

Report to:	RESILIENT COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Relevant Officer:	Diane Booth, Director of Childrens Services
Date of Meeting	27 April 2017

CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE REPORT

1.1 To inform the Committee 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 areas.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

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 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.

2.4 To identify any further information and actions required.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

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 and have assurance that Blackpool is continuing to meet its statutory obligations for future inspection requirements. The Local Authority remains and 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 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 Background Information

5.1 Appointments

5.1.1 The new Director of Children's Services, Ms Diane Booth, has been appointed and commenced in post on the 24 April 2017. There have been regular meetings between Diane Booth and the Interim Director, Gani Martins to ensure a smooth period of transition.

5.1.2 Ms Josephine Lee has been appointed as the interim Deputy Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help. Josephine Lee previously held the position of Interim Head of Safeguarding and Principal Social Worker. Mr Simon Fisher has been appointed to position of Interim Head of Safeguarding and Principal Social worker, Simon previously held a position as a service manager. These appointments, whilst only interim, have provided consistency to the Strategic Management structure through this period of transition.

5.2 Edge of Care Model

5.2.1 Since the last update, the Children in Care Council was consulted over the naming of the new service, so as to make a distinct break from the previous Argosy residential home. A number of options were considered and in the end the young people chose the name - "The Link", identifying the service as building family relationships. All documentation relating to the service now refers to it as The Link.

5.2.2 All vacancies in the service have been filled, with four of the new members of the team being external appointees and having a wide range of skills. The team has been working closely with Headstart to incorporate the Resilience Framework into its approach to working with young people and families. All staff have been now been given Resilience Therapy training and additional bespoke training from HeadStart is also being provided. A "Resources" room has been developed to support the team in delivering the correct direct/therapeutic work needed for each family.

5.2.3 The physical decoration of the home has been completed and policies and procedures have been updated and new referral pathways and documentation

created. The statement of purpose and function is in the process of being shared with Ofsted and it is hoped that Ofsted approval for the short breaks element will be granted in May. The Team Manager has been formally approved as suitable to manage the service. A variation to the current statement of purpose and function was required. Short breaks cannot be offered to families until Ofsted formally registers the new service.

5.3 Children's Social Care

- 5.3.1 Demand for Children's Social Care remains high, the number of Children in Care is currently 532 and the total of allocated cases is 2,112. This is placing increased pressure upon the service for caseload management and meeting deadlines. Social Workers and managers are working hard to meet the demands. As referenced in the previous report to Scrutiny on 26 January 2017, as the initiatives Pause, Vulnerable Adolescence Hub, Edge of Care Service, Better Start, HeadStart, and the Opportunities Project are implemented, the pressure on the service will be alleviated.
- 5.3.2 The review that the Delivery Unit has undertaken has been welcomed. The interim Deputy Director and interim Director have met weekly with the unit for feedback and are in the process of implementing any changes that have been highlighted through the process, and are currently focusing on re-modelling the Front Door to ensure resources are being utilised as effectively as possible. This piece of work has also been informed by the review undertaken by the Futures Team regarding the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub; this review has been led by the Police with multi-agency input. Findings from this review mirror that of the Delivery Unit.
- 5.3.3 Focus remains on appointing Social Workers to posts; there are currently 11 vacancies, backfilled with eight agency workers and we are working closely with Human Resources and recruitment to appoint permanent staff. We now have a professional lead in post that has joined us from Adult Services. The post holder is an experienced manager who is supporting our Newly Qualified Workers and also offering Learning Circles to develop our more experienced staff. We have bought-in to the Firstline Programme which is a Department of Education national initiative to develop more experienced Managers and equip them with the skills required to manage the complexity of our work. Four Managers commenced the programme in March 2017 and to date we have had positive feedback. We are looking to appoint a Placement Officer to support the current process to improve the tracking of placements and negotiate costings with the external providers to reduce costs.
- 5.3.4 We have been able to move some young people from high cost placements to placements better equipped to meet their needs and we are continuing to analyse the 20 highest cost placements to ensure we are getting value for money.

5.3.5 We are currently undertaking a piece of work to exit children from care wherever it is safe and possible to do so. This is a substantial piece of work that is being completed; it will take time and can only be applied where it is in the interest of the child.

5.3.6 Children's Social Care has unfortunately experienced three child fatalities in a short period; notification has been sent to the regulatory body where this has been applicable. These cases will be reviewed through the appropriate mechanisms by an Independent Reviewing Officer appointed through Blackpool Children's Safeguarding Board. Our condolences are with the families, and the workers directly involved with them have been provided appropriate support.

5.4 Ofsted Annual Conversation

5.4.1 On the 3 March 2017, Neil Jack, Gani Martins, Josephine Lee, Amanda Whitehead, Janette Weafer and Philip Thompson attended Ofsted's offices in Manchester for the Annual Conversation. Overall this was a positive experience, the Inspectors appreciated the challenges faced by Blackpool Council in relation to geographical neighbours and their view is that we have a good understanding of ourselves and needs of the community in which we work. They acknowledged the number of initiatives that Blackpool Council has embarked upon and consider that whilst it will take time for impact to be evidenced, there is great opportunity to make a difference for the children, young people and families of Blackpool. Ofsted intend to visit in August 2017 for further conversations giving our new Director of Children's Services the opportunity to gain a good understanding of the service before this meeting.

5.5 Special Free School Bid

5.5.1 Blackpool has been successful in its bid for a special free school to provide education for up to 48 pupils aged between 10 and 16 years of age as reported at the last scrutiny meeting. The Authority will now have to engage in the process of finding a sponsor for the new facility which will commence in May. The Department for Education has not given any indication of time scales for the completion of the scheme but a realistic time frame would enable the school to open in September 2019. The Department for Education will be in contact with the Authority after Easter to provide more detailed information.

5.6 Early Years – Ofsted Inspections

5.6.1 Four group setting reports have been published since 1 January 2017, all were judged to be Good, with three maintaining their previous grading and one improving from Requires Improvement to Good. Two childminder reports have also been published, one improved their grading from Good to Outstanding, whilst the other had no early years children present at the time of inspection so was not graded but was found to be meeting all statutory requirements.

- This gives overall % of good and outstanding as:
- Childminders – 100%, Childcare on non-domestic premises – 97.7%, all registered provision – 98.8%

This compares to national figures as at 31 December 2016 of 91% CMs, 95% PVI, and 93% all provision.

5.7 Early Years Free Entitlement Funding – Universal 15 hours and additional 15 hours free childcare for working parents (also referred to as 30 hours)

5.7.1 *Blackpool Funding Formula for 3 and 4 year old provision*

Following introduction of the new national Early Years Single Funding Formula, the Blackpool Funding Formula has been revised in line with Department for Education requirements. A consultation process has taken place, the new formula agreed and the revised funding rates are payable from April. Despite a reduction in funding to Blackpool resulting from the application of the new national formula, all Blackpool Early Years providers will see an increase in their funding rate, although new requirements on local authorities around the proportion of overall funding that must be directly passed on to providers will lead to changes to arrangements for training and support that are currently available to providers free of charge or at a subsidised rate.

5.7.2 *Department for Education - Digital Accelerate funding*

Blackpool Council has secured £34,000 from The Department for Education (DfE) to develop a website portal which will link to the Department for Education's Eligibility Checking Service (ECS). This will enable childcare providers to instantly validate Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) eligibility codes which are given to the parents of children eligible for the 30 hours free childcare so that parents can be offered a place for their child straight away. The portal will also provide the facility for providers to submit information to the Council in a secure way.

The intention is to build on the existing framework to achieve the following benefits:

1. Remove the need to assign extra staffing to manage the additional workload that this initiative brings.
2. Build on our existing collaboration with providers
3. Further reduce the time it takes to process data updates
4. Provide an on-line view of children attending the setting and their hours

5.7.3 *Promotion and Publicity Campaign for 30 hours*

A media campaign is underway to link with the national campaign that is planned and includes:

- Weekly 'E-blasts' - which have already started. This is a series of emails with key information for childcare providers.
- Website information for all interested parties, eg parents, early years providers, staff from other agencies, etc., with appropriate links that will be

regularly reviewed.

- Email to parents who have expressed an interest in receiving such information
- Social media campaign on Facebook and Twitter
- Leaflets and posters
- Advertisement in Your Blackpool
- Postcards

We also intend to look at possible links with the local business community to enable information sharing with employees.

5.8 Fylde Coast Vanguard - Directory of Services - All Services Hub (FYI)

The Family Information Service is working with local partners and Open Objects to create an 'All services Hub' for the Fylde/Wyre/Blackpool Area – to be called FYI. The initial stages of this have been completed and the project is now in the Design phase. The development is due to launch in August 2017.

6.0 Adult Learning

6.1.1 The Family Learning team is working with Better Start to deliver the EPEC project. Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities (EPEC) is a programme to train and support parent facilitators to deliver parenting courses to other families in their communities. The initial project will be delivered over 2 years and will enable parenting courses to be delivered by local parents for local parents to develop parenting skills, strengthen family relationships and support facilitators to develop employability skills. 30 learners have passed English and Maths qualifications this term. Awards range from Entry Level to Level 2 (GCSE equivalent). A further 66 learners are currently enrolled on courses to improve their English and Maths skills. To date 356 families have taken part in Family Learning courses to develop their own skills and support their children's learning.

6.1.2 The Adult Learning team working on the Mental Health Project has received over 250 enquiries with enrolments on courses of 198. Sixty courses have been delivered during the first two terms with a further 17 scheduled for the last term; these include a variety of different topics aimed at getting people out in the community building and designing a community garden, bush crafts and gardening. There are also yoga and Tai Chi taking place at Central library to raise a persons' well-being; in addition to this there will be the usual anger management, confidence building and anxiety management which remain very popular with those who have mild to moderate mental health issues.

7.0 Opportunity Areas Update

7.1.1 The Shadow Board has been in place since January 2017. The Council Lead on the Board, Alan Cavill, Director of Place is now also supported by Mike Taplin, Senior Manager (Lifelong Learning), Childrens Services. Membership also includes

Lancashire Enterprise Partnership, Blackpool School Improvement Board and Blackpool and The Fylde College alongside the Department for Education. The main activity has been to prepare a draft delivery plan to address Social Mobility in Blackpool. A process has been used to map existing high level activity and its impact, review gaps and develop a narrative of social mobility in Blackpool with a view to identifying potential investment priority areas over the three years of the plan. The process included a successful consultation event at the City Learning Centre on 3 March 2017 attended by over 40 wider partners. The initial draft delivery plan has been submitted and received favourable comments along with constructive feedback. The final draft needs to be submitted to the Secretary of State by the end of April for consideration

8.0 Vulnerable Adolescents’ Hub

8.1.1 The work towards opening the Vulnerable Adolescents’ Hub continues. There has been an Accommodation Appraisal and the Foyer is identified as the most appropriate venue to accommodate all agencies to integrate a good model of working together. The operational team and change team have been working on policies, processes, pathways and developing new ways of working with this age group. Whilst there is still some way to go we are looking to launch the new service in July 2017. The services will come together over a planned phase to ensure that all staff are equipped to provide the new model of service delivery.

8.0 Delivery Unit Report

8.1 Blackpool Council is an outlier in relation to the number of children who are “Looked After”. As at 24 March 2017, this figure is 527. This represents 163 per 10,000 population, the highest in the country. By comparison, the next highest authorities by 10,000 population are Southampton and Middleborough who both have 120.

Authority	LAC per 10,000 Population (at 31 March 2017)
Blackpool	163
Middleborough	120
Southampton	120
Stoke on Trent	117
Kingston upon Hull	116
Liverpool	115

8.2 The Council is committed to ensuring that the system in place to support vulnerable children in Blackpool is operating effectively and that families are well supported by the right people at the right time to maximise opportunities for young people. There are concerns throughout the service, the Council as a whole and partner organisations that the system is not working to best effect to deliver positive outcomes for families. Various different approaches, projects and initiatives have

been actioned over the years which have been designed to reduce the pressure in social care, but as yet, these have not delivered significant change to the numbers of children looked after, which have continued to rise and have the potential, if the trend continues, to rise further.

- 8.3 If change cannot be delivered which has a significant impact on the way in which vulnerable young people are supported in Blackpool then there is a real danger that the systems will fail to provide protection, risk levels will rise and the placement costs will be unaffordable. It was agreed in February 2017 that the Corporate Delivery Unit would undertake a mapping review exercise of the process end to end within Children's Services with a view to presenting their findings to the new Director of Children's Services, Diane Booth and her team when she comes in to post at the end of April 2017. This information can then be used to consider what change could be made across the whole system to start to impact positively on the performance of the service.
- 8.4 The timeline outlined in the planning document estimated that the mapping project would take 14 weeks, with the final week as a reporting week. The review commenced as planned on the 6 February 2017 (Week 1) and is due to conclude on the 8 May 2017. The review is now (W/C 27 March) in Week 8. The review team has completed the mapping exercise at the "front door" and the "Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)", and the Safeguarding Teams. The review timeline is broadly on track, though there has been some additional time required to map the Families in Need (FiN) service, which was not scoped in the original review. Two weeks of the time spent so far has been with the Families in Need team. At this time, it is anticipated that this will not extend the timeline of the project by two weeks.
- 8.5 The remaining areas to map and consider are –
- Looked After Children (LAC teams)
 - Fostering and Adoption
 - Local Authority Designated Officer
 - Family Group Conferencing
 - Independent Reviewing Officers
 - Pupil Welfare (in relation to Social Care)
 - "Deep Dive" analysis of individual cases to look with the service at timeliness and effectiveness of early interventions, decision making and thresholds, case management and compliance, quality and outcomes.
- 8.6 **Brief Service Descriptions (Covered to date)**
MASH - MASH stands for Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. The MASH allows resource from the Police, Social Care, Education and Health to work together to look at concerns raised by the Police about vulnerable children, families and adults, gather

information from partner agencies and then consider next steps.

Duty and Assessment – Duty and Assessment is the “front door” for Childrens Social Care, where concerns about children are raised, information and advice given and next steps to safeguard welfare initiated.

Emergency Duty Team (EDT) – EDT deal with all serious concerns about children and vulnerable adults outside working hours (post 5pm and pre 9am, weekends and Bank Holidays), making short term provision to reduce risk where required to be followed up by day time teams.

Families in Need – Provide support to families with multiple and complex needs with a view to increasing resilience and reducing the number of children who require formal intervention.

Safeguarding Teams – Take forward the assessment and care planning process from Duty and Assessment when a child requires intervention and monitoring through a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan.

Children with Disabilities Team – Work with children and families where the child or children have a disability, irrespective of whether there is a safeguarding concern.

8.7 In each area the team met with managers and sat alongside staff exploring what they do on a day to day basis, and how it is done. Staff have offered feedback suggesting that the mapping exercise is welcomed, and that they hope that it influences effective change. Overall, in the teams reviewed to date the team has found staff who are dedicated to their roles and working hard. In most areas, staff reported that stress and workload levels are high, and that they do not feel in control, supported or autonomous. The team has seen themes emerge from the information found during the review to date. These themes cover broadly –

- Management and Leadership
- Performance Management and Processes
- Structure and Workflow
- Information and Communication

8.8 **Management and Leadership**

- Where there are professionals from different organisations working together, this is described as “multi-disciplinary working”. However, in some cases the structure and processes were not in place to support effective sharing of resource and expertise, but rather focussed on information sharing between services.
- The role of the manager in delivering and improving the compliance and quality within their teams is not always clear, and managers say that they are not able to spend as much time with their direct report as they feel is necessary to support them in their practice. As a result, some aspects of case management, compliance checks and resource management have been moved in to “panel” processes.

- Individual performance management is not consistent. Relationships between teams where resource works together or where there are handovers are poor and issues unaddressed.
- Managers do not report consistently feeling knowledgeable of the workloads of their teams, how well individuals are performing and able to support practitioners to develop effectively as they would like.
- The scheme of delegation of decision making is not clear and consistent and workers and managers say that they are frustrated by the processes which are in place for some decisions, which do not always appear to be proportionate to the risk. They reported that this contributes to drift in cases where work cannot progress without a decision.
- There is no consistent and cross cutting skills and knowledge development plan for people working in Childrens Social Care who are not qualified Social Workers. As these staff are sometimes in roles where they are making decisions, monitoring plans, identifying and assessing risk and providing advice and guidance, there is a concern that this may not be applied consistently.

8.9 **Performance Management and Processes**

- Data collection and inputting is not always effective across the board, and therefore the associated data is not reliably accurate. For example there is evidence of underreporting on sickness (with periods of absence not recorded on the Selima system) which in turn, underrepresents the impact of sickness on the workforce.
- Policies and Procedures which have been designed are not universally applied and custom and practice deviates from these in a number of areas – sometimes because workers feel this is required to act in the best interests of the child and family. Roles and responsibilities are not always clear across the service, and time can be spent disputing which team or individual is responsible for a piece of work, rather than progressing it. It is sometimes the case that two procedures within the authority will describe the same role and its associated responsibilities differently, which contributes to this conflict.
- There are action plans and performance improvement plans in place following audits and serious case reviews, but a lack of coordination and follow up makes it difficult to assess whether these are always effective in delivering the desired improvements.

8.10 **Structure and Workflow**

- The structure of the service at this time is fractured, with work being referred and transferred to and from teams multiple times. This gives rise to a risk that people do not feel ownership of the work, that young people and families meet multiple people in their journey and that the service fails to build effective relationships that recognises and balances risk and opportunity.

- There are multiple routes into Social Care, rather than one “front door”. The duty and assessment function is delivering a wide range of services rather than a focused assessment and management of cases which are within the threshold. People who refer into the front door report that the advice, guidance and decision making does not always appear transparent. The staff and managers within the front door are working to a high capacity, though the outcomes achieved are not always positive or evident.
- The quality of information presented to the officers at the front door varies in quantity, quality and depth. There is high demand leading from contacts generated from the Police via the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, more than 50% of the contacts recorded in February 2017. Only 11% of these converted to “referrals”.
- The structure and current physical separation of the Duty and Assessment function and Safeguarding/Looked After Children functions contributes to poor working practices and does not encourage ownership and positive working relationships.
- Support to manage concerns and issues within and about local families is not universally strong within communities, with genuine multidisciplinary work focussed on improving circumstances before they develop in to concerns which meet the threshold. There is inconsistent support for existing partners like schools, the Police and GPs to help them work in a different way to ensure that early help is deployed at the right time by the right people to ensure that is effective.
- Securing the right placement at the right time for children who cannot remain at home is a challenge and practitioners expressed concern that some placements are not “best fit”. The cost of some placements appears to be driven by availability and demand, rather than the needs of the child.
- It is not evident that the child (and family) is at the centre of all assessment, decision making and action throughout the system.

8.11 Information and Communication

- The most consistent feedback the team have had from all services has been that communication outside teams is poor. Communication with other teams, and across the service, is not effective and people feel disconnected from the wider Council aims and objectives.
- The early help offer in Blackpool is not well articulated and understood. There is a lack of coordination, monitoring and reporting on early help by other agencies from the Authority – making it difficult to evaluate its effectiveness and develop services which are evidently effective.
- Information governance, what information is shared with whom, for what purpose and using what method, varies. There is a risk to the authority that needs to be explored to ensure that there are clear policies and guidance in place for staff.

- The thresholds for support, how they are applied and how they have influenced decision making is not universally well recorded and it is not evident that within the service, consideration is given to them at key decision points.

8.12 It is important to note that these key findings have been shared with the Senior Management Team during the review, and some actions have already taken place to begin to address these concerns and those which had already been identified by the management team. These include –

- Holding a “communication event” for managers across the service which will be held regularly to improve communication between senior leaders and front line managers
- Regular meetings for the senior leadership team with the Chief Executive prior to the start date of the new permanent Director of Childrens Services
- Commissioning a compliance audit in Safeguarding
- Engaging with Human Resources to improve effective implementation of sickness management procedures, training, support and recruitment and retention.

8.13 **Next steps**

The review continues and is due to conclude at the beginning of May 2017. At this time, key managers and the new Director of Children’s Services, Diane Booth, will come together with the review team and look at the findings of the review alongside key local and national data. They will then consider options to develop end to end projects for change, develop plans for implementation and set performance measures to ensure that the impact of any change is understood and quantified.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

9.0 **List of Appendices:**

None

10.0 **Legal considerations:**

10.1 None

11.0 **Human Resources considerations:**

11.1 None

12.0 **Equalities considerations:**

12.1 None

13.0 Financial considerations:

13.1 None

14.0 Risk management considerations:

14.1 None

14.0 Ethical considerations:

14.1 None

15.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

15.1 None

16.0 Background papers:

16.1 None