

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
WEDNESDAY, 12 JANUARY 2022**

Present:

Councillor Burdess (in the Chair)

Councillors

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| D Coleman | Hunter | Owen |
| Critchley | B Mitchell | R Scott |

Ms Jo Snape, Diocesan Co-opted Member

In Attendance:

Councillor Maxine Callow, Scrutiny Lead Member

Ms Kirsty Fisher, Engagement Officer for Our Children

Ms Kara Haskayne, Head of Safeguarding and Principal Social Worker

Mrs Elaine Ireland, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser

Chris, Justuz member

Sam, Justuz member

Shayne, Justuz member

Lita, Chair of Justuz

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Critchley and Burdess declared personal interests in relation to agenda item 4 'Corporate Parent Panel Annual Report' due to their positions on the Corporate Parent Panel.

2 HEADSTART UPDATE

The Committee agreed: To defer the item to a future meeting.

3 BLACKPOOL FAMILIES ROCK

Ms Kara Haskayne, Head of Safeguarding and Principal Social Worker gave a presentation outlining the Blackpool Families Rock partnership culture, values and practice principles to support children and their families. Ms Haskayne explained that Blackpool families, children and young people were at the heart of everything that the Council did and that the Blackpool Families Rock model of practice had been co-produced with children, young people, families and foster carers who had experienced Blackpool's partnership services. The Committee was informed that during 2019 Ms Haskayne had worked with Blackpool families, carers and partnership agencies to co-produce the practice guidance principles and values which determined that the partnership should work in conjunction with families. These practice principles and behaviours shared a vision that families had the potential to be active agents of change and aimed to positively support them in effecting such change.

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Following the presentation, the Committee questioned whether the Blackpool Families Rock model had received support from the regulatory bodies monitoring Children's Services. Ms Haskayne advised that the most recent Ofsted inspection report from September 2021 had recognised the cultural shift in place at Blackpool, although she acknowledged that there were still further improvements to be made. The Committee asked whether the cultural shift had resulted in fewer children entering the care system, to which Ms Haskayne responded that the number of children in care or on care plans in Blackpool was at its lowest level for five years. Furthermore, she informed the Committee that when cases of exemplary practice resulting in good outcomes for individuals were identified, they were added to a library of good practice which could be accessed by social workers as a learning tool.

In response to a question on improvements in partnership working, Ms Haskayne reported that a re-design of Children's Services' 'front door' systems had resulted in the joining up of partnership agencies into a co-located multi-agency team, with a change in the language being used by partners and improvements in family liaison and consent processes.

The Committee discussed the issue of the recruitment and retention of social workers, with Ms Haskayne able to report that resignations had reduced over the past three months. She acknowledged the importance of retaining Blackpool's social care workforce and outlined a number of measures being introduced to help encourage trained social workers to remain in post. Work had also been ongoing in conjunction with Lancaster University to ensure the provision of high quality social care placements for students, as well as a scheme whereby students on placement with the Council could be offered a permanent post without the need to complete the full application and interview process. In addition, Ms Haskayne explained that newly qualified social workers completed a protected programme over their first year, whereby they received additional support and a reduced workload.

The importance of assisting families with accessing the benefits system was considered, with Ms Haskayne asserting that poverty did not equate to neglect and that all available support would be offered to families in need of financial assistance.

The Committee thanked Ms Haskayne for her presentation and for attending the meeting.

4 CORPORATE PARENT PANEL ANNUAL REPORT

Ms Kirsty Fisher, Engagement Officer for Our Children attended the meeting with Chris, Sam, Shayne and Lita from Justuz and presented the Corporate Parent Panel Annual Report. In addition, Ms Fisher and the young people provided further information on the wider work of the Justuz young people's Council.

The Committee was informed that Justuz had supported several co-production groups over the past year, which had looked at ways to improve and develop the support our children received from the Council's workers and services. These included changes to

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young people's health checks and the way in which care plans would be written to ensure the use of clear language and the removal of jargon. Lita informed Committee Members that the members of Justuz were proud to be able to use their knowledge and experience of being in care and recognised the value of working together to make improvements for all children and young people experiencing care in Blackpool.

Ms Fisher reported that a survey of all of our children aged eight years and over had recently been completed, and highlighted the following results:

- The majority of young people felt safe and cared for where they lived;
- They felt supported in school/college and had someone they could talk to if they needed some support;
- They felt that the Council listened to them and they had good relationships with their support workers;
- That the Council was ambitious for them and supported them to achieve their future goals;
- They reported how they had been supported by their social workers and personal advisers;
- That they were given choices and encouraged to take part in fun hobbies and activities;
- That they were seeing the people who were important to them.

The survey results had also been used to identify areas which our children felt needed improvement:

- That if a social worker was leaving the role they should always come and say goodbye and introduce their new worker;
- They asked for more choice about where and who they lived with;
- That they did not like having to change their social worker as they wanted to build a good trusting relationship with them;
- They asked for a clear explanation as to why they were in care and needed a good understanding of their family history;
- That although they did feel that the Council helped to prepare them for independence, the hardest thing about living by themselves was being lonely;
- They would like more opportunities to undertake work experience.

The Committee was informed that the survey results would feed into the creation of a new Pledge, which would have a focus on relationships, education, care and respect, health and preparing for the future. Ms Fisher explained that the Pledge would link closely with the Our Children Strategy, the Permanency Strategy and Our Care Leavers Strategy in order to ensure that everyone was informed of what the promises were and how they would be delivered to our children and young people. Justuz would be leading on the design and overall look of the Pledge and a version using images would also be created for our younger children. On completion, Councillor representatives, the Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services would be asked to sign the Pledge as a sign of their commitment to keeping the promises made.

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The Committee questioned how those children aged under eight and those with additional needs had been surveyed. Ms Fisher advised that younger children were reviewed every six months in order to ascertain if they happy and if they enjoyed school. With regard to accessing children with additional needs, she reported that schools adapted the information in order to be accessible by each individual child and that all results had been included in the survey's findings.

Details were provided of the creation of a new app to be utilised by social workers and our children and young people and which aimed to improve communication and information sharing. Ms Fisher advised that the app was now 'live' and was being rolled out to all social care staff and young people, with a campaign to raise awareness of its capabilities being planned.

The Committee discussed the changes made to our children's health checks as a result of the work of Justuz, with Ms Fisher identifying that work had been undertaken in conjunction with Health services and as a result improvements had been implemented and were ongoing. She raised the issue of school nurses not being provided with mobile phones and identified the limitations regarding communicating appointment times to young people which resulted. Ms Fisher noted that improvements in communication between school nurses and our young people could result from the allocation of mobile phones and the Committee agreed to give further consideration to the issue.

Ms Fisher highlighted the ongoing 'War Against Words', reporting that the movement was going from strength to strength and would be further helped by changes being made to the language used in the Council's electronic recording system. All banned words were to be removed from forms used by social workers and Justuz would continue to challenge and encourage the use of everyday language and promote the importance of carefully using words that showed our children that people cared.

The Committee questioned how the voice and opinion of those children and young people who did not engage in Justuz was accessed, with Ms Fisher acknowledging that reaching every child was a challenge. She informed the Committee that all children were visited by a social worker at least once every six weeks for a review meeting and that herself and her team were always looking for ways in which to engage with our children. She highlighted a number of events and opportunities which had been held to encourage engagement, as well as identifying the launch of the new app.

The Committee gave thanks to Ms Fisher and the attending young people, noting the enthusiasm and hard work of the whole team.

The Committee agreed: To give further consideration to the issue of improving communication with our young people via the issuing of mobile phones to school nurses.

5 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee was noted as Thursday 27 January 2022, commencing at 6pm.

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Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.00pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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