

Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 15 December 2021 in City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 4.31 pm
Concluded 8.45 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	BRADFORD INDEPENDENT GROUP
Alipoor Choudhry Jamil Mohammed Wood	Winnard Pollard	Stubbs	Sajawal

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Joyce Simpson

Church Representative (CE)

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Apologies: Councillor Julie Humphreys, Fauzia Raza, Tom Bright and Dr Samina Karim

Councillor Winnard in the Chair

57. CHAIRS OPENING REMARKS

The Committee stated that it was saddened by the case of Star Hobson and their thoughts were with all those affected. There was a Children's Safeguarding review which will be published in 2022 and this would give full attention to the case. It would not be appropriate for Members to discuss the case in the meeting and normal questioning would apply at the appropriate time.

A minute's silence was observed by all members and officers in attendance in the memory of Star Hobson.

58. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made for matters under consideration.

59. MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 October and 22 September 2021 be signed as a correct record.

60. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

61. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

No referrals were received.

**62. ANNUAL REPORT FOR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS
APRIL 2020 - MARCH 2021**

The report of the Designated Team for Looked After Children - Bradford District and Craven Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) (Document "M") provided a summary statement on the first annual report for Children Looked After and Care Leavers to include background, content – successes and challenges - and future focus.

Members noted that this was the first report of its kind and while not a necessity, it was good practice to produce an annual report.

Members learned of the complexities of providing healthcare to Children Looked After (CLA), and the challenges of the provision of care, in meeting statutory timescales and the increase in the number and complexities of the children who become CLA in the Bradford District.

Members understood that a new clinical model has been implemented and had provided success for the Designated Team for Looked After Children, and that it was this that had allowed for an annual report to be produced.

Officers stressed the strategic role of the Designated Doctor and a move away from the clinical tasks of the Named Doctor for CLA.

Members understood there had been improvements to the statutory timescales of initial assessments and an improvement in the system used to accurately identified at which stage a CLA child is at in the process.

Members were keen to understand If the statutory guidance was being delivered and if the Designated Team for Looked After Children was falling short.

Members were asked to understand that this was guidance, and that children were no longer falling through the gap. Furthermore, the difficulty was in the timescales of 21 days, to provide an initial healthcare assessment for a child or

young adult. This was inevitably difficult to adhere to as obtaining consent can be difficult. The team was not seeing every child within the timeline but this is improving. There are delays especially with services such as CAMHS. Members were told it is not realistic to say every need is being met, and the priority going forward is to meet need.

Members sought clarity on the issue of consent and who is responsible for obtaining consent. In response, officers from the Designated Team for Looked After Children, stressed that it is preferable to gain the parent's consent. It is the responsibility of social workers to obtain consent. In the event that a parent would be unwilling or unable to consent on behalf of the child, the social work manager can sign and subsequently give consent. Furthermore, the Local Authority can seek a court order. In the case of a young person they may have capacity to give their own consent. There is no set age but it is usually those young adults over 13 or 14 years' old that can consent for themselves.

Members understood that the obtaining of consent can cause delays for the service. The number of children that do not have consent is reviewed in a weekly triage meeting in which these cases are reviewed and a plan can be put in place for that child to receive consent and subsequently their initial health assessment. Members asked to what extent had Covid-19 prevented health services being delivered. They were assured that whilst there were remote arrangements made, the service had since resumed in person appointments. Additionally, dental care was an ongoing issue. There is a large backlog of children waiting to be added to a local dentist. In the instance of children being in foster care, the families they are with make their own arrangements with their own dentists.

Members sought clarification on the process of children being placed out of district and whether they are brought back to the Bradford District for their assessments or they receive them in their local districts.

In response, many of the children who are placed out of district are with friends and family. It is the Designated Team for Looked After Children who are responsible for conducting their initial assessments for children placed out of district. They also ask local CLA teams to do initial assessments, some have the time and capacity and others do not. Children in West Yorkshire at a reasonable distance can be brought in or clinicians can do a home visit if appropriate.

Members also asked officers about their recommendations and thoughts on the services provided by Designated Team for Looked After Children with regards to the budgeting of the council for next year. Officers demonstrated a need to maintain priority in early help and prevention which has been excellent. There is a need to maintain the capacity to gain consent, this was worrying but has improved. Anything that affects the budgeting in these areas would have a negative impact on the service.

Members were concerned that children who are placed out of area did not receive the same level of service, which is due to their circumstance and subsequently not in their control. Officers divulged that this is dependent on where the child is placed, but yes. This is worrying as these children that move around often are the one that really need to be seen, as these are the children with complex needs.

Members were concerned about the number of health assessments that had not taken place and wanted to know if this had improved since April 2021. Officers assured members that this was not something that is independent to Bradford, and it would be unusual to find an authority that met the deadlines due to issues of obtaining consent. Officers were more concerned with giving children in depth and quality health assessments than they are meeting deadlines. Members were told that although children may be waiting for health assessments, they are still seen by the nursing team weekly. Members were assured that the service has improved because of the new system in place which means the situation the service was in a year ago will not happen again.

Members were keen to receive an update on the statistics in three months' time. Members also sought to understand the definition of backlog. Officers explained there will always be children waiting, but it is not the same children waiting. Therefore, the numbers may remain the same but it is different children who make up the numbers. This language of 'backlog' is something officers wished to improve on because of the negative connotations of the term.

Members also wanted to understand the difference between a designated doctor and a named doctor. It was clarified that the named doctor is a trust appointment and is someone who leads on clinical advice. They are essentially clinicians with additional responsibilities. Officers explained that the designated doctor is not a clinical role but working at a strategic level.

Members were told that keeping people in the roles of designated doctor and named doctor has been a challenge. One person cannot do it all because it needs to be a localised service where the doctors are close to the children. If they get this service right, then children do not become persistent users of the service.

Members asked whether the budgets should be reviewed and stated the success of school nurses in lessening the number of children who are suffering. Officers stated there were plans in the process and that a review is currently under way. Officers would welcome sight on this at a later meeting of this committee.

Members were made aware that there is no legislation that sets out a timeline of how long children should be seen in. Members demonstrated a need to check in which children who are ill, as they would with their own children, in their capacity of corporate parents.

Officers outlined that the service is not there, so to set timelines would be futile and create failure. There is a need to look at the medical need as priority.

Members thanked the NHS Team and Dr Ward for their presence and contributions.

Resolved –

- (1) The Committee would like to thank officers for their attendance and contributions.**
- (2) This Committee requests that a report be presented in 12 months.**

(3) That more up-to-date statistics in relation to the timeliness of Children’s Health Assessments, be circulated to members of this Committee in three months’ time.

(4) This Committee requests that the findings from the review into children’s health assessment caseloads be presented to the Committee, in the new municipal year.

Action – Strategic Director of Quality and Nursing

63. PROTECTING VULNERABLE CHILDREN & ADULTS AT RISK OF EXPLOITATION

The report of the Chief Executive (Document “N”) provided an update on the contemporary strategic response to all forms of exploitation of children and adults at risk of exploitation and how partners from The Bradford Partnership – Working together to safeguard children and the Bradford Safeguarding Adults Board work to drive continuous improvement and to hold agencies to account for their work on this subject. The report also outlined the challenges presented to the partnership following the global pandemic – Covid 19 and the current update on progress made to the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Thematic Review recommendations published on July 27, 2021.

Officers from the Bradford District Safeguarding Group provided a summary of the Report of the Chief Executive, detailing a multiagency strategic approach and two strategic plans.

Officers outlined the positives of the report to Members which were; an increase in pace, allowing for a focus on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Furthermore, Officers made Members aware of the continual presence of neglect and that this is an ongoing issue.

Members were keen to understand the impacts of Covid-19 on the ability of partners in Bradford to prevent or mitigate risk of exploitation.

Officers answered by highlighting the fact that with restricted movement, there was less missing children, and it was the strategic approaches that brought this down. However, vulnerable children did not return to school at the same rate. Furthermore, Bradford had maintained a street based youth programme, as well as area based youth work teams engaging at garden gates and green spaces in order to comply with restrictions.

Members sought to understand to what extent the police have changed their approach over the last few years resulting from issues faced by South Yorkshire police with regards to exploitation, and whether West Yorkshire Police have faced the same issues.

Officers from West Yorkshire Police explained to members that exploitation has changed massively in 25 years. The exploitation team is the biggest office in Bradford. With regards to early help PCSOs build relationships and are working in children's homes. However, there is a significant reduction in resources and, which has been impacted by the recruitment process taking longer to being qualified police officers.

With regards to the issues faced in South Yorkshire, officers highlighted this as a huge issue and informed Members that there is a full partnership assessment which will lead to a city wide action plan creating a positive future of continual improvement.

Members sought to understand the impact of the new format of police training on the type of modules delivered and whether when trained PCs are ready to deal with issues of Domestic Violence etc. Officers explained that there has been a professionalization of police training, so officers are better prepared to be fully rounded officers, who are good quality investigators. New recruits are continually improving with partnership work with Bradford University where officers and students train each other. The force has arranged full day practitioner training courses and workshops by professionals.

Members were made aware of the appointment of a specialist educational safeguarding officer which has been publicised to schools. Furthermore, Bradford schools have taken up more POLED than any other area in West Yorkshire. Members expressed their happiness with the excellent multidisciplinary teamwork demonstrated by officers from West Yorkshire Police, Children's Services and the Safeguarding Children team.

Members expressed their concerns over the different methodology used in exploiting children with the increase in use of social media, and sought to understand how schools and parents were made aware of this and how to combat it. Officers explained that CSE training is not mandatory however it is good practice to do it, and there is a weekly podcast with updates. However, officers acknowledged that there needs to be more signposting for parents and outreach and due to having a vacant post for a year, this has been difficult to do. More needs to be done to ensure children do not fall through the net to ensure safety.

Members suggested the engagement with families and especially mothers due to the influence they can hold. Members suggested coffee morning where methodologies and the use of exploitation can be discussed and emphasised that women are a captive audience. Officers supported this and emphasised the value of this for religious and migrant communities.

Members sought to understand the importance of youth workers targeting the right people to ensure those children not already on the radar do not slip through the net. Officers stated that resources are stretched but it is likely that the youth service is already supporting CAMHS referrals etc. Officers also outlined that research on adverse childhood experiences demonstrates a need to invest in the childhood and not just the service, as early experiences keep children at risk of exploitation.

Officers made Members aware that No Further Action (NFA) was used when there was no alternative on the computer. Many were NFA as the local authority didn't need to do any more due to school or early help involvement. Officers agreed the use of NFA was slightly misleading, and assured members that the system is more sophisticated now.

Members were concerned about the number of repeat referrals and that information was not being taken on board in order to combat this. Officers outlined the view that there is Audit work being completed on this, but that in exploitation, a referral is a strength. In creating a universal safety plan, children are told to tell someone if anything else happens.

Members sought to understand the level of County Lines activity in the Bradford District. Officers from West Yorkshire police outlined that there are individuals connected to multiple areas. This is high on the agenda.

The Committee thanked officers in partnership for the report and for their attendance at the committee.

Resolved –

- (1) The Committee would like to thank officers for their attendance.**
- (2) This Committee requests that a progress report be presented in 12 months.**
- (3) This Committee requests the review into existing CSE services and development of the Multi-Agency Exploitation Hub, be presented to this Committee in the new Municipal Year.**

Action – Bradford Council Chief Executive

64. OFSTED MONITORING VISIT CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Strategic Director of Children's Services presented a report (Document "O") following Ofsted's Inspection of Children's Social Care Services from the 17 to 28 September 2018, the sixth of a series of Monitoring Visits took place on the 7 to 8 September 2021. The focus of the Monitoring Visit was around Children in Care and Residential Services. The findings were published by Ofsted on 22 October 2021. The report included as an appendix the Children's Services Improvement Plan.

The Strategic Director for Children's Services provided a summary statement of the report following Ofsted's Inspection of Children's Social Care Services, and following a monitoring visit focusing on Children in Care and Residential Services.

The strategic director for Children's services outlined plans for an independent review into the Star Hobson case in order to improve services, and commented that the purpose of the report was to update members and not to talk about the successes of the service.

Officers explained to members the focus of the Improvement Plan following the 2018 inspection was a focus on children in care, and on performance planning and decision making. Furthermore, the voice of the child being evident as well as the standard of care in residential services, were highlighted in the report.

Officers also stated that the 7 outcomes of the Ofsted Improvement plan had been made visible to staff around offices etc. in order to ensure these are understood and used consistently.

Members presented concern about the problems in children's homes and that it demonstrated a failure in corporate parenting. As a result of this Members asked what officers can do to assure them the weaknesses in theory and practice have been resolved.

Officers from Children's Services stated that young people recognising the service and the council as good corporate parents. This is supported by the new terms of reference for the Corporate Parenting Panel which will change what the panel can achieve. Furthermore, a new Child Protection Plan is being drafted with a focus on work pertaining to residential homes. Improvement were seen here. This is supported by a consistent and collaborative approach to all homes.

Members were made aware of a new Level 4 position in the Mockingbird structure, providing provision for mother and baby placements which are traditionally hard to place. The Mockingbird is something that has been tried before, however it is starting again in the new year and will provide for more complex needs.

Members asked officers to include reports which had been referenced. In this case the Ofsted report as this was left out of the Agenda and members had to source this themselves.

Additionally, Members sought to understand whether the service had been bought into after a consultation with staff and partners, so when Ofsted come back in 6 months' time there will be improvements. Members were assured by officers that the Ofsted Commissioner was well sighted on the plan, and subsequently can hold officers to account. Members were assured that the plan is fit for purpose.

Members sought to understand how many children and young people had been collaborated with and what their view is. Officers explained there were events held in summer, which regards to participation, officers outlined a need to be more inclusive in order to represent a breadth of views. Use of a care leaver survey regarding young people's experience of the service. Officers explained to members that information is still being gathered so feedback cannot be given at this stage. Officers will feedback when it is possible to do so.

Members asked whether children or young people would understand what a corporate parent is. Officers explained that the use of the 'Talk to Marium' email inbox for children in care to inform of experiences. As a result of this, officers can check in and have conversations as a parent would do. Officers stated that with regards to Corporate Parenting and children's understanding of this, there was 244 comments, 61 young people, of which 40% understood what a corporate parent is and does. This reflects that work needs to be done with the language used rather than in the CP itself.

Members concluded this item by asking members and officers to come back on 23 March 2022. Members also requested more supplementary information on the plan.

Resolved –

(1) The Committee requests that the Outcomes Improvement Plan also contains within it, an outcomes column.

(2) For the Committee to keep an overview of the revised Outcomes Improvement Plan and at its meeting on Wednesday 23 March 2022, members request a report which specifically focuses on one aspect of the priority area in the Outcomes Improvement Plan; with that priority area being children and young people recognising Bradford Council as good Corporate Parents.

Action – Interim Strategic Director Children's Services

65. YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE

The of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (Document "P") provided an update on highlights from the Youth Justice Service since the HMIP Inspection during September & October 2019. Including focus on areas of progress, action in the next period and areas of concern and potential concern.

The Head of Service and Service Manager for Youth Justice Service provided a summary on the highlights from the YJS in the Strategic Director of Children's Services' report. This included focus on areas of progress, action in the next period and areas of concern and potential concern.

Following an inspection in September 2019 regarding Keeping Children away from Crime found that the Youth Justice Service requires improvement. So far there has been progress, gone from priority 2 to priority 1.

Officers from the Youth Justice Service explained the use of the youth Justice Board, which has provided a lot of challenge, however they are impressed with the improvements the service has made.

There has also been a focus on preventative services in an effort to reduce re-offending. One such example is behind the blade.

Members were keen to understand the impact that the COVID19 pandemic had had on service delivery.

In response, officers indicated that the court had been closed for three months, which could have led to an increase in an increase in re-offending rates. However, Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny members also heard that the backlog in court cases had been reduced and the courts in Bradford were now up-to-date.

Members of the Committee acknowledged the good work that had been undertaken in this area, by officers.

Resolved –

This Committee recognises the progress and improvements that the service has made and requests that a further report be presented late in the New Municipal Year, specifically focusing on the “Next Steps”, which include:

- **Improving participation with young people and families to understand their experiences of the services they have received;**
- **Starting to address themes that arise from the audit feedback;**
- **Using data to drive the service and its impact;**
- **Continued Thematic Inspection reports within the service;**
- **Embedding the pathfinder model to focus on prevention;**
- **Continuing to improve quality and embed the audit process.**

Action – Interim Strategic Director Children's Services

66. CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE- WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22

The Overview and Scrutiny Lead presented the 2021-22 work programme. Members heard that the work programme agreed by the Committee formed the basis for the committees work during the year, but can be amended as issues arise during the year.

The members discussed and amended the 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. The members discussed and amended the 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 -

- (1) Members discussed and amended the 2021-22 work programme for the Committee.**
- (2) Members agreed the amended Terms of Reference for the Elective Home Education Scrutiny Review.**
- (3) That an additional meeting take place in late January 2022, to consider the findings from the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review, after it is published.**

Actions – 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