

MINUTES OF AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING - THURSDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 2022

Present:

Councillor Galley (in the Chair)

Councillors

Burdess	Hunter	Wilshaw
Critchley	R Scott	

Mr David Swift, Independent Co-opted Member

In Attendance:

Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services

Ms Victoria Gent, Director of Children's Services

Dr Arif Rajpura, Director of Public Health

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources

Ms Tracy Greenhalgh, Head of Audit and Risk

Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services

Mr Nick Henshaw, Head of Adult Care and Support

Mr John Greenbank, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser (Scrutiny)

Ms Nicola Wright, External Auditor, Deloitte

1 MINUTE'S SILENCE - HER LATE MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

Following the passing of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II a minute's silence was observed at the start of the meeting as a mark of respect.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 21 JULY 2022

Resolved: To agree that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2022 be signed by the Chair as a true and correct record.

4 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2021/2022

Mr Steve Thompson, Director of Resources, provided a verbal update on progress to sign-off the Annual Statement of Accounts. He informed the Board that the two-year delay in signing-off the accounts had been due to national issues relating to infrastructure accounting. In response to this, the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) had provided a solution that would allow accounts to be signed off up until 2024. This would act as a stop gap during which time a system for infrastructure accountancy

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would be developed.

However before this could be implemented Mr Thompson informed the Committee that a statutory instrument would be required which was expected to be passed in October 2022. Once this had occurred Deloitte, External Auditors, would undertake an audit of the 2021 and 2022 accounts. Following this, Mr Thompson confirmed that the 2022 Audited Accounts would then be brought to the Committee in early 2023.

Ms Nicola Wright, External Auditor, added that audit work on the 2021 accounts had begun and that this work would be completed once the statutory instrument was in place.

The Committee asked if the public would be able to query the accounts during this time and what information would be publically available. Mr Thompson responded that all the information in the accounts was publically available and included in reports to the Executive and Council such as the Provisional Financial Outturn reporting. Members of the public could also utilise freedom of information requests to access information.

With respect of a possible solution for infrastructure accounting in future accounts from 2024, Members queried if this would require substantial additional resources to undertake. Mr Thompson replied that it would have to be seen what the CIPFA solution was before the necessary determination could be made but that there was currently sufficient resources to undertake accounting work.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

5 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER DEEP DIVE - STRATEGY

The Committee considered a deep dive into the Strategic Risk 'Strategy' which included the sub-risks (a) 'Poor health and wellbeing outcomes', (b) 'Poor educational attainment' and (c) 'Provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is inadequate'.

Dr Arif Rajpura, Director of Public Health, and Mr John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services, provided an update in respect of sub-risk (a). In terms of public health work, Dr Rajpura informed the Committee that when considering trends Blackpool was behind national averages. He explained that the Council had measures to address health and wellbeing issues in Blackpool, in the long term these featured projects to improve issues such as poor housing. In the medium term programmes included drug rehabilitation, while programmes to encourage healthier living would improve health and wellbeing outcomes in the short term.

Dr Rajpura added that the Covid pandemic had delayed a lot of the intended work but that it had been reinstated since the lifting of restrictions and significant work had been taking place. He also noted that the intervention into housing being undertaken would have a substantial positive long term impact on health and wellbeing in Blackpool.

Mr Blackledge informed the Committee that within their directorate the main streams of work related to health and wellbeing were within the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

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and Leisure Services. Closer working between Leisure Services and Public Health had meant that leisure providers were able to link with health services and programmes to secure better outcomes. Leisure Services also worked with Sport England to encourage more people into physical activity and was looking at how this work could engage with people known to Public Health, Children's Services and Adult Services. Mr Blackledge also reported that encouraging greater use of communal spaces such as parks for leisure activity was a further important stream of work for Leisure Services. He added that parks needed to be used better across Blackpool, including each receiving a development plan, and but noted that Stanley Park had won English park of the year for the third consecutive year.

Significant work related to the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy was underway with Mr Blackledge informing the Committee that it would be connected with the aims of the Town Centre Strategy and work with planning policy. This work was intended to embed the strategy, and its intended health and wellbeing outcomes, into growth and prosperity work.

The Committee discussed the recent appointment of Karen Smith, Director of Adult Services, as the Interim Director of the Integrated Care Board. Concern was raised regarding what risks this pooling of work could present to services in Blackpool. Dr Rajpura explained that the Lancashire Plan Place Based Partnership would look at how Blackpool services could be integrated and that Ms Smith's role would be to supervise this work. He added that resources had been put in place for her to undertake this new role without it negatively impacting her role in Adult Services. There was however a risk that budgets could be removed from Blackpool as part of the integration of services but no announcement had been made in this regard at the time of the meeting. Mr Neil Jack, Chief Executive, added that capacity had been considered as part of Ms Smith accepting the role and that new roles to support her work were being developed and noted that if necessary she could withdraw from the new role. The Committee thanked officers for the update and asked if Ms Smith could be invited to a future meeting so that the risks associated with her new role could be better understood.

Members received an update on work by Public Health to improve the models in place in Blackpool to promote and protect health and wellbeing with Dr Rajpura informing the Committee that services regularly looked at models in place at other authorities. For example he reported that work to intervene early in the community and prevent hospital admissions reduced overall hospital occupancy and pressure on services.

The relocation of services was also discussed with Mr Blackledge explaining that in the case of mental health this could be relocated out of a hospital based setting into a leisure facility. This would have the benefit of reducing pressure on hospitals and allow engagement and encouraging physical activity, which had been shown to be beneficial to mental health. Consultations regarding the relocation of services were reported to be ongoing with health and leisure partners.

Dr Rajpura added that relocation work with leisure services was important in public health efforts to encourage people who had remained at home during Covid to return to activity and improve health outcomes.

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Ms Victoria Gent, Director of Children's Services, and Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services, School Improvement and Special Education Needs, provided an update in respect of risk (b). They reported that educational attainment was tracked through the Blackpool Schools Improvement Board which combined local, regional and national data to judge Blackpool's performance. This was linked to the Council's Inclusion and Literacy Strategies which sought to ensure the best educational attainment for children. Ms Gent added that the Board had shown continual improvement and that GCSE results were broadly considered to have been positive. In addition to this it was reported that the Pupil Referral Unit had experienced its lowest rate of admissions in ten years.

The Committee highlighted that the audit report stated that predicting rates of pupil referrals was difficult as it depended on the level of need of families arriving in Blackpool. Mr Turner explained that the high level of transience experienced in Blackpool made any prediction of need difficult as the numbers of young people fluctuated.

Academy finances was also discussed with the Committee querying if an increase in the number created a financial risk as they were not backed by the Council. Mr Turner noted that the Council still contributed to Academies through the joint-funding of specialist roles. He stated that a risk existed as this was in deficit but the Council's participation in the Department of Education's (DfE) "Safety Valve" programme would allow this to be addressed in the long term. It was further recognised that Academies were not legally permitted to operate budget deficits and financial details had to be published annually. Mr Turner also stated that the Council sought ongoing engagement with academies to allow oversight of their work and they and the Council were all involved in the Improvement Board. Ms Tracy Greenhalgh, Head of Audit and Risk added that with respect of maintained schools, they were required to submit annual financial information to the Council's audit to ensure ongoing monitoring.

The Committee discussed the use of schools to promote community engagement. Activities such as inviting people who might otherwise be isolated within their community to read with young people were highlighted as programmes that helped both the children involved and the mental health and wellbeing of the adult they read with. Although Officers noted that this was an important part of the Literacy Strategy Members expressed a view that more could be undertaken to promote this work and requested that this issue be referred to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.

Educational attainment among non-transient children was raised in comparison with those who were transient with Mr Turner informing Members that national data supported the view that better attainment was associated with more stable school admissions. This in turn meant that children in this group were at lower risk of poor educational attainment. In Blackpool it was also noted that lower attainment was connected to poor housing quality, with areas of such housing showing higher levels of special educational need and disabilities (SEND) and transience.

Mr Neil Jack, Chief Executive also explained that the Council sought in cases of children at high risk to wrap services and support around them and their families. This would also link them to other available support in their communities.

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Ms Gent and Mr Turner further provided an update in respect of sub-risk (c). It was explained that following an Ofsted inspection of SEND provision in early 2022 the Council had submitted a 'Written Statement of Action' setting out the work to be undertaken to address the recommendations made. Once this had been accepted the Council would be held accountable to the DfE for performance against it. Ms Gent added that improvement in this area had also involved the development of the SEND Strategy, which had involved scrutiny input.

Mr Turner outlined the use of a Place Plan Model which looked at the turnover of SEND places and sought to increase the places available for less cost. This would be done by utilising Blackpool's existing resources to expand places in schools. He reported that there were 1,300 young people with educational care health plans and 3,000 with SEND plans. In order to manage the risk associated with SEND the Committee heard that greater investment in provision was needed and that the DfE had been contacted to discuss this.

Members raised the timescales for the building of the High Furlong School and it was reported that a free school application would be submitted in October 2022 and it was expected that building work would be completed by 2024/2025.

The difficulty in predicting the demand for SEND places was discussed with Mr Turner noting that in addition to transience, legislation prevented Blackpool from restricting access to places in the town to residents. Instead all places were open to residents in Lancashire, under free parental choice. Mr Jack highlighted the need for an awareness when planning new SEND placements of where new housing was being built in Lancashire and how this would impact Blackpool.

Resolved:

1. That the updates be noted;
2. That Ms Karen Smith, Director of Adult Services, be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss her new role with the Integrated Care Board and the associated risk; and
3. That the issue of the promotion of Community Engagement work in schools be referred to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee.

6 INTERNAL AUDIT FOLLOW UP - CARE AT HOME

Mr Nick Henson, Head of Adult Care and Support, presented a report on progress made against the recommendations identified as part of the Internal Audit of Care at Home. He informed the Committee that the audit had taken place in October 2021 when Care at Home had been subject to Covid-19 restrictions which had affected how the service was delivered. Training during this time for example could only be delivered online, however since the lifting of restrictions this had where possible returned to face-to-face delivery.

With respect of Recommendation 2, which recommended a systematic method for carrying out quality reviews on service user packs and medication records to ensure consistency in

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quality and recorded information, Mr Henshaw reported that a review was in place but more quality assurance was needed. However work to meet this recommendation was underway.

In regards to, recommendation 3 'that the Medication Action Plan outstanding actions were followed up and required changes incorporated into service delivery', the Committee was informed that new operational procedures had been developed and were awaiting sign-off. This was expected by the end of September 2022.

The use of iPool in relation to Recommendation 8 which recommended the updating of training logs urgently was discussed. Mr Henshaw informed the Committee that a manual fix was in place to allow staff to screen shot and print off manual evidence of the completion of training modules as these could not be provided electronically. No technological fix for this issue had yet been identified however consideration of using the iTrent human resources system for iPool to feed into was being undertaken. It was expected that this would be resolved by the end of 2023.

The Committee queried if service providers had been impacted by the recruitment issues being experienced by the social care sector. In response to this, Mr Henshaw explained that this was an issue being experienced nationally and that the Council was working with the Department for Work and Pensions to attract more candidates. This included the offer of a guaranteed interview for applicants.

Members were also informed that there had been no Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspections but that all services had previously been rated "Good". The CQC had suspended inspections due to Covid-19 but had undertaken some checks online. It was also known that the CQC would be changing its inspection framework once face-to-face inspections resumed to make this more focussed on certain themes.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

7 AUDIT COMMITTEE ACTION TRACKER

The Committee gave consideration to the updated Action Tracker.

Resolved: To note the Action Tracker.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date and time of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday, 20 October 2022 at 6pm.

Chairman

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(The meeting ended at 7.40 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact
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