

Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 5 August 2020 in Virtual remote meeting

Commenced 3.10 pm
Concluded 6.17 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT AND INDEPENDENT GROUP	BRADFORD INDEPENDENT GROUP
Humphreys Arshad Hussain S Khan Mir	Gibbons Pollard	Ward	Sajawal

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Joyce Simpson
Fauzia Raza

Church Representative (CE)
Parent

Observers: Councillor Farley Children and Families Portfolio Holder

Apologies: Councillor Beverley Mullaney and Kathrine Haskett Co-opted Member

Councillor Gibbons in the Chair

53. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

54. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals submitted to review restricted documents.

55. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals to the Committee.

56. PROGRESS UPDATE FOLLOWING OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL

AUTHORITIES CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILACS)

The Strategic Director Children's Services presented a report (**Document "V"**) that provided the Committee with a progress update in respect of improvements identified within the Ofsted Improvement Plan, namely the Ofsted October 2019 and February 2020 monitoring visit outcomes, progress and continued challenge and the Improvement Programme update.

The Independent Chair of the Improvement Board attended the meeting and provided members with an update and referred to the circumstances during the Covid 19 restrictions. He noted that the Social Care and safeguarding partnership had worked very well and partners had been brought closer to one another especially in Bradford. He added that there had been a better relationship with schools, with more focus on vulnerable children and safeguarding. A specific Covid team had been established for vulnerable children already known to the authorities and those that were not. He explained that the demand data at the front door had improved. The number of referrals with no action or rejected as there was no consent were now much lower. Twelve early intervention Co-ordinates had been recruited, 3 to work in each of the 4 localities. He highlighted that with regard to timeliness ie meeting statutory timescales in which social workers and managers have to respond to specific incidents, Bradford was as good if not better than other authorities with nearly all timescales being 80-92% met across all factors which was very good. He added that the peer review of the front door had identified some positives and some recommendations for action which the Deputy Director Social Care was addressing. He stressed the urgent need to focus on recruitment and retention of social workers and noted that Bradford still had 104 agency social workers and stressed that supervision was better done by permanent staff. He advised members that electronic recording of supervision statistics and the electronic recording of audit were being worked on. He added that each month every council must audit a number of cases and that at present Bradford's methodology and auditing needed improvement. A new e-learning platform had been procured which was not yet operational. Social workers had commented that the cameras on their lap tops had been disabled and that it was important to have a camera facility to conduct case conferences. He concluded that the DfE review and consultation would result in a formal letter and he suggested that the Committee receive a copy of the letter.

The Chair expressed concern about the recruitment and retention of social workers and expressed the view that money should be spent on employing permanent, not agency staff.

The Strategic Director of Children's Services acknowledged the need to recruit more social workers and noted that recruiting level 3 social workers, those with a minimum of 2 years post qualification experience, was particularly challenging with regard to issues of remuneration packages and the stability of workloads and that a package was being developed for September. He added that there had been a lot of success in recruiting Heads of Service, Team Leaders, newly qualified social workers and unqualified Community Resource Workers. He commented on the quality of provision and stressed that a number of the agency staff had been with Bradford a long time and that no staff had been accepted that could not meet the required standards. He hoped that the situation would

improve in the autumn.

The Chair commented that nearly 2 years had elapsed since the Ofsted inspection and asked how close Bradford was to being assessed as satisfactory.

The Strategic Director responded that following the Ofsted judgement there was a period in which foundations towards good social work were not put in place. He added that time had been spent recruiting and when he came into post in June 2019 he estimated that it would be a 3 year project to deal with an authority the size of Bradford with the issues identified. He was pleased to note that the Covid 19 pandemic had not stopped the improvement and that planning was underway for the next phase. He noted that Ofsted inspections would not restart until April 2021 and that there was time to lift the quality of the service further. He stressed that fundamental issues such as IT and practice standards had to be unpicked which were all significant areas. He stressed that Ofsted and the DfE were confident that the authority knew where to had to concentrate it's work. He added that the trajectory was good and the goal was to come out of the inadequate judgement by April 2021.

The Chair asked whether we had learned form other authorities. The Strategic Director responded that no two authorities were the same but that the peer review of the front door had helped to identify strengths and areas that needed improvement. He stressed that the size and complexity of the issues in Bradford was so ingrained that improvement was not something that could be done quickly.

A member commented that prior to the inspection this Committee was being told that children's social Care was good when it was now evident that it was poor. He referred to the fact that there were 140 agency staff and high sickness levels which would discourage anyone looking to work for Bradford. He asked what was being done to support staff who were not coping mentally or emotionally. Based on previous experience he was sceptical when told that things were improving and viewed 3 years as optimistic when the basics were only now being addressed.

The Strategic Director accepted that prior to the Ofsted inspection the Committee was told that the service was good and it was not. He was of the opinion that the Ofsted judgement was correct and had identified inadequate service across the board. He added that when an authority was judged inadequate a large number of social workers would leave and that coupled with a national shortage of level 3 social workers posed a real challenge. He challenged the assertion that progress was not being made and referred to the stocktake letter, the Ofsted letter and the peer review of the front door and noted the improvement. He stressed that 20 months on, progress had been made and that it would continue. Practice standards were now clear and robust and high standards had been set and staff now know what is expected of them.

The Independent Chair of the Improvement Board noted that in receiving the Vital Signs report the Committee did not have to rely on being informed of issues of concern by officers as had previously been the case. He also pointed out that additional issues had continued to be identified after those highlighted in the Ofsted inspection report. He added that managers and front line staff had felt engaged in re-writing practice standards and that the Practice Supervisor role had been re established which would make a significant difference in supporting and

recruiting staff. He expressed confidence that September to December could see the biggest recruitment since the Ofsted inspection.

In response to a member question the Strategic Director assured members that the issue of some partners not engaging in child protection meetings had been raised through the safeguarding partnership and that it had improved and was not now an issue but that attendance would be monitored.

A member highlighted that there had been an additional 114 cases in June compared to May but only additional 3 case holders. In response the Strategic Director reported that the average caseloads had remained at 20 and that anyone with caseloads over 25 were identified weekly. It was also noted that the information related to the monitoring visit in October 2019 and referred to the period 6 months before that. It was noted that following close monitoring the position had improved.

A member noted that 21% of looked after children were in out of area placements and asked what measures were being taken to increase resources in the district such as Foster Carers. The Strategic Director confirmed that work was required in the area of children placed with non Bradford carers or in non Bradford homes. He added that residential homes were with good or outstanding with reduced capacity due to Covid 19. Additional funding had been approved for Residential Services to open another home. A permanence tracker had been developed to monitor every child in care so that children did not stay in placements longer than necessary.

A member asked whether there was provision if looked after children living with connected carers had to be moved. The Strategic Director responded that stressed the need to ensure that the connected carer met the child's needs and that currently there were too many and for too long. The introduction of a permanence tracker should reduce this drift and delay. The issue of those with Special Guardianship orders being worse off financially had been addressed.

In response to a member question about preparedness for looked after children to return to school in September the Deputy Director Education advised that all schools had been asked to update their risk assessment and identify looked after children as a key vulnerable group. She added that if there were a localised more restrictive lockdown she would advocate that schools remain open. She added that DfE guidance provided for a local lockdown and how schools would manage remotely and schools had been asked to consider and plan for this scenario. She was confident that schools were well placed should there be another lock down in September and added that schools remote working plans would be scrutinised by Ofsted. She stressed that the role of the virtual school was vital in supporting schools to engage with looked after children. The Chair requested a report for the next meeting on plans in place for schools to open in September.

In noting the percentages of managers setting performance goals in Education and Learning and Performance commissioning and Partnerships the Strategic Director accepted that although they had improved since the previous month they did present a particular challenge.

In response to a member question regarding life story work it was noted that

guidance was being prepared for staff on what a life story should look like.

In response to a member question regarding support for children with special educational needs it was reported that children with a full EHCP were encouraged to access school physically as they needed more guided learning and parents did not have the necessary specialist teaching input. However staying at home was more appropriate for those children with clinical vulnerability. Schools would discuss with parents how best to support individual children.

Resolved –

- (1) That a more detailed report be presented to the Committee that sets out areas that still require improvement and action taken to address them and includes the Ofsted visit letters of October 2019 and February 2020.**
- (2) That a report be presented to the Committee in September setting out in detail the contingency plans in place to allow education to take place whether or not there is local a lockdown across the District due to Covid 19.**

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children’s Services

57. CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH - UPDATE

The Strategic Director Children’s Services presented a report (**Document “W”**) that provided an update on progress to improve mental health support for children and young people.

The following questions were asked by members and answers provided:

- What were the outcomes from the Action Plan?
 - 4 themes were identified that would be ratified by Leadership Team in the next 2 weeks.
- What is the timescale from assessment to treatment?
 - 12 months for children from Keighley and 16 months for children from Bradford, each child on the waiting list had been written to offering them 6 sessions of counselling while they were on the waiting list.
- Spend per head at £48 per child was £11 below the national average despite an increase in 2017/18 which suggested an issue of local priorities rather than austerity.
 - This highlights that Bradford is not spending the right amount. The Health and Wellbeing Board has accepted this and set CAMHS as a priority that investment rises with need.
- How do you triage cases?
 - Previously the Care Trust did not differentiate between urgent and non urgent cases, now each case receives a response within 5 days.
- Why is the waiting time so long and what support is given to children and parents in the interim?

- There was a lack of investment in early intervention. Work was being undertaken with the Early Help Team to provide peer support networks and sign post self support and offering 6 sessions of counselling for all those on the waiting list.
- Why was counselling support not being accepted?
- A very small number have not accepted and the authority were working with them.
- Why are waiting times different in Keighley and Bradford?
- They are two different bases in the same service and this was being looked into
- What is done to remind people of appointments as the percentage of missed and cancelled appointments was of concern?
- The Care Trust had been asked to implement sending text reminders.
- The impact of Covid 19 had increased fragility in families and increase pressure on a fragile system. What is the timeline to achieve the model of support outlined in paragraph 4 page 80 of Document “W”
- A grief and loss pathway had been established with a wide range of providers and went live in July. Work was being undertaken with Public Health and £600,00 had been identified to work on financial support and welfare advice, wellbeing, mental health support, suicide prevention support, signposting and guidance, providing services via Freephone and befriending and carer support.
- What training had been provided for staff in schools?
- Training on early signs of mental health and first aid training would be in place in September.
- Concern was expressed about the issues regarding the fitness for purpose of SystemOne and members expressed the need to know how long before it would be working?
- It was noted that the issuers with SystemOne covered a wide range of services as well as mental health.
- Why were the number of referrals in Bradford lower than the national average, given the demographics of the District?
- Traditionally referrals would be made by school nurses and there were less school nurses. It was clear that children and young people were not being reached when they needed support.
- Could anything be done to increase the number of schools engaging with and identifying mental health champions from 50%?
- The number of schools had increased to 75% and work was in progress to increase this further.

Resolved –

That a progress report be presented to the Committee at the earliest opportunity that includes the Action Plan developed by the Children and Young People’s Mental Health Sub-group and issues of concern raised regarding System One.

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children’s Services

58. SCHOOL ORGANISATION, INCLUDING; SCHOOL EXPANSION PROGRAMME, EDUCATION CAPITAL FUNDING, AND ACADEMY CONVERSIONS

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

A member questioned the usefulness of the information in the School Condition Allocation in table 2 as it had to be read in conjunction with the number of schools that had converted to academies. The Deputy Director Education maintained that it was important to see what funding was received and how it was used and that problems were identified in good time. It was agreed that in future members be provided with a capital breakdown to see what funding was received and what it was spent on and identify if there was a significant mismatch. It was agreed that members be provided with this information as soon as possible.

In response to a member question it was agreed to provide members with an analysis of the impact of academisation on the ethnic mix of schools.

Resolved –

That a report be presented to the Committee in 12 months, which also includes a breakdown of capital and ethnic mix of schools.

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children's Services

59. CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

Resolved –

That the work programme be kept under review.

ACTION: Overview & 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