

**Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services
Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday,
28 September 2022 in Council Chamber - City Hall,
Bradford**

Commenced 4.35 pm
Concluded 6.25 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	BRADFORD INDEPENDENT GROUP
Alipoor Humphreys Shafiq Thirkill Parsan	Winnard Pollard	J Sunderland	Sajawal

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Shifa Simab

Joyce Simpson

Church Representative (CE)

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Tom Bright

Councillor Winnard in the Chair

14. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No declarations were received for matters under consideration.

15. MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 29 June and 13 July 2022 be signed as a correct record (previously circulated).

ACTION: Director of Legal and Governance

16. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

No requests were received to inspect any restricted documents.

17. APPOINTMENT OF VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBER

Resolved – That the Committee confirm and recommend to Council the appointment of the following voting co-opted representative for the remainder of the 2022/2023 municipal year.

**VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBER:
Parent Governor: Shifa Simab**

18. ESTABLISHING THE BRADFORD CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TRUST (THE TRUST)

The report of the Chief Executive (**Document “E”**) provided an update on activities to establish the Bradford Children & Families Trust, the progress to date and critical next steps.

It was reported that after the children’s services social care services was deemed inadequate following an Ofsted inspection, the Department of Education intervened to improve the provision of the Service by establishing a wholly owned local authority company (Children’s Trust) to take responsibility for the provision of children’s services social care services.

The Council would remain responsible and accountable for the delivery of Children’s statutory duties but the Trust would be responsible for delivering priorities and outcomes.

The Officer provided a PowerPoint presentation which provided an update on Bradford Children and Families Trust Programme, items in the presentation included:

- Summary of the Programme
- Lessons learned from other Trust programmes and how these lessons learned had informed the set-up of the BCFT implementation programme
- And a Programme update (September 2022)

Members asked who the Trust would be accountable to and who had the ultimate control. The Officer presenting stated that the Trust would have its own procedures and that the Council and the Trust would need to work together to ensure good end product. The Council would retain statutory accountability for children’s services and required assurance that the accountabilities were being effectively and appropriately discharged by the Children’s Trust. Members were advised that there would be ongoing engagement and briefings with elected members.

A Member asked if there could potentially be any conflict of interest due to Interims. The Officer replied that the Interims would have a very detailed knowledge of what was required and there would be a good balance with experienced Interims and a permanent Chair.

A Member asked that moving forward, looking and learning from other Children's Trusts, how well equipped Bradford was to adapt in the new ways of working. The Officer informed Members that the programme structure and plan was put together after conducting lessons learned from Trust arrangements for other local authorities. Lessons learned formed the basis for the programme itself and focus on allowing the programme to deliver, safely, efficiently and to the 1st April 2023 deadline.

The presenting Officer provided the Committee Members with summary of progress to date that:

- The overall progress to date was on track and in line with the programme plan and that progress towards achieving critical milestones had been quicker due to building on the lessons learned from elsewhere when compared to other Children's Trust implementations.
- A programme rhythm has been established which allowed critical oversight from key stakeholders and this had proved to be effective in monitoring progress and mitigating key risks and issues.
- Trust board members had been appointed and relationships between stakeholders were good and getting stronger. This has played a key role in progress within the implementation programme.
- The main risk had been around agreeing the establishment list, this was close to resolution.
- The programme had moved into the negotiation stage; this could become a complex progress but the legal teams were experienced in the process and the negotiation meetings had been scheduled which would allow sufficient time for these to complete.
- All stakeholders within the programme had acknowledged that the democratic process and scrutiny was crucial to the success of the implementation programme and the trust itself.

A Member of the Committee asked if there was any indication what the baseline budget was for the Trust. The Officer advised that budget would need to be part of Council approval and need to meet the expectations of the Council. The Trust would need a viable budget and discussions were still underway.

Another Member asked if the DfE would make any contributions to the additional costs and if they will continue to fund any additional costs. The Officer replied that the DfE would fund the initial set up costs for this year and the next. The Officer advised that this was a complex negotiation process and officers were working to see how DfE could continue to assist financially.

Committee Members sought further clarification on current staffing issues, council staff would most likely be concerned what the Trust means for them individually. The Officer advised that discussions with the HR Lead are underway which was a typical process but did not anticipate any redundancies/severances. Once staff are transferred over they would be on a 5 year fixed term contract. The Officer stated that the Local Authority had agreed to work to establish the Trust to improve services for children and no issues were raised by staff regarding the Trust.

A Member of the Committee was keen to understand if Bradford Council would be in a position to terminate the contract if there were real performance issues. The Officer advised Members that the contract sets out a timetable and if the Trust was not able to achieve targets then the Council may be in a position to terminate the contract. The Trust was only being established under the direction of the Secretary of State and there would be ongoing supervision by the Government, the key was to remain focussed on improving things for children and young people in Bradford.

Members of the Committee asked if the programme was on track according to the timeline. The Officer replied that it was a complex programme but a gateway review would take place in October to monitor the progress, currently things were on track.

Members requested an update on slippages and the detail of the role of PWC to which the Officer informed that there were no major slippages, meetings were being held regularly to identify progress and recognise issues and work on solutions. PWC carried out all day to day overseeing of operations including coordination of administration and programme governance.

A Member stated that despite the establishment of the Trust in Sunderland a year later it was still reported as inadequate, the Member of the Committee asked if the shortfall was identified.

The Officer replied that it was important that Scrutiny in Bradford had a good working relationship with the Trust, one which was open, honest and transparent. There has been a significant amount of learning since the first establishment. The Trusts sole function is to support children and young people in Bradford, therefore the Trust would report to Scrutiny about performance management and also have external inspection. The Council and the Trust would work together to respond to outcomes of Ofsted.

A Member of the Committee asked what the rationale was for virtual learning to remain with the Council.

The Officer replied that the Virtual School were an innovative team of professionals working with children in care alongside schools and settings to ensure they provide the best provision for young people in care and care leavers and needed to be operated the way the schools wanted, therefore it made sense for it to remain with the Local Authority.

Members were keen to understand the key issues that had prevented improvement and stability in children's social care and commented that one of the key issues in children's social services over a number of years has been stability in the work force and high levels of dependency on agency staff. This would be one of the key performance indicators, the Service could learn how the new Trust succeeds in stabilising the work force and ensuring that Bradford benefits from longer tenure and the building up of tried and tested experiences.

The Officer reported that a number of things have been done, there is now a recruitment retention package in place which would encourage some agency staff to become permanent because of the benefits that would be made available to them. From September there had been a higher number of newly qualified social

workers had joined Bradford which has been positive. Like many other local authorities across the country, Bradford Council was also looking to support the establishment of more permanent staff looking to oversees recruitment, the plan was to bring the first cohort of oversees social workers in to the Authority in January 2023 and become full case load by the end of March. This would allow the new staff time to arrive and undertake some training. In partnership with Bradford University and with some financial support from DfE a bespoke social work programme would be running for staff that was currently working in Bradford that were interested in becoming children's services social worker. The funding would allow the recruitment of social workers who would support the students in student units. Looking at a longer term recruitment and retaining staff strategy and this should see Bradford being fully staffed within the next two-year period.

Resolved -

This Committee requests that a further progress report be presented to this Committee in December 2022.

ACTION: Strategic Director, Corporate Resources

19. CHILD POVERTY SCRUTINY REVIEW - DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE.

The report of the Chair of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (**Document "F"**) presented the DRAFT Terms of Reference for the Child Poverty Scrutiny Review.

The Scrutiny Lead presented the report and requested and feedback/comments.

A Member suggested that it would be useful to have some desk data in terms of areas of deprivation.

Another Member commented that it would be beneficial to have data of the impact of the pandemic on children.

Members also suggested that engaging with useful sources such as schools would provide valuable information on how they have been managing issues with children and parents through the pandemic and recognise what efforts the schools are putting in.

Resolved –

Members amended and approved the Terms of Reference.

ACTION: Overview & Scrutiny Lead

20. CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK

PROGRAMME 2022/23

The report of the Chair of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (**Document "G"**) was submitted to Members for comment and review of the 2022/23 Work Programme.

Resolved –

Members discussed the Elective Home Education Scrutiny Review and commented on the Work Programme.

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