

Minutes of:	CABINET
Date of Meeting:	12 January 2022
Present:	Councillor E O'Brien (in the Chair) Councillors C Cummins, R Gold, C Morris, A Quinn, T Rafiq and T Tariq
Also in attendance:	Councillors N Jones, M Powell, R Bernstein, C Birchmore, N Boroda, R Brown, J Harris, J Lancaster and J Rydeheard
Public Attendance:	Members of the public and press were present at the meeting.
Apologies for Absence:	Councillor A Simpson and Councillor J Mason

CA.198 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Andrea Simpson and Councillor James Mason.

CA.199 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Quinn declared a personal interest in respect of all matters under consideration, as he is a member of the Down's Syndrome Association and a member of the trade union, Unite.

Councillor Jones declared a personal interest in respect of the Willow Street item, as he is a governor at Elms Bank school.

CA.200 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

CA.201 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

The following question was submitted in advance of the meeting by Councillor Carol Birchmore:

On Appendix 3(A) of the report submitted to Cabinet summarises "explicit Ofsted findings". Under the Workforce section three issues are included:

1. The recruitment and retention of social workers, to stabilise the workforce and reduce multiple changes in social worker for children
2. Manageable caseloads for social workers
3. The quality of supervision and management challenge to ensure social workers have time to reflect on complex cases

At a number of meetings I have attended recently I have listened to discussions about Bury Council's overreliance on agency staff and social workers in particular have been mentioned, it appears that this has been a problem for some time. I

have noticed that the Council's solution to difficulties it encounters is to recruit highly paid executives who the Council appears to believe will magically come along and sort out all the problems. In fact, according to the MEN in April 2021, Bury has around ten executives who are paid over £100K compared to Salford with around four. In light of the highlighted shortage of social workers would it not be better to consider ways of incentivising recruitment and retention of more on the ground workers to reduce caseloads and provide stability in service delivery? I suspect problems in recruitment and retention of staff are more related to the working conditions than pay.

Responding, Councillor Tamoor Tariq reported that a more stable workforce with lower caseloads will be a crucial factor in improving the support we provide. This challenge is in no way unique to Bury and it is something I will be working on as a key priority together with colleagues in HR, building on work already undertaken over recent weeks, to help Bury stand out as an employer of choice for potential social work recruits.

Benchmarking data looking across Greater Manchester suggests you are also correct that our level of base pay is not out of step with other Councils as you suggest. In order to be successful our work in this area will need to take account of our wider approach to reward as well as creating the environment and conditions where social workers can flourish through our approach to development, wellbeing and engagement for example.

A number of measures have already been agreed as initial steps in our strategy here including:

- The introduction of two managed services to work within the court team and the initial response team to support reduced caseloads and assist in retention – this has reduced caseloads
- Agreement to an initial additional capacity investment of five new social workers
- Agreement to cover the costs of social workers' professional fees each year
- Agreement to pay a retention bonus after year 1 and Year 2 of £1000 to encourage retention and develop skill in the workforce.
- A simplified approach to assist in the conversion of agency social care staff to permanent employees where appropriate.

In addition to this we are working on further measures which will support a targeted recruitment campaign to launch later this month. This will include new recruitment media and be aided by a retention payment to support both candidate attraction and the retention of those we recruit.

Bury has had positive experiences of recruiting newly qualified social workers and supporting our own workforce to qualify through social work apprentices. Attracting and retaining more experienced social workers will be a key focus and, to support this, we will be undertaking work to strengthen our learning and development offer and also improving the mechanisms we have in place around employee voice, with a new board bringing together representatives of front-line social workers from across teams so I can properly understand the on-the-ground experience of our staff and respond to any practical issues and challenges being faced.

Supervision - Regular and effective supervision is the cornerstone of good social work practice and staff support and retention – we have begun to report on the frequency of supervision, there has been some audit activity undertaken, more is planned to understand the quality and impact of the supervision. The practice standard is monthly supervision.

A further supplementary question was submitted:

Being a social worker is a really tough job and it can take a toll on people's health. The Ofsted report by its nature was focussed on the children, but there is a wider impact on families in general. Quite often the parents of children known to social services have had problems in the past and we need to be able to provide stability for those people. Support needs to be available for families, especially due to the added pressures from covid.

Councillor Tariq agreed and reported that while it's clear the Children's Services department works for and protects our vulnerable children, it also offers a service that relates to and impacts the families as well. Some families we're in contact with have complex and challenging circumstances which impacts the children and also on mental health and wider NHS services, and as such the work we've been doing around public sector reform over the last 4 or 5 years has been important. Through the Early Help Team, an Early Help Worker is now attached to each school, which helps to link to young people and families facing challenges in and out of school. It is hoped that the Early Help work will reduce pressures on the system and enable direct access to young people and families in need of support. I am keen to ensure the three divisions within Children Services work collaboratively and integrate across workstreams and all levels of management to ensure we are facing all challenges met by the department collectively.

The following question was submitted in advance of the meeting by Councillor Jo Lancaster:

Can the Cabinet Member Children, Young People and Skills outline when was the last time action was taken to reduce the casework for Social Workers, prior to the OFSTED inspection?

Responding, Councillor Tamoor Tariq reported that a managed team was commissioned in July 2021 in response to continuing increases in case load activity. Additionally, a further commissioned service was agreed in October 2021 which started in November 21. Since this time, we have seen a decrease in the average case load across the service.

We also reviewed all child in needs cases and moved the support to our early help teams where appropriate. We continue to review cases between early help and social care to ensure children move quickly out of the social care system where this is appropriate to do so.

We have a recruitment campaign which was initiated in December and will continue to roll this out every three months to support continuous recruitment of social workers.

A further supplementary question was submitted:

At the focussed visit on 31 July 2019 it stated that the child in need of help and protection had declined since the last inspection in 2016 – why had it taken until October 2021 to do anything for the social workers?

Councillor Tariq reported that the focussed visit took place at the height of Covid, in October 2020, when a number of Children's Services departments across the country were selected for inspection. We did come out quite well from that visit, with inspectors praising how we dealt with Covid-19. This was a sensitive period for our staff and we got recommendations from Ofsted at that point including those around help and protection. The level of change needed did not take place, and the scale and focus required did not come to fruition and the priority at the top of the department was not there. This meant that some of the challenges identified were unable to be delivered on. Issues had been identified from the Peer Review, prior to the Ofsted report, and we had already started to take action to deliver on them.

The following question was submitted in advance of the meeting by Councillor Jackie Harris:

Can the Cabinet Member Children, Young People and Skills outline what the reasonable number of caseloads are per Social Worker dependent on Social Workers level and how Bury MBC compares to other Metropolitan authorities?

Responding, Councillor Tamoor Tariq reported that our ambition is to ensure caseloads are at 15 for social workers and between 0-10 for newly qualified social workers. Whilst we have reduced case load averages some of our experienced social workers continue to have higher caseloads and we are working at pace with our commissioned services to reduce this. Case load averages vary across Greater Manchester but there is national issue in relation to social work recruitment and shortage of experienced social workers which also influences case load numbers.

A further supplementary question was submitted:

I have great empathy for Social Workers, they work very hard and it's a difficult job, but surely the issue here is leadership. What are you going to do about making sure that we have continuity and efficiency in the leadership to get us out of this horrendous and unacceptable mess?

Councillor Tariq reported: I agree that leadership and management in any department is the focal point of delivery and that is why we took steps before Ofsted arrived to make changes in the leadership of the Children's Services department. We appointed Isobel Booter as Interim Director of Children's Services and I would like to place on record my thanks to her and Sandra Bruce (Interim Director of Children's Social Care) for taking us through this difficult time. We have also made a permanent appointment to the role of Executive Director of Children's Services, Jeanette Richards, who brings a wealth of experience taking other Local Authorities through similar circumstances and will be leading on Bury's improvement work. This has allowed Isobel to back to her substantive post and strengthened the department overall. It also means that three members of the

senior leadership team for the department have experience working with children's social care challenges. This will ensure the divisions of the department are interlinked and work collectively as well as alongside wider Council departments. My ambition is not only to get out of the Ofsted rating, but to ensure the changes we put in place are there for the long term so we have a Children's Services offer that we can all be proud of.

The following question was submitted in advance of the meeting by Councillor Russell Bernstein:

Can the Cabinet Member Children, Young People and Skills explain what are the reasons for the deterioration of service delivery as outlined in the OFSTED report since October 2020?

Responding, Councillor Tamoor Tariq reported that from October 2020 social workers and managers remained primarily working from home and business continuity measures were in place which ensured statutory work continued but there is no doubt that aspects of continuous development and monitoring was more challenging in this environment when teams were not meeting together.

In hindsight, the decision to continue to implement a new practice model was ambitious in light of the changes in leaderships and the instability of the workforce.

Since new interim leadership arrangements were put in place we are developing a more robust approach to all areas of practice and quality assurance which will ensure continuous improvement.

A further supplementary question was submitted:

Can I ask, Councillor Tariq, what you believe your personal, political responsibility is in this period?

Councillor Tariq reported that it was to carry out my duties as Cabinet Member, as well as the responsibility all Elected Members have as Corporate Parents, to protect the most vulnerable people and the families that we support. In my role of Cabinet Member I have been involved in thorough, challenging and constructive conversations and meetings before the Peer Review or Ofsted inspection. I initiated the Peer Review, and some of the issues that came out were as a result of those conversations I was having at the top of the department. I was amongst the first people in the Council to raise concerns when I saw poor leadership and poor practice, so, as Cabinet Member, I would say that I have been at the heart of what's been happening and able to identify issues and have uncomfortable conversations to address them. I have championed the department, calling out issues where I've seen them, and fighting from within. This might be the first time these issues have come into the public domain, but they are issues I have been challenging for over 12 months.

The following question was submitted in advance of the meeting by Councillor Roger Brown:

The OFSTED report states, "when children go missing, the local authority response is not consistently robust". Can the Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member Children, Young People and Skills explain what the Council intends to do to improve this?

Responding, Councillor Tamoor Tariq reported that a piece of work has been generated from the inspection in October 21 and has included:

- Refresh of missing panel chaired by the service manager for Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and with multi agency attendance. The panel was established in April 21 but needs to mature to ensure that as a partnership we are sighted on missing children and the quality of service they receive and the impact this is having on their lives.
- The panel has set priorities:
 - Review children with more than one missing episode in the month to immediately quality assess and ensure due process has been completed
 - Refresh missing process to ensure children at higher risk of missing have regular strategy meetings chaired at escalating levels of seniority in both police and children's services;
 - Multi agency auditing of return interviews to build in continuous learning on quality of interviews and themes around push/pull factors;
 - Data and performance for missing children will be reported into social care performance management meetings quarterly;
 - Reports on missing children will be shared with the complex safeguarding sub-group of the Bury Integrated Safeguarding Partnership.
- The Assistant Director has set up with immediate effect and Friday meeting with strategic leads to review highest risk children – which includes those children with high levels of missing and vulnerabilities in relation to CSE/CCG to ensure as senior leadership team we are sighted on our most vulnerable young people and escalating their concerns and reviewing the service to them and impact weekly.

A further supplementary question was submitted:

Bearing in mind that the report makes it clear that the standards have been slipping for some years and have got worse since the last two years, if there has been an attempt to change this in April 2021 it doesn't appear to have been manifest when the Ofsted report was being prepared. Secondly, when there has been a recent act by the Assistant Director to set up a new scheme, why that has been left so long when it was clear to the Ofsted report that these matters were causing them considerable concern?

Councillor Tariq reported that, to be clear, the Ofsted report does not talk about decline over the last two years. As you say, the Panel was only established in April 2021, around 6 months ago, and the benefits of some of these changes in practices are very complex and the impact from them is not necessarily seen within a short period of time. This is alluded to in the Ofsted report, that a number of changes are taking place and are being evidenced following the Peer Review, but the full impact of those changes are unable to be similarly evidenced. With the additional relationship we now have with the DfE and with Ofsted, we met with

them this morning and will have a focussed inspection in May/June 2022, at which I am confident that we will be able to evidence the impact of the changes established before the inspection took place. We are accelerating our commitment and our improvement journey to ensure the department turns around in the quickest time possible.

CA.202 MINUTES

It was agreed:

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CA.203 COUNCIL TAX ON EMPTY PROPERTIES AND SECOND HOMES

Councillor Eamonn O'Brien, the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Growth, presented the report regarding the consultation on the proposal to remove the Council Tax discount applied to empty properties and second homes. Members discussed the report, noting the majority of responses had been against the proposal but this had to be weight against the financial context the Council was in. With regards to alternative savings, it was noted that the property portfolio brought in revenue funds and that one off savings was not a sustainable way to address revenue pressures.

Decision:

Cabinet:

1. Considered the outcomes of the consultation exercise attached at Appendix 2; and
2. Agreed to the removal of the discretionary Council Tax discount for empty properties and second homes with effect from 1 April 2022.

Reasons for the decision:

Bury Council, like other local authorities, has seen an increase in demand on public services with reduced funding levels. A number of savings will be proposed to enable it to balance its budget. Some of the savings will affect front line services and may reduce service provision and other savings, like this proposal, have no impact on the levels of service the Council currently provides.

The Council has a strategy of bringing long-term empty homes back into use at the earliest opportunity. The return of long-term empty homes back into the community will not provide the complete solution for the demand for homes within the area, but it will play a part in its solution reducing pressure on the existing housing stock. A new level of charges should help encourage the reintroduction of long-term empty properties. Empty homes have a detrimental impact on surrounding areas and can lead to anti-social behaviour in the vicinity of empty properties.

The proposal affects a small proportion of Bury's population for a period of time but can deliver significant income for the Council. Other neighbouring authorities in the Greater Manchester area no longer provide discounts on empty properties or second homes and haven't done for some time.

The policy will reduce the number of empty properties in the Borough and support the Council in achieving a balanced budget for 2022/2023. Recognising that this will protect savings from having to be made from front line services.

Other options considered and rejected:

The Cabinet could choose to make no change to the council tax discounts for empty properties; however, alternative proposals would be required to support the production of a balanced budget, which is a legal requirement.

CA.204 BURY COMMUNITY STADIUM, GIGG LANE

Councillor Eamonn O'Brien, the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Growth, presented the report which sought approval for the Council to engage in negotiations with the Bury Football Supporters Society in relation to a proposed financial contribution in the Gigg Lane Stadium site. Councillor O'Brien and all those present thanked supporters and community groups for their work, as well as James Daly MP for Bury North, local Councillors, and Council officers.

Members discussed the report, praising the work and response from the people of Bury, and confirmed their cross-party support for the proposal. It was noted that this was just the beginning, with more work required to ensure the stadium was safe and suitable, and ongoing conversations to ensure a one-club, fan-owned club with a successful governance system.

Decision:

Cabinet:

1. Agreed in principle to work with the Bury Football Supporters Society to explore how the Council can provide financial assistance to bring football back to Gigg Lane; and
2. Agreed that a further report be submitted to a future meeting of Cabinet seeking approval to any funding proposals.

Reasons for the decision:

Gigg Lane is an important community asset, and the Council has been asked to help with the process of re-commissioning and re-developing the facility.

The proposals to re-commission Gigg Lane as a football venue are complex and the plans involve a considerable amount of risk and challenge. Given the community benefits associated with the project it is right that the Local Authority play a proactive role in working with the various stakeholders.

Other options considered and rejected:

The alternative option is for the Council to not offer support however a solution must be found for the future of the Gigg Lane site, as it currently sits an abandoned building in the middle of a residential neighbourhood.

CA.205 BURY TOWN CENTRE GOVERNANCE

Councillor Eamonn O'Brien, the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Growth, presented the report which proposed governance arrangements for the implementation of projects planned for Bury town centre, including the Bury Market Flexi Hall. In response to Members' questions it was

noted that a report on the establishment of the Regeneration Programme Board and the Programme Management Office would be brought to Cabinet before the end of the municipal year.

Decision:

Cabinet:

1. Approved the creation of a Bury Town Centre Advisory Panel with the terms of reference set out in section 2 of the report; and
2. Approved the arrangements for governance of the implementation of the Bury Flexi Hall, as set out in section 3 of the report.

Reasons for the decision:

The full range of developments currently being planned for Bury town centre will have a significant impact on the economic, environmental and social development of the Borough as a whole. The outcomes that can be achieved will play a key role in delivering the Let's Do It strategy. The proposals for their governance set out in this report are designed to bring long term coherence and an inclusive approach to leadership.

Other options considered and rejected:

None.

CA.206

APPROVAL OF TERMS TO DISPOSE OF THE FORMER CPU KITCHEN SITE ON WILLOW STREET, BURY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIALIST/SUPPORTED HOUSING FOR ADULTS WITH A PHYSICAL AND/OR SENSORY DISABILITY OR LEARNING DISABILITY - PART A

Councillor Clare Cummins, Cabinet Member for Housing Services, presented the report which sought approval for the disposal of Council-owned brownfield land in Bury, which has the potential to provide much needed supported housing for young adults with a physical and/or sensory disability or learning disability. Full financial details were contained in Part B of this report.

Members voiced their support for this scheme and the support it provided for those with a disability. It was noted that the housing would be built to the latest low carbon and eco-friendly standards and, in response to a Member's question, Councillor Cummins undertook to report back outside the meeting as to whether provision for electric car parking was included. It was also noted that this site would also be subject to a planning application.

Decision:

Cabinet:

1. Approved the disposal of this site for supported living in accordance with the terms included within Part B of this report; and
2. Delegated the finalised terms of the agreement to the Director of Economic Regeneration and Capital Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, the Cabinet Member for Housing Services, S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer.

Reasons for the decision:

To facilitate the Councils Brownfield first approach to housing delivery, to accelerate the delivery of specialist accommodation to help meet the requirements

of young adults with additional support needs, and to reduce revenue cost to the Council for holding, maintaining, and securing long-term derelict sites.

Other options considered and rejected:

Do nothing: Bury has high levels of housing need for specialist accommodation and supply is required in the marketplace immediately.

Market the site: Irwell Valley are proposing to deliver a bespoke supported housing scheme which would not be delivered in the current housebuilding marketplace.

The Council is currently disposing of 50+ additional sites through the Accelerated Land Disposal Programme. Capacity is limited and there is an acute shortage of specialist accommodation in the Borough. This disposal is 'oven ready', allowing resources to be spent unlocking other brownfield housing sites.

CA.207 INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Councillor Tamoor Tariq, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills, presented the report which informed Cabinet of the findings of an Ofsted inspection of the Council's children's services. The inspection found the services to be inadequate. The report explained the form of intervention by the Secretary of State for Education and the action already taken to implement improvements. The report also sought approval to the framework for an Improvement Plan which the Council will submit to the Department for Education by 31st March 2022.

Members discussed the report thoroughly, noting the less severe interventions recommended for Bury, being a DfE advisor rather than commissioner. The advisor would work with Bury to develop their improvement plan and feedback regularly to DfE on progress made.

In response to Members' questions it was noted that pressures had been known internally for some time with work underway before the inspection to address problems. This work was recognised in the Ofsted inspection and means the Council was in a better position to progress and implement changes. Members debated the briefings given to Opposition Members, but it was stated that these problems should be above party politics. With regards to scrutiny, this had been encouraged and a dedicated Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee set up to recognise this.

Councillor Tariq advised that, as Cabinet Member, he had been raising concerns for a long time and had been taking actions to improve the situation, and it was noted this was a managerial failure not a political one. Councillor Tariq advised that it was the responsibility of the Council as a whole to fix these problems, and he was confident we would do.

Decision:

Cabinet:

1. Noted the Ofsted report following the inspection of the Council's children's services; and
2. Approved the framework for the Improvement Plan attached at Appendix 2.

Reasons for the decision:

To take swift and decisive action to address the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted.

Other options considered and rejected:

None.

CA.208 URGENT BUSINESS

CA.209 APPOINTMENT OF MAYOR/DEPUTY MAYOR

Councillor Eamonn O'Brien, the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Growth, confirmed that Councillor Shaheena Haroon was currently Deputy Mayor and therefore Mayor elect for the forthcoming year, and he proposed that Councillor Sandra Walmsley be appointed as Deputy Mayor. Members praised Cllr Walmsley's work in the borough, her dedication, empathy, and understanding of the borough and her ability to connect with its residents.

It was noted that should either of these Councillors lose their seats in the upcoming election, new candidates would be brought forwards to the Democratic Arrangements Forum and then on to full Council.

Decision:

That Council be recommended to appoint Councillor Shaheena Haroon as Mayor and Councillor Sandra Walmsley as Deputy Mayor for the Civic year 2022/23.

CA.210 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Decision:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100 (A)(4), Schedule 12(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, for the reason that the following business involves the disclosure of exempt information as detailed against the item.

CA.211 APPROVAL OF TERMS TO DISPOSE OF THE FORMER CPU KITCHEN SITE ON WILLOW STREET, BURY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIALIST/SUPPORTED HOUSING FOR ADULTS WITH A PHYSICAL AND/OR SENSORY DISABILITY OR LEARNING DISABILITY - PART B

Councillor Clare Cummins, Cabinet Member for Housing Services, presented the Part B report which contained the full financial details.

Decision:

Cabinet:

1. Approved the disposal of this site for supported living in accordance with the terms included within Part B of this report.
2. Delegated the finalised terms of the agreement to the Director of Economic Regeneration and Capital Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, the Cabinet Member for Housing Services, S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer.

Reasons for the decision:

Cabinet, 12 January 2022

As set out for the Part A report.

Other options considered and rejected:

As set out for the Part A report.

COUNCILLOR E O'BRIEN

Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.12 pm)