

**MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING -
THURSDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2023**

Present:

Councillor Stansfield (in the Chair)

Councillors

Burdess	Cross	M Mitchell	Wright
Critchley	B Mitchell	R Scott	

Gemma Clayton, Parent Governor and Co-opted Member

Jo Snape, Diocesan Co-opted Member

In Attendance:

Councillor Maxine Callow JP, Scrutiny Independent Member

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

Councillor Gillian Campbell, Cabinet Member for Inclusion, Youth and Transience

Lisa Arnold, Head of Community and Wellbeing Services

Chris Coyle, Assistant Director of Operations - Children's Social Care and TIS

Victoria Gent, Director of Children's Services

Ms Sara McCartan, Head of Adolescent Services

Ms Nicola Turner, Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing

Programme Manager, Integrated Care Board

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Andrew Stansfield declared a personal interest in respect of item 9 - Fylde Coast Mental Health Support Team, as they worked in Blackpool school supported by the team.

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 8 DECEMBER 2022

The Committee agreed: That the minutes of the last meeting held on 8 December 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 EXECUTIVE AND CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

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

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5 OFSTED INSPECTION UPDATE

Ms Vicky Gent, Director of Children's Services, provided a verbal update on the Ofsted Inspection report that had been received on 1 February 2023.

Ofsted had undertaken an inspection of Children's Services 5-16 December 2023, with the report being published on 1 February 2023. The outcome of the inspection was that the Council had been moved out from an "Inadequate" rating and to "Requires Improvement". This was a positive outcome for services and noted that while work was still required widespread improvement had been achieved. Within Children's Services it was also highlighted that the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers had been rated "Good". Areas for improvement had included strengthening partnership working in early help and multi-agency work with children in cases of domestic abuse and neglect.

The Inspection Report had made a further four recommendations, work on which had begun. Ms Gent expressed the view that the outcome had shown that Ofsted had confidence in the improvement journey being undertaken at the Council and reiterated that the service aspired to be "Outstanding".

The Committee discussed the issues surrounding partnership working in early help, with Ms Gent explaining that although the Council's work had been good more was needed to co-ordinate with partners. To ensure that this happened a Partnership Development Day had been organised for March 2023, where all partners would be brought together to agree a partnership strategy and headline priorities for all involved. The strategy would lay out what was expected from each member of the partnership to address the priorities and establish a governance structure to ensure that assurance could be provided. Once this had been achieved it was proposed that monitoring of partnership work would be undertaken through the multi-agency Children and Family Group.

Members noted that the report had identified one child who had been placed in an unregistered children's home and queried why this was the case. Mr Chris Coyle, Assistant Director Children's Services, responded that unregistered children's homes were establishments that were not regulated by Ofsted and that if used the Council had to notify the regulator of the number being placed in them, with it being recognised that the use of such establishments was undesirable. He added that in respect of the case highlighted in the report, that the child placed in the home had complex needs and had posed a significant challenge to services in identifying a suitable placement for them. However the service would be reviewing how the case was handled to determine if any learning could be gained.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the update be noted; and
2. That the Service be congratulated on the positive outcome of the review inspection.

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6 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Ms Vicky Gent, Director of Children's Services, presented the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for Children's Services. The report outlined that the MTFS was the result of a refresh of the document undertaken in 2022 and was underpinned by actions across the service that are designed to ensure that more children and families receive coordinated and effective early help. Ms Gent added that if achieved the actions outlined would bring Blackpool in to line with levels of demand experienced by comparable local authorities.

Targeted early intervention by services had been recognised as the most effective approach in delivering positive outcomes for children. It was also emphasised that untargeted excessive interventions could be expensive and cause harm to children, young people and families. The MTFS therefore sought to reduce cost pressures through a strategic approach of targeted intervention, at the right time and right level by the most appropriate service, which would deliver positive outcomes for children, young people and families.

Members of the Committee discussed what 'normal' would look like for Blackpool, querying what levels of demand were experienced in comparable authorities. Mr Chris Coyle, Assistant Director of Children's Services, explained that areas in the North East of England, such as Middlesbrough, with similar levels of deprivation to Blackpool offered the best comparators. In these cases 'normal' was represented by 175 looked after children per 10k people, or approximately 500 children in care. Blackpool had 205 per 10k at the time of the meeting, although it was noted that this was 15% lower than during June 2022.

The Committee asked if data on looked after children numbers from 2019 to the present day could be provided for information, which would demonstrate the impact of improvement work.

Mr Coyle emphasised that although it was desirable to reduce the number of children in care, the service would seek to do this in a sustained and safe manner, with priority focussed on the outcomes for children, not statistics. The Committee also asked if Middlesbrough or other comparable authorities could provide any learning that could be applied in Blackpool to safely reduce numbers. Mr Coyle explained in response that although the Council was open to examining models of best practice in other areas, it had to be careful that if implemented in Blackpool that they suited the unique challenges faced and would deliver the outcomes for children that was desired.

The MTFS showed that the proposed development of an Assessment Centre had been dropped from future plans. Mr Coyle explained in reply to a query from members regarding the reason for this, that it had been determined that the impact of such a centre would not deliver the outcomes hoped for and that other schemes and improvements to existing practices were in place to achieve better results.

Proposals in the MTFS to reduce the number of Section 47 enquires, placing children in residential care, being undertaken by 30% through a greater focus on interventions in a family setting were discussed. Members expressed concern that in some cases domestic

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abuse could prevent successful intervention in a family setting and asked how a reduction could be safely achieved. Mr Coyle responded that although domestic abuse was an issue, and Section 47's would continue to be used where necessary, neglect posed the biggest challenge to services in Blackpool.

Placing children in residential care through Section 47's was not considered an effective approach to addressing neglect and would not achieve positive outcomes for the child and their family. The most effective approach therefore was through targeted interventions within a family setting in cases of neglect. Ms Gent added that the "Blackpool Families Rock" practice model had proven that this was the approach which delivered the best outcomes for children.

It was also stated that work to develop Family Safeguarding, whereby partners would wrap services around a family was under consideration. Ms Gent confirmed that if a proposal was developed from this work that a report could be provided to a future meeting of the Committee.

Mr Coyle also provided details of issues relating to the stability of foster placements to the Committee. He explained that for a placement to be considered stable, a child would have to remain in one for two or more years. The national average of stable placements was 70%, whereas in Blackpool the level was 50%. It was stated that instability was often caused by the complex needs of a child being placed. Although the current level was an improvement on previous years, work was still needed to improve and it was expected that Blackpool could meet the national average, if improvement continued, in approximately two years.

The Committee raised the possibility of exploring different deliver model for Children's care homes in Blackpool to allow greater Council control over children's care rather than reliance on private sector providers. Ms Gent responded although they were aware of proposals to do this, that due to ongoing high demand and the improvement work taking place that it was not feasible to make such a substantial change to the operation of Children's Homes currently. Councillor Jim Hobson, Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care and Schools, added that once the Council was further progressed along the improvement journey then the proposal could be given further consideration, noting that issue was included on the Committee Work Plan.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the Medium Term Financial Strategy for Children's Services be noted;
2. That data on the levels of look after children from 2019 to 2023 be provided for information; and
3. If developed that proposals for a Family Safeguarding approach be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

7 YOUTH JUSTICE TEAM UPDATE

Ms Sara McCartan, Head of Adolescent Services, presented an update on the work being undertaken by the Youth Justice Service (YJS). She explained that the YJS operated a "Child First" approach, which placed children at the heart of work being undertaken,

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treating children as children, seeing the whole child, including any structural barriers they face and focusing on better outcomes for children.

Challenges faced by the services were outlined to the Committee. Ms McCartan reported that the YJS had seen an increase in the number of children remanded and sentenced to custody in the last quarter and explained that the number of first time entrants into Blackpool's YJS remained higher than local and national averages. Work was needed to understand the causes of these issues and how services could be supported to address them.

As previously reported children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), Speech, Language or Communication needs, made up approximately three-quarters of all those involved with the YJS. Challenges in addressing this issue included a lack of targeted intervention provision for the YJS. The service had therefore entered a service level agreement with Children's Targeted Intervention Service and Blackpool Teaching Hospitals to provide specialist intervention services to the YJS.

Ms McCartan also reported that the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) had informed the YJS that a revised set of Key Performance Indicators will be introduced in April 2023 including areas such as:

- Accommodation
- Employment
- Training and Education
- Learning Needs
- Mental Health
- Substance Misuse
- Youth Justice Board Attendance
- Out Of Court Disposal Orders
- Youth Violence

The data to support these KPIs had been already been collected by the YJS but work would be undertaken to adapt the information to fit the MoJ's requested format.

The Committee discussed Out Of Court Disposal Orders with Ms McCartan explaining that these covered a number of outcomes for children, including "Words of Advice" from a Police Officer, but that the YJS main areas of work involved those children subject to a Community Resolution with an element of diversion. The precise details of diversions implemented were dependent on the individual child and were designed to ensure their engagement by linking them to educational and training opportunities and other relevant services.

Members also queried if the rise in the number of children sentenced and remanded in custody was linked to the reported increase in instances of youth Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). Ms McCartan explained that there was no evidence for a correlation between these two but a link between ASB and the rate of children being arrested in Blackpool was likely. The YJS and partners would however be undertaking work to ensure it understood why there had been an increase in children in custody.

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The Committee agreed: That the update be noted.

8 FYLDE COAST MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAM

Nicola Turner, Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Programme Manager, provided an update on work of the Fylde Coast Mental Health Support Team in schools in Blackpool. The core aims of the team's work were detailed as:

- Delivering evidence-based interventions for children and young people with mild-to moderate mental health problems
- Supporting the senior mental health lead in each education setting to introduce or develop their whole school/college approach
- Giving timely advice to school and college staff, and liaising with external specialist services, to help children and young people to get the right support and stay in education

The team worked with Educational Diversity and various schools across Blackpool to deliver these functions to children and young people. In addition to this the team supported children in Wyre and had been looking to undertake work in Fylde.

Recruitment to the team had been a challenge, but Ms Turner reported that a new approach had therefore been adopted which had seen this issue resolved.

The Committee noted that of 441 appointments offered only 43 had not been attended. Ms Turner explained that each child referred to the team would be offered six appointments, which could be increased in required. In some cases where it was regarded that more in-depth support was required a referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services could be made. Members asked if educational services not supported by the team could also refer child to it, in response to which Ms Turner explained she would provide details in which circumstances that this would be appropriate.

Training opportunities for teaching staff were also discussed with Ms Turner noting that these had been recognised and would be explored in the future. It was added that teaching staff were offered Mental Health First Aid currently.

The Committee agreed:

1. That the report be noted; and
2. That details of the possibility of referrals into the Fylde Coast Mental Health Support Team from educational services not supported by the team be provided to members.

9 YOUTH PROVISION REVIEW UPDATE

Ms Lisa Arnold, Head of Community and Wellbeing Services, provided an update following the review of Youth Provision completed in 2023 and the commitment from the Council to establish a small Youth Service, to provide coordination and support to third sector youth providers.

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The review had made a number of recommendations, based on the outcome of a survey of young people in Blackpool. Ms Arnold explained that achieving these recommendations, including ensuring all young people had access to youth provision within a 15-minute walk of their homes, would be challenging and that these would be likely only possible in the long term. However the Council had made a commitment to improve youth provision and recognised the health, mental and social benefit of implementing the recommendations.

Work to establish a Youth Services to support the implementation of the recommendation had been undertaken, with the appointment of a Youth Services Manager having been made, with them starting work in March 2023. Following this four further members of the team would be appointed. This team would then seek to support collaboration between youth service providers and assist in securing grant funding. This work would be supported by a Youth Services Plan which had been developed with Ms Sara McCartan, Head of Adolescent Services.

The Committee discussed if existing provision had been mapped and were informed that although the Council had already been aware of significant gaps, with some wards having no youth provision, a mapping exercise would be undertaken once the Youth Services team was in place.

The Committee agreed: That the update be noted.

10 CORPORATE PARENT STRATEGY

Mr Chris Coyle, Assistant Director of Children's Services, provided an update regarding Blackpool's Corporate Parent Strategy. The Strategy was designed to support the Council in being a good corporate parent and fulfilling its duties corporately, in partnership with other statutory agencies.

To ensure that the new strategy focussed on issues children and young people had identified as mattering to them, five promises had been developed:

1. Care and Respect
2. Your Relationships
3. Your Health
4. Your Education
5. Your Future

These had been launched in October 2022, were now the strategic priorities outlined in the strategy and it was hoped that this would further demonstrate the Council's commitment to ensuring that the voice of children and young people continued to drive the Blackpool Corporate Parent agenda and its priorities.

The Committee discussed the Passport to Leisure card available to all Looked After Children. Ms Lisa Arnold, Head of Community Health and Wellbeing Services explained that the passport gave young people access to the Council's Leisure Centres and allowed them to undertake activities at half price. It was added that the Council also funded

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leisure activities for those children placed outside of Blackpool.

The Committee agreed: That the update be noted.

11 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

The Committee considered its Workplan for 2022/2023 and noted the items within.

Members considered Committee's Action Tracker, noting the outstanding items contained. Ms Vicky Gent, Director of Children's Services, informed the Committee that in respect of Action One, "To receive the findings of the National Association of Children's Services examining the costs of residential placements for children and the impact on Local Authorities.", that this information had been received and provided to members.

In respect of Action Two "To receive the findings of the Department for Education impact study on out of area placements." Ms Gent reported that despite the findings being expected in 2022, the Council had not yet been received them. Officers would continue to monitor this situation and would provide the Committee with further updates when possible.

Mr Chris Coyle, Assistant Director of Children's Services, confirmed that in respect of Action Nine that he would provide members with the data on the number of Semi-independent Children's Care Homes in Blackpool.

The Committee agreed:

1. The report be noted; and
2. That the Action Tracker be updated to reflect the updates provided at the meeting.

12 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted the provisional date and time of the next meeting as 6.00pm on Thursday, 22 June 2023, subject to confirmation at Annual Council.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.01 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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