

Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 7 October 2020 at 4.00 pm in Virtual remote meeting

Commenced 4.00pm

Concluded 6.30pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	BRADFORD INDEPENDENT GROUP
Choudhry Arshad Hussain Mullaney Firth	Gibbons Pollard	Sajawal

Councillor Gibbons in the Chair

Apologies: Claire Parr and Katherine Haskett – Voting Co-Opted Members

68. ALTERNATE MEMBERS (Standing Order 34)

Cllr Firth for Cllr Humphreys.

69. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

70. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals submitted to review restricted documents.

71. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals to the Committee.

72. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The report provided Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee members, with a progress update relating to the Children's Services Improvement Plan, which is aimed at enabling Bradford Council to improve services for children and families.

Officers from Bradford Councils Children's Services Department covered three key aspects of the Improvement Plan, which included highlights from this period

and areas for improvement over the coming months; key areas of focus and action with more in depth updates; Children's Improvement Plan summary of progress.

Members enquired whether the newly established Performance Clinics were just another layer and if we should actually be using them and how they would assist in the improvement Journey.

Children's Services officers stated that this was not another layer and was required to examine patterns and trends, along with being able to forecast potential difficulties at an operational level.

Members were also keen to know what the current figures were in relation to sickness absence and the current state of the recruitment campaign for Level 3 Social Care workers. Furthermore, members indicated that vacancy rates are at 15%, which also means that a Serious Case Review is likely to happen; and that the Council was covering holes with agency staff.

Officers indicated that they did not have the information, but would provide this information. Also, officers did not agree that agency staff were filling a gap and that a more measured and detailed response was needed in relation to the management of agency staff and full time staff.

Members stressed that it was clear that improvements would only happen, if there was a stable and skilled workforce and what the degree of dependence was, on agency staff.

Officers said that if they started to explore the agency staff numbers, then it could undermine the recruitment campaign that was about to be launched and that they did not want to start casting doubts over the quality of agency staff.

Members said the recruitment of Social Care workers and it was disappointing that no substantial improvements had been made in this area and that they could not see any significant improvement.

Officers from Bradford Councils Children's Services stated that they had to pick up on a lot of big issues and that it was not correct to say that there had been no improvements. The biggest problem was the recruitment of Level 3 Social Care Workers and that all of the leadership team were not permanent, which was not the case a year ago.

Members were keen to explore the increasing workloads of Social Care workers and the impact that this was also having on sickness absence. In response, officers said that they had undertaken a lot of work to review case loads and challenging workers where they have more than 26 and that there is a commitment that staff should have case loads of 22 or less. A year ago, it was not common to see Social Workers with cases of 50 or more.

Resolved-

- (1) That the contents of the report (Document “AE”) and the progress being made were considered and that the Committee receives a detailed analysis in respect of recruitment and sickness absence at the next meeting.
- (2) That future presentations to the Committee include the full Improvement Plan and the Vital Signs report with detailed explanation of items where required, following the Chair and Deputy Chair of Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Briefing.

Action: Strategic Director, Children’s Services

(Irfan Alam – 01274 432904)

73. PLANS TO RETURN TO SCHOOL IN SEPTEMBER 2020

Officers from Bradford Councils Children’s Services explained the contingency plans that were in place which would allow education to take place and continue whether there is or is not a further or extended COVID19 local lockdown, across the District.

The report also set out the additional funding approved by the Executive in June 2020, to support the post COVID recovery for education.

Children’s Services Overview & Scrutiny members were keen to understand if Bradford Council was actually considering a local circuit break, for instance like extending the half term holidays.

In response, officers from Bradford Councils Childrens Services stated that any such decision would be taken by Government and Public Health and that Children’s Services would then respond.

Members then wanted to know that if there was an additional lockdown, how far was Bradford Council is distributing appropriate Laptops, to those that needed them, as well as those children who do not even have the internet and equipment to Young Carers.

Officers indicated that at the moment they were in the early stages of laptop roll-out and were looking more in the long term and providing devices to a wide range of children, including the pre-school sector. Furthermore, part of the strategy also related to providing internet access and equipment to Young Carers.

Members were also keen to explore in terms of managing the outbreak, why different advice had been given to staff about having a COVID19 test. In response, officers highlighted that all schools across the District had been given clear advice and that they were also working with colleagues in Public Health. Moreover, testing advice is being communicated consistently and is being understood.

Members questioned officers about schools that are financially struggling and the measures that are in place to ensure that money is being used in the right way.

As well as this, members wanted to understand why only Maths had been identified and why not English; as if a child cannot understand in the first place, they will struggle with the rest of their work.

Officers stated that they would be starting with Maths first and then would be moving to English, specifically looking at comprehension, text and question analysis.

In relation to mental health, members indicated that there appeared to be insufficient support for mental health capacity and that whether five Therapeutic Officers were enough to meet the enormous demands of schools across the District.

In response, officers highlighted that they had the support from the entire Counselling Support Service, through the Clinical Commissioning Groups.

There are also mental health projects which are for those children that will require something over and above, for instance more specialist and support, which is unique to their circumstances.

In addition to this, members were keen to understand what the process for this was and who decides which groups have additional vulnerabilities. Children's Services officers replied by saying that discussions take place with the school, family and health services, to determine the support required.

Resolved-

That the contents of the report (Document "AF) were considered and that the Post Covid Educational Recovery Plan including the action plan be presented to the next meeting of this Committee which:

- **also includes more detailed information on the £1.2 million additional capital funding committed to support post covid recovery for the provision of digital devices**
- **and detailed information of the £715,000 revenue funding which has been identified to provide tuition programmes and the creation of a small team of education therapeutic officers.**

Action: Strategic Director, Children's Services

(Mariam Haque – 01274 431078)

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

The Overview & Scrutiny Lead went through the work programme for the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee, as well as the programme of detailed Scrutiny Review that the Committee has agreed to undertake.

Members agreed that the focus of the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny

should at the moment be on the OFSTED Improvement Plan, along with the provision of education being provided during the COVID19 pandemic.

However, Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee members did agree that the work programme should continue to be flexible and adaptable and that the Committee should return to the planned work programme when it was possible.

Resolved-

That the Work Programme be continually reviewed in light of the current Covid situation.

(Mustansir Butt – 01274 432574)

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.

THIS AGENDA AND ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER