

**Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services
Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday,
29 November 2023 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall,
Bradford**

Commenced 4.30 pm
Concluded 7.55 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	BRADFORD INDEPENDENT GROUP
Fricker Mohammed Regan Thirkill Zaman	Davies Pollard	Sunderland	Sajawal

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Joyce Simpson – Church Representative
Shifa Simab – Parent Governor Representative

Observers: Councillor Duffy – Portfolio Holder for Children and Families

Councillor Davies in the Chair

25. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

The following declarations were made in the interest of transparency:

- (i) Cllr Zaman declared that his daughter was employed as a social worker.
- (ii) Cllr Sunderland declared that she was a landlord of a property that had links to a Young Carers Group.
- (iii) The Strategic Director of Children's Services declared during the meeting that she was the mother of an adopted child.

26. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meetings held on 27 September 2023 and 18 October 2023 be held as a correct record.

27. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

28. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**29. ANNUAL REPORT FOR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS
APRIL 2022 - MARCH 2023**

The report of the Director of Nursing and Quality - West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (Bradford) (**Document “F”**) presented the Annual Report for Children Looked After and Care Leavers April 2022 – March 2023. The annual report (Appendix 1) was produced by the Designated Doctor for Children Looked after on behalf of the West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board for the period of April 2022 - March 2023.

A Member drew attention to the shortage of paediatricians and asked if there was any local or national action underway to increase provision. The Committee were advised that recruitment was ongoing however there was a national shortage which meant filling vacancies was a challenge.

Several questions surrounding consent in relation to looked after children were asked by the Committee particularly in relation to delays and systems in place to obtain consent. The Committee were informed that the aim was to obtain consent at the earliest opportunity as soon as a child entered care. Officers explained that weekly triage meetings with health professionals would follow up on any outstanding consent. It was added that further training for new social workers and regular triage meetings would reduce delays in obtaining consent.

A Member asked about oversight and asked if desperate health needs were identified would they be acted upon and in response they were assured that oversight was proactive and robust, and that any urgent medical needs would be responded to appropriately.

A Member asked about the improvement that was seen in appointment attendance and asked if social workers were involved in the appointment process in order to reduce missed appointments. It was confirmed that social workers were notified of appointments, but an increasing number of social workers attended appointments with looked after children. It was explained that there was a tracking system in place which allowed follow up in regard to missed appointments.

A Member stated that it could be beneficial to include a breakdown of data in relation to the age groups of looked after children in relation to missed appointments.

A Member said the voice of young people was missing from the report and that in future reports this could provide more insight and focus on the young people who the report is about. The Committee were told that future reports could incorporate the voice of young people more and demonstrate outcomes.

The Committee queried the strength and difficulty questionnaires that were detailed within the report and asked what the purpose was and what feedback had been provided. The Committee were advised that the questionnaires were reviewed by nurses at repeat health assessments and that the questionnaires gave scores rather than detailed responses, so they were used as a screening tool rather than for detailed responses.

Resolved –

That this Committee requests a further progress report be presented to the Committee in 12 months and also specifically includes:

- ***A breakdown by age group, in relation to children missing appointments and reasons for this;***
- ***The views and comments of children who are receiving such health services.***

To be actioned by – Director of Nursing and Quality for Bradford Health Care Partnership

(Dr Catherine Murray – 01274 237523)

30. UPDATE REPORT AND THE NATIONAL INDEPENDENT CHILD PRACTICE REVIEW REPORT PUBLISHED IN MAY 2022

The report of the Office of the Chief Executive (**Document “G”**) provided an update and built upon the report that was presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 29th June 2022. The report identified the progress made against the six local recommendations outlined in the National Independent Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's review from May 2022. The report highlighted not only the advancements made in each area but also instances of improved processes and practices that emerged during the period of reflection and improvement.

The Committee asked about consistency and oversight for each looked after child and were assured that there was consistency through care arrangements and processes. It was added that children's care plans were overseen and monitored internally by the Bradford Children and Families Trust (BCFT) and also by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

A Member asked about the Integrated Front Door and whether the success was

monitored. The Committee were told that the Integrated Front Door was working well, and that positive feedback had been received, particularly from schools.

A further question about the Integrated Front Door queried whether information arising from direct conversations was shared efficiently and the Committee were advised that the system was working well and continually improving.

The Committee asked several questions about the section of the report relating to allegations of bruising. A Member asked if the national shortage of paediatricians was having an impact and was informed that referrals came through health visitors and A&E, so the shortage of community paediatricians was not impactful.

A Member asked about the process for which allegations of bruising would be dealt with. Officers described the process to the Committee which would involve a referral being made through the Integrated Front Door which would then result in a multi-agency strategy discussion where evidence would be discussed. The importance of a joint approach between multiple agencies was emphasised.

A Member asked if fathers or male carers were encouraged to be involved and was advised that fathers and male carers were engaged with, and the importance of engagement was stressed. Officers also acknowledged that there may be barriers to engagement such as access to interpreters.

The Strategic Director of Children's Services was asked when impacts and improvements in relation to children and young people would be seen and whether results would be benchmarked against other local authorities. The Committee were informed that there was constant monitoring and implementation of the action plan which would deliver improvements and various improvement reports would be presented to the Committee in the future.

A Member asked if there was a robust set of records that were easily accessible for clinicians and was advised that System One was used for this.

Members asked about the Bristol Insight Model that was detailed in the report and officers acknowledged the constraints on resources but stated that maintenance costs would be lower and explained that it would enhance the current model.

A Member of the Committee stated that it may be beneficial for Members to look at the government guidance documents before a report about information sharing was presented. The importance of information sharing, and consent was addressed, and it was explained how consent could become a complexed issue in relation to early support and intervention.

Resolved –

That this Committee requests that a report be presented in 12 months which focuses on the progress against the local recommendations.

To be actioned by – Assistant Director, Chief Executives Office

(Darren Minton – 01274 434361)

31. **UPDATE ON THE BRADFORD PLACEMENT AND SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY**

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "H"**) provided an update on the Bradford Placement and Sufficiency Strategy. The update detailed within the report focussed specifically on progress against the red and amber actions presented in a report in March 2023 as well as fostering and adoption.

A Member stated that they had not seen the strategy document and that it should be referred to in the section of the report that listed background documents. Officers acknowledged that in the future the list of background documents would be more comprehensive, and that the strategy was agreed by the Executive in June 2022.

Officers were asked about the Mockingbird Model and told the Committee that it was a constellation that would consist of a number of households which would create a community to support one another.

A Member asked about Friends and Family Foster Carers and Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) and was provided with details about the difference between the two.

The Head of Service for Placements and Foster Care was asked about the accelerated trajectory and volume of emergency admissions mentioned within section 3.4 of the report particularly who the data was recorded by. The Committee were informed that it related to old data in the sufficiency strategy and that if the trajectory had continued it would have been of concern.

A Member referred to section 4.4 of the report and acknowledged that the issue was not unique to Bradford in relation to the number of children entering care and difficulty placing those with complex needs. Officers were asked if there was anything to learn from local authorities who were dealing with this well. Members were informed that several forums existed to look at best practice and that there were ongoing conversations with regional and national partners.

The Head of Service for Placements and Foster Care was asked about the difficulty surrounding the recruitment of foster carers and particularly whether Bradford suffered from a reputation issue. The Committee were told that the recruitment of foster carers was a challenge nationally and that the cost-of-living had an impact on this. It was added that an Enrichment Officer had recently been recruited and they would do work surrounding foster care.

A Member told the Committee that there were numerous independent fostering agencies who made profits and asked about the relationship between the local authority and the private sector, and asked whether the Council should be building more Children's Homes. The Head of Service for Placements and Foster Care stated that they want to be able to provide the best care possible and that if more Children's Homes were built by the Council, it would make the local authority less reliant on external providers. Members were informed that two Children's Homes were being renovated and that the local authority always try to engage with external providers.

Members asked about foster carer retention and whether data in relation to this could be broken down to provide a more detailed picture as to why carers were leaving. The Committee were told that this data was not currently available but that it could be provided at a later date. The support that was offered to foster carers was detailed.

A Member noted the steep rise of children entering care and stated that there had been a 72% rise in just under 7 years which was unlike any other local authority. Officers were questioned how such a sharp rise of 72% could be accounted for. The Head of Service for Placements and Foster Care explained that concerns had been raised in the 2018 Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) inspection and therefore if a sharp increase had not been witnessed in response this would have caused concern. It was added that Bradford had previously been low in comparison to statistical neighbours.

The Head of Service for Placements and Foster Care was asked if there was a facility for mothers and babies and told Members that there was not a facility of this type within the district.

A Member stated that it would be beneficial to invite private companies to a future Committee meeting so that they may present what they offer and be scrutinised.

Resolved –

That a progress report be presented to this Committee in 12 months to reflects the comments raised by members and to also specifically include:

- ***The Placement and Sufficiency Strategy 2022-25;***
- ***Feedback from Foster Carers and trend data in relation to the retention of Foster Carers.***

To be actioned by – Chief Executive Officer for Bradford Children and Families Trust

(Paul Sutton – 07974 855292)

32. YOUNG CARERS

The Strategic Director of Children's Services submitted a report (**Document "I"**) which provided an annual update that focussed on measures of performance, details of outcomes and improvements delivered.

A Member asked if first aid training was provided to young carers and the Head of Service for Prevention and Early Help said that they were unsure about this.

Members spoke about the need to reassure families that it was acceptable to have a young carer in order to tackle any stigma and assure families that it would not result in children being removed by social services. The Head of Service for Prevention and Early Help acknowledged that many young carers go unidentified and spoke about the support that could be provided by family hubs.

Resolved –

(1) That this Committee requests a report be presented in 12 months, which highlights the outcomes delivered.

(2) That the draft Carers Strategy 2025-30, be presented to this Committee prior to its approval.

(3) That Carers Resource be invited to the Committee meeting.

To be actioned by - Chief Executive Officer for Bradford Children and Families Trust

(Cath Dew – 01274 437949)

33. SUPPORTING FAMILIES PROGRAMME 2022 - 2025

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "J"**) provided an overview of the progress made on Supporting Families Programme since the last report that was tabled and discussed on 20th November 2022.

A Member asked what the abbreviation PBR stood for and was told that this meant payment by results.

The Committee asked about the data contained within section 3.2 of the report and noted the low number of families who had achieved continuous employment. Members were informed that the information was supplied from the Department for Work and Pensions and that in the data training courses were included as employment. It was added that the data measured ten different outcomes and employment was the most challenging.

A Member told officers that they had heard from schools that a significant number of children were not ready for the school environment due to poor socialisation and asked what work was being done with schools and families to tackle this issue. It was stated that schools could contact early help coordinators and liaise about any particular issues. Officers explained to Members that attendance workers encourage children to attend and liaise with schools. The Committee were told that the 2-year-old offer is encouraged throughout the district as it could help child development although it is non-statutory for a child to attend pre-school.

The Service Manager was asked how families could become involved in the support programme and whether they needed a referral. Members were advised that anybody could contact for help and that this could be done through the family hubs. In relation to whether a referral was required the service manager explained that some people asked for support voluntarily and others were referred by family navigators.

A Member asked if efficient communication links still existed given the increasing number of schools becoming academies and was assured that communication

was still efficient as each school would have a safeguarding lead.

Resolved –

That a report be presented to this Committee in 12 months, which specifically focuses on outcomes delivered, (not outputs) and also includes case studies of how families have been assisted, as a result of the Supporting Families Programme.

To be actioned by – Chief Executive Officer for Bradford Children and Families Trust

(Cath Dew – 01274 437949)

34. CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

The report of the Chair of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (**Document "K"**) included the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2023/24. The work programme was briefly discussed, and Members were told that the Child Poverty Scrutiny Review would pull together key findings. The Overview and Scrutiny Lead summarised what items would be considered at future meetings.

Resolved –

That the Committee discussed and amended the work programme.

To be actioned by: 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.

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