

Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 15 March 2023 at 4.30 pm in Council Chamber - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 4.34 pm
Concluded 7.00 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	BRADFORD INDEPENDENT GROUP
Alipoor Humphreys Berry Thirkill	Winnard Pollard	J Sunderland	Sajawal

Councillor Winnard in the Chair

Apologies: Tom Bright, Councillor Mohammed Shafiq and Fauzia Raza

1. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interests of transparency, the following declaration of interests were received:

- (1) Councillor Geoff Winnard is an unpaid Trustee and Chair of Airedale and Wharfedale Autism Resource (AWARE) a charity supporting families affected by autism - that has received funding from both Bradford Council and the local NHS. AWARE was mentioned in the report on the Children's Strategy.
- (2) Councillor Ralph Berry's wife worked for A Better Start Bradford

ACTION: Director of Legal and Governance

2. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

No requests were received to inspect any restricted documents.

3. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals made to the committee.

4. BRADFORD SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY REPORT

The Director of Children's Services presented a report (**Document "X"**) which provided an update on the Bradford Sufficiency Strategy.

Last year in March the Sufficiency Strategy and an action plan was shared with Children Service's and Overview Scrutiny Committee, it was agreed at that meeting that officers would return a year later with an update of progress.

The Officer reported that progress has generally been good and there were important areas of work where the Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan had underpinned real improvements in the care of children looked after, such as the improvements to the Council's residential care and better support for family members looking after children under Special Guardianship Orders. A revised Placement and Sufficiency Strategy 2022-2025 was provided in Appendix A of the report. This was approved and an action plan had been developed to map and track progress against key areas of delivery within the Strategy, details of which were provided in Appendix B of the report.

Members of the Committee sought further clarification on point 2.6.1 on page 2 of the report in relation to the number of foster carers.

In response to this, the officer reported that they had invested in the Fostering Team and had recruited new managers with a successful track record including in recruitment and retention. The team were now working on a range of projects to improve recruitment. The team had done well with managing to recruit more foster carers and has spent more time re launching the fostering service. There was now a clearer pathway with foster carers, where more experienced carers were paired with children with more complex needs. There had been a development to improve support and a pathway for training and development for 'Level 4' Foster Carers who worked with children with additional needs.

A Member of the Committee asked if foster carers were offered a reduction on their council tax. In response the Officer reported that they were proposing for this to transpire.

Members of the Committee questioned how many children in the care system had exited the system. The Officer responded that 22 children had exited the system.

Members were keen to understand the current capacity at children's residential homes and how a placement was made for a child/young person. In response the Officer reported that each child's needs were matched to a residential home that could meet those needs and had availability but matching homes could sometimes present issues. It was further reported that all of the aspects relating to the child were taken into account in their care plan, such as background, culture, religion etc.

Members of the Committee wanted assurance that all children in care were in safe and secure accommodation's. In response the Officer assured Members that all children in care were placed in safe and secure placements that were the best match for their needs.

A Member of the Committee asked if there had been any work done with other local authorities to create partnerships and work collaboratively. In response to this the Officer reported that while it would be great to work with other local authorities regionally, it was not possible as it would be a be an enormous task with many challenges around fair placements.

A Member of the Committee sought further clarification on level 4 progression on page 7 of the report. In response the Officer explained that they had agreed and developed a Level 4 progression criteria but were still in talks with partner agency around the support need of carers. 1 constellation of Mocking Bard had also been implemented and there were plans to expand by 2 more constellations with a development of localised support.

Members of the Committee were keen to understand factors taken into account when assessing a placement for a child/young person. In response to Members question the Officer reported that a profile of the child was created after a thorough assessment of the child's needs was carried out which enabled the service to place the child at the most suited accommodation.

Members of the Committee asked if there was a figure available of the number of people that have approached the Local Authority to foster care but had been refused. In response the Officer reported that this information was not available however, potential foster carers would only be refused if they did not meet the criteria i.e. housing. People could have independent reviews carried out after a refusal.

A Member of the Committee was keen to understand if there was any support available to foster carers. In response the Officer reported that foster carers had access to support they require including mental health support. One of the arrangements for support was through training. Improvements had been made for training and development for Level 4 Foster Carers who worked with children with additional needs.

Members of the Committee asked if support was available to foster carers at all times. In response to this the Officer reported that fostering network was available at all times and is accessible. Normal service is available Monday to Friday, carers could also access support from the EDT services. Members were assured that immediate support would be made available anytime for foster carers.

Members sought further clarification on page 38 of the report regarding young people in care and criminal exploitation. In response the Officer reported that as the child gets older the needs become more complex and challenging and there was a great chance that the child had already been exposed to criminal exploitation before coming into care.

Members commented that there was a need for a better way to gain feedback on how external agencies/ providers were operating.

Resolved –

- (1) Members thanked officers for the work undertaken.**

(2) This Committee requests that the progress against the Sufficiency Strategy and recommendations contained within it, be presented in the new Municipal Year.

ACTION: Strategic Director for Children's Services

(Picklu Roychoudhary – 01274 431967)

5. DRAFT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN

The Strategic Director for Children's Services presented a report (**Document "Y"**) which provided an update on the development of a new Children and Young People's Plan (CYP Plan) for Bradford District, building on the themes within the interim plan (published in 2021).

Members of the Committee sought further clarification on engagement with various agencies. In response the Officer reported that exhaustive process was carried with partners/agencies as themes had to be agreed. A broad and in depth approach had been taken with partners through working groups, active engagement and extensive involvement after which all views and ideas were taken into consideration. A working group composed of partners' representatives from across the partnerships had worked together on the development of a new child-friendly, co-produced, partnership led plan for the District. The work was closely linked to the commitment to Child-Friendly Bradford as well as the need for improved partnership-led governance and accountability arrangements for children, young people and families across Bradford District.

Members were keen to understand how Bradford Council would be held accountable for Children and Young People's Plan. In response the Officer reported that Bradford Improvement Board had been set up, which would oversee the delivery of the Plan.

Members of the Committee were concerned that social landlords were not included in the plan, as they housed a large number of young people it would have been helpful if they were also on board. In response the Officer reported that all listed partners were ones that were willing to engage and participate.

Members of the Committee sought further clarification regarding inequality on page 57 of the agenda.

The Officer in response reported that inequalities could start early in a child's life, in terms of the economic and social environment that children were born into. They could be exacerbated by varying levels of access and attendance in education, health-care, community and service settings. The Officer further reported that to effectively close the health and attainment gap, a multi-faceted, determined and collective effort was required. Early interventions and prevention of poor health during childhood would be key, as will more focused support for the children, families, communities and groups who have experienced the most inequality and marginalisation.

A Member of the Committee raised concerns on low school attendance in Bradford and how there needed to be more resources that would allow more care

for the whole family to address attendance issues, as there may be various elements that could be preventing the child from having good attendance.

The Officer reported that if support is provided in a timely manner it was more effective, therefore the Children and Young Peoples Plan was drafted with partners after listening to children. The Officer added that the point about intergenerational impact on children would be noted.

Members of the Committee were keen to see young people attend the committee meetings to ensure they were heard and more involved. In response the Officer advised that some young people may want to attend committee meetings and some may wish to engage in other ways.

Members of the Committee wanted to know why the Children's Voice Project was finished. The Officer replied that the same principals were used but applied in a different manner in the new plan.

A Member of the Committee said that the Children and Young Peoples Plan looked hopeful but would like to see how progress was measured. The Member stressed that one of the major issues in Bradford was housing, therefore, more engagement with social landlords was desperately required. The Officer, in response reported that all points would be taken on board and more social landlords would be approached.

Resolved –

- (1) This Committee requests that the comments and suggestions raised by members, be considered by officers, as part of the development of the Draft Children and Young People's Plan.**
- (2) That the Children and Young People's Plan be presented to this Committee prior to it being finalised.**
- (3) That a progress report be brought back in 12 months, which also includes all relevant data to hand, in respect of the various elements listed under the following four key themes:**
 - **Education;**
 - **Physical and mental health;**
 - **Safe Homes places & Communities;**
 - **Skills Development.**

ACTION: Strategic Director Children's Services

(Kate Welsh – 07811 503285)

6. CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

The report of the Chair of the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee (**Document "Z"**) included the Children's Service Overview and Scrutiny

Committee work programme for 2022/23.

Resolved –

Members discussed and amended the work programme.

ACTION: Overview and Scrutiny Lead

(Mustansir Butt – 07582 101597)

Chair

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

THIS AGENDA AND ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER