

Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 1 March 2023 in Council Chamber - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 4.30 pm
Concluded 6.40 pm

PRESENT – COUNCILLORS

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	BRADFORD INDEPENDENT GROUP
Alipoor Humphreys Johnson Shafiq Thirkill	Winnard Pollard	Sunderland	Sajawal

Apology: Shia Simab

COUNCILLOR WINNARD IN THE CHAIR

57. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

58. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals submitted by the public to review decisions to restrict documents.

59. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals made to the Committee.

60. FULL OFSTED INSPECTION - INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILACS)

The Strategic Director of Children's Services presented a report (**Document "V"**) following Ofsted's Inspection of Children's Social Care Services from 21 November to 2 December 2022. Full inspections are part of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework of inspection activities carried out by Ofsted.

The Strategic Director, Children's Service was present and accompanied by the Strategic Director, Corporate Services and the Assistant Director for Change. At the invitation of the Chair, a synopsis of the report was provided to the committee. They jointly explained that in September 2021, the Secretary of State for Education as Children's Services Commissioner for Bradford was asked to bring together evidence to assess this Council's capacity and capability to improve itself in a reasonable time frame and recommend whether or not this evidence was sufficiently strong to suggest that long term sustainable improvement to children's social care functions could be achieved, should operational service control remain within the Council. The Commissioner recommended for the creation of an Executive Commissioner role who would oversee the delivery of children's services as he was concerned about the pace of improvement being inhibited during the establishment of the Trust. The Department for Education was not supportive of this recommendation and concluded that Children's Services in Bradford should be provided through a Children's Trust arrangement. The Council voluntarily agreed to enter into the Trust arrangement with the DfE. The planned go live date is in April 2023.

Proceeding the presentation, a question and answer (Q&A) session ensued:

- Was the service in agreement of Ofsted findings?
 - Yes, they were very accurate and nothing surplus to what we dot aware of;
- Following inspection of the report, it was apparent that the same issues were repeatedly being raised. What was the cause of the continuation?
 - During 2018, the service was deemed to be inadequate but then the decline progressed and since then, the Council not had the opportunity to return to 2018;
- What were factors that caused the inadequate delivery of services?
 - The inadequate levels of services commenced much earlier than 2018. Bradford received £157 less per each child and £200 less than the highest recipients. This Council's overspending or future overspend forecast on investment was a result of lack of vital funding for services.
 - The Covid-19 Pandemic (C19p) had also hampered the improvement of services.
 - In terms of national position, there were a number of authorities struggling to improve due to having to adopt different ways of working following the (C19p).
 - The Council's overspend had been maintained for Children's Services.
 - The budget for Children's Services was not an easy one to predict in advance and therefore assessed on a yearly basis.
 - There were also issues with recruitment.
 - Senior Officers had been continuously writing business cases for the purpose of securing additional external funding
- What was implemented to overcome Ofsted comments on slow pace of improvement of services?
 - The service had now adapted improvement plan to highlight any areas for improvement stated by Ofsted in its report. The majority of these areas were included in existing plans.

- A number of programme, project and work stream teams were established to take forward the Council's improvement agenda.
- Progress will be monitored on the stated areas for improvement to Ofsted.
- We are preparing a monthly and a quarterly monitoring report on key areas of performance from the Children and Families Trust to the Council;
- It was believed that a percentage of employees within Social Services was agency provided staff, hence clarity was sought on the process of completing personal education plans so they were consistently completed by all relevant professionals?
 - Previous children's records were not being operated as today's professional standards;
 - Personal educational plans were now being driven by professional Social Workers. Style of addressing children's records was now significantly different to a decade ago. No further sympathetic and descriptive recording but more so focusing records on attributes.
 - There were a number of children that had experienced multiple changes in Social Workers so the instability of the workforce had detrimental impacts on child progress;
 - Some additional funding had been secured for virtual schools;
- Had any risks or potential risks been identified?
 - No risks to children and improvements to services were already being made.
 - Management were aware of some issues with agencies delivering workforce and therefore different ways of working was being implemented.
 - In regards to the Workforce Strategy, the Council had entered into six months' contracts or longer with agency staff as opposed to one week contracts;
- Was the service sustaining consistency in standards of provision?
 - The service was now moving away from a task oriented to a more child centred provision.
 - The consistency of maintaining good managers was highly promoted;
 - Identifying vulnerable children through the good working practices of social work was being delivered through good managers and providing Social Workers and other staff with the right support.
- What had been considered in regards to the request of the Local Authority Trust (LAT) for significant funding over the course of next 3 years?
 - The budget had been set and efficient for the coming Municipal Year. The Council was not able to customise the budget for establishing further additional tailored support and therefore, request for funding, the service would to work in consultation with LAT on a daily basis to achieve better outcomes; and,
- What plans had been put into practice to overcome the increase in cost of services?
 - Through the practices of providing services on a more efficient and tailored basis.

Following Q&A, the following comments were made by the committee and officers:

- There was a clear lack of oversight by managers and it seemed that child assessments were not being fully completed, therefore it would be difficult to implement the correct interventions in favour of child progress;
- Further, if senior management team of Children's Services was not communicating vital information of cuts to funding down to lower level managers then it would be extremely arduous in improving meeting the issues raised by Ofsted;
- The service has begun to see significant improvements in some areas;
- It was acknowledged that there were real issues such as the workforce, staff retention and therefore the service was adopting ever increasing different ways of working to make positive change;
- There was a long way to go before positive difference could take effect; and,
- This Council would never put finances before a child's needs and that quality level of services was paramount for each individual child.

Resolved –

The Committee noted the OFSTED report.

ACTION: Strategic Director for Children's Services

61. BRADFORD CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Strategic Director of Children's Services presented a report (**Document "W"**). The areas for improvement identified in the recent Ofsted inspection (ILACS), resulting in Bradford being judged to be Inadequate overall, inform the Improvement Plan. This report was to present an update on the Improvement Plan and Progress Report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Strategic Director, Children's Service was present and accompanied by the Strategic Director, Corporate Services and the Assistant Director for Change. At the invitation of the Chair, a synopsis of the report was provided to the committee. They jointly explained that the Bradford Children's Services Improvement Plan had strong leadership and assurance mechanisms in place. Support from the Chief Executive, elected members, the emerging Children and Families Trust, partners and senior leaders, ensures focus, drive and pace. The new plan commenced in April 2022 and was commissioned and is governed by the refreshed Bradford Children's Improvement Board, which was chaired by the Bradford Commissioner. The plan had most recently been presented and discussed at the Improvement Board which took place on Thursday 2nd February 2023.

Proceeding the presentation, a Q&A session ensued:

- If the Children's Trust was to deliver the plan, how much of a flexibility did the trust have?
 - As any other plan, the operational aspects outlined in the plan would change and develop further as time goes by. However, in the

- beginning it would be focusing on delivering vital services;
- How would this improvement plan be different in comparison to previous strategies?
 - It was measurable but at its early stage. The feedback from partners was a positive one to this plan. The service would be implementing the robust model and ensure correct scrutiny would be addressed; and,
 - Due to the complexity of the plan, clarity was sought?
 - The service tried to reflect in approach a measure of process and the plan entailed processes on auctioning highlighted shortcomings of practices.

Following Q&A, the stated that the plan was welcomed however the issue of delivery was another matter. In light of the council's failings over so many years, the plan had been tailored for the purpose of improving services.

Resolved –

This Committee requests that the progress against the improvement plan be presented to this Committee in July 2023 and to also include performance data.

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ACTION: Strategic Director for Children's Services

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.

THESE MINUTES HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER