

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

Commenced 4.30 pm
Concluded 6.10 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	BRADFORD INDEPENDENT GROUP
Fricker Regan Thirkill Zaman	Davies Pollard	Sunderland	Elahi (Alt)

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Joyce Simpson – Church Representative
Shifa Simab – Parent Governor Representative

Apologies: Councillor Nussrat Mohammed

Councillor Davies in the Chair

35. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interest of transparency Cllr Thirkill and Cllr Sunderland declared that they had been involved with organisations who received HAF funding and that they had participated in the Holiday Activity and Food Programme (Minute No. 39).

36. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

37. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

38. RAISING ATTAINMENT STRATEGY

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "L"**) provided an update on the Raising Attainment Strategy following the release of Phonics, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 attainment data 2022/23.

Given the mixed results it was put to the Education and Learning Strategic Manager whether the strategy had been a success. Members were told that it had been a success and that there were various reasons for the inconsistency in results such as the quality of leadership and teaching in the school, therefore some schools had seen more improvement than others. A Member asked if attainment was recorded regularly and was informed that data from the Department for Education (DfE) and data provided directly from schools was analysed annually to see if any trends could be observed.

A Member asked about section 2.8 of the report, specifically why there was more Specialist Leaders in Education (SLEs) for Maths than English and whether the Local Authority would attempt to obtain more SLEs for English. The Education and Learning Strategic Manager explained that funding was provided by the DfE and that there were constraints on what funding could be spent on therefore it was not a model that the Local Authority could influence.

Attention was drawn to section 2.13 of the report that detailed English outcomes data and the relationship between phonics and reading was questioned particularly why in some schools phonics had gone up whilst reading had gone down. Officers stated that it could relate to the data being from different year groups but also noted that other issues may have influenced results for reading such as comprehension which could explain the variance. The Education and Learning Strategic Manager added that variance could also be attributed to factors within the school such as staff turnover and the quality of teaching.

A Member noted that the strategy had been planned to be in place for five years and asked how many years had been delivered. The Committee were told that it had been in place for four school terms although one term was the set-up period, so the strategy was delivered for one year only. A Member asked if the decision to cease funding was a Council decision and was told that this was the case. Officers stated that for impact to be observed the programme would need to be long term and English and Maths hubs were proven methods to bring change, it was also acknowledged that bringing the school leadership onboard was crucial.

The Education and Learning Strategic Manager was asked if changes in assessment post-COVID had impacted results. The reading test was acknowledged to be difficult although a range of outcomes were seen nationally. It was added that it may be beneficial to do further research into results in order to seek explanation but the capacity for this was not available.

A Member asked how the Raising Attainment Strategy would support specific children and was subsequently informed that the strategy was never intended to

take over tuition for individual children but instead was aimed at raising the quality of teaching so that attainment would be raised long term by enabling teaching staff and not just one particular cohort. It was explained that by enabling teaching staff this would raise attainment for future cohorts.

The Committee queried what the cost of the strategy would have been if it was delivered for the planned five years. The Strategic Director of Children's Services told Members the cost would have been 2.5 million pounds and that it would have included both primary and secondary education as well as attendance services.

Resolved –

- (1) That appreciating this specific work stream has ceased, a further progress report regarding KS1 and KS2 outcomes in Maths and English at schools involved in this project, be presented to this Committee in 12 months, so that the sustainability of such interventions can be demonstrated.***
- (2) That this Committee requests that officers continue to explore options for more funding from the Department for Education, for maths and English hubs across schools in Bradford.***
- (3) That officers obtain feedback from the schools in the programme to ascertain their views in relation to the effectiveness of the programme.***

To be actioned by – Strategic Director for Children's Services.

(Sue Lowndes – 01274 432009)

39. HOLIDAY ACTIVITY AND FOOD PROGRAMME (HAF)

The Strategic Director of Children's Services submitted a report (**Document "M"**) that provided an update on the Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF) delivery across the district.

The successful delivery and work of the HAF programme was praised by the Committee, particularly the staff who had been involved in the implementation and running of the programme.

It was noted by Members that letters had previously been issued to inform families about the programme with a cost of 18 thousand pounds, officers were asked how this would be done differently over the Christmas period and how families would find out about HAF if letters were not sent out. Members were informed that schools would be the main source of information and that the letters did not generate much uptake. It was added that funding had been tightened by the Department for Education (DfE) and each child now required a registration number.

Members asked about the flexibility of 15% of the funding allocation referred to in

section 3 of the report. Officers told Members that the 15% flexibility could reflect the many vulnerable children who were not eligible for free school meals and that in some instances schools had provided lists of families who may need the support of the programme. The importance of engagement with families was emphasised.

A Member raised concerns that children who were persistently absent and who did not engage with school would miss out on the programme. Officers echoed the concerns raised and stated that families who did not engage were inevitably missed.

The Strategic Director of Children's Services was asked what would be done differently if HAF was started again, it was explained that ideally HAF would target more children although the criteria set by the DfE must be followed, however it was stated that greater flexibility would be beneficial.

A Member asked how many young people had been turned away if they did not meet the criteria and therefore did not have a registration code and asked if there was any data that recorded this. Officers explained that they were unsure about the data but assured Members that children would not simply be turned away.

It was brought to attention that the HAF programme currently had a three-year funding settlement, Members recognised the positive impacts and asked how it could be ensured that funding from the DfE would continue. Officers advised Members that Bradford was nationally recognised as delivering the HAF programme well and therefore had a national voice, although it was stressed that any support or influence from councillors would be beneficial.

The Strategic Director of Children's Services was asked if information could be placed outside shops in order to reach families who may not engage with school and in response it was explained that many families were unable to afford shops and therefore were reliant on foodbanks, who work closely with the Local Authority.

Resolved –

- (1) The Committee thanks Sharon Sanders and her team for the valuable work that has been undertaken, whilst also receiving national recognition for the delivery of the Holiday Activity Programme across the District.***
- (2) The Committee would also like to thank the Voluntary Community Sector and volunteers, for the work that they have undertaken, in ensuring the successful delivery of this programme.***
- (3) That a further report be presented in 12 months, which also includes the approaches being used to engage with the hard to reach and vulnerable groups.***

To be actioned by – Strategic Director for Children's Services

40. OVERVIEW OF THE TRAVEL ASSISTANCE SERVICE

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "N"**) provided an overview of the Travel Assistance Service together with current costs and how this compared to previous years.

It was observed that over 3000 children were in receipt of travel assistance, a Member inquired whether it would be possible to get a breakdown of what type of travel assistance they received and for what reason. The Strategic Travel Service Manager acknowledged the increase in demand and stated that the current transport service was good value for money in comparison to statistical neighbours per capita. Members were told that data containing a breakdown of types of transport and reasons for eligibility could be provided in the future although most were eligible due to having an EHCP.

A Member questioned given the current financial position of the Council how much of the travel assistance provided was statutory and in response was advised that all of what was provided was statutory travel.

The Strategic Travel Service Manager was asked about accessibility in relation to application documents and explained that all documents were available online.

A Member queried the maximum amount of time that children would spend on a bus and was told that the aim would be 1 hour although it was admitted that traffic or a mixture of primary and secondary children could lead to this adding more time to the journey.

The Strategic Travel Service Manager was questioned about whether children would be encouraged to take part in after school provision if they were reliant on the travel assistance service. It was explained that there was potential to make arrangements however home to school transport was designed for access to education. It was added that during the school holidays for example the transport fleet may not be available so it would not be possible to transport children to activities during the school holidays.

A Member drew attention to section 3.1 of the report that highlighted the increasing difficulty with the recruitment of drivers. It was queried whether the cost of obtaining a D1 class entitlement may dissuade potential applicants and who would pay for this. Officers explained that anyone who passed their driving test prior to 1997 would have the entitlement on their license. The Committee were told that passenger assistants were encouraged to train for this, and it was suggested that if the Local Authority were to pay for further tests to achieve the D1 class entitlement there would need to be a stipulation within a contract of employment to ensure driver retention.

Clarification was sought in relation to who held the responsibility to provide transport as some schools provided this. It was clarified that schools had no statutory duty to arrange transport and that the responsibility to provide transport rested solely with the Local Authority.

A Member asked if there had been any progress in regard to outdated IT systems and was informed that since moving to a cloud system it had been functional, but work was ongoing with IT towards a new system.

Resolved –

(1) That the information relating to the breakdown of children who use the travel assistance service be circulated to members of this Committee and to also include:

- **Distances that Children travel;**
- **Categories of children and why they are travelling.**

(2) That this Committee requests that a report be presented on 12 months which also includes:

- **Distances that Children travel;**
- **Categories of children and why they are travelling.**

To be actioned by – Strategic Director for Children's Services

(Michelle Pickles – 07582 109012)

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