

Council Forum, 5th October 2023

Progress of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Purpose of the Report

To update the Council Forum on the progress of the Policy and Corporate Resources, Health and Social Care, Children and Young People and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

At the meeting on 7th August, the meeting was dedicated to scrutiny of the Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB).

Members received a presentation from Kevin Lavery, Chief Executive for NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria about the expectations for the ICB, and Claire Richardson, Director of Health and Social Care Integration (Blackburn with Darwen) at NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB on Developing Health and Care integration in Blackburn with Darwen in a place based partnership. Mark Warren, Strategic Director, Adults & Health, also reported on the Adults and Health Service Plan for 2023/24.

The Committee highlighted the need for better use of Darwen Health Centre, to alleviate pressures at Royal Blackburn Hospital A&E and other hospitals, feedback from residents who had to accept hospital appointments outside the Borough, and the difficulty of getting to their appointments due to financial constraints and distance. It was noted that each hospital in Lancashire had their own specialist consultants and areas and therefore it would still be necessary to travel further for appointments in some cases.

Members also discussed COVID boosters/vaccinations, and where residents did not meet the criteria they would be encouraged to have the Flu vaccine.

Outside of the main Committee, the Task and Finish Group looking at Care Homes has started its work and will report back to the Committee in February 2024, with the next Committee meeting in October focussing on how prepared the Council is for the CQC Self Assessment.

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

At the meeting on 12th June 2023, the Committee received an update from the Youth MP and Youth Forum on their recent events and activities, as well as information relating to the role of Young Inspectors, how inspections were carried out, and how certification was awarded, and what happened following an inspection.

The Committee also discussed next steps following the recent LGA Training '6 steps to Effective Scrutiny of Children's Services'. All of the advice and recommendations were noted and those who attended asked for feedback. Discussions were taking place about implementing as much as possible whilst recognising many are dependent on extra capacity. Reducing duplication was being considered as part of

agenda setting process. There would be more focus on data and analysis – with a dashboard at every meeting with relevant KPIs. A glossary of terms specific to Blackburn with Darwen Children’s Services was to be developed. Members, Officers and partners were investigating the proposal to merge the Corporate Parenting Special Advisory Group (Members) and the Corporate Parenting Executive Board (Officers and partners) to form a Corporate Parenting Panel. A workshop was planned for mid-Sept to explore this further, once structures and membership were in place the LGA could be invited to deliver training.

The Children’s Services sector led improvement partners (SLIP) approach would also be explored to identify other local authorities that may be able to support the council on its improvement journey.

As requested at the previous meeting, the Committee also received a report and information on the Wellbeing Champions project, commissioned by the Public Health Team.

Finally, the Committee received detailed presentations and information relating to Corporate Parenting, which outlined the role of the Council and Councillors as Corporate Parents, working together with key partner agencies such as Health, Police and Education, and examples given of how Corporate Parents could contribute and shape the lives of children. The presentation highlighted the role of the Virtual School, and detailed Corporate Parenting performance data. Foster Carer Recruitment continued to remain a priority for the Council, which remained a challenge, as it continued to be nationally. Challenges, as well as the shortage of foster carers, included shortage of suitable local accommodation for children seeking asylum, and imminent regulation by Ofsted of post 16 provision. Members discussed the key points arising and it was felt that generally there was a better understanding of the role of Corporate Parents, but more work was still required with Members.

The next Committee meeting in November will focus on the Local Safeguarding Assurance Partnership, and receive an update on the last 5 months since the update at the June meeting.

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee received a report and presentation on Waste, Litter and Dog Fouling Enforcement at its meeting on 14th August 2024, and debated the key issues arising. Following discussions the following actions were agreed:

- Tony Watson to circulate details to Members of litter and dog fouling hotspots.
- Phil Llewellyn to circulate the Whatsapp contact information for reporting littering and dog fouling offences to Members.
- Consideration to be given to reviewing the current FPN charges with a view to increasing the fees to reflect national charges. This to be considered alongside the likelihood of cases backing up in the courts and potentially lower collection rates.

- The littering and dog fouling contract to be reviewed on its renewal date and consideration be given to strengthening the role of the dog enforcement officer in particular.

At the next meeting in November, the Committee will focus on Highways Infrastructure, with particular emphasis on the condition of the roads themselves, including information on pot-holes and issues with traffic lights.

Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

As agreed at the last meeting, the main agenda item at the meeting held on 11th September 2023 was Sickness Absence, and Members received a presentation that detailed staff absence data from April 2018 to March 2023.

Following the presentation, Members asked a number of questions and made statements on the topic and also received information and questions from the Joint Unions.

The Committee resolved:

- That Officers be requested to provide information on the breakdown of absence data between Clerical and Manual Staff, and of Long Term Absences (over 20 days or more) over the last two years, and provide answers to the questions presented by the Unions;
- The Committee recommend that consideration be given to increasing the hours of the Part-time in-house Occupational Health Advisor, and also that the arrangements relating to Occupational Health support be reviewed;
- The Committee recommend that more proactive support be given in regard to Mental Health/Neuro-Diversity and the Menopause before people needed to access support such as Mental Health First Aiders; and
- The Committee recommend that consideration be given to re-introducing dedicated HR support to project manage sickness absence.

At the next meeting in January, the Committee will receive an update on Finance and discuss budgets, emerging pressures, and income collection issues.

Councillor Tony Humphrys, Chair of the Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Jacqueline Slater, Chair of the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Sylvia Liddle, Chair of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Suleman Khonat, Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.