

PEOPLE PORTFOLIOS

The 'People' portfolio consists of:

- Councillor Lynn Williams – Acting Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services
- Councillor Kathryn Benson - Cabinet Member for Schools, Education and Aspiration
- Councillor Jo Farrell - Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health
- Councillor Maria Kirkland - Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Leisure

The full details of the portfolio areas can be found on the Council's website at <https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Your-councillors/Executive-members.aspx>

Strategic Issues

Adult Social Care - preventing infection, containing outbreaks, supporting safe service delivery

Whilst this report will focus on the work undertaken in Blackpool, it is important to acknowledge the partnership effort which has gone on across the County. The Lancashire Resilience Forum co-ordinated the initial Lancashire response to the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing together local authorities, NHS bodies, Public Health, Fire, Military and Police as well as a range of other public services and utilities. The Police chaired the initial crisis response. As we have now moved into the next phase of response the Chair has passed to the Local Authorities. The Council has played a key role in the Humanitarian Assistance function, encompassing Community Response, Social Care and Testing and Tracing.

Recognising their key role in keeping people safe, one of our priorities has been to support the social care market to work in a safe way. This has comprised of a combination of both financial and practical support to overcome operational challenges, all aimed at ensuring the needs of people using their services continued to be met as effectively as possible. The challenges faced by providers cannot be understated, with the combination of issues multiplying the difficulties being faced. All have experienced an increase in financial pressures, including from reduced numbers of service users, increased staff absences, increased overheads for Personal Protective Equipment and cleaning materials and enhanced infection prevention measures. On a practical level, it was important to secure cash flow for providers at an early stage, so the Council set a minimum baseline payment and made early payment arrangements. In mid-April, the Council and Clinical Commissioning Group both issued an immediate across-the-board 10% fee increase by way of a temporary COVID premium, initially for three months, which has now extended to the end of September. For care homes, in June the Council passported over the first tranche

received of the Government's Infection Prevention Fund, equivalent to around £460 per registered bed.

The Council has taken extra steps to support providers with free PPE on request, sourcing extra supplies with weekly arrangements for ensuring this is kept topped up. This has taken concerns over costs and supply away from the frontline, ensuring that the only decision providers have to make with regard to PPE is to follow the national guidance. The Council has also funded an Emergency Workforce as part of our Provider Failure Support Plan, able to be deployed temporarily into care providers experiencing shortages of staff that impact on care delivery. In some instances we have also deployed Council staff to support services with fragile staffing in place, building their resilience, in areas such as catering and hands-on care. Finally, in cases where providers are experiencing unsustainable increased costs which are not alleviated by these measures, we have set up a simple process for them to claim additional COVID funding from the Council. Fortunately, within our care homes and amongst our hands-on care rates of staff infection have remained relatively low. Many settings remain COVID-free and the current position is characterised by sporadic, well-contained cases, largely asymptomatic and identified via testing.

Where the virus is detected, our overriding aim has been to keep people as safe as possible, and we have used the capacity within the residential care market to accept new and returning residents and isolate those who are positive or awaiting results. In practice, all people coming into care homes are being isolated for at least 14 days. This has required flexibility and to this end we have re-purposed services and facilities withdrawn due to the pandemic, with the ARC Assessment and Rehabilitation Centre meeting the needs of people with COVID-19 who cannot be admitted to, or return to, a residential care home.

This approach is shaped by constant communication, ensuring we are pro-active in adapting to emerging needs and issues. We have established a Provider Support and Resilience Hub, which operates from 8am to 8pm seven days a week and which conducts daily ring rounds of care providers to ensure that problems are picked up early and we are responsive to issues that need our help. The Hub has been supported by a wide range of external partners, including the NHS CCG, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals Acute Trust, and the Care Quality Commission. We are also delivering weekly webinars with briefings and Q&A sessions to provide direction, clarification, and develop a shared understanding of the latest issues and emerging threats.

Corporate Issues

Reaching out to shielded people

Continuing to provide the right support for people who need it as part of our response to the pandemic has been absolutely vital to maintaining community resilience at this trying time. Everyone in Blackpool matters to us and our aim has been to reach out and offer care and support to as many people as we can, particularly those in most need. The Adult Social Care team have supported those people with pro-active steps wherever possible, including making contact with several thousand people on the Government's Extremely Vulnerable Persons (EVP)

shielded list to make sure that they have all the practical help they need to remain at home during their shielding period and keeping in touch with those who need it. This approach was complemented by the Corona Kindness campaign covered elsewhere in these reports, which encouraged people to ask for help if they needed it, or to tell us about those they were concerned about. As a Council we often talk about our values, and we can all be truly proud of the way everyone involved has demonstrated compassion in going about their work.

Food Parcel Provision

At the start of the lockdown period, Blackpool Sports Centre became the food parcel production and distribution centre for both free school meal parcels and the family and individual food parcels provided to support Blackpool residents most in need. The emergency food response to the COVID crisis has been a joint effort across Leisure, Catering and School Transport Services, with Catering Services sourcing the food provision and liaising with community hubs and schools to meet demand, Leisure Services providing the staff to make up the food parcels and process the daily orders and the School Transport Service delivering the parcels to the community hubs and schools, whilst Active Blackpool staff have also delivered shopping supplies, performing welfare checks and offering much-needed social interaction for vulnerable residents. To date over half a million meals have been provided to the residents of Blackpool, which is a fantastic achievement and credit to the services who have worked tirelessly throughout this period to support the local communities.

Registrars and Bereavement Services

After an intense and difficult period for everyone, the number of deaths over the last two months has now started to stabilise and is coming into line with the expected norm from previous years. We are immensely proud of how the team has adapted during this period and yet continued to offer the deceased and their families a dignified and respectful service. Although the amount of services will hopefully continue to reduce, these still need to be COVID-secure, so our current arrangements will remain in place until guidance changes. This means that members of the person's household and close family members can attend services and potentially close friends too if the family is small.

We are pleased to report that we are now able to register births again, following a change in guidance on 10 June, which has meant the Registrars team has been busy working through the three-month backlog of outstanding registrations. We are also pleased that The Wedding Chapel was able to reopen on 1 July on an appointment only basis to take notices of forthcoming ceremonies. Following the Government announcement, the Sea View and the Tower View rooms have been able to hold ceremonies attended by a maximum of 30 people on a socially distant basis. The team has also introduced an option now to stream ceremonies live online, which is proving popular for those with large wedding parties or distant friends and family.

Children's Services Update

The service and the workforce have responded well during a difficult time and vulnerable children in Blackpool have been as safe as they could be in the circumstances. We have

continued on our improvement journey, although a large part of our business has had to be conducted virtually. The shock to national systems caused by COVID has led to some slow-down in some areas, most notably court work, but conversely, COVID has also provided an opportunity to demonstrate strong leadership in the delivery of Children's Services – and this has been recognised externally.

Throughout COVID, our children in care have coped exceptionally well and we have seen remarkable examples of their kindness, care and generosity. During the peak of the PPE shortages, one of our children in care used a 3-D printer provided by one of our social workers to manufacture personal protective face guards for NHS staff and keyworkers on the frontline, learning how the printer worked and how to operate the printer, even setting targets for the number of masks to be produced and delivered each day. Another one of our children did a sponsored run from their home to the glitter ball on the South Short sea front, raising over £200 for the NHS. The money was used by the ward to purchase a tablet to allow patients recovering from COVID to see and speak to their families, when they could not visit hospital in person.

Ofsted have currently suspended all inspection activity and have deployed inspectors to work in the wider children's services sector. We have had four inspectors working in Blackpool, two in support of the SEND services and two helping out with reviews for children in our care. Ofsted are bringing forward proposals for an amended inspection framework in the autumn, in the light of the continuing social restrictions arising from COVID.

Even though there has been no formal Ofsted monitoring visit since the postponement of the March visit, nor a face to face visit by DfE advisers, we have maintained contact and held discussions virtually. The Getting to Good (Improvement) Board has met three times virtually during COVID and the work of the Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership has also continued at both a county-wide and local level. The degree of managerial grip within Children's Services in both continuing to deliver services and also continuing on our improvement journey has been positively noted by both the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted colleagues and positively compared with other areas in the region and nationally. Through this period, Blackpool has continued to lead on the launch of the new county-wide threshold document for children's services, which will be launched across the local partnership shortly.

In spite of unprecedentedly difficult circumstances, we have continued to visit the families that we are most concerned about. In the first two weeks of June, social workers saw 760 children and young people and had telephone contact with 500 more. We have also sought to continue and develop direct work remotely and have developed a virtual support platform for teenagers during COVID, which is currently in the final stages of testing. Virtual support has been particularly successful with teenagers, with some engaging with us more via technology than face to face. We intend to use this learning in the future.

The area where progress has been most impeded is in the direct work with families and the development of the new relationship-based model of practice, which really requires face to face contact. We are currently planning for a return to some office-based work from late June/early July, with teams alternating between visiting children and families one week and working at home the next. We are continuing to strive to balance the needs of the service, particularly around direct work with children and families, with the risk of infection/transmission, both within the local community and within our own workforce.

Finally, there will be definite legacy issues arising from the COVID period, with harm and unmet need that was not apparent during lockdown becoming clearer afterwards. It is difficult to estimate the scope of this likely demand for service, not least because Blackpool has continued to receive a relatively high level of contact from local agencies and the community during the lockdown period, but we are preparing for an increase in presenting need in the autumn and winter of 2020. More widely, we also know that any serious economic downturn affects young adults and teenagers the most of any group in society and within that group, the most vulnerable, disadvantaged young people are affected most. The shock of the national shutdown on the economy both locally and nationally has been profound and we must strive to advance the interests and protect the future prospects of our young people as best we can. There are already signs of the adverse affect on young people in the rising proportion of young people not in education, employment or training – itself a mirror image of rising adult unemployment.

Schools and Education

Schools in Blackpool have remained open throughout the COVID-19 Outbreak to ensure that vulnerable children and the children of key workers were able to access safe, secure provision and we know that this has been hugely valuable to the community across the town. More recently, we have been pleased to support schools to bring more pupils back into schools safely in advance of the summer break after half term and we have seen our attendance levels compare favourably with the national average. Our schools have worked proactively together and with the local authority to share expertise across Blackpool in the development of risk assessments and positive plans to support staff, pupils and parents to feel confident about the provision in place and this is continuing as we plan for greater participation in school life in September.

Many of our schools are Academies and their decisions are independent of the Council, but we have seen clear evidence of a town and sector-focussed approach from our school community, supported by confident and positive leadership from the Council. Together with Primary and Secondary schools across Blackpool, we have worked closely with Teaching and other staff Trade Unions to understand and reflect the legitimate concerns and worries of staff, parents and carers. Other measures include providing a risk assessment template, providing Health and Safety support for schools with Service Level Agreements with the Council, outlining the Council's position in a statement from the Director of Public Health and putting in place online Question and Answer Sessions with him and Director of Children's Services. We have also maintained a list of Frequently Asked Questions, held remote meetings with Head teachers, given schools access to our education consultants to joint-plan when required and provided a

stock of Personal Protective Equipment in case schools require it to be used for pupils who are symptomatic or who require first-aid.

We have had really positive feedback from our schools about the local support offer and have been pleased to receive emails confirming how successful the reintroduction of Reception, Year One and Year Six has been and how schools have been able, at the right pace for them and their community, welcome more years back in to school over the past weeks.

We had some fabulous news from Waterloo as in June, pupils participated in an assembly about Kindness led by the Duchess of Cambridge – something that the pupils will never forget! Many of our schools have been supporting pupils with home learning activities and there has been a huge collective effort to ensure that children entitled to free school meals have been supported, whether through the use of the voucher scheme, or through the practical provision of food deliveries which have been sourced and packed by our fantastic catering team to be delivered to schools, who have made sure that they have been getting to the families who need them. So many parents, pupils and school staff have shared with us the great work that schools are doing to support pupils, whether they are in a school setting or at home and we are really proud of how our school community has risen to the challenge.

The Opportunity Area are leading work to secure a range of summer activities for young people across Blackpool, working rapidly with the emerging guidance from national government to ensure that we and our partners use the facilities and resource available to us well to ensure that young people are well supported to engage in positive activities through the holiday period.

Early Years

In early years, we have again seen a really positive and supportive response from our providers across Blackpool. A range of early years providers, including nurseries and childminders, have remained open throughout the COVID period, providing essential care for children of key workers and vulnerable children and maintaining contact with families not attending. Several providers have also taken on additional children who were not able to access their usual setting. Providers have been flexible and resourceful, making use of government guidance and further guidance and information provided by the Early Years Team to ensure care is provided safely, and children's health and well-being needs are met.

Within the authority, the Early Years teams have supported providers and families by helping families find alternative childcare, keeping settings up to date with guidance, providing additional information to support settings in implementing guidance, risk assessments, meeting children's emotional needs both during lockdown and as settings welcomed back more children and ensuring the additional needs of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities continue to be well met. We also continue to send out regular electronic newsletters for Early Years providers and families, make regular contact with families who access the Portage Service, and provide activities to support their children such as stories, rhymes and games via a new closed Facebook group established to support parents during lockdown.

Nursery attendance continues to increase and response to reopening from the market has been good. Attendance and open settings in Blackpool are significantly higher than national averages, with 88% (30% above the national average) of our providers being open, whilst those that are closed are generally childminders who are isolating. We are pleased to say that providers are working really hard to ensure that they are able to support families across Blackpool with their childcare needs.

Planning to re-open Leisure Facilities

At the time of publication, indoor leisure facilities across Blackpool remain closed in line with government restrictions, with no date currently set for their reopening. However, we have already established a plan for a phased approach once we are able to do so, ensuring the service provides a safe and enjoyable experience for customers and staff alike.

Blackpool Sixth Form College

We are pleased to announce that Blackpool Sixth Form College was awarded 'The BTEC College of the Year 2020' at the annual National Teaching Awards virtual ceremony in London. We are sure Members will support us in asking the Chief Executive to write to the Principal of the college to send the Council's congratulations to them on this magnificent achievement on winning this nationally recognised award.

Working with Partners

Active Blackpool presses forward with upcoming activity programmes

Blackpool Council's Active Blackpool team remains committed to supporting the town's residents through and beyond the pandemic, with an exciting and inclusive new programme of activity. Two major new initiatives will provide lots of ideas on how people can become more physically active in their local community. Get Out Get Active (GOGA) is a national three-year programme delivered locally in partnership with Blackpool Coastal Housing, which helps disabled and non-disabled people enjoy being active together. Catering for all abilities, it aims to highlight the benefits of physical activity on self-esteem, physical health and mental wellbeing and will increase the number of people who are able to access and enjoy local opportunities. Meanwhile, the team continues to work with Sport England and Table Tennis England as part of the Tackling Inequalities partnership. This work aims to build on that work by focusing on the negative impact that COVID-19 has had on physical activity levels, in addition to addressing the widening of inequality in sport. The programme will see table tennis heading into the homes of Blackpool residents and families, with a range of activities and challenges shared across the town.

Transforming Services

Much-improved Anchorsholme Park to re-open after five years

Anchorsholme Park is set to reopen on Monday 20 July after the completion of United Utilities' £80million waste water project. Working closely with the parks team, ward councillors and the Friends of the Park, their investment has seen the overall green space significantly enhanced and the provision of a new café, outdoor seating areas, children's playground, sports areas, music and a performing arts space. The café will be operated by Blackpool Catering Services, initially providing take-away food, drink and ice-creams in line with COVID-19 restrictions, with the intention of fully opening as a sit-in café once restrictions are lifted.

Stanley Park

Stanley Park is undoubtedly one of the true jewels in Blackpool's crown. Voted the UK's "Park of the Year" twice, its popularity endures with residents and visitors alike. However, like other parks in the country it has suffered from waves of vandalism which parks staff and the police have found very challenging to deal with. We are now making a significant investment of £200,000, mostly through Proceeds of Crime Act funding, to install a state-of-the-art CCTV facility. This features 16 cameras mounted on poles operated remotely from the central control system in the town centre and an additional four fixed-position cameras on each. This will be supported by new arrangements for park security, supported by the Council, Police and the Friends of Stanley Park.