

Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 12 December 2018 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 4.30 pm
Concluded 7.30 pm

Present – Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Gibbons M Pollard	Engel Mullaney Wood	Ward

Voting Co-opted Members:

Claire Parr, Church Representative (RC)
Joyce Simpson, Church Representative (CE)

Non Voting Co-opted Members:

Tom Bright, Teachers Secondary School Representative

Observers: Councillor Azam, Councillor Duffy, Councillor Farley, Councillor Watson and
Councillor Anila Ahmed

Apologies: Councillor Arshad Hussain, Councillor Talat Sajawal, Sidiq Ali and Shain Wells

Councillor Gibbons in the Chair

34. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interest of transparency Claire Parr disclosed an interest in Minute 37 as her daughter was a Social Worker.

Action: City Solicitor

35. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

36. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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

The report of the Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "P"**) 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 2018.

The Deputy Director Children's Social Care reported that:

- There had been an incremental increase in demand which was putting pressure on services.
- There were now 290 Social Workers employed by children's services of which 143 Social Workers (132 full time equivalents) were located in Locality Child and Family or Assessment Teams (including agency workers) where the demand was. In addition there were 32 Community Resource Workers (CRWs) (27 full time equivalents) across the service (mainly in Through Care service).
- At 30th September 2018 there were 33 agency Social Workers and 1 agency CRW being utilised within the social work services. The length of time agency Social Workers had been in post was 10; under 3 months, 20; 3 to 5 months, 2; 6 to 11 months, 1; 12 months or more.
- The average caseload per full time equivalent (FTE) Social Worker was 19.0 cases, an increase from 17.9 in September 2017. Social Workers took on a mixed caseload of child protection and children in need work. The average caseload per full time equivalent Community Resource Worker was 14.2 (compared to 12.2 in September 2017). The most recent published figures from the DfE (2016-17) showed a national average of 17.8 cases per FTE social worker and a regional average of 18.1 cases.
- The aspiration was for experienced Social Workers to have a caseload of 18 and 16 for newly qualified social workers.
- The Service employed a number of agency workers to deal with demand; but the service needed to retain experienced Social Workers.
- Experienced Social Workers had caseloads far larger than they should have and the department was being challenged to bring that down; the Service was continuing to work hard to bring caseloads down; the increase in demand reflected the national increase.



Members made the following comments:

- Concerned not only about the safety of children but the mental health and wellbeing of social workers particularly experienced social workers who had a high caseload; when would the caseload be down to where it should be?
- Were existing social workers made aware that new social workers were being recruited and that caseloads would be coming down?
- Was it appropriate for newly qualified social workers to have a caseload of 16?
- This Committee was criticised at Council for not undertaking an in depth review on Children's Social Care Services; this Committee had asked to establish a task and finish group to look into ways of improving recruitment and retention of Social Workers and report back to the Committee in December 2018 but no work had been undertaken to take that forward.
- Concerned at the significant shortfall in experienced social workers; 18 new social workers had been recruited and 12 were in the pipeline, what level of experience did they have?
- Did the Service have a breakdown of the reasons why a Social Worker left? Why was this information not in the report.
- The committee felt let down and disappointed at not being provided with the information on how much strain the service was under.
- The way the Committee was looking at this sort of issue was not working; there was an expectation to look at workloads of Children's Social Work Services but it felt like a tick box exercise rather than a thorough scrutiny; the Committee needed to consider appropriate ways of scrutinising and the information it wanted; what happened with the inspection should not happen again.
- The Committee had asked for information on staff surveys a number of times; the Labour Group had undertaken a staff survey, why was that not available to this Committee as it was vitally important information, needed that information to do a proper scrutiny; when you compare positive improvement in July then look at the Ofsted report in September it looks as if the Committee had not been given information it was entitled to.
- The Committee needed to be given factual and full answers by officers.
- When would the service be in a position to increase social worker pay?
- Can the unions be involved to ascertain what more could be undertaken to help staff with their needs?



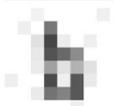
- The government was placing an emphasis on child protection and partnership working; partnership working between social workers and schools was key; how was the service monitoring impact of the strains on schools? Social Workers were turning up at school without correct documentation; teachers were driving the process; Social Workers were attending schools unprepared without having read the documentation relating to the child, putting additional pressure on schools; schools and social workers needed to have mutual confidence in each other; needed to ensure these sort of cases were being monitored and there should be clear channels of communication so that schools could report concerns back to the service.
- What was the stability of placements? How many special guardianship orders had broken down and what impact did that have?
- There needed to be a new era of openness and transparency; why did officers not alert the Committee to the outcome of the meeting at Shirley Manor Primary which provided feedback from those who work with the service and officers responded to criticism?
- Ofsted stated the service failed and we failed as a committee; the committee had not been given the opportunity to give a bigger contribution to put things right.
- How was the situation in terms of recruiting foster carers?
- Were children becoming subject to care orders a second time higher in Bradford than nationally?
- Were there any further cuts to Prevention and Early Help Service?
- Needed to look at the state and quality of services being provided and not just the number of Social Workers.
- What would happen after the Ofsted monitoring had finished?

In response to Members comments it was reported that:

- Caseloads for newly qualified social workers would be a maximum of 16; there had been an agreement to recruit a further 18 Social Workers to Child and Family Teams which would reduce caseload numbers; it was not easy to recruit and retain experienced Social Workers.
- The Improvement Board was looking at improving the number of social workers to work with newly qualified Social Workers and recruit a further 14 Managers; needed to get the ratio of 1 Team Manager to 8 Social Workers which would help in reducing caseloads and stress levels.



- The Service was successful in recruiting 12 social workers this week who should be with the service in the next couple of months to ease the pressure; caseloads were being monitored to ensure staff were coping and to ascertain what else could be undertaken to support them.
- The service had a far higher level of agency workers; if caseloads became unsafe agency staff would be employed to alleviate some of that pressure; the service needed permanent managers, supervisors and social workers.
- The type of cases that were allocated to newly qualified social workers were not as complex and they would not hold any care proceeding cases; newly qualified had a 10% reduction in caseload which was a national standard.
- In line with the recommendation of the Committee in July the DFE were written to, to explain the concerns in the difficulty in recruiting and retaining social workers, Wakefield's and Kirklees Ofsted judgements and their pay scales were affecting Bradford's vacancies for social workers and asking National Government for a National Pay Scale for Social Workers; in June 2018 the service had 30 vacancies, the gap of the number of vacancies had been plugged but there was still a gap of experienced social workers; Task and Finish Group would have considered that issue.
- The Service had 25 experienced agency staff who would continue to work for the authority until they were required.
- Out of the 12 social workers that were recruited recently, 6 were experienced and 6 were new; some were agency staff that were already working for the authority.
- Three more Social Workers had given their notice during this week and were going to work for Leeds.
- An annual staff survey was undertaken which had a closing date of 20 December which asked staff about working conditions, pay, how well they were supervised etc, could arrange for the results of the survey to be brought to this Committee; exit interviews were also undertaken with staff, needed to increase the number of exit interviews being held; exit interviews were not being routinely completed.
- Unless Social Worker pay was enhanced the Service would struggle to retain Social Workers; needed to look at starting salary to ensure recruiting the best social workers; a retention allowance was brought in and the Service was working with the Finance Department to see what could be undertaken in terms of pay scales.
- Staff were already talking to their unions and those discussions were being fed back to management.



- Child safeguarding was the domain for all partners; it was extremely important to work in partnership with all concerned.
- Were not aware of special guardianship orders breaking down, it was usually children placed in care settings where relationships broke down; teenagers in care ended up in a number of placements which was an area that needed looking at.
- There was an ongoing dialogue with head teachers through forums and area presentation panels.
- Fostering services were in a stronger position, recruited more Foster Carers.
- The national average of children subject to protection plans for the second time was 6.1%, Bradford was higher than the national average at 8%.
- There was no plans to reduce the Prevention and Early Help Service; team went live in October.
- Social Worker Apprenticeship route would be going live next year.
- The number of social workers employed by the service and the number of vacancies would be looked at by the Improvement Board.
- The service would be having Ofsted monitoring reports every three months.
- The Service would also have another Ofsted inspection after two years, if no longer judged inadequate the improvement notice would not be removed; work of the Improvement Board would continue until Secretary of State was satisfied that the improvements would be sustained.

The Interim Strategic Director, Children's Services emphasised that any Social Worker leaving would be speaking to her first to ascertain what the reasons were for leaving and to see if the issues that were affecting their decision could be changed; the Service was looking at other ways of making exit interviews more accessible. She also reported that officers would work in openness and provide the information requested by Members and that there would be a number of people scrutinising the Service's improvement journey.

Financial information relating to Children's Social Care was tabled at the meeting, it was reported that:

- Children Social Care Services had a full year net budget of £60.1m. The 2018-19 financial forecast for the service reported as at the end of quarter 2 (September 2018) an overspend of £3.8m.
- The Deputy Directors office net budget included £0.4m of non employee budgets (insurance premium, ICT software license cost; these budgets were forecasted to breakeven in 2018-19.



- Prevention and Early Help support included the £0.5m allocated by the Council for two financial years to support more key worker and Prevention worker posts; the new structure for Prevention and Early Help was implemented in October 2018.
- Social Work Services – the Assessment function included three assessment teams and the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH); the budget overspend related to employee cost due to use of agency staff; there were three Children and Young People teams who had a combined overspend of £0.5m due to the use of agency staff; the employee overspend was partially offset by £0.3m forecasted underspend on the £1.0m Legal/Court fees budget.
- Looked After Children/Resources – the number of children in care and supported in permanent arrangements continued to increase; the main pressure related to the Purchased Placement budget which was forecasting a 2.6m overspend; this pressure had been put forward into the 2019-20 budget setting process; the in-house residential provision was set to overspend the £4.7m budget by £0.5m mainly due to staffing (£0.4m) and premises cost of £0.1m.
- Targeted Early Help – the service was currently forecasting a £0.2m underspend on employee cost; the new Prevention and Early Help (including Children Centres/Family Hubs) had been established from October 2018; as at quarter 2 the budgets for the Children Centres were included within the Education and Learning service budgets.

The Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked what measures the Service was taking to respond to the overspend.

In response the Deputy Director Children's Social Care reported that there was an increase in demand and a report was being submitted to the Executive, the service pressures had been recognised and there was a budget of £2.35m in budget documents for social care.

He reported that the use of agency staff was a huge drain on resources; there needed to be an affective strategy to drive down that cost; agency staff should be a short term fix; when benchmarked use of agency staff against statistical neighbours Bradford's use of agency social workers was lower, Bradford was in the top quartile on use of agency staff.

In response to a Member's question it was reported that there was an underspend in the use of barristers and not all court cases required a senior barrister supporting them.

The Chair highlighted that he had attended the Improvement Board and commended the Board's standard of questioning, their expectations and request for further information. He emphasised that he had confidence that the Board was heading in the right direction.



Resolved-

- (1) That in view of the extremely disappointing Ofsted Inspection outcome further reporting on workloads of children's social care services be incorporated into the feedback reports from the Improvement Board.**
- (2) That the results of the staff survey be circulated to Members via email as soon as the information is available.**

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

38. OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILACS)

The report of the Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "Q"**) provided updated information about the Council's response to the OFSTED ILACS judgement published.

It was reported that the Department for Education had written formally to serve the Council with an Improvement Notice.

Members were informed that under the leadership of the Portfolio Holder for Children & Families, and in consultation with other councillors, DfE, OFSTED and the Local Government Association (LGA), there had been progress in establishing the approach to addressing the key areas for improvement identified by OFSTED and the necessary supporting arrangements were as follows:

- **Establishment of the Improvement Board.** An Improvement Advisor was identified by the DfE and would be invited to chair the Improvement Board. Draft Terms of Reference and proposed membership of the Board were attached at Appendix 3 of the report. The Chair of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been asked to consider joining the Improvement Board. The work of the Board to secure the improvement of Children's Services identified by OFSTED would be supported by a staff and a children's reference groups, as well as established internal and partner officer working groups. The Board's Terms of Reference would also need to be approved by DfE/OFSTED.



- **Development of our Improvement Plan.** With the voice of the child at its heart, improvement planning had been a key focus of activity, involving staff at all levels in Children’s Services, with the support of corporate resources (Finance, HR, Legal and Performance) and in consultation with partners. A Planning workshop was scheduled with Ofsted on 10th December 2018 to help inform the Improvement Plan. A Statement of Action must be submitted to Ofsted by 4th February 2019.

It was reported that as set out in the Improvement Notice, the Council was now subject to intervention by the Department for Education (DfE) until services improved. OFSTED would monitor the progress regularly and the Service would be subject to a full re-inspection within two years. Key actions and milestones included:

- Establishment of the Children’s Social Care Improvement Board once membership and Terms of Reference are approved by both DfE/OFSTED and Executive.
- Producing a draft Statement of Action for discussion at the OFSTED planning meeting.
- Submit a full Statement of Action (Deadline for submission: 4 February 2019).
- Support a monitoring visit (which will take place 3 months after our publication of inspection i.e. January)
- Quarterly monitoring would continue until the Council had an inspection and moved into a different pathway (ie good or above)

In response to a Member’s question it was reported that the Service did not record the evidence that all foster carers had undertaken training; a database had been created to track training; the service prided itself in how it supported foster carers but the concerns in the report related to recording of mandatory training of foster carers; Ofsted would be reviewing the Services assessment processes closely and reviewing signs of safety and how that was being used; the service was undertaking training to ensure that signs of safety model were being applied consistently.

It was reported that the Ofsted inspection highlighted that social work practices across locality teams varied in both quality and impact; some children had been on child protection plans longer than they should have been; Bradford had a lower number on child protection than statistical neighbours; child protection cases had gone up in the last 6 months and was now above the national average and below the statistical neighbours.

In response to a Member’s questions it was reported that signs of safety was a model about decision making, Ofsted had commented on the application of that model.



Members questioned what progress had been made with children leaving care without access to key documents such as their health passports, national insurance numbers and passports. In response the Deputy Director Children's Social Care reported that this was an area that the service was trying to address.

In response to Members questions it was reported that the training on Regulation 44 visits would be circulated to Members through the Overview and Scrutiny Lead.

A Member suggested that the key to improving social workers was continued professional development, Ofsted highlighted quality of reports was not good enough, quality of evidence not good enough etc these were areas that could be addressed through continuous personal development.

In response to the continuous personal development of social workers it was reported that monthly development sessions were held with social workers; work was undertaken with Bradford College and Bradford University on developing social workers; some social workers did not have time to access training which was a challenge the service was working on; social workers were receiving relevant training to develop their skills.

Resolved-

- (1) That the actions taken in response to the September 2018 Ofsted Inspection findings be noted.**
- (2) That the establishment of the Improvement Board be noted.**
- (3) That the monitoring of the Improvement Plan is placed on the Committee's Work Programme as a standing item for each meeting.**

Action: Overview and Scrutiny Lead

39. CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE

The report of the Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "R"**) highlighted the work being undertaken in Bradford to prevent children being missing from home or care the actions taken to protect young people when they do go missing and the provision that was in place to meet their needs.

The report covered the period April 2017 to October 2018.

Members commended the information contained in the report.



Resolved-

That the work being undertaken to safeguard children who go missing in Bradford be accepted.

40. CHILDREN MISSING FROM EDUCATION

Under Section 436A of the Education and Inspections Act 1996 all local authorities have a statutory responsibility to “make arrangements to enable them to establish (so far as it is possible to do so) the identities of children residing in their area who are not receiving a suitable education. In relation to children, by ‘suitable education’ we mean efficient full-time education suitable to her/his age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs the child may have.”

The Deputy Director of Children’s Services presented a report (**Document “S”**) on Children Missing from Education including information on Unregistered Schools and Elective Home Education.

Members made the following comments:

- How confident was the service that every child had been identified?
- What work was being undertaken with new arrivals and traveller communities?
- What discussions were taking place with parents before they chose to elect for home education?
- Concerned that there was no statutory right to inspect children being home schooled.
- Some schools were forging registers to make their attendance figures look good; schools were not recording data correctly.
- Why did some schools see larger numbers of children being taken off their rolls?
- How do parents know what rights they had? Should the information be in the school admissions booklet.
- Some parents could not afford uniforms and children were sent home from school if they did not arrive to school in the correct uniform.
- Was the service aware of any unregistered schools?
- Future reports could include information on ethnicity and gender.
- Concerned over the authority’s lack of power to make sure children who were home schooled were receiving a good education.

In response to the comments raised by Members it was reported that:

- Some parents elected for home education, registering for home education was voluntary.
- There was a whole team dedicated to new arrivals/traveller communities.
- 42 school attendance orders were being pursued; needed to ensure children attend school.



- Work was on going with a particular school to work with parents to ensure they are fully aware of responsibility of home education.
- The authority would look into cases where they had been informed of school attendances being forged.
- Some families took children out of school because they had “fallen out” with the school; others may be trying to avoid paying fines for poor attendance, and some were not happy that they had not been allocated their first choice school.
- The Department of Education website provided information on parents rights.
- Any parent who elected for home education could choose for their child to go back into school at any time; the Fair Access Protocol was being revised; would be looking at doing a leaflet for parents to explain that.
- Should not be discriminating against poor families because they could not afford uniforms; would be supporting schools that could have separate badges that could be sown onto uniforms; pupil premium could be used and the school could show that barriers were being removed by using the premium in this way.
- The service was not aware of any unregistered schools; there were some established alternative providers who were supported where necessary.
- The Council had very little intervention powers for children that were home schooled; because of these limiting powers and the fact that some families did not register when they home schooled children there was no way to know the exact number of children in the district who were being educated at home.

Resolved-

That the Committee notes the report and expresses grave concerns regarding the lack of intervention powers available to the Local Authority and the potential safety and educational attainment of those children missing from education.

Action: Interim Strategic Director, Children’s Services

41. CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2018-19

This report of the Chair of the Children’s Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee (**Document “T”**) presented the Committee’s Work Programme 2018-19.

Resolved-

That the Work Programme 2018-19 continues to be regularly reviewed during the year.

Chair

