

**Minutes of a meeting of the Children's Services
Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday,
7 February 2024 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall,
Bradford**

Commenced 4.30 pm
Concluded 6.45 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	BRADFORD INDEPENDENT GROUP
Fricker Mohammed Regan Thirkill Zaman	Davies Pollard	Sunderland	Elahi (Alt)

VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Joyce Simpson
Shifa Simab

Church Representative (CE)
Parent Governor Representative

Observers: Councillor Duffy, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families

Councillor Davies in the Chair

48. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

The following declarations were made in the interest of transparency:

- (i) Cllr Zaman stated that his daughter was employed as a social worker in Bradford.
- (ii) Cllr Elahi stated that his daughter was employed as a business advisor to the Integrated Front Door (IFD).

49. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

50. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

51. BRADFORD CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The report of the Chief Executive Officer of Bradford Children and Families Trust (BCFT) (**Document "R"**) presented a Progress Report on the Improvement Plan that detailed the progress made since July up to November 2023 and the next steps of the Bradford Children and Families Trust (BCFT). The BCFT Executive Director of Social Care and Practice summarised the report and outlined the priorities contained within both the business plan and the wider strategic plans of the Trust. The Committee were informed that in relation to the Integrated Front Door training had been refreshed and key performance indicators (KPI's) were improving.

A Member asked about the membership composition of the Improvement Board and was told that the board had been set up by the Department for Education (DfE) and had been in place since 2018. The membership of the Improvement Board was detailed, and Members were assured that the Council were represented by the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, the Portfolio Holder for Children and Families as well as the Strategic Director of Children's Services.

When asked about the recruitment and training of foster carers the Executive Director of Social Care and Practice explained that recruitment was an issue nationally as there had been a decrease in interest, the work done by the Trust to promote and encourage foster caring alongside increasing engagement was detailed. It was added that a Training and Development Officer had recently been recruited which would provide more training options for new foster carers.

A Member noted the reduction in the number of contacts detailed within the Improvement Plan and asked if it had been a case in the past of an automatic Police Protection Notice (PPN). The Committee were informed that the Police were encouraged to refer concerns so if a child was present at an incident of crime a PPN would be issued. It was explained that the quality of PPN's had improved, and this allowed risks to be identified. Members sought clarity whether all crimes were incorporated into PPN figures if a child was present, and it was confirmed that it would only be in instances where the Police had safeguarding concerns.

The Executive Director of Social Care and Practice was asked about data contained within the Improvement Plan, specifically the 2669 contacts in December, of which 706 contacts were from the Police and only 387 were given information and advice. It was explained that the remainder of contacts where information and advice had not been given would have referred to a social worker

or the Integrated Front Door.

A Member asked about early help assessments, specifically why the number of assessments was decreasing. The importance of Early Help was stressed, and it was explained that the data only included assessments by the Trust's own early help services. Members were informed that early help assessments were also completed by partner agencies.

It was highlighted that the Ofsted report in August 2023 had highlighted issues with timeliness and the quality of assessments, Members queried how the quality of assessments could be ensured. The Committee were told that data could be compared with statistical neighbours and acknowledged that there was a need for further progress.

A Member asked if the Committee had been given sight of the Ofsted Action Plan and was informed that this had been built into the Improvement Plan and that anything that may arise from future inspections would be incorporated into the Improvement Plan.

Members raised queries regarding the workforce, particularly the number of leavers, and questioned if exit interviews were conducted. The Committee were assured that exit interviews were completed and that information would feedback into Human Resources and Workforce Development. Officers stated that a high proportion of leavers were moving into agency roles or promotions elsewhere. The issue surrounding recruitment and retention was discussed and acknowledged.

Officers were asked to circulate the membership of the Improvement Board and the Multiagency Improvement Development Board with a brief description of the roles of members. Officers confirmed that this could be circulated.

The Committee discussed the section of the report that addressed placement reviews and from the discussion it was explained that a panel had been established to review and scrutinise residential placements, and to explore alternatives or more appropriate placements. Officers were asked what would happen if someone was unhappy with a placement, the Committee were informed that there was a concerns resolution process which allowed the voice of the child to be shared. It was added that there was also an independent advocacy service.

The Executive Director of Social Care and Practice was asked about the capital investment for phase 2 and the source of capital funding. It was confirmed that the funding was from the Council and that it was not at risk. The Executive Director of Social Care and Practice stated that phase 1 of the capital investment had been agreed and was underway and that phase 2 was being discussed between the Council and the Bradford Children and Families Trust.

A Member expressed concern that the number of external residential placements was increasing and whilst the concerns were acknowledged officers told Members that the number of new entrants to external placements were decreasing so the figure was becoming steadier.

It was noted that within the report figures indicated a 6% reduction of children

living in unsuitable accommodation and clarity was sought regarding the definition of unsuitable accommodation. Officers confirmed that the definition of unsuitable accommodation referred to children living in hotels, bed and breakfast accommodation and could range to children moving to various houses and sleeping on the sofa.

Members suggested that it could be beneficial for further updates of the Improvement Plan to include a qualitative paragraph to summarise the data included within the report.

Resolved –

(1) That a report on progress against the Improvement Plan, be presented to this Committee in the new municipal year, in June/July 2024 and to also include:

- **RAG rating, (Red, Amber and Green);**
- **A qualitative summary.**

(2) This Committee requests that the membership of the Improvement Board and the Multi-Agency Development Group be circulated to members of this Committee and to also include the remit of both bodies.

To be actioned by – Charlotte Ramsden, Chief Executive Officer, for Bradford Children and Families Trust.

(Ruth Terry – ruth.terry@bradfordcft.org.uk)

52. AUDIT FINDINGS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The report of the Strategic Director of Children’s Services (**Document “S”**) provided an update regarding the quality assurance and audit process in the Children and Families Trust, April 2023 to November 2023. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, and Professional Practice summarised the report and told the Committee that there had been progress in terms of auditing and quality assurance processes. It was explained that the Quality Assurance activity mirrored the areas of concern raised by Ofsted and sought to address such concerns. Members were informed that audit returns had previously been an issue, but the return rate had increased to 76% in January 2024 which could provide greater understanding, and an opportunity to reflect and learn.

Members highlighted the table within the report that indicated only 1 audit had been graded outstanding in 7 months and asked if this example had been circulated to other teams as an example. Members were informed that the aim was to create a portfolio of good practice.

The Committee discussed the audit process, and it was confirmed that audits would be completed by a manager and that support was available to complete the audit. The Committee noted the increase in audit returns and asked what had

been done differently to increase engagement. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, and Professional Practice explained that the importance of audit returns had been stressed and highlighted that it was good practice.

A Member asked how far back an audit would go, specifically in scenarios where a child had several different social workers. Officers informed the Committee that audits focussed on the last 6 months.

Attention was drawn to the section of the report that addressed children subject to Child in Need Plans over 12 months which identified that 71% of children were receiving regular visits. Officers were asked why the remaining percentage were not in contact and it was explained that this could be due to a lack of engagement and families not wanting to engage with the service.

A Member asked about newly qualified social workers and if they possessed the appropriate practical skills. Officers told the Committee that all new staff were supported with learning and development as it was important to enable staff to build practical skills.

Officers were asked about the prebirth panel, and it was explained that it was a multiagency panel including health colleagues that was chaired by a service manager within the Bradford Children and Families Trust. The purpose of the panel was to enable mothers to meet the needs of their child when it arrives and that mothers would be referred to the service.

Resolved –

That a progress report be presented in 12 months.

To be actioned by: Assistant Director, Bradford Children and Families Trust.

(Amandip Johal – 07773 248040)

53. CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

The report of the Chair of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (**Document "T"**) included the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2023/24. The work programme was briefly discussed by the Committee, and it was confirmed that the Child Poverty Scrutiny Review as well as a report about persistent absence in school would be presented to the Committee in the future.

Resolved –

That the Committee discussed and amended the work programme.

To be actioned by – Overview & Scrutiny Lead

(Mustansir Butt – 07582 101597)

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