

## Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 11 March 2021 at 4.30 pm in

Commenced 4.30pm  
Concluded 7.00pm

### Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT AND INDEPENDENT GROUP	BRADFORD GROUP	INDEPENDENT
Choudhry Humphreys S Khan Wood	Winnard Pollard	Ward	Sajawal	

### Councillor Winnard in the Chair

Apologies: Cllr Mullaney, Dr Samina Karim, (Non Voting Co-opted Member).

#### 16. ALTERNATE MEMBERS (Standing Order 34)

Cllr Wood for Cllr Mullaney.

#### 17. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made for matters under consideration.

#### 19. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

#### 20. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

No referrals were received.

#### 21. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The purpose of the report was to inform Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee members with an outcome following the Ofsted Assurance Visit, which

took place from 15 to 17 December 2020 and to appraise members with the Vital Signs report.

Children's Services Officers informed Councillors that the focus of the visit was to look at the quality of key decision-making for children who need help and protection, children in care and care leavers, together with the impact of leadership on service development. A copy of the Ofsted Assurance Visit letter, was also appended for members.

Members learned that the Ofsted letter had recognised a number of improvements relating to:

- Leaders having achieved some positive steps forward in a challenging context;
- Having taken opportunities to maximise partnership working with other organisations;
- Putting in place the basic infrastructure and practice standards needed to support improvement within the service;
- Developing a more effective oversight to support immediate decision-making when children are first referred to social care;
- Renewing IT resources to better support frontline practice;
- Recruiting to specialist posts and secured financial funding investment for children's services.

Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee members were encouraged at these improvements, however members were concerned at the areas of weakness in achieving consistently good practice, as set out in the Ofsted Assurance Visit letter. Particularly those areas that relating to:

- The delivery of improvements being slow since September 2018;
- Significant weaknesses in practice and oversight in front line services, as a result of workforce instability, high caseloads and ineffective casework planning;
- Children in need and child protection plans not always being effective in improving children's circumstances and some children in need cases were often closed or stepped down without evidence of sustained change, because management oversight had not thoroughly tested the impact of social work practice for children and families;
- Enduring drift and delay due to long-standing poor practice continuing to affect some children;
- The consistency of social work practice continuing to remain to be an issue;
- Care leavers receiving an inconsistent service and some care leavers had experienced poorer levels of support through the COVID19 pandemic.

Councillors were keen to know if the as stated in the Ofsted Assurance letter that the comment relating to the delivery of improvements being slow was accurate.

In response, Children's Services Officers highlighted that Ofsted had taken the view that the period of improvement commenced from the inadequate judgement in 2018 and not from when the management team was in place. Moreover, members also heard that it does take time to appoint the senior management team.

Continuing on, members wanted to explore how the significant weaknesses were going to be addressed.

Officers stated that addressing the weaknesses was a three year plus improvement journey and that the service was currently half way through that improvement journey. Furthermore, officers also indicated that the improvement work has been affected by the current COVID19 pandemic and acknowledged that there were some weaknesses in practice, along with some legacy issues.

Moreover, members highlighted that in several places in the Ofsted assurance letter, it stated that transients in the workforce was not easy to address, yet this is vital to the improvement work. Therefore, members were keen to understand the steps that were being taken to address this, within the timescales.

Officers did acknowledge here that the stability of the level 3 Social Care workers was a substantial challenge. However, there had been some success in recruiting new Social Care workers. Members also heard that one in four Social Care Workers were from agencies, which was higher than the national average. Furthermore, members were also made aware that there were 30 level 2 Social Care Workers, who were about to make the step into level 3. As well as this, four teams of Social Care Workers had been procured for 12 months, from additional COVID19 funding received.

Continuing on officers informed members that Practice Guidance and Standards for all our workforce had been issues to staff.

Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee members were concerned at the lack of basic management procedures in place, along with some cases being closed too early with children then being exposed to risk for far too long.

Here, officers acknowledged that the standards of Social Care work in Bradford had not been good enough for a long period of time and the leadership team had spent most of last year getting the right structures in place, ensuring that the service has the managers with the experience and skills to be able to support practitioners and showing them what good social care work looks like.

Members commented that workforce stability was key in relation to the improvements to be delivered and members felt that one of four Social Care Workers being from an agency was not good enough and that the improvements had to be accelerated.

In response, officers stated that this was one of the biggest priorities and challenges, with the challenge being to reduce the numbers of agency staff where possible. However, officers highlighted that the agency staff that were in the service, were of a high quality.

**Resolved -**

**That the progress and challenges that need to be addressed be noted and**

**that the Improvement Plan and Vital Signs be presented to the Committee early in the new Municipal Year.**

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children's Service

## **22. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND AUDIT IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE**

Following a request from members, the report provided an overview of the quality assurance and audit process in Children's Services.

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee members heard that case file auditing was an essential part of our quality assurance arrangements and that regular and in depth case file audit are a meaningful and useful method for understanding the experiences of children and young people whilst examining practices against agreed Practice Standards, guidance, policy and procedures.

Members were keen to understand the consistency of practice in relation to the quality of assessment and practice, as this was not clear from the report.

More importantly, members were keen to know what the areas for improvement were.

In response officers highlighted that key improvement areas included:

- The Voice of the Child to be more sophisticated;
- Using chronology as a record of events that happen, to assist in identifying patterns of behaviour.
- Support for Social Care Workers.
- Engaging with the family and children.

**Resolved -**

**That a further report be presented to the Committee which focuses specifically on the outcomes, areas for improvement and what is being done to address those areas of improvement.**

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children's Services

## **23. YOUNG CARERS**

The report provided members with a requested update focusing specifically on the success rates in getting Young Carers back to school following the COVID restrictions, the success of the re-launch of the E-Learning system and the numbers of children who have become Young Carers as a result of COVID19 and how they are being supported.

Children's Overview & Scrutiny Committee members, were keen to know how many Young Carers there actually were in the District.

Officers from Bradford Councils Children's Services stated that it was really difficult to say how many Young Carers there were across the District, as some do not see themselves as Young Carers.

Continuing on, members were concerned as to why there was reluctance to engage with Young Carers and adults, once schools re-opened as a result of the COVID19 pandemic.

In response, officers highlighted that they did not have all the information to respond, but this was due to the schools own risk assessment and that no adults and only children were allowed into schools.

Furthermore, members were keen to explore the levels of support that were available to Young Carers, particularly in relation to the COVID19 pandemic.

Officers highlighted that they had supported Young Carers by bringing them together through events and competitions and were hoping that once we start to come out of the COVID19 pandemic, that they will be looking to use Youth Centres across the District to engage with Young Carers.

**Resolved -**

**That the Annual Report be presented to the Committee in the new Municipal Year, which also includes performance standards.**

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children's Services

**24. 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 discussed the work programme for the Committee and agreed that the following topics needed to be considered in the new Municipal Year:

1. The School Admissions Appeals Process;
2. Workforce aspects of the Children's Services Improvement Programme;
3. Impact(s) of educational results across the District.

**Resolved -**

**That the workforce development aspect of the Children's Services Improvement Programme and School Appeals process be considered in the new Municipal Year.**

ACTION: Overview and 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.**

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