

**Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services
Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday,
6 October 2021 at 4.30 pm in Council Chamber, City Hall
- City Hall, Bradford**

Commenced 4.30 pm
Concluded 7.00 pm

Present – Councillors

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

Councillor Winnard in the Chair

Apologies: None.

43. ALTERNATE MEMBERS (Standing Order 34)

There were no alternate members.

44. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made for matters under consideration.

45. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

46. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

No referrals were received.

47. Child Sexual Exploitation Thematic Review 2021

Officers from the Safeguarding Partnership informed Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee members that the Child Sexual Exploitation, (CSE), Thematic Review was commissioned in 2019 by the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board, subsequently replaced by the Bradford Partnership Working Together to Safeguard Children. The partnership includes the three statutory partners to the Council, Police, Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and also a number of key agencies.

Members also learned that the review focused on the response of the agencies in Bradford to CSE in response to two historical cases of CSE, which have already been in the public domain and the media. Officers also stated that the review included a review of three more recent cases and was led by an independent author and that the review looked into details at service responses to the experiences of the five children.

Members of the Committee were keen to know if all the partnerships were working together.

In response, officers indicated that they were working together, record keeping was challenging as all the partners had different Information Technology systems and this is where the difficulties arose.

With regards to some of the key areas of work relating to agencies working together, agencies developing a long term plan and services being professional; it was felt by members that these were not new concepts at all in this area and should be already be in place.

In response, acknowledged this, but did state that this would all be considered as part of the assurance exercise.

Moreover, Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee members were keen to seek assurance from Safeguarding officers, that they would not again have to consider a report like this again.

Officers acknowledged this and that practitioners needed to learn from the same recurring issues. As well as this members heard that staff turnover was an issue and is central to this, along with first line management and quality of management; whereas managers need to be equally competent and that staff caseloads need to be reduced.

Members were keen to understand if there had been any change of CSE hotspots.

In response, officers from West Yorkshire Police stated that they would be reviewing this in light of the findings from the event recently held event with key partners. Members heard that officers never really know the extent to which CSE is taking place across the District, but that they did monitor events.

As well as this, there is also a three weekly meeting with Council officers and the Police looking at identifications of risk to CSE. Members highlighted that some children are vulnerable to more than one

category of risk and were keen to understand how this was being managed by the partnerships.

In response, officers indicated that they were working with agencies to prioritise this area of work, over other areas and that they are reliant on the agencies to deliver. Officers were adamant that to make a real difference, the areas that needed to be focused on included poverty, deprivation and neglect.

Officers from West Yorkshire Police informed members of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, that at the last HCMI, (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector), inspection judged Bradford as being good in relation to Safeguarding.

Councillors enquired as to the effectiveness of partnership working, in the key area.

In response, officers highlighted that more work needed to be done and that meeting with colleagues face-to-face was beneficial and that open conversation were need with all key partners.

The meeting then went in camera, (closed session), as Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Councillors wanted to discuss the details contained in Appendix C, which was a Not For Publication document.

Resolved –

1. This Committee requests that a report be presented in December 2022 that focuses on the:
 - Work undertaken to date;
 - Progress against the review recommendations.
2. That a Cross-Party Working Group be set-up from within this Committee to review the evidence against the actions that have been completed.

Action – Strategic Director, Children's Services.

(Darren Minton – 01274 434361)

48. Residential Children's Homes & Related Issues

Children's Services officers, provided members of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update, regarding the current situation regarding the Children's Residential homes in Bradford and related issues.

Officers also informed members that since June 2021, seven homes have been inspected, with three of the homes retaining their "Good" judgement. The outcomes for the other four homes was:

- Valley View – Inadequate, (previously Required Improvement). This included a suspension of registration and a compliance notice.
- Owlthorpe – Inadequate, (previously Good). This included a suspension of

- registration and a compliance notice.
- The Willows – Inadequate, (previously Good). This included a compliance notice.
 - Wedgewood – Requires Improvement, (previously Good).

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Councillors were keen to understand why residential children's homes, were not performing well.

In response, officers from Bradford Council's Children's Services indicated the reasons were wide and varied and that there was no specific reason.

Furthermore, Officers indicated that the right level of response and the timeliness of responses had not been good enough.

Councillors enquired as to whether concentration has been on other areas of Children's Services, which has resulted in the Children's Residential Homes area being neglected.

Officers replied by stating that this was a service that was not regularly discussed, but that there was a lot of focus on this area now, with it being regularly discussed at Directorate Management Team.

Furthermore, members highlighted that there had been issues with staffing in homes including sickness absence and what level of support had actually been provided to keep people at work.

Here, officers informed members that they were working with staff to get them back to work and helping them to meet the needs of the children, as well as having a wide range of services to support children in residential homes.

Moreover, officers from Children's Services stated that they were currently developing a Sufficiency Strategy and would present this to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the near future.

Members were concerned that there was still not set of forms available for Regulation 44 visits, as well as understanding what staff were saying. Officers indicated that they had undertaken a staff survey and that they wanted staff to feel part of Children's Services, as being considered just Residential staff, who do not feel part of Children's Services.

Moreover, officers highlighted that Regulation 44 visits had pro-formas and each home had an action plan, whereas previously, there was no consistency in how each Residential was undertaking action planning.

Members did express their concern over the state of Children's Residential Homes and that they were keen to see radical changes and improvements being delivered, to better improve the life's for looked after children.

Resolved –

1. This Committee requests that the actions being taken to improve the Children's Residential Homes, be presented to this Committee, as soon as possible.
2. That the findings from the external review of the quality of provision across each of the Children's homes be presented to this Committee in January 2022.

Action – Strategic Director, Children's Services

(Mariam Haque – 01274 432955)

49. Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Work Programme 2021/22

The Overview and Scrutiny Lead presented the 2020-21 work programme.

Members heard that the work programme agreed by the Committee formed the basis for the committee's 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.

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.