

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Monday 4th September 2023

PRESENT – Councillor Sylvia Liddle (in the Chair) Councillors McCaughran, Raja, Ali, Gibson.

YOUNG PEOPLE REPRESENTATIVES – Muhammed Bapu, Youth MP, Roisa McCusker and Fatima Asif, Zainab Shah and Faisal Ahmed (Youth Forum representatives).

ALSO PRESENT – Executive Member – Julie Gunn, Officers – Michelle Holt, Imran Akujji, Andrew Bradbury, Suzanne Kinder, Louise Helm, Cath Taylor, Fran Riley and Phil Llewellyn.

RESOLUTIONS

8. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked all to introduce themselves.

Apologies were received from Councillors Jackson, Gee, Patel and Slater Ju, and from Officers, Jo Siddle and Andrea Sturgess.

9. Minutes of the meeting held on 12th June 2023

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12th June 2023 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12th June 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

10. Declarations of interest

No Declarations of interest were made by Members of the Committee.

11. Youth MP and Youth Forum Update

Ahead of the Youth MP's update, Muhammad Bapu, as requested at the last meeting, gave a short presentation, outlining the role of the Young Inspectors, how inspections were carried out, how certification was awarded and what happened following an inspection.

Muhammad gave details of the scoring process and of an example inspection relating to the Leaving Care Service.

Muhammad then verbally reported on recent events and activities including :

- Progress of the national Spill the Tea campaign targeting food poverty, including work with Kate Hollern MP.
- Attendance at the recent UK Youth Parliament Conference at Leeds.
- Forthcoming attendance at the Annual Sitting at the House of Commons.
- Muhammad had now stepped down from his role, but would be still involved behind the scenes.

Members discussed the updates and thanked the Youth MP and Youth Forum for the ongoing excellent work, and in particular praised Muhammad for his excellent contribution over the course of his term.

RESOLVED- That the updates be noted.

12. Next Steps following LGA Training – ‘6 steps to Effective Scrutiny of Children’s Services’

A report was submitted updating the Committee on next steps following the LGA training on July 31st 2023.

The training covered the general overview of the steps:

- Knowledge of children’s services
- Clarity of role and purpose
- Work programming and planning
- Demonstrating value and influence
- Engagement and working with others
- A strong organisational culture

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. Further ‘deep dive’ training could be accessed on any of the 6 steps

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.

Development and training offer via the LGA would aim to support the Council in:

- Embedding strong governance and accountability for Corporate Parenting, with clear understanding of responsibilities and expectations.

- Achieving a whole system approach to Corporate Parenting across the wider council and partners, driven by the voice and experiences of children and young people.
- Understanding what good looks like and measuring impact.
- Achieving improved outcomes for children and young people who are care experienced.

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.

RESOLVED –That the report and next steps be noted.

13. Wellbeing Champions Update

A report was submitted on the Wellbeing Champions project commissioned by the Public Health team, as requested at the last meeting of the Committee.

The Wellbeing Champions (WBC) project was based on the evidence based intervention of Peer Support. The potential benefits of peer support for young people had been well documented by the Department for Education and Public Health England. It had been found to reduce social isolation, increase self-confidence and improve quality of life.

The project aimed to successfully recruit, support and train young people, aged 12 – 18 to become Wellbeing Champion in schools, and youth settings. A Wellbeing Champion was a young person who has undertaken specific mentoring training in order for them to support other children and young people.

The WBC project began in June 2021 and was originally delivered by Realign Futures for 12 months using funding from the Public Health England Better Mental Health grant. This was time limited and ended in May 2022.

Following this, the Public Health team agreed to fund the programme for a further two year period. However, an open tender process was required in line with procurement regulations.

The current contract was now being delivered by Child Action North West (CANW) and runs from August 2022 to July 2024, with a total value of £70,000.

The report outlined achievements to date, and officers reported on the next stage of the project, which should provide more progress following the work undertaken in the first year of the project.

The Youth representatives asked a number of questions, in particular:

- Where there any major success stories?
- How many were also Kooth?
- Would training be accredited?

- How were issues fed back and discussed?
- What were the qualifications of the 6 staff involved?

Cath Taylor and Fran Riley provided some initial responses, but agreed to respond to the Committee with more detailed answers to the questions, which Liz Clarkson agreed to forward.

The Committee discussed the promotion of the project and the importance of engagement, particularly with Wellbeing Champions, and the importance of working with more schools and ensuring sustainability of the project going forwards, particularly in relation to future funding, and it was possible ICB funding could be accessed.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

14. Corporate Parenting

The Committee received detailed presentations and information relating to Corporate Parenting.

Suzanne Kinder, Head of Corporate Parenting and Permanence, outlined the role of the Council and Councillors as Corporate Parents, working together with key partner agencies such as Health, Police and Education. Suzanne gave details of the types of care being provided to children and young people, and how Corporate Parents could contribute and shape the lives of children.

The presentation also highlighted the role of the Virtual School, and also gave details of young people who had gone on to attend university, and indicated that a local authority was considered a good Corporate Parent when it was ambitious for every child to do well.

Andrew Bradbury and Louise Helm, Service Leads, then provided some detailed Corporate Parenting performance data, highlighting the rate per 10k of Children Looked After (CLA) in comparison to statistical neighbours, with the Council currently have less CLA in comparison.

Details were also shared of numbers of children in Foster Care, Children's Homes, Semi-Supported accommodation, and those children placed at home with their parents.

Foster Carer Recruitment continued to remain a priority for the Council, which remained a challenge, as it continued to be nationally. The presentation also gave details of Kinship Care and Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) and occasions where Adoption was considered the most appropriate.

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.

The Committee raised concerns about children from the Borough, who were being cared for outside the Borough, and questioned how they were being supported, with officers advising of the support arrangements in place, and

also advising that most of the children were in the North West area. The role of the Virtual School in this regard was also highlighted. Care Leavers seeking accommodation when outside the Borough was more of a challenge, as the Council did not have the same influence with landlords etc as it would do locally.

Andrew Bradley agreed to provide some data relating to SGO's in relation to Blackburn with Darwen following a request for data from Councillor Matt Gibson.

Councillor McCaughran asked about support for the staff that was in place, and received details of support for practioners and good feedback received from staff in this regard.

Councillor Julie Gunn advised that she felt that the Council had a better understanding of the role of Corporate Parents, but that more work was still required with Members.

RESOLVED – That the information and updates provided be noted, and Officers thanked for the information provided.

Signed:

Date:

Chair of the meeting
at which the minutes were confirmed