

## CABINET MEMBER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND ASPIRATION – COUNCILLOR KATH BENSON

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Portfolio areas of responsibility:

- Schools under LA control, community schools
- Children with Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- LEA support to academies and voluntary aided schools
- School place planning, organisation and buildings
- Education diversity and support units/service e.g. Pupil Referral Units
- Youth Services
- Youth Employment and Education

### Introduction

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

### Theme 1: Schools Update

Following its latest Ofsted report, South Shore Academy has been judged as inadequate. As South Shore is already an Academy with a previous inadequate judgement, it is now potentially in scope for re-brokering to another Trust. This process, if enacted, often takes considerable time and so the Department for Education will advise on the next steps. Two termination warning notices have been issued to Bright Futures Trust who run the school.

Foundations have been laid for the extension to Highfurlong School and the steel frame is being constructed. Planning permission for stage two, which includes a new hydrotherapy suite, has been approved and the construction of the second phase will follow-on from stage one. Both stages are expected to be complete by the end of 2024, with students on site from September 2024. The completion of the building work will mean that there will be over 40 new special school places for Blackpool children, whilst the hydrotherapy provision will also be available to some adult members of the community who require the use of such a facility.

Langdale Primary School has now closed and the pupils have moved on to new schools. The building has been acquired by Blackpool Council and will be used as a specialist SEND provision, catering for pupils who cannot manage in mainstream classrooms and struggle to attend school.

Plans are in place to use this building to provide bespoke support for children with Education, Health and Care Plans and to open the building for extended hours for community use.

## **Theme 2: “The Big Education Conversation” event with Bridget Phillipson MP**

On 24 November 2023, students of different ages and backgrounds across Blackpool came together to engage in “The Big Education Conversation” event at Montgomery High School. This event brought together organisations including Big Change, Blackpool Youth Council, Right to Succeed and Blackpool Council in a youth-led conversation about potential changes to the English education system. Participants reflected on ideas set out in *Out of kilter: How to rebalance our school system to work for people, economy and society*, a report produced by the Progressive Policy Think Tank. The Shadow Secretary of State for Education met children and teachers as they articulated what a re-shaped school system might look like.

The debate was facilitated by The Big Education Conversation, an organisation which supports communities to talk about what education means to them and how real changes to systems can be made. Children suggested adding more practical and vocational subjects to the curriculum, such as budgeting skills, to enable young people to pursue a wider set of interests and career pathways. In the afternoon, in a more formal setting, leaders reflected that a one size fits all system may not be fit for purpose and welcomed further debate, consultation and engagement about how the system may be changed.

## **Theme 3: Adult Education – the success of The Platform**

The Platform youth employment centre was launched in January 2022 in response to high levels of youth unemployment in Blackpool. The Platform is a bespoke youth-friendly facility focused on the needs of the 16-24 age group. It hosts a dedicated team of employment advisers and offers training and digital job search facilities. Jobcentre Plus Youth Work Coaches are co-located with the Council’s team, which means that staff can liaise to ensure an effective handover and work jointly with clients. The Platform regularly hosts workshops and jobs fairs with excellent links with Blackpool and the Fylde College and other training providers and crucially local employers who offer job opportunities, careers advice and work experience opportunities.

In December 2023, the Platform reached an important milestone in terms of directly assisting 1,000 young people with employment and training advice, with 291 young people helped into work and a further 264 into education and training. In recognition of the considerable achievements of the Blackpool delivery model, the Platform recently won the Partnership of

the Year Award from the Employment Related Services Association. This acknowledged the effective partnership working between the Council and Jobcentre Plus, as well as other supporting organisations. The Platform has received financial support from various government initiatives to enable its initial setup and to sustain the core team and activities, including the Community Renewal Fund, the Town Deal and the Shared Prosperity Fund. Its future is secured until at least March 2025 and the Council will explore all funding opportunities to continue the excellent work of this much-needed employment advice facility for young people.

### **General questions / comments**

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