

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING - THURSDAY,  
27 JANUARY 2022**

**Present:**

Councillor Burdess (in the Chair)

Councillors

Critchley	M Mitchell	R Scott
B Mitchell	Mrs Scott	

Ms Jo Snape, Diocesan Co-opted member

**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

Ms Vicky Gent, Director of Children's Services

Ms Sara McCartan, Head of Adolescent Service

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

Ms Pauline Wigglesworth, HeadStart Programme Leader

Ms Hannah Eaglestone, Peer Sessional Worker for HeadStart

Mrs Elaine Ireland, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser

**1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

**2 MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING HELD ON 12 JANUARY 2022**

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the Special meeting held on 12 January 2022 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

**3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 9 DECEMBER 2021**

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 9 December 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.

**5 HEADSTART UPDATE**

Ms Pauline Wigglesworth, HeadStart Programme Leader presented the Resilience Revolution's annual report, covering the period from September 2019 to August 2020. She informed the

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Committee that the report had been co-produced alongside young people, parents/carers, practitioners, leaders and academics.

The Committee was informed that the HeadStart programme had been funded by the National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) as part of its strategic programmes. Ms Wigglesworth reported that an investment of £13 million had been made over six years in order to test and learn new ways of supporting youth mental health. Blackpool had been selected as one of six sites nationally and had developed a community approach to building a resilient town for young people to grow up and thrive in, under the banner of the Resilience Revolution. She informed the Committee that TNLCF funding would cease on 31 July 2022 and assured Members that there had been rigorous attention to sustainability over the last 12 months, with funding for successful projects having been identified and sourced by the Council, schools and the NHS.

The Committee sought additional information around the sustainability of projects and the levels of further funding which had been achieved. Ms Wigglesworth explained that as part of the grant award from TNLCF, a phased funding approach had to be demonstrated over the final three years which identified how the projects would continue to be funded. During that period, a number of activities had been withdrawn, some had been embedded by teams to be incorporated into new ways of working and a number of projects had continued via the allocation of additional funding from other sources, such as the NHS.

In relation to workforce training, the Committee questioned which groups had been trained on the resilience model and whether any gaps in training had been identified. Ms Wigglesworth reported that Children's Services had engaged well with the training, as had voluntary sector staff. In terms of gaps, she advised that further engagement from Health would have been preferred but she acknowledged the difficulties faced by Health colleagues in taking time away from their places of work, particularly during the pandemic and noted that overall she had been pleased with the level of training completed.

Ms Wigglesworth summarised a number of highlights from the annual report, which included 'A Year of Parents of the Revolution', consideration of the in-depth analysis of the results of interviews held with a selection of young people who had been involved with Youth Engagement activities and details of actions being initiated by schools following audits undertaken to identify schools' assets and to identify areas for resilience building.

The Committee noted that the report referred to 2019/2020 and asked for examples of any further successes which had been achieved since that period. Ms Wigglesworth advised that HeadStart's final report was anticipated to be completed in April 2022 and offered to return to the Committee with the report once available. The Committee was informed that the report would be in both written and digital form, with the aim of including a choice of ways in which to access the information in order to make it as accessible as possible. In the meantime, she provided a selection of performance data from December 2020, which identified that 19,000 young people had benefited from HeadStart interventions overall and that a successful online speech, language and communication toolkit had been launched across Blackpool schools.

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Ms Hannah Eaglestone, Peer Sessional Worker for HeadStart and lead for the Blackpool Beating Bullying Project provided an overview of the anti-bullying campaign being implemented across Blackpool schools, explaining that Blackpool Beating Bullying was a campaign that was set up by young people, for young people with the aim of reducing the amount of bullying incidents taking place in Blackpool schools. She informed the Committee that the UK's first co-produced charter mark had been introduced, which aimed to equip all schools with the necessary tools and knowledge to tackle bullying. To date, 12 schools had achieved the bronze award and five schools had gone on to achieve silver. The Committee questioned if ways in which bullying could be stopped had been identified as part of the campaign. Ms Eaglestone advised that prevention was key and that schools had adopted a zero tolerance approach in the hope of preventing bullying from occurring and creating a culture where no levels of bullying were tolerated. Committee Members noted that bullies were often unaware that their behaviour was bullying and queried how this thinking could be tackled and changed. Ms Eaglestone reported on work being undertaken with primary schools which identified what bullying looked like and encouraged children to reflect on their actions and behaviour to consider the impact they might have on others.

The Committee noted that 28 schools in Blackpool had signed up to the project, but questioned what was being done to reach the remaining 18 schools which had not. Ms Eaglestone advised that she continued to make contact with these schools every six weeks to offer support and seek their engagement but acknowledged that schools had numerous competing priorities and were not always able to commit to another new project immediately. She highlighted that a number of Blackpool's special schools were also involved in the project, with Park Community Academy having achieved the bronze charter mark and that all learning material could be adapted by schools to ensure their pupils could access them.

The Committee requested an update on the reported Friend for Life initiative, whereby adult volunteers were matched with our children aged 10, 11 and 12 for fun and friendship. Ms Wigglesworth reported that the adults made a permanent commitment to be there for their young person and that our children chose their adult via video submissions. Further to the reported 18 friendships, Ms Wigglesworth informed Committee Members that this number had now reached 28 and that all original matches had continued throughout the restrictions of the pandemic.

The Committee extended its thanks to Ms Wigglesworth and Ms Eaglestone for attending and for the positive work being undertaken by HeadStart.

**The Committee agreed:** To receive the 2022 HeadStart final report once available.

### 6 YOUTH JUSTICE TEAM INSPECTION

Ms Sara McCartan, Head of the Adolescent Service presented a report outlining the feedback from a recent inspection of the Youth Justice Service. She reported that the service had been inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) during May and June 2021 and that the service had been rated 'Good' and in three aspects 'Outstanding'. The Inspectorate had worked jointly with partner inspectors from policing, health, social care and education to undertake the inspection.

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Ms McCartan summarised the six recommendations which had been made by HMIP following the inspection and which aimed to further improve the service:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of interventions to ensure they are meeting children's needs and reducing re-offending.
- Provide thorough and effective initial assessment of children's health and educational needs, including communication skills and dyslexia.
- Reduce the unacceptably high NEET (not in education, training or employment) rates for the over-16 caseload by getting more children into further education provision and vocational training, including access to services where children can gain the personal, life and social skills they need to work towards employment.
- Ensure that in all children's records there is a plan to keep other people safe and contingency planning if issues in the child's life increase the likelihood of harmful behaviour.
- Where risk to the child's safety or wellbeing is identified, put in place clear contingency planning for circumstances where the risk may increase.
- Where risk to other people is identified, put in place clear contingency planning for circumstances where the risk may increase.

The Committee was informed that the HMIP recommendations had been incorporated into the revised Youth Justice improvement plan and that the plan would continue to be monitored by the service and bi-monthly via the Executive Board.

Ms McCartan reported that the Youth Justice Executive and Shadow Board had held a Development Day on 26 January 2022 with the aim being to further strengthen the service's partnership and problem solving in order to achieve consistently positive outcomes for all our children and to create a 2022 development plan to get the Youth Justice Service (YJS) to Outstanding. The event had originally been hoped to be held in person at the Winter Gardens but due to continuing Covid restrictions, the decision had been made to hold it virtually. The Committee extended its congratulation to the YJS for the progress made and supported its aims of striving towards Outstanding.

The Committee noted the disappointingly high number of our children presenting as Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) and sought assurance that this would remain an area of continued focus for improvement. Ms McCartan confirmed this to be the case and outlined a number of actions being implemented to help address the issue, which included:

- An Employment and Skills Board had been established with a wide range of partners;
- A strategy was to be co-produced with youth advisers to identify a joined up approach to reducing NEET figures;
- Close working with the Council's wholly owned companies was in place to identify employment and training opportunities for our young people;
- Confidence building and support to develop basic life skills were being provided to young people to further improve their abilities to succeed with training or employment;

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- Supportive employers were being contacted to seek out any available opportunities to work with them;
- Officers were seeking out examples of best practice from other local authorities, with the specific examples of Salford and Stockport being discussed. Ms McCartan was hopeful that physical visits to other authorities could soon be arranged;
- Increased liaison with Blackpool and the Fylde College was in place to offer better support around the transition from school to college.

The Committee requested that Members be kept informed of progress and that regular updates be provided going forward.

**The Committee agreed:** To receive a further update on the Youth Justice Service at a future meeting.

### 7 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT

Ms Sara McCartan, Head of the Adolescent Service provided the Committee with data around the support given to young people turning 18 and the number of vulnerable young people accessing services, as requested by the Committee at a previous meeting. She explained that the majority of 17 year olds currently open to the Adolescent Service were our young people and as such they would remain supported by their Leaving Care Personal Adviser until at least aged 21 and up to aged 25 if they chose to. The Committee gave consideration to the presented data, noting in particular that only 53 per cent of Blackpool's care experienced young people reported positive outcomes in education, employment and training.

Further clarification was sought around the reported 102 care leavers aged 21-25 years who were receiving support from an Adolescent Service Personal Adviser. Ms McCartan advised that the support offered to this group of young people could be for a range of concerns, both financial and emotional and that all our young people were entitled to continue to receive support until they reached 25.

The Committee requested that recognition be paid to the excellent work undertaken by foster carers and special guardians in helping to take care of our young people, which often continued well beyond them reaching 18 years of age. Committee Members also welcomed the extension of the Awaken project to include young people over 18 years old, with Ms McCartan acknowledging that these young people often remained at risk of exploitation after turning 18.

**The Committee agreed:** To receive periodic future update reports on the support offered to our young people post-18, at a frequency to be agreed with Ms McCartan.

### 8 LITERACY STRATEGY UPDATE

Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, SEND and Early Years) provided an update following the launch of the Council's Literacy Strategy in September 2021. Mr Turner advised that the Strategy was now being operationalised through the Literacy Strategy Steering Group, which consisted of members from across the town, at all levels of education from Early Years to Adult education. Furthermore, professional academic input was

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also being provided to ensure that the most current educational research was included in the planning.

The Committee was informed that significant project support was being provided through a contract with Right to Succeed and that part of their role would be to continue to source funding. Two leads had been identified from within the Blackpool education community to champion literacy and to engage with businesses who wished to support the Strategy. In addition, Officers had met with the Showtown museum staff to consider how the Literacy Strategy could support their work and be integrated into the work of the museum in engaging families. Mr Turner noted the gratefully received ward budget funding provided by a number of Councillors towards the purchase of books and other resources.

Further information was requested on the work underway to secure additional funding to support the implementation of the Strategy, with Mr Turner reporting that the two education leads were actively engaging with businesses to seek financial support and sponsorship for specific literacy initiatives.

In response to a question from the Committee regarding how volunteers were recruited to hear children read in school and whether there were sufficient numbers of volunteers, Mr Turner advised that recruitment was via the Council's social media platforms and he agreed to provide the necessary link to Committee Members in order that they could access the information.

The Committee requested a future update on Blackpool's Library Service, seeking to determine if Blackpool's libraries were well used. In addition, the Committee asked Mr Turner to provide quarterly updates on the progress of the Literacy Strategy.

### **The Committee agreed:**

1. To receive a report on the work of the Library Service at a future meeting of the Committee;
2. To request quarterly updates on the progress of the Literacy Strategy.

## **9 SEND STRATEGY**

The Committee considered an update on the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy, with Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, SEND and Early Years) reporting that work had begun in late spring 2021 to refresh the Strategy and that this would recommence now that the underpinning work on the Needs Assessment and self-evaluation was reaching a conclusion. He advised that the next stage in the development process would be to agree a set of key priorities for the Strategy, based on the outcome of the co-production sessions which had been held last year along with the findings from the self-evaluation exercise. Mr Turner stressed the importance of avoiding rushing the Strategy as buy-in from a number of partners would be vital to its success and as such it was necessary to ensure all parties were in agreement with its contents.

As per the reported expected timeline of progress, the Committee was informed that further development of the draft SEND Strategy would take place in February 2022, following which it

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would then be shared with Headteacher groups before consultation with wider stakeholders, including a Scrutiny working group. Mr Turner advised that all Committee Members should have received an invitation to take part in the working group but suggested that any Members still wishing to join should contact him following the meeting. The Committee was informed that the final version of the Strategy was anticipated for completion in late March 2022 and would be submitted for consideration by the Committee at its next available meeting following that date.

**The Committee agreed:** To consider the final SEND Strategy once completed and by no later than June 2022.

### 10 ORACLE BUILDING UPDATE

Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, SEND and Early Years), provided an update on the proposals for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision at the Oracle building.

Mr Turner reported that following a public consultation, planning continued for the transfer of Park Community Academy's post-16 students into the Oracle building on St Anne's Road. He advised that Sea View Trust was still awaiting the outcome of its application to the Education and Skills Funding Agency regarding the proposed change in the use of the facilities. Furthermore, discussions were continuing with the Trust regarding tenancy arrangements, which would include continued access for those community groups who currently used the Oracle.

The Committee sought assurance that children using the facility would be safeguarded whilst also ensuring that community groups were still able to access the building as appropriate. Mr Turner advised that use of the premises would be compartmentalised, with children using it during the day and other groups accessing it at other times and that children would be safeguarded throughout.

The Committee questioned whether approval might be denied and if so, what alternative plans were in place to ensure the Council met its obligations in the provision of appropriate SEND places. Mr Turner reported that refusal was always an option but that he felt confident that the plan would be approved. He reassured the Committee that pupils' families had not been advised of an anticipated completion date but that he was optimistic that the provision would be available from September 2022. In relation to an alternative plan in the event of the Oracle not being available, Mr Turner advised that a back-up plan had been formulated to ensure sufficient SEND places were offered.

In response to a question from the Committee asking how many community groups had previously been using the Oracle building, Mr Turner was unable to provide the specific number but informed Committee Members that all groups were currently still able to use the facilities.

The Committee noted that places at Blackpool's special schools continued to grow in popularity despite the aim of the Council to integrate more pupils into mainstream education settings. Mr

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Turner acknowledged that despite the Council's desire to place children within mainstream schools where possible, provisions for SEND within schools were not always suitable to meet all pupils' needs. He informed the Committee that pupils would continue to be supported to attend mainstream schools wherever possible, alongside the placement of children in special schools as necessary. He also advised that as parents and carers had the choice of where to send their child, further work was needed on improving families' confidence of the availability of sufficient support for their children within mainstream education.

**The Committee agreed:** To receive a further update report on the proposed SEND provision at the Oracle building at a future Committee meeting as appropriate.

### 11 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

Members considered the Committee's Workplan for 2021/2022 and requested that a report on the nutritional content and cost of school dinners in Blackpool schools be added. Mr Turner suggested that information on the work of the Chef's Academy also be included within the item. The Committee noted the previous request to add information on the Library Service to the Committee's workplan, acknowledging that both would need to be included on the 2022/2023 workplan as only one meeting remained within the current municipal year.

The Committee requested an update in relation to two items within the Recommendation Monitoring schedule:

- 'That the data relating to the proportion of Our Children who were looked after be reported to a future meeting of the Committee following the outcomes of the working party examining the issue.' Ms Sara McCartan, Head of the Adolescent Service agreed to review the original request and to circulate information to Committee Members following the meeting;
- 'To receive further data on Blackpool's mental health hospital admission rates once available.' The Committee was advised that Mr Stephen Ashley, Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership (CSAP) Independent Scrutineer would be attending the next meeting of the Committee in March 2022 to provide an update on the work of CSAP and would be asked to provide the requested information at that time if available.

**The Committee agreed:**

1. The Workplan for 2021/2022;
2. That a report on the nutritional content and cost of school dinners, including information on the work of the Chef's Academy, be added to the 2022/2023 workplan;
3. That a report on the Library Service be added to the 2022/2023 workplan.

### 12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee was noted as Thursday 24 March 2022, commencing at 6pm.

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**Chairman**

(The meeting ended at 7.47pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:  
Elaine Ireland, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser  
Tel: 01253 477255, E-mail: [Elaine.ireland@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:Elaine.ireland@blackpool.gov.uk)