

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 9 JANUARY 2020**

Present:

Councillor Collett (in the Chair)

Councillors

Clapham
D Coleman

Critchley
Farrell

Mitchell
Owen

Stansfield
Wing

Dr Elaine Allen, Roman Catholic Co-opted Member

In Attendance:

Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools, Education and Aspiration

Mr Robert Arrowsmith, Head of Performance and Systems

Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services

Mrs Jeanette Richards, Head of Partnerships and Improvement

Mrs Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager

Mrs Elaine Ireland, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Ms Helen Sage, diocesan co-opted member.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Debbie Coleman declared a personal interest in Item 6 Forward Plan 'Review of Residential Children's Home Provision', the nature of the interest being that she was employed by a residential children's home which dealt with Blackpool children.

Councillors Coleman, Critchley and Stansfield all declared a personal interest in Item 9 'Corporate Parent Panel Annual Report' due to their positions on the Corporate Parent Panel.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 10 OCTOBER 2019

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting held on 10 October 2019 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Committee noted that there were no applications to speak by members of the

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public on this occasion.

4 APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBER

The Committee agreed to approve the appointment of Dr Elaine Allen as a Roman Catholic co-opted member to the Committee.

5 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

The Committee noted the Executive decision on the 'School Organisation Pupil Place Plan 2020-2028' which had been taken since the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Schools, Education and Aspiration responded to a question regarding the size of classrooms and whether the schools would physically be able to accommodate the potential increase in pupils, assuring Members that the room sizes were sufficient.

The Committee was informed that schools were consulting on the proposals and that a flexible approach with annual review would be necessary due to the unpredictable mobility of pupils year on year.

6 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan, January – April 2020 relating to the portfolio of the Deputy Leader of the Council (Children) and the Cabinet Member for Schools, Education and Aspiration. Members noted that the Forward Plan contained three items relevant to the Committee: To progress the Acquisition of the former Job Centre Plus building at 43 Queens Street to accommodate Children's Services in a single location, in line with the preferred delivery model following the Ofsted review; The implementation of a regional adoption agency with Lancashire County Council in November 2019, in accordance with the regionalising adoption agenda and Review of residential children's home provision.

In response to the Committee's previous request that the outcome of the review of residential children's home provision be reported to this meeting, Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services informed Members that the findings of the independent review had been received and would form the basis of an action plan. Mrs Booth agreed to present the resulting plan at the next meeting of the Committee.

The implementation of a regional adoption agency with Lancashire County Council had been delayed and as a result Mrs Booth informed Members that she would provide an update within her Children's Social Care Improvement report at the next meeting of the Committee.

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Discussions were held around the proposed acquisition of the former Job Centre Plus building to accommodate Children's Services in a single location, with questions raised on why that particular building had been identified as a suitable venue. Mrs Booth advised that from the limited options available, the Job Centre Plus building was centrally located and of an appropriate size. Members questioned whether Children's Services could be housed together within Bickerstaffe House, with Mrs Booth advising that she did not believe there was enough room within that building and that the needs of other partners would also need to be considered when choosing the shared location.

The Committee agreed that further information should be sought from Councillor Cain prior to him taking the decision. The Committee specifically requested information on:

- 1) Whether any other suitable venues had been identified;
- 2) Whether Bickerstaffe House had enough room to accommodate the move as an alternative to the Job Centre building;
- 3) Further details as to the anticipated costs involved.

7 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT

Mrs Booth presented the Committee with an update on the progress and implementation of developments within the "Getting to Good" Journey for Children's Social Care. She identified that the service was facing three particularly pressing issues in the form of the volume of presenting concerns from partner agencies (Health Services, the police and schools) felt to require Children's Social Care input and assessment; the quality of work undertaken with children and families across the partnership to remedy concerns and to prevent escalation and the quality of partnership support for those children and families; and the number of children open to Children's Social Care, in particular those in local authority care and the financial pressure this placed on the Council.

Mrs Booth further explained that all three of these issues were intrinsically related to each other, with the volume of new work placing pressure on the capacity of the service and the time social workers had to build the effective relationships with children and families to support positive change. This then led to less effective interventions and long-term escalation of some children and families, which, in some cases, led to entry of children into the Council's care. Equally, the high numbers of children in the Council's care was placing significant constraints on the local authority's ability to provide other services.

In response to a question about the previous issues experienced with police referrals, Mrs Booth confirmed that the new arrangements whereby informed consent would be required for all referrals had been implemented that week and that the Council was providing full support to the police as they adjusted to the change. Performance data resulting from the new practices would be reported to the Committee at its next meeting.

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The Committee asked whether any progress had been made on recruitment to the post of Head of Service for Strengthening and Supporting Families. Mrs Booth advised that a number of applications had been received and the closing date had not yet been reached. She stressed the importance of finding the right person for the role. The Committee was informed that with regards to the use of agency staff, permission had been granted for the recruitment of higher graded social workers at H3 level in order to attract better qualified and experienced colleagues. In response to the retention issues identified, Mrs Booth acknowledged that agency staff often preferred to work for shorter periods and that there was competition across the North West for experienced social workers with the result being that other areas increased their hourly rate in order to secure agency staff. Mrs Booth made it clear however that Blackpool offered very competitive rates of pay along with financial travel incentives for applicants living outside the area.

The Committee raised concerns over the service's budget overspend as well as the seemingly open-ended nature of the budgetary increase. Questions were asked as to timescales for anticipated improvements and a reduction of the required overspend. Mrs Booth highlighted the scale of the improvement journey and as such was unable to identify a specific date for improvement. The Committee requested that going forward future Children's Social Care updates included detailed financial projections with target dates and identified risks.

Discussions were held over the high cost of children's residential placements, with a request made that a detailed breakdown of costs per placement and numbers of children placed in Blackpool from other authorities be included in the report of residential children's home provision due to the next meeting of the Committee. Members also questioned the feasibility of the Council providing its own residential provision as a means of reducing expenditure in this area. Mrs Booth identified that other Local Authorities had also recognised these costs as prohibitive and as a result the National Association of Children's Services was examining the issue. She agreed to share the findings with the Committee once the study had been concluded.

Members heard that there were 180 known Looked After Children (LAC) currently placed in Blackpool from other areas. Members requested that information on children placed in Blackpool from other authorities be included in the forthcoming report on residential children homes provision. In addition, Mrs Booth cited an anticipated impact study being undertaken by the Department for Education on the impact of placing young people in out of area residential placements, the results of which she agreed to bring back to the Committee.

The Committee agreed to consider a detailed report of residential children's home provision at its next meeting.

8 YOUTH OFFENDING TEAM IMPROVEMENT

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Mrs Booth introduced a progress report on the implementation of developments within the Youth Offending Team (YOT) and informed the Committee that a re-inspection was anticipated to occur anytime from April 2020, with the resulting findings to be reported back to the Committee once received.

The Committee was informed that there were 62 young people working with the YOT with just under a quarter of the caseload being young people who had transferred to Blackpool from other local authorities on a caretaking basis. Members questioned whether Blackpool residents were prioritised over those coming from other authorities, noting that Blackpool young people were often sent to placements out of the area due to a lack of suitable spaces in Blackpool. Mrs Booth stated that whilst legally it was not possible to prevent other authorities from placing their young people here, if the Council was notified of cases then a letter would be sent requesting justification for the proposed placement and challenging the decision. She pointed out however that the Council did not always receive advance notification of the placements.

Further discussion was held around the potential safeguarding concerns of placing vulnerable young people together in Pupil Referral Units as well as the recharge costs to other local authorities who utilised Blackpool's facility.

[Dr Allen left the meeting during consideration of this item.]

9 CORPORATE PARENT PANEL ANNUAL REPORT

Members considered the Corporate Parent Panel (CPP) Annual Report and congratulated the young people and officers involved for their efforts and positive impact. The merits of holding a special meeting of the Committee and inviting young people to attend was discussed and agreed.

Mrs Booth provided information on the new Blackpool Families Rock model of working, with Members requesting a presentation at a future meeting of the Committee.

[Mr Arrowsmith left the meeting on conclusion of this item.]

10 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

Committee Members considered their annual workplan and agreed a number of changes to the content of meetings for February and April 2020.

It was noted that three Members were required to take part in a piece of work to produce a policy on community engagement, with the Committee agreeing that Councillors Critchley, Farrell and Wing be nominated.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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The date of the next meeting was noted as Thursday, 13 February 2020, commencing at 6pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.30pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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