

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

Commenced 4.35 pm
Concluded 6.10 pm

Present – Councillors

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

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Joyce Simpson Church Representative (CE)

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Tom Bright Teachers Secondary School Rep

Observers: Councillor Duffy, Children and Families Portfolio Holder

Apologies: Dr Samina Karim Children's Social Care Representative

Councillor Winnard in the Chair

85. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

86. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2022 be signed as a correct record.

ACTION: City Solicitor

87. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

88. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

89. MONITORING OF THE CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "AA"**) presented the improvement plan that had been revised to make it more outcome focused and more streamlined so that the improvement Ofsted required in key areas could be accelerated to ensure that better outcomes for children and young people were seen.

It was reported that the Corporate Parenting Strategy had been drafted and would be reported to this Committee in June. With reference to engagement with Councillors to understand and fulfil their Corporate Parenting responsibility it was noted that work was being undertaken with members of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Work would also be undertaken to broaden member involvement in Regulation 44 visits with the intention to ask members for expressions of interest to become lay visitors of children's homes.

It was stressed that it was important to have as wide an audience as possible regarding Corporate Parenting. There was a need to identify ways for members to understand how their role as Corporate Parents impacted on their role as Councillors for by example in tapping into their other areas of interests such as housing or green spaces. With reference to the engagement with looked after young people it was reported that the format of the Corporate Parenting Panel had been changed with half of the meetings being led by Young People, the first of which had been held in the previous week and a number of actions had been raised which would be reported back. One of the issues that arose was the turnover in social workers and the impact on young people and the young people expressed a wish to be actively involved in getting the right staff and retaining them. It was intended to reinstate the involvement of young people in the recruitment and interviews of Social Workers.

A number of members referred to the RAG (Red Amber Green) rating used in the improvement plan. A member asked why a number of key milestones were marked green when they were yet to be delivered and asked whether there was confidence that the rating given was robust. The Strategic Director responded

that the lower level operation actions came below the high level plan and that external oversight was given outside Children's Services. She added that each area had a number of actions under it. She stressed that green meant that the authority was on track to deliver. She pointed out that the previous plan was criticised for being over complicated and activity based and there had been a need to move to a plan that focused on outcomes and urged members to allow officers to work with the current plan that had been seen by Ofsted, the DfE and the Commissioner who were all happy with it. She stressed that the emphasis was about delivering outcomes that impacted on the lived experience of children rather than recording actions.

In response to a question about reducing the number of cases held by individual social workers it was noted that social workers were being given time to be in the office and that business support officers were giving them support with administrative and IT work to free up more of their time for case work. It was stressed that the priority was to employ more staff which was a significant task.

Reference was made to recruitment of Community Resource Workers to support Social Workers leaving them more time to do detailed work with families.

In response to a member question the Strategic Director confirmed that caseloads continued to be safe and manageable.

A member referred to people having difficulties getting an answer to phone calls and asked if staff were returning to the office. In response it was noted that staff were being brought back into the office on a 60% office: 40% working from home split. Officers would follow up individual cases where people were experiencing difficulties.

A member referred to the RAG rating and noted that 12 key milestones were on target and 23 were not and asked whether it was anticipated that this would be different by the end of April. She asked how the RAG rating was decided. In response it was noted that the coding was explained in the document and that it was a well used system which the authority and partners were well used to. It was also noted that the next iteration would be based around 7 priorities and engagement events were being planned with partners. It was noted that introducing a scoring system alongside the RAG rating was being explored.

A member asked about the time frame and evidence to support the judgement that children and young people will recognise Bradford Council and its partners as good corporate Parents (priority 1). In response it was noted that all forums would be used to identify the voice of young people including the Care Review Process, a survey of care leavers, the Independent Reviewing Officer and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

In response to a question about ensuring that the authority had a sufficient fostering workforce (priority 3) it was noted that recruitment had been static for 3 years; that the authority did not have a fostering recruitment strategy; and that there was a need to increase the number of carers across the board. Reference was made to difficult to place groups such as sibling groups, adolescents and children with disabilities and complex needs. The need to have engagement with partner agencies such as health to provide appropriate levels of support for foster

Carers was stressed.

A member asked what the authority was doing to attract more social workers to the district and to mitigate against neighbouring authorities paying social workers more than this authority. The Strategic Director responded that there was an emphasis on making the district an attractive place to work which was difficult given the negative messaging around. She referred to positive messages such as the result of the recent monitoring visit that had identified that the authority had made significant progress on child exploitation and noted that this had not received much press coverage. The Council had made a lot of the positive improvements but she acknowledged that staff picked up on negative messages in the district. Positive messages were being put out by the authority to encourage people to come and join the district on its improvement journey. She acknowledged the need to recruit permanent staff but recognised the national issue of attracting people into social work and pointed out the need to address this issue nationally. The role of social worker should be highly regarded and respected in keeping children safe. With reference to the need to explore rates of pay it was noted that as a result of research the authority was becoming more competitive in paying agency staff and there had been an increase in the number of CVs being received as a result and that permanent staff would be looked at.

Resolved –

- 1. This Committee requests that the next Improvement Plan report focuses specifically on Priority 2 – Caseloads across all Social Work Teams.**
- 2. That future Improvement Plans contain an outcomes column, which illustrates improvements being delivered.**

ACTION: Strategic Director for Children's Services

90. YOUNG CARERS

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "AB"**) provided an annual update, specifically focusing on performance, targets and standards, as requested.

The Young Carers Service is a commissioned service which meets the Council's statutory duty to provide an assessment for Young Carers, as well as providing other resources following assessment. The Carers Resource currently holds the contract.

Appendix 1 to Document "AB" presented the actual data from Quarter 3 and Appendix 2 was a graphical representation of some of the key data.

The following questions were asked and answers given:

- Do the issues regarding raising awareness relate to identifying Young Carers or awareness of the service?
 - The issue relates to the fact that a lot of young people do not identify themselves as Young Carers

- Are schools supportive and co-operative in identifying Young Carers and making referrals?
 - Carers Resource is well established and used in schools. The challenge is in young people identifying themselves as carers.

- Is there any information on the impact on Young Carers attainment?
 - This information is not available.

- A question was asked about grants and the holiday activity fund.
 - Work is undertaken with the Voluntary Sector that have access to charitable funding. It was noted that a needs and demand assessment would be undertaken at the end of the contract.

- Is the appropriate balance being struck between one to one, group work and awareness raising?
 - Each of these is given equal weight and if one to one support is required it will be provided.

- Will Young Carers get support if they have short term caring responsibilities?
 - There is no definitive length of time and it is self-declared based on the young person's circumstances at the time.

The following questions were asked, to which the Head of Service would respond to all members of the Committee following the meeting:

- How are Carers resource working with the Youth Service?
- What work is being undertaken to reassure parents that it is OK to be a young carer?
- As the number of Young Carers are rising have discussions taken place with the CCG's regarding funding?
- Is there any indication of the number of potential Young Carers who have yet to be identified?
- What is the reason for the statement that youth club timings continue to be an issue?

Resolved -

- (1) That a further progress report be presented in 12 months, which includes measures of performance and details of outcomes delivered.**

ACTION: Strategic Director of Children's Services.

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