

Minutes of: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 24 November 2022

Present: Councillor C Boles (in the Chair)
Councillors D Berry, C Boles, A Booth, N Frith, J Lancaster,
L McBriar, T Pilkington, J Rydeheard and M Whitby and Helen
Chadwick, Union Representative.

Also in attendance: Councillor Thorpe, Deputy Cabinet Member Children and
Young People, Councillor Quinn, Deputy Cabinet Member
Children and Young People, Councillor Bernstein, Conservative
Group Leader, Jeanette Richards, Executive Director Children
and Young People, Isobel Booter, Director of Education and
Skills, Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director (Early Help and School
Readiness), Michael Kemp, Strategic Lead - Inclusion & Special
Educational Needs & Disabilities, Paul Cooke, Strategic Lead
(Education Services), Wendy Jackson, Service Lead - Quality
Standards & Performance (Secondary), Sean Walsh, Director
of Social Care Practice, Jacqui Dennis, Director of Law and
Democratic Services, Bryan Holland, Foster Carers Association
Lorraine Boswell, Foster Carers Association and Chloe
Ashworth, Democratic Services

Public Attendance: 2 members of the public were present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor U Farooq, Councillor Smith, Amanda Nellist and
Georgia Murphy

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies are noted above.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd September 2022 be approved
as a correct and accurate record.

Matters arising:

Councillor McBriar asked for an update on accessibility of the building. In response
Julie Gallagher, Democratic Services Manager advised the part has been ordered
for the lift and it should be up and running by January 2023. In addition, the seats
at the back of the Chamber are being removed and replaced with flip-up chairs to
provide an accessible space.

Councillor Rydeheard requested if a meeting had been arranged with Ms McCauley following the last meeting. Jeanette Richards, Executive Director advised that an update will be provided following the meeting

Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills informed the Committee that following the last meeting, at which a question was asked regarding Education, Health and Care Plans, a briefing note has been uploaded to the Council's website and a copy circulated to all members of the Committee.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were two members of the public in attendance at the meeting.

The first question was asked by Mr Hagen; My wife and I are foster carers and have been for over 20 years for Bury Council. Yesterday we renewed our contract with the foster team, not that we agreed with it, but because we believe in the children receiving the love, care and attention and the change to grow up as a decent human being; especially disabled children who need so much positive attention and some 24-hour care. They are special to carers and the carers are special to them. I was not going to mention money, but I must, the fee is 80 pence per hour, some carers get less. I am also concerned about foster carers who work for the Council but work privately and I just wonder why they refuse to work for Bury Council. We the present foster carers will not be here forever. The minimum wage will be going up soon as the Government stated to £10.40 per hour. My question today is, would you take a job with Bury Council for a 24-hour job at 80 pence per hour.

Councillor Boles thanked all who attended this evening and advised a training session has recently taken place that highlighted the importance of lived experience at Scrutiny.

Councillor Quinn, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised that we are aware of the essential roles you play and the financial issues currently and these will be addressed under the foster carer item later in the agenda. In addition, Linda Evans, Interim Director of Social Care Practice advised that Bury Council is a Foster Friendly Employer. Linda advised she will seek to find out how many employees of Bury Council are also foster carers. Councillor Thorpe, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People also advised the Corporate Parenting Board no has a standing item of Foster Carers and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on them at meetings.

Ms Delaney asked the next question; working in co-production with parents to inform plans is a separate issue to the one I raised. Education Health and Care Plans in Bury lack the specifics needed for young people and children to achieve good outcomes. Also, lack of specificity compromises the legal enforceability of the provision in the plan. A lack of specificity and you may risk not being able to enforce the provision in your child's Education Health and Care Plan under section 42.2 of the Children and Families act 2014. The existing case law and code of practice all support that Education Health and Care plans are required to be quantified and specific. Children and Young People should be central to this process, their views and that of their parents are of the highest importance but the specifics of a plan and the provision that support to quantify to make the plans to be legally compliant should not be left to parents. After all, if you do not know the legal documents that are there to protect you and your family you have no chance. Please can you inform us today how will this happen with limited permanent staff available on the SEND team?

Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills advised that improving the quality of Education Health and Care Plans has been a key piece of work that Michael Kemp, Strategic Lead -

Inclusion & Special Educational Needs & Disabilities is now leading. Regarding the enhanced Education Health and Care Plan Team you are quite right, some of those colleagues are on fixed term contracts as they are partly funded through the additional transformation monies. We are in the process of taking the second phase of the Children's Services restructure of which the Team are part of. Bury are currently an outlier in the amount of Education Health and Care assessments and requests that take place, in Bury there have been 1.6% of the population where there have been requests, 1.3% of the population where there have been assessments, in comparison in the Northwest it has been 0.6% so there is a noticeable difference. We are trying to work with parents to re-establish the trust that has broken down. Some of our plans and parents experience is that because some plans are so specific some schools are struggling to meet need. There is a consultation about increasing capacity and we are committed to improve the quality of the plans and EHCP Plan writing training with parents present from the DfE

5 MEMBER QUESTIONS

Notice had been received of 1 question. The Chair, Councillor Boles advised that a copy of the question and response will be made available on the Council Web Site.

Questioner	Topic	Responding
Councillor Bernstein	Restructure	Councillor Quinn

Councillor Bernstein asked if the schedule of planned appointments can be provided.

6 FOSTER CARERS

Councillor Quinn, Deputy Cabinet Member firstly began by acknowledging the hard work of foster carers and the dedicated hard work they do.

Councillor Quinn provided an update on action taken to consider the financial support being offered to foster carers now and in the context of the cost-of-living crisis. The report also provided an update on the progress of a review of Bury's current fostering, fees, allowances, and incentives and how we compare to other Greater Manchester local authorities.

Brian and Lorraine attended from the Fostering Association to provide their views. Key points highlighted were:

- The £200 payment will help this month but will not stretch further.
- Fees have not changed much for 12 years
- Foster carers have stood the pandemic with no support
- Independent fostering agencies offer more money to foster Children
- Families who foster children need money to support the children to have the same as their peers
- Communication between services needs to improve
- We need to be involved in decision making to put forward personal views

Councillor Boles thanked Brian for his powerful contribution to the meeting and wished to move on to questions from the committee.

Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People advised the Local Authority does not compare itself with Independent Fostering Agencies. Children's Services Departments across the country have shared issues with placement sufficiency and escalating costs for high-cost placements which is the same in Bury. Bury's strategy must be to support

our own foster carers and increase our own fostering sufficiency, to provide our community with opportunities to become foster carers and to ensure we have the strongest influence as corporate parents over the care our looked after children receive. Our Fostering service has not been reviewed in many years which is why we are undergoing a restructure to compartmentalise to generate the best outcomes around recruitment, training and support.

Improvements are to be made; to support this one being specific leadership of the service which is within the restructure and includes the creation of a dedicated Head of Service to grow our resources and support our carers.

Discussions took place regarding foster carers dedication and hardwork especially in relation to the support they give to children with disabilities coming into care who need more support.

Discussions took place regarding Bury being one of eight Greater Manchester authorities who are exploring the possibility of the development of a Greater Manchester Enquiry Hub aimed at supporting foster carer recruitment.

Members asked if work could take place with the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector to put together a holistic package to support foster carers over the Christmas period.

Members discussed the paper regarding financial support for foster carers and sought commitment that the recommendations are carried out at the soonest possible opportunity. Members were advised that the papers are being worked on then will be consulted on with Foster Carers, therefore the papers will be considered at January Cabinet.

It was agreed unanimously:

1. That the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that on receipt of a report regarding foster carer financial support they give consideration to whether any increased financial support should be backdated.

7 IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People provided an overview of a letter which summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Bury children's services on 12 and 13 October 2022. This was the second monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in November 2021.

Inspectors reviewed the progress made in the following areas identified as needing improvement at the last inspection:

- Children in need.
- Children subject to a child protection plan.
- Pre-proceedings work.
- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.
- The local authority's own evaluation of the quality and impact of performance and practice

Discussions took place regarding social worker recruitment and retention. Whilst Ofsted stated after this visit no child was found to be unsafe so no significant safeguarding issues the high caseloads of social workers is an issue. This links to the focus on recruitment activities and we are currently considering additional business support to strengthen children's records and take certain tasks away from social workers.

Discussions took place regarding when improvements are expected to be visible. In response Jeanette Richards, Executive Director advised that there are currently 17,000 children open to the service and therefore reviewing all plans is not achievable. However, our audit activity is a representative sample, and this will continue monthly. It was also reported that there is now clarity of expectations and stronger expectations but there is more work to do to ensure every child has an improved plan. In addition, members were informed the journey to improvement is a three-year cycle when you receive an inadequate rating as it is acknowledged it will take time to deliver, but the Committee should expect quarterly updates that show improvement.

It was agreed that members are pleased with the progress set out in the letter and we will continue to focus on social workers recruitment and retention.

8 SCHOOL READINESS

Councillor Quinn, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People introduced the School Readiness report. This report provides some detail of the council's duties linked to its early years delivery and how this supports children's readiness for school. Early years is defined as children from conception to age 5. School readiness is measured through assessment when children enter school at reception. The report provides information on the council duties for its early years population which contributes to children's readiness for school namely:

- Universal Offer
- Sufficiency
- Early Years Foundation Stage and school readiness

The report also provides some wider national context which members may wish to be sighted on and scrutinise over the next three years:

- The first 1001 days (Leadsom Review)
- The Family Hub agenda

Finally, the report provides some detail on the Bury picture including some of the issues for consideration for the council to meet requirements of its delivery of early years services and the impact on school readiness.

Discussions took place regarding the impact of the pandemic on the development of Children and their readiness to school. Alternatively, discussions also took place regarding schools' readiness for an increase in children who may have Special Educational Needs. In addition, the development of girls against boys and the gap between them.

A Member questioned why the opportunity to apply for funding was missed. In response Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director (Early Help and School Readiness) advised that we needed to demonstrate system maturity and we did not hold the level of data needed to access the funding. In addition, members were informed that Bury is very involved with the work of the GMCA and Bury is involved in a pilot scheme regarding data.

Councillor Boles thanked report authors and members for the questions and answers given.

9 ATTENDANCE AND EXCLUSION REPORT

Councillor Thorpe, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People provided an overview of the latest published data for absence which includes all Bury schools and enables comparison with national averages covers the Autumn Term 2021 and Spring Term 2022. The data includes children and young people in Year 1 through to Year 11. The data does not

include figures for Bury's Pupil Referral Unit, Spring lane School, as these settings are not included in the national data set.

The 2021/2022 academic year was the first full year without school 'closures' due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During 'closures' schools remained open for vulnerable children and children of key workers. This report makes comparisons between absence Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022 and Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019 which was the last full year pre-pandemic.

It was highlighted that Members may wish to note that attendance figures for Bury schools overall are better than the national which reflects schools' hard work in delivering these figures. However, the fact remains that absence is too high and, initially, the collective focus needs to be on improving overall absence to pre-pandemic levels and reducing the number of children and young people that are classed as either persistently or severely absent. As governors in Bury schools, members may wish to ask if governing bodies they serve on have identified a lead governor for attendance; this is a recommendation in Bury's model attendance policy.

Discussions took place regarding improving attendance of SEND Children, in response members were advised we do have an emotional based pathway to support children and is supported by the educational psychologists.

In addition, Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills advised that school attendance must be seen as a whole Council approach and proposals on how this is done will be brought back to a future meeting.

A member raised that having low attendance because of contributing factors related to Education Health and Care Plans does not tell the full picture as in contrast some children will always want to attend school regardless. In response Isobel Booter, Director, advised that there is a detailed SEND Report that the Committee receives and upon completion of the next one a breakdown of attendance against SEND Need.

A member raised the impact following the pandemic and the impact of people taking holiday's previously cancelled due to the lockdown. Councillor Thorpe advised we do not have enough national data to compare currently but the impact of unauthorised absences is still yet to be seen in the data.

10 URGENT BUSINESS

Helen Chadwick, Union Representative raised a concern regarding CAMHS, and ask through Scrutiny how Health Communicates with Education, not only over CAMHS matters but other issues as well.

It was agreed:

An update on CAMHS and the communication between health and education to be brought to the next Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Members also wished to put on record their thanks to Councillor Thorpe and Councillor Quinn in deputising for Councillor Smith at this evening meeting.

COUNCILLOR C BOLES
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 9.30 pm)