

Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee Informal Meeting 14 July 2020

SEND and Alternative Provision – Proposals for Change

Attendance

Cllr Don Clapham
Cllr Jane Hugo
Cllr Martin Mitchell
Cllr Andrew Stansfield
Cllr John Wing

Representatives of the Children and Young People’s (CYP) Scrutiny Committee attended a briefing session with Paul Turner, Head of Schools Standards, Safeguarding and Inclusion on the proposed changes to the Council’s SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) services. Mr Turner provided further insight into the previously-circulated document and explained the rationale and purpose behind the consultation process undertaken with schools. He explained that pupils with additional needs had previously not always had their needs adequately met via Blackpool’s education provision and a requirement had been identified for greater diversity and range of provision within mainstream education settings.

Members were informed that the SEND/AP proposals would be incorporated into the 2020-2030 Blackpool Plan, along with a new Literacy Strategy for Blackpool and a town-wide School Improvement Plan. Cllr Hugo requested that going forward the CYP Scrutiny Committee be involved early in the process for any consultations on policies relevant to the remit of the Committee.

Feedback from school leaders, Mr Turner reported, was very positive and they were in support of the Council’s direction of travel as set out within the document. Members queried the heavy use of abbreviations and acronyms within the document, which Mr Turner noted as appropriate for school audiences but acknowledged that a glossary of abbreviations used would have been beneficial for those not from an education background.

The anticipated impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was raised by Committee Members as an area of concern, particularly on the mental health of Blackpool’s young people, with Mr Turner acknowledging that the report did not currently address the anticipated impact that may arise following the medical emergency but that there was an awareness of the risk.

Questions were raised around the proposed reduction of available places within the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), as outlined within Proposal 4 and Members queried where pupils would be accommodated instead. Mr Turner clarified that the PRU would still be able to accommodate 250 pupils but that the majority of these would also remain on-roll at their main school instead of becoming permanently on-roll at the PRU. There were also plans for the future provision of additional needs places at a range of venues, with the aim of distributing high needs pupils more widely across several settings.

In relation to the specialist vocational centres as detailed in Proposal 6, the choice of offering a catering provision was discussed, with the suggestion being made that Covid-19 may impact the availability of catering job opportunities in the immediate future. Suggestions were made for alternative vocational routes, such as agricultural or skilled trades. Mr Turner agreed with the suggestions and stated that additional courses would be planned following the initial introduction of the catering options.

Utilisation of the Oracle building for the delivery of local specialist provision was welcomed by the Committee Members, but questions were raised around the delivery of support for youth services which were originally housed within the building. Mr Turner advised that John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services had been overseeing work looking at ways to increase youth service provisions across the town. Members requested that further information on this project be sought from Mr Blackledge for future consideration by the CYP Scrutiny Committee.

Members were strongly in favour of the proposals to reduce the commissioning of High Needs places from external agencies and the aims to bring provisions 'in-house'. Discussion occurred around the role of the Lotus School and the potential to extend provisions yet further if approved by the Department for Education.

The Members in attendance agreed that the proposals were positive and despite being ambitious would benefit the town once realised.

It was agreed:

1. That consideration be given to incorporating the potential impact of the Covid-19 pandemic into the new 'SEND and Alternative Provision – Proposals for Change' document;
2. To seek further information from John Blackledge on the work underway looking at ways to increase youth service provisions across the town;
3. That officers give regard to including CYP Members in future consultation processes on policies/projects relevant to the remit of the Committee.