

AGENDA FOR

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



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To: All Members of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Councillors : C Boles, S Butler, P Cropper, J Lancaster, L McBriar, T Pilkington, D Quinn, K Thomas, M Whitby and S Wright (Chair)

Dear Member/Colleague

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee which will be held as follows:-

Date:	Thursday, 20 January 2022
Place:	Council Chamber, Town Hall, Bury, BL9 0SW
Time:	7.00 pm
Briefing Facilities:	If Opposition Members and Co-opted Members require briefing on any particular item on the Agenda, the appropriate Director/Senior Officer originating the related report should be contacted.
Notes:	

AGENDA

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3 MINUTES *(Pages 3 - 18)*

Minutes from the meeting held on 4 November 2021 are attached.

4 MATTERS ARISING

5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A period of 30 minutes has been set aside for members of the public to ask questions on the agenda for tonight's meeting.

6 MEMBER QUESTION

A period of up to 15 minutes will be allocated for questions and supplementary questions from members of the Council who are not members of the committee. This period may be varied at the discretion of the chair.

7 INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES *(Pages 19 - 44)*

A report from the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills.

8 BURY VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT *(Pages 45 - 54)*

A report from the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills.

9 DEFIBRILLATORS IN SCHOOLS *(Pages 55 - 58)*

A report from the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills.

10 WORK PROGRAMME *(Pages 59 - 60)*

Attached is the work programme for 2021/22.

Minutes of: **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 4 November 2021

Present: Councillor S Wright (in the Chair)
Councillors C Boles, J Lancaster, L McBriar, T Pilkington,
D Quinn, G Staples-Jones, K Thomas and M Whitby

Also in attendance: Councillor Tamoor Tariq, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills
Councillor Bernstein, Shadow Cabinet Member Corporate Affairs, Transformation and HR
Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills
Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director (Early Help and School Readiness)
Paul Cooke, Assistant Director of Learning
Wendy Jackson, Service Lead for Quality Assurance and Performance

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor S Butler and Councillor P Cropper

1 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Boles declared a personal interest as he was employed by a Bolton school which also has a site in Bury.

Councillor Staple Jones declared a personal interest as a Governor of Bury Church High School.

Councillor Wright declared a personal interest as his wife is employed at a school in Bury and Grandchildren in a school in Bury.

Councillor Pilkington declared a personal interest as a parent of a child with special educational needs who attends a school in Bury.

Councillor J Lancaster declared a personal interest as she has Children who attend school in Bury.

Councillor M Whitby declared an interest regarding item 5 as one of the Children's Hubs is based in her ward.

2 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS TIME**

A period of 30 minutes has been set aside for members of the public to ask questions on matters considered at the last meeting and set out in the minutes or on the agenda for tonight's meeting.

Questions and responses, received in advance of the meeting are attached.

Minutes:

The following questions from members of the public were received in advance of the meeting:

Question one: My question refers to the SEND HAF funding; please can the Cabinet member confirm - how much scrutiny has been given to the SEND HAF Funding including the number of children in attendance, those that had multiple spaces and what efforts were made to include children with SEND that parents/carers weren't members of Bury2gether? **Emmajane Michael-Okocha**

In response Councillor Tamoor Tariq, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills reported that HAF was new to Bury this year; we worked with the VCFA to encourage local organisations operating in local communities to provide provision for as many as our FSM children as possible, and for as many of them to be as inclusive as possible. This was advertised through Bury Council and the VCFA.

We provided a number of provisions with additional funding for a SENCO to ensure they were able to open their provision to as many SEND Children as possible. Local Organisations (including Bury2Gether) completed a grant application form which was scrutinised by members of the HAF Steering Group, which included the VCFA and the Children's Services Commissioning Team to ensure scrutiny.

In order to advertise all available provision to eligible children, we developed a leaflet of all activities which was sent to all parents of FSM children (using the current list of children eligible for FSM)

Data in respect of all HAF activity has been submitted to the Department for Education.

Supplementary Question: I am asking specifically regarding the SEND HAF funding, a lot of the activities in the leaflets would not accept children with SEND, therefore I am asking specifically in relation to the funding given to Bury2gether for SEND children.

In response to the supplementary question Sandra Bruce advised the HAF funding was specific to children eligible for free school meals. All children who were eligible for free school meals whether they had additional needs or not were contacted, and enough spaces were available. We requested from the Department for

Education if we could allocate some of the funding that was available to other children who may not be eligible for HAF activities. Then we put out a different form for other children in different communities to apply this included SEN children. Bury2gether made an application and requested some of that money. FSM children were prioritised in the activities and we had around 23,000 places for children over the summer holidays.

Question 2: When the child's voice is supposed to be central to their care and support why does the CWDT think it is necessary to remove an early help worker because of process, ignoring the children's wishes. Why does the continuum of care for a child with disabilities not favour consistency? **Kiera Delaney**

In response Councillor Tamoor Tariq, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills reported that he is in complete agreement that consistency for children, young people and their families is very important. We do not remove Early help workers from cases, but on occasion EH workers demonstrate that their work has identified unmet need and it may appear that a child or young people meet the threshold for CWD involvement. When this occurs the decision as to whether we support by consulting with the family and EH worker or whether we supersede the Early Help worker to enable the family to benefit from our support is made in discussion with the family themselves. We have examples of families we are supporting who wish to remain with the EH worker and families who have requested an assessment from CWD.

Supplementary Question: At no point in the assessment process my family or my child's wishes and feelings were taken into consideration. This was detrimental as at the point of losing our early help worker we were in crisis. We then had to go over our whole situation again which led to support systems getting things wrong as they don't understand the full picture. I ask, are the child's wishes and feelings considered going forward and what do the Council do to ensure situations like this don't happen in the future.

In response Councillor Tariq, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills reported that he is sorry for the experience Ms Delaney and her family have had. Cllr Tariq made a commitment that as Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills he will look into some of the specifics of this

case to ensure that experience is not repeated. He thanked Ms Delaney for bringing this matter to the Committee and being so brave to share her story. Councillor Tariq stated he will look to ensure family's in the same circumstance as M Delaney do not go through this same experience.

Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director (Early Help and School Readiness) stated she is unhappy to hear this experience has happened as the purpose of her role is to support families. Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director requested to catch up with Ms Delaney outside of this forum to ensure this does not happen again.

The next three members of the public were unable to attend so the Chair, Councillor Wright choose to read out the questions to the Committee.

Question 3: My question is in the report about school place projections are there none for SEN specialist school places needed? **Deb Hirst**

In response Councillor Tamoor Tariq, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills reported that the paper presented to the Scrutiny Committee on pupil place planning responds to the statutory duty on the Council in respect of mainstream school places, and the important role of the Council in managing the sufficiency of high-quality school places and taking appropriate action to ensure sustainability where the demand for places is in decline.

The provision of specialist school places is subject to different statutory duties, and the demand for places, and the manner in which the Council ensures the sufficiency of places differs to the arrangements for mainstream places.

Through the work that the Council is doing in respect of Project Safety Valve, which was the subject of a report to Scrutiny at its last meeting, plans are being developed to increase capacity of specialist provision.

Further details about this will be provided when an update on SEND is provided to Scrutiny at a future meeting.

Question 4: Was the HAF funding for SEND children provided through Bury2gether effectively spent considering the cost of the activities, how many places were available, how many individual children accessed these places, how

many children accessed multiple places, were all children eligible for free school meals and how was this eligibility checked? **Dawn Airey**

In response Councillor Tamoor Tariq, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills reported that prior to the summer holidays, the DFE confirmed that we were able to use some of the HAF Funding to support children with additional needs, rather than those eligible for FSMs.

Bury2Gether made an application which reflected the HAF eligibility of an activity and food.

Due to data protection, we do not have the names of individual children who attended all HAF Sessions, but now that HAF Funding has been confirmed for future years, the Council are looking at a centralised booking and reporting system which will provide this level of detail.

Question 5 What is Bury Council's eligibility criteria for a disabled child to have a child in need assessment carried out? Where is this eligibility criteria document published? (so as to be publicly available to councillors and public alike).

Catherine Black

In response Councillor Tamoor Tariq, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills reported that the document explaining access to support on the Children With Disabilities team can be found on the council website. The link is: <https://www.bury.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=11365>. The accessibility of this document, where it is found and how the contents are presented are matters being considered within the scope of several working groups. I can confirm that members from Bury2gether attend these forums to ensure that such documents are co-produced. The eligibility criteria will be reviewed in co-production with Bury2gether.

As there was time left from the 30 minutes set aside for Public Question's the Chair opened up to members of the public present.

Question 6: How many parent/carers assessments have been done in the past two years and what the eligibility for those assessments is? **Kiera Delaney.**

Isobel Booler Director of Education and Skills advised parent/carer assessment is something we need to look at. We do have work on this at the moment which is in co-production with Bury2gether as our partner. Isobel Booler offered to have a discussion outside the meeting regarding this matter.

Question 7: How many EHCP haven't been reviewed when they were supposed to be reviewed and how many EHCP's have needed to be reviewed straight away as soon as they have been finalised as they have been finalised incorrectly.

Emmajane Michael-Okocha

Isobel Booler, Director of Education and Skills advised we hold around 2000 EHCP's and we have a statutory duty to annually review. Colleagues are aware from the last Scrutiny Committee that we have challenges around SEND. We are currently recruiting to the Education Health and Care Plan Team and have a new manager that starts next week and have just employed four new case workers. Last year assessments completed within the 20-week statutory window only reached 27% so this year a lot of work has taken place to close the gap; this year we are around 53% on the 20-week statutory window. In comparison nationally it is around 58% and so this is a national issue also.

3 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

Two member questions have been received in advance of the meeting. Copies of the questions were circulated to Members of the committee in advance of the meeting.

Question 1: Why does Cllr Tariq think that the Let's Do It strategy has been found to have minimal awareness across the Children's Services directorate?

Councillor Nick Jones asked by Councillor Bernstein.

Councillor Tariq, Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Children, Young people and Skills reported that the Let's do it! Strategy includes a commitment to hear and engage with all voices in the community, including young people. Children and Young People are at the heart of the strategy including early help within the "Local" principle; education and skills within "Enterprise"; engagement and co-design with young people in "Together" and inclusion within "Strengths".

The LGA peer review recognised the ambition in Bury for children and young people in Bury but fed back that there was work to do to embed the new approach within children's social care practice. Co-production with young people is currently too limited, for example and the current "Compliance" culture in children's social work does not support the flexible and engaging spirit of Let's do it!

A commitment has therefore been made to developing the "Let's" model within the Children and Young People's department, which will be reflected in the improvement plan which has been branded as "Let's do it it ... for children". This will include the further strengthening of Early Help; evaluation and development of the Signs of Safety model (a strengths-based approach to social care); a review of the co-production approach and new tools to align practice with the "Let's" strategic approach such as appreciative enquiry.

In parallel, a broader piece of organisation development work is being planned to similarly reinforce new behaviours amongst all other staff and ensure complementary support across other departments.

Supplementary question: Would you give us the reassurance that included in the action plan will be milestones to identify those improvements have been achieved?

Councillor Tariq, Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills reported that he can give that commitment; the whole point of the improvement plan is to ensure the actions set are being implemented. The Improvement Board is being Chaired by Linda Clegg and will ensure we achieve the milestones set.

Question 2: What plans and by what date are being put in place to assist Members to strengthen their corporate parenting responsibilities? **Councillor Russell Bernstein**

Councillor Tariq, Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Children, Young people and Skills reported We have an active Corporate Parenting Board we will be holding a Corporate Parenting week from the 15th to the 19th November and elected

members are invited to this. During this period sessions and events will be held every day which the members will be invited to get involved with.

The Members briefing training has been updated and the link sent to all to complete. Following this we increased the number of corporate parenting champions. We have invited the members of the Corporate Parenting Board to be members of the constituted group for Care Experienced young people and the Virtual School Governing Board. This has increased participation and involvement. Also elected members got involved with supporting the Summer activity programme.

The Corporate Parenting Newsletter will also be sent out this week which will provide an overview of work in the last few months.

We will continue to drive this important work forward – we need to get the whole of the council on board with the responsibility towards children in care and care leavers. We certainly have a lot to do and to celebrate.

4 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 07th September 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendments:

Councillor Whitby raised that a question had been asked by another Committee member about the diversity of Parental Consultations and what consultations were taken outside of Bury2gether. Councillor Pilkington raised the question: What help was available for parents who are not members of Bury2gether.

The response to Cllr Pilkington's questions was that for Bury2gether to have a reach of over 1000 is an incredibly successful parent model. One of the important aspects is where you get support, we have an Independent Advisory Service commissioned from Barnardo's; the local offer on the Bury Directory communicates this to parents. We have a working group including our parents; however, the governance of the local offer needs to improve to reach more parents.

Councillor Lancaster requested that the difference in costs for maintained and none maintained Schools be noted due to being a significant difference between maintained and none maintained.

Councillor Lancaster requested the number of children (140) and the cost comparison (approximately £25,000 per child) to attend a maintained school is noted.

Councillor Lancaster requested the noting of the question: Who attended in the Fit and Fed Scheme in the May half term and what the figures were like across the Borough.

5 MATTERS ARISING

Councillor Luis McBriar requested an update on the independent review on Speech and Language.

Isobel Booler, Director of Education and Skills advised that a colleague from the CCG has been looking for people to complete this. It has not started yet but it is due to be underway in the next few weeks. Funding and commissioning has been agreed and work will commence shortly.

Councillor Tom Pilkington advised that members of the Scrutiny Committee were invited to meet with Bury2gether earlier this week and asked some direct questions of them. This included asking who scrutinises them, he reported that they gave a comprehensive answer in that they are scrutinised not only by this Committee but by the Department for Education and the Charity contact also. He believes this will be a point of public interest especially regarding the public questions received.

6 MEETING THEME - LGA PEER REVIEW FEEDBACK AND RESPONSE

Councillor Tariq, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills wished to use this opportunity to make members aware, if they were not already that there has been a change in the leadership of the Department. This has meant there is additional pressures with the current senior leadership team within Children Service's. He added that Paul Cooke, Sandra Bruce and Isobel Booler have all been acting up in their respective areas and in most cases covering two roles. Councillor Tariq requested that members of the Committee consider this with the workload and pressures of this Department at this stage. It is hoped that this interim arrangement will soon be over, and a briefing can be provided at the next meeting providing information on the senior leadership team. Councillor Tariq thanked the officers for stepping up at such a critical point.

Moving on to the meeting theme; LGA Peer Review Councillor Tariq reported that the review was conducted virtually.

It covered:

- The effectiveness and recruitment of social workers

- The impact of quality assurance
- Quality placements for Looked after Children and care leavers
- Looking at the effectiveness of Child Protection Plans
- Capacity for transformation across the department

Isobel Booter, Director for Education and Skills reported that a Delivery Board and Plan has been set up and met in September 2021. However, the last three weeks we have been under inspection by Ofsted and therefore the plan has changed due to this and leadership changes.

A key area we are aware of is the recruitment and retention of social workers and is at the heart of the recruitment plan. As well as responding to the LGA Peer Review we will respond to the Ofsted findings. The findings from Ofsted will be provided on the 17th December 2021.

Councillor McBriar requested a breakdown of what cases are and aren't dealt with in one day and if high caseloads result in children remaining in harmful situations for longer what is being done to solve the situation as per page 14 point 2.6 in the agenda pack.

In response Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director for Early Help and School readiness advised that for the cases dealt with in one day the figure is 96%. Whilst there has been a slight drop recently this is due to bringing MASH back together but as a usual figure, we are in the high 90's. We have measurements on how long it takes to do assessments and whether they are in timeframe, whether visits and planning is also done in set timeframes. We are in line with our statutory neighbours and nationally, therefore despite setbacks the service has had it has not impacted performance. However, Sandra Bruce advised that with maintaining statutory figures you can lose some of the quality, which is demonstrable from the public questions submitted.

Councillor McBriar also requested further information on document pack page 14 point 2.9; he acknowledged that Bury Council carrying out all 'expected' activity is positive, however, he questioned what is being done further to this.

In response Isobel Booter, Executive Director of Education and Skills advised a new quality assurance framework is in place and the audits have happened. One area for more work is to look what we can learn from previous cases to drive change going forward.

Councillor McBriar further questioned document pack page 16 point 2.13 and asked what timeline is in place for when the findings are going to be completed.

In response Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills advised that because of challenges around recruitment this week a managed service is being brought in bring in experienced social workers to work with children in need to impact and improve casework. This is for a total of six months and therefore next steps are already being considered and therefore a robust recruitment plan will be used to support the service going forward.

Councillor Whitby asked if the change to the Children's hub's is now embedded and if it is successful.

Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director (Early Help and School Readiness) advised 60% of our schools are working along the task model. It was launched in 2019 but this was right before lockdown, so we have only been able to re-engage in September 2021. We are tracking data but in early days, we are seeing a reduction in referrals in Schools and in turn this is reducing the demand into social care. We ask schools regularly for feedback and this has been predominantly positive.

Councillor Whitby also questioned; due to the pandemic the number of child protection and safeguarding issues throughout the Borough has increased, since services have begun to open up again.

Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director (Early Help and School Readiness) informed the Committee that Bury is usually very low with our figures however what we saw pre-pandemic is our figures increasing. We viewed this positively as we were identifying those children at higher risk. Through the pandemic they remained consistent and are now inline with our statistical neighbours and we are now reaching the children we should.

Councillor J Lancaster asked if the follow up Peer Review has been booked in for the recommended six month period.

In response Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills reported that due to the Ofsted review taking place recently it feels timely to use the findings from the review to drive forward improvements as opposed to the findings from the LGA Peer Review. The Lead for the LGA Peer Review is the Chair for the Delivery Board and will see both findings.

Councillor J Lancaster, the review does not mention SEND within its themes.

In response Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills advised that a review usually focuses on one area, and this was on the 'front door' of services. In the future it would be helpful to have an LGA Peer Review on SEND but once work has taken place.

Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director (Early Help and School Readiness) clarified the SEND framework for inspection is different to the social work frame for inspection. This framework was a social work framework.

Councillor J Lancaster how is the access to safe, good quality housing going to be accommodated considering the housing crisis in Bury.

In response Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills advised the Committee that following a survey completed by care leavers on housing findings proved positive in the housing they were in. Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director (Early Help and School Readiness) added that whilst the Peer Review identified that care leavers did not feel safe in their homes it is due to not having choice of area sometimes; the quality of accommodation is rated highly within the review. We are involved in a national project for care leavers which looks at accommodation along with the HEN project which is led by Greater Manchester.

Councillor Lancaster asked a question in relation to the recruitment and retention of staff; how we are compared to other Councils, how are we going to attract staff and how we are managing sick leave.

Councillor Tariq, Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member, Children, Young People and Skills reported our approach has previously been too traditionalist. An attractive offer must be put forward for Social Workers going forward. An officer has been recruited to support the service specifically around communications and engagement going forward. We are looking at the Bury offer and what the message is to prospective employees.

Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director (Early Help and School Readiness) advised that we currently average at the FTE of 9 days per month in sickness levels.

Councillor Lancaster also asked how we are going to make sure children's voices are to be made a priority in the future.

In response Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills advised the Committee that an audio file has been produced by the Children and Young People in Care Council about what it feels like to be taken into care. It was reported that ensuring child experience is put into delivery plans to make sure it drives forward improvement.

Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director (Early Help and School Readiness) we have refreshed the Children's Strategic Partnership Board and we have created a Children's Participation and Voice Sub-group of that board.

Councillor Pilkington questioned if the reasons for people leaving and if this information is collated. Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director advised the average time for a member of staff to remain as a front-line social worker is two years so demonstrates this is a national problem. Many workers then move into agency work or other related areas. We have learnt it is key for the scaffolding around social workers to be safe and supported in their roles.

Councillor Wright requested further information on the issues identified with the MASH Team.

Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director (Early Help and School Readiness) advised that the MASH Team was co-located in the Police Station. The MASH Team has been brought back together with the ambition to move back into the Police Station.

Councillor Wright requested we hear back on how recruitment and retention of Social Workers is going at a suitable future meeting.

7 DEMAND FOR SCHOOL PLACES

Councillor Tariq, Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member Children, Young People and Skills provided an overview of the report. He advised it is projected there will be gaps over the next five years.

Paul Cooke advised the report sets out the forecasted demand for school places. Typical projections are for five years, and this covers that period. From primary

we take data from the Health Services such as births and add data from other variables such as faith preferences, building, housing, commuting out of Borough and changes in locations. Secondary Schools have a slightly longer leading time as we can see this developing based on current figures in primary.

The Birth rate in Bury has been in decline for a number of years and housing growth has also been limited reducing demands for school places. The report sets out the implications for this the reason it is important is the level of school funding declines due to the projections and can affect the viability and sustainability of individual Schools if action is not taken to mitigate it. The report gives us an advanced view of this and helps us to mitigate the risk of schools entering hardship. There is the potential for significant residential growth though the proposals of the GMSF and those demand pressures are not recognised in this report.

The report brings forward proposals to mitigate issues on schools that could be impacted. This may include leadership models, class sizes and executive heads that function over more than one school and this paper informs these discussions.

Admission arrangements for secondary schools is the use of catchment areas which is largely historical. They have not evolved as demographics and schools have changed. Proposed changes to admission arrangements critically reviewing the role of catchment areas.

Councillor Boles clarified that whilst the report discusses the drop in demand for primary schools it is not reflected in Bury East and Moorside.

Paul Cooke agreed, the issues are not consistent across the Borough. Sometimes the issue is popularity, whilst you aim to maintain parental preference equally we must ensure all our schools are sustainable and have places filled.

Councillor Boles Also Secondary School's planning do we have any idea on how the schools in the north of the Borough will be affected when the Radcliffe /school is developed.

Paul Cooke, Assistant Director of Learning advised we currently see a high level of demand in Secondary Schools, we currently have a temporary increase in capacity to use when needed and to scale back when not required. Admitting first year 7's in 2024 should help to offer more parents the option for preference. When the new Radcliffe schools starts it will offer a place to 750 pupils, over time this will increase to 1000 although it will grow incrementally so will take until September 2028 until it is full. Paul Cooke to provide some further more detailed responses by email.

Councillor McBriar asked why catchment areas haven't been looked at before and when will they be looked at again.

Paul Cooke Assistant Director of Learning advised admissions are looked at regularly however the idea of catchment areas has not. Any changes to admissions will be consulted on to a more modern distance which is standard across many councils. We will be going out to consultation next year but this academic year.

Councillor Tariq Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member Children, Young People and Skills advised school admissions has been a continual issue and catchment areas should not be seen as a political issue and hope to have all Council to support.

Councillor Lancaster questioned the report states that new secondary school in Radcliffe will respond to some of the localised pressures.

Paul Cooke, Assistant Director of Learning advised that the number of brownfield sites that are going to be brought forward which will make great demand pressures and the option to expand from 750 to 1000 is a definite option should those developments come to fruition.

Councillor Lancaster questioned when will the public consultation be likely to take place.

Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills advised the Education Business Plan did not consider the demands of staff time elsewhere in the service. The past 7 weeks of staff covering internally has impacted the Educational Business Plan and timings, at the next Education SLT we will look at when we can run that consultation.

It is important to note our faith schools will have their own admissions policy and the majority of academies choose to follow our admissions policy, but this is not compulsory. We have the duty to provide places, but academies are allowed to choose their own admission policies.

Councillor Lancaster questioned what the Council are doing to work with Schools with low uptake.

Paul Cooke, Assistant Director of Learning advised that this is typically a parental preference matter, so we work with all our schools to support way to improve interest in those schools.

Councillor Pilkington following the COP 26 meeting how does school transport match up with school places especially in light of the bee network, does this give greater control over cutting emissions outside schools and how do you come up with a fair system for parents to choose.

We have positive relationships with all our schools and trusts. It is an important role of ours to maintain quality and performing at the highest level. Conversations with transport for Greater Manchester as transport has followed the demand in parental preference this is demonstrated by demand not design.

Councillor Whitby asked if any nursey provisions at primary schools have closed and if so, will support to those schools/nurseries be offered as a result.

Paul Cooke, Assistant Director of Learning advised we have one nursery school which is Hoyle Nursey and is sustainable and viable. We have many primary schools which have nursery classes, one school made the decision to shut the nursey class however we have no plans to scale back maintained nursery classes.

Councillor Whitby asked more specifically about the impact on nursery provision linked to Primary Schools.

Paul Cooke Assistant Director of Learning further advised we are working with individual schools to ensure sustainability to not reduce preschool capacity. We have several schools that have really small numbers in their reception classes and to be viable going forward they have had to do mixed aged classes and others have now gone for an executive headteacher model to ensure their local school remains open.

Councillor Pilkington asked if one of the key aspirations going forward to address the inequality gap across the Borough.

Paul Cooke, Assistant Director of Learning advised if you look at the case the Council submitted to the DFE to our current plans to establish a new school in Radcliffe. It looked at the role housing employment, health and high-quality education played in the wider place shaping and growth of a community.

It was agreed:

The report be noted.

8 SCHOOLS UPDATE ON RE-OPENING

Councillor Tariq, Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member Children Young People and Skills introduced the report.

Wendy Jackson, Service Lead for Quality Assurance and Performance thanked the Committee for asking for an update and thanked the Schools and Governors for the work they have done. Communication has been key throughout the pandemic in informing and helping our schools.

The vaccination programme is going well but take up has not been high however this is reflective at a Greater Manchester level too. Work has been done to help 16/17-year-olds with the uptake of the vaccine.

Councillor Wright asked a question regarding the school nursing teams being used for the vaccine role out; has it effected the nursing teams in schools.

Paul Cooke, Assistant Director of Learning advised that the utilisation of the school nursing team should not negative impact programmes in place such as the flu vaccination. We are currently doing some additional pop-up clinics which do impinge on schools nursing time but it should not affect nurses time.

Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills reported Primary headteachers have raised formally their school nurses have not been as available from the vaccination role out. This does illustrate challenges our schools have had to deal with they are expected to have made progress whilst dealing with covid notifications and high staff and pupil absence.

Councillor Wright wished to record the Committees thanks for all the work Isobel, Sandra and Paul have done stepping up in their respective roles and the hard work of teachers getting back into schools.

9 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR S WRIGHT
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 6.30 pm and ended at 9.10 pm)



Classification: Open	Decision Type: Non-Key
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Report to:	(a) Cabinet	Date: 12 January 2022
	(b) Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee	Date: 20 January 2022
Subject:	Inspection of Children's Services	
Report of	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills	

Summary

The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee of the findings of an Ofsted inspection of the Council's children's services. The inspection found the services to be inadequate. The report explains the form of intervention by the Secretary of State for Education and the action already taken to implement improvements. The report seeks approval to the framework for an Improvement Plan which the Council will submit to the Department for Education by 31st March 2022.

Recommendations

1. That the Ofsted report following the inspection of the Council's children's services be noted.
2. That Cabinet approve the framework for the Improvement Plan attached at Appendix 2 to this report.

Reasons for recommendations

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

Alternative options considered and rejected

None.

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1. Result of Ofsted Inspection

- 1.1. Bury Children's Services received an inspection from Ofsted under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework from 25th October to 5th November 2021. The outcome of the inspection was published on 17th December 2021. A copy of the inspection report is attached at Appendix 1.
- 1.2. The findings of the inspection were that two domain areas – the 'Impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families' and the 'Experiences and progress of children who need help and protection', were graded as Inadequate. For the third domain, 'Experiences and progress of children in care and care Leavers', the finding was that the service Requires Improvement. Under the ILACS framework, the Inadequate finding for both leadership and for help and protection resulted in a judgement that the 'Overall effectiveness' of the service is Inadequate.
- 1.3. The safety and well-being of the Borough's most vulnerable children is an absolute priority for the Council and its partners. This report sets out how the Council will respond positively to the inspection both now and into the future.

2. Improvement Notice

- 2.1. Arising from the inspection the Secretary of State for Children and Families has issued a draft improvement notice.
- 2.2. Under the terms of the notice the Secretary of State has decided to appoint an advisor to provide advice to the Department for Education and to the Council.
- 2.3. The improvement notice requires the Council, working with its partner agencies, to :
 - (a) produce an improvement plan to address the areas identified in the Ofsted report and any recommendations made by the advisor;
 - (b) maintain an improvement board with an independent chair who will oversee implementation of the plan and report to the board on progress to a timetable agreed by the Department; and
 - (c) aim for actions included in the plan to be delivered by the end of December 2022 or sooner if appropriate.
- 2.4. The improvement notice will last a minimum 12 months with formal reviews at least every six months and more regularly if appropriate.

3. Monitoring of Improvement Progress

- 3.1. In addition to the monitoring and formal reviews from the DfE, Ofsted will carry out regular monitoring activity following the inadequate judgement.
- 3.2. There will be an Ofsted action planning visit in January 2022 and then regular quarterly monitoring visits. There will be between 4 and 6 Monitoring visits prior to a reinspection, with the first monitoring visit expected in June 2022.

- 3.3 Given the intensity of the external scrutiny of improvement, it will be important to ensure that Members have political oversight of progress. The proposals for Member involvement are :
- (a) progress reports will be submitted to future meetings of Cabinet following each six month review;
 - (b) the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee will play an important role in providing challenge and support as the Improvement Plan is delivered; and
 - (c) the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills, the Leader of the Council and representatives from all opposition groups on the Council will be invited to all meetings of the Improvement Board referred to later in this report.

4. The Council's Response

- 4.1. The Council's response is organised into three phases:
- (a) immediate action following the LGA Peer Review of July 2021 and then responding to the Ofsted findings;
 - (b) a detailed one year action plan; and
 - (c) a three-year strategic improvement plan.
- 4.2. In relation to (a), new work to improve the service had already started following an LGA Peer Review completed last summer. This work then intensified following the Ofsted inspection. This is described in section 5 below. This phase has included work to ensure that children are safe. This is summarised in section 6 below.
- 4.3. In relation to (b), work has commenced on the improvement plan which the Council is now required to produce by 31st March 2022. The framework for the plan is explained in section 7 below.
- 4.4. In relation to (c), the ambition of the Council and its partners will not be restricted to moving out of the Ofsted judgment of Inadequate and being judged as "Requires Improvement". Bury's vulnerable children and families deserve services to be good or better. This will require a Council-wide commitment to child centred improvement and for children's services to be at the heart of the wider reform of public services as set out in the Let's Do It Strategy.
- 4.5. Whilst the Council will not hesitate to provide the necessary financial investment to improve the service in response to the Ofsted report, there will also need to be agreement on what constitutes best value for that investment over the long term in terms of the outcomes for vulnerable children and their families.
- 4.6. These longer term issues will be discussed at the Improvement Board and reflected in the three year strategic improvement plan.

5. Action taken before and immediately after the Ofsted inspection

- 5.1. The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills and the Chief Executive, supported by partners, have issued public statements apologising for the failure to maintain high quality services for children and families. The public statements issued have outlined the action that has been taken so far and the actions that will now follow.
- 5.2. The Leader of the Council has written to the Secretary of State responding positively to the draft improvement notice and provided assurance in regard to the commitment to improve services for children in need of help and protection .
- 5.3. The Council's childrens services were previously rated as Requires Improvement and the Council's own assessment had recognised earlier in 2021 that improvements in the quality of services to children and families were not being made fast enough. For that reason, the Council invited the LGA to conduct a peer challenge of its childrens services. This took place in July 2021.
- 5.4. The LGA review findings confirmed that the service was facing significant challenges. In response to those findings the Council established a Children and Young People Service Delivery Board with an independent chair. In responding to the draft Improvement Notice the Council has suggested to the Secretary of State that Delivery Board transitions into an improvement board to meet the requirements of the improvement notice for an improvement board with an independent chair.
- 5.5. New leadership arrangements were put in place on an interim basis in September last year. The Ofsted report acknowledged that the Council and the interim leaders had already identified the correct priority areas and were taking the appropriate action. A new Executive Director, Jeanette Richards, was appointed in November and has now taken up her post.
- 5.6. Action has already been taken to reduce caseloads for Social Workers and to increase the stability the social care workforce. This is critical given the shortages within the market for social workers. Action is being taken to retain social workers and to attract new social workers to Bury. The Corporate Core is supporting the service to run a new continuous recruitment process. This includes refreshing and simplifying the application form to make applying for social work posts in Bury easier and creating a bespoke Bury space on Greater Jobs website with Let's Do It branding as well as implementing initial steps to make the Council's employment offer more attractive in an extremely competitive market.
- 5.7. The Council has already committed to reducing caseloads and has brought in two managed services to work within the court team and within the initial response team. Where caseloads have been protected better quality of practice was seen by Ofsted. The key workforce priorities in improvement plan will be recruitment and retention, learning and development and staff wellbeing.

6. Immediate Assurance

- 6.1. Immediate action has been taken since the Ofsted inspection to ensure that children and young people are safe. This has involved extensive sampling exercises and actions have been taken promptly in response to the findings. The work completed includes the following:
- (a) remedial action has been taken for all cases raised by inspectors and additional tracking is now in place for these cases;
 - (b) there has been regular sampling of cases in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH);
 - (c) action has been taken to sample cases of children experiencing domestic abuse. The way that such cases appear on the case management system has been changed and there has been associated training for staff in the MASH ;
 - (d) additional sampling of child in need cases has been introduced and follow up action is being taken, including in-service training with managers to look at the child in need process and the quality of case planning;
 - (e) all Child Protection Plans which have been in place for more than nine months have been reviewed by service managers and the case planning process has been reviewed;
 - (f) immediate actions have been taken to improve the management of cases prior to court proceedings. A task and finish group with legal services has been put in place to develop training on court skills and to improve the management of pre-proceedings cases to ensure clear oversight and grip;
 - (g) child in need cases recommended for step down have been sampled. As a result “ Step Down Clinics” have been introduced to focus on the wrap around support required for children and to support better practice in relation to the application of thresholds; and
 - (h) the cases of children in care and requiring permanent placements have been reviewed. A permanence tracker is being used to ensure there is continued grip of planning for all looked after children.
- 6.2 The learning from this immediate assurance work is being use by managers to drive improvements in practice. The sampling that has been undertaken so far will continue.
- 6.3 A detailed report on this assurance work was discussed by the Delivery Board on 21st December 2021.

7. Improvement Plan

- 7.1. Since the inspection report was received work has progressed at pace on developing a framework for the Improvement Plan which will be submitted to the Department for Education by the end of March. The draft framework for the plan is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.
- 7.2. The framework is built around three themes:
- (a) leadership and management;
 - (b) quality and impact of practice upon outcomes for children; and
 - (c) a skilled, confident, engaged and experienced workforce.
- 7.3. More detailed action plans within this framework will be developed with staff and partners before submission in March. The involvement of front line staff and partners is essential to achieving long term sustainable change, not just short term compliance.
- 7.4. In parallel with the development of the Improvement Plan framework, immediate action has been taken (summarised in section 5 above) and will continue to be taken to ensure that children and young people are safe.
- 7.5. All of the current action responding to the Ofsted report (summarised in section 6 above) is being aligned with the framework for the Improvement Plan. The immediate action is therefore balanced with a measured and forensic approach to planning the longer term sustainable improvements for children and young people.
- 7.6. The framework includes;
- (a) governance arrangements to ensure robust multi-agency ownership for delivery of the improvement plan;
 - (b) arrangements for the involvement of front line staff in the design and delivery of the improvement plan;
 - (c) the framework of strategic priorities for improvement : leadership and management, quality and impact of practice upon outcomes for children and workforce;
 - (d) detailed analysis and cross referencing of the priority actions for improvement set out in the Ofsted report and the earlier LGA Peer Review; and
 - (e) a clear list of the topics where more specific action planning will be produced to provide the detail for the full plan to be submitted in March.
- 7.7. The Delivery Board has met on three occasions since October. Its initial work was paused when the Ofsted inspection began. It has met once since to approve the framework.

7.8 In agreeing the improvement plan framework, the board emphasised the particular criticality of focused action on workforce stability, through the third theme of the improvement strategy. This work will include action in relation to four key interconnected areas:

(a) Recruitment and retention: Building on the initial strategy developed and work undertaken to strengthen our employment offer and marketing and attraction approach through further initiatives and intervention. The focus here must be on attracting and retaining high quality practitioners. As well as our core employment offer, strengthening people management capabilities and, principally, addressing caseloads will be critical here in providing a high quality employee experience which supports retention.

(b) Learning and development: An initial refreshed strategy has been developed which emphasises the importance of a culture of learning and continuous development to the overall improvement journey. This is an area where the Council should be ambitious and, ultimately, work to establish a Social Work academy.

(c) Wellbeing: This is a key focus for the Council across the full workforce. The mental wellbeing impact of the Pandemic are well documented. Given the nature of social care work, there must be particular focus here and it will be important that the Council is honest and clear in its commitment in this area.

(d) Engagement: It is crucial that the workforce are fully engaged in the improvement journey and feel a sense of shared ownership in its success. We will use the skills and expertise of our workforce to co-design new approaches and ensure a culture of transparency. A staff-led Shadow Improvement Board will be fundamental to this work.

7.9 The requirement to improve relates to all public services in the Borough. Partners are therefore fully represented on the Delivery Board. Partners will also play an important leadership role on the Bury Integrated Safeguarding Partnership Board. The development of the independent scrutiny of multi-agency arrangements for children's safeguarding will be a key for improvement.

8. Conclusion

8.1. This report provides the basis for debate at Cabinet, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and at Council.

8.2. Recommendations appear at the front of the report.

Links with the Corporate Priorities:

The Improvement Plan will be referred to as the 'Let's Do it for Children Plan'. The drive to transform Children's Services is key to the Let's Do it Strategy ensuring that children's and parents voice influence the change and service improvement is at the heart of the transformation which will be best achieved through locality working centred around place.

Equality Impact and Considerations:

Ensuring inclusive practice is a central principle of Bury's Children's Services and that the diverse needs of different communities across the borough are appropriately considered will be a core element of the overall improvement journey.

Environmental Impact and Considerations:

None known.

Legal Implications:

The Government's statutory powers to inspect Local Authority Childrens Services is set out in 136 (2) of the Education and Inspection Act 2006. All Ofsted inspections are carried out in accordance with the statutory guidance titled Inspecting Local Authority Childrens Services (updated 3rd December 2021). A Local Authority judged to be inadequate will receive mandatory meetings followed by a reinspection. The guidance provides a framework for how Local Authorities in this position will be monitored. A timetable provides for an action planning visit, the delivery of an action plan, a first monitoring meeting and subsequent meetings. The details of the follow up actions are set out in these reports. Members will be provided with regular updating reports.

Financial Implications:

Prior to the Ofsted the Council had already committed to funding one of the managed services to manage caseloads and has now identified funding for the second team. Funding has also been identified for the new workforce practices to attract, train and retain social workers. It is recognised as the work of the delivery board progresses and in order to deliver the actions required to respond to the issues found by Ofsted, the actions within the Improvement Plan may require additional investment into Children's Services. This will be considered as part of the current and future Budget planning process.

The main financial costs for childrens social care remain in meeting the need for residential placements for Looked After Children, the committed costs in funding Fostering placements and in supporting young people leaving the care of the Council.

Background papers:

None.

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning
LGA	Local Government Association
ILACS	Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services
DfE	Department for Education

Inspection of Bury local authority children's services

Inspection dates: 25 October 2021 to 5 November 2021

Lead inspector: Lorna Schlechte, Her Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate

There are serious failures which leave too many children at risk of harm in Bury. Children who need help and protection experience drift and delay in having their needs met as a result of frequent changes in social worker, over-optimistic assessments, poor-quality plans, and gaps in supervision and management oversight. In some cases, risk is not always recognised, or responded to, in a timely way, leaving some children with insufficient timely protection.

Since the focused visit in October 2020, the quality of practice has deteriorated, particularly for children in need of help and protection. There has been significant instability in the senior leadership team, and a lack of focus on the areas of improvement needed.

Although an internally commissioned peer review in July 2021 appropriately identified a mixed picture of progress and improvement and led to the establishment of an improvement board, this is very new and has not brought about the level of change required. The appointment of new interim senior leaders in mid-September 2021 has provided opportunities for the changes required to be identified, but this is a fragile situation and there is still much work to do to improve the experience of children in Bury.

What needs to improve?

- The timely recognition and response to risk at the front door.
- The quality of strategy discussions and child protection investigations.
- Manageable caseloads for social workers.
- The quality of assessments, to ensure that they are regularly updated and are not over-optimistic in their analysis.
- The quality of plans and planning for children, to ensure that actions include clear timescales and contingencies, including for those children who require suitable placements when they come into care.
- The response to pre-proceedings to ensure that progress is monitored and tracked more robustly to reduce drift and delay for children.
- The quality of supervision and management challenge to ensure that social workers have time to reflect on complex cases and take account of children's changing circumstances.
- The recruitment and retention of social workers, to stabilise the workforce and reduce multiple changes in social worker for children.
- The stability of the senior leadership team to support implementation of an appropriately focused plan of improvement.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: Inadequate

1. Children in need of help and protection are not always identified. Consequently, children do not always receive the right help to meet their needs. Although screening of referrals in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) provides appropriate management oversight informing next steps, there are missed opportunities to identify risks earlier for some children. This is because the impact of cumulative harm on children is not always well understood, especially in relation to domestic abuse, and decisions are based on an overly optimistic assessment of risk. As a result, some children are at risk of further harm before more purposeful action is taken to protect them.
2. The model of co-location with partner agencies in the MASH has been adapted in response to the pandemic, but not all agencies are based together as they were previously. This has reduced the quality of information-sharing, although daily virtual meetings are held with police. Some referrals from partner agencies are not timely and this leads to a delayed protective response.
3. Children and families benefit from sensitive work to meet their needs through detailed early help assessments. However, the thresholds to signpost children

for early help support are inconsistently applied. Some children are signposted to receive early help support when they should have received a statutory social care assessment. As a result, some children do not have their needs understood and met at the right time. This sometimes leads to repeat referrals for the same concern.

4. Strategy meetings do not always identify the necessary actions to progress the child protection enquiry or to keep children safe during the enquiry period. There are missed opportunities to gain a multi-agency response to secure children's immediate safety in some cases. These concerns were raised by inspectors at the last focused visit in October 2020 and have not improved.
5. There is timely and proportionate action when children need a social work response to keep them safe out of office hours, although the detail of screening and decision-making in the emergency duty team (EDT) was not being recorded on electronic systems until the issue was raised by inspectors.
6. Assessments are mostly overly focused on adults and concerned with the presenting problem, to the detriment of understanding the impact of cumulative harm on children's broader needs and risks. Parental capacity for sustained change is not consistently considered in assessments. They are too often based on parental self-reporting, and are not regularly updated when circumstances change. This means that assessments are not focused enough on the impact of harmful experiences on children, which leads to over-optimistic decision-making and unidentified risk.
7. Many children experience multiple changes in social worker. This has an impact on their ability to form secure relationships and to share their views and worries. It is also disruptive to planned work with families and contributes to drift and delay in the delivery of social work interventions, assessments and plans, which repeatedly restart with a new social worker. Caseloads are too high, and this reduces the ability of social workers to complete appropriately focused direct work with children. Although most children are seen regularly, visits often lack purpose and this contributes to a lack of progress in plans.
8. Significant numbers of children experience delay in having their plans progressed. Most plans for children in need and for children subject to child protection planning are confusing, often too generalised and lack clear timescales or contingencies to measure children's progress. Many are adult focused or do not consider the support children need to mitigate the harm they have suffered. As a result, the plans are not easy for parents to understand what needs to be done to achieve the desired outcomes.
9. Some children do not receive sufficient protection when they are subject to child protection planning. There is an overreliance on unrealistic written agreements with parents to protect children. When risks increase, there are delays in taking appropriate protective action. Decisions to cease child protection plans are influenced by parental self-reporting and engagement with

services, rather than considering what has changed for children. The rationale for decision-making by social care and partners in child protection conferences is often unclear. Some children step down from child protection planning too early when actions are incomplete, or before an updated assessment is completed to consider whether risks have reduced. Consequently, too many children experience repeated episodes of child protection planning and lengthy social care involvement, without change being sustained. This means children are not always afforded the appropriate level of protection they need.

10. Core groups are not consistently effective forums to drive and measure progress when children are subject to a child protection plan. There is insufficient focus by social care and partners on the impact of interventions to reduce risk, and what additional actions are needed to meet children's needs in response to a lack of progress. Virtual review meetings held during the pandemic are mostly well attended.
11. When parenting does not improve, timely authoritative action to escalate into the pre-proceedings stage of the public law outline (PLO) is not always taken, leaving some children in ongoing situations of neglect. The monitoring of these children is not robust, and some children repeatedly step in and out of the PLO, despite risks not always reducing, or change being sustained.
12. Once cases are escalated into pre-proceedings, there is inconsistent management oversight to support timely applications into court should change not be achieved. Review and tracking mechanisms are not regular enough, lack rigour and do not challenge delays in completing actions. Cases in the pre-proceedings stage are sometimes extended inappropriately in response to continued risk of harm. The system of review does not consider current risks to children or reflect on changes in their circumstances to support critical decisions to extend, or step down from pre-proceedings. When risks escalate and decisions are made for children to come into care, they sometimes remain in unsuitable placements with extended family members, while alternative foster placements are sought.
13. Some disabled children have experienced significant drift and delay in having their need for help and protection met. Assessments and work undertaken with disabled children and their families is too adult focused and does not consistently identify the risk and harmful circumstances in which some disabled children have been living. A new team manager has appropriately identified what needs to change, but has limited capacity to implement the improvements needed. Children face further delay while the newly expanded team forms relationships with them, understands their communication needs, and completes updated assessments. It is acknowledged by senior leaders that the team, mostly made up of agency social workers, lacks the necessary skills to undertake direct work with some disabled children to understand their experiences. A training and development plan identifies the shortfalls but has not been implemented.

14. Children at risk of exploitation are seen regularly by social workers in the complex safeguarding team, who build meaningful relationships with them. This supports purposeful work in helping children understand and recognise when they are being exploited. However, detailed risk assessments do not sufficiently inform multi-agency plans to support these children. The service is still evolving and mapping meetings have only recently been introduced to engage wider partners to share information and intelligence. As such, this is not resulting in a comprehensive multi-agency approach to reduce risks.
15. When children go missing, the local authority response is not consistently robust. Although return home interviews are mostly timely, they lack clear analysis of push and pull factors. When children refuse to engage, information is not consistently sought from carers to understand prior events to inform intelligence gathering. Strategy meetings are appropriately triggered when children go missing for long periods or on multiple occasions, but this does not result in clear multi-agency safety planning. There is a lack of planning to minimise risk for children who regularly go missing. Plans are too broad to identify longer-term work to mitigate future risks.
16. Children aged 16 to 17 years old who present as homeless receive appropriate support to live in suitable accommodation. Although their needs are well assessed, they are not routinely informed of their rights and the benefits of entering care, which limits their understanding of what support is on offer.
17. Monitoring systems for children who are electively home educated and those missing from education are slow and inefficient. Although there have been recent improvements in the way children are tracked and monitored, capacity issues in the team have meant that visits have not routinely taken place. This also means that the lead for children missing education does not have time to sufficiently develop the network of contacts which are needed to locate children and young people efficiently. As such, the arrangements to ensure that children's whereabouts are known and closely monitored are not as effective as they need to be.
18. Allegations against professionals are mostly well managed by the designated officer. The response is timely, thorough and robust. However, when the designated officer is absent, the role is covered by two child protection chairs. This leads to delays in allegations being progressed, and actions not being completed in a timely way. Allegations management meetings are used effectively to share information and identify actions, which are regularly reviewed. Effective information-sharing between the designated officer and MASH ensures that children at risk are identified and action is taken. Tracking mechanisms are robust; however, workload demands have reduced the designated officer's ability to keep records up to date and this reduces oversight.

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers: Requires improvement to be good

19. The majority of children come into care in a planned way and senior managers have appropriate oversight of key decisions. However, some children have waited too long in neglectful or harmful circumstances before coming into care and this has increased the complexity of their needs. In some cases, placement decision-making is influenced by the lack of foster placements to meet the needs of vulnerable children.
20. Although there is a clear focus on keeping children with family members where it is safe to do so, a minority of children have had to remain at home once the threshold is met to come into care, while a more suitable placement is found, because there are insufficient placements to meet the needs of some children.
21. Senior managers have recognised the drift and delay in care planning linked to high caseloads and commissioned an additional specialist court team. This team has improved the quality of social work practice since it was established in July 2021. Work is now being progressed more effectively for children in the court arena in this team.
22. The majority of children who have a plan to return home to their parents are able to return safely because of purposeful work both before and after they are reunited. A few children have remained at home with parents on care orders for too long. For some children, discharge of care orders is not progressed quickly enough, where it is appropriate to do so. For these children, an up-to-date assessment of their needs has not been undertaken to inform a decision about whether statutory intervention is still required.
23. Children's wishes and feelings about who they want to live with are carefully obtained and inform court statements. The quality of assessment of parents and connected carers is inconsistent. This leads to delayed court proceedings and some children having to wait too long to have their long-term plan of permanence confirmed. This is in addition to the delays in the family court, which are due to the impact of COVID-19 over the past year.
24. Children receive independent reviewing officer (IRO) visits before their reviews to gain their wishes and feelings. Reviews are written sensitively and in a way that helps the child to understand their care plan. IROs routinely escalate concerns where there is evidence of drift and delay in care planning, or when court timescales are at risk of delay. However, this is not always effective in achieving the required change swiftly.
25. Visits to children in care are mostly regular and social workers have a good understanding of children's individual needs. However, this level of understanding is not always evident in the child's record and the purpose of visits is sometimes unclear. Too many children have experienced multiple

- changes of social worker due to the high turnover of agency staff. This has an impact on children forming relationships with social workers.
26. Children in care benefit from timely accessible support through a dedicated child and adolescent mental health services team. Most children's health needs are well considered and children receive appropriate medical and therapeutic support. There are delays for some children in accessing Healthy Young Minds.
 27. The new virtual headteacher (VHT) has a clear focus on promoting the achievement and well-being of all children and young people in care. The experienced virtual school team is quick to respond to the needs of children, carers and the schools or provisions they attend. The VHT has quickly identified priorities to improve the quality of personal education plans (PEPs) and the use of pupil premium to enhance children's achievements. Almost all children have a PEP, although the quality is inconsistent, which means that the impact they have on children's education and achievement is variable.
 28. Most children live in placements that meet their needs for care and stability and they make positive progress. However, a small number of children are still waiting to live in a permanent home. Work has progressed to increase the number of children who are subject to special guardianship orders, and to match children to their long-term placements.
 29. Foster carers are well supported by their supervising social workers and receive regular supervision and virtual support. This has been particularly important due to the impact of COVID-19 on fostering families. Recruitment of new foster carers is a clear priority, albeit a challenge in the current climate, and work is undertaken collaboratively across Greater Manchester to increase the pool of carers available. Experienced foster carers act as 'ambassadors' for the service. Panel processes offer sufficient scrutiny and challenge to the recruitment and approval of foster carers.
 30. There is mostly effective planning of early permanence, especially for babies and younger children. Adopters feel very well supported through the matching process, the suitability of prospective adopters is scrutinised effectively by panel and there has been an increase in the number of children matched with adopters. Training and post-adoption support are appropriately considered. Children have been supported to keep in touch with their brothers and sisters and other family members after adoption, where this is in their best interests.
 31. Children in care are helped to maintain contact with people who are important to them. The impact of family time is routinely reviewed to ensure that it is in the child's best interests. There is appropriate consideration given to whether brothers and sisters can live together.
 32. Care leavers benefit from positive relationships with personal advisers who are caring, conscientious and committed members of staff. During the pandemic, personal advisers have seen care leavers regularly and sent letters, sweets,

toiletries, and parcels to care leavers to keep in touch and show they care. The reopening of the hub for care leavers recently has provided a valued drop-in space for support and advice to be offered.

33. There is an appropriate focus in pathway planning on the things that matter to care leavers, such as becoming independent, keeping well, learning and finding work. Children's views are captured in their own words and plans are carefully written to encourage positive choices. Some plans need to be strengthened because they lack detail and do not sufficiently address all identified needs.
34. Care leavers are helped to understand their physical and mental health needs. When it is necessary, the looked after children nurse supports timely access to a range of specialist services. Care leavers do not always understand their health histories or why this information is important for them to have.
35. Care leavers, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, benefit from dedicated support with education, training and employment. There is proactive work completed to encourage work experience and apprenticeships. Often, this leads to employment and further training. Some children have been supported to achieve success through further education and university.
36. Most care leavers are living in suitable, safe accommodation with the right levels of support. Personal advisers work with the tenancy sustainment worker and support care leavers to secure permanent accommodation. The housing, employment and new opportunities project is an effective collaboration to achieve this. However, some care leavers are unclear about their entitlements.
37. Young people have access to a children's rights advocate who supports them if they wish to make a complaint.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: Inadequate

38. During the last year, the changes in senior leadership in children's services have led to turmoil, instability and drift at a strategic and operational level. As a consequence, there has been an insufficient focus on children's experiences, and the quality of frontline practice has deteriorated since the last Ofsted focused visit in 2020.
39. These leadership changes culminated in the departure of both the director of children's services (DCS) and an assistant director (AD). While these interim arrangements were put in place promptly, they are still very recent. In September 2021 the Director of Education and AD Early Help stepped into these roles until permanent appointments could be secured.
40. There were mounting concerns from November 2020 onwards about high caseloads, the level of workforce churn, and the negative impact this was having on children and families, where there was significant drift and delay.

Although operational managers raised these concerns persistently at the time with senior leaders, and requested additional capacity to address high caseloads, these concerns have not been appropriately prioritised by senior leaders until recently.

41. As concerns escalated throughout the early part of 2021, the chief executive of the council commissioned an LGA peer review which was completed in July this year. This was a wide-ranging review which explored the broader corporate responsibilities of the council in relation to recruitment and retention of social workers, as well as concerns about the quality of social work practice. The findings were hard-hitting and described a mixed picture of progress and improvement aligned with inspection findings.
42. Although the response to the peer review led to the establishment of an independently chaired improvement board in late August 2021, and a review of cases in early help and children in need to address concerns about the quality of practice, corporate leaders have been too slow to act from the point of the initial concerns being raised in January 2021. This has meant that long-term sustainable improvement has not been achieved and there is still much work to do to address the known concerns.
43. A newly managed service (court team) was brought in to address high caseloads in the safeguarding teams in July 2021. Inspectors have seen the positive impact of this service on practice very recently as it features reduced caseloads, reflective supervision and more purposeful and effective practice. This has begun to address significant drift and delay in that team, but it is not making a difference to all children.
44. Since their appointment eight weeks ago, the interim DCS and AD have taken some swift action to strengthen services. This included securing another managed service team to address high caseloads in the initial response teams, although this was not established at the time of inspection and it is too soon to say if this will lead to the improvement needed.
45. The new senior leaders are more visible and accessible to frontline staff and they have appropriately prioritised the known areas for improvement in recognition of there being too much drift and delay, over-optimism and workforce churn. They have also responded quickly to concerns raised by inspectors about risk to individual children. This has led to some immediate protective action being taken to protect children, and a strengthening of practice, including a refresh of operational protocols in MASH and EDT. However, it is too early for this to have brought about the significant changes in the quality of practice required.
46. Senior leaders have struggled to implement the new model of practice during the pandemic, and it is still not embedded. Training has been rolled out virtually, but it has been difficult for staff to prioritise it, due to high caseloads. The workforce churn and a frustration with online learning have further

hindered the implementation of this model. The situation has been exacerbated by the different approaches to implementation employed by external consultants. This has led to mixed messages and a lack of clear service direction. Staff have struggled with the practice templates, and do not fully embrace the model of practice, or understand it.

47. There is a robust support programme for ASYE and established links with the local teaching partnership. Senior leaders are committed to supporting and developing newly qualified social workers and have refreshed the workforce development strategy.
48. Audits of practice have continued to be moderated and sometimes involve social workers and families. Audits identify appropriate practice issues, and mostly tell senior leaders what they need to know. However, there is more work to do to ensure that audits focus on children's experiences, and that learning leads to positive and sustainable changes in practice.
49. The approach to performance management has changed in recent weeks since the arrival of the new senior leadership team. Over the last year, there was too much attention on process and compliance, especially for children in need of help and protection, where there was insufficient focus on children's experiences to inform critical decisions. The new approach aims to encourage a more inclusive, less compliance-focused, reporting system which can close the learning loop. It is too early to see the impact of this in terms of shaping service priorities, in order to improve social work practice.
50. The new interim senior leadership team is appropriately sighted on the need to prioritise recruitment and retention, improve the Bury offer to encourage more permanent staff, and reduce the reliance on agency social workers in order to stabilise the workforce. However, there is still a long way to go for this to lead to the long-term sustainable changes required. The impact of working at home during a pandemic has also been difficult and staff have only very recently started to return to the office.
51. The Children in Care Council (CiCC) has worked hard to construct the Bury Promise. Children attend the corporate parenting board and present feedback from the CiCC on what matters to them. The council is a committed corporate parent, although it has acknowledged that the strategic approach could be strengthened in line with peer review recommendations.
52. The quality of supervision for social workers is too variable, and there are gaps in frequency across the service. This means that the level of reflection and ability to consider children's experiences is inconsistently recorded. Supervision does not always challenge unidentified risk, or drift and delay, effectively. Despite this, staff have continued to work diligently in a difficult COVID-19 context and report being supported by their managers.



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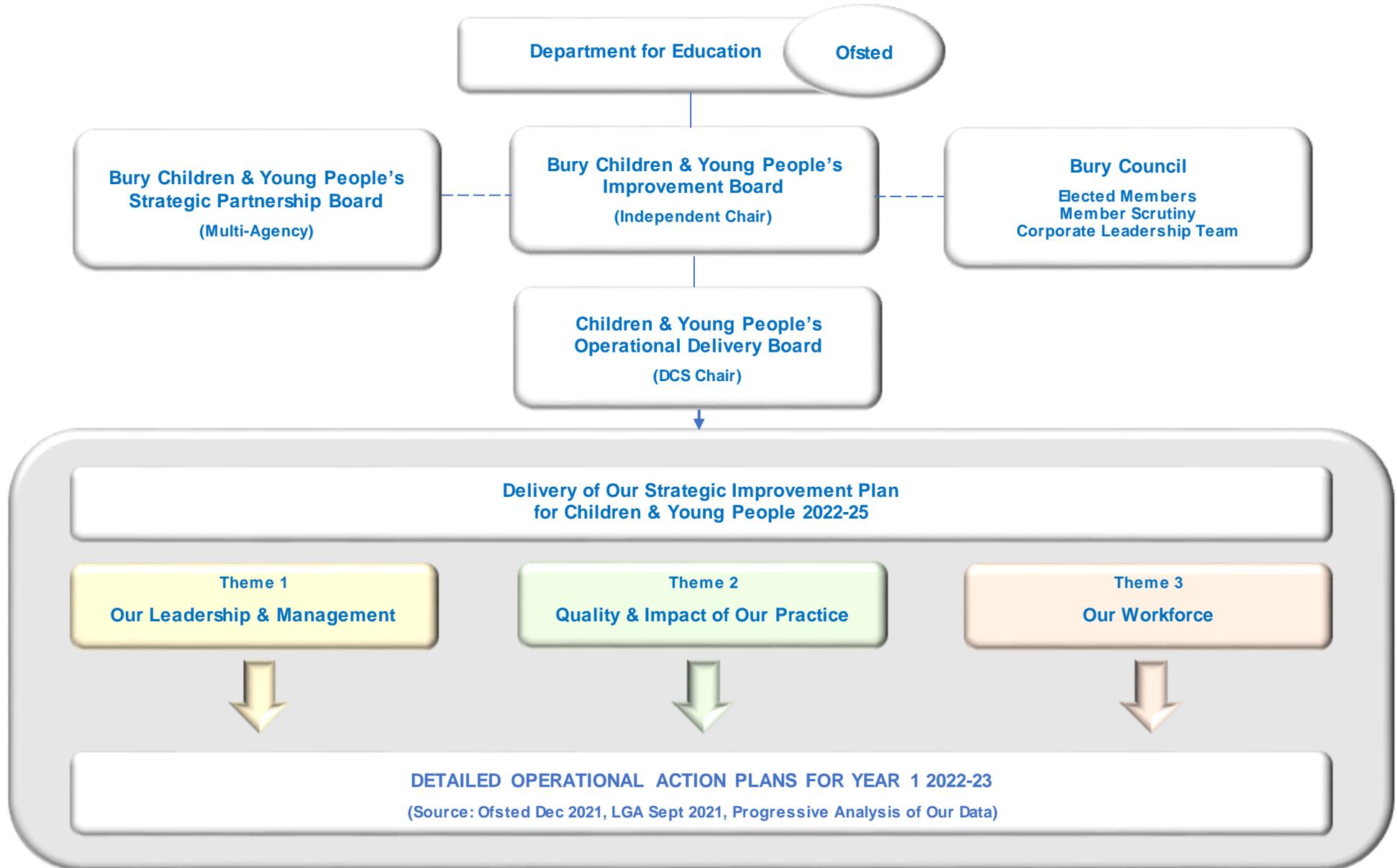
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APPENDIX 2

**BURY IMPROVEMENT PLAN TIMELINE
(Ofsted Submission Date w/c 21st March 2022)**

Ref	Key Objectives		w/c 29 th Nov	w/c 6 th Dec	w/c 13 th Dec	w/c 20 th Dec	w/c 27 th Dec		w/c 3 rd Jan	w/c 10 th Jan	w/c 17 th Jan	w/c 24 th Jan	w/c 31 st Jan		Feb 2022	March 2022	April 2022		
1	Scope & approach agreed • Strategic Imp Plan 2022-25 • Year 1 Action Plan 2022-23	PHASE 1 – IP FRAMEWORK						PHASE 2 – IP DETAILED ACTION PLAN						PHASE 3 – IP SIGN-OFF & SUBMISSION					
2	Analysis & filtering of Ofsted report and related information																		
3	IP Framework draft – develop content with leadership team																		
4	Finalise IP framework and covering report																		
5	Development of IP content with leadership team & stakeholders (to include substantive Year 1 Action Plan for sharing w/c 24 th January)																		
6	IP formal sign-off through internal governance and partnerships																		
7	Formal submission (w/c 21 st March)																		
8	Progressive Implementation																		





APPENDIX 3 (A)

Source of Improvement Priorities (Grouped within Our Proposed Improvement Themes)

Theme 1 Our Leadership & Management		Theme 2 Quality & Impact of Our Practice		Theme 3 Our Workforce	
1 Para 42	Effectiveness of the independently chaired Improvement Board to secure long-term sustainable improvement	1 Page 2	Timely recognition and response to risk at the Front Door	1 LGA/DP	Growing our culture, values and ways of working together
2 LGA/DP	Strengthening the alignment of support for Children and Young People with the Corporate Core	2 Para 2	Quality of multi-agency information sharing within MASH	2 LGA/DP	Develop a culture and practice of co-production across our multi-agency partnership and with children, young people and their families
3 Page 2	The stability of the senior leadership team to support implementation of an appropriately focused plan of improvement	3 Page 2	Quality of assessments , to ensure they are regularly updated and are not overly optimistic in their analysis	3 Page 2	The recruitment and retention of social workers, to stabilise the workforce and reduce multiple changes in social worker for children
4 LGA/DP	Increasing the active and effective engagement of our multi-agency partners in delivering improved outcomes for children and young people	4 Page 2	Quality of strategy discussions and child protection investigations	4 Para 46	Effective implementation of the new model of practice , supported by a robust programme of staff training & development
5 LGA/DP	Strengthening performance management arrangements at a strategic and operational level, with a focus on children's experiences	5 Page 2	Quality of plans and planning for children, to ensure actions are child-focused and include clear timescales and contingencies	5 Page 2	Manageable caseloads for social workers
6 Para 48	Strengthening the quality and impact of audits of practice	6 Para 14	Quality of multi-agency risk assessments and planning for children at risk of exploitation	6 Page 2	The quality of supervision and management challenge to ensure social workers have time to reflect on complex cases
7 Para 20	Sufficiency of placements for vulnerable children	7 Para 1	Identifying impact of cumulative harm – especially in relation to domestic abuse	7 LGA/DP	Workforce development focused on the consistent application of a strengths-based approach linked to the impact on the child
8 Para 19/21	Drift and delay in care planning for children , including once the threshold is met for care	8 Para 3	Consistent application of thresholds to signpost children to receive Early Help support		
9 Para 26	Reducing delays for children and young people accessing Healthy Young Minds	9 Para 9/10	More effective engagement and communication with parents of children on child protection plans, including at core groups		
10 Para 17	Monitoring systems for children who are electively home educated & those missing from education	10 Para 23	Quality of assessments of parents and connected carers		
11 Para XX	Timeliness of IRO action and impact	11 Para 13	Quality and capacity to implement improvements needed for support for disabled children		
12 Para 18	Ensuring that allegations against professionals are progressed in a timely way in the absence of the designated officer	12 Para 15	A consistent and robust response to supporting children who go missing		
		13 Page 2	The response to pre-proceedings to ensure progress is monitored and tracked more robustly to reduce drift and delay for children		
		14 Para 16	Support for children age 16-17 who present as homeless		
		15 Para 27	Quality and impact of Personal Education Plans		

Key

Explicit Ofsted Finding (*What needs to improve*)

Key Ofsted findings located in main body of text

Sourced from LGA Peer Review & draft Delivery Plan

OUR IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES TO BE SET OUT IN DETAILED OPERATIONAL ACTION PLANS

(Source: Ofsted Dec 2021, LGA Sept 2021, Progressive Analysis of Our Data)

Theme 1

Our Leadership & Management



- 1.1 High functioning Improvement / Delivery Board
- 1.2 Aligning the Corporate Core in Bury Council with improvement for children & young people
- 1.3 Stability of Senior Leadership Team
- 1.4 Strengthening active engagement of our multi-agency partners
- 1.5 Robust Performance Management, analysis & insights
- 1.6 Quality & impact of audits of our practice
- 1.7 Placement Sufficiency
- 1.8 Reducing drift and delay for children across our whole system of support
- 1.9 Reducing delays for children & young people accessing partnership support
- 1.10 Monitoring for children home educated or missing from education
- 1.11 Timeliness of IRO action & impact
- 1.12 Timely response to allegations against professionals

Theme 2

Quality & Impact of Our Practice



- 2.1 Timely recognition & response to risk at Front Door
- 2.2 Quality of multi-agency information sharing at Front Door
- 2.3 Quality of assessments & social work decision-making
- 2.4 Strategy discussions & child protection investigations
- 2.5 Quality of Plans & Planning
- 2.6 Quality of risk assessments & management of risk for children
- 2.7 Consistent application of thresholds
- 2.8 Engagement with Parents & Carers
- 2.9 Support for Children & Young People with disabilities
- 2.10 Our response for children who go missing
- 2.11 Timely management of pre-proceedings
- 2.12 Support for children and young people 16/17 who present as homeless
- 2.13 Quality of Personal Education Plans

Theme 3

Our Workforce



- 3.1 Growing Our Culture, Values & Ways of Working Together
- 3.2 Workforce Development Strategy
- 3.3 Recruitment & Retention
- 3.4 Workforce Capacity, Confidence & Resilience
- 3.5 Targeted staff training to drive improvement
- 3.6 Support for Newly Qualified Social Workers
- 3.7 Manageable Caseloads
- 3.8 Quality of Supervision
- 3.9 Management Support & Challenge

APPENDIX 4

PAGE	CONTENTS
3	Welcome - The Voice of Our Children & Young People in Bury
4	Our Vision, Our Values and Our Culture
5	Our Strategic Partnerships in Bury - Supporting Improvement For Children & Young People
6	Our Children and Young People – The Local Picture (<i>Data Picture – Key Facts</i>)
7	Our Multi-Agency Governance Arrangements for Improvement in Bury
8	Our Improvement Themes
9	Our 3-Year Milestones for Embedding Improvement 2022-25
10	Our Performance, Quality & Self-Evaluation Arrangements
11	Resourcing Our Improvement Plan
12	Our 3-Year Budget for Improvement 2022-25
TO BE REFERENCED IN CONJUNCTION WITH AFFILIATED DOCUMENT - OUR IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN - YEAR 1 (2022/23)	

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SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 20 January 2022

SUBJECT: Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report

REPORT FROM: Cllr Tariq Tamoor, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

CONTACT OFFICER: Gemma Parkes, Virtual School Headteacher

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This paper provides a summary of the work of Bury Virtual School to support the education of children in care in the academic year 2020 – 2021.
- 1.2 The Council is under a statutory duty to promote the educational progress and attainment of its looked after and previously looked after children. This duty is the responsibility of the Virtual School, which is managed by the Virtual Headteacher. Throughout 2020 – 21, the Virtual School was led by interim Heads, namely Paul Tinsley until December 2020 and Jen Mills from Jan – August 2021. This report summarises the work carried out by the team under their interim leadership periods. In September 2021, Gemma Parkes took up post as the new, permanent Virtual School Headteacher.

2.0 STATUTORY DUTIES

- 2.1 The statutory duties of the Virtual School as follows:

Duty 1: To maintain an up-to-date roll of Looked After Children (LAC) who are in school or college settings and gather information about their education placement, attendance and educational progress.

Duty 2: To ensure sufficient information about a child's mental health, SEN (Special Educational Needs) or disability is available to their education setting so that appropriate support can be provided.

Duty 3: To inform Headteachers and designated teachers in schools if they have a child on roll who is looked after by Bury.

Duty 4: To ensure social workers, designated teachers and schools, carers and Independent Reviewing Officer understand their role and responsibilities in initiating, developing, reviewing and updating the child's Personal Education Plan (PEP) and how they help meet the needs identified in that PEP.

Duty 5: To avoid drift or delay in providing suitable educational provision, including special educational provision, and unplanned termination of educational arrangements through proactive, multi-agency co-operation. Where this requires negotiation with other authorities, this should be completed in a timely manner and with the best interest of the child as paramount.

Duty 6: To ensure up-to-date, effective and high quality Personal Education Plans (PEP) that focus on educational outcomes and that all Looked After Children, wherever they are placed, have such a PEP.

Duty 7: To ensure the educational achievement of children looked after by Bury is seen as a priority by everyone who has responsibility for promoting their welfare.

Duty 8: To report regularly on the attainment of children in care through the Authority's corporate parenting structures.

Duty 9: For previously Looked After Children, to respond to parental requests for advice and information; from providers of early education, designated teachers in maintained schools and academies, and providers of alternative provision; and to make general advice and information available to early years settings and schools.

3.0 KEY ISSUES

3.1 Looked After Children (LAC) experience significant disadvantage compared to their peers. They are 2.7 times more likely to have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) than the overall pupil population and more than 1.8 times more likely to require school-level support for Special Educational Needs (SEN). Their educational attainment and progress, nationally, is poor when compared to the overall pupil population. Although rates of permanent exclusion are not higher for LAC, they are significantly more likely to have a fixed-term exclusion from school than their peers. It is in recognition of these vulnerabilities that the position of Virtual Headteacher was made statutory for English Local Authorities in 2014.

4.0 VIRTUAL SCHOOL WORK DURING THE COVID-19 2020 SCHOOL CLOSURE

4.1 Schools were closed to all pupils except those considered vulnerable and children of key workers, from January – March 2020. Where possible, the advice was for LAC to continue to attend school. 86% of Bury LAC continued to attend school throughout this time.

4.2 Some children did not attend as they were clinically vulnerable, or their parents/carers were clinically vulnerable. These children were supported to engage in remote learning at home. 10% of the cohort continued to learn in this way.

4.3 2% of the cohort attended Alternative Provision and continued to attend this throughout the lockdown.

4.4 2% of the cohort did not engage with school or home learning in this period. Due to the size of the cohort, this equates to four young people. One of these was not engaged due to a placement move so the Virtual School met with Children's Social Care to expedite this. All of these young people were offered

access to counselling provided by the Virtual School. The Virtual School team met with them and their schools to see how they could help them to engage and attended all Personal Education Plan meetings.

- 4.5 The Virtual School team monitored the attendance of Children in Care in school every week and liaised closely with social workers, carers, the fostering team and school staff to ensure either attendance in school or engagement with home learning.
- 4.6 Lists of students who were not engaging were shared with social workers and managers who also provided support in addition to the Virtual School weekly Caseload meetings which continued to be held in the pandemic. Contact was made with schools/carers and changes to school schedules were discussed as well as other barriers to attendance which the Virtual School then tried to remove.
- 4.7 The Virtual School arranged appropriate tuition where this was required, finding suitable venues when buildings were closed and writing risk assessments where appropriate.
- 4.8 The Virtual School sourced, ordered and delivered 23 laptops to carers' homes for their children to use, before the commencement of the DfE laptops scheme.
- 4.9 The team provided transition support for all children moving to the next phase of their education, with a higher level of intervention for those who were deemed particularly vulnerable.
- 4.10 The team worked with Connexions, CSC colleagues and post-16 providers to ensure appropriate pathways were in place for Year 11 students.
- 4.11 An additional £500 per Looked After Child was provided to schools in the Spring term to support with COVID-19 educational and mental health recovery.

5.0 OTHER WORK OF THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL IN 2020-21

- 5.1 The Virtual School provided support and in several cases completed and submitted a number of Education Health and Care Plan requests, resulting in a plan being issued and the needs of children and young people being met in appropriate educational provision.
 - 5.2.1 The Electronic Personal Education Plan (PEP) system is now in place for Reception to post-16.
- 5.3 An increased focus on Personal Education Plan (PEP) completion and quality enabled robust reporting systems to be developed, enabling greater oversight and challenge from the virtual school to both schools and social workers in continuing PEP improvements.
- 5.4 The Virtual School Governing Body is now established.
- 5.5 The Virtual School deployed a school counsellor who worked with 8 young people. She attended their Personal Education Plan planning meetings and remained in weekly contact with them. She worked with them over the summer to support them with transition into the next academic year.

- 5.6 A student Youth Worker supported the Virtual School team and increased its capacity.
- 5.7 The Virtual School now has social media pages where advice, employment and training opportunities and relevant information is shared.
- 5.8 The Virtual School launched a Transition project, involving care leavers working on story work around their own key transition points to create better support for younger children.
- 5.9 Health training: the Virtual School co-ordinated training by young people on how to talk to teenagers which was delivered to 200 staff at Tower Health as preparation for Care Leaver work experience and better service provision for Children in Care.
- 5.10 The Virtual School signed up for the Imagination Library project, enabling pre-school children to receive a book every month until they turn five years old. It also ran its own Lending Library of books at the New Kershaw Centre.
- 5.11 Internships offered paid work experience through the council for Looked After Children and Care Leavers in Summer 2021.
- 5.12 The Virtual School Praise System was established; over 60 certificates and awards were sent out to acknowledge the hard work and effort young people put in to their education, together with praise postcards that were sent home throughout the year.
- 5.13 The Prince's Trust course for Care Leavers was brought to Bury. Four young people attended who were not ready for Education Employment or Training. The programme offered developmental opportunities to help them and two subsequently went on to education or training..
- 5.14 Care Leavers were involved in a Christmas event. Those who would otherwise have been alone on Christmas Day came for an alternative Christmas Day to reduce isolation and maintain contact.
- 5.15 Closer working with the fostering team was established, to be part of their social media and information sharing.
- 5.16 A consultation was carried out with foster carers to shape the Virtual School approach to training and support and improve relationships.
- 5.17 Personal Education Plan compliance systems were established that demonstrably improved compliance rates.
- 5.18 New structures for monitoring Pupil Premium Grant spending were devised and tracked.
- 5.19 Involvement in the Barclays LifeSkills project: all Year 9 and 10 Children in Care in Bury schools were offered the opportunity to participate in monthly sessions focussed on CV writing, job applications, interview skills etc. All accessed a mentor who the Virtual School trained on impact of trauma and loss.
- 5.20 Involvement in the Education, Employment and Training (EEt) forum: a multi-agency partnership approach to look at young people who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) and devise plans to move them into

EET – monthly meetings held to discuss the entire NEET cohort.

- 5.21 Work with Greater Manchester on increasing support for Children in Care in criminality: better access to prisons, increased information sharing, enhanced support when due out. The Virtual School also built closer relationships with the Youth Offending Team.
- 5.22 The Virtual School attended the Greater Manchester post-16 group to increase support for this cohort, resulting in better holistic working, reciprocity, increased provision, and work to remove barriers to Education Employment and Training.
- 5.23 The creation of the post 18 action plan (using the Personal Education Plan format) so that those turning 18 during the academic year are still supported.
- 5.24 The Virtual School worked closely with the Job Centre and was involved in initiatives such as KickStart.

6.0 **PRIORITIES FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2021 – 22**

- 6.1 Recruitment of an Education Employment and Training Personal Adviser. Support for Year 12 on access to provision / learning programmes following GCSE.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 Commissioning of Speech and Language Therapist and Educational Psychologist services to support understanding and practice in meeting the individual and educational needs of LAC.
- 6.4 Through partnership working, reduce those young people Not in Education, Employment of Training and improve participation rates for Post-16.
- 6.5 Support continued development of trauma-based practice, leading to better understanding of the needs of Children in Care, early identification and prevention leading to improved inclusive provision, improving attendance and reducing exclusions for Children in Care.
- 6.6 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.
- 6.7 Work with Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure appropriate educational challenge and support.
- 6.8 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.
- 6.9 Implement monthly multi-agency meeting to review children in Care cases that are a cause for concern, using education data ie. attendance, exclusions to target support and resources appropriately.

- 6.10 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.
- 6.11 Review and continue to improve the Personal Education Plan documents and ensure that we are able to use them to run reports and efficiently manipulate data to show the progress of the cohort.
- 6.12 We will continue to work with our colleagues in Social Care to emphasise the importance of stability in education, particularly for pupils in Key Stage 4.
- 6.13 Continue our work regarding Children in Care with identified Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) at local authority, Greater Manchester and regional level to strive to reduce the barriers our children in SEND experience with education.
- 6.14 Work with colleagues in Childrens Social Care to set aspirational targets for attendance within Personal Education Plans.
- 6.15 For those who are persistently absent, create attendance action plans in conjunction with the Education Welfare Service, and secure appropriate intervention for those who are persistently absent.
- 6.16 Integration of the Personal Education Plan and Education Health and Care Plan annual review processes.
- 6.17 Ensure that Personal Education Plans focus on the voice of the young person and that their wishes and feelings are known.
- 6.18 Work closely with the Children in Care Council to ensure effective co-production with our young people.
- 6.19 Embed the Bury Virtual School Alternative Provision Policy and ensure that all Children in Care who access Alternative Provision are reviewed every three weeks as a minimum, work towards clear targets and that there is a plan for reintegration into appropriate school provision.
- 6.20 Develop the role of the Virtual School to oversee the education of all children with a social worker, as set out in the extension to role duty with effect from September 2021.

7.0 EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES 2020-21

- 7.1 As in 2020, there is no validated external data to report for qualifications this year. Our own collected, invalidated data is detailed here.
- 7.2 There were 25 young people in the Year 11 cohort at the school leaving date 25/06/21. 22 were in care for the whole year (01/04/20 – 31/03/21) and so are the qualifying cohort.
- 7.3 21 out of 22 achieved a recognised qualification including Functional Skills or Unit Awards (95%) - above the target of 90% (national Children in Care figure 2019: 73%)
- 7.4 7 out of 22 (32%) achieved GCSE passes in English and Maths, as detailed below:

- 7.5 5 out of 22 achieved GCSEs in English and Maths at standard pass grade (4-9) which is 23% – 2021 target 25% (national CIC figure 2019: 18%)
- 7.6 2 out of 22 achieved GCSEs in English and Maths at strong pass grade (5-9) which is 10% – 2021 target 15% - (national CIC figure 2019: 7%)
- 7.7 Contextual factors affecting the results:
- 7.8 There were 4 students with EHCPs; 2 for Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), one for moderate learning difficulties and one for a specific learning difficulty.
- 7.9 13 students were in mainstream schools and 9 in specialist or alternative provision.
- 7.10 Many of these students received additional support in the form of tuition paid for with PPG and support from the Virtual School Learning Mentor. There were some fantastic examples of personal successes, including:
- 7.11 The two students who achieved Grade 5s in English and Maths achieved above their target grades with tuition and support from the Learning Mentor. One had been through family bereavement, placement and school changes and overcame many personal barriers to achieve her final grades.
- 7.12 A young person who lived in a residential care home and struggled to motivate himself; he was on the cusp of giving up but with proactive multiagency support from his carers, social worker and the Virtual School, he managed to complete his exams and pass English plus other subjects.
- 7.13 A young person who experienced extremely difficult personal circumstances in Year 11, including a placement breakdown. She received lots of support and is now engaged in Post-16 study.

8.0 ATTENDANCE INFORMATION 2020-21

- 8.1 It is impossible to compare the attendance of Children in Care in 2020 - 21 with that of previous years; many were sent home to self-isolate during periods of school bubble closures, and many tested positive themselves or had to self-isolate as a result of a household member testing positive.
- 8.2 This data also includes some young people who have been in care for brief periods and therefore only a snapshot of their attendance data for the period that they were in care was collected.
- 8.3 The Virtual School uses Looked After Call to track the attendance and exclusions of Children in Care pupils on a day to day basis, intervening early where appropriate. Looked After Call produces twice daily alerts; any unauthorised absences or fixed term exclusions are allocated to the relevant case worker.
- 8.4 School attendance is monitored and intervention plans put in place, based on weekly caseload meetings, where there are concerns. This is particularly the case for pupils who fall into the Persistent Absence (PA) category. The PA cohort data below, applies to pupils whose school attendance is below 90%.

8.5 Persistent Absentees (PAs)

	Non-Qualifying PAs	*Qualifying PAs
2016-2017	14.3%	13.6%
2017-2018	16.7%	13.8%
2018-2019	10.1% (23 pupils)	9.7% (22 pupils)
2019-2020	3.2% (6 pupils)	12.1% (23 pupils)
2020 - 2021	4% (9 pupils)	37.1% (83 pupils)

8.6 Pupils with 100% Attendance

Table 2	
2016-2017	13.6%
2017-2018	15%
2018-2019	7.4%
2019-2020	21.1%
2020 - 2021	11.2%

8.7 Average attendance of Children in Care (CIC) with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities by category

	EHCP	SEN Support	No SEN
2017/2017	93%	92.5%	96%
2017/2018	92%	94%	96.5%
2018/2019	92.4%	94.6%	93.5%
2019/2020 (to end of March 2020)	94.4%	96.3%	93.2%
2020 - 2021	84.2%	89.3%	86.8%

8.8 Average attendance of CIC in mainstream and non-mainstream settings

	Mainstream	Non Mainstream
2017	94.6%	90.96%
2018	96.7%	89.8%
2019	94.5%	91.4%
To end of March 2020	95.1%	90.1%
2020-2021	89.7%	76.9%

8.9 Attendance of CIC educated inside and outside of the Borough

Table 5		
	Educated in borough	Educated out of borough
2017-18	91.8%	95.4%
2018-2019	94.98%	93.7%
Up to end of March 2020	93.5%	95.5%
2020 - 2021	87.4%	86.1%

9.9 Overall Attendance By Year Group, 2020-21

Year Group	% Attendance
Rec	94.2%
Y1	92.5%
Y2	91.6%
Y3	97.4%
Y4	92.6%
Y5	92%
Y6	91.2%
Y7	90.1%
Y8	85.9%
Y9	86.2%
Y10	78.2%
Y11	71.5%
Totals	86.9%

10.0 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The Virtual School made considerable improvements to its operation last year, in particular with regard to the Personal Education Plan process and compliance rates. Children in Care were well-supported throughout the year, including during the COVID-19 school closure period.
- 10.2 Clear priorities have been identified to take the work of the Virtual School forward. Particular challenges are presented by the extension to role to include other children with a social worker. This will require expansion of the Virtual School team.

List of Background Papers: The 2020-21 Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher

Contact Details:-

Gemma Parkes
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Executive Director sign off Date: _____

JET Meeting Date: _____

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SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: Children & Young People's Scrutiny

DATE: 20th January 2022

SUBJECT: Defibrillators in schools

REPORT FROM: Councillor Tariq Tamoor, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

CONTACT OFFICER: Paul Cooke

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report considers the policy and guidance position in respect of the provision of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) in schools, and the extent to which schools are making arrangements for AEDs to be located on school premises.
- 1.2 An AED is a portable electronic machine that can detect the abnormal heart rhythms that are present when someone has a cardiac arrest. When an abnormal rhythm is detected, the machine delivers an electric charge/shock that might be able to restart the heart or establish a regular rhythm. The sooner the heart is restarted, the better the casualty's chance of survival.
- 1.3 An AED is easy to use and safe. It cannot harm the casualty because it detects when shock is needed (irregular heart rhythm) and only works in that situation.
- 1.4 Anyone can use an AED, they do not need to be a medical professional or first aider. The machine will 'speak' instructions that tell the user what to do. It is always better to try to use an AED if someone's heart has stopped than to do nothing.
- 1.5 Defibrillators are now commonly sited in public places, in workplaces, and increasingly in schools.
- 1.6 In 2015, the Council did engage with schools to encourage the provision of AEDs on school premises, providing information in respect of specifications, sources of supply and funding opportunities, including DfE funding that was available at the time.
- 1.7 The Council does not however, maintain a record of devices and where they are located.
- 1.8 There is no specific requirement for a school to provide access to an AED. However, in view of the vital role that AEDs can play in saving the lives of pupils, staff and other users of school premises, the Department for Education now

encourages all schools to consider purchasing these devices as part of their first-aid equipment.

- 1.9 The Department for Education, working with NHS Supply Chain has also negotiated an arrangement for schools to purchase AEDs from them at reduced cost.
- 1.10 The DfE has produced advice and guidance for schools on the provision of AEDs which includes advice on specifications of different devices, purchasing arrangements, advice on the location of devices within the school setting, community access to devices, and training in the use of those devices.
- 1.11 Additionally, each school is required to adopt a policy setting out how it will meet the needs of pupils with medical conditions. The DfE guidance to schools on the development of such a policy makes reference to the important role that AEDs can play, re-inforcing the need for schools to consider the provision of a device as part of its first aid arrangements.
- 1.12 Further, DfE advice and guidance to schools on first aid training for teaching staff now includes a section on the use of AEDs.
- 1.13 Working within the advice and guidance referenced above, it is for each Schools Governing Body to determine whether it wishes to provide an AED on its premises.
- 1.14 The Council does not have a specific policy position with regards AEDs in schools, relying on the national guidance, and recognising that any decision on provision of a device is a matter for each schools Governing Body.

2.0 ISSUES

- 2.1 National guidance to schools clearly promotes the benefits of schools providing AEDs, providing the information, advice and guidance necessary to enable schools to make informed decisions on the siting of devices on their premises.
- 2.2 There is no local policy position advising schools on the siting of devices on their premises, and it is left to individual Governing Bodies to determine if provision is to be made.
- 2.3 There is no central record of AEDs on school premises maintained by the Council or DfE, although schools should notify the ambulance service if they are locating a device on their premises.
- 2.4 There is no central record to demonstrate the use of an AED. Therefore, the impact of siting a device in a school setting is not immediately demonstrable.

3.0 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the information, advice and guidance to schools on the provision and use of Automatic External Defibrillators in schools; that the provision of devices, and the funding for that provision rests with the Governing Body of each schools.

List of Background Papers:-

[Automated external defibrillators \(AEDs\) in schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[Supporting pupils with medical conditions at school - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[Teacher training: basic first aid - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Contact Details:-

Paul Cooke, Strategic Lead (Education Services)

Executive Director sign off Date: _____

JET Meeting Date: _____

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Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Draft Agenda Plan 2021/22

Date of Meeting	Deadline for reports to Dem Services	Agenda Publication Date	Items for the Meeting	Officers/Cabinet Member
07.09.2021	26.08.2021	27.08.2021	Send provision in the Borough Readiness for Ofsted – to include some awareness training on the Ofsted Framework	Cllr Tariq
04.11.2021	26.10.2021	27.10.2021	Sufficiency of school Places (to include potential impact of new school in Radcliffe) LGA Peer Review	Cllr Tariq Cllr Tariq
20.01.2022	10.01.2022	12.01.2022	Main Theme – Ofsted Position Paper - De-fibs; update report Virtual Schools Headteacher Annual report	
07.03.2022	24.02.2022	25.02.2022	Project Safety Valve – DSG included Send provision in the Borough update	

Note: *The Committee have agreed to look at holding themed meetings to concentrate on particular subject areas. Items for future meetings will be discussed with Chair and Exec Director and confirmed by the Committee at each meeting.

Items to be plotted into meeting schedule from agreed work programme:

- Safeguarding
- Adoption
- Early Years Annual Report
- Mental Health - CAMHS
- Quality Assurance of EHCPS
- Early intervention for pre-school children

- Recruitment and retention of Social Workers