

AGENDA FOR

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Contact: Chloe Ashworth
Direct Line: 0161 253 5030
E-mail: C.Ashworth@bury.gov.uk
Web Site: www.bury.gov.uk

**To: All Members of Children and Young People Scrutiny
Committee**

Councillors : D Berry, C Boles, A Booth, U Farooq, N Frith,
J Lancaster, L McBriar, T Pilkington, J Rydeheard and
M Whitby

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, 24 November 2022
Place:	Peel Room, 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 - 8)*

Minutes from the meeting held on 22nd September 2022 are attached for approval.

4 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.

5 MEMBER QUESTIONS *(Pages 9 - 10)*

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.

6 FOSTER CARERS *(Pages 11 - 14)*

- A. Report attached, Councillor Quinn to provide an overview.
- B. Bryan Holland to be in attendance to provide representation on behalf of the Foster Carer Forum

7 IMPROVEMENT PLAN *(Pages 15 - 18)*

Letter published on 16th November 2022 attached. Jeanette Richards, Executive Director Children and Young People to provide an overview of the letter.

8 SCHOOL READINESS *(Pages 19 - 26)*

Councillor Debbie Quinn, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People to provide an overview. Report attached.

9 ATTENDANCE AND EXCLUSION REPORT *(Pages 27 - 38)*

Councillor Sean Thorpe, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People to provide an overview of the Report. Report attached.

10 URGENT BUSINESS

Minutes of: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 22 September 2022

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

Also in attendance: Councillor Bernstein, Conservative Group Leader
Linda Evans, Interim Director of Social Care Practice
Wendy Jackson, Service Lead
Paul Cooke, Strategic Lead (Education Services)
Linda Clegg, Observer
Chloe Ashworth, Democratic Services

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

Apologies for Absence: Isobel Booter, Janet Iyssejko and Amanda Nellist.

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 30th June 2022 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

4 MATTERS ARISING

Councillor McBriar sought assurances that Michael Kemp and Ms Harrison had met following the last meeting. Councillor Smith confirmed they had.

Councillor McBriar asked for an update on the response timescales from Children's Services. In response Councillor Smith advised progress has been made and statistics have improved. A response will be obtained from Michael Kemp and circulated to members.

Councillor Boles raised that the Social Worker visit has now taken place and members can provide updates under item 7, Social Care Recruitment.

5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

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

Ms Delaney asked that previous questions to the Committee regarding the continuum of care for disabled children and their families and if the 'tell us once' approach exists in Bury. In addition, the question asked to the Committee this evening was; why are Education Health and Care Plans being written and amended by Parents to be made legally compliant and why do they lack specificity when written by case workers?

In response Jeanette Richards, Executive Director, Children and Young People confirmed that they are in a process in relation to her personal circumstances and will be happy to continue working with her in relation to her personal circumstances. In response to the Education, Health and Care Plans there should be a collective endeavour of coming together between parents and partners. As this is new news Jeanette Richards assured Ms Delaney, she will take this back to the team for discussion and will report back to the Committee.

The next question was from Ms Hampson: I am asking this question on behalf of myself and many other parents. Why are these meetings not accessible for people with disabilities, vulnerable people, working parents and other people? It should be accessible to everyone in Bury whether it's virtual, online or face to face to include participation by everybody as all parents' voices are not being heard, and also young people and children wish to have their voice heard and we intend to bring them at the next meeting.

In response Councillor Smith advised that Georgia Murphy is the Youth Cabinet Representative for the Committee, and the meetings are live streamed to provide access for those who may not be able to attend the meeting in person. Councillor Smith also confirmed young people's voice are also heard at many statutory Council Committee meetings. Councillor Boles, Chair of the Committee advised that a representative from the Foster Carers Association will be attending the next Committee to provide input. In addition, Councillor Boles provided an offer to Ms Hampson that if residents would like to email him directly regarding matters to be raised at the Committee they can do so, and he would be happy for one person to attend and represent a group of people if they are unable to attend in person so their lived experience is discussed.

Ms McCauley was the third member of the public to ask a question. My Childs Education, Health and Care Plan has not been annually reviewed for four years. This is four years of no provision, professional input amongst lots of other things missing. Can you please inform me why; how many others in our Borough are out of statutory time frames and where is the ongoing care for disabled people and their families?

In response Councillor Smith advised she will source the exact number; however, work is being done to improve timescales by taking on new caseworkers and improving training. Councillor Smith advised she will contact Ms McCauley outside of the meeting to resolve any concerns she may have.

6 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	Ofsted monitoring visit	Councillor Smith

7 **IMPROVEMENT PLAN, DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION VISIT AND THE OFSTED MONITORING VISIT**

Linda Evans, Interim Director of Social Care Practice provided an overview of the progress on the Children's Services Improvement Plan that was put in place in response to the findings of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services that was carried out by Ofsted between 25 October 2021 to 5 November 2021 and judged services to be Inadequate. The Inspection report was published on 17 December 2021. In addition, Linda Evans provided an update on the progress review of Bury Children's Services from the Department for Education that took place on 25 May and 26 May 2022 and the Ofsted Monitoring visit that took place on the 21 and 22 June 2022.

Progress of the Children's services Improvement Plan will continue to be monitored at the monthly Children's Improvement Board chaired by an Independent Chair, Linda Clegg.

Linda Evans advised that findings from the Ofsted Monitoring visit that took place on 21 and 22 June 2022 have been considered in the improvement plan and a further Ofsted monitoring visit is expected in October 2022. The focus of the visit will be child protection planning, children subject to Public Law Outline and the impact of managers and leaders.

Councillor McBriar asked what plans are in place to improve our arrangements when children transfer from one social care team to another. In response Linda Evans advised there are arrangements in place on how we manage children's transfers and what needs improving is communication to ensure the child and families experience is a positive one. In addition, questions were asked regarding the delays young people transferring to adult social care were facing. The Committee were advised that a review is underway.

The Committee sought assurances on what has been done to improve staff knowledge of our vision for Children's Services. In response Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People assured the Committee that communications and engagement for the department has been improved through email briefings, team engagement sessions, and ensuring a copy of the infographic of the Improvement Plan around the buildings.

A member of the Committee questioned the current caseload figures for social workers currently. In response Linda Evans advised there is a constant focus on recruitment and retention of Social Workers. Whilst the aspiration of caseloads for Bury per Social Worker would be 15, as of today some social workers loads are too high with the highest being 32. In response two additional agency social workers will be starting to reduce this figure.

In response to a question regarding the LGA Peer Review, Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People assured the Committee the Peer Review will take place towards the end of the year and once results are available, they will be made available to the Committee.

Helen Chadwick, Union Representative questioned if the Council plan to provide forward-facing staff at 3 Knowsley Place. In response Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People advised the message to the public is that the service is open to

the public to visit in person, this includes the Victoria Children's Centre and New Kershaw Centre have reception staff.

Councillor Pilkington questioned the relationship with the Police in relation to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and the Improvement Plan. In response Councillor Smith stated the service is running and has received good reviews from Ofsted. In addition, Jeanette Richards, Executive Director stated that governance arrangements have improved but like many Public Services there are resourcing issues for the teams. In assurance to the Committee Jeanette Richards advised that she meets monthly with the Divisional Commander.

In summary Councillor Boles asked, following the DfE Review which states Political Leaders are not getting involved in operational decisions and distinguishing their role in relation to the Scrutiny and Challenge, what does this now mean in day-to-day practice. In response Councillor Smith advised she sees her role as Cabinet Member for Children and Young People as a dual role for strategic political leadership. Jeanette Richards, Executive Director advised that the upcoming LGA will focus on Corporate Parenting duties.

8 SOCIAL CARE RECRUITMENT

Lynne Ridsdale, Deputy Chief Executive attended to provide an overview of the Social Care Recruitment Report and an overview of recruitment activity in relation to Children & Young People Social Care. At a national, regional and local level, there are challenges for employers in securing sufficient numbers of suitably qualified and experienced qualified social workers to undertake a range of roles within Children's Social Care.

In addition, Councillor Boles asked if members of the Committee wished to share feedback following the visit to Bury's Social Workers that took place on 07th September 2022, Councillor Whitby, Georgia Murphy, and Helen Chadwick attended the visit. Feedback from the session was:

1. Social workers shared a view that administration support would be beneficial
2. Staffing for Social Workers is not a Bury issue and an issue around the stigma associated with the role of a Social Worker
3. The role of a Social Worker should be shown more to young people when considering education, job prospects or Apprenticeship options
4. The negative perception some children and young people have about Social Workers could be addressed through improved education via PSHE lessons in school and through bringing in a Social Worker to explain their role.

It was agreed that:

1. The Committee will organise a re-visit the Social Workers

9 ATTAINMENT HEADLINE OUTCOMES 2022 (PROVISIONAL)

On behalf of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Boles, Chair took the opportunity to congratulate those who have recently undertaken their exams this year and the teachers involved.

Wendy Jackson, Service Lead - Quality Standards and Performance provided an overview of the report. Wendy advised it is the first year since 2019 that our Primary School aged children have been assessed and there were no changes to the testing regime this year. Primary attainment results will not be published nationally but they are available to schools, and they are currently provisional. In addition, secondary schools and colleges returned to the formal

examination period following the use of Centre Assessed Grades in 2020 and Teacher Assessed Grades in 2021.

In 2022, 63% of Bury's children, attending schools in private, voluntary and independent settings, reached a good level of development. This is 2% below national and is 8% below that of 2019. However, it should be noted that in that period changes had been made to the Early Years and direct comparison should not be made. Bury's 'dip' is in line with Greater Manchester (GM) but 1% greater than national, which 'dipped' by 7%.

The Chair then opened up to questions from the Committee and the following areas were discussed:

- The cost-of-living crisis and how this may impact on attendance and attainment results.
- Children's reasons for missing school and the increase in children missing school due to emotionally based school avoidance.
- Schools adopting reception practice for some students in Year One as they are not quite ready due to the impact of the pandemic.
- The importance of the CLAS Team in supporting Children where English is an additional language.
- That girls have performed lower than the national average and that this is an area that needs looking into.

10 FOSTERING SUFFICIENCY

Linda Evans, Interim Director of Social Care Practice, provided an overview of the report. Linda wanted to highlight the amazing work of foster carers and the work they do. Foster carers offer children and young people a safe, loving, and nurturing home when they cannot live with their birth families.

As of 1st September 2022, Bury Council looked after 362 children and young people of which 237 (67%) are cared for by foster carers. A lower percentage of children and young people are cared for in foster placements in Bury when compared to our Statistical Neighbours, 68% and England average, 71%. Work is ongoing to increase the number of children and young people being cared for by foster carers.

Councillor Boles, Chair of the Committee took the opportunity to highlight that a similar report will be coming to the next Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and a representative from the Foster Carers Association will be invited to that meeting. In addition, Councillor Boles recommended that members review the Independent Review into Children's Social Care Report in advance of the meeting.

Discussions took place regarding the confidence Bury Council had to recruit the additional foster carers needed. In response Linda Evans, Interim Director of Social Care Practice advised that communication and recruitment strategies are being reviewed.

Councillor Rydeheard requested further information regarding the Mocking Bird Model that has been adopted by Stockport Council. In response Jeanette Richards advised this will be included in the report coming to the next Committee meeting.

Councillor Farooq echoed support for the work foster carers do and the marketing that currently exists.

In summary Councillor Boles sought assurances that the recruitment drive and support work to improve the number of Social Workers is also mirrored for Foster Carers.

11 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR C BOLES
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 10:00 pm)

Children's Scrutiny, Nov 24th, 2022

Question from Cllr Bernstein: Can an update on recruiting to the Children's Services restructure be given please?

Introduction

There has been purposeful and significant consultation with staff groups, and this is right to ensure that we retain our talent and maintain confidence in the leadership group. Although this has been lengthy, and in some areas longer than anticipated, it has been a critical exercise and will pay dividends as we continue to reset our culture and build faith and confidence in our front-line social care workforce.

Whilst this has imposed some limits to what can be achieved, it has not meant that recruitment has been paused or stalled, whilst awaiting the final sign off for the re-structure.

Systems supporting change

Some key technical points are important to note as we now look to moving into the full recruitment phase:

- The new structure is now formally signed off as of 15th November
- New structures have been built on the current HR system and are in the process of being populated
- Mapping exercise completed by Social Care to align existing workforce to new operational teams
- Appointments and transfers of staff between different parts of the structure (e.g. staff transferring from Early Help to Education) being progressed now, subject to operational handovers.

Progress

There has been significant progress in the last month whereby no permanent staff resigned or left the authority. This is considerable and has been rare in the preceding year and is hoped can be the sea change required to build a more permanent staff group with less reliance on agency.

As mentioned, recruitment has not completely paused as part of the re-structure process and roles that are not changed as part of the re-structure have continued to be advertised. This has been particularly successful with Team Manager in our social work services with 4 managers appointed as part of this recent process and further applications received. This is another sign that staff looking to progress are interested in Bury and this needs to be sustained.

Furthermore, the Scrutiny Committee will be aware that the leadership team is now almost fully recruited to, with one post to be advertised very shortly, the Fostering Head of Service.

In addition, intensive work has been carried out by the Principal Social Worker and Director of Practice to target key agency staff to convert to permanent staff with some success.

Next Steps

A full programme has been designed with key timescales and deadlines, held jointly with HR and CSC senior leadership to ensure we stay on track for our next phase and new roles that have been amended during consultation are currently being progressed through final grading processes prior to advert. The programme includes work with Communications team to highlight the development, innovation and offer a new staff member will receive when joining us in Bury and we intend to be more assertive

in the market, demonstrating how Bury are leading the way in GM regarding the Family Safeguarding Model, where others are now following.

The sequencing of internal advertisement has begun, where more senior roles are required to be filled first. The initial round of adverts for some key roles are already live on the recruitment system for applications including Service Managers in Early Help and Family Group Conference Manager. Further rounds of adverts will follow shortly to recruit to those key posts in Early Help/Early Years.

Expressions of interest for internal vacancies in Social Work teams are currently in progress, commencing with Team Managers, with very short timescales to allow for remaining vacancies to be identified and proceed to external advert in early December. The informal groundwork, preparation and development for these key posts has already taken place, enabling the short timescale. The proactive recruitment to social work posts prior to sign off of the restructure has created a small bank of appointable candidates for the roles, whom we are now onboarding following the establishment of additional positions. It is critical that our HR colleagues continue to process the onboarding at pace.

Finally, we have now finalised and commissioned a service to recruit overseas with a trip planned in the second week of January to interview and appoint up to 20 candidates which we hope will be able to join us in late spring of 2023.

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday 24 November 2022

SUBJECT: Foster Carer Financial Support

REPORT FROM: Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

CONTACT OFFICER: Jeanette Richards, Executive Director of Children's Services

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 22 September 2022, Children's Services were asked to provide an update on the financial support being offered to foster carers now and also in the context of the cost-of-living crisis.
- 1.2 This report provides 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.
- 1.3 The report also provides 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.

2.0 ISSUES

Local context

- 2.1 The Council currently have 361 children in our care. We are facing significant demand pressures upon placements and the availability of foster care placements within the Borough. As a result, too many children are being placed in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). The use of IFA placements is costly and places increasing demand on the agency budget. In addition, for a small number of children who have more complex needs, often due to the trauma they have experienced, we are unable to identify foster placements for them and residential placements are needed.
- 2.2 Foster carer conversion from application to approval has been significantly impacted during the two years of Covid. When we look at trends via the Greater Manchester dashboard (a tool utilised for sharing data across the authorities) it is clear that the patterns in enquiries and approvals from the start of the Covid pandemic have reduced. We have a clear need to increase the number of Bury approved foster carers to increase the availability of placements within the Borough, primarily to meet the needs of our children in care and care leavers and to utilise more cost-effective placements, rather than external high-cost placements. A key objective to improve placement sufficiency in the Borough is to increase the number of Bury approved foster carers available.

- 2.3 As at the end of October 2022 we had a total of 105 Bury approved foster carers. This figure included 60 mainstream fostering households and 45 Friends and Family connected households. We have 155 children in these placements, 79 children living with Bury Foster carer households and 76 children with our Friends and Family approved households.
- 2.4 In July 2022, Cabinet approved a proposed restructure of Children's Services subject to consultation. These proposals that we are now moving to implement include a restructure of the Fostering service to ensure managers have a clear line of sight on practice, increased capacity with smaller spans of responsibility. For Fostering this will see the introduction of a Head of Home role that will oversee fostering and adoption services, introduction of three fostering teams who will have a specific focus on training and recruitment, supporting foster carers and assessment and support to family and friend and SGO carers. This restructure will enable us to strengthen our offer to foster carers, our recruitment activity and support us to consider specialist fostering models.
- 2.5 Bury foster carers are committed to our children and young people and provide good quality care to them. We need to retain skilled and experienced carers and to recruit new carers. In 2023/2024 there is a priority to increase the number of Bury approved fostering households by at least 20.
- 2.6 Bury is 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.

National Context

- 2.7 There is an ongoing national crisis in terms of foster carer recruitment and retention and overall placement sufficiency and choice for children needing to place within foster families. The covid pandemic and subsequent lockdowns had a significant impact upon carer recruitment for all Local Authorities' and Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 2.8 Concerns of Foster Carers are highlighted in the 'Cost of Living Report' that was published this year by Fostering Network (a link to this report can be found in background documents below). A survey of foster carers conducted by FosterWiki has highlighted the serious financial pressures on the sector as the cost-of-living crisis continues to mount. This report echoes the findings of the State of the Nation 2021 survey of over 3,000 foster carers, which showed that for over a third of foster carers their allowances do not meet the full cost of looking after a child. (A link to this report can be found in background documents below). The report concluded if foster carers are to continue to provide stable, loving homes for children and young people, they must be well funded to do so and there are calls to have minimum allowances for foster carers.

Corporate Parenting Duty

- 2.9 As Corporate Parents we need to ensure wherever possible and safe to do so children looked after can continue to live in Bury as their hometown and stay connected to their family and friend network and their communities. When children cannot remain in the care of their own families we need to ensure that we have sufficient Foster placements to meet their needs.

Voice of Foster Carers

- 2.10 Bury Foster Carers have an active Foster Care Association who provide a representative voice and link directly to the service, they have sought the views of carers and are a representative voice for the wider carer group. The Foster Care Association have voiced concerns regarding two significant issues. Firstly, the cost-of-living crisis and carer fees, secondly the council spend on Independent Fostering Agency placements for children in care. Our Carers, like other families are experiencing challenges linked to the cost-of-living crisis. There is a strong and compelling view that the local authority should put greater investment into the Bury Fostering service and financial support to Bury carers needs to

support them to continue to foster and to provide good quality care to our children. This will also assist with the recruitment of new carers and to retain existing carers who are supporting Bury children in care.

- 2.11 At the Corporate Parenting Board held on 25.10.22 foster carer representatives were clear they want to continue to care for our children but highlighted the needed the right level of financial support to do so. Foster carers have highlighted the impact the cost-of-living crisis is having on families caring for our children and young people and they are concerned that this may result in some carers not being able to continue to foster. This was reiterated on the 15.11.22 when the Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Lead Member for Children and Young People attended the Foster Carers Forum. At the forum foster carers told them that many fostering households were struggling financially and that current fees were not adequate. Foster carers reported feeling heard but frustrated by the time it is taking to address this.

3.0 ACTION TAKEN

- 3.1 Foster carers currently receive weekly fees for their professional role and a maintenance allowance that supports them to care each child and young person, and in addition they receive Birthdays, Christmas, and holiday allowances. Please see below the current weekly professional fees and allowances offered to Bury foster carers:

Current weekly Professional Fee for each child placed:

0-10 years old is £130

11-17 years old is £140

Current weekly maintenance allowance for each child placed:

0 - 4-year-old is £141

5 -10-year-old is £156

11- 15-year-old is £177

16 - year-old is £207.

- 3.2 We are preparing a report for Cabinet that provides a range of information regarding Fostering fees and allowances and how our offer to foster carers compares to other Greater Manchester authorities. Bury are not the lowest paying local authority but we are not competitive when compared to higher paying neighbouring authorities in particular for older children and young people and this is likely to impacts on our ability to recruit and retain foster carers. The table below provides an example of how our allowances compared to other Greater Manchester local authorities in September 202, in relation to two age groups.

Child's Age	10-year-old	14-year-old
Bury	£286	£317
Highest GM Authority	£311	£419
Lowest GM Authority	£149	£177
GM Ranking	4th	5th

- 3.3 Greater Manchester Fostering Leads meet monthly and work closely with Placements Northwest and the Greater Manchester Combined Authorities. Scoping exercises have been carried out by Greater Manchester Combined Authorities with a view to developing additional workstreams to support recruitment of Foster carers amongst all ten Greater Manchester authorities. This 'scoping' has generated a great deal of discussion about the offer each local authority provides to carers.
- 3.4 The report to Cabinet will also make recommendations about how we can develop and improve the range of incentives to strengthen our current offer to foster carers.

- 3.5 We have made a request for a one-off grant for foster carers from the Household Support Fund to support foster carers with the rising costs of living which is being considered and we hope to have feedback on in the next weeks. We are aware other Greater Manchester local authorities plan to offer a one-off grant or have done so already.
- 3.6 This year we have offered an uplift to fostering fees and allowances. Fees were uplifted 2.3% this year, backdated to the start of this financial year. Whilst the uplift was welcomed Foster Carers have told us this uplift did not go far enough and has had little or no impact on the challenges they face with the cost-of-living crisis..
- 3.7 In August 2022 the Foster Carer Forum raised concerns about the rise in fuel costs and queried why it was that mileage could only be claimed after the first 10 miles when these costs are directly attributable to caring for foster children. We recognise foster carers will routinely use their cars to support our children and young people to attend school, out of school activities and contact with their families. In response to the increased fuel costs, we increased the mileage allowance for foster cares from 40.4p to 45p per mile in line with the approved HMRC rate and the recommended mileage and the allowance we have paid to staff. In addition, it was agreed that foster carers should be paid the first ten miles at the full mileage rate was backdated for mileage claims from 01 April 2022

4.0 CONCLUSION

The department are mindful of the impact the cost-of-living crisis is having on families including foster carers who are caring for our children. We are carefully considering how we can strengthen our support to foster carers and will be able to provide a further update following our report to Cabinet.

List of Background Papers/Information:-

Foster Talk Cost of Living Report 2022 [FosterTalk-Cost-of-Living-Report-2022.pdf](#)

State of the Nation Foster Care 2021, [State of the Nation's Foster Care 2021 | The Fostering Network](#)

Contact Details:-

Linda Evans (Interim Assistant Director for Social Care Improvement)

Executive Director sign off Date:_____

JET Meeting Date:_____

16 November 2022

Jeanette Richards
Executive Director of Children's Services
Bury Council
3 Knowsley Place
Duke Street
Bury
BL9 0EL

Dear Jeanette

Monitoring visit to Bury children's services

This letter 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. His Majesty's inspectors for this visit were Lisa Walsh and Julie Knight.

Areas covered by the visit

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.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. A range of evidence was considered, including electronic records, performance management information, case file audits and other information provided by senior managers. In addition, inspectors spoke to social workers and managers.

Headline findings

Since the last inspection, there are some pockets of improvement in service delivery for children and families in Bury. The local authority is beginning to improve the experiences for children who are subject to child in need and child protection planning. This is supported by increased stability in the senior leadership team,

continued corporate support and financial investment. However, high caseloads and too many changes in social workers are still leading to inconsistency in practice for too many children.

There is a refreshed quality assurance framework, along with a renewed focus on developing a performance management culture, but this is not yet embedded. There is a continued high turnover of social workers, which makes any improvements difficult to embed. The quality and frequency of managers' supervision continue to be variable, which means that sufficient rigour is not always applied in progressing children's plans or in challenging poorer practice when circumstances for children are not improving. Actions to progress cases are not always being completed.

Findings and evaluation of progress

Since the last monitoring visit, senior leaders have continued to focus on establishing the foundations for improving practice. Some progress is being made, but it is too early to make a difference to children's experiences. Leaders recognise that there is much more to do to make sustainable improvements in the quality of social work practice. A more stable leadership team, along with the recruitment of a permanent director of social care practice, has renewed positivity among the workforce. This is supporting a clarity of vision, standards, and expectations.

There is strong political and corporate support that has led to significant additional investment in children's services. There is a strengthened recruitment and retention strategy that includes an enhanced offer to attract and retain staff. A number of new posts at strategic and operational level are providing better stability and greater line of sight on front-line practice. In addition, funding has been secured to increase the number of team managers and social workers in order to increase capacity and strengthen front-line practice.

An appropriate and refreshed quality assurance framework provides leaders and senior managers with a line of sight on practice. Auditors and moderators are mostly consistent in understanding what good practice looks like. Audits are balanced in identifying positive practice and areas for development. However, feedback from families, is not consistently audited to ensure compliance with this quality standard. Actions from audits do not consistently support case direction or learning about individual children for social workers or the local authority. This reduces an overall understanding of children's experiences to support improvement.

Social workers report that senior managers are visible and have recently taken a more restorative approach to their engagement, including better consultation with social workers to support in-service improvements. Social workers and managers report that leaders now have a real focus on improving services for children. Despite this, in the safeguarding teams, some social workers' caseloads are too high, which has an impact on their ability to keep children's records up to date. This results in

key decisions for children not always being fully recorded on their records, and opportunities for team managers to review children's progress are reduced.

Supervision is mostly regular and social workers value the support they receive from their team managers. However, most supervision records are not reflective and actions are too generic and lack timescales for completion. Managers do not consistently provide appropriate challenge where children's plans are delayed. Contingency planning, to inform next steps when children's circumstances do not improve, is absent for most children.

Some children continue to experience too many changes of social worker, which contributes to significant drift and delay in progressing their plans. When children do have a consistent social worker, they are visited regularly and are able to develop positive, meaningful relationships.

There is an improving use of multi-agency information to understand risks and inform decision-making in assessments for some children. This includes assessments for disabled children. Family history is being used more readily to understand children's current experiences. Relevant multi-agency information is included and is helping to inform risk analysis and planning for children.

Thresholds of risk are clear and applied appropriately when decisions are being made to step-up and step-down between early help, children in need and child protection.

Most children have an up-to-date plan. However, plans are variable in quality, with some being too generic and without timescales. Actions do not always provide families with information about what needs to change and by when. This means that children's individual needs are not consistently met in a timely way. Where plans are better quality, direct work is completed in order to understand children's experiences to inform future planning. For most children when their circumstances change and risks increase, there is appropriate and timely escalation from children in need to child protection processes.

Although there is regular attendance by key professionals at core group meetings and child protections conferences, which is supporting sound decision-making, these meetings are not always effective forums for holding partners to account for not completing actions which would reduce risk or meet children's needs. More recently, there are some positive examples of case escalation to address drift and delay. This is beginning to have an impact on progressing those children's plans.

Inspectors saw timelier progress being made for some children who are subject to child protection planning and recently entering pre-proceedings. Children whose cases have been open longer to the service are now actively reviewed through regular legal gateway meetings. The progress of these plans is closely monitored by senior managers.

Senior managers have established clear practice standards that are supporting social workers to develop consistent practice in pre-proceedings work. The number of children escalated into pre-proceedings has doubled since the last inspection. This means that when children's lives are not improving, more children benefit from earlier decision-making and appropriate escalation. When children's circumstances improve, they are appropriately supported to remain safely at home, having stepped down from pre-proceedings. A positive development is the introduction of the pre-proceedings plan, enabling families to have a clearer understanding of expectations.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lisa Walsh
His Majesty's Inspector

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: Children's Scrutiny Report

DATE: 23/11/22

SUBJECT: Early Years and School Readiness

REPORT FROM: Cllr Lucy Smith

CONTACT OFFICER: Sandra Bruce- Assistant Director Early Help and School Readiness

1.0 BACKGROUND

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.

1.1 Early Years – Duties on the Council

Early Years Universal Offer

- 1.2 Early Years is defined as children pre-birth to age 5 and the universal offer refers to the offer available to all families with children aged 0-5. The council has certain duties placed on it to deliver a universal offer to families some of which include, conception to birth support, and parenting support around key development stages (weaning/walking/starting nursery/home environment, learning)

In short as part of its duties the council should provide parents/carers access to support across a range of needs and services. This is usually delivered through the councils, children centres

Children centres are defined through the Sure Start initiative and, until 2015 were inspected by Ofsted. The inspection process was suspended pending government review - it was not revoked.

- 1.3 Current legislation regarding children centres is contained in the Childcare Act 2006 and underpinned by the Sure Start statutory guidance which was updated in 2013. The guidance seeks to assist Local Authorities and partners by making it clear what they must provide. The government guidance lays out an expectation that the universal early years offer is delivered both through children centres as well as some off-site delivery.
- 1.4 The children centre offer should improve the well being of early years children (0-5) in the following areas
- physical and mental health and emotional well-being
 - protection from harm and neglect.
 - education, training, and recreation:
 - the contribution made by them to society.
 - social and economic well-being.
 - Reduce inequalities between young children in those areas.
 - make arrangements to secure that early childhood services in their area are provided in an integrated manner.

The early years offer particularly between the age of 0-2 provides the foundation for children to be ready for nursery having met the basic developmental milestones to support ongoing learning.

Sufficiency of Child Care

- 1.5 As well as a universal offer delivered to families, the council has a responsibility to ensure that there is sufficient childcare provision across the borough to allow parents to access free childcare in line with government eligibility criteria. Childcare is accessed via its early years' settings
Early years settings are made up of childminders, playgroups, crèches, nurseries and before and after school provision across the borough, ranging from very small business models to larger group chains.
- 1.6 Bury has 183 early years providers. 72 are group-based settings (nurseries) and 111 are childminders. All providers are regulated by Ofsted. Whilst these are private businesses and therefore not managed by the Council, the Council has a responsibility under law to
- Secure free early education places for 2-, 3 and 4 year olds in line with the government offer which provides entitlements for parents to access a number of hours free childcare dependent on their own circumstances and age of the child. All parents regardless of circumstances should have access to some free childcare and the Council must ensure it has this available – this is called sufficiency
 - Fulfil demand across the eligibility criteria including any children who move into the Borough.
 - Complete a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment annually giving a picture of the different factors surrounding the supply and demand of childcare
 - Proactively, provide information to parents about its childcare provision and how they can access it.

- Undertake outreach to identify disadvantaged children and promote the take up of free places
- Act as broker between parental demand and capacity in any given area.

Sufficiency of childcare settings and good take up of free places ensures that children have access to the Early Years Foundation Stage which forms the basis of early years education and prepares children for school and for school readiness

Early Years Foundation Stage and School Readiness

- 1.7 The early years foundation stage in short sets out the curricula activity for early years settings. It sets an expectation that children will receive support across 7 learning areas
- Communication and language
 - Physical development
 - Personal social and emotional; development
 - Literacy
 - Mathematics
 - Understanding the world
 - Expressive arts and design

Between the ages of 2 and 3 children are assessed against these areas of development to track progress and then are assessed again at school, in reception against the same criteria and this criterion (called the early learning goals - ELG) defines whether a child is perceived to have achieved a good level of development (GLD) which is the measure used for school readiness.

2 National Drivers

The first 1001 day (Leadsom Review)

- 2.1 Scrutiny and interest in the early years offer has gained traction in the last two years. The Leadsom review commissioned by Government and completed in 2021 in response to the impact of the pandemic on very young babies and infants, set out a vision for support to children in the first 1001 days (conception to age 2) The review concluded that **'2 is too late'**

The 1,001 days from pregnancy to the age of two sets the foundations for an individual's cognitive, emotional and physical development. There is a well established and growing international consensus on the importance of this age range.

The review laid out certain areas for action, namely

- A seamless coherent and joined up start for life offer
- Family Hubs to be established as a place for families to access start for life services
- Designing digital virtual and telephone offers for families
- Developing a modern skilled workforce to meet changing needs for families
- Improving data, evaluation outcomes and proportionate inspection
- Ensuring local and national accountability through improved leadership across the sector

The review sets out greater expectations on councils in respect of its universal offer for the first years of life (first 1001 days) and builds on the expectations already enshrined in guidance, broadening the support through its Family Hub initiative.

This also sets the ambition for greater integration across the early system i.e. providers, the council, public health, midwifery and health visiting working together to share data to ensure targeted support to our more vulnerable cohort.

2.2 Family Hubs

In 2020 the government confirmed its commitment to develop family hubs by providing 2.5 million investment monies to trial the concept in several LAs. Between 2020 and 2021 more funding was made available (20 million) and in 2022 another 82 million was provided to 75 Local Authorities to develop Hubs in their area. Bury was unable to apply for additional funding as we were not able to provide the early years data required to evidence system maturity. The additional monies provided in phase two were not allocated to Bury as we did not meet the criteria in terms of indices of deprivation. Bury is one of two GM localities that has not been granted monies but who are progressing the agenda to ensure we are in line with national drive and if there is a further phase of funding, we will be in a better position to apply.

- 2.3 The focus of family hubs is centred on the requirement to reform public service driven through children's partnerships and specifically has directed much of the funding and guidance to respond to the Leadsom Review and development of the universal early years offer. For those councils that received funding, 60% must be directed to early years programmes.

3 The Bury Picture

The 0-5 cohort equates to 7% of Bury's population

Age	Female	Male	Total
0	1,044	1,079	2,123
1	973	1,207	2,180
2	1,129	1,205	2,334
3	1,110	1,100	2,210
4	1,135	1,268	2,403
5	1,179	1,268	2,447
TOTAL	6,561	7,043	13,604

3.1 Children Centres and Universal Offer

Not dissimilar to many councils Bury has reduced its investment in early years delivery over the past 5 years. Initially all councils received monies to build sure start children centres as part of a huge programme to invest in early years in the early 2000s. In Bury this saw the development of 14 children centres. Children centres had to be built in areas based on local demographics so where there were higher needs and indices of deprivation more centres were built. The core premise of children centres was that they had to be built within communities and within walking distance of families.

Since 2015 Bury has had to respond to reduced financial investment and has disestablished or repurposed most of its centres (9).

In 2019 the council agreed to disestablish its early years workforce and merge this into its targeted early help teams due to demand for targeted support for children and increase of children entering social care services. Whilst necessary, this significantly reduced capacity in the early help division to deliver against the required early years universal offer with much of the resource now focused on working with families in a case management and targeted way

- 3.2 Currently Bury has three centres in Whitefield, Redvales and Radcliffe that are fully operative and from where some limited early years services are delivered from but there has been a reduction in delivery and the range of services available. This has included

some withdrawal of health services such as midwifery and joint work with health visitors which through the family hub initiative we will seek to rebuild so that families can access a more integrated and comprehensive offer through their local centre.

- 3.3 Additionally in light of the Leadsom review and the family hub initiative the recent children's directorate restructure has re-established some of the early years provision through the creation of a small early year's team, including a manager and 5 early years workers. This will be an agile team which will start to develop delivery across the 5 neighbourhoods out of 5 retained children centres

Woodbank children centre will be established as an early years base and centre of excellence, to start to rebuild expertise, including data collection and analysis, to drive through improvement. It will provide support to families out of the centre as well as build back some key deliverables to be offered from Whitefield, Redvales and Radcliffe. The team will look to map provision across the 5 neighbourhoods to start to rebuild some universal delivery out of other community spaces to ensure availability to families.

The Family hub initiative which will be developed across the 5 neighbourhoods starting with East Bury will have a renewed core early years offer. This will include midwives delivering out of local hubs as well as building better integration with health visitors and other universal early years partners in the voluntary sector, to start to increase our universal offer in each neighbourhood but crucially to ensure it is an integrated offer across key stakeholders, namely health, the council and voluntary sector.

Additionally, we are working with IT to secure a system for recording and supporting data management across the universal delivery so we can better track support to families especially in the 0-2 year range (the 1001 critical days) including impact and outcomes for children to support better targeted service delivery.

3.3 The health economy is crucial to the delivery of early years services especially from health visitors who provide the universal offer including, ante natal support, new birth visits, 6–8-week visit, 8-12 month assessment called the ages and stages questionnaire and the 2-2.5 year assessment. These assessments can identify developmental needs even prior to take up of nursery provision and support identification of the need for targeted work with families to support children's development and readiness for school.

3.4 Sufficiency

The council is required to have sufficient childcare places for families to access free childcare in line with eligibility. Bury has sufficient places required to meet its sufficiency target. Sufficiency is tracked and supported through a sufficiency lead as well as through the brokerage system which every council has in place through its Family Information Service, to support application of childcare places

- 3.5 As part of its duty in relation to sufficiency Bury early years advisory team track and support the quality of childcare offered to our children to ensure that across the sector education is delivered in line with the early years foundation stage, contributing to overall good level of development and ensuring our children are school ready. Every year the council has a duty to complete a childcare sufficiency assessment to ensure it tracks availability.

Our assessment this year evidence that there are sufficient childcare places and that currently our 2 year old take up is at 77%. Take up for 3 year olds is at 94%. Bury compares well in relation to take up which is nationally at 69% for 2 year olds and is higher than government target for 3 year old take up which is at 90%

- 3.6 The quality of childcare in Bury is also good, with 97% of our child minders judged to be good or outstanding and 98% of nurseries.

Our early years advisors provide universal support to the sector through early years network support and targeted training. Targeted support is delivered through specific programmes to support the ongoing development of quality of practice and drive

improvement. If a setting is judged inadequate or requires improvement by Ofsted, then the setting can request targeted in-house support from their early year's advisor. We currently have no settings judged to be inadequate in Bury and 98% of our settings are good or outstanding

3.7 School Readiness

Up to 2019 Bury was above national average for children assessed as having a good level of development (GLD), or assessed as school ready, at 71% which was in line with national averages and above the northwest which was at 69%

The first reporting on GLD post pandemic showed a decrease, nationally in children ready for school with the England average reducing to 65% and the northwest reducing to 62%. Burys grading was at 63% which was below the national average though still slightly above the region. However, it dropped further than our northwest statistical neighbour by 1%.

The breakdown across Bury is,

GLD Breakdown

Area	Overall GLD	Boys	Girls	SEND
National	65%			
GMCA	62%			
Bury	63.3%			
Whitefield	67.4%	64.3%	70.4%	18.5%
North	68.6%	61.5%	75.9%	9.1%
East Bury	57.3%	52.2%	62.3%	11.6%
West Bury	65.0%	59.9%	70.8%	21.6%
Prestwich	61%	58.8%	63.4%	18.3%

Children with SEN achieving GLD in Bury is below the national average (20%), at 15% overall but is in line with GM and the same or better than most GM localities.

3.8 In response to the drop in GLD a survey has been completed across a number of early years providers to assess the development of children as they enter an early years setting to look at how we can address support to our children and to inform the development of the universal offer. Some of the findings are of concern and emphasise the impact on our 0-2 year olds, of the last two years.

22% of all providers contributed to the survey so whilst a small number it is a reasonable percent to suggest findings will be replicated across the system. Of note, 78% of settings said speech and language had deteriorated, 68% said there was a noticeable impact on children's emotional wellbeing with 38% describing children as being more vulnerable in terms of lower socio-economic context. Bury is working in partnership with GMCA on pathways to talking and we have a considerable programme to support early years speech language and communication. We have a project worker part funded through Public Health to deliver training on Wellcom an early assessment on speech and language to determine children's development in this area and identify support needs. In the last two years we have trained 194 Wellcom leads across our early years and school system.

Additionally, we are working with settings to encourage the home learning environment, equipping parents to support their children through play, communication etc in the home, to support children's development.

4 Considerations and Risks

4.1 Universal Offer – There is significant challenge for the council to meet the requirements of its universal offer. The Leadsom review highlights the intent to re-establish the inspection framework which was formerly linked to children centres and carried out by Ofsted. The family hub initiative together with the re-established small early years practitioner team will provide a vehicle to rebuild some universal provision, in partnership with other providers in the health economy and the third sector and gives Bury an opportunity to deliver something

new and more bespoke. This will focus on an offer to families for the first 1001 days. A comprehensive plan has been developed across partners to support this delivery. As well a task group has been established to start to build a system whereby, we can again record and manage data in relation to early years delivery including an outcomes framework which measures impact on children.

- 4.2 Sufficiency – There is availability of good childcare in Bury and good take up of the free childcare 2 years and above. However, the workforce in childcare settings is some of the lowest paid and the costs of childcare provision against funding provided by government to councils to provide free places is challenging and likely to become more so in the current economic climate. The early years sector is vulnerable to market forces, and we may see some in the sector unable to continue to afford to continue delivery which may impact on future sufficiency.
That said there is good tracking of childcare sufficiency and monitoring which means we will be able to predict and respond to changes in the market. Direct meetings with Early Years lead in the Department for Education as well as Ofsted has allowed us and other localities across GM to raise issues directly on the challenges to the sector which is also now receiving national attention.
- 4.3 School Readiness - The early years division is working at pace with partners through the development of its first family hub in East Bury to deliver a coherent and joined up offer to families especially in the 0-2 age range. This will support children to be 'ready' for nursery and support settings to deliver against the outcome's framework of the Early Years Foundation, so our children are school ready.
- 4.4 Our early years advisory team provide support through network meetings including training as well as direct support to the sector in delivery of the Early Years Foundation stage where this is required.
- 4.5 Bury is well connected with Greater Manchester Combined Authority, School Readiness Board and has contributed to the development of a shared delivery model (8 stage delivery model) which supports the journey for children through early years to school readiness. This will inform the early years delivery model for family hubs and ensure the seamless delivery of services to our youngest children
- 4.6 The changes to the early years' service in 2019 included the decommissioning of the bespoke early years system which provided the platform for recording much of the early years delivery work and whilst there is work being completed in the corporate performance team to bring data together this is not currently available. This means that data in respect of early years is difficult to scrutinise and to layer the journey for children through birth to school. This includes data from other sources such as midwives and health visitors which it is crucial to triangulate to accurately track the development of our youngest children. Bury is part of a GMCA pilot linked to digitisation of health records so that the information from the ages and stages questionnaires can be triangulated with other data to help us identify those children and families who may require more targeted support. Once this is available this will support our data maturity and analysis.

We have seen a rise in our early years cohort requiring support through an education health, care plan (EHCP) as children are presenting at nursery with some global delay. In 2019 pre pandemic there were 60 requests for SEN support, but this increased to 121 children in 2021 and is continuing to rise. Good data would allow us to review the ages and stages questionnaires at an earlier opportunity and reach out to families more quickly to offer support prior to entry to nursery.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Early years for children and especially the first 1001 days is one of the most crucial development stages which lays the foundation for learning and future achievements. The

current GLD data evidence a drop in children being ready for school and whilst this is not unique to Bury, there are some gaps in universal provision which may compound the impact on babies and infants, of the pandemic.

The Childrens Directorate and the early years division is responding to this through a significant transformation programme, which includes building a comprehensive universal offer in line with the 1001 days agenda and there is clear commitment across key stakeholders to create a seamless offer to families.

The expertise in the early years' service and the high quality of the childcare in Bury will support the development and delivery of the universal offer which will support children to be ready for nursery and subsequently ready for school.

Improved data across the health and care economy will be a crucial element to support better targeting and support to our more vulnerable children at an earlier opportunity which still requires significant development.

Members will want to consider how regularly they wish to scrutinise the developments in early years and the impact for children as well as consider any appropriate actions to ensure this challenging agenda is delivered against other competing needs across the children's system.

List of Background Papers: -

Contact Details: -

Sandra Bruce -Assistant Director Early Help and School Readiness

Executive Director sign off Date: ____15/11/22_____

JET Meeting Date: _____

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 24 November 2022

SUBJECT: Absence and Exclusion Report for Bury Schools

REPORT FROM: Councillor Lucy Smith, Cabinet member for Children and Education Services

CONTACT OFFICER: Isobel Booler, Director of Education and Skills
Wendy Jackson, Quality Standards lead

1.0 BACKGROUND – PART ONE - ABSENCE

- 1.1 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.

- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 This report makes comparisons between absence Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022 and Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019 which was the last full year pre-pandemic.
- 1.4 During the pandemic and following the full re-opening of schools, the Department for Education (DfE) introduced new coding, the X code, this was neither an absence or a present mark. The 'X' code included 'bubble' closures. As the rules on isolation changed a new sub-code for Illness (I02) was introduced for children and young people who were absent due to having COVID-19.
- 1.5 Sessions missed due to COVID-19 were not included in the absence for individual children and young people.
- 1.6 The changing nature of absence coding and school 'closures' means that meaningful comparisons in the period between 2018/19 and 2021/22 at LA level cannot be made. At individual school level the figures give an indication of the impact of the pandemic which has been disproportionate across Bury schools and across classes within individual schools.

- 1.7 This report includes absence, persistent absence and severe absence.

Absence	Number of sessions missed/ Total number of possible sessions
Persistent absence (PA)	Absent for 10% or more sessions
Severe absence (SA)	Absent for 50% or more sessions – <i>this is a relatively new definition introduced by the Department of Education</i>

There are two sessions each day, one morning session and one afternoon session.

- 1.8 Schools have a statutory duty to take registers twice a day and record attendance/absence using national codes in accordance with regulation 6 of the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 as amended. These codes are grouped as authorised absence, unauthorised absence, attending an approved educational activity and unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.
- 1.9 Following consultation the DfE issued new guidance [‘Working together to improve school attendance’](#) in May 2022 which applied since September 2022. The expectation is that this guidance will become statutory for September 2023.
- 1.10 We are grateful to our schools, as the majority are sharing their data with us regularly. However there have been challenges in processing and cleaning the data in addition to the changes in coding for COVID-19 which have limited the effectiveness of analysis. From this September, we expect coding to be consistent across the academic year.
- 1.11 The DfE has made clear in its guidance that collection of data from schools should be automatic which links to changes in IT systems at the LA. Alongside this the DfE introduced a voluntary collection of attendance data from schools which is automated. Over 80% of Bury schools have signed up and we are encouraging the remaining schools to do so. It is our understanding that the DfE intends to make sign-up compulsory and that the secure access website will continue to evolve.

2.0 ABSENCE DATA

2.1 Overall Absence

Phase	Bury			National		
	% absence Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019	% absence Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022	Difference	% absence Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019	% absence Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022	Difference
Primary	3.8	5.6	1.8	3.9	6.2	2.3
Secondary	5.4	8.4	3.0	5.2	8.6	3.4
Special	8.2	12.5	4.3	10.1	13.2	3.1
All schools	4.5	6.9	2.4	4.5	7.4	2.9

Absence in all phases increased between Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019 and Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022 with primary schools seeing the lowest increase and special school the highest. Overall, the increase in absence was 2.4% which equates to an additional 6.5 sessions missed per pupil in the two terms i.e. just over 3 school days.

Absence in Bury primary schools remains below national figures, which is positive, and saw a smaller increase between Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019 and Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022. Absence in Bury secondary schools was slightly higher than national in Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019 however it was below national in Autumn 2021/Spring 2022 having increased by a smaller percentage than national in that period. Absence in Bury's special schools remains below national however the increase between the two periods was 1.2% higher than the national increase.

Our priority is to improve attendance, initially, to at least pre-pandemic levels.

2.2 Persistent Absence

Phase	Bury			National		
	% persistent absence Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019	% persistent absence Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022	Difference	% persistent absence Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019	% persistent absence Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022	Difference
Primary	8.0	15.4	7.4	8.4	18.2	9.8
Secondary	13.5	25.9	12.4	12.7	26.7	14.0
Special	26.7	41.5	14.8	28.5	40.2	11.7
All schools	10.6	20.4	9.8	10.5	22.3	11.8

All phases saw a significant increase in the percentage of pupils classed as persistently absent between Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019 and Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022. For all schools, the figure almost doubled however this was a lower increase than national. All increases were lower than national with the exception of Bury special schools.

As persistent absence is defined as missing 10% or more sessions this would equate to missing a minimum of just over 27 sessions (14.5 days) in the two terms. Whilst Bury's overall figures are better than national in Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022, one fifth of our pupils (over 5000 pupils) missed almost three weeks of learning time in schools.

2.3 Severe Absence

Phase	Bury			National		
	% severe absence Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019	% severe absence Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022	Difference	% severe absence Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019	% severe absence Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022	Difference
Primary	0.33	0.37	0.04	0.39	0.63	0.24
Secondary	1.11	2.58	1.47	1.24	2.47	1.23
Special	5.47	5.25	-0.22	4.44	5.61	1.17
All schools	0.73	1.41	0.68	0.81	1.53	0.72

Severe absence increased in Bury between Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019 and Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022 by a slightly lower percentage than national. Bury's special schools saw a drop in severe absence in this period however secondary schools saw a greater increase than national and the figure for Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022 is the only one that is above national, albeit by 0.11%.

Severely absent is defined as missing 50% or more sessions. In Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022, 373 pupils were severely absent with 299 of these being in the secondary phase.

2.4 Absence of Vulnerable Groups

In primary, the groups with the highest absence in Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022 were pupils with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) at 9.7% followed by pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM). These groups also had the highest persistent absence. In terms of severe absence the most significant group was EHCP pupils. There was no significant gender difference or English as an additional language (EAL) compared with English first language for overall absence. However, a higher percentage of EAL pupils were classed as persistent or severely absent compared with non-EAL and a higher percentage of boys were severely absent compared with girls.

In secondary, the groups with the highest absence in Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022 were pupils with special educational needs and/ or disabilities (SEND) and those FSM eligible pupils. These groups also had the highest persistent absence and severe absence. A higher percentage of girls than boys were absent, persistently absent and severely absent. The percentage of White British heritage pupils who were severely absent was almost double that of non-White British.

Across primary and secondary, the ethnic groups with the highest absence figures were travellers of Irish heritage and Gypsy Roma heritage pupils however in secondary White and Black Caribbean and White and Black African heritage has absence figures just below travellers with Irish heritage.

2.5 Authorised Absence

Phase	Bury			National		
	% authorised absence Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019	% authorised absence Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022	Difference	% authorised absence Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019	% authorised absence Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022	Difference
Primary	3.0	4.6	1.6	2.9	5.0	2.1
Secondary	3.8	6.0	2.2	3.7	6.3	2.6
Special	7.4	10.5	3.1	7.9	10.5	2.6
All schools	3.4	5.3	1.9	3.3	5.7	2.4

There was an increase in the percentage of authorised absence between Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019 and Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022 with the largest increase in special schools which was higher than the national increase. Overall Bury's increase in authorised absence was lower than the national increase by 0.5%.

3.8% of authorised absences were code as Illness (not appointments) in primary, 4.9% in secondary. 0.23% of authorised absences were for medical appointments in primary, 0.31% in secondary.

2.6 Unauthorised Absence

Phase	Bury			National		
	% unauthorised absence Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019	% unauthorised absence Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022	Difference	% unauthorised absence Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019	% unauthorised absence Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022	Difference
Primary	0.9	1.0	0.1	1.0	1.2	0.2
Secondary	1.6	2.3	0.7	1.5	2.4	0.9
Special	0.8	2.0	1.2	2.2	2.7	0.5
All schools	1.2	1.6	0.4	1.2	1.7	0.5

The percentage of unauthorised absence in Bury was in line with national in Autumn 2018/ Spring 2019 for all schools and slightly lower than national in Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022. Special schools saw a larger than national increase however the figure for Bury special schools remained below the national figure for special schools.

In primary schools, 0.38% of unauthorised absences were for Family Holiday (not agreed or days in excess of those agreed) with the same percentage classed as not covered by any other code. In secondary schools, 0.21% of unauthorised absences were for Family Holiday with 1.86% classed as not covered by any other code.

2.7 Use of the X Code

Not attending school due to COVID circumstances decreased across all phases between Autumn 2021 and Spring 2022. In both primary and secondary schools 0.97% of coding was against the X code across these two terms.

2.8 Lates

In primary schools 1.1% of present codes are lates before closure of registers, in secondary schools this is 3.1%.

2.9 Year Groups

In the period Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022, **absence** in primary year groups showed minor variation however Years 1 and 6 had slightly higher absence than the average figure for Bury primary schools. In secondary schools, Years 9 – 11 had absences above the Bury average figure, the highest absence being in Year 10. Absence in Year 7 was the lowest at 6.4% however this was above the primary average and absence in Year 6 (5.8%).

In relation to the percentage of **persistent absence**, Years 1, 4 and 6 have higher than the Bury average figure in primary with Years 8 – 11 being higher than the average figure for Bury secondary schools; there is a marked difference between Year 7 (8% below the Bury average) to just above (0.1%) in Year 8 and Years 9 – 11 with Year 9 having the highest persistent absence figure of 3.1% above the average.

In relation to the percentage of **severe absence**, Years 1, 5 & 6 have above Bury average figures for primary with Years 9 – 11 being above the Bury average figure for secondary; Year 10 has the highest severe absence at 3.77%.

2.10 Early Help Localities

Using the Early Help localities of Bury, Radcliffe and Whitefield the highest **absence and persistent absence** in Autumn 2021/ Spring 2022 was in Bury and the lowest was in Whitefield. However, **severe absence** was highest in Radcliffe with Bury and Whitefield being lower and with just 0.01% difference between the two localities.

3.0 Challenges and Next Steps

- 3.1 A key priority for Bury is to ensure 'live' attendance data is available for all Bury schools and therefore the ability to undertake full analyses. For example, under the new duty for the Virtual School we need to be able to monitor the attendance of children with a social worker and that requires a full data set and two different IT systems being able to link together effectively.
- 3.2 The DfE guidance 'Working together to improve school attendance' has been in place since September 2022. This requires significant changes in, and probably renaming of, the Education Welfare Service within the School Attendance Team. The traditional role of Education Welfare Officers in visiting homes is no longer the case with the role being replaced by a school attendance support officer.

The DfE guidance makes clear the expectations of schools, trust boards and governing bodies and local authorities. The local authority is expected to:

- Rigorously track local attendance data
- Have a School Attendance Support Team which provides the following core functions free of charge:
 - Communication and advice
 - Targeting Support Meetings
 - Multi-disciplinary support for families
 - Legal intervention
- Monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker through the Virtual School

- 3.3 Bury has continued to offer a Service Level Agreement (SLA) which provides a named Education Welfare Officer to those schools that buy back. 50% of Bury schools purchased the SLA from April 2022. The support was flexible with one high school purchasing 2.5 days per week to other schools having half a day per fortnight to others have case load work only.

Pre-summer, the intention was communicated with schools to cease delivery of the SLA from January 2023. However, schools have continued to have access to their time allocation with Education Welfare Officers following through existing cases and supporting the buy-back schools to transition to the new model.

- 3.4 The 2022/2023 academic year is a transition year for buy-back schools and for the local authority as we move to full delivery, in line with the principles within the DfE guidance by September 2023. To support all Bury schools, a draft model attendance policy was made available in September. The policy has been through consultation and a final version is now available. Comprehensive guidance to accompany the model policy is currently out for consultation. The guidance will be launched later this autumn term.
- 3.5 The expectation within the DfE guidance is that the revised service will work with all schools including independent schools and alternative provision. Currently, the focus is on Bury's state-funded schools. As the new service is to be delivered at no cost to schools and the DfE has stated that it should be able to be delivered within existing resources there are financial implications and potential demand pressures.
- 3.6 Currently the School Attendance Service and Education Welfare Service is within the Early Help Directorate of Children's Services. As attendance is a statutory duty of the local authority the intention is that it will move into the Education and Skills Directorate whilst retaining key links to Early Help in supporting families to improve attendance. This is linked to Phase 2 of the restructure of Children's Services.

4.0 Summary

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.

Members may also wish to refer to the [DfE's Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance \(May 2022\)](#) which provides guidance on the roles of parents, schools, academy trustees and governing bodies as well as local authorities for all pupils, pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent, persistently absent pupils, severely absent pupils. The guidance also outlines expectations for supporting cohorts of pupils with lower attendance than their peers, those with medical conditions or SEND with poor attendance and pupils with a social worker.

5.0 BACKGROUND – PART TWO - EXCLUSIONS

The latest published exclusions data is for the academic year 2020/21. As with absence these figures are compared with 2019/2019, the last full academic year pre-pandemic. However, it must be noted that the 2020/21 academic year was disrupted by COVID and so any comparisons are only potentially meaningful when comparing Bury picture with the national picture.

Figures are based on rates which relates to the number of suspensions or exclusions as a percentage of the school population which makes for a fair comparison between schools of differing population sizes. In this report this makes it a fair comparison of Bury with national rates.

The DfE released updated guidance in September 2022 on [Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England](#) to reflect the government's ambition to create high standards of behaviour in schools so that children and young people are protected from disruption and can learn and thrive in a calm, safe and supportive environment.

The guidance provides schools and other bodies involved with information so that they can continue to use suspensions (formerly known as fixed-term exclusions) and permanent exclusions appropriately.

There have been changes to the legislation governing the disciplinary school suspension and permanent exclusion process which are reflected in the guidance.

Part two of the DfE's guidance outlines the updates from the previous edition.

5.1 Permanent Exclusions

Phase	Bury			National		
	Permanent exclusion rate 2018/19	Permanent exclusion rate 2020/21	Difference	Permanent exclusion rate 2018/19	Permanent exclusion rate 2020/21	Difference
Primary	0	0.01	+0.01	0.02	0.01	-0.01
Secondary	0.18	0.07	-0.11	0.20	0.10	-0.10
Special	0	0	0	0.06	0.03	-0.03
All schools	0.07	0.03	-0.04	0.10	0.05	-0.05

In 2020/2021, Bury's overall permanent exclusion rate was 0.03 which equates to 3 permanent exclusions for every 10,000 pupils whereas nationally the figure equated to 5 permanent exclusions for every 10,000 pupils.

Secondary permanent exclusions were below national in both academic years and saw a similar drop between 2018/2019 and 2020/2021.

5.2 Suspensions

Phase	Bury			National		
	Suspension rate 2018/19	Suspension rate 2020/21	Difference	Suspension rate 2018/19	Suspension rate 2020/21	Difference
Primary	1.36	0.70	-0.66	1.41	0.99	-0.42
Secondary	15.25	10.40	-4.85	10.75	8.48	-2.27
Special	1.61	1.37	-0.24	11.32	7.29	-4.03
All schools	6.62	4.45	-2.17	5.36	4.25	-1.11

Suspension rates reduced in Bury schools and nationally between the two academic years however, it should be noted that schools were 'closed' in the spring term 2021 and pupils were not in school across the academic year due to COVID-19.

Bury's suspension rates in primary schools are below national in both academic years and saw a greater reduction in the rate than national between 2018/2019 and 2020/2021.

Suspension rates in Bury's secondary schools are above national in both academic years although there was a greater reduction in the rate than national between 2018/2019 and 2020/2021.

Suspension rates in Bury's special schools are much lower than national.

Overall, Bury's suspension rates are higher than national however the gap above national reduced to 0.20 from 2018/2019 to 2020/2021.

5.3 Pupils with more than one suspension

Phase	Bury			National		
	1+ Suspension rate 2018/19	1+ Suspension rate 2020/21	Difference	1+ Suspension rate 2018/19	1+ Suspension rate 2020/21	Difference
Primary	0.50	0.34	-0.16	0.63	0.52	-0.11
Secondary	6.53	5.42	-1.11	4.93	4.38	-0.55
Special	1.34	1.14	-0.20	4.65	3.66	-0.99
All schools	2.79	2.30	-0.49	2.44	2.20	-0.24

Both Bury primary schools and special schools have lower suspension rates than national in the two academic years with special schools being well below national.

The suspension rate for pupils with more than one suspension is higher in Bury, due to secondary school rates, than nationally although Bury saw a greater decrease than national between 2018/2019 and 2020/2021.

5.5 Exclusions and suspensions in Bury primary schools

Two pupils were permanently excluded from two Bury primary schools in 2021/2022. This rate would be in line with the national figure for 2020/2021 (national data for the 2021/2022 academic year is not yet available).

In terms of suspensions, 47% of Bury primary schools suspended one or more pupils in 2021/2022. The majority of suspensions were for physical assault against an adult, persistent disruptive behaviour and physical assault against a pupil. The overall rate is below the national figure for 2020/2021.

5.5 Exclusions and suspensions in Bury secondary schools

The Social and Emotional Mental Health Partnership Manager for Bury secondary schools produces an annual partnership report. Whilst data for the 2021/2022 is yet to be published, Bury's provisional figures indicate a rise in the rate of permanent exclusions largely due to very high figures from a small number of schools; 45% of permanent exclusions came from two schools. The suspension rate is similar affected by high figures in a small number of schools, one with extremely high figures accounting for 28% of suspensions.

At this stage there are no national figures available for us to put Bury's provisional figures in context.

Analysis of the 2021/2022 provisional data indicates that a higher proportion of boys and pupils with no special educational need and/ or disability were permanently excluded. The vast majority of exclusions are from pupils with White British heritage. Year 10 saw the highest number of permanent exclusions followed by both Years 8 and 9.

The Partnership Manager is continuing to work with all secondary school leaders to reduce suspensions and exclusions and is meeting regularly with the schools with the high figures to discuss earlier intervention for pupils at risk of suspension or permanent exclusion. In addition the Director of Education has held meetings with the schools with the highest exclusion figures.

Currently there are three strategic priorities which have been identified, with associated activities, to drive improvements through the secondary inclusion partnership:

1. Realign the Partnership, in order to ensure a coherent, effective and efficient, continuum of provision for SEMH.
2. Ensure Partnership Protocol and Practice support early identification and intervention, in order to reduce exclusion and placement breakdown.
3. Develop outreach support and preventative programmes in order to ensure early identification and a graduated approach to assessment and intervention.

A comprehensive toolkit has been developed, which is currently under consultation, in order to improve consistency across the partnership. The toolkit will support the development of practice, processes and protocols in order to ensure a multi-agency approach to supporting schools to reduce exclusion.

6.0 Summary

Members may wish to note the work of Bury's primary schools and in the majority of secondary schools in supporting children and young people so that suspensions and permanent exclusion are reduced.

List of Background Papers:-

DfE guidance [Working together to improve school attendance \(May 2022\)](#)

DfE [Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance \(May 2022\)](#)

DfE guidance [Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England \(September 2022\)](#)

Contact Details:-

Wendy Jackson

Service Lead: Quality Standards and Performance

Executive Director sign off Date:

JET Meeting Date: