

Report to:	CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Relevant Officer:	Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services
Date of Meeting	13 February 2020

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT AND RESIDENTIAL CHILDREN'S HOME PROVISION

1.1 To inform the Scrutiny Committee of the financial profile of Children's Social Care and Early Help services in 2020/2021, explore the reasons for the current spending levels and inform the Committee of what is being done to support positive change.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1
- To note the contents of the report.
 - To continue to meet statutory monitoring, challenge and support obligations.
 - 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 about the spending profile across Children's Social Care and Early Help and support effective monitoring and scrutiny in 2020/2021.

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:

- Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience.

5.0 Background Information

5.1 Introduction

Blackpool Council is currently looking after 623 children and young people and the number of children in care continues to slowly rise. The number of children per 10k population who are looked after, subject to a child protection plan, identified as a “child in need” and those who are identified by partner agencies (such as the Police, health and schools) as being in need of a statutory assessment are all higher in Blackpool than in any other local authority in England.

5.1.1 The current situation in Blackpool has been arrived at steadily over a long period. Blackpool’s children’s social care statistical profile began to move decisively away from the pattern in similar authorities more than a decade ago. While there have been periods where the divergence has been arrested, the underlying trend has consistently reasserted itself. It is the very degree of difference of Blackpool to similar areas that points out that alternative scenarios are possible. The degree of divergence from similar areas must reflect the long term ineffectiveness of all local services in collectively addressing the challenges faced by local children and families to enable more positive outcomes to be achieved.

5.1.2 Blackpool’s children’s social care services face three particularly pressing issues which were found to be impactful prior to and at the point of the inspection in 2018:

1. The volume of presenting concerns from partner agencies felt to require children’s social care input/assessment.
2. The quality of work undertaken with children and families to remedy concerns and to prevent escalation and the quality of partnership support for those children and families; and
3. The number of children open to children’s social care, in particular those in local authority care and the financial pressure this places on the Council.

5.1.3 All three of these issues are intrinsically related to each other. The volume of new work places pressure on the capacity of the service and the time it has to build the effective relationships with children and families to support positive change. This then leads to fewer and less effective interventions at an early point and long-term escalation of some children and families, which in some cases leads to entry of children into care. Equally, the high numbers of children in care places significant constraints on the local authority’s ability to provide other services.

5.1.4 Significant progress has been made to address the way that children’s services work with families and partners and this is starting to have an effect. The numbers of children entering care in 2019/2020 is relatively low – the trend in the year to date suggests the lowest number entering care in the past six years, with between 40 and 50 children fewer entering care, 20% lower than the average annual figure for the past five years. The pattern of entry by age is also of note: a similar number of very young children are entering care as in the past five years, but only 70% as many children aged between 3 and 11 and only half as many children and young people aged 11 or older. It is worth reiterating that the rate of entry in 2019/2020 is still a third higher than the average for similar authorities.

The reason that the number of children in care continues to rise is that the number of children leaving care has been even lower. The projection for the full year, based on the first eight months is for the lowest rate of exit in a decade, although still markedly higher than in similar authorities.

- 5.1.5** The rising number of children in care is putting pressure on placements (and stability) and is leading to an increasing number of children in care placed in Independent Fostering Agency Placements
- 5.1.6** The steady, slow increase in the number of children in care is having less impact on the number of children living in children's homes, or in care but placed at home with parents, both of which have been relatively steady since March 2019. The number of children placed in children's homes is still very high when scaled per head of child population – an issue related particularly to a group of young people taken into care in their teenage years during 2016/2017.
- 5.1.7** So, the fall in the number of children entering care is to be welcomed and there are some positive signs in the profile of entry and the speed of exit for the very young. However, exits from care need to accelerate children through to permanent exits from care and will be a key area of focus over the next six months.
- 5.1.8** The costs of supporting children and young people in care are high but there is no drive to reduce the number of children in care because of the cost. The drive to reduce the number of children in care is a reflection on the focus to ensure that children are well supported and only in care when it is the right outcome for them and that the people working with them are constantly working to find a long term, safe and stable home for them. Equally, there is an increased focus on ensuring that the quality of service that is provided to children in care is high and offers value for money.
- 5.1.9** The partnership with Lancashire to develop a Regional Adoption Agency is progressing, with a go live date for the new arrangements set for 1 April 2020.

5.2 Financial Information

See Appendix 5(a) for details and charts.

- 5.2.1** As the detail within Appendix 5(a) shows, there are plans for an additional £12.4m of investment in the 2020/2021 budget to support children's services. £11m will be invested in Children's Social Care and 1m in Early Help.
- 5.2.2** £4.3m of this investment will be in staffing, with increased support and social workers able to work with lower caseloads, deliver more direct work and engage effectively with families to support sustainable change. Managers have fewer direct reports so that they can understand the work that is being done with each child and family and support social workers to ensure plans are progressed effectively. Increased activity is planned (and underway) to support effective long term planning for children whether or not they are returning to their family home and this will address the concern over the drop in exits from care detailed in 5.1.

5.2.3 Work is underway across Lancashire, Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool to ensure that partners understand and are able to effectively deliver early help within their services and as a partnership without social care coordination (which is in line with statutory guidelines) as well as ensuring that there is effective targeted intervention when the threshold for Social Care is not met, but nevertheless significant, solution focused work is required to prevent family circumstances from deteriorating to the point where children are exposed to significant harm.

5.2.4 The cost of placements to support children who are looked after is set to rise by £7m in the coming year. This is based on the current cohort of children and young people and acknowledges that even though the number of children in care may fall in 2020/2021, some of these young people will continue to be funded through, for example, a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).

5.2.5 External placement costs are high, but the cost per placement is not higher for Blackpool than in other authorities. This is benchmarked on a regular basis with other local authorities and Blackpool participates in the Northwest Partnership of local authorities to support engagement with providers on a wider footprint.

5.3 Placement Costs - Examples

Residential Care

5.3.1 There are 63 Children and Young People who are in the care of the local authority supported in residential care by Blackpool. 23 of these children and young people are supported in Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde. Most children and young people are supported within the North West region.

5.3.2 Residential Care for children and young people is provided in homes which are usually similar in layout to family homes. Our highest cost placements are for children and young people who, because of their individual needs, cannot be accommodated with other young people and require a solo placement and high input from staff throughout the day and night. This means that all of the costs associated with staffing and accommodation fall on one young person. There would always be at least one member of staff at the home with the young person at any time 24/7, with often two or three staff supporting the young person when they are out of the home to ensure their safety and wellbeing. The costs include rent and service charges, overheads associated with the management of the building, direct staffing and management costs and the costs of supporting the young person to actively engage in activities, education, therapeutic support etc. When a young person can be supported in a home alongside other young people, the core and overhead costs will be shared, but 1:1 time will be factored in to any support provided.

5.3.3 A sample placement in a single gendered home with a maximum occupancy of three young people, immediate access to 1:1 Psychotherapy, ongoing assessment, delivery and reporting, 1:1 staffing including a waking watch is £4250. A placement such as this may be

appropriate for young people who do not require a solo placement but who need single sex accommodation and where they are struggling to regulate their feelings and behaviours and as a result require a high staffing ratio, direct therapeutic input overseen by a qualified therapist and staff available (and not sleeping during the shift) for the young person 24 hours a day. A placement of this cost level equates to £25.29 per hour and is inclusive of all housing, support and day to day costs.

5.4 Residential Care Provision in Blackpool

There are 24 private children’s residential homes registered with OFSTED in Blackpool, with an occupancy range from 1-6 beds. In total, there are 70 beds registered with OFSTED in the town. Much of this capacity is being used by other local authorities where there is less provision available to them. Using our statistical neighbors, we can see that capacity is variable and that the number of homes and the number of available beds in Blackpool is high by comparison to other, similar local authorities.

Local Authority	Number of registered homes	Number of beds in registered homes.
Blackpool	24	70
Stat N1	5	19
Stat N2	15	35
Stat N3	29	66
Stat N4	10	44
Stat N5	13	56
Stat N6	7	32

5.5 Foster Care

When a child or young person can be supported in a family environment this is the preferred option. If no internal placements are suitable and available, Independent Foster Agencies (IFAs) will be contacted to see if they can find a family to support the child. Usually the costs of foster care are fixed, with a transparent fee which is paid to the carer to provide the support and a fee to the provider that covers the cost of doing business, recruiting, monitoring and supporting carers. Higher fees will be paid where there are specific skills and/or experience needed by the carer to meet the child’s needs, including therapeutic support overseen by qualified therapists, an area of work that has been developed by fostering agencies in response to increasing demand across the country. At the average cost, support through an IFA amounts to £4.77 an hour.

5.6 Future plans

Too many children and young people who are looked after by Blackpool are not looked after in Blackpool. We want to increase the number of good quality providers within the town that we work with to support children who require residential care and encourage

them to work with us to step young people down to more family based or independent living wherever possible.

5.6.1 The Council is looking to ensure that the provision in Blackpool is proportionate to local need and to work with those providers who are supporting children well within their community to support children in the town, so that they can maintain and grow positive links that help them feel secure and develop their independence.

5.6.2 To support growth in the provision of fostering support we are looking to increase focused investment in the internal foster care service and support available to fostering households to increase the number of families working directly with Blackpool to support our children and a detailed business case is being developed to map the required investment and balance this to the benefits in terms of outcomes and impact.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

6.0 List of Appendices:

Appendix 5(a) – Finance Information

7.0 Legal considerations:

7.1 None.

8.0 Human Resources considerations:

8.1 None.

9.0 Equalities considerations:

9.1 None.

10.0 Financial considerations:

10.1 Please refer to Appendix 5(a) for detailed financial information.

11.0 Risk management considerations:

11.1 None.

12.0 Ethical considerations:

12.1 None.

13.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

13.1 None.