

Minutes of: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 20 January 2022

Present: Councillor S Wright (in the Chair)
Councillors C Boles, P Cropper, J Lancaster, L McBriar,
T Pilkington, D Quinn and M Whitby

Also in attendance: Geoff Little, Chief Executive, Bury Council
Jeanette Richards, Director of Children's Services
Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills
Gemma Parkes, Virtual School – Head Teacher
Paul Cooke, Strategic Lead – Children's Services
Julie Gallagher, Head of Democratic Services

Public Attendance: 6 members of the public were present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor S Butler

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Steve Wright declared a personal interest in all items under consideration as his partner is employed in a school in the Borough.

Councillor Nick Jones declared a personal interest in all items under consideration as a school governor in the Borough.

2 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4th November 2021 be approved.

3 MATTERS ARISING

Written responses will be provided to Cllr Lancaster and emailed to all scrutiny members in respect of:

The numbers of attendees at the fit and fed scheme across the Borough. (Including those attending during May half term)

The retention of 4 new caseworker and managers.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Pages 7 - 14)

Notice had been received of 5 questions. The Chair gave an undertaking that the questions and responses would be made available on the Council Web Site, following the meeting.

Questioner	Topic	Responding
Andrew Luxton	Ofsted	Cllr Tariq
Emmajane Okocha	SEND	Cllr Tariq
Emma Scott (not present)	Epilepsy nurse	Cllr Tariq
Jack Turner (not present)	Early Break	Cllr Tariq
Ermen Trout(not present)	First Point Family Support Services	Cllr Tariq
April Fenton	Virtual Head Report	Cllr Tariq
Kiera Delany	SEND provision	Cllr Tariq

5 MEMBER QUESTION (Pages 15 - 22)

Notice had been received of 5 questions. The Chair gave an undertaking that the questions and responses would be made available on the Council Web Site, following the meeting.

Questioner	Topic	Responding
Cllr Bernstein	Ofsted	Cllr Tariq
Cllr Harris	Recruitment and Retention of Staff in Children's Services	Cllr Tariq
Cllr N Jones	Ofsted	Cllr Tariq
Cllr J Rydeheard	Virtual School	Cllr Tariq
Cllr Caserta	Social Work Academy	Cllr Tariq

6 INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Following consideration of the Ofsted report at Cabinet, 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 provided details of the framework for the Improvement Plan which the Council will submit to the Department for Education by 31st March 2022.

A copy of the Inspection report and improvement plan had been circulated to Members ahead of the meeting and in considering the report and the Cabinet Member's statement the following comments and issues were raised:

Responding to a question from the Chair, the Cabinet Member reported that he and the Director of Children's Services (DCS) met with staff in Children's Services following the publication of the Ofsted report, to provide assurance, to thank them for their hard work and to discuss any issues they may have. Following this meeting further meetings have been scheduled as well as a walking the floor event, to enable staff to raise any concerns with the Cabinet Member and the DCS.

Responding to concerns raised by Members in respect of the financial resources required to fund the improvement work; the Cabinet Member reported that additional resources would be made available to Children's Services. In order to address the inadequate Ofsted inspection, the Cabinet Member reported a whole system response is required across all of the different Council departments.

The DCS reported that following the Ofsted inspection findings work has already commenced to address the issues and concerns raised including, a sector led improvement programme.

Responding to a Members question the DCS reported that a quality assurance framework has been developed to review and system check the work undertaken by social workers.

The Cabinet Member reported that he welcomes the interest the Scrutiny Committee has taken in reviewing the Ofsted report. Following the notice of motion considered at Council last night he will ensure that update reports in respect of the improvement plan will be considered at Cabinet, Council and this Scrutiny Committee and would also ask that the Improvement Board minutes be shared with Elected Members.

Responding to a Member question the Cabinet Member acknowledged that there are staffing issues with the Social worker disability team, including the over reliance of agency staff; the development of a work force plan will seek to address this issue.

The Cabinet Member reported that school staff play a significant part in Safeguarding children, the relationships between the local authority and the schools in the Borough has improved considerably.

Responding to a question from a co-opted Member in respect of support for social workers, the Cabinet Member reported that a new social retention and recruitment process for social workers has been developed, as well as financial incentives, reduction in caseloads and a plan to reduce the reliance on agency staff.

It was agreed:

- The Ofsted Improvement Plan with progress of implementation be monitored by the Council's Children's Scrutiny Committee as a standing agenda item until the completion of all actions.
- A special meeting of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee be convened to discuss the Improvement Plan
- The Committee recommends to the Democratic Arrangements Forum that the Council Procedure Rules be amended to include at every Council

- meeting a statement from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, updating all Councillors on the work of the department.
- Democratic Services will facilitate a meeting between Members of the Committee and front line social worker ahead of the next meeting.

Cllr Pilkington and Chief Executive Geoff Little, left the meeting.

7 BURY VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT

Following consideration of the report at the Corporate Parenting Board, Councillor Tamoor Tariq, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills, presented the Virtual School Annual Report. A key priority last year was to improve completion rates of PEPs (Personal Education Plans) which review the education and support for Children in Care on an individual basis.

A copy of the report had been circulated to Members ahead of the meeting and in considering the report and the Cabinet Member's statement the following comments and issues were raised:

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Education and Skills reported that in regards to the development of a seven day a week integrated bespoke service for SEND the Council would certainly be interested in exploring the possibility of this as a service.

Members discussed the lack of availability of work experience placements for all students due to the pandemic. The Director of Education and Skills reported that work is underway to develop an enhanced work experience offer.

The Director of Education and Skills reported that the role of the virtual head teacher is expected to expand to include all children and young people known to children's social care. It is hoped this will build on the good work the virtual school has achieved in improving attendance and reducing exclusions for LAC.

It was agreed:

The Director of Education and Skills will provide an update to a future meeting in respect of the enhanced work experience offer.
The Virtual HeadTeacher will share once available, the proposals in respect of the extension of the scope of the Virtual School.

8 DEFIBRILLATORS IN SCHOOLS - FOR INFORMATION

It was agreed:

Paul Cooke will provide an update at the next meeting in respect of where Defibrillators are situated across the Borough.

9

WORK PROGRAMME

COUNCILLOR S WRIGHT

Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7pm and ended at 9.30pm)

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SCRUTINY - 20TH JANUARY 2022 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Q1. Andrew Luxton

Bury Council recently had an inadequate OFSTED rating with the report stating 'there are serious failings which leave too many children at risk of harm in Bury'

At the Council Cabinet meeting last week, the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills said this was a managerial issue and not a political issue. Given they are the Cabinet Member who have final responsibility for ensuring children's services are fit for purpose, do they not believe that they are responsible or accountable in any way?

RESPONSE –

The Cabinet Member reported that this was a management failure not a political failure.

As Cabinet member I have facilitated a Peer Review, lead by Linda Clegg which identified a number of significant challenges, including workforce and caseload issues.

A number of these issues were also identified by Ofsted.

Subsequently I have as Cabinet Member engaged with the staff and taken a report to Cabinet which included details of the improvement journey which has already commenced.

As Cabinet Member I have addressed developing and improving the relationship with those working in the Local Authority and social care. As well as meeting with Head Teachers, attendance at Scrutiny tonight, meeting with the Department for Education and Ofsted.

Q2. Emmajane Okocha

How many SEND children are currently out of school in Bury including: those with no school place and those with an allocated place but are unable to attend or attending an alternate provision due to their needs not being met?

RESPONSE – The question is a complex one and a response requires more detailed consideration which can be picked up when the Scrutiny Committee receives an update on SEND and Project Safety Valve at its next meeting. In addition, a written response will be sent directly once the specifics asked for have been further clarified.

That said, significant work to transform the experience of children with SEND, and that of their parents is being undertaken through Project Safety Valve.

This includes strengthening capacity and improving systems and processes in relation to Education Health and Care Plan assessment.

In addition, there is work underway to improve Special Educational Needs and Disability sufficiency including enhancing the continuum of provision by increasing access to SEMH (Social Emotional Mental Health) Resource provision, and the establishment of two new Special Schools.

In respect to the specific question, there are a number of historic SEND cases including some quite complex SEND cases that are currently being reviewed. A small number of these are going through the tribunal process where there is dispute over the provision within the EHCP plan.

We are in the process of reviewing all complex cases including children without a place, and those with poor attendance.

Alongside this, we have co-produced an anxiety-based school avoidance pathway with extensive input from the Education Psychology service to support children back into school.

As I have already stated we will ask for clarification over some of the numbers asked for and respond directly. I am also conscious that I do not want to give information which allows for individual children to be identified. Therefore, as stated, officers will respond directly once they have sought clarification on the specific asks and we will report on SEND in the next scrutiny meeting when a full report will be tabled and will include the steps being taken to resolve individual cases where parents and children feel that they are unable to access the named provision.

Q3. - Emma Scott

QUESTION – Bury is the only Borough in Greater Manchester which does not provide an Epilepsy Nurse, when will constituents be given access to this service like other authorities and what is the timeframe for this vital service?

RESPONSE – A review into this matter has been initialised by Health. Timescales for completion of the review are not yet firm as the system is still responding to compounding pressures in health due to the pandemic. However, we are committed to completing this by April 22.

Q4 - Jack Turner

QUESTION – “How many contracts has Early Break received without a public tender process taking place, through Bury Council and Health; Please can you name the contacts, their lengths and their amounts per year.”

RESPONSE - Early Break is part of a consortium that has a contract with Bury Council for provision of a Drugs and Alcohol Substance Misuse Service. It is an all-age service of which Early Break provides the service for children and young people (it includes Holding Families). It was a fully tendered process.

Early Break have 2 contract variations via the CCG
Contract name MHIE (GM funded)
This contract was for emotional health and wellbeing practitioners in high schools this currently provides practitioners supporting all 13 high schools.
This contract length is (1/10 2020-1/8/ 2022)
Contract value £149,872

In response to the mental health crisis investment was secured last September to increase provision in children’s mental health services. A contract variation with Early Break for the services of increased

Community based CYP mental health support
Closing the Gap community transition support
Bereavement and Loss Counselling
Proud Trust (LGBTQ) support
Pre and Post Diagnostic support

Contract length is 1/10/21 until the 30/09/24. Value is £166.025 per annum.

Q5. Ermen Trout

QUESTION – The post diagnostic contract is a subcontract of CAHMS (formally Healthy Young Minds), commissioned by Pennine Care. The contract holder is First Point Family Support Services. Where is the scrutiny over the quality of this service?

RESPONSE – Quarterly contract monitoring meetings are in place with Pennine and First Point

Q6. April Fenton

The annual report for Virtual Schools references that a Prince's Trust course was brought to Bury.
Can the Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Skills explain what this course was and how the course supported young people.

RESPONSE This was a four-week personal development programme for 16-25 year olds which focused on improving key skills such as confidence, teamwork and communication. It was specifically aimed at hard-to-reach young people who were not in education, employment and training and very unlikely to become engaged without additional support. It ran twice-weekly in June at the New Kershaw Centre and included activities such as cooking, money management, outdoor activities, teambuilding, employability skills, first aid, food hygiene and sport, tailored to the group's needs and wishes. We linked with the CCG to offer follow-on work experience and the Prince's Trust supported the young people after the programme. It was offered to our care experienced young people. Four of them enrolled on the programme, two completed it and one went on to become enrolled in education, employment or training (EET).

Q6. Kiera Delany

SEND Provision

RESPONSE

The Director reported that the Council is on a journey with SEND there are a number of challenges, as Director I will focus on reviewing all aspects which has commenced with a recently commissioned Speech and Language review. Mental health – understand that people will wish to only tell the story once. As Director I have met with yourself and will continue to meet and will ensure action and the Council continues to reach out to parents, and include them in the development of the local strategic area action plan. Please be assured there is real commitment and energy for change.

SCRUTINY - 20 TH JANUARY 2022 – Member Questions

Q1. MEMBER – Councillor Russel Bernstein
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In the Inspection of Children’s Services report (Item 6) could Councillor Tariq confirm when a first draft of the Improvement Plan (paragraph 7.1) will be available for all Elected Members to comment on?

RESPONSE – The initial plan is currently in draft and has been shared with the Cabinet.

However, it is likely that following consultation with the DfE advisor that it may be amended to include reference to agreed support via sector led improvement partners as the DfE are keen to support Bury by commissioning sector led improvement.

The LA has been afforded some time to establish an improvement plan, this reflects the need to establish the right plan.

Ofsted have requested that the plan is sent to them for review by the 30th of March, when they will offer a view as to the focus and quality of the plan, progress of the plan will subsequently be continually reviewed by the Improvement Board, where there will be attendance from partners, elected members, cross party membership and the DfE.

The Board will meet month and is independently chaired by Linda Clegg LGA Improvement Lead.

The effectiveness of the plan in driving forward on improvement and the impact upon children and families will be reviewed and considered by Ofsted via monitoring visits which will result in letters and with the exception of the first visit the letters will be in the public domain.

The 6-month formal reviews undertaken by the DfE will also result in reports in the public domain.

Scrutiny and any other council meetings could agenda Improvement updates on progress.

Q2. MEMBER – Cllr. Jackie Harris

The report into children’s services refers to a focus being on recruitment and retention, learning and development and staff wellbeing.

Can the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills provide more detail to the timelines on when these priorities will be introduced and how they will differ to the policies at present?

RESPONSE – The workforce strategy and recruitment and retention strategy had been reviewed and refreshed; this will be an evolving process. A learning and development strategy and learning offer has been developed and signed off this was the work of a new workforce development board for children’s services has been implemented – All of this was completed in October 2021 since then following the inspection further work has been undertaken,

A more stable workforce e with lower caseloads will be a crucial factor in improving the support we provide. This is challenge is in no way unique to Bury and it is something we 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.**

We have undertaken Benchmarking data looking across Greater Manchester suggests that our level of base pay is not out of step with other Councils 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 workforce engagement, flexible working 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 we can properly understand the on-the-ground experience of our staff and respond to any practical issues and challenges being faced, but this will also enable staff to co-produce and influence our improvement journey.

The learning offer is refreshed every 3 months and offers a blended style of learning for staff including those specialist areas that are requirements for the role of social worker to satisfy their registration requirements. A new way of delivering learning sessions has commenced with a preferred model of small group learning aligned to practice areas and

findings from quality assurance activity – initial feedback from staff is positive.

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. All of this work will be the function of the Social Work Academy, governance of the Academy will be jointly shared between Childrens Services and HR.

A small working group overseen by the workforce board has been set up to look at recruitment and retention. A recruitment campaign was launched over Christmas. We have refreshed the application form, so it is much easier to complete and we have also worked on better marketing and strengthened the interview process.

We have interviews for social workers week of 24th January.

A further advert will go out which will include a marketing video and explanation of the retention payments for experienced social workers joining the council. We have a programme of recruitment through the year as we will continue to roll this out every other month
I am confident we will start to see some stability in the workforce as we progress this year.

3. MEMBER – Cllr. Nick Jones

The report following the inspection into Children's Services refers to the independent scrutiny of multi-agency arrangements for children's safeguarding.

Can the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills how the independent scrutiny will be delivered and when this will be fully developed to improve children's safeguarding in the borough.

RESPONSE –. The partnership has agreed that we need to appoint an independent scrutineer to both oversee provide challenge across the Bury Integrated Safeguarding Partnership, particularly the effectiveness of services in responding to safeguarding concerns, to this end the Job description has been agreed by the Bury Integrated Safeguarding Partnership Board.
The post is due to be advertised.
The Improvement Board is independently chaired by Linda Clegg LGA North West improvement lead, who will provide challenge and scrutiny in relation to the progress of improvement in terms of outcomes for children and families. Ofsted will evaluate progress by undertaking 5 or 6 monitoring visits over the 3-year period before full inspection.
The DfE will provide 6-month review reports.

Q4. MEMBER – Cllr. Jack Rydeheard

The report 'Virtual Schools Headteacher's Annual Report' makes reference that 'clear priorities have been identified to take the work of the Virtual School forward.

Can the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills outline what these priorities are including the number of FTEs expected to be recruited?

RESPONSE – The priorities for the Virtual School for 2021 – 22 are set out below. We plan to recruit two FTE posts initially: a PEP Officer and a SEND Caseworker. Further posts will be subject to funding.

Priorities:

Explore models to develop and expand the Virtual School team to increase our capacity and improve the service we can offer to our young people.

- Commissioning of Speech and Language Therapist and Educational Psychologist services to support understanding and practice in meeting the individual and educational needs of children in care.
- Through partnership working, reduce numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training and improve participation rates for Post-16.
- Support continued development of trauma-based practice, leading to better understanding of the needs of children in care.
- Further strengthen partnership working across Education, Children's Social Care and partners to ensure that the educational needs of children in care are understood and addressed.
- Work with Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure appropriate educational challenge and support is in place.

- Further develop the training offer to schools, carers and social workers, utilising the skills and expertise of professionals through commissioned services, key partners and the Virtual School Team.
- Establish a monthly multi-agency meeting to review cases that are a cause for concern, using education data e.g., attendance and exclusions, to target support and resources appropriately.
- Develop information about Bury Virtual School, both web-based and as documents, to ensure that partners and our young people have accessible information available to all.
- Review and continue to improve the Personal Education Plan (PEP) documents and ensure that we are able to use them to run reports and efficiently manipulate data to show the progress of the cohort.
- Develop an action plan to implement the extension to role of the Virtual School to oversee the education of all children with a social worker.
- Work with colleagues in Children's Social Care to set aspirational targets for attendance within PEPs.
- For those who are persistently absent, create attendance action plans in conjunction with the Education Welfare Service, and secure appropriate intervention.
- Integration of the PEP and Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) annual review processes.
- Ensure that PEPs focus on the voice of the young person and that their wishes and feelings are known.
- Work closely with the Children in Care Council to ensure effective co-production with our young people.
- Embed the Bury VS Alternative Provision Policy and ensure that all children in care who access AP are reviewed every three weeks as a minimum, work towards clear targets and that there is a plan for reintegration into appropriate school provision.

Q5. MEMBER – Cllr. Bob Caserta:

The cabinet report the Children's Services inspection makes reference to the Council establishing a 'Social Work Academy'.

Can the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills explain what he envisages this will look like as well as the timelines from initial idea to full implementation?

Response -

Some of the initial ideas have been implemented, via our revised workforce strategy, which is further developed with a focus upon recruitment retention, learning and development and wellbeing.

The establishment of an Academy is aspirational and is a feature of Authorities judged to be good or outstanding. The timelines of the various strands of the offer will be set out fully in the Inspection Action Plan, as we co-produce this with staff, via engagement through the voice of the workforce board, strengthen links with the Greater Manchester Teaching Partnership and the Universities.

The Academy, will be jointly owned by Childrens Services and HR within the Corporate Core,

The Academy in essence sets out our promise to staff by articulating that which social care professionals can expect from Bury in terms of support around health and wellbeing, learning and development and career pathways including management and leadership programmes and will fully considers and supports all routes into social work, via apprenticeships, Frontline, or via facilitating student placements., It will be key to attracting staff to Bury.