

Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held remotely on Wednesday, 4 November 2020

Commenced 4.35 pm
Concluded 7.35 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT AND INDEPENDENT GROUP	BRADFORD INDEPENDENT GROUP
Choudhry Humphreys S Khan Mullaney	Gibbons Pollard	Ward	Sajawal

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Joyce Simpson
Kathrine Haskett

Church Representative (CE)
Parent

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Tom Bright

Teachers Secondary School Representative

Observers: Councillor Farley Children and Families Portfolio Holder

Apologies: Claire Parr and Fauzia Raza

Councillor Gibbons in the Chair

74. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

75. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 August and 2 September 2020 be

signed as a correct record.

ACTION: City Solicitor

76. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

No requests were received to remove the restriction on a report or background paper.

77. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

No referrals were received.

78. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The Director of Children's Services submitted **Document "AH"** which reported on the Vital Signs report requested by this Committee on 7 October 2020. The Vital Signs report was a Children's Social Care performance report which enabled leaders and members of the Improvement Board to understand and interpret the key trends in children's social care performance.

Responses were given to member's questions as follows:

- It was difficult to give a timescale in which there would be a noticeable increase in Early Help Assessments because the process involved up skilling the whole workforce in the district including education, health, police and voluntary sector.
- Tablets were being provided for Independent Reviewing Officers in response to the audit finding that insufficient technology was having an adverse impact on professionals' ability to recommend the ceasing of Child Protection plans.
- As of the previous week contacts had dropped from 900 in September to 680 and referrals leading to assessment were 230.
- Examples of case studies could be provided at a future meeting.
- All schools had made aware that 12 Early help Co-ordinators were now in post.
- Video conferencing had been available since March but there had been a national shortage of IT equipment.
- It was accepted the length of time children were on Child Protection Plans had increased and that due to lockdown there had been an understandable reluctance to step down plans however the number had started to reduce again. A multi agency audit had found that safe decisions were being made regarding Child Protection Plans. Average caseloads had increased and in mitigation Community Resource Workers had been introduced, there had been increased levels of supervision from Practice Supervisors

with 44 Community Resource Workers and 40 Practice Supervisors being appointed.

- It was noted that dental and health checks had reduced due to lockdown and that this was an issue with all Local Authorities and had been raised with the CCGs. Bradford was one of the better performing authorities with 91% of dental appointments being kept up to March 2020. Once dentists opened Foster Carers would arrange appointments.
- A risk assessment is undertaken to assess whether visits take place in person or digitally. In August and September it was decided to undertake more face to face visits. A dip sample was undertaken to audit face to face and digital visits to ensure that they were of the desired quality.
- It was noted that there were extenuating circumstances in the cases where 2 conferences were re-arranged at the request of the family in August and that it was appropriate for the conferences to be delayed.
- The reasons why the number of workers with caseloads over 26 had increased mainly in Keighley and Shipley were still on going and families were being actively worked with.
- The Strategic Director agreed to provide members of the Committee with more detail on the number of young people in custody doubling over time.
- A further update would be provided for members on the discussions to finalise the Named and Designated doctor roles across Bradford District and Craven.
- It was accepted that the number of agency social workers in the district was high and that that this was not sustainable, however it was recognised that agency social workers had provided stability and support for children until permanent social workers were able to be recruited and that this was an issue that would take time to address.
- Training for managers and senior practitioners regarding domestic abuse was being rolled out however workforce recruitment capacity was still an issue.
- The domestic abuse audit had been started in the previous week.
- The concerns of members regarding the high number of agency social workers was acknowledged and it was stressed that the recruitment of permanent social workers was a top priority and that an impact should be noticed at the next meeting.

Resolved –

- (1) That having considered and commented on the Improvement plan the Committee request that more detail be provided in relation to**

progress on targets regarding recruitment.

(2) That a further report be presented to the Committee in December.

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children's Services

79. SICKNESS ABSENCE AND RECRUITMENT IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

The Director of Children's Services submitted **Document "AL"** which provided an overview of sickness absence and reasons for this in the period April 2019 to August 2020 with predominant focus on the social work employee group. The report also provided an overview of recruitment activity and plans.

Reference was made to the number of days lost due to stress and the need for further analysis into work related stress as social workers reported higher levels of work related stress than other professions. It was noted that the stabilisation of the leadership team had resulted in a significant impact on reducing sickness.

The Director of Human Resources accepted that sickness absence among social workers would never be the same as the Council average because of the nature of their work and agreed that the target of 9.8 days be reassessed.

Resolved –

That sickness absence and recruitment in Children's Social Care be considered as part of future improvement plan reports and smarter targets for Social Care Worker absence be developed.

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children's Services

80. EDUCATION COVID RECOVERY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The Director of Children's Services submitted **Document "AI"** which provided an update on the work that formed part of the Education Covid Recovery Improvement Programme. It updated the status of work to date along with the approach to be taken for further development.

The following responses were given to member questions;

- The Council was working closely with schools regarding the cohort of pupils that were expected not to reach level 4 in maths and English at GCSE and support could be provided in other training, careers and education.
- It was difficult to predict how long it would take for pupils to return to their expected levels as this would depend on how much support they received from their families and how much access they had during lockdown to remote learning. As this was a new and evolving situation no comparative data was available. It was noted that Bradford provided extra support over

and above the national tutoring programme.

- Due to the closure of libraries during lock down the use of virtual tutoring or other community based venues was being investigated.
- Prospective tutors were required to apply and go through a selection process and would be provided with training.
- Digital devices provided by the local authority were pre loaded with security software.
- Digital devices provided by the DfE are supplied directly to schools.
- Chrome books and iPads were being provided. Engagement was being undertaken to understand the needs of different groups of children to ensure that other devices could be procured.
- The 5 Education Therapeutic Officers (ETO) were appointed on fixed term contracts as part of the education recovery programme to get children to re engage with education and learning

Resolved –

- (1) That the contents of Document “AI” be noted and that a further report be presented to the Committee in December.**
- (2) That officers explore the options to make Education Therapeutic Officers posts into substantive posts, to be considered on a more long term basis rather than the Education COVID recovery plan.**

ACTION: Director of Children’s Services

81. WORKING TOGETHER TO SAFEGUARD CHILDREN - THE BRADFORD PARTNERSHIP - ANNUAL REPORT 2019/2020

The Chief Executive submitted **Document “AJ”** which reported on the Annual Report of the Bradford Partnership the body set up by the three safeguarding partners in the district, the Local Authority, West Yorkshire Police and combined Clinical Commissioning Groups to provide scrutiny to safeguarding activities and responses by all relevant agencies in the Bradford District.

The Annual Report covered a period when the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) ceased to exist and the new partnership arrangements came into force and reflects this transition. The report outlined the work of the safeguarding partners across the Bradford District to promote the safeguarding and welfare of children and young people; provided an overview of the issues facing children and young people across the Bradford District including those with specific vulnerabilities; reported on the quality of services that are provided by agencies within Bradford and the results of both local and national inspections of services.

Members commented that as this was an annual report, a lot of the information provided was out of date and stressed that the Committee needed more timely information. It was suggested that a discussion take place on how the elements that made up the annual report could be provided for the Committee in a more timely way.

The following responses were given to Members questions:

- The on line assessment tool used for completion of the Section 175 Schools Safeguarding Audit was being improved to help increase completion rates.
- The responsibility for completion of the safeguarding audit lay with the senior management team in schools and should be taken to the Governing Body.
- The role of the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) was set out in statute to manage all allegations and concerns against a person who works with children in all settings.
- Members would be provided with information on the “Central repository for learning” that would incorporate all learning outcomes from reviews, audits and analysis to ensure best practice was shared.

Resolved –

That a report be presented in 12 month’s time and in preparation, discussions to take place with officers, the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Chair and Deputy Chair to agreed on the key areas to be included in the report at the earliest opportunity.

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children’s Services

82. CHILDREN’S AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S MENTAL HEALTH - UPDATE

The report of the Joint Mental Health Commissioner **Document “AK”** provided the Committee with an update on progress made to review and improve mental health support for children and young people since the last report in February 2020.

It was noted that there was a need to ensure that cancelled appointments had been correctly recorded so that it did not appear that they were being cancelled by the Care Trust.

It was also noted that under the One Trusted Pathway a child would receive a phone call within 5 days of being referred asking how they would travel to the appointment, where the appointment would be held and what support could be offered to them enable them to attend. A key worker would be assigned to them to help them through their whole journey.

Members considered the report and no resolution was passed on this item.

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

Resolved-

That the work programme continue to be kept under review and changes be made as necessary, in light of the Covid19 pandemic.

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