

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES - COUNCILLOR JIM HOBSON

Portfolio areas of responsibility:

- Children's social care and targeted intervention services
- Care leavers
- Early help
- Fostering/adoption/permanence planning
- Children's commissioning
- Family Hubs
- Early Years

Introduction

The cabinet member will present the report to Council and report on any key issues.

Theme 1 – Delivering sustainable change through Family Safeguarding Funding

Family Safeguarding is a whole family approach to working with children and families that supports parents to create sustained change for themselves and for their family. This approach fits with the Blackpool Families Rock approach. Following a successful bid, the Department for Education awarded £764,000 to implement the Family Safeguarding Model, with a view to an anticipated “go-live” date of April 2024. The model will support key elements of the Children's Social Care improvement plan.

The Family Safeguarding Model is part of wider work to transform Children's Services that includes delivery of Family Hubs and a revised Early Help system. It seeks to embed domestic abuse, substance and alcohol misuse, and mental health specialists within children's social work teams to work with adults. This will help to address long-standing high levels of demand for statutory services by stimulating better frontline practice and cultural change.

After an “inadequate” rating for Children's Social Care in 2018, improvement work led to OFSTED rating services overall as “Requires Improvement” with “Good” for children in care and care leavers. Recommendations within the report are as follows:

1. A multi-agency response to children suffering domestic abuse or long-term neglect, and to those children with complex needs.
2. Work with partners to strengthen their contribution to early help and neglect.
3. Sufficient placements to meet children's assessed needs.
4. The timeliness of meeting children's dental and emotional needs.

There are also two key areas for consideration from the OFSTED report relevant to the Family Safeguarding model:

1. The practice model needs to be strengthened in order to better support families where domestic abuse, neglect and mental health issues are present.
2. The practice model needs to clarify the expectations and role of partners with a shared narrative.

A key strength noted by OFSTED and other inspectorate bodies working with Blackpool has been the emerging collaborative approach evident from Blackpool Families Rock. Working alongside families, parents, children and young people has revolutionised how we identify the need for, and support change in families to make the environment safer for children.

Working with partners to develop a whole family, multi-disciplinary approach to safeguarding children achieves better outcomes for children and their families. It will:

- Transform the support offer provided to families in Blackpool particularly in relation to neglect and domestic abuse.
- Drive culture change and further improve social work practice to reduce the long-standing challenges with numbers of children being placed on child protection plans and becoming Looked After.
- Support the next phase of the improvement journey to “Outstanding”.

The main aim is to deliver better, sustainable outcomes for children and families, but it is also expected that it will reduce high intervention and placement costs. Blackpool Children’s Services, in partnership with the Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice, plan to deliver the following key work between September 2023 and April 2024:

- Launch multi-disciplinary teams once 75% of adult specialist workers are in post.
- Building on trauma informed and motivational interviewing training with the delivery of targeted motivational interviewing and change workshops (launched once 75% of the Strengthening and Supporting Families teams have attended targeted workshops).
- Set up the Family Safeguarding Workbook (Workbook is an assessment tool for multi-disciplinary practitioners).
- Adopt the Family Safeguarding group supervision method, which involves all practitioners as opposed to Children’s Staff alone.
- Ensure clear governance and accountability is set up across the new teams.

In terms of benefit realisation, outcomes, outputs, and measurable objectives have been identified and will form the basis of monitoring what success will look like as part of Family Safeguarding adoption for Blackpool. Local Authorities that have adopted family safeguarding have seen significant reductions in rate of Public Care proceedings alongside the improved offer to families.

Theme 2 – Family Hub and Start for Life Offer

In the Autumn Budget 2021, the Government announced around £300m investment into the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme, covering 75 upper tier local authorities in England. Blackpool was invited to take part in the programme, which is jointly overseen by the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education.

Family hubs are for families with babies, children and young people from birth until they reach the age of 19, or up to 25 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The programme emphasises the importance of the first 1001 days (from conception to age two) for laying important foundations for children's emotional and physical development and ensuring parents and carers can give their children the best possible start in life. Family hubs bring together multiple organisations in a 'one stop shop' with the aim of making it easier for families to access the right help and support at the right time. There is a key requirement for family hubs to make services and information available digitally for parents.

Services that are focused on supporting Families in the first 1001 days are known as the Start for Life Offer. The vast majority of the funding is focused on the development of parenting support, home learning environment/speech and language, infant feeding, parent infant relationships and mental health, parent and carer panels, and publishing the offer. The wider range of services family hubs should have available are funded through existing funding streams such as council budgets, public health grants, and Integrated Care Board funding streams. Family hubs are tasked with working with partners to deliver these in family hubs, or to have strong links to services to be able to support families to access the support.

Between April 2022 and March 2025 Blackpool will receive £2.8 million for the development of Family Hubs and the Start for life offer. There are three Family Hubs in Blackpool: North Family Hub (formerly Grange Park Children's Centre), Central Family Hub (formerly Talbot and Brunswick Children's Centre), and South Family Hub (at Palatine Leisure Centre). These were launched in July 2023 and are open to all children and families in Blackpool. There are also a number of additional sites that we are working with, including our former children centre sites and because we protected our children's centres, when many local authorities were closed we are in a good position to build upon this investment.

The Start for Life Offer is mostly in place, with the new funding used to enhance or extend existing commissions lead by Public Health or A Better Start, or the introduction of new services where gaps were identified. Funding has also been used to create Family Hub teams, employed by the council to deliver the range of groups and activities and respond to family's needs as they come to the hub. There is more work to do on developing the digital aspect of Family Hub delivery but work is underway to do this.

General questions / comments

Councillors will have the opportunity to raise questions / comments on any matter in the Cabinet Member's portfolio.