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MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2022

Present:

Councillor Stansfield (in the Chair)

Councillors

| | | |
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| Critchley | Hunter | M Mitchell |
| Cross | B Mitchell | R Scott |

Ms Gemma Clayton, Parent Governor Co-opted Member
Ms Jo Snape, Diocesan Co-opted Member

In Attendance:

Councillor Gillian Campbell, Cabinet Member for Inclusion, Youth, Schools and Transience
Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care and Schools
Councillor Jo Farrell, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Community Health and Wellbeing

Victoria Gent, Director of Children's Services
Chris Coyle, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Children's Social Care and Tis)
Paul Tuner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, SEND and Early Years)
Lisa Arnold, Strategic Head of Service – Community and Wellbeing
Kara Haskayne, Head of Service Safeguarding Quality Review Service and Principal Social Worker
Joanne Stewart, Head of Early Help
Sara McCartan, Head of Adolescent Services
Nicky Dennison, Public Health Specialist
Derek Wright, Catering Service Manager
Kathryn Morris, Better Start Early Years Co-ordinator
Margaret Williams, Chair of Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership Executive Board

John Greenbank, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 30 JUNE 2022

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting held on 30 June 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.

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4 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Executive and Cabinet Member decisions taken since the last meeting.

With respect of Ex19/2022 SEND Written Statement of Action, Councillor Gillian Campbell, Cabinet Member for Inclusion, Youth, Schools and Transience, informed members that the statement had been submitted to Ofsted and approved.

5 FORWARD PLAN

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

6 EARLY HELP STRATEGY AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Ms Joanne Stewart, Head of Early Help, presented a report on partnership working in the implementation of the Early Help Strategy. She informed the Committee that although it was early in the implementation of the strategy there had been strong engagement from partner organisations. However a number of challenges had been highlighted, in particular partners' limited resources. The Council therefore was looking at how to support partners achieve their ambitions under the strategy.

Work was also outlined on the analysis of data collection, with Ms Stewart explaining that the Council was looking at how to collect data on partners' early help work. This would assist in giving a clear picture on what work was being undertaken by which partners.

The Committee discussed the response from partners to the early help training offer, with Ms Stewart reporting that it had been very positive. The multi-agency approach had been welcomed by partners, who had stated that the inclusion of people working in a variety of settings in training sessions had improved the experience and gave those taking part an insight into others' work. Ms Stewart added that in addition to the multi-agency training offer the Early Help team also offered individual briefings to partner organisations.

The ongoing cost of living crisis was raised as having the potential to limit partners' resources further. This was noted by Ms Stewart as a concern but she highlighted that the Council had undertaken work to look at how the early help offer was organised and how partners' workforces were structured to enable the Council to support them in the best way.

Members also discussed the Family Workers in schools project that had seen four workers deployed to two high schools. It was reported by Ms Stewart that following some initial reluctance by the schools to take part in the project, both settings had now expressed a desire to continue. The role of the family workers was to upskill and support early help work in schools and connect them to wider services in Blackpool.

The Committee queried how the schools involved in the project had been selected with Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, SEND and Early

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Years), responding that they had been selected based on their central locations within Blackpool and the number of early years referrals they had. Following the success of the project in the two schools that were currently involved, Ms Stewart confirmed that there were ambitions to roll out the project further.

A monitoring tool from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Department for Education had been distributed to the Committee and. Members asked why this had been provided, with Ms Stewart explaining that the tool had to be used to undertake self-assessment of the supporting families programme, and demonstrate the progress that had been made.

7 YOUTH JUSTICE UPDATE

Ms Sara McCartan, Head of Adolescent Services, presented an update on the work of the Youth Justice Service. She informed the Committee that the report outlined the Youth Justice Team's progress against the recommendations made by Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Probation (HMIP) following its inspection in the summer of 2021 where the service was rated Good with Outstanding Features. In response to the recommendations the Youth Justice Executive Board had adopted a business plan to assist in guiding service improvement. The Youth Justice Board had graded the plan as Outstanding.

The use of vocational training was discussed with Ms McCartan reporting that the Youth Justice team looked to link young people to employment and educational opportunities including practical vocations, such as construction. In order to further this the service had links with the Responsible Business Network and wider partners via the Employment and Skills strategy partnership.

The help provided to those in alternative provision was discussed, with Ms McCartan informing the Committee that where a young person was known to services a dedicated Youth Justice Education, Employment and Training worker would be assigned to work with the individual and their family to feed into their a personalised plan.

Members of the Committee raised the use of referrals to youth justice services or other diversionary interventions with young people. Ms McCartan explained that the Youth Justice team sought to intervene where possible before an 'at risk' young person became known to the courts. The Youth Justice Team's response to repeat offending by young people, where interventions and assistance had been attempted was discussed.

The use of Council powers to sanction children or their families for repeat offending was also raised, with Members noting that methods such as Parental Orders could be used. Ms McCartan responded that Parenting programmes were impactful when voluntary and while it was important that young people were aware that their actions would have consequences, the Youth Justice Partnerships Child First approach meant that services treated children as a child first building on supportive relationships and children's strengths to divert children away from offending behaviour. Child First meant that services would seek to wrap support around an individual to support them to engage in constructive work and meaningful activity.

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Noting the Committee's concerns regarding the high levels of reoffending in the Brunswick and Talbot Wards, Ms McCartan explained that these were complex areas where issues such as deprivation contributed to youth offending and that these would need to be addressed as well as engaging with individuals. It was also noted that the use of council powers such as Civil Orders could be counter-productive in reducing youth offending and their use should consider the individual child's circumstance. A decision to arrest and charge a young person was the responsibility of the Police. Ms McCartan added offences committed by children were scaled on a matrix based on seriousness and other factors and ultimately a child could be sentenced to custody and completely deprived of their liberty.

Using ex-offenders with lived experience of the youth justice system was raised as a possible means to engage with young people by the Committee. Members were informed in response that this had not been undertaken and that while appropriate lived experience had been impactful for Young People in the Adolescent drug and alcohol service there was no appetite in the Youth Justice Service to undertake the work. The reason noted that often there was a desire on the young person's behalf not to revisit those experiences.

8 SCHOOL FOOD PLAN

Mrs Nicky Dennison, Public Health Specialist, presented a report on the School Food Plan, Free School Meals (FSM) uptake, Free School Breakfast uptake and fluoridated milk provision.

The School Food Plan had been developed by the Department of Education (DfE) to set the standards for all food served in schools. Although the Council could not enforce against the plan in schools the Department for Education (DfE) and the Food Standards agency had developed a programme of inspections for schools that would link food checks to the plan and benchmark them against it. Mrs Dennison also stated that the Council's Catering Team provided food to thirty-one of Blackpool's schools, which allowed greater influence over the food served in those locations. Where the service did not provide food it would be harder for the Council to influence standards, but the inspection programme would assist in giving a picture of their performance.

It was reported that in respect of FSM, uptake nationally was 65% of those who were eligible in maintained schools, this was a concern for the Council. Ms Dennison explained that the Council only had data for maintained schools, and that Academies would have their own data, but that all schools would be aware of those who would be eligible. Ms Lisa Arnold, Strategic Head of Service – Health and Wellbeing, added that the process of encouraging uptake varied across Blackpool. This complicated efforts to engage parents and highlight their child's eligibility for a FSM.

Ensuring that those in receipt of FSM were not singled out when in schools was discussed. The Committee was informed that schools now operated a variety of electronic systems to pay for school meals with students using pay cards at tills. This meant that those using money from FSM would be indistinguishable from those not.

Free School Breakfast had been offered to all primary schools in Blackpool. The

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programme sought to ensure that the children would receive a healthy meal at the start of the school day. The initial roll out of the programme was being reviewed by Public Health with Mrs Dennison reporting that feedback was being sought from schools and parents. The outcome of this review would further influence how breakfasts were offered in the future and inform plans to introduce them into secondary school settings.

The uptake in fluoridated milk provision was discussed with Mrs Dennison reporting that since the lifting of Covid restrictions uptake had fallen. This was a concern with Ms Arnold stating that a number of schools had gone back to ordering non-fluoridated milk for their children. Consideration was therefore being given to how to re-engage schools and parents and encourage the uptake of fluoridated milk, with a possible opt out scheme instead of the current opt in approach. The benefits of fluoridated milk to children's dental health was noted with the Committee querying how this could be monitored. Councillor Jo Farrell, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Community Health and Wellbeing, responded that the Adults Social Care and Health Scrutiny Community was undertaking a Dentistry Review that would be looking at this and other related issues.

Members raised a concern that the standard of school meals could fall due to the increase in costs associated with the cost of living crisis. Ms Arnold responded that the Catering Team was committed to a high standard of food provisions and that this would be maintained. While recognising the risk that the Catering Service could lose school contracts when tenders are due as private contracts often offered the service at a cheaper rate, Ms Arnold noted that private sector providers would also face similar challenges in relation to the rising costs.

9 CHEFS ACADEMY PROJECT

Ms Lisa Arnold, Strategic Head of Service – Community and Wellbeing, presented a report on the Chefs Academy Project. The project was an alternative provision run by the Catering Service aimed at providing young people with skills in the catering and hospitality sector. The project was launched in 2021/2022 and engaged eight young people all of whom had progressed to higher education. Twenty-eight young people had been signed up for the 2022/2023 school year.

The Committee discussed plans to expand the project with Ms Arnold explaining that although ambitions to do more existed, there was a need for further capital investment to achieve this. Mr Derek Wright, Catering Service Manager, added that it was important also that the project used the right settings such as a professional kitchen where the appropriate catering skills could be taught. Teaching in this setting would allow young people involved to learn skills in a setting that were transferable to employment settings within the hospitality sector.

Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, SEND and Early Years) added that the project had been a risk when established, due to the demand for such a provision being unknown. However, the 2021/2022 year had shown that there was support and the expanded uptake in 2022/2023 confirmed this. He also welcomed the interest shown by Members of the Committee and stated that any who wished to do so could visit the academy to see how it worked with young people.

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10 EARLY YEARS GRANT FUNDING

Mr Paul Turner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, SEND and Early Years), presented a report on the administration of Early Years Grant Funding.

The Committee discussed how eligibility for Early Years Grant Funding for two year olds was determined, with it being noted that means testing could exclude some who were in need. Mr Turner replied that means testing of eligibility was a legal requirement and no other pathway for assessing eligibility was permitted. Although the Council was aware that this would exclude some from receiving funding other methods of assistance existed such as the Child Care Voucher Scheme which employers had been encouraged to sign up to.

11 THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON EARLY LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Ms Kathryn Morris, Better Start Early Years Co-ordinator, presented a report outlining the impact of the Covid pandemic on early years language acquisition. The report presented data for children under five and showed that there had been no significant rise in children in higher need following the pandemic. The universal dashboard included in the report also showed that there had been a rise in the number of children who did not need speech, language or communication help.

The Committee noted that the graph provided at 6.1 of the report appeared to show a rise in referrals for speech and language, in response to this Ms Morris explained that better identification of speech and language need had meant more had been referred. This had been achieved through training for staff and was not the result of the pandemic.

The issue of families not wishing to engage with speech and language services was raised by Members. In reply to this Ms Morris explained that between a referral being made and it being considered by the Triage Panel, services would contact a child's parents to identify possible interventions and the appropriate location to undertake them, whether at home, in school or an alternative setting. She also noted that very few parents refused any help but that in the event this occurred then services would try to engage a child through their early years setting.

Mr Paul Tuner, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education, SEND and Early Years) informed the Committee that the two year outcomes on language acquisition following the pandemic were expected to be published soon and that the Council did not expect it to show a negative impact on young people. This was attributed to the hard work undertaken by schools and services throughout the pandemic to support children.

Members queried if there had been an increase in the number of speech and language therapists since the pandemic. Mr Turner informed the Committee that the number of therapists for the under-fives had risen from 1 to 1.93 per 1000 children, but was at 0.7 for the 0-19 cohort. This remained below the national average of 2.4 per 1000. He added that these roles were funded through Better Start.

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12 CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING ASSURANCE PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

Ms Margaret Williams, Chair of Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership Executive Board, presented the Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership (CSAP) Annual Report which covered the period 2020 to 2021. The report demonstrated the good work and partnership working that had been undertaken during the Covid-19 Pandemic and showed how services across Lancashire had strengthened their relationships. Throughout this period the CSAP had also provided robust challenges to its members.

Looking forward Ms Williams reported that the CSAP had identified Contextualised Safeguarding, Domestic Abuse and Neglect as its priorities for 2022. A flexible approach to these priorities allowed the CSAP's locality groups to interpret the work required to address them within their individual settings. The CSAP would also be undertaking a Governance Effectiveness Review to determine what work had been done well and where there were areas for improvement.

The CSAP had recognised that the unprecedented challenges of Covid had a significant impact on partners' staff. Therefore the report noted the value of the workforce and the need to ensure their health and wellbeing going forward.

Members of the Committee discussed the various parenting support work that had taken place under the CSAP. Mr Chris Coyle, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Children's Social Care and Targeted Intervention Service) informed the Committee that lots of work with parents had been undertaken and that bringing this together with other family work had been shown to deliver better outcomes. An important thread for this work was the establishment of positive relationships between families and the staff working with them.

Ms Kara Haskayne, Service Safeguarding Quality Review Service and Principal Social Worker, added that the Council had ten Family Group Conference Co-Ordinators who helped create sustainable development around a child. This work included the identification of interventions such as working with dads to encourage them to be better role models. Ms Joanne Stewart, Head of Early Help and Support, added that Early Help also worked with parents as part of its family work and the Committee asked that an item outlining this be added to its work programme for 2023.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the update be noted; and
2. That a report on Early Helps work with families be added to the work programme for 2023.

13 CORPORATE PARENT PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2022

Ms Kara Haskayne, Head of Service Safeguarding Quality Review Service and Principal Social Worker, presented the Corporate Parent Panel Annual Report which outlined the work of the panel in 2021/2022. She reported that the Panel had undertaken work to revise its Pledges to Our Children, consulting with children and young people, and decided to rename the pledge to "The 5 Promises". This process had been undertaken to demonstrate to children and young people in care that their views and voices had been

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heard by the Panel and changes made to reflect them. The Council was also developing two forms of communicating these promises to young children in care, with the support of a teddy bear and story and a different version for older children and young people in our care. The 5 Promises would be signed by Panel members in October 2022 and a partnership launch would be arranged subsequent to this.

The Your Rock Awards had been held in November 2021 which highlighted and celebrated the achievements of children and young people in care. It was reported that this had been a successful celebration event and had been supported by Blackpool's Winter Gardens staff, to ensure this was a special evening for the children involved. The next event was planned for 25 November 2022.

The Charter Mark for Semi-Independent Homes was also outlined. The Charter Mark and the higher Gold Mark, had been developed with input from young people and could be awarded to semi-independent unregulated settings by Young Inspectors, in recognition of it meeting certain standards. It was hoped that this would assist in driving up standard in currently unregulated semi-independent homes and improve the care offer.

Members queried the number of semi-independent homes in Blackpool and how this compared nationally with Ms Haskayne reporting that the available data could be provided following the meeting. She added that as there was no legal requirement to regulate some semi-independent homes the exact number could not easily be confirmed as providers were not required to be on a commissioning framework. This was an area of concern for the Council, but Ms Haskayne added that it was one that had been experienced nationally and that the National Independent Review of Social Care Report had considered this and made recommendations for the Government to take action to address the unregulated nature of this provision so quality of care can be assured for 16-18 year old young people.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the report be noted; and
2. That the availability data on the number of Semi-Independent Homes in Blackpool be provided following the meeting.

14 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

The Committee considered its work programme for 2022/2023 and noted the additional item added during the meeting.

Members also considered the Committee's Recommendation Monitoring chart and noted that there were two items mark as red. These related to the costs of residential placements for children and the impact on Local Authorities and the findings of the Department for Education impact study on out of area placements. Ms Victoria Gent, Director of Children's Services, informed the Committee that both of these issues had been incorporated into the Independent Children's Social Care Review being undertaken nationally. Therefore no information could be provided at the meeting but a report could be provided to the November 2022 meeting.

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Ms Sara McCartan, Head of Adolescent Services, informed the Committee that in respect of Recommendation 3, that the number of Our Children involved with the Youth Justice Team had halved since January 2021.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the report be noted; and
2. That a report on the outcome of the Independent Children's Social Care Review, including details on the costs of residential placements for children and the impact study on out of area placements, be added to the work programme for the 17 November 2022 meeting.

15 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee was noted as Thursday 17 November 2022 commencing at 6pm.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.55 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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