

Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 29 July 2021 at 4.30 pm in Council Chamber, City Hall - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 16.30
Concluded 19.00

Present – Councillors

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

Councillor Winnard in the Chair

Apologies: Councillor Stubbs, Fauzia Raza and Joyce Simpson -Voting Co-opted members

25. ALTERNATE MEMBERS (Standing Order 34)

There were no alternate members.

26. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made for matters under consideration.

28. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

29. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

No referrals were received.

30. APPOINTMENT OF NON-VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBER

Tom Bright – Teachers Secondary School Representative
Dr Samina Karim: Children’s Social Care Representative.

Resolved –

That the appointment of the following non-voting co-opted representatives for the 2021/2022 municipal year be recommend to Council:

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

**Dr Samina Karim - Children’s Social Care Representative.
Teachers Secondary School Representative - Tom Bright.**

ACTION: City Solicitor

(Mustansir Butt – 01274 432574)

31. APPOINTMENT OF VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Joyce Simpson – Church Representative (CE)
Fauzia Raza – Parent Governor Representative

Resolved –

That the appointment of the following voting co-opted representative for the 2021/2022 municipal year be recommended to Council:

**Fauzia Raza - Parent Governor Representative.
Joyce Simpson – Church Representative (CE).**

ACTION: City Solicitor

(Mustansir Butt – 01274 432574)

32. OFSTED MONITORING VISIT - 28-29 APRIL 2021 (Help and Protection)

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 28 to 29 April 2021. This was the fifth monitoring visit since Bradford Council Children’s Services was judged inadequate in October 2018.

Children’s Services Officers informed Councillors that the focus of the visit was on children in need and children who are subject to a child protection plan. 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:

- Since 2018, a new permanent senior leadership team had been put in place and was driving improvement;
- An improved front door service and revamped training programme;
- Improvements in quality assurance and performance management;
- Significant investment to increase social work and managerial capacity;
- The newly commissioned agency social work teams have been incrementally introduced and are beginning to have a positive impact on some children;
- Quality assurance and management information have continued to improve in the last six months.

Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee members were encouraged at these improvements, however members were extremely 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 pace of improvement being too slow for children and families, but OFSTED did recognise that this had been exacerbated by the breadth of the inadequacy and challenges associated with maintaining service delivery during the pandemic;
- In particular, the progress on the quality of core social work practice has been too slow to show the impact for children and families and there have been four previous monitoring visits, which have all reported on the slow pace of change in improving the quality of core social work practice;
- Although the service had been restructured and there has been significant investment in staffing and service improvement planning, due to the breadth and depth of the inadequacy identified in 2018, this had not led to sufficient positive change for some children;
- Delays in the identification of risk, need and early intervention and where risks are identified, this does not always result in timely progression to an initial child protection conference and if needed, resultant multi-agency protection plan.
- The recruitment of experienced social workers remaining a challenge;
- Some children's cases are not taken to conference quickly enough, meaning that there has been a delay in the needs of those children being considered and to having a multi-agency plan in place to reduce the risk;
- There is variability in how rigorously the social worker uses the child's plan to check progress to avoid drift.
- Inspectors felt that Initial Child Protection plans were too long and complex for parents to understand.
- As well as this, Inspectors also identified that some Child Protection Plans were closed prematurely and resulted in needs remaining unmet for children.

Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee members indicated that OFSTED had consistently mentioned the slow pace of change in delivering improvements and that this Committee had also expressed its concern over the slow pace of change. Therefore, members were keen to understand what plans were in place to ensure that real improvements are actually being made.

In response, officers from Bradford Councils Children's Services stated that, the breadth and depth of the inadequacies was greater than they had imagined and that since the period between the failed inspection and the appointment of the Director for Children's Services, had taken too long. As well as this the COVID19 pandemic had also had an impact on the pace of improvement, particularly in the areas of training and practice standards.

Officers also highlighted that the recruitment of level 3 Social Care Workers was still the biggest challenge.

Members were keen to understand to what extent the key findings from the Child Exploitation Thematic Review, had actually been covered in the Improvement Plan and that whether Children's Services Officers were confident that they were doing everything they could do in this area.

Officers responded by stating that there had been investment in the Safeguarding Hub and that Children's Services staff were now better trained, with better monitoring systems now also in place. Moreover, Children's Services officers assured members of the committee, that a significant amount of work had gone into this area.

Furthermore, members expressed their frustration at the level of social care practice not being at a good enough standard to be able to look after the children of the District. As well as this, members felt that officers should be more proactive towards the recruitment of level 3 Children's Social Care Workers and providing a better offer, in terms of training, salaries and advancement. Members also indicated that officers should be undertaking benchmarking, to establish what other Councils, bit regionally and nationally are doing in terms of the recruitment of level 3 Children's Social Care workers.

Bradford Councils Children's Services officers did acknowledge that the improvements were taking a long time, but the leadership team was fully in place on March 2020; the Practice Standards had been agreed in September 2020.

Continuing on, members wanted to know what officers were doing in relation to reducing the 25% of agency staff currently working in Children's Social Care.

In response to this, officers insisted that there are key areas that exist which attract Social Workers to Bradford and these are:

- Salary;
- Manageable Caseloads;
- Good training;
- Good supervision;
- Stable Management.

Furthermore, in response to members questioning, a representative from the Childrens Services Improvement Board state stated that the key issues facing the service were that recruitment needed to be better and that there needs to be a reduction in the case loads of Children's Social Care workers.

Resolved –

- (1) The Committee considered the OFSTED monitoring letter and requests that an update on progress be brought back to this Committee, together with an updated Vital Signs report at the meeting on Wednesday 22 September 2021; as it is clear that the pace of improvement is still unsatisfactory.**
- (2) The Children’s Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee has examined this report in the context of serious shortcomings, both historic and relatively recent, as highlighted in the Child Sexual Exploitation Thematic Child Safeguarding Practice Review. Therefore, the necessity for driving the pace of improvement as a matter of the highest corporate priority, is clear.**

Action – Strategic Director, Children’s Services

(Mark Douglas – 01274 431266)

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

The Overview & Scrutiny Lead talked through the draft 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.

Also mentioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Lead, were the unscheduled topics and resolution tracking from 2020-21.

There was also discussion in relation to the recent important developments after the agenda for this meeting had been published, which required detailed scrutiny. These areas were the Valley View Home Closure, Child Sexual Exploitation Thematic Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Private Fostering.

Members discussed agreed the work programme for the Committee and agreed that the following topics also needed to be included in the work programme:

- Valley View Home Closure;
- Child Sexual Exploitation Child Safeguarding Practice Review;
- Private Fostering;
- Better Start Bradford.

Resolved –

The Committee discussed and agreed the 2020-21 work programme and recommended that the following topics also be included in the work programme:

- **Valley View Home Closure;**
- **Child Sexual Exploitation Child Thematic Safeguarding Practice**

- Review;**
- **Private Fostering;**
 - **Better Start Bradford.**

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.

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