

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 30 JUNE 2022**

Present:

Councillor Burdess (in the Chair)

Councillors

Critchley

B Mitchell

Owen

Stansfield

Cross

M Mitchell

R Scott

Ms Gemma Clayton, Parent Governor Co-opted Member

Ms Jo Snape, Diocesan Co-opted Member

In Attendance:

Councillor Maxine Callow, Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Board

Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care and Schools

Ms Victoria Gent, Director of Children's Services

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

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

Mr John Greenbank, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser (Scrutiny)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 24 MARCH 2022

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting held on 24 March 2022 be signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING

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

4 APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS

The Committee considered the appointment of Co-opted Members for the 2022/2023 municipal year.

The Committee agreed:

1. That Ms Gemma Clayton and Mr Mike Coole be appointed parent governor co-opted members to the Committee for the 2022/23 municipal year; and
2. That Ms Jo Snape be appointed diocesan co-opted member to the Committee for

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 30 JUNE 2022**

the 2022/2023 municipal year.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan July 2022 to October 2022 of upcoming decisions.

Members noted that the decision reference for the Children's Services Medium Term Financial Strategy showed 2002 as the year for the decision to be made. Ms Victoria Gent, Director of Children's Services, clarified that this should show 2022 and would be amended going forward.

6 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT UPDATE

Ms Victoria Gent, Director of Children's Services, provided a verbal update on the number of children and young people who had been re-referred back into the social care system following discharge. She reported that an analysis of these cases had shown that between January 2020 and June 2022 fewer than one in ten had been re-referred back into Children's Social Care (CSC). This represented four hundred and twenty-two children of which two hundred and thirty-three had subsequently been closed. Overall one hundred and ten of those re-referred were care leavers and a further forty-two remained open at the end of the care period. Ms Gent explained that those cases left open were in cases where children were the subject of a care order but in a care home or with a parent. Leaving the case open allowed a more gradual exit for the child from care and allowed services to monitor their progress.

Mr Chris Coyle, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Children's Social Care and Tis), informed the Committee that Blackpool had a re-referral rate of 27.3% within six months, which was comparable with other similar authorities but above the North West average of 21.6%. He added however that the most recent four week average was 20% which demonstrated an improvement. It was also noted that Blackpool's average was affected by the significant number of children assessed and larger than average families, as children were admitted individually to CSC.

The Committee queried what services were accessed by those re-referred into CSC and what the likely reasons for a re-referral were. Ms Gent explained in response that most of those re-referred were under Children In Need and the re-referral was usually as a support package was needed for the child rather than them being at risk of harm. It was noted that in many cases parents had complex needs. This meant that it was difficult to determine how long ongoing support was needed and would be assessed on a basis of individual need in each case.

The pathways available to care leavers to access ongoing support was raised by the Committee, asking if social workers shared this information. Ms Gent replied that the information provided to care leavers was based on an individual assessment of their needs and ongoing review to identify the key events in their lives so that support could be tailored to their circumstances. She also recognised that there were varying levels of experience among social workers but that the Children's Services Management Team had been stabilised and was able to provide an overview of the work taking place and ensure

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 30 JUNE 2022**

consistency.

In response to a query, Ms Gent agreed to provide details of the number of excluded children who had been re-referred into CSC in writing following the meeting.

The rate of re-referral being above the North West average was raised as an area of concern by the Committee. Mr Coyle explained that it was recognised that over six months this had been the case but that the rolling four week average was lower. He added that CSC was seeking to assess more children going forward with a focus on ensuring their quality. Ms Gent added that the higher rate of re-referral had been identified as part of an internal audit and that the Early Help Strategy launched in November 2021 would play a part in reducing the number of re-referrals.

The Early Help strategy would allow earlier intervention and prevent cases being escalated too quickly. Ms Gent added that Ofsted would also be focussing on the rate of re-referral as part of the strategy and that it was part of its implementation plan.

Non-Council support for children as part of care packages was discussed by members. Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, SEND and Early Years), informed the Committee that schools offered an increased level of support through extended opening hours and after-school activities. Challenges to ensure this support included ensuring the quality of the schools offer and maintaining high levels of staff training.

The possibility of an increase in the re-referral rate during the summer holidays was queried with Mr Coyle stating that although a slight increase was expected, it was not believed this would significantly impact the overall average rate. Activities offered during the summer holidays would also be supported by the Holiday Activity Fund which the Council had increased investment in for 2022. Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care and Schools added that the key period to determine the future re-referral rate would be October 2022 to March 2023 during which time the impact of the cost of living crisis would become known and CSC could experience increasing pressure.

Work to embed the learning and support offered by Head Start and Better Start was discussed by the Committee with Ms Gent informing members that the last meeting of the Head Start Board had been held on 4 July 2022. At this meeting the role of co-producing services was highlighted as key to the future of supporting children going forward. She noted that such co-production had made an important contribution to the development of Blackpool Families Rock. In recognition of this the Head Start co-production team would be brought into Children's Service to ensure that their skills were retained.

The Committee raised the outcome of the details of the independent review into Council-run children's services released in 2021. It was noted that the Government expected the number of children in care to increase and the Committee recognised that this would increase the pressure on services in Blackpool. Councillor Hobson agreed that the report had made the challenges for Children's Services clear but added it had also highlighted opportunities for reducing the cost of services. He noted that the possibility of councils forming co-operatives to commission services was an area that was under consideration

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 30 JUNE 2022**

by the Council. Ms Gent added that the Council was aware of the pressures that an increased number of children in care presented to services. She advised that Children's Services collected a large amount of data in this area but that greater understanding of how this could be used was needed.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the update be noted; and
2. That details of the number of excluded children who had been re-referred to CSC be provided in writing following the meeting to the Committee.

7 YOUNG INSPECTORS UPDATE

The Committee agreed that the Young Inspectors Update be deferred to the meeting to be held in November 2022.

8 ORACLE BUILDING UPDATE

Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, SEND and Early Years), presented an update on the Oracle building works and the timeline for Park Community Academy students to occupy the building. He reported that the works had been completed and it was planned that students from Park Community Academy would occupy the building at the start of the new school year in September 2022. It was also reported that tours of the Oracle building had been arranged for the Committee on Monday, 4 July 2022 and Monday, 18 July 2022, to view the facility.

Members discussed the scope for use of the facility by outside groups, with Mr Turner informing Members that Park School would have priority use and that this would have to be balanced against any other potential user.

Media reports that a new youth building would be built in Blackpool were raised by the Committee, with Members noting that the Oracle had been planned to fulfil this role. Mr Turner responded that he was unaware of such a development but that the Oracle would deliver a significant improvement for Park Community Academy and its Special Education Needs and Development offer.

9 LITERACY STRATEGY UPDATE

Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, SEND and Early Years) presented an update the progress of the Literacy Strategy. He reported that significant work had taken place, including involving businesses from across Blackpool, such as Merlin and the Rugby Club. The Council was confident that this progress would allow the improvements made to continue. Mr Turner added that a further report on progress on implementing the strategy would be brought to a future meeting to allow ongoing scrutiny.

The Committee noted that the strategy lacked details of the Alternative Provision (AP) work being undertaken and highlighted its importance adding that the number of English Literature courses available in Blackpool was limited whilst recognising such courses were

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 30 JUNE 2022**

useful in promoting reading. Mr Turner explained that AP offer required work and should include literacy and numeracy elements. In order to improve the offer work had begun with libraries and School Trusts, promoting access to books and opportunities to read. He added that although a large amount had been achieved progress had been slower than hoped for due to the impact of the recovery from Covid.

10 SEND OFSTED INSPECTION OUTCOME AND NEXT STEPS

Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, SEND and Early Years) presented a report on the outcome of the recent Ofsted and Care Quality Commission SEND inspection, its implications and next steps. He informed the Committee that the inspection had identified the following areas of weakness;

- 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 coproduction.
- The long waiting time for some therapies.

As a result of these findings the Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group had seventy days to produce a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) setting out how it would address these areas of concern. Mr Turner informed the Committee that a briefing on the WSOA would be provided to Members to highlight the actions being considered.

Despite these findings, overall, Ofsted had stated that the Council's SEND provision was much improved from previous inspections.

The Committee discussed the provision of services to young people transitioning to adulthood and the drop off of available pathways for them. Mr Turner responded that the Council recognised that this was an area where improvement was needed and that discussions had taken place with Adult Services regarding the co-location of more services and the identification of funding to support additional service provision.

Communications had been noted as an area of weakness by the inspection. The Committee discussed why this was the case as it had previously been demonstrated that Children's Services had good communications with parents and providers. Mr Turner explained that the inspection had highlighted HeadStart as having good communications and that more work was required to expand their model across SEND. He also stated that it had been recognised that some communications used language that was too specialised, but that the Council's Head of SEND would be picking up the work needed to address this issue.

The Committee recognised that poor communications had created a perception among some parents that the Council was creating obstacles while undertaking SEND assessments. Mr Turner added that more needed to be done to explain why certain decisions were taken during assessments and that contact with parent should be high quality.

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 30 JUNE 2022**

Delays in changing placements for children with SEND when their current one had proved incorrect was raised as an issue. It was noted that a lack of availability of places and specialist settings in Blackpool made changing a placement difficult in some cases.

Mr Turner also presented the Draft Blackpool SEND Strategy 2022-2025 to the Committee. He asked that Members provide any comments to Children's Services following the meeting.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the outcome of the SEND Inspection be noted;
2. That a briefing on the Written Statement of Action be organised; and
3. That any comments on the Draft Blackpool SEND Strategy 2022-2025 be provided to Children's Services.

Councillor Amy Cross left the meeting during this item.

11 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

The Committee considered its work programme for 2022/2023 and noted the additional items added at the 10 July 2022 Committee Work planning Workshop.

Members also considered and agreed the draft scoping documents for the Mental Health Support for Young Men Scrutiny Review and the Young People classed as Not In Employment, Education or Training (NEET) Review.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the Committee work programme for 2022/2023;
2. The Mental Health Support for Young Men Scrutiny Review scoping document; and
3. The Young People classed as Not In Employment, Education or Training (NEET) Review scoping document.

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee was noted as Thursday 22 September 2022 commencing at 6pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.40 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
John Greenbank, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser
Tel: 01253 477229
E-mail: john.greenbank@blackpool.gov.uk