

Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 18 January 2023 at 4.30 pm in Council Chamber - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 4.30 pm
Concluded 6.55 pm

PRESENT – COUNCILLORS

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	BRADFORD INDEPENDENT GROUP
Alipoor Humphreys Johnson (Alt) Mukhtar (Alt) (Left the meeting at 18:38) Thirkill	Winnard (Chair) Pollard (present from 16:40)	Sunderland	Elahi (Alt)

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Church Representative – Joyce Simpson

COUNCILLOR WINNARD IN THE CHAIR

36. ALTERNATE MEMBERS (Standing Order 34)

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Berry, Sajawal and Shafiq. Apologies were also received on behalf of Shifa Simab (Parent Governor Representative) and Dr Samina Karim (Children's Social Care).

37. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interest of transparency, Councillor Elahi declared a non-disclosable interest, in that his daughter worked for Children and Families Front Door.

In the interest of transparency, Councillor Winnard declared an interest in Minutes no. 41 – SEND Services, in that he was the Chair of Aware Charity.

38. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

39. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals made to the committee.

40. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND AUDIT IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (**Document "N"**) which provided an update regarding the quality assurance and audit process in Children's Services.

In introducing the report, the Assistant Director of Safeguarding and Reviewing outlined the audit findings of the quality of social work practice and the actions undertaken to address practice that was required improvement or inadequate.

It was reported that early in the year, a decision was taken to step down team managers and practice supervisors from completing this monthly audits due to staffing challenges and capacity. It was agreed that the team manager and practice supervisors needed to focus on ensuring that service delivery was prioritised. This had limited the number of audits completed on a monthly basis. Auditing arrangements resumed with all managers and practice supervisors being part of the monthly programme from September 2022.

The focus of the work involved six areas of improvement work as outlined below:

- Practice Regarding Child in Need (CiN) and Child Protection (CP) Planning in the Keighley and Shipley Locality.
- A Review of 15 Case Closures/Step-downs in the Child and Family Teams in the Keighley and Shipley Locality.
- An Analysis of 25 Re-Referrals.
- A Review of 10 Matters Involving Criminal Exploitation (CE).
- A review of the quality of current practice in Bradford's Care Leavers service.
- Practice Evaluation and Management Development.

In the ensuing discussions, the following points were highlighted:

- The findings of the report outlined some good practice identified but was not consistent across the services. It was noted the challenges in recent years to bring more people into social care and equip social workers with the right knowledge and skills.
- The Director acknowledged the challenges around practice and management failings. Whilst the management had already started to make improvements in practice, including providing adequate training and recruiting more staff, it was recognised that more had to be done.
- Workforce showed signs of significant strain and there was more to do in recruiting, retaining and providing sufficient support.
- Audit found that the dependence on agency staff was contributing to delays and leading to children experiencing many changes in social worker, adding that critical work were not always being completed.
- Members stressed the frequent turnover of social workers lead to children and parents frustrated with the delay and lack of support. It added the

instability in the workforce and frequent change of social worker led to upset children and families at having to re-tell their stories and difficulties in forming a relationship of trust with their social workers and other professionals.

- In response to a query regarding what improvements had been made since the findings of the report, the Committee was advised that some improvements had been made and whilst there was a high level of agency staff and the reliance on agency staff was unsustainable, it recognised that there was still more to do to have stability in the workforce. The Interim Assistant Director of SEND & Inclusion advised the Committee that it looked to see progress in the next six months.
- Management were committed to delivering the improvements needed to ensure that all children know what their long-term plan was, so that they feel safe and secure about their future. It added they accepted its findings and assured to take further actions and to learn and improve.
- The Committee was advised of work ongoing to stabilise the workforce including what package could be offered which would be attractive enough to entice agency staff to become permanent and provide more stability for the children and families.
- Members stressed that bullying had also been a huge problem into social services failing. The Committee was informed that there was a policy on bullying and how it should be handled and that staff who felt they had been bullied would be advised to speak to managers first.
- In response to a query regarding consent, the Committee was advised NHS and partners had a clear understanding how consent works. The David Thorpe's model had been introduced within services.
- In response to a query regarding audit process, the Committee was informed that regular monthly audits would be undertaken by Social Workers and the Social Care Management Team. A Child's audit process would normally take 2.5 to 3 hours to complete.
- In response to a query regarding recruitment of overseas staff, the Committee was advised that the recruitment of social workers was a national issue. It was noted that the overseas recruited social workers were being placed at the front door which would reduce the numbers of agency staff. Furthermore, Bradford struggled to recruit qualified social workers and that social workers from Africa and India would be among the first cohort of international workers coming to Bradford district within the next month. Furthermore, there would be around 40 social workers starting over the next four months. Moreover, the establishment of the Children's Trust in April 2023, should create more stability.

Resolved –

- (1) The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests that a progress report be presented in 12 months; and**
- (2) The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee requests that the Director of Children's Services circulate a briefing note to members of this Committee, in relation to the David Thorpe model.**

ACTION: Strategic Director for Children's Services

41. **SEND SERVICES - PROGRESS AGAINST THE WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ACTION (WSOA)**

The Director of Children's Services presented a report (**Document "O"**) which provided an update on the progress towards the Written Statement Of Action (WSOA) that followed the March 2002, SEND Area Inspection.

Bradford Council was required to deliver a number of actions to transform special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services across the local area. On the 21st October 2022, Ofsted agreed that the proposed Written Statement of Action was sufficient.

Following Local Area SEND Inspection, the report provided a high-level overview of progress within each of the five areas for improvement as follows:

- Poor communication between stakeholders across education, health and care.
- The variable quality of EHC plans, including plans which did not fully describe the provision that children and young people with SEND need.
- The inconsistent delivery of the 0 to 19 health visiting, school nursing and specialist nursing service.
- Children and young people waited too long for assessments, treatment and diagnosis. There was insufficient support for children and young people with SEND who were waiting for provision, services, diagnosis or equipment.
- Education, Health and Care Services did not work together well. The arrangements for joint commissioning were underdeveloped.

In the ensuing discussions, the following points were highlighted:

- In response to a Member's question, the Committee was informed that the improvements in the areas identified would all be actioned within 24 months.
- Collaboration between agencies had not worked well previously and required strengthening.
- The Committee recognised the free services that SENDIASS provided was vital to support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and families.
- Members expressed their frustration that children with SEN had been waiting an unacceptable amount of time for their EHC plans to be issued, with some families waiting for almost three years. Officers explained how the applications received were prioritised. It was further acknowledged a high number of EHCP waiting to be issued and explained this was sometimes due to applications received that had not received any input from partner agencies. This had been recognised and improvements were required to support parents and partners.
- The criteria for orthoptic vision screening available for children was not clear and consistent approach was required around orthoptic vision screening for children.
- In response to the comments regarding the issues that not all children

were being offered health checks at schools. The Committee was informed that all children (0-19) would be offered a health check. School nurses were well-equipped and ensured they had the right skills in managing the relationships between child, family and school setting. Furthermore, regular health and development reviews (health visitor checks) were offered for 0 to 2 years.

The Chair requested that the full Written Statement of Action be shared with the Committee.

Resolved –

That the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny requests that a further progress report be presented in 12 months, which also includes the detailed Action Plan, RAG rating and the full Written Statement of Action.

ACTION: Strategic Director for 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.

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