

**Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services
Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday,
20 March 2019 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall,
Bradford**

Commenced 4.30 pm
Concluded 6.35 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	BRADFORD INDEPENDENT GROUP
Engel Arshad Hussain S Khan Peart Thirkill	Gibbons M Pollard	Ward	Sajawal

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Joyce Simpson

Church Representative (CE)

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Tom Bright

Teachers Secondary School Representative

Observers: Councillor Farley

Apologies: Sidiq Ali, Shain Wells and Claire Parr

Councillor Gibbons in the Chair

61. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

- (1) **In the interest of transparency Councillor Thirkill and Councillor Engel disclosed an interest in Minute 65 as they were Chair and Deputy Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.**

(2) In the interest of transparency Councillor Peart disclosed an interest in Minute 65 as she was on the OFSTED Improvement Panel Working Group and worked for one of the Multi Agency Academy Trusts.

Action: City Solicitor

62. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2019 be signed as a correct record.

63. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

64. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

No referrals had been received.

65. PROGRESS UPDATE FOLLOWING THE OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILAC)

Previous Reference: Minute 46 (2018/19)

The Strategic Director, Children's Services submitted **Document "AD"** which provided the Committee with a progress update in respect of improvements identified within the Improvement Plan following the recent OFSTED inspection September 2018 and subsequent DFE notice to improve issued on the 4 December 2018.

More specifically the report focussed on changes and improvements within Workstream 2 of the Improvement Plan – Partnerships namely:

- The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Front Door Service

In addition, the report provided the Committee with a general update relating to:

- The structure and governance around the Improvement Board including Improvement Plan, and
- OFSTED's first monitoring visit.

The Interim Strategic Director Children's Services reported that progress was continuing to be made in response to the OFSTED Improvement Plan which included:

- That a Back to Basic's programme for all children's social care staff, was being developed focussing on what good looked like in terms of case recording, voice of the child, analysis of risk within assessments, undertaking home visits and use of supervision.
- A review and refresh of the social work job role, with a view to achieving an increase in grade to support retention of staff in a competitive market was being undertaken; benchmarking had been undertaken of a new job description and roles and the next step would be to look at increasing pay.
- Currently the service had 10 social workers who had caseloads of above 25; the service was continuing to recruit practice supervisors to hold some of the cases; the service was continuing to use agency staff; some agency staff were not performing up to the appropriate standard and had to be relieved of their duties.
- The service was going to start a recruitment process which would take time to work through.
- The Service continued to improve use of analysis and performance data so that Managers understood where performance was good and where it needed improving.
- The first monitoring visit took place on 6-7 March and focussed on front door and MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub).
- Section 47 safeguarding strategy meetings had now moved to the locality teams, this was where there were concerns/risk about a child and agencies through the MASH shared key information in order to assess risk and consider whether a child should be made subject to a child protection plan. By moving the Section 47's to locality provided greater continuity in the case management, through timely allocation of a social worker, thereby reducing the "handoffs" across service areas.
- A multi agency mock inspection was undertaken in February to help with getting ready for the OFSTED monitoring visit; noticed that at the mock inspection that staff were confident about talking about their work and that there was progress being made; staff were positive and understood the urgency required to make changes to ensure the system was safe.
- Whilst the mock OFSTED inspection was positive, it was acknowledged that whilst the changes were beginning to evidence better management grip and decision making, there remained much to do to ensure that consistency of practice and safe decision making across the service was offered.

- The central theme of the Improvement Plan was the Voice of the Child, in order to achieve this, it was important to engage with some of the existing young people groups such as the Children in Care Council and Youth Voice. It was anticipated that over the next month arrangements would be made for the Strategic Director of Children's Services and members of her leadership team to meet with Youth Voice and also the Children in Care Council, to share and gain feedback around the OFSTED findings, the improvement plan and what they believed needed to happen.

The Interim Strategic Director, Children's Services gave a verbal feedback on the OFSTED Monitoring visit which took place on the 6 and 7th March 2019 as Appendix 1 contained confidential information it could not be disclosed to the public until after 29 March 2019:

- Inspectors stated that they did not find any cases prior to the visit of children not being safe that had been referred to the service which was a reassuring message.
- The inspectors commented on work they saw and the progress and impact already starting to show through discussion with staff and partners; staff were feeling the benefits of improvements taking place and confident that improvements were being made.
- improvements were required in response to homeless young people which the service was aware of.

Members made the following comments:

- Concerned that the service did not even have appropriate agency staff in place.
- What improvements had been made in respect of MASH and front door services?
- Was early help as effective as it was expected?
- Relieved that Social Workers caseloads were being reduced but have been made aware by social workers that this was not happening.
- Acknowledged the update and the work undertaken so far but why did the service need the back to basics drive?
- What was being undertaken in relation to paragraph 2.6 (7) where it stated that there were still changes around consistency and quality of practice for too many teams?
- What was the timescales in terms of seeing the improvements proposed in terms of consistency and quality of practice?
- was the ratio of staff to manager looked at? Were some teams too large?

- Were schools aware of the contribution they felt they were making, were schools aware of what the service was doing? Some schools were adding to the problems such as forging attendance and had a bigger agenda of being successful.
- Was the use of agency staff in the long term sustainable? what was the solution long term?
- Aware of social workers feeling confused by the changes being implemented; MASH and the work involved included having cases turned around in 24 hours which social workers were finding stressful.
- Any changes needed to happen with accuracy.
- How many people were encouraged to accept promotion to do a managers job without adequate training?
- What kind of vision did the service have on career progression? What support did the service have to manage capability processes?
- Lessons learnt from this situation would benefit other service areas.
- Respected the significant changes made in a complex system but worried about confused and anxious social workers; in a recent experience of working in a school that needed improvements, the staff were heavily involved in the improvements that needed to be made and were asked where they thought the school was at each of the standards; engaged staff as a whole in their critical thinking and being a partner in moving things forward which made staff feel they were part of the process rather than changes being forced upon them; everyone needed to be engaged; people wanted to do a job well and be recognised.
- Had managers been replaced for the three teams that had issues?
- How up to date with the needs and requirements of the service were people who would be recruiting for the new Strategic Director, Children's Services post?

In response to Members comments it was reported that:

- Not all agency staff were up to the standard required by the Authority; the Service would be in a better place once the pay had been increased and the improvements had been made in terms of recruiting and retaining social workers.
- Early Help gateway would have a single management structure; it was crucial that people were getting to the right place and have a single point of entry for everyone rather than several ways into the department; there had been some internal changes to the front door and MASH, including a social worker now being based at the Contact Centre that screened all calls coming in which was well received by the OFSTED inspector; application of threshold where it should be.

- Early Help offer was in its infancy and would assess which families needed assistance; Early Help was not at the stage it should be; working with partners to help make improvements in this area; when schools identified that a child had an extra need they should be referring cases to Early Help.
- Back to basics drive was needed as audits kept showing that basic things were not being undertaken; compliance with basics was not there; contribution of all should be following a certain practice and not undertaking bad habits and helping everyone to understand and getting basic things right.
- In relation to challenges around consistency and quality of practice – a vast amount of audits (1700) were undertaken last year; talks had been undertaken with Managers and staff where teams had issues; some managers were struggling to manage appropriately and training need was being identified for them; managers needed to be good to get good social work practice.
- There were three teams that had issues who also had a high level of demand and turnover of staff; needed a visible picture of every staff and team as well as audit findings and shift resources so the division of labour was more equitable; it would take about six weeks to see improvements in this area.
- The ratio of manager to staff was looked at.
- Schools were aware of what the service was doing; level of partnership engagement had been huge; the threshold event was well attended.
- The reality was that any improvements that were made would involve challenging conversations but needed to equip staff to ensure that some partners required to be more challenged.
- Uplifting social worker salaries would make recruiting more competitive with neighbouring authorities as well as good case loads, good managers, good working environment, how people are treated, how people behave, staff feeling respected and recognised would make retaining staff easier.
- It was important for people to be held to account, there needed to be consistent accountability for poor performance so people were aware of what was expected of standards.
- The 24 hour turn around relating to MASH was statutory; vast amount of local authorities were managing this without difficulty; Bradford only achieving 60 % of cases turned around in 24 hours which was low; part of the issue of not reaching a higher target was the front door, now that was being streamlined it would help to increase the turnaround of cases and reach a higher target.

- There was still staff who felt confused and upset at the amount of changes happening; staff had to be encouraged to be patient as improvements would take time; needed to keep talking to staff to reassure them that things would settle; things would begin to settle down in about three months; staff were continuing to be informed of the changes taking place to help them understand and listen to their suggestions.
- Changes had to be made quickly and demands on the staff were huge; will start to get better performance and give good service to families of Bradford; it was a big ask and no doubt staff felt anxious.
- Some staff had been promoted to a managerial position without appropriate training and then there were those managers who were doing a fantastic job; needed to determine who could step up with the right training and expectation and who was not in the right role; needed career pathways to be good social workers and practitioners but did not always make good managers or leaders.
- There was a difficulty in the organisation in dealing with capability; now that HR was outsourced the advice received was not always appropriate; there were very few staff in the capability process; if staff were dealt with properly and supported from the beginning then issues would not escalate; Bradford had good progression for social workers; good progression route was not being used effectively.
- Staff surveys had been undertaken based on how people work and supervision etc but not on what OFSTED had found, but getting staff involved in the changes would be a good idea; staff could see what was in the Improvement Plan and see where they felt they were; getting staff involved in this way was a good suggestion.
- New managers had not been identified yet, permanent managers would be supported; some agency managers were not suitable and would be replaced with other agency managers; vast majority of managers end up doing what was expected from them after support; there were only a small number of managers that were not appropriate.
- The interim Strategic Director, Children's Services was involved in the recruitment process; the recruitment process for the Strategic Director Children's Services was rigorous; confident that the right candidate would be appointed to the post.

Resolved-

That the contents of the report be noted and the Committee look forward to the next update and the outcome of the OFSTED Monitoring visit when it becomes available.

Action: Interim Strategic Director, Children's Services

66. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE OUTTURN REPORT

The Interim Strategic Director Children's Services submitted **Document "AE"** which provided a current position summary of key Children's Services performance indicators. The indicators in the report had been benchmarked against the England and Yorkshire & Humber averages.

It was reported that the report provided an assessment of key performance indicators across children's services. These indicators were reported annually and the report was based on the latest published information. A comparison against the England and Yorkshire & Humber averages had been made. There were a number of successes to highlight in the Department:

- In September, funding was confirmed for the 'Glasses for Classes' trial in 8 schools. This would be delivered in partnership with Varilux who would provide 2 pairs of glasses for all young people who needed them in trial schools.
- In August, 'Parents and Partners in Learning' was launched in three areas (Keighley, Eccleshill/Idle and Tong/Bowling). This aimed to improve parent's engagement with their education providers on their children's learning journey.
- For primary school pupils, the recent results showed that there was an increase in the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard across a range of subjects. However, the gap between Bradford and national performance had remained the same.
- GCSE results continued to improve with Attainment 8 narrowing the gap on the national average and Progress 8 showing positive progress and the second best performer in the family group of local authorities.
- Some of the schools and academy chains were performing at an exceptionally high level nationally. Dixon had performed particularly well at Progress 8 with Dixons Trinity the 3rd best nationally and Tauheed had the highest performing nationally. This should bode well for local schools they sponsored.
- There was also improvement at A-levels and more young people continued to participate in the Industrial centres of Excellence and Bradford Pathways.

Members commented on the following:

- The narrative relating to children's social care re-referral rates was misleading.
- Were unauthorised absence figures being recorded accurately?
- Was the authority in a stronger position to prevent, protect and ensure that there was the correct level of provision in place to address children Looked After who were away from placement without authorisation?

- In relation to progress 8; children used to go to local primary schools but since acadamisation that was not the case; what work had been undertaken on the impact of schools like Dixons which were in deprived wards but one of best schools in the country but the majority of children attending the schools were out of the area; how real were progress 8 scores when the information was distorted by intake not being from the local areas.
- Bradford had one of the best schools in a deprived area but it was disappointing that it was not benefitting the children in a ward that had the most deprived children in the country.

In response to Members questions it was reported that:

- Re-referrals were cases that came into the front door which went to Early Help and then come back; It was anticipated that there would be a continued upward trend in referrals which would include referrals over the coming months.
- Strategies in place to manage demand included a full review and re launch of the Threshold of Need and Response document and associated Consent policy; a focus on compliance with the multi-agency statutory guidance *Working Together* when assessing and responding to risk; strengthening of the management and oversight of the Front Door functions and embedding of the Prevention and Early help strategy and service offer.
- Unauthorised absence was a measure that was looked at rigidly, most authorities looked at persistent absences; it was up to schools how to determine the Local Authority guide on absence; most local authorities focussed on persistent absenteeism.
- The authority had a good handle on ensuring that there was the correct level of provision in place to address children Looked After that went missing.
- Progress 8 indicators looked at individual schools; Bradford did have a high number of schools that operated the fair banding system; officers did not analyse whether children attending schools were from the local area; meetings were taking place with Chief Executives of multi academy trusts to see what they were doing and learn from it as well as looking at some elements of how they delivered their curriculum so that good practice could be shared with other schools; needed to look at high prportion of single sex schools and schools not pulling children from the local area.
- One of the success of Dixons schools was the fact that they had smaller schools.

Resolved-

That a further progress report on key Children's Services Performance Indicators be presented to the Committee in 2019/20.

Action: Interim Strategic Director, Children's Services

67. PROGRESS OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

The Strategic Director, Children's Services submitted **Document "AF"** which provided an update on the progress and development of the Fostering Service.

It was reported The Ofsted Inspection of the Local Authority Children's Services in September 2018, recommended 10 areas requiring improvement of which there were the following key areas in relation to Fostering Service activity were specifically identified:

- Sufficiency of local placements to meet the needs of children in our care.
- Completion of mandatory training for all foster carers.

Members were informed that the Fostering Service faced continuous challenges in identifying and resourcing good quality foster homes for children and young people becoming cared for by the local authority. However, this was not just a local issue unique to Bradford but reflected the position nationally, not least because most children looked after were accommodated in foster homes.

It was reported that in relation to recruitment and assessment the service was on track to increase the number of enquiries from 2017-18 (432 enquiries) by 7%. This was over twice the 3% national rise in the number of enquiries about fostering.

Members were informed that the national conversion rate for enquiry to mainstream / short break foster carer approvals was 4.19% (source DfE 2019) of 117,335 enquiries to 4920 'stranger' fostering household approvals. Bradford Fostering Service projected conversion rate for 2018-2019 was 5.2% - 25 mainstream / short break foster carer approvals were projected by 31 March 2019.

It was reported that:

- A more streamlined service for recruiting foster carers had been created with the addition of a temporary post of Recruitment and Marketing Manager supported by a Community Resource Worker.
- The time taken to recruiting foster carers had reduced from 20 weeks to 16; most authorities completed the assessment process in 16 weeks.
- The service was looking into speeding up statutory checks.
- The service was looking at reducing the length of time taken to complete an assessment.
- Needed a Fostering Carers charter.
- Service needed to become more foster carer friendly.

It was reported that as part of the Journey to Excellence and the New Model of Care for Children Looked After in Bradford, the service had worked hard to train, develop and support PACE practitioners in order to help embed the Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy (PACE approach). PACE was a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aimed to make the child feel safe to enable a trusting relationship to develop. The priority group for this training was children's residential managers and workers and at least one foster carer in each household. It was estimated this to be approximately 800 people that needed the course which was delivered half a day a week over a 6 week period.

The progress made in training foster carers was detailed in section 2.16 (2) of the report.

It was reported that as part of the successful innovation bid by Children's Services, the fostering service was one year in to supporting 2 Mockingbird hubs since February 2018. The model had proven to achieve greater resilience in placements and reduced the number of children and young people experiencing an unplanned ending in their foster home placement. The model increased support to carers and was a whole family approach with the carer's birth children all being involved too.

It was emphasised that Elected members support and promote the importance of fostering in their wards and opportunities for children who were looked after and their carers to access local facilities.

Members commented on the following:

- What was the reason for the difference in the number of people that enquire into fostering to the number of people that actually applied?
- Were the number of enquiries about fostering similar to the national average?
- How was the Muslim Fostering Network (Mercy Mission) working?
- Aware of situations where potential foster carers did not meet the authorities assessments but had gone to an independent fostering agency and become foster carers with them; was there a trend that people not passing the authorities fostering assessment were getting through private fostering agencies?
- Which community did the authority need more foster carers from?
- Officers should look into the catholic churches as a way of helping to increase more foster carers from certain communities; churches would want to be part of the good work being undertaken.

In response to Members questions it was reported that:

- Some foster care applications were lost to independent fostering agencies who offered a higher rate of pay.
- The authority had local children who needed to be fostered by local foster parents.
- The support offered to foster carers by the authority included social workers; foster carers felt that the authority offered good support but the fees offered by independent fostering agencies was a challenge; there was not a huge number of people going to independent fostering agencies.
- The conversion rate from potential foster carers enquiring to applying had improved; the reasons for potential foster carers who attend information sessions but not move to initial home visit included wanting adoption rather than fostering, language barriers, expressing an interest but not able to foster at the current time, solely interested for financial reasons, not having a spare room to foster.
- The service was looking to increase the number of fostering enquiries; 44 people were in the assessment process at the current time; the service was looking to speed the process up to make it quick and efficient and improve the conversion rate.
- The Muslim Fostering Network was a Bradford based organisation with huge national recognition; it had a good network in the community and could attract potential foster carers; it had cutting edge technology system to target the right people; the organisation was being contracted out to see if they could help the authority to get more foster carers from the community, the authority was well represented with foster carers from the South Asian Community.
- The fostering assessment undertaken by the authority was the same as the assessments used by independent fostering agencies; some independent fostering agencies did not apply the regulations rigorously; records of those foster care applicants rejected by the Council could be cross referenced with appointments to independent fostering agencies.
- The authority needed more foster carers from the Eastern European Community as there were a number of children in care from that Community.
- Officers were looking at young people participating in the development of the service and having their views on it was important.
- Exit interviews were offered to foster carers as it was crucial to receive feedback as to why they were leaving.

Resolved-

- (1) That the significant developments in the Fostering Service be noted and welcomed.**
- (2) That the Committee requests that officers maintain records of those foster care applicants rejected by the Council, to cross reference with appointments to Independent Fostering Agencies, with a view to expressing the Committee's concerns to OFSTED if necessary.**

Action: Strategic Director, Children's Services

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