

Report to:

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Relevant Officer:

Annette Algie, Betterstart Project

Date of Meeting:

9 November 2023

BLACKPOOL BETTER START ANNUAL UPDATE

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 This is an annual report for the Committee summarising key achievements of the Better Start Partnership over the last 12 months, details of the time extension received from the National Lottery Community Fund, future focus areas, and sustainability progress.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To consider the update on the programme and mainstreaming of the approach, questioning as appropriate and identifying any areas for further scrutiny.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 The recommendations of the review are still relevant.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? N/A

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 N/A

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priority is

- "Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience"

6.0 Background information

Blackpool Better Start, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, has been operating across the town since 2015. The programme is a partnership approach, including the Local Authority, the

Integrated Care Board, Blackpool Teaching Hospital, and the community and is led by the NSPCC. The programme aims to improve outcomes for babies and young children, reducing the stressors that families are facing and increasing the capabilities of parents.

Blackpool Better Start is an investment in transformation, as well as funding new services and interventions that have a solid evidence base, it has also utilised the investment to change the local system. Key examples of this have included redesign of speech and language processes and provision for under 4s, and the redesign of the health visiting service which has resulted in doing more within existing budgets.

The partnership, in year 9, is focusing on mainstreaming and sustaining services, undertaking a governance review to support this process (Appendix A). This has resulted in the inclusion of a new Sustainability Board which will make recommendations to the Finance and Executive Board on mainstreaming and sustaining services.

6.1 **Achievements Over the Last 12 Months**

Since the last update to the committee, the following outlines some of the key achievements of the Better Start partnership. The annual dashboard for the project is in Appendix B.

Community-Based Approaches

Healthy Start

Health Start is a government scheme available for families who access Universal Credit. The scheme nationally has a low take up but, through a communications campaign and our Community Connectors raising awareness of the scheme and supporting families to apply, there has been a 13% increase in the uptake across the town. (Appendix C).

Promoting the Healthy Start scheme is one way Blackpool Better Start is responding to the cost-of-living crisis facing families. Community Connectors are also supporting families to access free nursery entitlement, vitamins, discretionary funding and additional benefits, warm hubs and foodbanks. In addition, support on how families can save money in different ways such as food preparation and activities for children has been a focus of the work. This work has been nominated for a Children and Young People Now Award with the ceremony in November 2023.

Christmas Advocacy 2022

Through the popular letter from Santa and Christmas Grottos, of the 1000 families that engaged, 112 families were identified as requiring additional support. All these families received support from a Community Connector which included supporting families to access health or social care services and support, discretionary funds, foodbanks, Christmas gifts or complete benefit or housing support forms. The events again enabled the team to identify those families who needed more support and signpost them to services across the town.

The Grottos will again be delivered this year with the ambition to support more families. Additional SEN sessions are planned, that will offer children with additional needs an opportunity to experience Father Christmas in a quieter environment. Some of the sessions will again be taking place at Church buildings, as well as through Blackpool FC and Family Hubs.

Infant Mental Health Awareness Week

This year, the focus of the nationally developed Infant Mental Health Awareness Week was on 'bonding before birth'. Whilst the event typically focuses on raising awareness of infant mental health within the workforce, Blackpool Better Start wanted to ensure that our local communities understand the importance of supporting positive mental health and healthy relationships between babies and parents. 'Baby Showers' were subsequently held across the town, which invited pregnant women, partners and families, and provided a light touch and non-threatening way of talking about babies' mental health and bonding during pregnancy.

The events provided families with the opportunity to receive a photograph of them with their 'bump' and engage with services. These included maternity, antenatal education, infant feeding support, parent-infant relationship services, community connectors and early help. The events were well attended with 20 new families over the week signing up to attend antenatal education who had previously not registered. The events are being replicated through family hubs as an engagement tool to bring more families into family hubs and universal services.

Oral Health

Blackpool Better Start has been committed to addressing oral health inequalities in the town, working in partnership with Public Health and NHS England and Improvement, an oral health strategy has been implemented. The strategy has included distribution of oral health resources, working with early years settings and local dentists, and ensuring consistent language and messaging on the importance of good oral health practice in the early years. The work has included an innovative approach to commissioning and piloting ringfencing of time within community settings for appointments for babies and young children and has been nominated for a Children and Young People Now Award for 2023. (Appendix D).

School Readiness

Working with three local primary schools, sessions have been delivered over the summer supporting children to be ready for school and building on the universal videos and books already distributed. The sessions, which are delivered by a new team of practitioners, focus on the Home Learning Environment and give key messages to families on the practical things that they can do with their children to support them to be Ready for School.

These sessions have included the development of tools which can be used by families and practitioners to support school readiness with a qualitative study indicating a promising impact.

The approach will be scaled up over the year to be delivered through family hubs and early years settings, supporting more children for the September 2024 intake.

Services and Support

Parent Infant Relationship Service

Blackpool's specialist Parent Infant Relationship Service was launched in January 2023. The service - which had been in development for over 2 years - will provide much needed support to parents and their infants pre-birth to 2 years around attachment and responsive parenting. The team not only provide direct services and evidence-based programmes to families facing significant adversity, but also provide consultations and support to other organisations, helping them to support families in the best way. The service, which is provided by Blackpool Teaching Hospitals, is commissioned through the ICB with a commitment to maintain the service post National Lottery Funding.

For Baby's Sake

The For Baby's Sake team, within Early Help, continue to offer holistic and therapeutic support to families where domestic abuse is a concern. In November 2022, the team were recognised for their cutting edge and essential child protection work, winning the Children and Young People Now Award in the Safeguarding category.

Behavioural Activation

Behavioural Activation is an intervention designed to improve the mental health of women experiencing mild to moderate post-natal depression. The intervention was piloted in Blackpool through trained Health Visitors over 6-8 weekly sessions with 24 women. The pilot showed that the intervention gave the Health Visitors a new approach to structuring support for women with low level depression/anxiety and the outcomes for participants showed a statistically significant reduction in anxiety and depression following the support. Discussions are currently ongoing with Public Health (commissioner) and Blackpool Teaching Hospitals (provider) over the continuation of the intervention within Health Visiting pathways.

Born into Care

The 'Born into Care' work has progressed this year, building upon the national guidelines developed for practice and co-producing Blackpool's adaptation of these. In addition to this, a Steering Group has been established, including those with lived experience, to ensure that Blackpool can implement the best practice guidelines.

Together, the partnership group has developed a clear theory of change and outcomes that we are collectively working towards, aiming to reduce the numbers of babies going into care and

ensuring that parents are not traumatised by the very systems that is there to support them. The work is a clear example of systems transformation and further updates will be provided as the work progresses.

Workforce

Trauma Informed Schools Guidelines

In June 2023 Blackpool Better Start launched *Guidelines to becoming a trauma informed school*. The report aims to help local schools understand the impact traumatic experiences can have on children, so they can provide the support they need to help all children achieve their potential. The guide was developed through interviews and training delivered to 4 schools across the town and is now being implemented across the town as best practice.

Measuring What Matters

Within the development of the Parent Infant Relationship service a key piece of research was undertaken with practitioners of parent-infant services and their use of outcome measures. The Measuring What Matters Report published in January 2023 by the Centre for Early Child Development summarises the measures and has recommendations for practitioners to choose the most suitable outcome measures within services, supporting both local and national practice in this area.

Fathers Inclusive Practice

In response to community views on fathers' experiences of exclusion in early years services and support, the fathers inclusive practice group has been established. The group aims to share and model best practice and provide training and development for services on how to ensure that services are inclusive of fathers and fathers' views. The group has launched training, co-produced with fathers, which will be delivered across the town to professionals to raise awareness of inclusive practices and the impact on fathers when they feel excluded.

6.2 Extension of Time and Future Focus

In May 2023, following the submission of a business case to the National Lottery Community Fund, Blackpool Better Start received formal confirmation that the programme underspend could continue into years 11 and 12, two years beyond the original funded period. The additional time will not support a full-scale continuation of Blackpool Better Start's current delivery model but will comprise of £4.5million spend between April 2025 and March 2027.

The work will focus on three key identified areas and will continue to be supported by the Centre for Early Child Development. (For note, the spend previously has been at a pace of around £4.5million per year).

Areas to be continued are:

1. Pregnancy to Age Four pathways of support
2. Speech, Language and Communication
3. Research, Data and Evidence

The intended impact is that by focusing in these areas there will be a sustained change in the services families in Blackpool universally access. Additional work will be taken on development of pathways into targeted services and consistent messaging around public health messages on child development, for example the impact of smoking in pregnancy.

The partnership has been collecting data on those attending services and population level impacts and there is an evidence base generated which will support shared learning around what it takes to achieve this kind of transformation. The additional time will enable programmes with higher associated costs to generate more evidence over a longer time period which will support the influencing of future commissioning decisions and the implementation of programmes or campaigns within areas that have not previously been ready for innovation e.g. developing a new approach to reducing smoking in pregnancy.

6.3 **Sustainability**

The Blackpool Better Start partnership has, since day one, been planning for the sustainability and mainstreaming of services which have been proven to have a positive impact on children, families, the workforce or wider system. The Finance Board, consisting of key partners, has reported on a regular basis to the Better Start Executive Board regarding the potential for leverage funding, changes in commissioning and the redistribution of resources longer term.

Key examples of this include the Baby Steps antenatal education programme now being delivered solely by the Hospital Trust across the town and commissioned by Public Health in the 0-19 Universal Health Visiting and School Nursing contract. Programmes such as SafeCare, Survivor Mums and Video Interaction Guidance delivered through trained staff in the Local Authority Early Help and Support Service. And the Parent Infant Relationship Service funded initially by the National Lottery Community Fund grant moving to full funding through the ICB from March 2024.

However, despite this success, there is still more work to do mainstreaming key services such as Community Connectors, Early Years Park Rangers, and universal parenting support. Work is already underway developing a more defined and robust sustainability plan in relation to these (Appendix E), in part utilising the opportunities brought about through the government's Start for Life funding and other grants across the town. Partners will continue to work closely on this, reviewing areas of cost savings and the feasibility of rediverting statutory budgets into the proven services.

The new governance structure for the final two years, which has introduced a Sustainability Board, chaired by the Director of Resources for Blackpool Council, will review projects and

mainstreaming options and make recommendations to the Finance board who will look at the opportunities for rediverting funds or identifying funding strands where necessary.

6.4 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

7.1 6(a): Blackpool Better Start Governance Structure
6(b): Year 8 Annual Dashboard
6(c): Shared Learning Report Healthy Start Vouchers
6(d): Shared Learning Report Oral Health
6(e): Sustainability Tracker

8.0 Financial considerations:

8.1 Contained within the report.

9.0 Legal considerations:

9.1 N/A

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 N/A

11.0 Equalities considerations and the impact of this decision for our children and young people:

11.1 The impact of Betterstart on children and young people is included in the content of this report and its appendices.

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

12.1 N/A

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

13.1 N/A

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 None