

**Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services
Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday,
14 March 2018 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall,
Bradford**

Commenced 4.35 pm
Concluded 6.35 pm

Present – Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT AND INDEPENDENT
D Smith M Pollard	Mullaney Peart Tait Thirkill	Ward

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Sidiq Ali
Joyce Simpson

Parent Governor Representative
Church Representative (CE)

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Tom Bright

Teachers Secondary School Representative

Observers: Councillor V Slater

Apologies: Councillors Shaheen and Sajawal, Claire Parr, Kerr Kennedy, Irene Docherty and Gull Hussain

Councillor D Smith in the Chair

62. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

63. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2018 be signed as a correct record (previously circulated).

ACTION: City Solicitor

64. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

65. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

No referrals had been received.

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

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "AH"**) 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 31st December 2017.

There had been a slight rise 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.

The Deputy Director of Social Care noted that the increase in workloads was a cause for some concern but that mitigating action had been taken to ensure the safe running of the services. He added that the issue of most concern was the balance between experienced and less experienced social workers. He went on to advise that social worker turnover was at 17.7%. Feedback provided at exit interviews had highlighted that the level of pay was lower than other authorities and in particular Kirklees. He advised members that an additional £450,000 had been allocated in the 2018/19 budget for the social work service and that consideration was being given to how best to use this. He noted that managers had not left the authority and remained loyal to Bradford despite bigger rewards that could be offered in other authorities. He referred to the increase in looked after children to 988 but noted that this was still significantly better than the Council's statistical neighbours. He noted the significant pressure due to the number of referrals and assessments that were being received.

A member asked a question about the staff survey referred to at a previous meeting. In response the Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder advised members that a working party of Labour members had been set up and had held



meetings and drop in sessions with social workers who had also completed questionnaires. She added that an improvement plan had been drawn up and that an additional £450,000 had been allocated in the 2018/19 budget to deal with issues raised. It was agreed that the questionnaire and action plan be circulated to members of this Committee.

A member asked a question about the support that was given to looked after children that were excluded from mainstream school and the Deputy Director of Social Care advised that the Head of the Virtual School reported regularly to the Corporate Parenting Panel. He acknowledged that looked after children were vulnerable but that in general they did have good attendance records. He accepted that some looked after children did struggle in mainstream settings and that the Head of the Virtual School worked to reintegrate them into mainstream schools. Support plans for looked after children were reviewed every six months to ensure that they had the right level of support.

A representative of UNITE attended the meeting and highlighted the union's serious concerns regarding Children's Services. He stressed that this report should be considered in conjunction with the report on Early Help. He referred to the fact that social workers were leaving the authority and that caseloads were rising. He added that social workers had contacted UNITE stating that they felt burned out, that they did not get support from senior management and that they felt under pressure. He stated that social workers were leaving due to the senior management structure. At OJC in October-November 2017 senior management proposed deleting Time Off In Lieu and requiring new social workers to give 3 or 6 months notice to leave. He was of the opinion that this was punishing dedicated social workers. He referred to the fact that high caseloads were factors in the deaths of Victoria Climbié and "Baby P". He asked a number of questions which he was requested to put in writing and a response would be provided by officers. He concluded by stating that UNITE was concerned about the service and the ability to protect vulnerable children. He added that the situation would worsen if Early Help went ahead and that UNITE believed that social workers and community support workers did an excellent job to reduce the risk to families and felt that management did not support them.

The Strategic Director of Children's Services noted that the service had been inspected last year and the inspectors did not find any of the issues referred to by UNITE. He added that they found that social workers enjoyed working for the Council, were supported and felt that it was a good place to work. However they recognised that social workers in Bradford did have difficult issues to deal with. He added that officers were not complacent and that a comprehensive survey was being carried out which would be reported to the Committee on an annual basis.

He recognised that there were issues regarding working conditions at Henry Mitchell House and providing social workers with appropriate technology. He stressed that there had been no budget cuts in the social work service. The retention and recruitment of social workers was being looked into. He added that the UNITE representative had conflated a number of issues however he



recognised that this was a high risk service. He stressed that regular meetings were held with unions and that social work pay would be on an agenda for a meeting the next week.

The Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder pointed out that the social workers' responses to the questionnaire did not support the concerns raised by the UNISON representative however she did accept that individuals did have issues that they had raised.

A member who was on the working party that met social workers noted that issues raised by the social workers were pay, working conditions such as hot desking, workloads and the inability to take Time Off in Lieu. She hoped that the additional budget allocation would help to reduce workloads. She expressed concern that the number of experienced social workers was low and stressed the need to increase the number of experienced social workers.

The Deputy Director of Social Care noted that Bradford had a full time dedicated Principal Social Worker who liaised with him on behalf of the workforce. Bradford had 12 agency social workers which equated to 6-8% of the workforce which was very low and remained static. Requests for agency social workers came from unions and managers in equal numbers. He added that he wanted social workers to take Time Off in Lieu but that the needs of the child must come first.

A co-opted member requested information on the proportion of experienced social workers that had 5 or 10 years experience. She welcomed the additional £450,000 investment as the working conditions of social workers influenced the quality of the service provided to vulnerable children.

The Principal Social Worker confirmed the DfE defined a social worker with 2.5 years as experienced however she stressed that caseloads reflected the length of time the individual had been a social worker.

The Deputy Director of Social Care responded to a member question by stating that caseloads were rising and workloads rising but not by any greater degree than nationally. He added that caseloads were a concern as this reduced the amount of time spent on individual children and that this was what the additional £450,000 would be used to address.

The Deputy Director of Social Care noted that some reasons for sickness absence had increased and some had reduced. The main reasons for absence being muscular skeletal, work related stress and non work related stress.

The Strategic Director of Children's Services emphasised the need for more precise information on why there had been an increase in sickness absence in the social work front door and report back.

The newly created role of Practice Supervisor would look at how staff were supported and in particular how support was provided for newly qualified social workers. They would be involved in training staff and preparing them for



progression to handling more complex caseloads.

In response to a co-opted member question the Deputy Director of Social Care confirmed that no social workers were suspended at the current time.

The Strategic Director of Children's Services confirmed that he would circulate the staff survey to members of the Committee and would undertake an annual health check and report this to the Committee.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Committee considers further reports on workloads of Children's Social Care Services in the 2018-19 Work Programme.**
- (2) That the results of the annual staff survey be included in the first report of each Municipal year.**
- (3) That the current staff survey be circulated to all members of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children's Services

67. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD FOR 2016/17

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "A1"**) provided a summary of the Annual Report of the Safeguarding Children Board to accompany the full report which was provided as an appendix. The report provided a summary of priorities and achievements of the Board in 2016/17, as well as the annual summary of the Child Death Overview Panel.

The Independent Chair and members of the Safeguarding Children Board attended the meeting and the Chair introduced the report.

The Chair of the Committee noted that after 2018 the Safeguarding Children Board would no longer be statutory and asked who it would report to. In response the Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder noted that both the Children's and Adult Safeguarding Boards reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board at present and that it was envisaged that this would continue.

The Chair of the Child Death Overview Panel summarised the Panel's Annual report and noted that infant and child mortality in the district had reduced but remained above national and local rates. She confirmed that there was a specific strategy regarding consanguinity and that a significant amount of work had been undertaken regarding reducing risks. A leaflet had been produced for families, a short video had also been produced which was aimed at communities at risk, community development work was undertaken and individual genetic counselling was undertaken. The Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder referred to the 10 years of evidence produced by Born in Bradford and suggested that Professor



Wright, Chief Investigator, Born in Bradford be invited to the Committee.

In response to a question about measures taken regarding child protection and safeguarding a transient population it was noted that steps were taken to ensure that pregnant women were seen before 13 weeks of pregnancy and that hard to reach and vulnerable women were identified. The Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder who chaired the Children's Trust had held workshops involving all services to identify challenges and good practice.

In response to a member question whether the "Hamza Khan" case could happen again it was noted that a whole system review was undertaken following the case and that lessons had been learned but that we should never be complacent.

A co-opted member welcomed the liaison between the Adult and Children's Safeguarding Boards. She noted the increased number of deaths and suicides among undergraduates and welcomed an opportunity to engage with local universities on the issue.

The Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder noted that the suicide prevention plan included a section on students. She also noted the work being undertaken on building resilience in pupils moving from primary to secondary school.

The Chair of the Child Death Overview Panel advised that an audit was undertaken of child and adult suicides and that there was no indication that Bradford was an outlier for suicides. It was noted that there was a detailed suicide plan in place which was being implemented.

The Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder noted that the Health and Wellbeing Board was looking into deaths of people with learning disabilities.

Resolved –

That officers be thanked for the report and further annual reports of the Safeguarding Children Board be considered by the Committee.

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children's Services

68. ARRANGEMENTS BY THE COUNCIL AND ITS PARTNERS TO TACKLE NEGLECT

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "AJ"**) provided a briefing to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the issue of Neglect and it includes how the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board and partners were working together to drive improvements across the District's safeguarding partnership and to hold agencies to account for their work in their area.

A member raised the issue of recording instances where children had missed a



doctor or dentist appointments as “was not taken” rather than “did not attend”. It was noted that this had been raised with Health colleagues and that progress on the matter would be chased. She raised the issue of children needing glasses and not being taken to the optician. This issue was recognised by officers.

The Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board referred to the complexities of neglect and different streams of neglect such as deliberate neglect and neglect by omission where parents had not received adequate parenting themselves.

A co-opted member questioned the adequacy of training in schools regarding neglect. However it was noted that the highest level of referrals were received from schools.

Resolved –

That Document “AJ” be noted and a further update on the progress of the response to neglect be presented to the Committee in 12 months time.

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children’s Services

69. CHILDREN’S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2017-18

Resolved –

That the Work Programme continues to be regularly reviewed during the year.

ACTION: 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

