

Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held remotely on Wednesday, 6 January 2021

Commenced 4.30 pm
Concluded 6.55 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE
Choudhry Humphreys Arshad Hussain S Khan	Winnard Pollard

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Joyce Simpson
Fauzia Raza

Church Representative (CE)
Parent

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Tom Bright
Dr Samina Karim

Teachers Secondary School Representative
Children's Social Care Representative

Apologies: Councillor Beverley Mullaney, Councillor Talat Sajawal and Kathrine Haskett

Councillor Winnard in the Chair

1. ALTERNATE MEMBERS (Standing Order 34)

No alternatives present.

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No declarations were made for matters under consideration.

3. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2020 be signed as a correct record.

4. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

5. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

No referrals were received.

6. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The report of the Strategic Director for Children's Services (**Document "AR"**) was presented to the Committee in response to a request for regular updates on the Vital Signs report. The aim of the report was to enable leaders and members of the Improvement Board to understand and interpret the key trends in children's social care performance and covered the period up to December 2020.

Highlights and key points were shared including the recent 3 day inspection by OFSTED in December which endorsed the already identified areas for improvement from self assessments.

Officers stated that contact with vulnerable children was maintained throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and an exemplary response to demand had been evident also. The quality of audits had improved in 2020 and Senior Officers were aware of the status of the service and inconsistencies in the quality of service delivered. This was an identified area for improvement.

The main areas for improvement and issues being faced were as follows:

- The threshold of what was referred to social care was not as well understood, resulting in some inappropriate referrals being made. This would be addressed by the Safeguarding Partnership during 2021.
- Sickness management had been criticised.
- Recruitment of permanent staff
- Auditing – quality still needed driving up

Representatives from the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) were also present in the meeting and gave an explanation of its role in the context of children in care and the difficulties being faced as a result of the pandemic. A new clinical model would be implemented in 2021 which addressed the difficulties in completing medical assessments for children looked after as it had not been possible to recruit paediatricians to complete the work and to have designated doctors.

Members were then given the opportunity to ask questions, details of these and the responses received are below.

- Good progress was being made on timeliness and compliance, could an explanation be given on issues that auditing social work practices was exposing? Were they easy to solve?
 - Officers advised that social workers use a system of assessment, plan and review. If this was carried out to the correct level of quality,

children would receive the right support at the right time. Assessments still needed to be comprehensive and plans must address the needs of the children being assessed. Children would then move through the system as issues were being addressed to meet those needs, with managers ensuring that the work moved them through the system. Success depended on a number of factors which made it a complex issue to address but with the right training etc. the standard of practice would be lifted. It would take time to achieve and the 'churn' of level 3 practitioners was a key factor affecting the success.

- Were recommendations made in internal audits? And were they taken forward and implemented?
 - In response, Officers advised that all case file audits were checked monthly and had targets set and recommendations made.
- Were there any common issues arising?
 - The main issues identified were in consistency of practice and delays in children looked after care planning. A set of practice standards was now in place which needed embedding.
- A business case to increase provision was included in the report presented, was this related to the funding mentioned in the verbal presentation?
 - In response, it was confirmed that it had been signed off as the 'case for change'
- The details around Pathways of autistic spectrum were unclear.
 - In response, it was advised that it needed updating and reviewing. Work was being delivered by three providers but it had not reduced waiting times. Providers had adapted but this was not always suitable.
- One Member stated that it was difficult to assess the situation regarding recruitment from the report and asked for clarification.
 - Officers advised that additional posts had been implemented to enable the right structure to be put into place in a new establishment chart. Senior level and newly qualified practitioner recruitment had been successful and staff retention was good up to two years. The challenge of retaining staff beyond that time and a recruitment campaign was underway to address this. Details of the establishment structure chart would be shared at a later meeting of this Committee (information due to be ready to share by the end of February)
- A new 'integrated front door' system had been introduced. Were Officers confident that sufficient staff were in place to respond to reports of domestic abuse?
 - In response, Officers advised that new contacts had increased, especially domestic violence but all standard domestic violence notifications were triaged and notified into an early help service.

- One member commented on the social worker case load and that it was a worrying statistic.
 - It was advised that Community Resource workers, Practice Supervisors plus five additional teams and three fixed term teams who would be in place for twelve months had been introduced.
- The number of young people in custody had doubled, what action would be taken to safeguard young people going into custody?
 - It was acknowledged that this had been a problem for some time and there was a significant improvement programme in place so it was anticipated that this would come down. Further information in relation to the work of the Youth Offending Service would be presented at a later date if requested by the Committee.
- Access to dental check ups and treatment was a cause for concern as it formed an essential part of health care.
 - Officers advised that issues had arisen due to a lack of dentists operating during lockdown, although compliance levels were still considered 'good'. A plan was in place to address the issue.
- In order to be legally compliant, sufficient time from paediatricians was required, how was the Authority ensuring this requirement was being met?
 - In response, Officers advised that they were working with the CCG and providers to ensure health assessments were carried out. Conversations were underway on how these services could be delivered in a more timely way. There was an Action Plan/Dashboard which monitored the position. The Authority's Director of Children's Services provided assurance that he continued to challenge Health Commissioners and providers around these issues.
- One Member asked about the current number of agency staff and whether the number still being used was available. She also stated that the report did not contain details from the District in relation to inequality, poverty and children with disabilities. She requested whether explicit reporting on those issues could be available to aid procurement of appropriate services to address the needs.
 - The Director of Children's Services stated that the information requested by the Member would be brought back to a future meeting of this Committee.
- The establishment of the staffing structure chart, was this behind the specified £6.5 million in the 21-22 budget (from medium term financial planning)?
 - Officers advised that a large part of the money would be used to support the staffing structure.
- A Member asked for clarity on the threshold to override 'no consent' and was assured that the response was appropriate in 'no consent' scenarios at the 'Front Door'

- Were repeat referrals those which had been closed or were they previous ‘no further actions’
 - Officers advised that these were closed following a re-assessment and intervention within a twelve month period.
- Were there plans in place to manage the number of visits to children who were subject to child protection plans? And what was the impact of agency workers on children?
 - It was advised that all cases were risk assessed, especially child protection cases. Visits in person had continued where there were additional concerns. Staff went fully protected with PPE to carry out visits. Following ongoing dip sample audits, virtual visits had been carried out for unborn children with the expectant mothers or for those who were abroad. In relation to the effect of agency staff, it was advised that the management structure is stable with the majority of Managers and Practice Supervisors providing a level of consistency

The Chair of the Improvement Board stated that health assessments would be included in Future ‘Vital Signs’ reports so that Members could see how this area was improving.

Resolved –

(1) That the Committee focuses on specific aspects of the Children’s Services Improvement Plan including but not limited to:

- **Audit of quality of social work practice;**
- **Workforce Plans;**
- **Service areas that are in red and require significant improvement.**

(2) That the Vital Signs report be considered in detail every three month, however this Committee requests that the Vital Report Signs be electronically circulated to members of the Committee every month.

(3) This Committee requests that the outcome from the OFSTED assurance visit be presented to this Committee, as soon as they are available.

Action: Director of Children’s Services

7. EDUCATION COVID RECOVERY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The report of the Strategic Director for Children’s Services (**Document “AS”**) was presented to the Committee and provided an update on the work that formed part of the Education COVID-19 Recovery Improvement Programme. The report provided an update on the status of the work done to date along with the approach taken for further development.

Officers also advised that much of the work detailed in the report was still being carried out with some significant modifications to tuition programmes in light of the most recent lockdown and closures. Equipment was on order to ensure that children looked after had devices and wifi to work remotely.

Members then had the opportunity to ask questions which are detailed below along with the responses given.

- To what extent has the work done previously going to help in the latest lockdown?
 - In response, Officers stated that remote learning was not a new concept and that schools used a number of tools for remote learning with more 'hands-on' learning to complement it. However, some students did not engage with virtual learning.
- Were the figures of devices received still accurate?
 - Figures were only available for devices delivered to the Council. Academies were under no obligation to share information relating to their allocation
- Did it have an impact on investment on draft capital expenditure programme?
 - Officers stated that capital funding would supplement the provision from central government. The first 2000 devices were distributed via the local authority but the DfE had subsequently circumvented the Authority.
- The Chair stated that he would like to receive information on what had been provided by Bradford schools and whether there were any reports which could be presented to track activity.
 - Officers responded that it was difficult to take action around remote learners but provided advice and support if a school was experiencing difficulties on a school by school basis.
- The Chair also asked about the alternative provision review and would the attainment strategy be delayed?
- Officers advised that this was still being looked at across the District and was subject to ratification of the budget. Adjustments may be necessary but should not stop the ambitions to improve on attainment.

Resolved –

That the Committee keeps an overview of the Council's plans for remote learning taking place across the District and requests that officers present new information when it is available to the Committee.

Action: Director Children's Services

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

The report presented by the Scrutiny Lead (**Document "AT"**) detailed the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee work programme, as well as the unscheduled topics.

Members made amendments to the work programme and agreed to keep an overview of the Education COVID recovery programme, to allow the Committee to consider other pertinent topics.

As well as this, Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee members, were in agreement that the Alternative School Provision Scrutiny Review should be reconvened; particularly in light of increased home education during the COVID19 lockdown.

Resolved –

That the following areas be considered by the Committee at its future meetings, with a specific focus of the impact of COVID19 upon these:

- **Troubled Families;**
- **Youth Offending;**
- **Mental Health amongst young people**

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