

## CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES - COUNCILLOR JIM HOBSON

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Portfolio areas of responsibility:

- Children's social care and targeted intervention services
- Care leavers
- Early help
- Fostering/adoption/permanence planning
- Children's commissioning
- Family Hubs
- Early Years

### Introduction

The cabinet member will present the report to Council and report on any key issues.

### Theme 1 - Family Safeguarding Model

In December 2022, Ofsted rated Blackpool Children's Social Care Services overall as 'Requires Improvement', with 'Good' for children in care and care leavers. The report reinforced the need to implement the Family Safeguarding Model in Blackpool, where staff support parents to create sustained change for themselves and for their family. The model is entirely congruent with the Blackpool Families Rock approach. In June 2023, the Department for Education awarded Blackpool Children's Social Care £764,610 in order to develop multi-disciplinary, family safeguarding teams, with the aim that families address their needs and more children remain within their family networks. This extra resource will build on the current strengthening and supporting families service. Since then, the Centre for Family Safeguarding has worked alongside Blackpool Children's Social Care to implement and embed the Model through a series of workshops and training sessions.

Family Safeguarding teams have been proven to achieve better outcomes for children and families by working with partners to develop a whole family multi-disciplinary approach to safeguarding children. The implementation of whole family working will change our working culture, transforming the support offer provided to families in Blackpool, further improving social work practice to reduce the numbers of children being placed on child protection plans and becoming looked after and supporting the next phase of our improvement journey to

'Outstanding'. This will both deliver better, sustainable outcomes for children and families but also reduce intervention and placement costs.

In October 2023 we held the first Operational Transformation Board, where a cross-section of staff from Children's Social Care contributed to decisions regarding the implementation journey and provided challenge to the project team. The implementation of the Family Safeguarding Model is overseen by the Transformation Strategic Board, which has overall responsibility for our Children's Social Care journey to achieving "Outstanding", ensuring we focus on the basics and keep children and families at the centre of everything we do.

## **Theme 2 - Demand management: ensuring children and families are supported at the right level of intervention**

Blackpool has the highest rates of children looked after and of children supported at a statutory level of intervention in the country. Our overall aim is to bring these numbers down to a level seen in similar local authorities, our statistical "nearest neighbours". The focus of our approach is to work with families at the earliest opportunity and to ensure that we intervene at an appropriate level. As part of this we are supporting partners in their early help work with children and families. Positively, this has led to an increase in the number of children and families who have received an Early Help assessment by partners from 50 to over 180. In 2023 three Family Hubs were launched creating a community resource to support children and families, delivering services such as pre-natal support parenting programmes, with more specialist work being delivered through our Targeted Early Help teams. As a result of this, our referral rate has reduced by 22% over the last six months, whilst our re-referral rate has stabilized at 19%, indicating that we are supporting children at the right level of intervention.

The culture change created through implementation of the Family Safeguarding model is also having an impact, even before staff have been recruited. In the last six months the number of children we support with a Child In Need plan has reduced by 10% and those supported by a Child Protection Plan by 6%.

The result of this work is that the number of children we are looking after is at the lowest level since 2018 and we are narrowing the gap with our statistical neighbours.

## **Theme 3 - Better Start extension**

The National Lottery Community Fund formally confirmed in May 2023 that Blackpool Better Start could use underspend in the programme to continue for a further two years. This will

involve a full-scale continuation of Blackpool Better Start's current delivery model, which looks to change services universally accessed by families in support of three key priority areas:

1. Pregnancy to Age Four pathways of support
2. Speech, Language and Communication
3. Research, Data and Evidence

In addition, Blackpool Better Start will undertake additional work to develop both pathways into targeted services and consistent public messaging on child development. The partnership has, since day one, been planning for the sustainability and mainstreaming of services which have been proven to have a positive impact on children, families, the workforce or wider system. Extending the funded period on specific interventions will provide more time to generate evidence to inform future commissioning decisions. The additional time will also enable work to progress within areas that have not previously been ready for innovation, such as developing a new approach to reducing smoking in pregnancy.

To maximise the potential impact of the programme, it has established a new governance structure for the final years of funding. This includes a Sustainability Board, chaired by the Director of Resources for Blackpool Council, which will review all projects and mainstreaming options and make recommendations to the Finance Board, which will look at the opportunities for diverting funds or identifying funding strands to support all partners to continue to deliver the effective interventions post funding.

### **General questions / comments**

Councillors will have the opportunity to raise questions / comments on any matter in the Cabinet Member's portfolio.