

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -  
THURSDAY, 22 JUNE 2023**

**Present:**

Councillor (in the Chair)

Councillors

S Brookes

Critchley

Hunter

C Mitchell

Cooper

Ellison

Jones

Snape

**In Attendance:**

Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Young People and Aspiration

Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council and Statutory Lead Member for Children's Services

Councillor Paul Galley, Chair of Scrutiny Leadership Board

Councillor Michele Scott

Vicky Clarke, Head of Libraries

Chris Coyle, Assistant Director of Operations - Children's Social Care

Vicki Gent, Director of Children's Services

Paul Turner, Assistant Director- Education

**1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

**2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 2 FEBRUARY 2023**

The Committee considered the minutes of the last meeting held on 2 February 2023. The Committee noted there was an error in Minute Item 5 'Ofsted Inspection Update'. Where it had been stated that

"Ofsted had undertaken an inspection of Children's Services 5-16 December 2023". This sentence should have read "Ofsted had undertaken an inspection of Children's Services 5-16 December 2022".

The minutes of the last meeting held on 2 February 2023 were agreed as a true and correct record subject to the amendment noted above.

**3 APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS**

The Committee considered the appointment of co-opted members. It noted that the existing members Ms Gemma Clayton and Ms Jo Snape had indicated a willingness to continue in their posts. The Committee also agreed that Ms Clayton and Ms Snape had provide a useful contribution to the work of the Committee and their experiences had broadened the perspectives available to the Committee.

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The Committee agreed to appoint Ms Gemma Clayton as a parent governor co-opted member and Ms Jo Snape as a Diocesan co-opted member to the Committee for the Municipal Year 2023/2024.

#### **4 PUBLIC SPEAKING**

The Committee noted that there were no requests from members of the public to speak on this occasion.

#### **5 FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the Forward Plan noting that the Children's Services Medium Term Financial Strategy would be considered by the Committee in due course prior to its Executive approval.

#### **6 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE UPDATE**

The Committee received a presentation updating it on the activities within the area of Children's Social Care from Ms Vicky Gent, Director of Children's Services.

Ms Gent highlighted the progress made over the past five years within children's services. Members noted that the workforce within children's services had been stabilised ensuring that the Council had staff to achieve positive outcomes for children and families.

Ms Gent reminded Members of the key areas of improvement identified in the Inspection report namely:

- Improvements to the multi-agency response to children suffering domestic abuse or long-term neglect, and to those children with complex needs.
- The need to work with partners to strengthen their contribution to early help and neglect.
- The lack of sufficient placements to meet children's assessed needs.
- The timeliness of meeting children's dental and emotional needs.

The Committee noted the revised improvement plan and asked that updates on the progress made be presented as well as areas of potential issues including the identified challenges. Ms Gent explained that there were four cross-cutting themes which drove issues within the town broadly and children's social care particularly. These were neglect, domestic abuse, sufficiency and permanence of placements and education for children with social care involvement. The Committee agreed that in developing its workplan it would seek to ensure that these themes were addressed in policy development work and in Scrutiny Reviews.

Ms Gent then spoke about the Plans for the Future in terms of further improvement. Ms Gent highlighted the recent appointment of a Head of Service for Transformation to lead on whole service improvement. The recent successful funding bid for the implementation of Family Hubs with the aspiration for these to include the co-location of statutory

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services within the hubs and the development of multi-agency teams which could have additional positive impact around substance misuse, emotional health and domestic abuse.

The presentation also explained the proposed transition from Pan-Lancashire Safeguarding to a place based board. The pan-Lancashire arrangements which had been in place since 2019 it had been felt no longer offered the most responsive system for local needs and had not driven change in key areas such as domestic abuse. The ability to more clearly link with other partnership boards such as the Corporate Parent Panel and B Safe Blackpool Board was also noted. A report would be brought to the July Executive to agree the next steps. The Committee was broadly supportive but agreed that once implemented the Committee should consider reviewing the new arrangements' operation.

The Committee was also informed of the progress towards the creation of the Children and Families Partnership Plan. The development of the plan had already commenced with a Development Day held on the 15 March 2023 with over 80 attendees. The Committee agreed that the creation of such an overarching strategy which had not existed for sometime was necessary to the delivery of further social care improvements. The Committee emphasised its view that those with lived experience needed to be involved in the plan's development and help direct its implementation. The Committee noted that it would be involved further in the development of the plan which would take place during September 2023.

### **7 LITERACY STRATEGY UPDATE**

The Committee received a presentation on the implementation of the Literacy Strategy from Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director. Mr Turner was accompanied by the Ms Vikki Clarke, Head of Libraries. The presentation outlined the progress made in terms of implementation of the plan since it had been approved by the Executive on the 12 July 2021. Mr Turner reminded members of the rationale behind the development of strategy namely that exam results at GCSE level were low compared to other areas nationally and other similar areas. Adult literacy levels were also low. The Strategy outlined a collaborative effort to improve literacy levels across Blackpool in all age groups, but particularly in the Early Years and through Key Stage 1, with the aim of seeing lasting change in these outcomes. The general aim of the strategy being for every person in Blackpool to have the speaking, reading and writing skills to enable wider learning and employment opportunities as well as access to social and cultural activities.

Mr Turner pointed to the report which highlighted the five key strands of work: teaching and learning, curriculum development, libraries, early years and adult education and the twenty-four overarching recommendations.

Mr Turner highlighted the key improvements driven by the implementation of the Literacy Strategy which highlighted the need to use a range of different methods to address literacy making it a key priority for stakeholders including school leaders in Blackpool.

The development of a strategic group was also highlighted including two eminent

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professors and the Early Years Task and Finish Group. In response to questions from the Committee, Mr Turner explained that due to the changes in landscape of schools with increased numbers of Academies, it was clear that the Council could not drive improvement alone and needed to engage with a range of stakeholders including the Academy Trusts. Mr Turner then particularly emphasised the continuing Blackpool 30 reading challenge and reading standards at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6) were high throughout the pandemic period. It was then explained that writing had not produce as a strong results and this would be a focus going forward.

Ms Clarke then highlighted some of the initiatives involving Libraries including work with Early Years programmes being embedded in libraries, training for libraries staff, the use of the National Literacy Trust programme for developing reading for pleasure and other engagement strands such as the Young Poets Scheme and the Lancashire Book of the Year.

In response to questions the Committee highlighted its view that the synergy between children's centres and libraries was a positive. The Committee also expressed a view that there should be a wide range of options to avoid a drop off in reading for young people in key stage 3 and 4 but noted the positive impact of the use of virtual reality story trails and initiatives such as "Get it Loud in Libraries" in challenges pre-conceived ideas.

The Committee expressed a strong view that it needed access to a detailed town-wide data set to consider progress. This data set would include alternative provision, non-GCSE and GCSE results, results at all key stages and engagement levels.

The Committee agreed to support the continued focus upon literacy in Blackpool schools and the wider Blackpool community and ensure that the Strategy is implemented as agreed and to note the current work undertaken by the Libraries Service to support the Literacy Strategy.

### **8 SEND OFSTED INSPECTION AND WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ACTION UPDATE**

Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director presented a report on the progress made since the SEND Ofsted Inspection and Written Statement of Action. Mr Turner reminded members of the background of the Ofsted Inspection in March 2022 which had identified four key failings for addressing Special Educational Needs:

- The lack of specificity, ownership and accountability in the areas' improvement strategy for SEND.
- The duties around preparing children and young people for adulthood, not being fulfilled.
- The poor communication with parents and carers across the area – model of co-production.
- The long waiting time for some therapies.

The Council and partners had in response produced a Written Statement of Action which had been approved by the Executive at its meeting on the 5 September 2022 which had also been considered by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee.

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The Committee noted that the local area would be re-inspected by Ofsted and the CQC to decide whether sufficient progress had been made in addressing each of the areas of significant weakness identified, this inspection would take place later in 2023.

Mr Turner highlighted progress made since the last update noting the following:

1. Agreement of £3.8 million of funding to eradicate the school funding deficit and High Needs Block deficit (from the Department of Education safety-valve programme).
2. Agreement of £6.2 million of funding to build new school sites in Blackpool at Highfurlong Special School, Educational Diversity and Park school.
3. The introduction of a new post-19 offer at The Oracle, through Valley College.
4. Enhanced Assessment provision at Revoe Primary Academy.
5. A new SEMH Free School for 56 pupils had been approved by the Department for Education.
6. An Alternative Provision Academy bid had been submitted to the Department for Education for children with medical needs that prevented them from attending school.

The Committee noted that the development of a range of options would ensure that the most appropriate provision would be provided. In a number of cases this meant that children would now be accessing schooling within Blackpool rather than out of borough placements. The need for an increased post-19 offer was noted and a broad consensus to increase the proportion of children with Education, Health and Care Plans transitioning into full-time employment was endorsed. In short the service now had more spaces, better spaces and more responsive services for SEN children. The Committee further expressed satisfaction with these improvements to the local offer and the improved communication.

The improvements in timelines for Education, Health and Care Plans were also noted but concern was expressed that access to a range of medical therapies including speech and language and diagnosis continued to be very long.

The Committee agreed to request a presentation from the health provider on the issues regarding waiting times and access to services.

### **9 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORKPLAN**

The Committee noted that the workplanning workshop would be held on 18 July 2023, commencing at 6pm via MS Teams. The updated table of recommendations was also noted.

The Committee agreed that it should also develop a training programme to work alongside the Committee meetings to include the legal framework for children's safeguarding, the Journey of the Child and the legislation around education.

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**10 DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the date and time of the next meeting would be Thursday, 21 September 2023, commencing at 6pm.

**Chairman**

(The meeting ended at 7.35 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

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