

## PEOPLE PORTFOLIOS

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The 'People' portfolio consists of:

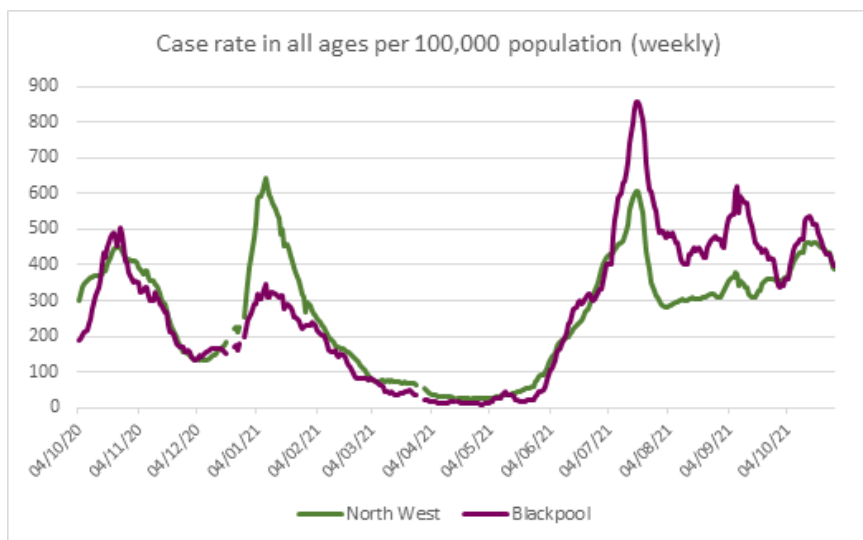
- Councillor Kathryn Benson - Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Aspirations and Community Assets
- Councillor Gillian Campbell - Cabinet Member for Inclusion, Youth and Transience
- Councillor Jo Farrell - Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health
- Councillor Jim Hobson - Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care and Schools

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

### COVID-19 case rate – high, but falling

The chart below shows the trend in the 7-day case rate per 100,000 people since October 2020. The case rate in Blackpool residents was higher than the North West and England rate over the summer period but the Blackpool case rate has now fallen into line with the North West and England rate and has been declining for two weeks. The case rate remains highest in school-aged children (particularly secondary school) and is also relatively high in 30 to 55 year olds, most likely due to this cohort containing a high number of parents. In the last two weeks cases have declined most rapidly in school aged children with the October half-term, relatively high levels of immunity acquired via infection and to a lesser extent the impact of the 12-15 year old vaccination roll-out all contributing.



The recent fall in the all age case rate has not been reflected as clearly in those aged over 60. This continues to cause us concern as this is the group most vulnerable to serious illness.

### **Vaccination Rate update**

Across Blackpool partners are working together to support the vaccination programme and in particular the booster programme for those identified as most vulnerable where the protection may be waning. All people 16 and over are eligible for two vaccination doses and people are still being encouraged to come forward to maximise coverage across the population. 12-15 year olds are eligible for a single booster dose unless they are vulnerable where they will receive two, with delivery being via secondary school visits or by booking through the national system. We are also looking for more people aged 50 and over, those in health and care roles and those who are clinical vulnerable to come forward for a third booster dose 182 days after their second dose.

As at 4 November 2021, 71.1% of Blackpool residents aged 12 or over have had both doses and 77.7% have had a single dose, slightly ahead of the national average. 21.1% of those aged 12-15 have had a dose, which is 3.1% below the figure for England and likely due to only two schools being visited before half term.

We work with our health partners to make sure that people are able to access the vaccine from the right location for them. For people for whom the booking system is not accessible, they can “drop in” to the site on Blackpool South Car Park and we are continuing to take the Vaccine Van around Blackpool to increase vaccination uptake, including boosters, amongst those over 15 years old. To date we have delivered over 10,000 vaccinations, with the mobile vaccination service continuing to be a very popular method of delivering vaccines. The Van gives residents an opportunity to ask questions, allay fears and turn up to a location that suits the individual without having to book.

### **Continuing to support Community Testing**

We are really pleased to report that the level of PCR testing conducted in Blackpool remains high, with good access to symptomatic testing being available. 734.7 people per 100,000 were tested between 22 and 28 October, significantly more than the North West (587.1) and England (651.9) figures. 8.2% of PCR test conducted by Blackpool residents currently return a positive result, compared with 9.6% across England as a whole.

We continue to take a very proactive approach with local businesses and visitor attractions to encourage regular asymptomatic testing. Most businesses that we have worked with since December 2020 onwards are continuing to test staff through assisted onsite testing, at home testing or a blend of both. Whenever there is a positive case, our Public Protection team make contact to ensure regular testing is taking place and if not encourage them to do so, supplying them with LFD test kits to support this. We are also ensuring that we support efforts to mitigate COVID outbreaks amongst the asylum seekers currently housed at the Metropole Hotel, providing test kits for staff and residents.

### **Face Coverings – still vital in the battle against Covid**

Despite the change in national restrictions, we continue to encourage the use of face masks, particularly as we come towards the winter and conditions which are more likely to encourage the spread of Covid. In particular, the BID and Public Protection teams are reminding businesses of the importance of

recommending the use of face coverings, especially at our indoor venues. Supplies of face masks are available for businesses to access from our Community Testing Hub in Hounds Hill.

### **Recognition of the Youth Justice Partnership**

I am pleased to share with you that The Head of Service for Adolescent Services, Sara McCartan, received a letter from the Minister for Justice congratulating the Youth Offending Service on its recent very positive inspection, where the service was deemed to be good overall with several outstanding features. The letter noted the strides made across the partnership in underpinning out of court disposal work and noted that the improvement of the service had been particularly impressive given the substantial social challenges that Blackpool faces, in addition to the additional strain of COVID on children, young people and services in the past year.

### **School Attendance**

Since the start of COVID, attendance in Blackpool schools has been strong and consistently at or above the reported national averages. This has continued throughout the current autumn term and is thanks to the hard work of our schools and the support of all our families.

The latest available national figure (published 21 October) was 88.2%, down from 90% on 14 October. In Blackpool, across 25 schools on 21 October, overall attendance was 92%. This reflects the hard work done by local schools throughout the pandemic in keeping as many children as possible regularly attending schools and accessing education.

### **Corporate Issues**

#### **Putting on a show – comedy and dance from Showtown**

In advance of the opening of the Showtown museum in 2023, the team has been busy with two key activity projects in recent months. The first, Open Up the Mic, is a partnership project with HeadStart and Blackpool comedian Ruth E. Cockburn. The project targets young people at risk of mental health issues guiding them through the process of becoming a stand-up comedian, helping develop skills in speaking, writing and performing comedy. Eight young people performed their own stand up sets for a live audience in the Comedy Station, opening up about issues personal to them. A further cohort will provide their final performance in December.

The second is Get Dancing, a partnership project with LeftCoast to get everyone doing Blackpool's newest social dance "The Blackpool Way". The project is inspired by Blackpool's long tradition of novelty dancing going back to the 1860s, with 125 suggested moves crowdsourced from all over the world. A new piece of music was composed, a website created ([www.getdancing.uk](http://www.getdancing.uk)), a digital school pack distributed and the dance has been taught to hundreds of Blackpool residents across Blackpool. Creative Leads, House of Wingz, have performed The Blackpool Way across Blackpool to a wide range of audiences. All of this built towards the creation of a film that will celebrate Blackpool's dance past and present. A three day shoot involved ten Blackpool locations, a crew of 20 and a cast of over 124 from the local community. The film will be showcased in train stations, public screens and dance and film festivals around the country to promote Blackpool's special significance in the world of dance.

## **Park Ranger Service: connecting people with the great outdoors**

The forest school activity programme delivered by the Park Rangers team continues to flourish, with weekly activity sessions delivered within the Better Start wards, a half term activities programme in Stanley Park and a fully-booked spooktacular Halloween event for local families at Revoe Park attracting over 140 people. The programme is designed to encourage children and local families across Blackpool to enjoy the outdoors and learning how to interact with nature.

Our work within the Better Start wards has seen a 46% increase in participants from 731 in June 2021 to 1,071 in September 2021. In addition, our Better Start volunteer hours has increased by 65% from 301 hours to 498 hours for the same period. This increase in engagement and volunteer support from the local community demonstrates the programmes' continued success in getting local families and residents back to nature.

## **Welfare Support for those in need**

Since the self-isolation payment scheme started we have awarded £456,500 for main scheme cases and £173,000 for discretionary cases to financially support residents to self-isolate and continue to pay this where appropriate.

The Household Support Fund was recently announced by Government to help households most in need with food, energy, water bills and essential costs over the winter and up until March 2022. We are finalising plans to distribute the funding, with the intention of providing vouchers to families in receipt of Free School Meals for the holiday periods and funding to the third sector to deliver support within the community. We are also planning to provide a separate fund to assist with utility bills, which we will announce further details on shortly. We are working hard with our partners to reflect on what we have learned from the distribution of previous funds to ensure that the money is routed to the places where it is most needed and can have the greatest impact.

## **Catering Services - Securing New Business**

We are pleased to announce that our Catering Services team has been successful in securing the Fylde Coast Academy Trust (FCAT) tender for seven local schools. This is the latest success for a service which has seen significant growth in the provision of catering recently, going from providing 30,000 meals a month in January 2020 to over 100,000 meals a month in November 2021.

## **Transforming Services**

### **We are Undefeatable Sport England Pilot**

In 2019 Active Blackpool secured funding from Sport England to deliver a pilot of an innovative approach to engage with inactive people with long term health conditions (LTHCs). Working with the Adult Social Care and reablement team, the pilot aims to provide education, improve awareness of physical activity opportunities within the community and get people with LTHCs more physically active. 50 frontline adult social care staff have had training to raise awareness of the importance of being active and different ways in which they can support their clients to be more active, leaving staff more knowledgeable and confident to support and provide advice to clients about being active.

## **Business Health Matters: supporting physical and mental health**

Business Health Matters is a ground-breaking programme that supports local businesses in improving the physical and mental health of their employees so that staff are fitter, happier and more resilient. This ultimately offers opportunities for them to upskill, remain in employment and live longer, happier lives. Businesses benefit from this with increased productivity and sustained workforces, resulting in reduced absence costs and lower staff turnover rates.

The programme launched in September and saw Active Blackpool deliver pilots with three local businesses. To date, four instructors from the Active Blackpool Exercise Referral team have completed training to carry out health checks traditionally provided with GP surgeries as part of the over 50's health check. Further training will take place in January 2022.

## **Children's Social Care – Demand and Improvement**

In national data released in the past month about Children in Need and Child Protection during the financial year April 2020 to the end of March 2021, there was a general pattern of a decrease in demand in aggregate across England during the year – perhaps not surprising given the lengthy period of national lockdown contained within that timeframe and the partial operation of schools and other key safeguarding partners. Looking at the local authority areas most similar to Blackpool, there is a similar pattern, although child protection activity remained closer to similar levels. Looking at Blackpool's relative position in the group of ten similar areas (Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, South Tyneside, Halton, Knowsley, Tameside, North East Lincolnshire, Kingston Upon Hull and Stoke-on-Trent) Blackpool is now most commonly in the middle of the group for volumes of activity and is no longer the highest in any volume measure. This speaks to the stability and tight management of the service that has grown over the past three years. Looking at the data for other similar local authorities also reveals that one or two have really struggled in the past year.

We know that pressure on Children's Services after the end of the last lockdown (April onwards) has grown in Blackpool – reflecting the legacy of unidentified need during the past year (the demand that was missing from the figures for England in 2020/21). There are some indications as autumn moves into winter that this pressure is beginning to reduce, with the three month rolling rate for referrals for a social care assessment falling by 12% between the end of September and the end of October and looking like it is returning to something closer to pre-COVID rates (early 2020).

For the families in need of more intensive intervention, there is a stable picture. Child Protection activity remains relatively quiet both comparatively to similar areas and historically for Blackpool and the number of children subject to a child protection plan in the town is slightly less than 300 (295). The number of children in the care of Blackpool remains less than 600 (12% down from its peak in May 2020) and holding steady. The number of older children entering public care remains at the lowest rate for a decade, as it has been for the past 12 months.

In their recent visit monitoring the progress made in Blackpool since the 2018 inspection, published on 2 November, Ofsted noted that Blackpool is making steady progress, specifically in relation to the positive impact of recent service improvements to support vulnerable families and to reduce the high number of children in care. The report noted the impact of senior management oversight and scrutiny of planning for children entering care. They also noted that a new service to support children on the edge of care is bringing about positive change to children's lives and that social workers feel positive about the new model of practice, Blackpool Families Rock. The report went on to stress the need for greater

consistency in practice, while acknowledging the ongoing challenges of recruitment and retention of social workers, the social challenges of Blackpool and the fact that senior leaders know the service very well and had in place plans to address these issues.

## **Arts and Culture - Recovering from the pandemic**

A recent scrutiny committee examined the damaging impact of the pandemic on arts and culture in Blackpool and how organisations can safely re-engage and re-build their audiences. It acknowledged the critical financial support provided by the Arts Council to sustain local organisations via the Cultural Recovery Fund and investment by Historic England via the Heritage Action Zone to support new cultural activity. To make the most of this, we are developing a Blackpool Cultural Partnership and Cultural Plan, strengthening a sector that contributes so much to our civic life and national reputation.

The review is particularly timely as Arts Council England (ACE) has recently announced that Blackpool will be one of 15 priority places in the North where they want to develop new opportunities for investment. Our forthcoming Cultural Plan and Partnership will therefore aim to make the most of the new opportunities that will come from this new relationship with ACE.

## **Working with Partners**

### **Working in Partnership with Health Services**

As of 4 November 2021, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals Trust is admitting on average 11 or 12 COVID patients every day, with a rapid rise over the last 2-3 weeks exceeding rising occupancy levels elsewhere in the country.

Adult Social Care works closely with the two Fylde Coast hospital sites, Blackpool Victoria Hospital and Clifton Hospital to support them to meet this pressure and the forecast winter strains. The last 20 months has seen accelerated discharge arrangements put in place with significant reconfiguration of staff bases to ensure that joint delivery systems minimise delay and maximise safe and appropriate discharge from hospital.

In line with DHSC guidance a seven day a week Transfer of Care Hub (TOCH) has been developed through which all discharges from the hospital, where some community service is likely to be needed, are managed through their single point of access. The hub is a multi-disciplinary team with staff from Blackpool ASC, Lancashire County Council ASC and NHS colleagues.

The Hub also incorporates the Home First Team, staff from Social Care and Health who oversee those less complex discharges with a view to rapidly assessing people at home to ensure that they regain as much independence as possible as quickly as possible. More complex discharges requiring a residential or nursing setting will be reassessed within weeks of being discharged, to plan and ensure that people regain as much independence as possible in a setting appropriate to their needs.

Arrangements are in place for all planned discharges from Clifton Hospital to be steered through the Hub from December. Once this is in place the community expertise will be located in one place and allow rapid decision making for future care and support needs in relation to people being discharged.

A and E social workers are part of the Hub and in-reach into the A and E department to prevent hospital admission where community services can provide a safe alternative to in-patient care, reducing the

pressures on the Acute Hospital services. This also reduces the potential for 'deconditioning' (where people can lose their confidence and existing physical capabilities) and avoids the risk of hospital-acquired infections.

There have been regular planning meetings in developing the above and these continue. There are also daily system reviews of delivery, and when the system is particularly pressured up to three times daily system calls, with all partners in health and social care services, including commissioned external providers, to undo any blockages contributing to delays and support all partners to deliver to the optimum level achievable.

As we head into winter with pressures already high in all parts of the system, our strong track record of joint working will really come into its own.

### **Care and Support – Provider Services**

The Council's adult social care provider services remains at the forefront of responding to the Covid pandemic in caring and supporting vulnerable residents of Blackpool. Planning is underway and steps are being taken in anticipation of a high demand for social care services over the winter period. This is made more difficult given the current situation with recruitment into social care and the wider health sector. However, the services are engaged in a local recruitment campaign supported by the Fylde Coast Health and Social Care Career Academy and the Association of Directors of Adult Services (ADASS) regional and national recruitment campaign.

The development of a new £2m Respite and Short Breaks service for adults with learning disabilities and/or autism is nearing completion by mid November 2021. Service users, families and carers have settled on the name for the service, this being 'Coopers @ Ambleside'. We are planning a launch event in the near future and further details will be shared in due course.

The Council's provider services continue to support the wider system across health and social care through the provision of hospital discharge 'care at home'. We are taking steps towards developing a dedicated 'hospital discharge service' which will better support hospital discharges but also the wider social care market. It is likely that in playing to strengths, a significant amount of the reactive and urgent care will be delivered by the Council's services, with the more stable / longer term social care delivered by the wider market of providers.

The Council's ARC (Assessment and Rehabilitation Intermediate Care Service) continues to deliver a residential care setting for patients in hospital who are ready to be discharged but who are within 14 days of a Covid positive diagnosis. There has been a requirement over recent weeks to increase the bed capacity for this purpose in response to the growing hospital admissions as a result of the increasing Covid infections within the Blackpool population. The ARC is an integrated model of care and delivered in partnership with Blackpool Teaching Hospitals which has ensured that the ARC is better able to meet the holistic needs of people with additional clinical needs as a result of Covid as well as what we would typically see within the social care sector. This is a strength for Blackpool and the ARC is our 'Designated Setting' - the only residential setting in the Town that is able to admit Covid positive patients being discharged from Hospital.

The Provider Peer Support and Resilience Team continues to support all social care providers across Blackpool with very practical operational assistance, support and guidance. In addition the team also coordinate an Emergency Workforce that is deployed to social care settings at times of increased staffing shortages, this in the main due to Covid infections but is also available to support general

resilience of the provider. This support has a significant impact on the ability of care home providers to maintain their level of provision in supporting admissions of people being discharged from hospital, thus ensuring that the hospital is better able to continue to care for the most poorly patients.

The Council has developed its approach to Quality Monitoring of care services over a number of years, and our support for providers has been a strength throughout the pandemic. However, over the period of the pandemic, there has been a reduction in visits into care homes by all professionals and informal visitors in accordance with National Guidance, in order to maintain effective Infection Prevention and Control. There was a corresponding increase in video / phone contact with providers by health and Social Care professionals and Quality Monitoring staff. In addition, there are significant staffing challenges in all areas of health and social care, which makes delivering safe and effective services even more challenging than they already were.

Over the course of this year, Quality Monitoring and other professionals' on site visits have restarted, together with informal visitors and most recently Healthwatch in exercising their 'Enter and View' responsibilities are restarting. The Director has continued weekly dial in briefings with live Question and Answer sessions in support of helping providers deliver safely to our service users and keep up to date with latest learning and developments. In what is undoubtedly the toughest operating environment in living memory, it is testament to the hard work of providers and all who work with them that the majority continue to deliver an acceptable standard of service. For a small number of providers, this has proved exceptionally difficult and we have worked together as a system to support safe service delivery, with the oversight of the Quality Monitoring Team, where standards of service fall below an acceptable level in one or more areas. We are also organising a series of learning sessions for a range of teams whose staff visit care homes in the course of their day-to-day work, to maximise their contribution to highlighting emerging problems so that we can respond effectively at the earliest opportunity. This is in addition to the regular contacts we have in place with each individual provider through the Quality Monitoring Team.