

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2023**

Present:

Councillor Flanagan (in the Chair)

Councillors

Bamborough
S Brookes

Cooper
Critchley

Fenlon
Jones

C Mitchell

Gemma Clayton, Co-opted Member

In Attendance:

Chris Coyle, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Children's Social Care and Tis)

Joanne Stewart, Head of Service – Early Help Services

Bertie Goffe, Workforce Development Lead

Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager

Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Councillor Paul Galley, Scrutiny Lead Member

Councillor Michele Scott

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 22 JUNE 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2023 were signed by the Chair as a true and correct record.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no requests from members of the public to speak on this occasion.

4 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Executive and Cabinet Member decisions taken since the previous meeting and Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member for Children's Services provided an update in relation to the Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership. It was noted that partners were engaged in the new structure and it was considered that it would be beneficial for Blackpool to focus on its own area in safeguarding work.

In response to a question, it was noted that the Child Death Overview Panel would remain at a pan-Lancashire level due to the small numbers involved to allow analysis and understanding of data.

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5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan noting that the Medium Term Financial Strategy would be received in due course.

6 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE UPDATE: IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Mr Chris Coyle, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Children's Social Care and Tis) provided an update on the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan. He highlighted that the plan had been developed following the most recent Ofsted inspection to address the areas requiring improvement within the inspection. The improvement plan covered areas including neglect, children with complex needs, partnership working and early help. The plan had also been formulated to address wider issues in relation to children and families.

The Committee was informed that whilst some targets within the plan were not as aspirational as they could be it was important that they were achievable. It was considered that often staff did not have the confidence in their own work to express and demonstrate what had been achieved and a key aim was to build the confidence of the workforce. The importance of partnership working was also highlighted and the required joined up approach that must be taken to address key issues.

Members queried whether other Council services were contributing as expected to Children's Services improvement. In response, Mr Coyle advised that the Council was contributing as required. He noted that previously Children's Services' approach had been too insular, however, the service was now reaching out and seeking help and creating good internal partnerships as well as external partnerships. It was noted that some areas such as Early Help were particularly well supported.

In reference to fostering, it was noted that Blackpool had a higher level of internal foster carers per 10k population than many areas. It was considered that the internal offer to foster carers was attractive, however, it was acknowledged that further support could be provided. A model called Mockingbird which provided peer support was being explored.

Mr Coyle noted that the number of looked after children was being reduced slowly and safely and that the aim was to become more in line with statistical neighbours..

The Committee noted that a report in relation to the domestic abuse was due and it was agreed that this would be circulated to Members when released.

Members went on to discuss the sharing of information and in particular in relation to private fostering arrangements and the process for registering these with the Council.

In relation to the Improvement Plan itself it was noted that a number of actions had not been updated and targets not included and it was agreed that an updated version would be circulated as soon as it had been updated. In response to a question, Mr Coyle advised that it was difficult to demonstrate success as data and figures did not tell how effective services had been in making a difference to a child's life.

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It was reported that the improvement plan was scheduled to be updated early in 2024 and that it would be resubmitted to the Committee for further consideration at that stage.

The Committee agreed:

1. To receive the domestic abuse review report when available.
2. To consider the improvement plan progress in early 2024.
3. To receive an updated copy of the improvement plan following the meeting once it had been updated to include the missing detail.

7 EARLY HELP STRATEGY AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Ms Joanne Stewart, Head of Service – Early Help Services provided an update on the implementation of the Early Help Strategy and improved partnership working in relation to early help. She advised that the Strategy had been launched two years ago and had been designed to reset the expectations of what the partnership would be expected to do. It was noted that early help was about wrapping services around the child/family at a very early stage in order to prevent more advanced support being required at a later date.

The original strategy had now been implemented and therefore a new strategy was now required to progress work even further. It was queried what the new strategy would focus on and it was noted that links to all other strategies would be identified, wider information would be contained about the family hubs with more explicit information regarding the expectations of all partners.

It was reported that the family hub programme was ongoing with three hubs in Blackpool now in operation. Blackpool was considered a leader in this area of work and was sharing learning nationally. The hubs had received strong partnership support from everyone involved to date. Upon further exploration with the Committee, it was noted that an exception was some schools with further work ongoing to increase buy in.

In response to a question, it was noted that the 'seldom heard' groups were targeted by the family support teams and the family hubs were a natural place from these groups to gravitate towards. Work was ongoing with Better Start connectors to promote the hubs and the community was actively drawn to the hubs through their attendance at appointments with midwives and speech and language therapists amongst others.

Further queries related to the sustainability of the programme and Ms Stewart advised that funding until March 2025 had been secured. A Better Start funding had been extended until 2027 and a sustainability board had been established across the partnership in order to secure the future of the hubs.

The Committee agreed:

To contribute to the development of the new early help strategy in due course.

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8 FAMILY SAFEGUARDING MODEL

Mr Chris Coyle, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Children's Social Care and Tis) and Mr Bertie Goffe, Workforce Development Lead provided an update on the plans for the family safeguarding model. It was reported that £760k funding from the Department for Education had been received to introduce the model to Blackpool with the hope that the model would become self-sustaining after the first few years as the impact on number of looked after children and placements was realised.

Mr Goffe advised that the key principle of the model was to support the child and the family so that a child could remain in their family setting rather than need to be taken into care as long as it was safe for them to remain. Services would be co-located to ensure partnership working and quicker response to aspects such as domestic abuse and adult mental health due to specialist workers being together. The service would be focused on families subject to children in need plans and child protection plans.

In response to a question, Mr Goffe advised that the aligning of different systems for data sharing was an issue, however, the co-location of different services helped to rectify this. The different service representatives would be able to access their own systems from the same office and share information in person together. It was noted that the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) had demonstrated how well this could work.

In terms of delivery, it was noted that the model would be running by April 2024 with operation and strategic boards in place to develop and support the arrangements.

Members noted the importance of 'invest to save' models such as this proposal and queried the scrutiny role in measuring and supporting success. In response, Mr Goffe welcomed the support and the potential for scrutiny to hold to account all partners for their contribution. It was considered important for the Committee to also be able to quantify the impact of the work on other services and it was noted that independent researchers had been invited to follow the programme from its inception in order to accurately monitor impact.

The Committee agreed:

That a report on the implementation and initial impact of the model be received in approximately 12 months with further reporting following in order to measure success.

9 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

The Committee agreed its workplan subject to the number of items for the November 2023 meeting being reduced.

10 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The date and time of the next meeting was agreed as Thursday 9 November 2023, commencing at 6.00pm.

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Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.48 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

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