

**Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services
Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday,
9 February 2022 in the Banqueting Hall - City Hall,
Bradford**

Commenced 4.30 pm
Concluded 8.05 pm

Present – Councillors

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

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Joyce Simpson
Fauzia Raza

Church Representative (CE)
Parent

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Dr Samina Karim

Children's Social Care Representative

Councillor Winnard in the Chair

67. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

68. MINUTES

Resolved –

**That the minutes of the meetings held on 17 November 2021 and 15
Decemeber 2021 be signed as a correct record.**

69. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals submitted by the public to review decisions to restrict documents.

70. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals to the Committee.

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

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "R"**) updated the Committee on Workforce Data and Improvement Progress in Children's Services.

The Director of Human Resources outlined the wider workforce data and developments which included: recruitment, retention and sickness information.

It was explained that managers were working hard to address absence issues within the Service and working on how things could be done differently to enable them to improve the Service. It was further reported that there were currently a number of vacancies to recruit more social workers as more resources were needed to be put in place to deliver the service which would assist in achieving results.

The audit activity had confirmed that changes in social worker could impact the quality and in particular the timeliness of intervention and as the stability of workforce was a high focus area for Children's Social Care. Management was introducing new mechanisms to try to further stabilise the workforce.

Members of the Committee were keen to understand if any impact had been made by the new microsite "Bring Heart" since its launch.

In response officers reported that the idea behind "Bring Heart" was to give people an idea of how it feels to be a social worker in Bradford and since it was only launched in December therefore data related to impact made was not available.

Members stated it was worrying that there were higher number of sickness absences for mental health and wanted to know what measures had been taken to identify causes in order to improve.

Members wanted to know if management had been able to identify key reasons behind social workers resigning after conducting the exit interview.

Officers stated that health and wellbeing advice was always provided and appropriate referrals made in order to achieve the best possible outcome. It was explained that some of the key reasons for resignations had been due to the volume of case load, work pressure and other mental health issues.

Members were concerned about agency staff and service continuity of social workers.

Officer advised that management was trying to ensure there was continuity in service especially when there was a changeover in social workers, there was a handover transition period to provide stability and continuity for children and families.

Members were extremely concerned as to why there seemed to be a reluctance in progressing level 2 social workers onto level 3. Given that there was a national shortage of social workers, they felt that management must do more to incentivise the position and ensure there is adequate support and guidance in place to retain staff.

Officers reported that even though a social worker may be eligible for progression, they may not yet be ready to move up a level. It was further explained that in order for progression there were certain criteria that needed to be met and the social worker must be able to demonstrate the required skills. As assurance was given that there was adequate support in place for all staff. Members were advised that the package for social workers was competitive, employee benefits and wider benefits of working for the Council had been published.

Members were keen to understand what practices were put in place to ensure that a child was not missed when a social worker is off sick.

The Officer reported that if staff were off due to sickness then it was covered by other members of the team. However, additional staff were recruited for prolonged absences.

Members requested additional information on the current average case load of a social worker and what measures were in place to relieve social workers of case load pressure. Furthermore, Members wanted to know if the management had numbers of how many social workers employed by Bradford Council had moved onto other agencies and what checks were carried out for competencies regarding agency staff.

It was reported that management had recently introduced Support Workers that were supporting social workers with admin duties which could be very time consuming in order to alleviate some pressure. Management ensured there was a fair balance in the distribution of case load. Furthermore, extensive and rigorous checks were carried prior to appointment to determine the suitable start level, staff were offered permanent positions with extensive benefits.

Members suggested that perhaps investing in managers to enable them to support staff would be beneficial which could potentially lead to reduced absences.

Officers agreed but also advised that the management was currently working on support pools introducing welfare conversations to enable social workers to debrief after traumatic visits. This would help identify any potential issues and enable management to take appropriate action.

A Member suggested that the Service should look into working with the local university for recruitment purposes.

Committee Members requested data reflecting the longest/shortest term of service of social workers in the Council.

Members were informed that this data is not currently available, however, there are almost 200 staff that have been in service since 2016.

Resolved –

That a further report be presented to the Committee in the new municipal year which also specifically focuses on:

- **The effectiveness of the new recruitment campaign;**
- **Retention of staff;**
- **Progress on training and growing our own staff;**
- **The exact breakdown of workforce establishment for social workers and the level of vacancies at each grade level.**

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children's Services

72. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND AUDIT IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SUMMARY

The Strategic Director Children's Services presented **Document "S"** which provided a Quality Assurance Highlight Report on the Findings of the Monthly Case File Audits for the period October, November & December 2021.

The report provided Members with graphs and charts that highlighted the findings of the audits.

Members expressed concern at the rate of audit, Members felt that the audit did not accurately reflect the scale of the problem due to the rate of participation.

Committee Members pointed out that the data for Bradford South and West was of serious concern and that there seems to be no positive impact in some areas.

Members questioned the process of auditing and wanted to understand the hierarchy of reporting issues within the management.

In response it was explained that there was an initial assessment and review of the caseload by the manager to identify any issues. The auditor produced a list of all actions which were reported at a meeting to ensure the remedial actions required had been carried out.

Members questioned officers on whether all the other cases of a social worker whose audited case was judged inadequate were checked. In response it was

noted that it depended on what the reason was for the judgement as if it was linked to quality of practice then other cases were reviewed, but if it was due to an assessment or report not being uploaded onto the system, but it had been completed correctly, then a proportionate response was considered.

In response to Members concerns it was acknowledged that there were still issues regarding the consistency of the quality of social care practice in that there were still “inadequate” casefiles, albeit that these had reduced overall in number which indicated a move towards “requires improvement to be good” and “good” cases. It was noted that the auditing process was having an impact in improving the quality of casework, although it was acknowledged that the pace of this improvement needed to be increased.

Furthermore, there were concerns that the audits were not signed off consistently due to poor management. It was suggested that ways to improve management skills should be explored.

Members were advised that there was a chain of accountability in place for both social workers and managers but ensured that reviews would be carried out once audit had taken place to follow up on any outstanding tasks in order to improve performance. An assurance was given that other than audits, regular work inspections were carried out which helped to identify issues.

Resolved –

That a further report be presented to the Committee in 12 months which particularly focuses on the actions being taken to address the areas of practice that currently, most often are shown to require improvement or are inadequate.

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children’s Services

73. RAISING ATTAINMENT STRATEGY

The report of the Strategic Director of Children’s Services (**Document “T”**) provided an update on the Raising Attainment Strategy. It updated the status of work to date along with the approach to be taken for further development.

Members expressed concerns about the persistent absence of children from school. Members requested to know what provisions had been put in place to improve school attendance. Members added that since the Pandemic many families were struggling with mental health and anxiety related issues and unless these issues were tackled, attainment in attendance may not be achieved.

Members were advised that the Early Help approach was used, in which consisted of 4 workers and a manager who work together to identify reasons and barriers that were preventing children from attending school regularly, they then made arrangements to provide the necessary provisions that would allow children to improve attendance. Furthermore, the schools had been provided with advice and guidance on how to deal with children who are suffering from mental health

issues and anxiety.

Members were keen to understand if any additional supportive resources were available to secondary school pupils.

Officers responded that currently children had access to White Rose maths which was an organisation that provided maths resources and schemes of learning for pupils of all ages, from early years to secondary schools.

Members were keen to understand what the Service was seeking to achieve in the 5-year plan and were advised that the ambition was to be in a position where the attainment of C&YP at each key stage is in line with or above national levels.

Resolved –

That a report be presented to the Committee that demonstrates key outcomes, with particular emphasis on the delivery of the Raising Attainment Strategy.

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children’s Services

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

The report of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Document “U”) included the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2021/22.

The members discussed and amended the work programme.

Resolved -

That the Children’s Services Commissioners Report relating to the options for Children’s Services, be presented to the Committee in March 2022.

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