

**Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services
Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday,
7 December 2016 at Committee Room 1 - City Hall,
Bradford**

Commenced 4.35 pm
Concluded 7.00 pm

Present – Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
M Pollard	Engel Peart Shaheen Tait	Ward

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Sidiq Ali	Parent Governor Representative
Joyce Simpson	Church Representative (CE)
Gull Hussain	Parent Governor Representative

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Tina Wildy	Health Representative
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Observers: Councillors I Hussain and V Slater
Apologies: Councillor Beverley Mullaney, Claire Parr and Tom Bright

Councillor D Smith in the Chair

47. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

- (1) In the interest of transparency all those who were school governors disclosed an interest.
- (2) Councillor Shaheen disclosed a non pecuniary interest in the item relating to Workloads of Children’s Social Care Services (Minute 51) as she was studying for a social work degree.

Action: City Solicitor



48. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meetings held on 12 October and 1 November 2016 be signed as a correct record (previously circulated).

49. DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLICATION OF BRADFORD'S LOCAL OFFER

The Children and Families Act (2014) placed a requirement on all local authorities to publish a Local Offer with effect from 1 September 2014. The Local Offer provided information on services across Education, Health and Social Care for children and young people who were aged 0 -25 years and had special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The Local Offer included local provision and provision outside of the area that was likely to be used including regional and national specialist provision.

The purpose of the Local Offer was to provide clear, comprehensive and accessible information about the available services and how families could access them. The aim was to make provision more responsive to local needs and aspirations by directly involving disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs, their parents and service providers in its development and review.

There was a statutory requirement for the local authority to publish an annual report relating to the feedback received through the Local Offer. The report had to be published by 31st August in each calendar year.

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "X"**) on the development and publication of Bradford's Local Offer was submitted.

Responses were given to member questions as follows:

- The Local Offer web site provided the facility to translate. The Local offer was also available in other formats. Feedback would be received from families on their requirements regarding accessibility of the information.
- The ethnic breakdown of people accessing the Local Offer was not recorded but this could be taken up with the Local Offer Officer.
- Work was undertaken with families that were harder to reach through Incommunities, Children's Centres and Community Groups to share information on the Local Offer.
- There was a legal requirement on all schools to publish information on their Local Offer annually. There was a direct link from the Local Offer web site to individual schools and schools had been asked to put a link from their web sites to the Local Offer web site.
- Education, which was the top most used category had doubled from 2014-15 to 2015-16. However it was not possible to conclude whether this had resulted from an increase in assessments or other factors that were



creating pressures for special school places.

- Briefings took place with all school services and health professionals on the requirements of the Children and Families Act (2014) therefore a number of people in schools would be aware of the Local Offer.
- Clarification would be sought regarding providing information for families on respite services.

A member commended the Local Offer on it's comprehensive nature and noted the need to update it's content and style in the light of feedback from users, in order to maintain it's relevance.

Resolved -

- (1) That the contents of Document "X" be welcomed and noted.**
- (2) That a link to the local offer be emailed to members of the Committee and the Governors Service be asked to send the link to governors and use their contacts to promote the Local Offer to all communities.**

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children's Services

50. CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE

The report of the Deputy Director (Children's Social Care) (**Document "Z"**) highlighted the work undertaken in Bradford to prevent children being missing from care, the actions taken to protect young people when they do went missing and the provision that was in place to meet their needs.

Responses were given to member questions by officers and a representative of West Yorkshire Police as follows:

- The voiceability contract was to be reviewed and officers were looking to strengthen it's delivery and reconfigure the contract. The return to home interview was to be strengthened. When the contract was re commissioned members would be advised of the changes.
- Children that were at risk were reported as "missing", if there was no risk they were reported as "absent".
- Information on gender, ethnicity, length of time missing and geographic hot spots could be made available to members at as later date.

Although West Yorkshire Police had a standard approach, each district reported missing events differently and because of historic issues in Bradford, as soon a child was unaccounted for this was reported. This was regarded as the best approach in terms of safeguarding children although



it did result in a higher number of missing events in Bradford than neighbouring West Yorkshire authorities.

All missing children were treated the same whether they were in care or not and work was being undertaken in the hub on how to stop reoccurrences of children going missing.

There was a reporting strategy for every looked after child.

More secure options had been explored for children who repeatedly go missing but this was not done as part of the strategy.

Episodes of going missing did increase in late teens. There had been issues with leaving care hostels which were not as secure as children's homes out of hours and options were being investigated to address this.

When a call was received and logged the call handlers were trained to undertake a risk assessment and the call was referred to the hub. At that point a decision was taken to either agree with the risk assessment or downgrade it. If the risk assessment was agreed a plan was put into action within 15 minutes. Information was gathered and the risk re-assessed at every stage.

The top 5 children who go missing was a reasonably static group and could be risk assessed quickly.

The same procedure had to be followed for children in foster placements as those in a children's home. Foster carers received multi agency training and undertook e-learning.

In the case of Bradford children placed outside the district it was confirmed that the outside authority would follow the statutory guidance and the child would be monitored by the Bradford missing co-ordinator.

The missing policy was the same for adults as children, including people between the ages of 18 and 25 and a problem solving plan and safeguarding to reduce incidents of missing would be put in place.

If there was an immediate risk to a child, care staff would follow them while in contact with the police by phone. The police could be "hands on" in returning them to their home.

It was noted that when a child was reported missing to the police, they would risk assess this and rate their vulnerability as high, medium or low by using the National Decision Making Model.

The Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder stressed that children who were in care were vulnerable and that only a small percentage were likely to go missing. She was pleased that Bradford was taking a proactive approach in protecting



children but recognised that this did get misrepresented.

The West Yorkshire Police Central Safeguarding Governance Unit had praised Bradford's approach to missing children and was looking to share this with other West Yorkshire authorities.

The Chair thanked officers and the police for their responses from which he took confidence in the approach being adopted in Bradford regarding missing children.

Resolved -

- (1) That the work being undertaken to safeguard looked after children who go missing in Bradford be endorsed.**
- (2) That the Multi-Agency Strategy to safeguard children who go missing be supported and reported to elected members on a yearly basis.**
- (3) That the evidence of strong partnership working be welcomed.**

ACTION: Deputy Director (Children's Social Care)

51. UPDATED INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS ON THE WORKLOADS OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

The report of the Deputy Director (Children's Social Care) (**Document "Y"**) presented the most recent information on the workload of Children's Social Work Teams and updated Members on key pressures on the service. The workload analysis was based on activity up to 30th September 2016.

There had been a slight change to the overall workloads of social workers, and pressures upon the service since the last report was presented. The report demonstrated that Social Work Services for Children & Young People in the District remained strong, robust and well managed.

A number of social workers attended the meeting and spoke about their experience of working in Children's Social Care Services. They reported that newly qualified social workers experienced high levels of challenge and support with formal training and a development plan and a reduced workload. Staff retention had improved, staff morale was high and the number of agency staff had reduced. Positive support was received from experienced social workers.

The following responses were given to member questions and comments made:

- The quantity and quality of work undertaken by social workers was regularly monitored.
- All team managers were challenged to undertake a random case audit each month and grade work as outstanding, good, adequate or inadequate. The majority of work is graded as adequate.



- Officers were in the process of collating the responses to the staff survey which would be reported to members.
- With respect to the number of agency workers employed for over 12 months members were advised that an individual could be employed to cover a number of different posts which would effect these statistics. It was not in the authority's interest to employ agency workers other than to cover sickness or maternity leave. It was noted that 25% of social workers in Kirklees were agency workers and it had received an Ofsted rating of inadequate. The percentage of agency social workers in London and Birmingham was high which was not the case in Bradford.
- The trends that had been identified for children becoming subject to a plan for the second time within 2 years were; transient movement out of and into the district; chronic neglect and domestic abuse.
- Bradford had a good reputation for newly qualified social workers in their Assessment and Supported Year in Employment.
- Formal and informal supervision was provided for social workers. It was acknowledged that Bradford was a complex community which made the job of social workers challenging and difficult and staff did move.
- The sickness analysis showed that stress was an issue, which was not confined only to Bradford but all other social work departments nationally. There was a need to support staff in building resilience.
- Work was being undertaken to identify hot spots and pressure points to balance workloads. Discussions were taking place about moving people from other sections but this was not undertaken routinely as specialist knowledge was required in specific areas.
- With reference to the increase in the number of referrals received per month compared to the year before, this was set against the backdrop of an increased awareness of neglect and that Bradford was Britain's youngest city with a growing child population of 2,000 per year. The early help agenda was based on the premise that earlier engagement with families should reduce the possibility of the situation escalating.
- Reference was made to the increase in the number of child protection cases held by less experienced social workers and the fact that relatively there were still fewer children subject to a plan in Bradford than nationally and whether the thresholds in Bradford were too high and were pressures being put on staff such as school nurses rather than social workers. In response it was stressed that the number of children on Child Protection Plans was a aggregate figure. There was an emphasis on children not being on a child Protection Plan for a day longer than necessary. It was stressed that early help was the gateway to reducing the number of children on a Child Protection Plan or becoming looked after. There were 50 Community Response Workers who could work with children when their involvement with statutory services ended.
- In the instances where public law cases were not allocated to an experienced social worker the social worker would receive support from experienced social workers and managers.



- Discussions were taking place with social workers on individual case loads and ensuring that the grading structure reflected the complexity of cases and not just the overall number.
- It would not be possible to establish a bank of social workers to deploy when required as the authority would not be able to match the agency rates of pay.
- The Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder referred to the reductions in public sector funding and the necessity to do things differently in the public sector as a whole.

The Deputy Director Children's Social Care reported to members that in furtherance of Bradford's pledge to take 10 unaccompanied asylum seeker children, six children aged 16-17 had already arrived and four girls aged 16-17 would arrive the next week direct from France. A further three children would arrive from France under a public agreement to join extended family members in Bradford.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Social workers be thanked for their attendance.**
- (2) That the Committee consider further reports in the 2016-17 work programme to ensure the continuation of safe workloads and practice into the future given the current financial climate and changing demographics.**
- (3) That further updates be requested three times a year and the results of the staff survey be included in the first report.**
- (4) That future reports include information relating to the Service's key performance indicators.**

ACTION: Deputy Director (Children's Social Care)

52. CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2016-17

Resolved –

- (1) That the report to the 14 February 2017 meeting regarding Child Sexual Exploitation include information on historic cases.**
- (2) That the Work Programme 2016-17 continues to be regularly reviewed**



during the year.

ACTION: Deputy Director Children's Social Care
Overview & Scrutiny Lead

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

