

COUNCIL FORUM 3rd OCTOBER 2024

Progress of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Purpose of 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 Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Place Based Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy

At the meeting on 5th August 2024 the Committee received a presentation from Abdul Razaq on the contents of the new Blackburn with Darwen Place Based Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy and the timeline for completion. The purpose of the Strategy was to have a shared document, that drove actions and held the Partnership accountable over the upcoming five years (2024-2029).

Members of the public, staff and people with lived experience of mental health and suicide had been consulted on the Strategy.

As part of the development of the Strategy, the Place Based Board would form a subgroup, namely the BwD Mental health Delivery Group, with an accountable structure that would deliver the action plans in alignment with the values and approach of this Strategy. The Place Board would provide regular assurance updates to the Integrated Care Board, and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The Strategy was now in its final stages of development and was due to go for sign off at the Place Based Board in September 2024, the Council Executive Board in October 2024 and the Health and Wellbeing Board in December 2024.

The Committee discussed the importance of sustained and accelerated funding from NHS England to help tackle mental health issues.

The Committee noted the contents and timeline of the Blackburn with Darwen Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy; asked for the Executive Board report to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee and it was agreed that the latest version of the Strategy (v2.4) the ICB update and SMI health checks would be circulated to the Committee.

Housing

The Committee received a report and information from Mark Warren and Steve Richards on the various Housing functions of Blackburn with Darwen Council including the supply of and demand for house, homelessness and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The report provided a brief context to the Blackburn with Darwen Housing market and provided an update on recent trends and activity across the various Housing services provided by the Council.

The governance and approach to the Housing agenda with the Council had been reviewed and updated in July 2024 with Directorate responsibility as follows:

- Adults and Health – responsibility for housing needs, homelessness, asylum seekers, refugee's and HMOs.
- Growth – responsibility for housing strategy and housing standards.

Both areas formed part of a revised Housing and Public Health lead member portfolio overseen by Councillor Talbot.

The report provided information on the high proportion of terraced housing in the area which provided challenges regarding quality and energy efficiency; issues around HMOs; a proposal to re-introduce and extend Selective Licensing in the Hollins Bank and Mill Hill areas; the high demand for social housing; the approach to Homelessness and Rough Sleeping; and the work that was ongoing in developing a Housing Strategy for the Council over the next 12 months.

The Committee raised concerns about HMOS and the increase in the number of phone consultations for mid-wife appointments. They welcomed the extension of Selective Licensing and discussed waiting lists for rental accommodation with 4 bedroom properties being almost impossible to rent.

The Committee received an update on the approach to Extra Care Housing, and the removal of properties that were not fit for purpose, with a focus on appropriate accommodation and care.

The Committee noted the report.

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Youth MPs Update

At the meeting on 19th August the Committee received an update from the Deputy Youth MP on recent events and activities which included:

- Training from the Beacon Trust regarding gambling harms at last month's Young Blackburn with Darwen Youth Forum.
- 15 young people from the Leaving Care Forum, Youth Forum and the SEND Inclusion ASD Youth Club had participated in a 3-day residential to Water Park Coniston.
- The Earcroft Centre at Darwen had been awarded the first ever Gold by the Young Inspectors following a recent inspection.
- Youth Forum members attended summer events and activities.

Preparation for the Special Educational needs and Disabilities (SEND) Inspection and Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

The Committee received a report and supporting presentation which gave details of the preparation for both inspections from Councillor Julie Gunn, Jo Siddle and Michelle Holt.

The last SEND inspection took place in June 2019 under a previous framework. Several strengths were noted along with areas for development. It was expected that the next inspection would take place during the Autumn.

The last ILACS inspection took place in early 2022, followed by a Joint Targeted Area Inspection in May 2023 with a focus on the multi-agency response to identification of initial need and risk in Blackburn with Darwen.

There had been a ILACS Focused Visit in April 2024 on arrangements for care leavers aged 18 to 25. It was expected there would be a full ILACS inspection in early 2025.

In preparation for these inspections the Directorate was undertaking several ongoing actions to ensure the Council was prepared and ready with focus on:

- Data and Performance
- Quality Assurance
- Peer Reviews/External Scrutiny
- Internal Scrutiny/Corporate Assurance
- Staff Engagement

In response to questions from the Committee, Councillor Julie Gunn, Jo Siddle and Michelle Holt provided answers in relation to terms of work with other agencies and different data systems a single strategic vision with fast escalation of issues.

The Committee were advised that £1m had been invested on Care Leavers, and the high cost of placements was noted. Commissioning was the biggest cost, and market issues were an ongoing issue.

The Committee considered any recommendations/next steps and noted there was further work required on the digital approach with partners and with the Adults portfolio also looking at similar matters/issues, it was felt it would be worth connecting with them to avoid duplication.

The Committee would be scrutinising commissioning arrangements at its next meeting.

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

An update from the meeting held on 2nd September will be circulated prior to the meeting.

Policy and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

At the meeting on 16th September 2024 the Committee received a presentation from officers on the Strategic Asset Management Plan. The presentation included information on the Council's Land and Property Assets, the Strategic Asset Management Plan, the Investment Estate and Asset Disposals, the Asset Work Programme and a summary of the Asset Review, Phase 1.

Members were particularly interested in the five strategic objectives in the Strategic Asset Management Plan and asked a number of questions in relation to these objectives. The SAMP was a three-year Strategy which had been approved by the Executive Board in March 2023. The Asset Management Group had been reset to review progress with the SAMP with an overview provided by the Corporate Assurance Board.

There were also discussions about the disposal/demolition of some specific sites; recent housing developments; support to businesses; investments and the management and monitoring of assets.

The Committee noted the report.

At the next meeting the Committee will receive a report on the Recruitment and Retention of Staff.

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

Councillor Ashley Whalley, Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Sbahat Imtiaz, Chair of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Suleman Khonat, Chair of the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee