other associated costs. Pause cost avoidance for this cohort is estimated to be £10,519,075. Given the numbers of unborns currently in Blackpool it is likely that

significant savings can be made here.

They are also offering services to significant numbers of those in greatest need, 67% of those accessing the centres are open to children's social care.

5.6 Families in Need Service

The Families In Need (FIN) Service is currently working with high numbers of cases, in excess of 1,800 children in 518 families. A commissioning Review completed in 2015 recommended that FIN work with 74 High intensity cases and 350 medium intensity cases at any time to provide a service that was value for money. Demand has far outweighed this and our delivery model has been adapted. Staff work out of hours, when families most require additional support ensuring that the delivery model is efficient and effective.

The team utilise a stepdown model with all cases closely monitored to ensure that professionals working in community based settings take ownership of cases as soon as that case no longer requires level 3 support. In the period 1st October 2015- 31st December 2015, 239 children were successfully stepped down to be supported by schools/ health visitors etc.

A substantial resource is provided to assist Children's Social care with cases where children are at risk of becoming looked after. The team is currently providing very intensive support to 54 children who are high risk. At the time of writing these children are able to remain safely at home due to this support.

The team is currently working with 19 children as part of a reunification from care approach. All of these children are being successfully maintained in the community. The NSPCC estimates that there is a current average annual cost for each child that returns back into care from home of £61,614, compared with an average annual cost of supporting a child to return home of just over **£5,627**.

5.7 Children's Social Care

Caseloads in both duty and safeguarding teams are becoming more manageable (average of 20). Referral rates have plateaued and are significantly lower than previous years. However, the complexity of work remains high and the number of section 47s (child protection enquiries) has increased which suggests what comes through front the door is more complex. However, the number of initial conferences has also plateaued and the number of children on a plan per 10,000 has once again reduced, 355 in March 2015 to 327 in October 2015. The reduction in rates of second plans suggests that the decrease in numbers on a plan is not caused by inappropriate step down.

Looked After numbers continued in the general downward trend (in October, 439) however, in recent weeks there has been a significant spike (up to 457) this is due to the need to bring a large family of children into the system and a number of babies requiring our care. The recent changes in case law, specifically the changes to section 20 (voluntary accommodation, which encourage a move away from this way of working, are likely to see an increase in care proceedings with the associated impact on budget resources and staff time.

Staffing in the duty and assessment teams and Awaken has improved significantly with only one vacancy now in place and permanent staff taking over from agency. The safeguarding (long term teams) have currently got vacancies and a high level of sickness. The sickness is not stress related and there is not a pattern to it and we are proactively managing this whilst back filling with agency staff as appropriate and are currently out to advert for more experienced social workers.

Within the 'Our Children' teams caseloads are high, the over 12 team is under review as part of the adolescent hub and we are looking at possible changes in transfer points between teams to ensure caseloads are more realistic.

Placement stability over all remains at a similar level however we continue to have a small group of young people who are extremely difficult to place and highly costly. This is usually due to national lack of resources to meet the needs of young people with very challenging behaviour and the need for mental health provision but who do not meet clinical threshold for tier 4. As a service we are reviewing our quality assurance processes to move away from a tick box audit approach to a focus on outcomes and a deeper understanding of issues. Therefore I have asked the service manager for Independent Reviewing Officers to review the support and disruption meeting process to ensure where placements look vulnerable we are able to intervene as soon as possible to manage and prevent breakdown.

Performance around health checks for our children has dipped; we need to take a similar robust approach to that of Personal Education Plans (PEPS), current performance 94.3%, and have asked the new permanence officer to robustly track health checks.

5.8 **Safeguarding**

Timeliness remains high which is to be expected in light of the significant reduction in numbers on Child Protection plans. Numbers of children participating in reviews also remains high and we are investigating the use of technology to enhance this further.

Permanence planning at second review although improving is still too low, more work is being undertaken to clarify and agree what constitutes a permanence plan,

for example placement with parents and section 20 are not plans for permanence. The new permanence officer will ensure robust tracking and challenge of plans is in place.

The issues resolution process has also been reviewed to shift its focus from data and information recording to the quality and robustness of care planning.

5.9 **Youth Offending Service**

The numbers open to the team remain stable and caseloads are manageable. Complexity continues to increase. The service is under review as part of the development of the vulnerable adolescents' hub which aims to provide a more appropriate and young person focused service reducing duplication and impacting on outcomes. A table top inspection exercise was undertaken internally and a number of actions developed from this.

5.10 **Legal services**

We continue to undertake a higher percentage of our own advocacy than our neighbouring boroughs. However, the use and cost of Counsel is increasing due to the complexity of the cases we are working with as is the use of experts.

5.11 **Budget/Service Reviews**

Reviews in light of funding changes are ongoing with a number reporting in February. The reviews include the following:

- The development of a vulnerable adolescent hub which shall bring a number of services together creating better access points and outcomes for young people.
- The review of the two local authority Children's Homes is now underway and the consultation process has commenced.
- Hornby Road and Coopers Way are also subject to a commissioning review with a clear focus on maximising capacity at the most appropriate times and looking at synergies with adult services and transition pathways.
- School Improvement – in light of national changes around Academies and funding the service will be restructured to reflect the new landscape. Consultation on proposals shall commence in February.
- Vulnerable Adolescent Hub - Mike Taplin, Senior Manager (Lifelong Learning) has been tasked to lead a service review to set up a Vulnerable Adolescent Hub. The aim is to integrate both services and systems to provide better support. The scope currently covers 11yr olds – 24yr olds covering young people with complex needs and at risk of developing complex needs. The services currently in scope are the Youth Offending Service, Connexions,

Specialist Support (Substance Misuse, Sexual Health, Youth Service) and the Social Care Over 12s team which supports Looked After Children and Care Leavers. The process has initially focussed on gathering information from the services in scope and key stakeholders who link with these services, analysing data, consulting with young people and reviewing models in other areas of the country. Early findings are to be shared in early February. It is anticipated that the Vulnerable Adolescent Hub approach will be broadened to include services outside the Council.

- The Review of Emergency Duty Team - A more effective use of existing resources to create a more robust structure Consideration of cross agency working to create more streamlined services especially in relation to mental health. We have developed a number of options to re allocate existing resources. These include a move away from the use of casual pool staff and an increase in management capacity. These can be achieved within budget. A challenge session was held with Police and Health colleagues to consider how all three agencies could better work together to provide out of hours mental health support. The results of this will inform the review and the review report will be available for the end of January.

5.12 **Developments (Social Care)**

Within the service there are a number of new service developments taking place. The Care Leavers Drop In now called 'The Core' was completed in December 2015. To date over 200 members of staff have completed the PREVENT e-learning package which is available on the Lancashire Constabulary Website. This is a 20-25 minute on-line course (with a certificate).

On the 14th January 2016 the Department for Education announced that it is planning to take forward an ambitious set of reforms and published the government's vision for children's social care reform. The Secretary of State, Nicky Morgan announced:

- A new regulatory body for social work is to be created – ensuring social work education supports a world-class social work profession;
- £100m expansion of Frontline and Step Up to Social Work to recruit and develop thousands more top graduates into frontline children's social care – driving up the quality and status of the sector;
- A further three councils – Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire and Islington – to be granted academy style freedoms to create conditions for high quality, frontline social work, following on from landmark PM intervention;
- A new 'What Works Centre' to ensure social workers and others across the country will be able to learn from the very best examples of frontline social work;
- The extension of social work teaching partnerships to drive up standards in social work education;

- Developing a Practice Leadership development programme – to ensure effective leadership of child and family social work across the whole local system. Through this we will train talented social workers to become the country’s future leaders in social work.

The paper - *Reforming Children’s Social Care, A Vision for Change* - sets out the reform principles for the children’s social care system.

5.13 Serious Case Reviews

The first of a series of ‘Serious Case Review Briefings’ presented by the Blackpool Safeguarding Children’s Board took place on the 15th January 2016. Since 2013 there have been 6 Serious Case Reviews. It is important that all professionals who work with children understand the ‘lessons learned’ from these reviews. The briefings are 2 hours long and the next sessions are due to take place on the 26th February 2016.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

6.0 Legal considerations:

6.1 The statutory obligations are monitored and continue to be met.

7.0 Human Resources considerations:

7.1 None

8.0 Equalities considerations:

8.1 None

9.0 Financial considerations:

9.1 None

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 None

11.0 Ethical considerations:

11.1 None

12.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

- 12.1 There is a duty under the **Children's and Families Act** to co-produce all policies with parents and children/ young people (CYP). Positive feedback has occurred from parent and charity groups to the DFE about parental engagement and engagement with children/ young people was seen as not being a major concern on a DFE monitoring visit. However, it has been highlighted by internal self-evaluation that engagement with CYP could be better and work is ongoing with the Chief Executives department to put in further structures to enable this to improve. It was also recognised that "hard to reach" parents views have not been obtained and a parent telephone survey is proposed.

There is a requirement under **the 2011 Education Act** to progress a School Led System. This is achieved through the work of the Challenge Board, School Federation and School Forum.

13.0 Background papers

None