

Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 14 March 2017 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 4.30 am
Concluded 6.45 pm

Present – Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
M Pollard D Smith	Engel Mullaney Peart Tait	Ward

Observers: Councillor Val Slater

Apologies: Councillor Fozia Shaheen, Councillor Talat Sajawal, Claire Parr, Tom Bright and Tina Wildy

Councillor D Smith in the Chair

69. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillor Mullaney disclosed an interest in Minute 11 as her son and nephew worked in Care Services.

Action: City Solicitor

70. MINUTES

Resolved-

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2017 be signed as a correct record.

Action: City Solicitor



71. **INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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

72. **APPOINTMENT OF NON-VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS**

The Committee was asked to confirm and recommend to Council the appointment of Irene Docherty as a Non-voting Teachers Special School Representative for the 2016/17 municipal year.

Resolved-

That it be recommended to Council that the following be appointed Non Voting Co-opted Member of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year:

Teachers Special School Representative: Irene Docherty

Action: City Solicitor

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

The Strategic Director, Children's Services submitted **Document "AL"** which presented 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 31st December 2016.

Earlier reports presented to the Committee had confirmed strong, robust and well managed Social Work Services for Children and Young People in the District. Information within this report therefore examined any changes in workload and demand on resources since that date.

It was reported that:

- There were 186 Social Workers in Children's Social Care directly employed by the Council. This was a reduction since December 2015 when there were 208.
- The significant change in number of social workers was due the change in how the service was now calculating staffing numbers. This would now be replicated in future reports. There were 44 Community Resource Workers (CRWs).
- At 31st December 2016 there were 10 agency Social Workers and no agency CRWs being utilised within the social work services. This was a reduction from December 2015 when there were 12 agency SWs and 1 agency CRW.
- Bradford had 46% of Social Workers who were experienced social workers



and had high levels of experience and training. This percentage had dropped slightly over the past year, from 48% in December 2015.

- The average caseload per full time equivalent (FTE) Social Worker was 16.1 cases, an increase from 12.7 in December 2015. Within the long term Social Work teams this figure rose to 17.6 cases per FTE (compared to 15.4 in December 2015).
- The average caseload per full time equivalent Community Resource Worker was 12.4 (a decrease from 12.6 at December 2015). The most recent published figures from the DfE (2014-15) showed a national average of 15 cases per FTE social worker and a regional average of 12 cases; the average across our statistical neighbours was 16 cases.
- 48% of looked after children (LAC) cases were held by an experienced social worker. The average number of LAC cases held by each FTE worker was 6.6, rising to 14.5 cases for the dedicated Looked After Children Teams. This was an increase from December 2015 when the average number of cases held was 6.0 (14.1 in the LAC teams).
- The overall trend in the numbers of children who were the subject of a child protection plan had been gradually rising over the last year, after a sharp fall between summer 2014 and May 2015; there were 535 at 31st December 2016 compared to 484 in December 2015.
- The percentage of Child Protection Plans lasting for 2 years or more had improved over the last year, with 3.4% in the year to 31st December 2016; this compares to 3.7% in the year to 31st December 2015.
- The number of looked after children had seen a sharp rise in the last 12 months. The number of children being looked after was 928 at 31st December 2016 – higher than the figure of 861 in December 2015. This equated to 66 children being looked after per 10,000 child population; this was higher than the national rate of 60 per 10,000 but lower than our statistical neighbour average of 78 per 10,000 (at 31st March 2016) (appendix – 2.5).
- The number of referrals received by Social Care Services had increased to about 520 per month over the last year, compared to about 420 per month for the year before.

Members were informed of the results of a Social Worker staff survey (health check) undertaken recently which concentrated on the overall aims and wellbeing of Social Workers and included the themes effective workload management, learning and development, a healthy workplace and effective service delivery.

The survey findings for what worked well in Bradford included:

- There was team support which was positive and helpful; others noted a steady team, with a good retention of experienced workers. Workers supported one another, as did the team managers and this helped to keep the children as the focus.
- Had good managers and enjoyed working for Bradford.
- Pleased that there was a Principal Social Worker in post now and that staff surveys were in place.
- Bradford was trying to keep children at the centre of their work and there



was a great emphasis on working with families to keep them together and were making differences to children's lives by acting appropriately to risk.

- Driving up standards through file audits and monitoring performance.
- Providing a range of quality training; the Signs of Safety model made concerns and positives much clearer for parents and professionals.
- Integrated working and the benefits of being co-located with relevant health and educational colleagues.

What some staff were worried about included:

- There were some themes which related to higher caseloads.
- Some staff felt that they worked beyond their allocated hours and struggled to claim back their hours.
- Not all staff appraisals were undertaken in a timely manner.
- Social workers were not always taking their protected 3.5 hours per month for Continuing Professional Development.
- Working environment was not appropriate, lack of space and IT equipment.
- There was a lot of expertise and knowledge within the service that was not always recognised.
- Some felt there was no consistent approach for induction of new staff.
- Needed to find out why staff left the authority.
- Consider revise the Workforce Development Strategy for the coming year with a focus on retaining experienced staff.
- Consider improving management and team relationships.

In response to the survey it was reported that:

- In terms of high case loads, a Workload Management System would be introduced, supported through supervision audits.
- Review of Staff Appraisals was being undertaken with Workforce Development.
- Piloting electronic tablets so that staff could work away from the office.
- Started to share good practice at team manager forums.
- Introduced "Welcome to Bradford Induction Plan" for new staff.
- Look at why staff leave at exit interviews.
- Revising Workforce Development Strategy and working on retention of Social Workers.
- Working on improving management and team work so that staff feel valued.

It was reported that the survey only produced a response rate of 17% which was very low but the service would be looking into ways of increasing response rates for next year; there had been technical difficulties this time.



Members commented on a number of issues which included:

- Future report could include information on addressing concerns outlined in the surveys.
- Worried about increase in workload of social workers; Social Workers working longer hours than contracted to and the downtime they were entitled to.
- Poor response rates to the staff survey needed looking at.
- Concerned about the increase in referrals being received by Social Care Services.
- Would services offered by Early Help reduce referrals being made to Social Services?

The Health and Wellbeing Portfolio reported that a Joint Targeted Area Inspection undertaken recently found that the caseload for Social Workers was appropriate and felt that to be a reassurance.

It was reported that it was extremely important that staff did get that down time and it was hoped that Service Mangers considered appropriate allocation of workloads.

In response to the queries raised by Member's it was reported that:

- The increase in the number of referrals received could be due to the way domestic violence work was approached; Bradford was complex and there was a lot of concern around families struggling.
- Early Help services was a new initiative and would take time to produce results.
- Staff survey would be undertaken on an annual basis and staff would be encouraged to complete the survey.

A Social Worker who attended the meeting suggested that more in depth discussion at supervision could look at areas of concern and feed into the staff survey.

In response to a Members question relating to children becoming subject to a care plan for the second time, it was reported that it was important to ensure that children were not on a care plan longer than they needed to be; a child taken off a protection plan was not a decision made by a social worker individually and was a joint decision made by a number of people. A child would be put back on a protection plan if other interventions such as early help were not successful. Deregistration of a care plan was carefully monitored.

Members were advised that the reduction in adoption and Special Guardianship Orders was a national issue following case law; case law stated that a Local Authority had to demonstrate the viability of wider group of family and friends carers before placing for adoption; Local Authorities had to explore all family and friends before the authority made Special Guardianship Orders.



In response to a Members question it was reported that:

- There was an ambition to roll out early help; good early help meant better outcomes for children.
- Early interventions sped up process for some children who were not being looked after appropriately and therefore came into care quicker.
- Increase in workload was due to changes in demography; principle reason in the increase was domestic abuse and the promotion of reporting domestic violence; second reason for the increase in workload was due to parental substance misuse and parental mental health.
- Children living in poverty came to the attention of Children's Services; migration of families into the City who did not have any public funds, potentially living in insecure housing conditions and not conducive to wellbeing of children.

Resolved-

- (1) **That the Children's Social Care Services Team be thanked for the work that they undertake in ensuring a strong, robust and well managed Social Work Services for Children and Young People in the District.**
- (2) **That the Committee consider further reports in the 2017-18 work programme to ensure the continuation of safe workloads and practice into the future given the current financial climate.**

Action: Strategic Director, Children's Services

74. HMRC CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION DATA SHARING PILOT

The Strategic Director, Children's Services submitted **Document "AM"** which reported that as part of the Local Authorities statutory responsibilities around locating Children who were Missing in Education (CME), the Education Safeguarding Team had entered into a data sharing pilot with HMRC, in order to reduce the number of CME cases the Council holds.

This was the second phase of this pilot; the first took place with Sheffield Local Authority, whereby they located over 40% of their CME using the data sharing agreement. Leeds, Harrow and Lancashire were also involved in the pilot with HMRC.

It was reported that this was the first time that data had been shared with the authority, and until now officers not been able to obtain address details of families who were in receipt of Child Benefit. The pilot would run from January to June 2017.



Members were informed that the authority would share details with HMRC of those children who were missing from education (CME) after officers had exhausted all enquiries when trying to find them. HMRC would then check if the family were in receipt of benefits, and if the address they held was different from the one that the authority held, they would share these details with the authority in view of trying to locate the children. If the address was the same, HMRC would then write to the family advising they had reason to believe they were no longer living at the address they held, asking them to get in touch as well as being at risk of losing their benefit payments.

Members were informed that the pilot commenced on 9th January 2017 and the authority had so far sent in two data returns consisting of 15 cases. The authority had one return with a possible address and one that officers were closing as enquires exhausted, as HMRC had identified them as left the country. Data returns were submitted on a weekly basis.

It was reported that details of 59 families had been passed onto HMRC; the authority had been passed details of alternative addresses of five families and so far had located four of them, some were outside this local authority and others were abroad.

It was reported that HMRC had already made saving of £300,000 from fraudulent claims.

It was reported that Sheffield shared the information received from HMRC with their Housing Benefit and Council Tax Department where as this authority did not and was something officers would be looking into.

The Chair emphasised that from the Committee's point of view, this was mainly about finding children who were missing education but any savings would be beneficial.

In response to a Member's question it was reported that due to data protection issues, the authority was unable to share details of the families with other local authorities not involved in the pilot.

Members felt that the Committee should lobby the local MP to have this pilot more widely extended.

Resolved-

- (1) That officers advise the Committee as soon as they receive notification as to whether the HMRC Children Missing Education Data Sharing Pilot would continue after June 2017.**
- (2) That the Strategic Director, Children's Services gives consideration to sharing the Children Missing Education case findings data with the appropriate Council Departments.**



- (3) That the Chair of the Committee writes to the Districts MP requesting that the HMRC Children Missing Education Data Sharing Pilot be extended nationally.

Action: Strategic Director, Children's Services/Overview and Scrutiny Lead

75. EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS 2016 - EARLY YEARS TO KEY STAGE 5

The Strategic Director, Children's Services submitted **Document "AN"** which provided a summary of performance for children and young people attending Bradford Schools at the following key stages:

- Early Years Foundation Stage – 5 year olds
- Key Stage 1 – 7 year olds
- Key Stage 2 – 11 year olds
- Key Stage 4 – 16 year olds
- Key Stage 5 – 18 year olds

It was reported that:

- Outcomes in Early Years had improved over recent years and at a faster rate than national.
- The percentage of Year 1 pupils achieving the required standard in phonics continued to improve in 2016.
- In 2016, Bradford's Key Stage 1 (KS1) pupils had performed slightly below national in reading, writing and mathematics on the new expected standard performance measures.
- At the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2) in Bradford, pupils' results were below the national averages on the new expected standard for reading, writing and mathematics (RWM) combined and separately.
- Bradford's KS2 pupils made above average progress in writing and maths in 2016 but were below average in reading.
- The number of primary schools below the Floor Standard was 6 (4% of schools). There were 15 schools below the Floor Standard in 2015 and 23 in 2014.
- In 2016, pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 in Bradford achieved an average Attainment 8 score of 45.7, slightly below national. Bradford's Progress 8 score was below average.
- Outcomes at Key Stage 5 in Bradford schools had been maintained in line with last year.



Members were informed that while in many areas results in the district had improved over the past year, boys still performed much worse than girls, and reading levels in Bradford were still too low.

It was also reported that:

- in early years 66 per cent of children achieved a “good” level of development, compared to 69% nationally. In 2014 the gap was five percent.
- At Key Stage 2, the percentage of Bradford pupils meeting expected standards in reading, writing and Maths was 47 per cent, compared with the national average of 53 per cent.
- The largest performance gap between Bradford and the national average was the percentage of pupils meeting expected standards on their reading test; 57 per cent of Bradford pupils compared with 66 per cent nationally – a gap of nine per cent.
- The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in the writing assessment was the same nationally; Bradford leapt from 140th out of 152 local authorities for writing in 2015 to 81st; last years figures also showed that Bradford pupils made better than average progress in writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1.
- At GCSE level the percentage of students getting A-C in English and Maths was 52.1 % last year up 4.3% on 2015 results.

Members were informed that there was still a lot of development needed, especially in Key Stage 4 and 5. People were working very hard to deliver big changes.

It was reported that the Education Improvement Board met 4 times a year and held to account senior officers and people who were responsible for school improvement whether they were academies or Local Authority schools.

Members were informed that there was a particular focus on barriers to improvement and improving reading levels which had an impact on the next level of attainment; another key area was the recruitment and retention of good and outstanding teachers in all schools; the Service was working closely with the Schools Regional Commissioner who had also been attending the School Education Improvement Board on a regular basis.

The Chair emphasised the importance of parents/carers and community collectively taking responsibility for educational attainment.

Members were informed that an Education Covenant was being developed; part of that document included what was needed from parents/carers, schools and different communities.

A Member suggested that it would be useful for the Committee to have the outcomes of the various reading initiatives that were taking place.



Members also suggested that it would be useful for the Regional Schools Commissioner to attend a future meeting of the Committee to ascertain how attainment was being addressed in academies.

Members emphasised the importance of improving reading levels and ensuring schools had sufficient and appropriate stock of reading books.

In response to a Members question relating to the London Challenge and how it could work for Bradford, it was reported that it was important that educational improvement was properly targeted and monitored; investment in Head teachers working collaboratively to share information with other schools was crucial.

The Health and Wellbeing Portfolio suggested that reports such as this should include a paragraph on how well our Looked After Children were performing.

Resolved-

- (1) That the detailed information on the various key stages be welcomed and a further report on the reading initiative programmes to increase reading levels be submitted to the Committee.**
- (2) That the Regional Schools Commissioner be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee.**
- (3) That further reports relating to Children's Services include a paragraph on how well our "Looked After Children are performing".**

Action: Strategic Director, Children's Services/Overview and 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

