

Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 2 September 2020

Commenced 3.10 pm
Concluded 6.17 pm

Present – Councillors

| LABOUR | CONSERVATIVE | LIBERAL DEMOCRAT AND INDEPENDENT GROUP |
|---------------------------|--------------------|--|
| S Khan Mir Mullaney | Gibbons Pollard | Ward |

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

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|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Claire Parr | Church Representative (RC) |
| Joyce Simpson | Church Representative (CE) |
| Katherine Haskett | Parent |
| Fauzia Raza | Parent |

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

| | |
|------------|--|
| Tom Bright | Teachers Secondary School Representative |
|------------|--|

Apologies: Councillors Humphreys, Arshad Hussain and Sajawal

Councillor Gibbons in the Chair

60. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

61. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals submitted to review restricted documents.

62. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

CORPORATE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 23 July 2020

Called in decision QTR. 1 FINANCE POSITION STATEMENT FOR 2020-21

(EXECUTIVE DOCUMENT "BT")

- (1) The Committee releases the decision for implementation.
- (2) This Committee requests that a further report be presented to in three months which specifically focuses on the key outcomes delivered from the Impower Contract.
- (3) **This Committee requests that the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee considers aspects of the Impower Contract that relate specifically to Children's Services.**
- (4) This Committee requests that the Health & Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee considers aspects of the Impower Contract that relate specifically to Health and Well Being.

Resolved –

That the referral be noted.

63. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The purpose of the report of the Director of Childrens Services (**Document "Z"**) was to provide members of the Committee with information following the Department for Education (DfE) six month monitoring visit 28th July 2020 and report the publication of the revised Children's Services Improvement Plan

The DfE monitoring visit and the revised plan provide supplementary information which support the progress and areas of improvement detailed in the recent Overview and Scrutiny Committee 5th August 2020 on Children's Services improvement journey.

The following questions were asked by members and answers given:

- What has been done to address the poor level of sickness?
 - Sickness was being tracked more formally, including recording absence which was not always recorded previously. A specialist HR adviser had been brought in to deal with the issue of sickness.
- How up to date is the information regarding the high level of agency social workers and that there are 44 vacancies at level 2 and 3?
 - These figures were for June/July. Clarification was sought on the accuracy of the figure and whether it was 44 posts or 44%. The HR advisor was looking at how to address this through the remuneration package and how to accelerate recruitment of permanent social workers. The ability to recruit experienced social workers continued to be a challenge and a range of strategies were being developed to address this.
- What are the proposals for a retention strategy?
 - Bradford is good at recruiting newly qualified social workers but the analysis shows that they leave after 2 years. The reasons are partly financial but also relate to supervision. Stable management, training opportunities and manageable caseloads were being looked at as part of the recruitment and retention strategy. The loss of the Practice Supervisor

role had a significant impact and since the role had been reinstated staff had indicated their desire to come back to Bradford.

- What services are children receiving?
 - Services had improved in the last year. Children continue to be seen, assessments are undertaken and interventions put in place in cases of abuse and neglect. The vital signs report showed improved and sustained compliance across all Key Performance Indicators (KPI's). External sources had recognised green shoots of improvement. 31 cases were looked at to assess if safe decisions were being made and they were found to be proportional and safe.
- What engagement are you having with children?
 - The Children in Care Council was being re-established which it was anticipated would be in place by Christmas and this should help test the impact of the improvement journey. Part of the engagement with children would be learning lessons from the advocacy service.
- Regarding the Lived Experience of children and young people, what % of cases would be satisfactory to Ofsted in which the child's voice was evident?
 - There is no benchmark, Ofsted would like to see it significantly higher although the current 44% is higher than it was.
- Regarding timeliness of child protection visits, what steps were taken to contact families that moved out of the District?
 - There is a statutory requirement to notify even if the move is temporary. Moves abroad are followed up through international channels.
- What progress has been made regarding the response to children and young people that present with the affects of domestic abuse?
 - The front door health check in July identified that triaging was appropriate in cases of domestic abuse. Additional funding had recently been identified for domestic abuse services in response to Covid 19.
- The current improvement plan is based on the plan implemented after the Ofsted inspection, have the plans been revised and refreshed? The Interim Strategic Director arrested the decline in the service and provided a foundation on which to build, can this work be tracked?
- What are the reasons for the high sickness levels among staff?
 - The pandemic has had an impact with people having Covid 19 and being off sick. Members would be provided with a breakdown.
- What progress has been made in implementing mandatory training for foster carers?
 - Foster carer training has been re-written and has stated to be delivered on line due to Covid 19. This will be included in the improvement plan.
- Is liaison with CCG's still an issue regarding delays in delivering an integrated whole family approach and mixed economy service offer for early childhood and family outcomes?
 - During the pandemic there has been constructive discussion with the CCG's to challenge performance issues. This has not been resolved fully but there is a willingness for organisations to work in different ways to make improvements.

Resolved -

That when the Improvement Plan is next considered by the Committee it contains:

- (a) detailed information on domestic abuse services in relation to Children's Services and**
- (b) the reasons for and actions being taken to reduce sickness absence in Children's Social Care.**

ACTION: Strategic Director Children's Services

64. YOUNG CARERS

The report of the Strategic Director of children's Services (**Document "AA"**) provided a requested update on the progress being made against the Key Performance Indicators and the new model for providing support to young people in the Bradford District who are known as Young Carers.

The Young Carers Service was a commissioned service which met the Council's statutory duty to provide an assessment for Young Carers, as well as providing other resources following assessment.

The Carers Resource was successful in gaining the new tender from 1st April 2019

Previous reports had been presented; the last one was on 9th October 2019 and should have been presented on 12th April 2020 but cancelled due to Covid 19. The impact on the service provision because of Covid 19 was noted.

It was noted that of the target of 200 professionals undertaking an e-learning package only 12 had undertaken it. A number of pledges had been made at a hidden carers event in January 2020 to undertake the training, however they were not honoured due to Covid 19. The Children's Society had been asked to re-launch the pledges when schools re-opened in September. Carers resource had worked with every school in the district. An issue log of interactions with schools could be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

It was reported that funding had been identified to support young carers who find it difficult to return to school when they open following Covid 19 restrictions. It was stressed that young people needed to be in school for their own wellbeing and to provide peer group support and respite from caring duties.

In response to a number of questions it was agreed that schools would be asked to keep an issue log of work with schools to develop and maintain Young Carers Champions; referrals to Barnardo's are passed on to Carers Resource; schools signpost young carers to other responsible agencies such as Early Help or the front door.

It was noted that Carers Resource had 2 workers who checked with schools that young carers had attended school and identified how they could be supported to get back to school. However it was noted that young carers were not recorded in the numbers of children who had attended school during Covid 19 restrictions.

Resolved –

- (1) That an Annual Report on Young Carers be presented to the Committee in June 2021, which would include the full year activity.**
- (2) That an Interim report be presented to the Committee in January 2021, which includes:**
 - (a) The success rate in getting Young Carers back to school following the Covid restrictions;**
 - (b) The success of the re-launch of the E-learning system;**
 - (c) The numbers of children who have become Young Carers as a result of COVID19 and how they are being supported.**

ACTION: Strategic Director Children's Services

65. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY REFORMS

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "AB"**) provided an update on the developments and progress in respect of the delivery of the SEND Reforms. It updated the impact of the work undertaken, specifically focusing on areas of risk and the approaches being used to address them through an updated SEND Action Plan.

It was noted that there had been a pause on SEND inspections and that visits to councils would be undertaken to see how they were performing on delivering the reforms, that would result in a published letter. This did not replace the inspection cycle and it was anticipated that inspections would resume in January or April 2021. It was reported that by 31 March 2020 the backlog of 600 cases had been cleared, the compliance rate had increased to 70-90% and the team was working effectively. The national compliance rate was 60% and the district's cumulative compliance rate was 41.7% which was a significant improvement.

The following questions were asked and answers given:

- Why are the EHCP's not of the quality required?
 - The key priority had been to focus on the 20 week time frame but the quality had not deteriorated. Checks and balances have been built in to allow quality to improve and quality had increased over the previous 12 months as compliance increased. It had been necessary to focus on time lines in order to improve quality.
- Would advice be given following the interim visit on how to make improvements? Would it be reasonable to expect compliance to reach the national average of 60% by December 2020?
 - Everything will be helpful in providing a stocktake. There have been significant improvements month by month and it was hoped that the authority would be nearer national figure by December 2020.
- What areas of improvement are anticipated following the SEND inspection?
 - The inspection will look not only at EHCP's but also Autism waiting lists,

how parents feel and accessing respite care. Significant known challenges are that waiting lists for Autism are too long which is recognised by DfE, NHS England and the CCG's; mental health assessments for children and young people are an area of concern with challenges around joint commissioning. Significant progress is being made but the inspection will look at all partners making progress together as it is a local area inspection. It was stressed that the inspection would measure progress since the change in the statutory process not just the changes achieved in the last 12 months.

- What influence can the authority bring to bear on the CCG's regarding Autism waiting lists and mental health assessments?
 - The expertise and knowledge base of colleagues in the local authority and partner organisations could be capitalised on.
- Is the quality of then EHCP's connected with the instability of levels of social work staff?
 - They are not completely disconnected but EHCP's mostly involve schools rather than social workers. Quality of EHCP's was a legacy issue, cases were not allocated to individual case workers, this has been put in place and a relationship can now build with schools, young people and parents and this is having a positive impact.
- What were the issues regarding short breaks and how have they been addressed?
 - Short breaks are valued and well received. There is a need to ensure that the provision is wide ranging enough to meet the needs of all children with SEND. Work is being undertaken with parents to co-produce information on what short breaks are provided.
- If a school can not provide for a child with SEND what provision is made?
 - The SEND reforms require the authority to provide sufficient places for children with SEND that have needs that can not be met in mainstream schools. Approximately 380 new places had been created in the previous 12 months. The authority has to ensure that all schools understand their responsibility to provide for children with or without EHCP's.

Resolved –

That a further report be presented to the Committee in January 2021 also focusing on compliance.

ACTION: Strategic Director Children's Services

66. PLANS FOR RETURN TO SCHOOL IN SEPTEMBER 2020

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "AC"**) set out contingency plans in place that would allow education to take place and continue whether there was or was not a further or extended COVID19 local lockdown across the District.

It was noted that the vast majority of schools had already opened for staff training and would open for students in a phased way from the following week. Schools were prepared for opening and where there were concerns they had contacted the authority for advice which was specific to individual schools.

The Chair recognised the amount of work that had been undertaken by officers, schools, head teachers, teachers and staff in schools and thanked them for this.

A member commented on the lack of detail in the report that made it difficult to scrutinise. In response the Deputy Director Education advised that at the time of writing the report it had only been possible to provide information that was available nationally and that this had changed a number of times per week. She provided an update and noted that there would be changes later in the week. A report would be presented at the next meeting of the Committee on the £1.2 m additional funding to support post Covid recovery. The key areas being focused on were:

- The national laptop scheme awarded 2,000 laptops, there were 5,000 vulnerable and known to social care children in the district so the additional funding would help address this.
- Targeted therapeutic input had been put in place for families facing additional vulnerability and challenges in returning to school
- Tuition work would continue to be built on for the current year 11 cohort.

Co-opted members of the Committee thanked the Deputy Director and her team for their support and advice in the difficult circumstances being faced by schools. They looked to her to monitor how the additional finance was being deployed and to advocate to the DfE that children get the additional learning time they need before the next assessment in Spring.

The Deputy Director would continue to send daily and weekly emails to head teachers. Issues raised by parents and schools were collated and shared at weekly meetings with DfE so that they were aware of the issues faced in the district. The national laptop scheme would continue until March 2021 however the authority was looking to extend it to the end of the academic year. Bradford had been held up as a national exemplar regarding the specification of the devices ordered and that controls and software were installed before they were allocated to children.

A co-opted member noted that preparations were in place to open schools and keep children and staff safe in unprecedented circumstances. He referred to staff members in vulnerable groups such as those who were pregnant, over 60 or BAME. He also referred to the condition of school buildings. The Deputy Director responded that none of the schools had said that they would struggle to open.

The Deputy Director responded to a question about school placements and appeals that there had been a delay in receiving guidance from DfE on how to conduct appeals and that new procedures had to be drawn up. She added that the appeal process had started but that it was complex and appeals were being conducted in different ways and would not progress quickly. She added that secondary appeals would be heard in the first part of the current term and primary appeals would be no later than the end of the current term.

In response to a member question the Deputy Director noted that attendance in different areas of the district would be monitored through the school attendance portal to identify any issues.

Resolved -

- (1) That Head teachers, Teaching and non teaching staff, School Governors and Bradford Councils Children's Services be thanked for their hard work in getting schools to re-open in a safe manner.**
- (2) That a detailed report be presented to the Committee at its meeting in October 2020, which sets out the use of £1.2m additional funding allocated to support the post COVID19 recovery in schools.**
- (3) That a more detailed report be presented to the next meeting of the Committee and regular updates be presented to the Committee at every meeting in relation to schools re-opening following COVID19.**

ACTION: Strategic Director Children's Services

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

Resolved –

That from 7 October all meetings of the Committee commence at 16.30.

ACTION: Overview & Scrutiny Lead/Governance Officer

Resolved –

That from 7 October all meetings of the Committee commence at 16.30.

ACTION: Overview & Scrutiny Lead/Governance Officer

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.