

Report to:

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Relevant Officer:

Annette Algie, NSPCC, Better Start Project

Date of Meeting

8 December 2022

BLACKPOOL BETTER START ANNUAL UPDATE

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 To consider the annual update on the Better Start Project and progress against recommendations of the Better Start Scrutiny Review.
- 1.2 Blackpool Better Start was reviewed in 2020/2021 by a working group of the Committee, following the review five recommendations were provided to the Better Start Partnership, summarised in 6.1.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 Better Start to continue to provide Councillors with regular updates on the programme and to provide the updated strategies when relevant.
- 2.2 Better Start to continue to work across partners to implement the recommendations from the report.
- 2.3 The Committee is asked to determine whether any/all of the recommendations can be signed off as complete.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

- 3.1 The recommendations of the review are still relevant.
- 3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No
- 3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? NA

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

- 4.1 None.

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priority is

- “Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience”

6.0 Background information

6.1 Since 2015 the Blackpool Better Start Partnership has been delivering services for early years children and families, a working group was formed from the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee in 2020 to review the programme, the review concluded April 2021.

The review identified five recommendations

Recommendation One

That Better Start should target funds to the seven wards originally identified for funding and in cases where residents of these wards are failing to access Better Start provisions the services on offer should be reviewed to ensure they are suitable and accessible.

Recommendation Two

That Better Start works in conjunction with the Council’s Performance, Systems and Intelligence Manager to target future interventions where appropriate more specifically to those parents identified as being at risk of having their children taken into care, with a periodic review of the subsequent impact on the data of children born into care.

Recommendation Three

That Better Start should produce a Communication Strategy within the following six months outlining how best practice will be better shared locally, with the aim of raising awareness of the positive outcomes of Better Start interventions and of upcoming events. This should address how communication will be improved with the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector.

Recommendation Four

That Better Start should introduce within the next six months a regular update bulletin to Councillors informing them of recent achievements and forthcoming events, as well as information on how they can get involved in any programmes.

Recommendation Five

That the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee receives annual updates from Better Start on the progress of sustainability planning of Better Start programmes.

6.2 **Recommendation One** – National Lottery Funding remains targeted on the identified Better Start Wards, however though the Better Start approach partners have scaled up the provision across the town, an example of this being with antenatal provision through Baby Steps.

Due to the scale up of Better Start services and approaches across the town, children and families in the Better Start Wards and outside the Better Start Wards access the provision. Providers of services are required to prioritise children within the Better Start Wards and where additional capacity allows then open up provision to those outside the Better Start Wards. In addition, some services continue to offer an enhanced provision within the Better Start wards, for example the Henry infant feeding service, the Community Connector service and universal early years support. Appendix 5(a) provides the Annual Dashboard which details the activities, reach and beneficiaries over 2021/22.

- 6.3 **Recommendation Two** – Work is ongoing around linkage of town wide data to enable analysis of population level impact and monitor outcomes for those that receive services and those that do not. This work is being led by Oxford University and has involvement from both the Council and Blackpool Teaching Hospitals.

In addition a large piece of work is underway with partners in the council and with Lancaster University to work with parents who have had children removed at birth, the Born into Care project will provide recommendations for systematic changes to support reductions in the number of children subject to care proceedings at birth. Better Start is providing support and resource to enable the work to move at pace and additionally the work is now being governed through the Better Start governance structure.

- 6.4 **Recommendation Three** – Through the Better Start boards regular reporting is undertaken on previous communication activities and future priorities. The programme has over the previous 12 months had a full rebrand and renewed its Vision and Pledges with partners and the community, Appendix 5(b). Over the next few months strategies are to be developed on how to achieve each of these pledges which will involve communications activities.

A key communication activity over the year has been undertaken with partners to establish a quarterly Family Activity Timetable of support for children and families which is circulated through Health Visitors, Social Care, Voluntary and Community Sector Partners and promoted through social media, <https://blackpoolbetterstart.org.uk/families/>

- 6.5 **Recommendation Four** – A councillor newsletter, Better Connected, has been developed which is circulated quarterly, Appendix 5(c). This has links in it to the Family Activity Timetable and Learning Event Timetable and any current promotions for early years families which can be promoted through wards.

- 6.6 **Recommendation Five** –

The Better Start Partnership has already mainstreamed some services across the town, this includes Baby Steps Antenatal support which is delivered through Blackpool Teaching Hospitals and the scale

up of the evidence-based services of VIG, SafeCare and Survivor Mums through the Early Help team.

The CECD is currently working with partners to explore the possibly opportunities for mainstreaming of more services which have proven to be impactful on children's outcomes and sustaining the approaches to town wide commissioning of early years services which ensure joint accountability and decision making. This will build on the work of the partnership to scale universal antenatal education and the provision of evidence-based support for children at risk of neglect and for mothers who may be experienced post-traumatic stress disorder. These services have been tested within the wards and are now part of the wider Early Help offer within the council with 22 practitioners trained in these approaches.

In addition, there is currently a review of the governance structure which proposes a Sustainability Board which will ensure over the final years of funding that services and approaches are embedded across the partnership. Attendance at this board will enable annual reporting on this progress and current priorities for the programme.

The Centre for Early Child Development, as a catalyst for place-based transformation in the early years has also undertaken work to review its current function and develop a strategy for continuing beyond the Lottery funded period. This will ensure that Blackpool continues to lead the way nationally, whilst also retaining a local focus for years to come. The plan is being presented to the Better Start Executive Board on 30th November with a final plan being confirmed prior to the next financial year.

6.7 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

7.1 Appendix 5(a): Year 7 2021-22 Annual Dashboard and Timeline
Appendix 5(b): Better Start Vision and Pledge
Appendix 5(c): Better Connected Newsletter

8.0 Financial considerations:

8.1 National Lottery Community Funding is in place until March 2024, the Executive board is currently undertaking a piece of work on sustainability including mainstreaming the activities which are both acceptable to communities and showing positive outcomes.

9.0 Legal considerations:

9.1 N/A

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 N/A

11.0 Equalities considerations:

11.1 N/A

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

12.1 N/A

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

13.1 N/A

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 Blackpool Better Start Scrutiny Review – Final Report (April 2021)