

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 25 JANUARY 2024**

Present:

Councillor Flanagan (in the Chair)

Councillors

Bamborough	Cooper	Ellison	C Mitchell
S Brookes	Critchley	Jones	

Ms G Clayton and Ms J Snape, Co-opted Members

In Attendance:

Councillor Paul Galley, Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Board

Councillor Kath Benson, Cabinet Member for Young People and Aspiration

Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

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

Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, SEND and Early Years)

Kara Haskayne, Head of Safeguarding Children and Strategic Partnership Boards

Jeremy Mannino, Head of Schools Safeguarding and Exclusion

Charlotte Baron, Head of SEND

Mike Chew, Divisional Director of Operations, Families and Integrated Community Care
Division, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals

John Greenbank, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser (Scrutiny)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 9 NOVEMBER 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023 were signed by the Chair as 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 and noted the Executive and Cabinet Member decisions taken since the previous meeting.

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5 FORWARD PLAN

Members considered the items on the Forward Plan within its remit. Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, informed the committee that in respect of the items on the plan both the Updated Children's Services Medium Term Financial Plan and the Blackpool Children's and Young People Strategic Partnership Plan, would be completed in the near future and that the Partnership Plan would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the be update; and
2. To add the partnership plan to its work programme for the next meeting.

6 HEALTH WAITING TIMES AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Mr Mike Chew, Divisional Director of Operations, Families and Integrated Community Care Division, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals (BTH), presented the report outlining the progress made in improving access to services for children and young people with SEND.

In respect of Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) waiting times had been improved through increased staffing capacity and better organisation of waiting lists through the appointment of a coordinator role and reducing the numbers of children not brought for appointments or who had cancelled their appointments.

At Blenheim Child Development Centre improved waiting times had been delivered through the securing of additional administrative support. However it had been recognised that waiting times remained above 52 weeks and that additional staffing resource was needed to address the issues. Increased recruitment resources had been put in place to address the issue and Mr Chew expressed the view that these actions would be successful in reducing waiting times to below 52 weeks.

Mr Chew also reported that there had been improvements in the Neuro-Development Pathway (NDP) through increased staffing which had reduced the waiting times from 130 weeks to 26 weeks. However he also stated that there was a need to be clearer on why waiting times existed, noting that waits could be generated by the time it took for information to be brought together to allow cases to proceed. There was a process known as "watchful wait" that had been introduced during the time that a diagnosis was developed to ensure patients and their families were kept informed. It was also reported that BTH would be working with the SEND Partnership and the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to develop a business case to secure increased priority funding for the NDP which would improve accessibility for children and young people.

Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) was discussed with Mr Chew reporting that nationally Blackpool benchmarked well but that there had been an increase

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in referrals which had created pressures on waiting times. In order that those on the waiting list remained supported and an overview of their wellbeing was retained CAMHS maintained contact with all those on the list. Recruitment of additional CAMHS staff was raised by the Committee with Mr Chew explaining that it was an issue. He highlighted that Blackpool had difficulty attracting quality individuals in a challenging national employment market. Work to address these issues included the development of incentives to working in Blackpool, however Mr Chew emphasised that whole system improvements would be a key feature in improving attractiveness to potential new staff.

The Committee highlighted that although those not accepted by CAMHS were informed of the reasons why they had not been accepted ongoing assistance was not always put in place. Mr Chew recognised that this should not be the case and emphasised the importance of listening to the experiences of those who interacted with services to ensure improvements could be identified.

The Committee noted that the report did not include details of “no-shows” at SLT appointments. Members understood that instances of children not being brought for appointments would contribute to increased waiting times and asked that the figures be provided for information.

Referrals on from the NDP were also discussed with the Committee informed that those who had been on the pathway and had received a referral to other services would be the subject of an additional waiting time. As this would result in further waiting for children and young people accessing help, the Committee asked that the numbers of those referred on be provided for information.

In addition to the work by BTH it was noted that waiting times were also impacted by features outside of health services such as housing and those not in employment education or training. Members therefore asked that the importance of partnership working between BTH, the SEND partnership, the ICB and other stakeholders within Blackpool in delivering improved access to services for children and young people be recognised.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the report be noted;
2. That details of “no-shows” for Speech and Language Therapy be provided to members of the committee for information; and
3. That details of waiting times for those referred on from the Neuro-Development Pathway be provided for information to members of the committee.

7 SEND WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ACTION AND STRATEGY UPDATE

Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director – Education, SEND and Early Years, presented an update on the SEND Written Statement of Action (WSOA) and Strategy, highlighting progress made since the February 2022 Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection. He

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highlighted that progress had been made against the actions identified in the WSoA and that the Department for Education (DfE) was satisfied with the work taking place and had been providing ongoing guidance and support. Mr Turner further explained that a key part of this work was the embedding of the concept that SEND was “everyone’s business” and that ownership should be accepted by all services that were accessed by children with SEND, such as leisure.

Progress had also been made in increasing the number of SEND placements available within Blackpool. Mr Turner explained that through the creation of additional placements Blackpool could offer support to out of area children as well as those within the town. This would also assist in driving down costs within Blackpool and further improve service provision going forward.

The Committee noted the role that the private sector could play in supporting children with SEND. Mr Turner stated that this had been recognised and that a number of employers did support work involving children with SEND, but that more could be done in this respect. Members asked that details of the work taking place be circulated for information following the meeting.

It was noted that Mr Turner would be leaving his role at the Council and Members queried who would replace him and where responsibility for overseeing SEND work would lie. In response, it was explained that Mr Jeremy Mannino would become Assistant Director with responsibility for SEND in Mr Turner’s place, while SEND work specifically would remain with Ms Charlotte Barron as the SEND Manager.

The report highlighted that the Council was awaiting the outcome of a bid for funding for an Alternative Provision Academy from the DfE. Mr Turner explained that although no guarantee could be provided on how successful the bid could be, officers were confident it would be approved. The delivery of a new academy was recognised as an important addition to the SEND offer in Blackpool and would assist in returning some children with SEND back into mainstream schooling.

Members highlighted that they had informally discussed issues surrounding SEND as part of the Preparation for Adulthood Strategy meeting. As part of this the Committee had recommended that a deep dive on the “Transition for Young Adults with SEND” be undertaken and asked that this be added to the Committee’s work programme.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the report be noted;
2. That details of work with private sector organisations be provided to members of the committee for information; and
3. That a deep dive on the Transition of Young Adults with SEND be added to the Committee’s work programme.

Mr Turner, Mr Mannino, Ms Baron and Mr Chew left the meeting following this item.

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8 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE

Mr Chris Coyle, Assistant Director – Children’s Social Care presented an update on progress against the Children’s Social Care Improvement Plan. He reported that sufficient improvements had been made and the Department for Education (DfE) had therefore removed its right of statutory intervention. This was noted as a significant step, although it was noted that the DfE had appointed a civil servant to provide dedicated support and advice to the Council as its improvement journey continued.

It was advised that two of the key aims of the plan were the aspiration to receive a “Good” Ofsted grading and that service users regarded the provision as good. This would involve better engagement with young people and their families to undertake their needs and identify where improvement could be made.

Oversight and monitoring of the plan had also been established to assist in ensuring that it was capable of meeting its aims. This included quarterly review meetings chaired by Ms Vicky Gent, Director of Children’s Services, where the work taking place would be monitored. Officers also regularly met with the DfE where constructive feedback was received and comment provided on work taking place. Mr Coyle added that the feedback received so far had been positive. Communication had also been maintained with Ofsted regarding progress and it was expected that a further inspection would be undertaken in the near future.

Mr Coyle also highlighted the data in respect of the work being undertaken, stating that the number of referrals had fallen from 1,000 to 780 per 100k, which was in line with comparable authorities. In addition to this the rate of re-referrals had fallen from 32% to 18%, which was below the national average. The number of Looked After Children had also fallen to 125 per 10k, although it was recognised that this remained above the national average. Section 47 Enquires were stated as being in line with Blackpool’s statistical comparators and the number of Children Protection Plans in place were at the national average. Mr Coyle reported that this demonstrated that the work taking place was having a positive impact and that services were improving.

It was noted that the number of Interim Care Orders was worse than the baseline figure and Mr Coyle accepted that this was the case. This was due in part due to national slippage in the number of orders but he also recognised that more could be done by the Council including work to identify members of children’s wider family.

The costs of Children’s Social Care was also discussed and Members queried if it was considered that the work taking place would lessen the financial pressures generated. Mr Coyle stated that this would be the case in the long term but pressures would remain in the short and medium terms. He advised that LAC and children in residential settings would remain the biggest cost, but that the number of these children was reducing in line with the national average and that officers were confident that services were progressing the right direction.

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The vetting of agency staff was raised with Mr Coyle explaining that Blackpool used fewer agency staff than the national average in Children's Social Care. He added that a structured process was in place for recruiting agency staff which was supported by the Council's human resources and commissioning teams. Further to this any externally recruited staff were subject to a contractual framework that ensured robust checks were in place before they could work.

The Committee agreed that the report be noted.

9 SAFEGUARDING GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Ms Kara Haskayne, Head of Safeguarding Children and Strategic Partnership Boards, presented a report outlining the new children's safeguarding arrangements for Blackpool. Following the ending of Pan-Lancashire safeguarding arrangements, partners had decided to review the joint safeguarding arrangements in 2022 following concerns that they had led to a lack of strategic focus on local areas. Following this review, partners had agreed to cease Pan-Lancashire arrangements and move to a place based model allowing a greater focus on local need.

As a result of this decision the Council met with safeguarding partners at a workshop event in March 2023 to agree the strategic safeguarding priorities for Blackpool. This meeting established that the partnership would set up Strategic Delivery Groups responsible for each priority which would report assurance to a Blackpool Children Safeguarding Partnership Assurance Board (CSAP). The first meetings of these group began following the first CSAP meeting in May 2023. Ms Haskayne reported that all the groups had met except the Domestic Abuse Children and Families Strategic Delivery Group, which had not met due to a delay in Lancashire Constabulary nominating a Chair. However she added that this nomination had been received in January 2024 and therefore it was hoped that the group would begin work soon.

Ms Haskayne also reported on the work to develop the governance arrangements for the CSAP. These had been developed following the publishing of the Department for Education's "Working Together" consultation in September 2023. This had led to the agreement that the Board should be chaired by one of Blackpool's statutory "Delegated Strategic Leaders", Blackpool Council, Lancashire Constabulary and the Integrated Care Board (ICB). For the first year of the CSAP would be chaired by the ICB's Director of Safeguarding.

Further to this, the CSAP had also appointed an Independent Scrutineer, whose role was to hold members of the partnership to account and ensure that it delivered against its strategic priorities. Ms Haskayne added that the Independent Scrutineer would produce an annual report which would be brought to the Committee in June 2024. This report would set out the CSAP's business plan and the work being undertaken by the Strategic Delivery Groups.

The Committee welcomed the update on the role of the Independent Scrutineer and asked

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that to enable greater understanding of their role that they be invited to a pre-committee briefing to meet Members and explain the work they would be undertaking.

In order to ensure greater joined up working and that safeguarding governance would be brought together, Ms Haskayne informed Members that a Blackpool Partnership Business Unit had been established. She would be responsible for this unit as Head of Safeguarding Children and Strategic Partnership Boards. This unit would ensure that the CSAP, Blackpool Safeguarding Adult Board and BSafe Community Safety Partnership would work together effectively to deliver safeguarding for children, adults and communities.

The role of co-production in safeguarding was discussed with Ms Haskayne emphasising its importance in designing services. In respect of the selection of parents to take part in this process she explained that clarity on how this was undertaken was key. Learning on how this could take place had been gained from "Blackpool Families Rock" and ensured that a wide and diverse sample of parents would be used. This would ensure creative solutions could be developed to the challenges faced.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the report be noted; and
2. That the Independent Scrutineer be invited to a pre-committee briefing.

10 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Committee noted its workplan, the table of recommendations and the notes of its Preparing for Adulthood Strategy informal briefing.

The Chair also reported that he would be attending a training session held by the Local Government Association with the chairs of children's scrutiny from other local authorities. He advised that this was an opportunity to gain learning on how other areas undertook children's scrutiny and that he would report back on the outcome of the training to a future pre-committee briefing.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted the date and time of the meeting as Thursday, 27 March 2024 commencing at 6.00pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.57 pm)

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Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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