

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE INFORMAL  
MEETING - THURSDAY, 24 JUNE 2021**

Councillor Burdess (in the Chair)

Councillors

D Coleman  
Critchley

B Mitchell  
M Mitchell

O'Hara  
Owen

Stansfield  
Wing

**In Attendance:**

Councillor Maxine Callow, Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Board  
Councillor Gillian Campbell, Cabinet Member for Inclusion, Youth and Transience  
Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care and Schools  
Dr Elaine Allen, Former Roman Catholic Co-opted Member  
Mr Robert Arrowsmith, Performance, Systems and Intelligence Manager  
Mrs Kirsty Fisher, Engagement Officer (Items 1-7 only)  
Charlotte and Tia, Young Inspectors (Items 1-7 only)  
Ms Jeanette Richards, Assistant Director of Children's Services  
Mr Philip Thompson, Head of SEND and Early years  
Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (School Improvement and Special Educational Needs)  
Mrs Elaine Ireland, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Chairman explained that it was an informal meeting as agreed at Annual Council on 24 May 2021.

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Ms Helen Sage, Co-Opted Member.

**2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Stansfield declared a personal interest in relation to Agenda item 7 'SEND Provision' due to his position of employment at the Lotus School.

**3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 22 APRIL 2021**

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting held on 22 April 2021 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

**4 PUBLIC SPEAKING**

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

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### **5 RE-APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS**

The Committee agreed to recommend the re-appointment of Ms Helen Sage as diocesan co-opted member to the Committee for the Municipal Year 2021/2022 under delegated powers to the Chief Executive.

The Committee noted Dr Elaine Allen's resignation from the post of Roman Catholic diocesan co-opted member with immediate effect and thanked her for her contributions to the Committee.

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

Ms Jeanette Richards, Assistant Director of Children's Services provided an update on Children's Social Care improvement including an overview of the Children and Families Partnership Board. The Committee was informed that the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive of the Clinical Commissioning Group and the Chief Superintendent had established the Children and Families Partnership Board to bring together the collective strategic aims of services in Blackpool and to ensure a unified vision for children and families. It aimed to bring together key members of public, private and third sector organisations with a focus on family life in Blackpool. Ms Richards explained that the primary responsibility of the Board was to develop meaningful and productive strategic oversight to the key challenges facing children and families in Blackpool and to drive their respective organisations to develop innovative and shared approaches to addressing these with a joint sense of responsibility and ownership.

Ms Richards provided an overview of the main priorities of the Board as well as the reporting mechanisms in place from the Getting to Good Board, Blackpool School Improvement Board and Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership. In response to a question from the Committee, Ms Richards clarified that the Children and Families Partnership Board had been re-established this year and had so far met twice in that period.

The Committee received an update in relation to third sector partnership working, with Ms Richards advising that at a strategic level the third sector was represented by Mr Mike Crowther, Chief Executive at Empowerment who was a Board member on the Children and Families Partnership Board. She further explained that at an operational level, the Blackpool Families Rock Implementation Group met monthly and as well as including agencies, parents and young people and carers, there was third sector representation from the Blackpool Carers Centre and Empowerment.

Ms Richards reported that an Early Help Strategy was planned for implementation across Blackpool, with engagement with the voluntary sector planned in order to offer support in the delivery of Early Help. The Committee requested examples of the planned engagement, with Ms Richards advising of the importance of involving parents, carers and young people in all decisions and of rolling out the Blackpool Families Rock working model within the community. With regards to the inclusion of volunteers, Ms Richards advised that the Council would be aiming to engage the third sector as part of the launch of the Early Help Strategy planned for September 2021 and would be making contact with third sector organisations as part of this process. She also reported that the Family Hub Board

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benefitted from wider representation of organisations that worked with children and families in Blackpool including the Football Club, Boys and Girls Club, Magic Club, local churches, Fulfilling Lives and New Routes. As services planned Covid-19 recovery, Ms Richards anticipated that there would be more organisations operating services from hubs. In response to a question from the Committee regarding the involvement of Scout and Brownie groups within the Family Hub, Ms Richards confirmed that whilst such groups would not be operating from the hub, packages of support would be provided to these community-based groups.

With regards to the Early Help Strategy, the Committee questioned whether such a strategy had been implemented previously across Blackpool and asked how the new strategy differed from previous work undertaken in this area. Ms Richards advised that the new strategy would provide a much broader approach and would include third sector organisations. She added that the strategy would be considerably more detailed than previous approaches and would build upon the Blackpool Families Rock working model.

The Committee received information on the Resilience Revolution and Committee members were informed that the Revolution was a collaboration between the HeadStart Team and two Voluntary and Community Sector organisations, 'boingboing' and the 'Centre of Resilience for Social Justice.' Ms Richards explained that the Resilience Revolution had been founded upon the original concept of 'Resilient Therapy' and its associated inequalities-related research. Organisations were supported to embed a resilience approach and there were a number of organisations which had successfully achieved this, with Ms Richards giving the examples of the Grand Theatre, Blackpool Football Club Community Trust, Aiming Higher and the Carers Centre. Further information was requested by the Committee on Resilient Therapy, with Committee Members seeking details of what the approach consisted of and the anticipated benefits. Ms Richards offered to provide further details of the Resilient Therapy approach to the Committee following the meeting.

In response to the examples of youth engagement events offered by HeadStart's Youth Engagement team as described by Ms Richards, the Committee asked whether the events had generally been well attended and if they had been impacted by the Covid-19 restrictions. Ms Richards confirmed that all such events had been negatively impacted by the pandemic and advised that HeadStart's Covid recovery plan would be aiming to re-establish the youth engagement offer once restrictions allowed.

The Committee sought further details of the Brain Story training and certification offered by Better Start and asked if the training would be suitable for Councillors to access. Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (School Improvement and Special Educational Needs) advised that the free online training course had been made available to all practitioners and had been well accessed, particularly by secondary schools. He offered to make the sessions available to any Councillors wishing to undertake the course, asking any interested Committee members to contact him directly and he would arrange access. The Committee requested specific details of the numbers of practitioners who had completed the training, which Mr Turner agreed to circulate to the Committee following the meeting.

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### **The Committee agreed:**

1. To request that Ms Richards provide further details of the Resilient Therapy approach to Committee members following the meeting;
2. To request that Mr Turner provide details of the numbers of practitioners who had completed the Brain Story training to Committee members following the meeting;
3. That any Councillor interested in completing the online Brain Story training should contact Mr Turner directly to request access.

### **7 YOUNG INSPECTORS**

The Committee welcomed two Young Inspectors who provided a presentation outlining their work, training and experiences. Charlotte and Tia informed the Committee that a Young Inspector was a volunteer aged 16 years and over who had experienced living in supported accommodation and had been or still was one of our children. They explained that Young Inspectors worked to support the quality monitoring of accommodation by visiting the homes where our children lived, spoke to the young people living there and assessed how safe and well cared for our children were.

Mrs Kirsty Fisher, Engagement Officer advised that at present recruitment was targeted but that as the programme became more established, young people would hopefully volunteer and be eager to become involved. With regards to training, Mrs Fisher reported that Young Inspectors received full training in consultation and questioning skills, confidentiality awareness and basic safeguarding. Quality Monitoring Officers in the Commissioning team also supported the Young Inspectors by providing an insight into the processes involved in their job.

Within their presentation Charlotte, Tia and Mrs Fisher provided a summary of the inspection work undertaken to date by the Young Inspectors as well as outlining future plans to extend the scheme and to formalise the training to make it more accessible to new recruits.

The Committee queried whether accommodation which failed to meet the required standards would no longer be used by the Council. Mrs Fisher advised that all residential homes went through a commissioning process to assess their suitability and that the Commissioning team continued to undertake inspections in conjunction with the Young Inspectors. If an accommodation was discovered to be failing to meet the agreed standards, the Council would work with the provider to help them implement the necessary improvements but if this did not happen then the Council might consider the option of no longer using the provider.

In respect of the training offered to the Young Inspectors, the Committee asked how this could be further developed and enhanced going forward. Mrs Fisher reported that the training currently offered to Council employees was being reviewed in order to identify any modules which could be adapted so as to be suitable to form part of the Young Inspectors' training programme and that attendance was planned at the National Children's Commissioning Conference with the hope that further ideas could be gathered there.

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The Committee extended its thanks and admiration to Mrs Fisher, Charlotte and Tia and requested that future updates on the work of the Young Inspectors be reported back on a regular basis to the Committee. Mrs Fisher advised that a further update would be beneficial towards the end of the calendar year.

**The Committee agreed:** To receive regular updates on the work of the Young Inspectors with an update to be considered by the Committee at its meeting on 9 December 2021.

[Mrs Fisher, Charlotte and Tia left the meeting on conclusion of this item.]

### 8 SEND PROVISION

Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (School Improvement and Special Educational Needs) provided an update on provisions in Blackpool for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Mr Turner reported that Park Community Academy, Woodlands School and Highfurlong Special School were all operating at capacity and that Lotus School was expected to be at capacity within the next two years. As a result, the provision of temporary capacity was being planned at the Oracle building. He explained that this would allow sixth form students from Park Community Academy to potentially be located at the Oracle from September 2021 thereby freeing up classroom space within the rest of the school, with the precise pupil numbers and details to be determined by the headteacher at Park. Building work at Highfurlong Special School would also result in the addition of further capacity.

The Committee was informed that work was underway to facilitate the continued use of the Oracle building by community groups in the evenings and at weekends as far as possible, with details of the groups that were currently utilising the building being reviewed as to their suitability to continue using the facilities. Mr Turner explained that whilst it was hoped that the majority of groups could continue to use the building, once the Oracle was being used by children, suitability would need to be carefully considered.

Mr Turner reported that the Oracle building was not entirely suitable for the housing of SEND provisions in its current condition and as such some improvements were planned, with a budget of £85,000 allocated for the work. Mr Philip Thompson, Head of SEND and Early Years briefly outlined the proposed modifications and the rationale behind them.

With regards to mainstream schools meeting SEND requirements, Mr Turner assured the Committee that consultation had been undertaken with all headteachers to ensure schools were adequately fulfilling their responsibilities as part of the SEND Strategy and he was confident that all schools were fully committed to ensuring pupils' needs were being met. The Committee questioned whether schools provided a pre-determined level of SEND provision or if schools responded proactively to the individual needs of their particular pupils. Mr Turner clarified that the expectation was that all children would be educated in the school of their parents' choosing and that the SEND team would work to support teachers to adequately meet their pupils' needs. As a result, schools found it necessary to adapt their SEND provision on a termly basis to react to their students' requirements. He added that it might not currently be possible to educate all Blackpool children in mainstream settings but where this was not possible the aim was to be able to provide a suitable place within a specialist setting.

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The Committee sought clarification around the number of SEND places that the Council was required to provide. Mr Turner reported that the Council had a statutory duty to provide a suitable place for all children who required one, whether that be within Blackpool or out of Borough as available.

**The Committee agreed:** To request that Mr Turner present the full detailed plans of the SEND provision proposals at the Oracle once available, with the Committee meeting on 9 December 2021 suggested by Mr Turner as being an appropriate timescale.

### **9 BLACKPOOL BETTER START SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Committee considered the final report arising from the scrutiny review of Blackpool Better Start. The Committee welcomed the recommendations and gave thanks to the working group of Councillors who had undertaken the review. The Committee particularly noted the reported lack of expectation from the Lottery Community Fund for evidence of significant impact until closer to the end of the ten year period in order to allow for interventions to become securely embedded, as well as the identified lack of engagement from residents within particular wards across the town.

Following approval by the Executive, the Committee agreed that the recommendations would be closely monitored by the Committee via regular updates.

**The Committee agreed:** To recommend approval of the final report of the scrutiny review of Blackpool Better Start for submission to the Executive under delegated powers to the Chief Executive.

### **10 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN 2021/2022**

Members considered the Committee's Workplan for 2021/2022, noting that the document had been updated to reflect Members' input at the Scrutiny Workplanning Workshop which had been held on Monday 7 June 2021.

**The Committee agreed:** To note the Workplan for 2021/2022.

### **11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting of the Committee was noted as Thursday 7 October 2021, commencing at 6pm, with the venue and meeting arrangements to be confirmed in advance of the meeting.

**Chairman**

(The meeting ended at 7.30pm)

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Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:  
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