

**Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services
Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday,
22 September 2021 at 4.30 pm in the Banqueting Hall -
City Hall, Bradford**

Commenced 16.30
Concluded 19.15

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Alipoor Humphreys Jamil Mohammed	Pollard K Green	Stubbs

Councillor Pollard in the Chair

Apologies: Tom Bright, (Non-Voting Co-Opted Member) and Cllr Winnard.

34. ALTERNATE MEMBERS (Standing Order 34)

Cllr K Green for Cllr Winnard.

35. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made for matters under consideration.

36. MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2021, (previously circulated), were signed as a correct record.

37. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

38. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

No referrals were received.

39. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY

Officers from Bradford Councils Children's Services informed Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee members of the highlights from the Improvement Plan and also focused on the areas of progress, as well highlighting the areas of work in progress.

Members heard that officers continued to monitor performance utilising bi-weekly forecasting reports and the monthly Vital Signs report, to ensure that the service is on track and that any concerns are identified at the earliest opportunity.

Councillors were keen to have an update in relation to the Children's Services Commissioner.

In response, Officers stated that Steve Walker had been appointed as the Children's Services Commissioner and had joined on 15 September 2021. In addition to this, Officers indicated that Steve Walker would be working in Children's Services for 12 weeks and would be focusing on Children's Services and Social Care and whether Bradford Councils Children's Services has the capacity to improve or whether Bradford Councils Children's Services need to be moved into a Trust status. Members also learned that at the end of this work, a number of recommendations will be developed.

Furthermore, officers also indicated that Steve Walker was also willing to meet with members of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members raised their concerns about health targets for children not being met and what individuals were actually required to do.

Officers replied by indicating that a consent form was required and this was checked by the Deputy Director, along with the four Heads of Service. As well as this, every week there is data available relating to Children's health assessments that are required. Members of the Committee also heard that at the moment, there are 32 children requiring health assessments.

Moving on, Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee members were wanted to know why there was a downward trend with regards to the children in care visits in accordance with timescales and what actions were being taken to address this.

Here, officers highlighted that this was due to a combination of virtual and physical visits, along with capacity issues, which have resulted in children not being seen on time. However, members heard that the trend was improving.

During the discussion around Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services, (CAMHS), members heard that there had been some improvement to the CAMHS provision, however the CAMHS system in Bradford had struggled and that it was too early to be able to demonstrate the impact and that looked after Children are being treated as a high priority group.

Moreover, members of the Committee were extremely concerned at increased number of external placements for looked after children.

In response officers highlighted that the demand coming into the service is high and that they were working with families to establish the level of support that they require, thus preventing them from going into public care. As well as this, officers further stated that it was imperative that the right children were actually in care. Officers further stated that they also needed to examine the Councils residential core capacity and purchasing placements from independent homes. Having said that, Children's Services officers, that it was crucial that children are closer and residing in the District, subsequently having a better chance to support the children and their families.

Furthermore, members discussed the RAG rating, (Red, Amber and Green) and that there were a lot of areas that were amber and red and requiring significant improvement.

Children's Services officers acknowledged this as a fair point and stated that they were now a different leadership team than before and that now was a good opportunity to review the Improvement Plan and look further at the areas of work that need to be focused on. As well as this, officers also emphasised that there are some underpinning practices issues that needed to be addressed.

Nevertheless, members of the Committee still felt that there were significant concerns around the areas of Children's mental health services, strengthening the "front door", increases in domestic abuse and failing to take action sooner.

Resolved –

- (1) This Committee requests that an informal and remote session be arranged with the Commissioner and members of this Committee at a date and time to be decided, to discuss the remit of the work to be undertaken and any key findings to date.
- (2) This Committee requests that the Improvement Plan be presented to the Committee, at its meeting on Wednesday 17 November 2021.
- (3) That the Annual Report for Looked After Children, be presented to this Committee, at its meeting on Wednesday 17 November 2021.

Action – Strategic Director, Children's Services

(Mark Douglas – 01274 431266)

40. OVERVIEW OF THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ASPECTS OF THE IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Officers from Bradford Council's Children's Services updated members of the Committee on the workforce data and improvement progress within Children's Services.

Members were concerned in relation to the lack of detailed information provided

in the report, especially as they had specifically requested this previously.

Members of the Committee were keen to understand what was being done to support staff that were off work due to mental health illness.

In response officers indicated that support was available through Occupational Health and that a new model was being implemented across the whole of Social Care Practice.

Moreover, members were concerned at the shortage of level 3 Social Care workers and whether in the Job Description, it stated that Bradford Council provided flexible working.

Officers stated that the Job Descriptions did not state that the Council provided flexible working and in addition to this, the Councils recruitment was out-of-date.

Furthermore, Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee members were not able to clearly understand from the report, what progress had actually been made and that performance had not improved. Moreover, members felt that it was not clear at all from the report as to the activities that have been undertaken to reduce the reliance on agency workers.

Children's Services officers responded by indicating that they would reply to members, once they had spoken to colleagues who had prepared the report.

Members of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee members were also unanimous in agreeing that they were very concerned at the over reliance on agency staff.

Resolved –

This Committee requests that a more detailed report be presented in six months, which also specifically focuses on the activities being undertaken and the progress being made on increasing the number of salaried employees and reducing the number of agency workers.

Action – Strategic Director Children's Services

(Mark Douglas – 01274 431266)

41. SCHOOL ORGANISATION: SCHOOL EXPANSION PROGRAMME, EDUCATION CAPITAL FUNDING, ACADEMY CONVERSIONS

Bradford Council's Children's Services Officers, updated Committee members in relation to a number of key areas related to School Organisation across the Bradford District. As well as this, officers highlighted that the population growth in Bradford over the last decade increased pressure on primary school places, resulting in a large-scale extension programme to meet the growth in demand.

Continuing on, members heard that increased pupil numbers at secondary level also increased the pressure on secondary schools as higher number of pupils

move through the education system.

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee members were keen to understand the impact of the reduction in birth rate, across schools in the District.

In response, Children's Services officers stated that they were looking to develop a policy whereby all schools collectively look at their Published Admissions Numbers. Members also heard that it was important to have a District wide agreement, where as many schools are kept financially viable.

Resolved –

This Committee requests that in future, annual electronic updates be provided to the Committee, with members having the option to discuss this formally if required.

Action - Strategic Director, Children's Services

(Mariam Haque – 01274 431078)

42. CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22

The Committee discussed and amended the 2020-21 work programme.

The Overview and Scrutiny Lead provided members with an update in relation to the Elective Home Education Scrutiny Review and members agreed on the next steps.

Resolved –

The Committee discussed and amended the 2021-22 work programme.

Action: Overview & Scrutiny Lead

(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.