

Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 10 April 2019 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 4.35 pm
Concluded 6.55 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Arshad Hussain S Khan Mullaney Peart	Gibbons M Pollard	Ward

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Joyce Simpson

Church Representative (CE)

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Tom Bright

Teachers Secondary School
Representative

Observer: Councillor Farley

Apologies: Councillor Sinead Engel, Sidiq Ali, Claire Parr, Kerr Kennedy and Shain Wells

Councillor Gibbons in the Chair

68. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

- (1) Councillor Peart disclosed an interest as she was taking part in the Labour group working party on SEND and Children's Services improvements.
- (2) Councillor Ward disclosed an interest in the item relating to the district Pupil Referral Unit (Minute 74) as he was a member of the Central PRU Management Committee.

ACTION: City Solicitor

69. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

70. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

71. SCHOOL EXPANSION PROGRAMME, EDUCATION CAPITAL FUNDING, AND ACADEMY CONVERSIONS

The report of the Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "AH"**) updated the Committee on a number of key areas related to school organisation in the Bradford District.

Members were provided with the following updated information on the Capital allocation from the Department for Education (DfE):

School Condition Allocation - £3,004,603.13 with a further £1,508,523 for Voluntary Aided (VA) Schools

Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) - £744,382 with a further £259,374 for Voluntary Aided (VA) Schools

It was noted that 95 schools had converted to academies and that 6 were in the process of conversion, most of which would complete their conversion in June or July 2019. Conversions to academies had slowed down.

The following comments and questions were made by members of the Committee and responses given:

- What was the impact of the local authority having less influence on where schools were located? Academies were involved closely when pupil place planning was undertaken. The level of consultation on free schools had improved since they were first introduced.
- Schools were being built in the city centre where children did not live, was there a transport plan in place? Sites were investigated and their feasibility would take account of accommodation and transport, particularly if there was a need to ease pressure on places.
- Ward members needed information on school places in their area. It was agreed to provide this information.
- How much of the £3.6m allocated to increase the Planned Admission number at Low Ash Primary school had been spent before the decision was halted? £50,000 had been spent on architects and structural engineers fees but this would not be lost, as the scheme had been deferred and would be implemented at a future date. The scheme would not have to go back to planning unless there was a material change to it. At the time that deferring the scheme was considered, there were no more applications for places than the previous year. There was no indication that parental preference this year would exceed previous years, although it was noted that primary offer day was 16 April 2019.
- A member referred to instances where a pupil did not get a place at their local school and could not afford to travel to the allocated school. In response it was noted that the Local Authority had to have arrangements regarding assistance with transport.
- A member referred to the reduction in primary school numbers and asked

about predicted primary school numbers in future years. It was noted that the reduction was a national one, as the birth rate had plateaued and that Bradford's figures reflected those nationally. The number of pupils attending schools outside the District and vice versa had remained the same as in previous years.

- How significant was the issue of air pollution and the effect on health in determining the location of city centre sites of new schools and what mitigation was put in place? Environmental Health was a statutory consultee in the planning process, they would raise issues and suggest mitigation regarding design and possible layout of buildings.
- If a city centre school was built where children did not live then journey times would increase, was it possible to model this? If a parent chose a school that was not the local school they were not eligible for assistance with travel, if the local school was not available and a pupil had to travel over 3 miles the Local Authority had to provide assistance.
- A member gave an example of a child that attended a local school then moved house and had to travel to school and asked whether they would qualify for assistance with travel. In response it was noted that the School Transport Team used a model to calculate distance of travel. Members requested that they be provided with this model.
- Schools should be built where children live rather than requiring children to travel to school. When a Local Authority identified a lack of school places the places were provided using Local authority capital. Free schools capital funding was provided through the DfE. The Local authority had to take account of where free schools were built.
- Who identified the availability of land for schools? Children's Services retained areas of land for future use and the Department of Regeneration worked on land availability in the District.

Resolved -

- (1) That Document "AH" be noted.**
- (2) That members of the Committee be provided with the model used to calculate assistance with travel from home to school.**

ACTION: Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services

72. LOCAL CULTURAL EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

The report of the Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "AI"**) provided an overview of the work of the Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP), its governance, membership and ambitions in developing a cultural offer for our young people in the District.

The following comments and questions were made by members of the Committee and responses given:

- A member was concerned that schools were facing funding cuts and were considering reducing their week to 4 1/2 days. She asked whether schools would have to buy in LCEP services. In response it was noted that the

Partnership would offer the 25 x 25 framework for schools to use and that they would not have to buy in. The emphasis would be identifying what was in the local area and what could be accessed.

- Bradford Festival was not included in the Partnership. In response it was noted that Bradford Festival was involved with LCEP the previous year and undertook a large consultation with young people as part of the Bradford Festival.
- Issues of diversity could be addressed and communities brought together through arts , how had the LCEP engaged with communities? A lot of the organisations involved with LCEP had this as a focus. The issue of contact with Faith groups would be taken back to the next meeting of the Steering Group.
- When would schools be able to become involved with LCEP? A pilot would be introduced in some schools in July 2019 then it would be launched in all schools in October 2019.
- A member asked about funding required to deliver the LCEP. It was noted that it did not fall with the Local Authority to provide funding. The bridging organisation was looking at sustainability of funding streams.
- How were other authorities progressing that had started the process before Bradford? Kirklees was ahead of Bradford in establishing a LCEP but the impact had not yet been evaluated.
- It was stressed that there were implications for all Ward Councillors as they knew local groups and schools in their Ward and could contribute if they were involved. Was this going to be reported to Committees? The work of LCEP would be brought to Area Committees at the same time as the Education Covenant.
- How had the membership of the LCEP Partnership been arrived at? Volunteers were requested from the original Steering Group which was too big. Names were put forward based on skill set and those who could get things done.
- How would the LCEP engage with people with learning difficulties? The age range of 25 was so that young people with additional needs would be included.
- It was suggested that contact be made with Bradford Talking Media.
- Did the membership of the Steering Group include representatives of disabled persons groups? It was agreed to take back to the Steering Group how the membership might be widened.

Resolved -

- (1) That the progress of the work of the Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP) be acknowledged.**
- (2) That members of the Committee be requested to promote the work of the LCEP through their networks.**
- (3) That members acknowledge the actions proposed in the action plan.**

ACTION: Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services

73. DISTRICT PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT

District PRU was first established as a virtual school in 2008 and it opened on a fixed site at Anerley Street in September 2014. It was inspected in March 2017 and judged to be Inadequate and placed into Special Measures. The report of the Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "AJ"**) outlined the progress made since the previous report to the Committee in November 2018.

It was noted that the monitoring visit in December 2018 had been positive. The Deputy Director advised Members that since the report had been written, Exceed Multi Agency Trust (MAT) had undertaken its due diligence process as part of the academisation procedure of District PRU and had indicated that it was to withdraw as its sponsor. The District PRU would remain as Local Authority maintained provision with the same level of support on its journey out of special measures. It would be for the Regional Schools Commissioner to decide if she wanted to try to secure another sponsor. It was noted that Exceed MAT had not published the results of their due diligence exercise.

A member of the Committee who was a member of the Central PRU Management Committee was concerned that he was not aware of the Exceed MAT decision. Having visited the District PRU he had been impressed with the changes that had been made.

The Deputy Director noted that the High Needs Block was no longer able to support the PRU. She added that schools would work collaboratively on a delivery model for pupils not attending their school, but other provision. Schools would have to look at how they wanted to go forward with a collaborative approach to find a funding model.

A member noted that there were 80 places in the PRU but only 59 on roll and questioned whether the stability of funding could have been a reason why Exceed MAT had withdrawn as sponsor. The Deputy Director responded that the Local Authority had been open with Exceed MAT and they agreed that the model of delivery was appropriate.

A member referred to the nationally issue of street crime and the comments that provision for young people in PRUs was not sufficient. Given that the District PRU had been judged as inadequate she asked how Bradford's PRU provision was viewed at present. The Deputy Director responded that every child was entitled to full time education and that the authority was working towards increasing the number of hours provided. She added that part time provision should be a short term, time limited process. The provision at the District PRU was on a journey out of special measures and was on a path to being judged as good. There was a keenness to build on Local Authority support to improve provision going forward.

A member asked if there was any perceived link between gang culture and PRU provision in Bradford. In response the Deputy Director noted that there was a surplus of PRU places in Bradford, so there was no evident correlation with gun crime or gang culture.

A member gave examples of young people who “fell through the net” and was concerned that provision was not holistic. The Deputy Director responded that a wider discussion was needed on the number of children moving around different provision and how to try to ensure that this did not happen. Other options needed to be considered and it was noted that an Advisory Service was available to all schools to give advice on implementing strategies in school. The Strategic Director added that measures were being taken to strengthen early help and how the authority worked with families to draw up a single plan round a family, including specialist services that were needed to catch young people before they were tempted to gun and knife crime.

A member stressed the importance of training and development of staff in mainstream schools to support pupils when they returned from the PRU or before they were excluded. The Deputy Director reported that work was being undertaken to identify leaders of the future from mainstream schools and that they spent a significant amount of time in the PRU as part of their personal development.

Resolved –

That the Committee be updated on the decision of the Regional Schools Commissioner regarding whether the District Pupil Referral Unit continues along the path of academisation including any decision by Exceed Academies Trust.

ACTION: Interim Strategic Director Children’s Services

74. PROGRESS UPDATE FOLLOWING THE OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILAC) - IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The report of the Interim Strategic Director of Children’s Services (**Document “AG”**) provided the Committee with a progress update in respect of improvements identified within the Ofsted Improvement Plan, namely:

Improving the quality of social work practice across the service areas
(Theme 1 being Front Door)

Members were advised that the next monitoring visit would take place on 11 and 12 June and would focus on Children in Need and children subject to Child Protection Plans.

The Chair expressed his disappointment that basic procedures and principles in the service had been allowed to slip. The Interim Strategic Director commented that with a high turnover of staff, the basics tended to be carried out less well. She added that starting with the basics should make it easier to get everything else right. She stressed that some staff were doing the basics well and they would be used as role models.

The Interim Assistant Director referred to the introduction of team health checks

that would assist managers in recognising what performance looked like currently and how to evidence and monitor performance. She added that in each team every case file would be monitored through team health checks.

In response to a member question she confirmed that, of the case files monitored 50% required improvement, 30% required small adjustments and 20% required additional work. The goal was that at least 80% of files would be compliant

The Interim Strategic Director noted that some homeless young people had not been given the option to become looked after and that this had now been made explicit to all workers and that the team had been moved to the front door and MASH to ensure a consistent approach. All accommodation options were being reviewed for this group to ensure a sufficiency of supply and range of accommodation.

A member asked whether monitoring would improve responses to requests for social workers to work with schools. The Interim Assistant Director stressed that the authority wanted to hear from all partners such as schools, health, voluntary sector and probation to identify what it was getting right and what needed improvement.

A member asked about the number of agency staff, team morale and recording using electronic templates. The Interim Assistant Director responded that 25% - 30% of the workforce were agency staff. She added that the Back to Basics training would be part of the induction training for all staff. The electronic system of templates were to be streamlined. The morale of social workers was mixed, it had improved in the front door and MASH but there were still social workers with caseloads that were not as they should be. She added that less than 7 staff in the Children and Families Team had over 25 cases.

The Chair acknowledged the work of the Interim Strategic Director and Interim Assistant Director and their teams in moving the service in the right direction. The Interim Strategic Director recognised the team effort and support from colleagues, staff and members in challenging, scrutinising and investing in the service.

In response to a member question about the timescale for recruiting permanent staff the Interim Assistant Director stressed that the authority was competing with other authorities and that a recruiting campaign was needed to employ staff who were already social workers and introduce peer uplifts.

Resolved -

That the contents of Document “AG” be noted.

ACTOIN: Interim Strategic Director Children’s Services

75. CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chair thanked Councillor Peart, who was not seeking re-election, for her work on the Committee and wished her well for the future.

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