

**Report to:**

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

**Relevant Officer:**

Paul Turner, Assistant Director – Education, SEND and Early Years.

**Meeting**

25 January 2024

## **SEND WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ACTION AND STRATEGY UPDATE**

### **1.0 Purpose of the report:**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Inform Scrutiny of the progress made since the February 2022 Ofsted and CQC SEND inspection.
- Inform Scrutiny of developments in relation to the SEND Strategy.

### **2.0 Recommendation(s):**

2.1 To review the update and consider if sufficient progress has been made since the inspection and in the implementation of the Strategy.

### **3.0 Reasons for recommendations:**

3.1 To ensure robust scrutiny of SEND.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council?

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget?

### **4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:**

4.1 None.

### **5.0 Council priority:**

5.2 The relevant Council priority is

- The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool
- Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience

## 6.0 Background information

Between 28 February 2022 and 4 March 2022, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) conducted a joint inspection of the local area of Blackpool to judge the effectiveness of the area in implementing the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014.

This inspection provides an independent, external evaluation of how well a local area carries out its statutory duties for children and young people with SEND between the ages of 0-25 years. The local area includes the local authority, clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) – now Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), public health, NHS England (for specialist services), Early Years settings, schools and further education providers.

The official findings letter was published and made publically available on 26 May 2022. A link to the report can be viewed [here](#).

## 6.1 Findings and outcome of the report

The outcome of the inspection, though hugely disappointing, was anticipated by senior officers. The inspection feedback recognised that Blackpool’s leaders have an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses across the area and that these are accurately reflected in the self-evaluation provided to Ofsted prior to inspection.

The inspectorates’ findings are detailed as strengths and areas for development against each of the key lines of enquiry. The report identifies 15 areas of strength and 18 areas for development.

## 6.2 Areas of strength

The inspectors did note the following areas of strength:

- Some parents and carers spoke highly of leaders’ efforts to maintain services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools remained open to vulnerable children and young people throughout local and national restrictions. Health services adapted their ways of working so they could continue to identify and meet children and young people’s needs. Parents and carers appreciated the emotional and practical support that they received from front-line professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Parents and carers are quick to sing the praises of many front-line staff who make a positive difference. There are staff who go the extra mile every day to give children, young people and their families the help and support that they need. These individual professionals are a ‘lifeline’ for the families that they work with.
- The area’s well regarded special schools provide an effective service for children, young people and their families. Many mainstream settings also meet the needs of children and young people well.

## 6.3 Significant areas of weakness

The inspectors identified four areas of weakness that the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) must address.

1. The lack of specificity, ownership and accountability in the areas' improvement strategy for SEND.
2. The duties around preparing children and young people for adulthood, not being fulfilled.
3. The poor communication with parents and carers across the area – model of co-production
4. The long waiting time for some therapies.

Addressing these four areas of weakness has required significant cross-organisation working between Blackpool Council and Blackpool CCG (now ICB) together with a wide range of stakeholders including:

- Children, young people and their families.
- Parent carer forum, other parental children and young people groups
- Information and Advice Services for education, social care and health.
- Education providers – Early Years, schools and colleges.
- Employers, housing and leisure providers.

The SEND Code of Practice 2015, sets out that children, young people and their parents and carers must be involved in planning, commissioning and reviewing services; and in decision making about individual support and local provision/services. The expectation is that this involvement is undertaken through a model of co-production. Co-production is a way of working where providers and users of a service work together to reach a collective outcome. This is now underway.

#### 6.4 **Monitoring and re-inspection**

The local area will be re-inspected by Ofsted and the CQC to decide whether sufficient progress has been made in addressing each of the areas of significant weakness identified. The timescale for re-inspection is eighteen months after publication of the initial inspection. This will be conducted under the new framework, introduced in 2023. A re-inspection is now overdue.

#### 6.5 **Key progress**

##### **WSOA 1: The lack of specificity, ownership and accountability in the areas' improvement strategy for SEND**

Our SEND Strategy 2022-2025 was developed throughout 2022 and is the result of our SEND Partnership working together and listening to the views and experiences of parents/carers, children / young people, and professionals across education, health and social care. It was underpinned by a SEND needs assessment and self-evaluation, which provided a robust evidence base to inform the strategic priorities and provide leaders with a shared understanding of the local area's strengths and areas for development. It was finalised and

formally launched in December 2022 with stakeholders and partners across the wider SEND community and has been approved by the Council's Executive, Blackpool Teaching Hospital's and the Integrated Care Board's governance structures.

The strategy has been shared throughout the partnership to ensure that partners are aware and understand how it impacts on their organisations and their role in its delivery. We also worked with our Youth Empowerment Forum to develop a young people's version of the strategy, which has been published on the Local Offer and shared with schools.

As part of the delivery of the SEND Strategy 2022-25, the following infrastructure projects have been agreed and development is underway:

1. £3.8 million of funding to eradicate the school funding deficit and High Needs Block deficit (from the Department of Education safety-valve programme).
2. £6.2 million of funding to build new school sites in Blackpool at Highfurlong Special School, Educational Diversity and Park school.
3. A new post-19 offer at The Oracle, through Valley College.
4. Enhanced Assessment provision at Revoe Primary Academy.
5. A new SEMH Free School for 56 pupils, funded by the Department for Education.

Additionally, an Alternative Provision Academy bid has been submitted to the Department for Education for children with medical needs that prevent them from attending school. The results of this bid should be available before Easter 2024.

To ensure continued focus upon the SEND strategy, the SEND Partnership held its second annual SEND Conference on 3 October 2023, attended by over 250 stakeholders from across the partnership. The keynote speaker was Dr. Pooky Knightsmith, an expert in social and emotional mental health and the topic was inclusive classroom practice. This is also part of our ongoing strategy to raise the profile of inclusion in our mainstream schools and how this can be achieved through small changes.

Leaders from the SEND Partnership also met with Ofsted and the CQC for an engagement meeting under the new SEND inspection framework in October 2023, and completed an updated self-evaluation which was positively received, which further drives forwards the SEND strategy.

In January 2024 leaders undertook an annual review of SEND strategy delivery alongside a range of partners, including young people and parent/carers. Partners identified key achievements and challenges since the strategy was launched in December 2022, as well as priorities for the next 12 months, which will shape the improvement plan for April 2024 – March 2025.

**WSOA 2: The duties around preparing children and young people for adulthood, not being**

## **fulfilled**

A mapping exercise of Preparation for Adulthood (PFA) provision was undertaken on behalf of the SEND partnership and its sufficiency discussed as part of the development of the PFA strategy. Findings indicate that there are improvements to be made in the following areas:-

- Earlier sharing of information and expectations when transitioning from children's to adults' services.
- Removing barriers to accessing GP services.
- Skills for living – a good offer available in special schools, with improvements required in mainstream secondary schools and further education colleges and sixth forms.
- More flexible employment opportunities – examples included job shares, part-time working and opportunities for Apprenticeships.

These improvements will be incorporated into the Preparation for Adulthood Plan.

In May 2023, our PFA Co-Production 'Act to Innovate' Group developed our Preparation for Adulthood Strategy. This group consists of adults, young people and parents with lived experience of SEND, together with a multitude of SEND professionals from different backgrounds, including the co-production Team. A three month consultation period on the draft strategy took place from July 2023 until September 2023 which led to the completion of our Preparation for Adulthood Strategy 'Living the Life I Choose'. This now reflects the support and provision young people in Blackpool will receive to achieve their ambitions.

The strategy was shared at the SEND Conference held on the 4th October 2023 at the Winter Gardens, where members of the group held workshops to share the strategy with delegates.

Members of the PFA Co-production "Act to Innovate" Group continue to work together to produce a Preparation for Adulthood Plan to deliver the promises set out in the strategy. Progress is monitored by the SEND Partnership Board.

The draft strategy was presented to a special Council scrutiny meeting in November 2023 and young people who have co-produced the strategy spoke to elected members about their experiences and their work, which was praised. The strategy is currently being finalised.

We have had 8 enrolments onto Project Search, our supported internship programme, this is above the England average and an increase of 2 on last year.

Our PFA lead has developed a Transitions Protocol alongside partners entitled 'A life not a service'. This document was launched at the SEND Conference through a series of workshops and has been published on the Preparation for Adulthood section of Blackpool's Local Offer website. The document explains what is meant by transitions, when transition takes place and what is involved together with useful information on where to find help and support.

### **WSOA 3: The poor communication with parents and carers across the area**

Over the last year we have worked closely with the co-production team to establish a young peoples' and parents' SEND Advisory Group. Together they have co-produced the redesign of the Local Offer website and developed the aforementioned PfA Strategy. They have also influenced the design of the SEND data dashboard.

We have redeveloped and refreshed the content in the Local Offer website. As a result the number of users is increasing and to date around 20,000 visits to the site have been made, with over 6,000 new users. General feedback is positive and increased user friendliness is reported. There is a calendar of events on the Local Offer, providing details of a range of regular events and sessions where young people and parents and carers can meet professionals from across the partnership, find out what support is available to them and also have an opportunity to share views or concerns and meet other parents. This is one of many ways in which services communicate with families.

### **WSOA 4: the long waiting times for some therapies**

To enable earlier identification and support for children the SEND service has allocated a lead Educational Psychologist and a SEND Advisory Teacher to each school in Blackpool. This enables our services to intervene at the earliest opportunity and reduces the need to escalate into health services/support families whilst they are waiting for health services.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information?

No

#### **7.0 List of Appendices:**

SEND Strategy 2022-25

#### **8.0 Financial considerations:**

8.1 Some additional resource to support the improvement program has been provided by the CCG / ICB , and additional capacity will be created within existing budgets and funding streams.

#### **9.0 Legal considerations:**

9.1 This is an evaluation of the Council's ability to meet the legislative requirements set out in the Children and Families Act 2014, s20 of the Children's Act 2004, and Equalities Act 2010

#### **10.0 Risk management considerations:**

10.1 These are published documents so there is risk to the Council's reputation if we do not fulfil our statutory duties.

**11.0 Equalities considerations and the impact of this decision for our children and young people::**

11.1 The purpose of the improvement plans is to ensure that Blackpool has fully inclusive services for all children and young people 0-25.

**12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:**

12.1 None.

**13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:**

13.1 None for the purpose of this report.

**14.0 Background papers:**

14.1 None.