

AGENDA FOR

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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To: All Members of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Councillors : R Bernstein, D Berry, C Boles, Chadwick, U Farooq, E FitzGerald, S Haroon, G Marsden, L McBriar, M Rahimov, L Ryder and G Staples-Jones

Co-Opted Members: H Chadwick and A Malik

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:	Tuesday, 17 September 2024
Place:	Council Chamber, Town Hall, Bury, BL9 0SW
Time:	7.00 pm
Briefing Facilities:	If Opposition Members and Co-opted Members require briefing on any particular item on the Agenda, the appropriate Director/Senior Officer originating the related report should be contacted.
Notes:	

AGENDA

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members are asked to consider whether they have an interest in any of the matters of the Agenda and, if so, to formally declare that interest.

3 MINUTES *(Pages 3 - 8)*

Minutes from the meeting held on 11th July 2024 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

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 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE *(Pages 9 - 14)*

Report Attached

7 SCHOOL RESULTS

Verbal update to be provided by Councillor Lucy Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

8 VIRTUAL SCHOOL UPDATE

Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People to provide a verbal update.

9 IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE *(Pages 15 - 38)*

Reports Attached

10 URGENT BUSINESS

Any other business which by reason of special circumstances the Chair agrees may be considered as a matter of urgency.

Minutes of: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 11 July 2024

Present: Councillor C Boles (in the Chair)
Councillors R Bernstein, D Berry, C Boles, U Farooq,
E FitzGerald, S Haroon, J Lancaster, G Marsden, M Rahimov,
L Ryder and G Staples-Jones

Also in attendance: Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor Lucy Smith.
Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, Councillor Tamoor Tariq.
The Executive Director (Health and Adult Care), Will Blandamer.
Interim Director of Education and Skills, Stephen Holden.
Head of Strategy, Assurance and Reform, Rob Arrowsmith
Secondary Inclusion Lead, Nick Bell.
Director of Social Care, Linda Evans.

Head of Legal, Ruth Whittingham.

Head of Governance, Julie Gallagher.

Public Attendance: 3 members of the public were present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor L McBriar
Jeanette Richards, Executive Director, Children and Young People.

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Boles made a declaration of interest in all matters under consideration due to his employment with an educational Alternative Provider in a neighbouring Borough.

Councillor Rahimov made a declaration of interest in all matters under consideration due to her employment with Acacium Group.

14 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 7th March be approved as a correct and accurate record.

15 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

One question was received in advance of the meeting.

Responding Cllr L Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reported that all children and young people must be safe in school. The local authority is committed to

addressing any concern or risk identified and we strive to work in partnership with schools to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all students.

The process for identifying a school for a child with an EHCP should work as follows:

- Firstly, it is important to note that all decisions to name a school in a plan are taken based on individual circumstances, in consultation with parents, considering the child or young person's views and that of the proposed school.
- Prior to naming a school within a child or young person's EHC Plan, the local authority must consult the school and request a response within 15 days. If a child's parent or a young person makes a request for a particular maintained school the local authority must consult that school too. The local authority considers responses to consultation very carefully before deciding whether to name a school in the child or young person's EHC plan. The local authority must comply with parental preference unless it would be unsuitable for the age, ability, aptitude or SEN of the child or young person, or the attendance of the child or young person there would be incompatible with the efficient education of others, or the efficient use of resources. All decisions are overseen by a multi-disciplinary panel, including representatives from education, health and social care to ensure a rounded view of the child/young person.
- Once a school is agreed upon, the local authority must be confident that the provision outlined in the EHC plan can be provided by the school and that any potential issues in doing this are addressed, whether by further financial support or advice and support from other services. This is carefully explored by SEND Officers and in consultation with schools.
- The EHC plan must be reviewed, at least annually (every 6 months for children under the age of 5 years) to ensure that it continues to reflect the needs of the child/young person, that they are making progress and the school named in the plan remains suitable. Should concern arise that this may not be the case at any time then an interim annual review may be requested.

Two further questions were submitted at the meeting, as one referred to a member of the public's personal experience, with regards a SEND Tribunal, the Cabinet Member provided assurance, that she would liaise with the questioner outside of the meeting.

Responding to a question from Kiera Delaney, with regards to problems with communication following the departure of senior staff within the SEND team; the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People acknowledged that there is work to be done to improve communication between the Council and SEND parents. With regards to the Ofsted action plan the Council were working to a timeline established by the Department for Education. Communication is a key priority for the Department, as is co-production with stakeholders when producing the Communication strategy.

Responding to concerns raised in relation to the failure to stream the meeting, the Head of Governance reported that the Council Chamber had closed due to health and safety concerns. The Council Chamber is equipped with static cameras no other committee rooms have this facility. It was agreed, in consultation with Elected Members, the Council would pause streaming of all Committee meetings until the Council Chamber re-opens.

16 MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were no member questions.

17 CORPORATE PARENTING CHAMPION

The Head of Governance reported following the unanimous agreement of the Corporate Parenting Notice of Motion, each Committee is required to appoint Corporate Parenting advocates, to champion their issues while considering matters at the Scrutiny Committee.

It was agreed that:

The following Members will be the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee, Corporate Parenting Champions:

Helen Chadwick
Councillor Ryder
Councillor McBriar.

18 BURY LOCAL AREA SEND INSPECTION REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, and the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, attended the meeting and provided Members of the Committee with a verbal update, following the recently jointly undertaken, Care Quality Commission and Ofsted inspection of SEND.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reported that the inspection team, identified widespread, systemic failings in services and highlighted the challenge that we need to do more to improve the outcomes of children and young people with special educational needs.

The inspection identifies 6 priority actions which Bury Council and NHS Greater Manchester ICB are jointly responsible for, along with 3 areas for improvement. As a result of the inspection outcome, the local authority will be issued with an Improvement Notice, and we will be subject to monitoring visits followed by a re-inspection in approximately 18 months.

In considering the report's findings, the following issues were raised:

Members expressed concerns with regards to the report's findings and particularly, that the Scrutiny Committee had not been informed, in advance, of the extent of the issues identified, despite discussing SEND, at numerous previous meetings.

With regard to concerns relating to SEND, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reported that she had shared these concerns previously with the Committee. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that the SEND service was in need of improvement and that is why the department had worked to develop a improvement plan.

The inspection report highlighted the progress that the Council, working with its partners had made but that there had been insufficient time, prior to the inspection, to see any real impact.

In addition, the Chair, raised concerns about the lack of information, and detail shared with the Committee, to the extent of the problems facing the SEND service. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reported that she was happy to work with the Committee and suggested moving forward, that Members review the format and the type of information shared with the Committee.

The Executive Director (Health and Adult Care) reported that the recommendations, did not constitute a surprise. The Council, together with partners believe that they had made significant progress, including reducing waiting times and an increase in the number of Health Visitors, this is not, as of yet, transferring in to better outcomes for service users.

Members agreed that they would like to see a dashboard highlighting SEND performance, whilst at the same time measuring impact and outcomes. Responding, the Interim Director of Education and Skills reported that this information is regularly shared with the Improvement Board and can too, be shared with Members of this Committee.

Responding to a Members question, with regards to PIP, the Executive Director (Health and Adult Care)– reported that NHS partners are confident that can deliver and make progress, demand continues to be problematic, with some services experiencing a 300% increase in demand for services.

Members discussed priority 2 of the action plan; “to improve or embed the use of the graduated approach to identifying and meeting needs across the local area”. Members expressed concern that one of the impact measures, included website visitors and or, pages accessed per visit. Responding, the Interim Director of Education and Skills, reported that this is only one measure and part of a wider strategic plan that includes not only the number of clicks but outcomes/successes.

The Trade Union Representative reported that there is an excellent SEND graduated approach and toolkit but due to pressures in Schools, including reductions in staff and ability to undertake these activities, there is risk that this priority would not be deliverable.

Responding, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reported that the report highlighted the need to develop partnership working, the Council acknowledges this and this will be a key part of the improvement journey and plan, moving forward.

Members asked when will the Committee see positive lived experiences for young people, and expressed concerns that as Councillors, their casework still suggests problems with SEND provision across the Council. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reported, that we are good outcomes, however some of the legacy plans remain an area of concerns. It is envisaged that we will have indication of impact in six months.

With regards to point 7.2 of the action plan; children, families and stakeholders understand what support is available; members expressed concerns with regards to the identified measures. The Head of Strategy, Assurance and Reform reported that information gained via the website is one of a suite of measures, used to measure impact, others will include co-produced surveys for parents, young people and their carers.

It was agreed that:

1. Members to consider, outside of the meeting, the types and format of data to be presented to future meetings.
2. Members will consider to scrutinise the findings from the inspection report and may look in the future to establishing a short term task and finish group to consider this matter in further detail.
3. Representatives from the Children’s Services Department, will approach School SENCO Leaders to check their understanding of the SEND graduated approach and remind them of the SEND toolkit.

19 EHCP MONITORING AND PROVISIONS

Prior to consideration of the report, the Chair outlined the reasons for this request. The Chair reported that following the BBC Panorama documentary concerning the independent school ‘Life Wirral’, in which concerns were raised about the standard of provision, an update was requested.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reported that this update describes the framework for overseeing such schools, Bury's use of this type of school and the national trends in the use and spend on these schools.

An accompanying report circulated ahead of the meeting provided information in respect of:

- The local authority aims to place young people who have an EHCP and require a specialist setting in a local maintained special school, the Council is able to do this for 70% of children in need of a special school to support their needs.
- High levels of expenditure on independent and non-maintained special schools (INMSS) is a national issue.
- In Bury, children placed in Alternative Provision are provided with temporary, part-time placements to support transition to the next setting.
- The local authority maintains an Alternative Provision Directory of approved providers. Providers on this directory have been through the LA procurement process which is now run annually.

The Chair raised concerns with regards to the substantial increase in the use of independent and non-maintained special schools (and alternative provision) and whether Ofsted could play a greater role in holding them to account and assurance that the schools are actually delivering what is asked of them.

Responding Nick Bell, Secondary Inclusion Lead reported that there are a broad range of ways to hold the provisions to account, and issues can be raised via parents the Council's LADO, annual conversation. The Council would then raise concerns to the Department for Education and Ofsted.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People explained that the Council have a legacy of poor EHCPs.

An ECHP Annual Reviews play a crucial role in potentially holding the provider to account however currently, the Council have not resourced themselves to make these interventions. The department have now appointed an Officer appointed to oversee attendance at the Annual Reviews.

The Secondary Inclusion Lead reported that the Council will visit providers, speak to young people and their carers and ask for information to ascertain if they are delivering against defined ECHPs. Further oversight would be provided by the Virtual Headteacher in relation to the Council's Looked after Children. In addition, a quality assurance framework is currently being developed.

It was agreed that;

1. Information will be provided to the Committee in respect of how many Annual Reviews of ECHPs have been undertaken in those in alternative or independent placements.
2. That the parents voice is captured in the quality assurance framework.

20 EARLY HELP AND SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY UPDATE

The Cabinet Member, Children and Young People supported by the Director of Social Care, Linda Evans, provided Members with an verbal update in relation to the Children's Improvement Plan highlighting areas of progress in the last 6 months, providing an overview of current challenges and our areas of focus for the next 3-6 months.

An accompanying report circulated to Members ahead of the meeting was organised into two parts – the first focusing on the enablers of good practice; and the second considering practice improvement in key areas within Children's Services.

The report provided updates in respect of:

- Quality Assurance and Performance
- Systems & Support for Workers
- Leadership
- Workforce
- Improving the quality of practice
- Support for Care Experienced Young Adults

In subsequent discussions the following issues were raised:

Responding to a question about an imminent inspection visit, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reported that despite having a good plan in place, workforce issues including an over reliance on agency staff, slow pace of change will mean that the Council does not believe it will get a rating of good.

In response to a Member's question, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reported that she has a good relationship with her Executive Director and that she takes direction and encourages scrutiny.

It was agreed that:

The update be noted and the Children and Young Peoples Scrutiny Committee will continue to receive timely updates, mindful that an Ofsted inspection is imminent.

**COUNCILLOR
Chair C Boles**

(Note: The meeting started at 7pm and ended at 9.55pm)

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 17th September 2024

SUBJECT: School Attendance Data

REPORT FROM: Janet Lloyd, School Attendance, Exclusion & Community Education Team Service Manager

CONTACT OFFICER: Janet.lloyd@bury.gov.uk

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Government has emphasised the importance of raising school attendance. Targets have been set for schools and local authorities to promote regular attendance. Ensuring that students consistently attend school positively impacts their learning outcomes and overall wellbeing.
- 1.2 The Department for Education (DfE) in England provides guidance on maintaining high levels of school attendance. The guidance is aimed at maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities.
- 1.3 The key aspects include:
- 1.3.1 Roles and responsibilities: it outlines the roles and responsibilities of parents, carers, schools, trusts, governing bodies and local authorities in maintaining attendance.
 - 1.3.2 Support for families: Schools should provide support to families and pupils who are persistently absent or at risk of becoming so.
 - 1.3.3 Legal Interventions: When attendance efforts don't work, schools and local authorities have legal interventions available.
- 1.4 The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) conducted a Rapid Evidence Assessment of Attendance Interventions in March 2022. A list of the interventions categories that have been explored:
- 1.4.1 Mentoring
 - 1.4.2 Family Engagement
 - 1.4.3 Legal Interventions
 - 1.4.4 Whole School Approaches
- 1.5 On the 19th August 2024 the DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance became a statutory document.
- 1.6 According to official statistics, the number of pupils regularly missing school in England has not returned to pre-COVID levels. These persistent absences are driven by various factors.

- Illnesses, including flu and other viruses, have contributed to the absence rate. However, it's essential to recognise that illnesses are only part of the picture.
- Many schools state that absences are often listed as stress, anxiety and long waiting lists for mental health treatment and disengagement with education due to the national pandemic.

2.0 ISSUES

- 2.1 Implementing the new DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance has ensured that school attendance is 'everyone's responsibility'.
- 2.2 The statutory document has impacted on the Children Missing Education (CME) statutory guidance. Bury Council has updated the CME Policy to ensure that we are in line with the statutory guidance and created an implementation guide. The guide will support schools with the CME process and also provide evidence for inspection purposes regarding Ofsted outcomes.
- 2.3 School Penalty Notices have seen an update with the new DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance Guidance 2024. There have not been any changes to the Penalty Notice system for 10 years.
- 2.4 The new legislation has required the local authority to produce new literature for all schools and parents to provide advance notice of the new changes coming into force. A new Code of Conduct has been produced and circulated to all schools in Bury along with proforma letters and forms for schools to use around this process.
- 2.5 The school attendance team has strengthened the legal process around school attendance and school penalty notices to ensure that the DfE working Together to Improve School Attendance Guidance is met within the local authority and schools. A new attendance guidance document has been produced for September 2024 which has been shared with all schools in Bury. This provides a step by step guide to the process along with proforma letters and forms to use. A supporting model school attendance policy is also available for the schools.
- 2.6 To support school attendance in Bury schools, guidance has been produced in relation to Part-Time Timetables and Alternative Provision. During the 'targeted support meetings' that take place regularly across all schools with the school attendance team officers, the information that is sent in to the local authority will be discussed at these meetings. This will help reduce the amount of children on part-time timetables and ensure that a multi-agency approach is being used.
- 2.7 School attendance orders have been established in Bury since 2023. An internal panel of children's services has been created to form a 'Children Not in School' panel to support the school attendance order process. The outcomes from this panel will increase vulnerable children are secured school place quickly and reduce their time out of education.
- 2.8 The School Attendance, Exclusions and Community Education Team underwent a large restructure which came into effect from September 2023. The team has increased by 50% with the recruitment of staffing taking place over the last 12 months. The team has not been at full capacity throughout the year.
- 2.9 The new guidance has placed a lot of responsibility on schools to carry out home visits and referrals. The School Attendance, Exclusions and Community Education Team have worked closely with schools in Bury to upskill the staff in order for them to be able to carry out their new duties.
- 2.10 School attendance forums have taken place on a termly basis over 2023/24 to support schools with the new guidance and training has been provided. This has placed extra work

on the team, however the benefits have been stronger working relationships, better outcomes for families, children and young people.

- 2.11 From 19th August 2024, data collection around school attendance has become statutory. Prior to this date, Bury Local Authority has struggled to gather the school attendance data. Schools within the borough use different systems to gather their school attendance data. In Bury, we have had a number of schools convert to academy status mid-way through the term which has impacted on the schools' status and new DfE numbers. Any data that was being collected by the DfE was cancelled as a result. The summer term attendance data is not available due to these issues.

3.0 NATIONAL DATA

- 3.1 The DfE release covers the full 2023/24 academic year **nationally**, up to 19 July 2024.

- 3.2 The data shows that the attendance rate across the **academic year 2023/24** for all schools nationally was 92.8%. The absence rate was, therefore, 7.2%.

- 3.3 By school type, the absence rates across the academic year 2023/24 were:

- 5.5% in state-funded primary schools (3.9% authorised and 1.6% unauthorised)
- 9.1% in state-funded secondary schools (5.5% authorised and 3.6% unauthorised)
- 13.0% in state-funded special schools (9.7% authorised and 3.3% unauthorised)

- 3.4 By pupil characteristics, the absence rates across the academic year 2023/24 were:

- 11.1% for pupils who are eligible for free school meals and 5.8% for pupils who were not eligible for free school meals
- 13.3% for pupils with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, 10.9% for pupils with SEN support and 6.5% with no identified SEN
- 7.3% for female pupils and 7.1% for male pupils

- 3.5 Across the academic year 2023/24, 20.7% of pupil enrolments missed 10% or more of their possible sessions and are therefore identified as persistently absent. By school type, the persistent absence rate across the academic year 2023/24 was:

- 15.2% in state-funded primary schools
- 26.7% in state-funded secondary schools
- 37.6% in state-funded special schools

4.0 BURY DATA

The current overall attendance data for Bury schools is 92% however, this is based on 95% of schools data in Bury. As mentioned elsewhere in the report, there are discrepancies in this data due to:

- mainstream schools converting to academy status
- Schools changing their schools platform data supplier which prevented the data being received into the DfE, View Your Own Data
- Not all schools signed up to the DfE to share their data until this became statutory on 19th August 2024

- Some schools only commenced sharing their data towards the end of the academic year (June / July)

After the October census, Bury Local Authority will be able to retrieve the accurate attendance figure for Bury.

The figure for 2022/23 was 92.9%. It is pleasing to see that despite the fact that we have not received all of the schools data, the figure has not reduced below 92%. All stakeholders will be updated as soon as the final figures are available after the October census date.

4.0 PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- 4.1 The data across **primary** schools for autumn / spring (we do not have the summer data available) across the academic year 2023/24. The absence rate for secondary schools 5.4%.

2023/24	5.4% Bury – autumn / spring	5.3% National – autumn / spring
2022/23	5.6% Bury whole year	5.9% National whole year
2021/22	5.7% Bury whole year	6.3% National whole year
2020/21	3.6% Bury whole year	3.6% National whole year

We are unable to provide the data comparison for 2023/24 until we have received the summer term data which will be available after the census, October 2024. Since 2021, Bury has been successful in overall absences at being below the national benchmark figure.

- 4.2 Persistent absence rate across primary schools for autumn / spring academic year 2023/24

2023/24	14.4% Bury – autumn / spring	15.0% National – autumn / spring
2022/23	14.5% Bury whole year	16.2% National whole year
2021/22	14.7% Bury whole year	17.7% National whole year
2020/21	8.1% Bury whole year	8.8% National whole year

We are unable to provide the data comparison for 2023/24 until we have received the summer term data which will be available after the census, October 2024. Since 2021, Bury has been successful in persistent absences at being below the national benchmark figure.

- 4.3 Severe absence rate across primary schools for autumn / spring academic year

2023/24	0.7% Bury – autumn / spring	0.8% National – autumn / spring
2022/23	0.7% Bury whole year	0.7% National whole year
2021/22	0.4% Bury whole year	0.6% National whole year
2020/21	0.5% Bury whole year	0.7% National whole year

We are unable to provide the data comparison for 2023/24 until we have received the summer term data which will be available after the census, October 2024. Since 2021, Bury has been successful in reducing the severe absences figures since 2021 to ensure that we are below the national benchmark figure.

5.0 SECONDARY SCHOOLS

- 5.1 The data across **secondary** schools for autumn / spring (we do not have the summer data available) across the academic year 2023/24. The absence rate for secondary schools 8.8%.

2023/24	8.8% Bury – autumn / spring	8.4% National – autumn / spring
2022/23	8.9% Bury whole year	9.0% National whole year
2021/22	8.8% Bury whole year	9.0% National whole year
2020/21	5.6% Bury whole year	5.5% National whole year

We are unable to provide the data comparison for 2023/24 until we have received the summer term data which will be available after the census, October 2024. In 2022/23, Bury was successful in reducing the overall absences across secondary education and placed us below the national benchmark figure.

5.2 Persistent absence rate across primary schools for autumn / spring academic year 2023/24

2023/24	24.4% Bury – autumn / spring	23.9% National – autumn / spring
2022/23	26.8% Bury whole year	26.5% National whole year
2021/22	27.6% Bury whole year	27.7% National whole year
2020/21	15.3% Bury whole year	14.8% National whole year

We are unable to provide the data comparison for 2023/24 until we have received the summer term data which will be available after the census, October 2024.

5.3 Severe absence rate across primary schools for autumn / spring academic year

2023/24	3.60% Bury – autumn / spring	3.40% National – autumn / spring
2022/23	3.02% Bury whole year	3.40% National whole year
2021/22	2.76% Bury whole year	2.74% National whole year
2020/21	1.43% Bury whole year	1.48% National whole year

We are unable to provide the data comparison for 2023/24 until we have received the summer term data which will be available after the census, October 2024.

The severe absence data has fluctuated each year Bury. Each child who is classed as severely absent has a package of support in place to help reduce this figure. We aim to continue working on this area to help reduce the figure further whilst working with partner agencies.

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance statutory guidance 2024, has demonstrated the document to be a strong working tool that has put school attendance at the forefront of everyone’s responsibility.
- 6.2 There is still work to be done in Bury to improve school attendance and plans are in place to continue on this improvement journey.
- 6.3 Through regular consultations with the DfE, it is evident that Bury Local Authority is working well with the new guidance and to quote the DfE, we have ‘moved mountains’ to implement the changes.
- 6.4 The Target Support Meetings in schools have been established for 12 months. This support strategy has improved relationships with schools and we are seeing positive outcomes in relation to reduced absences. We are aware that other local authorities are yet to implement the target support meetings in their schools.
- 6.5 There is an increase in schools applying for penalty notices. This reflects the work that has taken place via the school attendance forums and training implemented by the school attendance team and accompanying documentation.

- 6.6 The new 'LEAP', Legal Enforcement Attendance Panels that have commenced this September, along with the 'PACE', Police and Criminal Evidence Act before proceeding to legal action for non-school attendance is in place.
- 6.7 There had been a backlog of outstanding cases waiting to be heard at the Magistrates' Court which was an overlap from Covid. We have worked closely with the legal team in Bury Local Authority and now have up to date court dates. This has helped reinforce the relationships with schools who understand the pressures the local authority were under. The schools can see a clear path and feel supported and positive outcomes are being reached.
- 6.8 Bury continues to work collaboratively with GM colleagues through the Greater Manchester Local Authority Attendance Alliance (GMLAAA) sharing good practice and working regionally to improve attendance for all our children.

List of Background Papers:-

- 1. Bury Attendance Guidance Document September 2024
- 2. Bury model school attendance policy
- 3. Bury LA Guidance on Part-Time Timetables & Alternative Provision September 24
- 4. Penalty Notice, Code of Conduct, September 2024
- 5. Children Missing Education Protocol 2024
- 6. Children Missing Education Implementation Guide 2024
- 7. Children Not in School Terms of Reference (School Attendance Orders)

Contact Details:-

Janet Lloyd, School Attendance, Exclusions & Community Education Service Manager

Executive Director sign off Date:_____

JET Meeting Date:_____

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING:	Children's Scrutiny Committee
SUBJECT:	Children's Services Improvement Plan Update
REPORT FROM:	Jeanette Richards, Executive Director Children & Young People
CONTACT OFFICER:	Beth Speak

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 This report provides an overview on the progress made to date on the Children's Improvement Plan, highlighting areas of progress in the last 6 months, providing an overview of current challenges and our areas of focus for the next 3-6 months. The report is organised into two parts – the first focusing on the enablers of good practice; and the second considering practice improvement in key areas within Children's Services.

2.0 ISSUES

ENABLERS FOR GOOD PRACTICE

2.1 Quality Assurance and Performance

Monthly auditing and dip sampling enables managers to understand auditing as one part of a wider framework around quality assurance. Heads of Service moderate audits and discussion within the service develops a shared view of what good practice looks like. Learning from audit is fed back to staff through our 'Teaching Tuesday' sessions, which continue to be well attended and open to the whole workforce. We are also producing 7-minute briefings every month on topics or areas of practices to share with staff.

The core Quality Assurance framework has been embedded, and we are widening its coverage – ensuring that other services and teams are part of a single, consistent approach – while also beginning to use other types of quality assurance, for example using practice weeks to provide senior managers with regular opportunities to observe practice. Our first Practice Week took place in March 2024.

Discussions about performance, quality assurance and improvement planning are a core part of weekly Children's Social Care Senior Management Team meetings (SMT) chaired by the Practice Director, with SMT Meetings alternating fortnightly between performance and QA one week and general business the next. From May 2024, Team Managers have shared a weekly performance report with their Head of Service to develop a more consistent approach to performance across teams. The report focuses on performance in relation to children seen, statutory visits, assessment timeliness and supervision. Reports also inform discussion in the fortnightly Performance & QA SMT meetings.

2.2 Systems & Support for Workers

In January 2024 we employed an external expert consultant to complete a diagnostic of our Children's Social Care & Early Help management information system and to

recommend and design improvements. Following this initial review, we have sequentially implemented changes starting with reconfiguring the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) systems with a refreshed Multi-Agency Referral Form (MARF) that closely aligns with the Continuum of Need, and a new safety plan – both went live in May. Next steps are to look at the pathway plan, co-producing a form with our young people.

We have also developed a Sharepoint site as a single point of access for all staff to tools, practice guidance and other key documents to support good practice. The site includes refreshed practice standards, guidance, standard templates, useful links to key sites to support practice development such as Research in Practice, training calendars, weekly performance reports and quality assurance briefings. It also includes a new Social Work Career Pathway and Induction by Role matrix developed by the interim PSW, which sets out the support available for new practitioners.

2.3 Leadership

In January 2024, a senior management restructure was proposed following the departure of the Assistant Director for Early Help, with better alignment of services in sympathy with DfE strategy - bringing Early Help services under the remit of the Practice Director for Social Care (supporting the model of family help) and Early Years services under the oversight of the Director for Education. The remodel also strengthened senior management capacity by introducing Service Managers in the three main social care operational areas (MASH/IRT, Family Safeguarding & Corporate Parenting). Responsibilities around assurance, including the Principal Social Worker role, have been combined with those for Learning & Development into a single portfolio under a Head of Service. This restructure was in place from late June.

Our permanent Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help started in post in May, having been in Bury as an interim Head of Service since the beginning of the year and having previously acted in an interim AD role in 2022.

2.4 Workforce

Over the past 18 months, we sought to address social work workforce issues through international recruitment, but this has been much slower than expected, leading to continued dependence on agency workers, especially in frontline teams, where the proportion remains at 40%. We have 12 international social workers in post and 3 more expected in June/July. Delays in Social Work England (SWE) registrations and English language requirements (IELTS) have impacted significantly on our timescales. While the remaining 6 social workers originally recruited remain committed to Bury, we are in discussions with the provider to end the project early and move forward with the 15 practitioners who have or will have joined us by July 2024. We have appointed a new recruitment partner to support a further drive for new workers on a payment by results basis.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF PRACTICE

2.5 Front Door

In March 2024, a review of the phase 2 MASH implementation highlighted issues in relation to staffing, capacity and systems that affected the flow of work and decision making. A Rapid Improvement Plan was developed to address the issues and progress is being made – the system changes referred to in 2.2 above in particular support more effective decision making and vacancies within the team have been addressed and remedied.

In addition, the Practice Director established a MASH Strategic Group and Operational Group to provide clear governance:

- Operational Group – which meets fortnightly, chaired by the Head of Service
- Strategic Group – chaired by the Practice Director, currently meeting 4-6 weekly, moving to quarterly in future.

At the end of 2023, following concerns raised in relation to health capacity and its impact on timely decision making within the MASH/EHASH, NHS GM identified additional capacity, providing an additional 2-days of resource. However, there remains intermittent health presence in MASH while the health practitioner moves from a working from home arrangement. Cover during leave has also been an issue – although the Safeguarding Duty Nurse is available for urgent response (when 2-hour response needed).

2.6 Early Help Offer

Our DfE adviser is undertaking a review of our Early Help offer, the quality of practice and the impact of support provided for children and families. We received feedback in the DfE Review in April from partners that highlighted a need to strengthen the Early Help offer and process. There was a consensus view from partners that Early Help is only accessible as a step down from statutory services, with limited capacity available for referring other families for support from the council's Early Help services.

2.7 Family Safeguarding

The Family Safeguarding model formally launched in October 2024. We now have 5 family safeguarding teams with multi-agency practitioners in place (although not the full complement, as Adult Mental Health practitioners remain an unfilled gap). We have secured continued funding from the DfE to enable Hertfordshire County Council to continue their support in 2024-25, with a diagnostic overview planned for later in the year. Hertfordshire will also be providing support to the teams to reinforce the values and principles of Family Safeguarding. Our DfE Review in April identified that partners understood we were now a Family Safeguarding authority but were not aware of wider impact from the change in the social work approach to working with children and families. Practitioners working outside of the Family Safeguarding teams provided similar feedback, so there is a need to revisit the communications plan which has been affected by available capacity in the council's communications team.

2.8 Adolescent/Edge of Care Offer

There have been substantial delays in creating the team because of difficulties in recruiting into the social work roles within the initial team structure. These difficulties led to a re-think of the approach. Our Service Manager for Family Resources has revised the Edge of Care offer based on a youth worker approach. Progress in confirming job descriptions, job evaluations and structures was delayed by the senior management re-structure, which took precedence, but the new structure is expected to be formally agreed and out for recruitment shortly.

2.9 Fostering

We launched our first Mockingbird constellation in March 2024 (a Mockingbird constellation is a network of foster carers, working together and supporting each other, supported by an experienced foster carer). We are aiming for a second constellation to be live by the end of the year. There has been a 7% increase in foster carer payments on top of 12% last year ensuring that we remain competitive in the foster care market within GM and Lancashire. We have approved fourteen new families this year and lost five, which is positive compared to the pattern across the wider region. Fostering Unfiltered has been operational for 12 months across Greater Manchester. Our Head of Service is meeting with others from GM to review its effectiveness and sits on the steering groups driving the project forwards.

2.10 Support for Care Experienced Young Adults

Following an external review in May 2023, the Corporate Parenting Plan was reviewed and appropriately focused on the areas of development. The absence of the Head of Service between August and October 2023 impeded progress in challenging behaviours and practices within the service, resulting in the deficits in performance and outcomes identified in Ofsted’s monitoring visit in November 2023.

In addition, while Corporate Parenting is a key priority for the Chief Executive and the Corporate Parenting Board now has regular oversight of the Corporate Parenting Plan. Key challenges within the plan remain around housing and employment opportunities for care experienced young people. Although the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation is consistently above the England and similar authority average there is a shortage of housing in Bury and options are not as good as we would wish for our care leavers – a situation worsened by the general pressure on social housing and private sector housing within Bury. External expert consultants are helping to develop a Housing Strategy and an interim offer that better meets the needs of our care experienced young people. Two key issues that need resolving are the effective planning across the council to support transition into homes as an adult and the development of a wider range of housing options to better support the range of needs of our young people, particularly with supported accommodation.

3.0 CONCLUSION

The last 12 months has seen many of the building blocks put in place for better practice and better outcomes for children and families – the launch of Family Safeguarding, the Mockingbird model for foster carers, the review of the MASH, the overhaul and revision of the management information system and tighter oversight of performance and support and guidance for practice. Leadership challenges have impeded the pace of improvement, although the return of a former interim Assistant Director into the permanent Director of Practice role, has supported positive changes in induction, refreshed practice standards and a renewed focus on performance and QA.

The greatest impediment to improvement has been difficulty in recruiting permanent staff. Following the necessary restructure and increase in the social work establishment in the autumn of 2022, Bury has struggled to fill those roles with permanent staff and has been chronically dependent on agency staff, which in turn has led to churn and turnover. Turnover significantly compromises the development of strong, consistent relationships with children and families that support positive change.

Addressing the recruitment and retention of permanent staff must be our number one task through the remainder of the year. New, permanent team managers in parts of the service are having a notable impact, but the overall quality of social work practice remains too variable across the service. The next 6 months will see a relentless focus on delivery of the basics of social work practice and a strengthened emphasis on Team Managers as the gatekeepers and guarantors of the quality and timeliness of work undertaken with children and families.

List of Background Papers:-

Contact Details:-

[Report Author]

Executive Director sign off Date: _____

JET Meeting Date: _____

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Performance & Quality Assurance Update

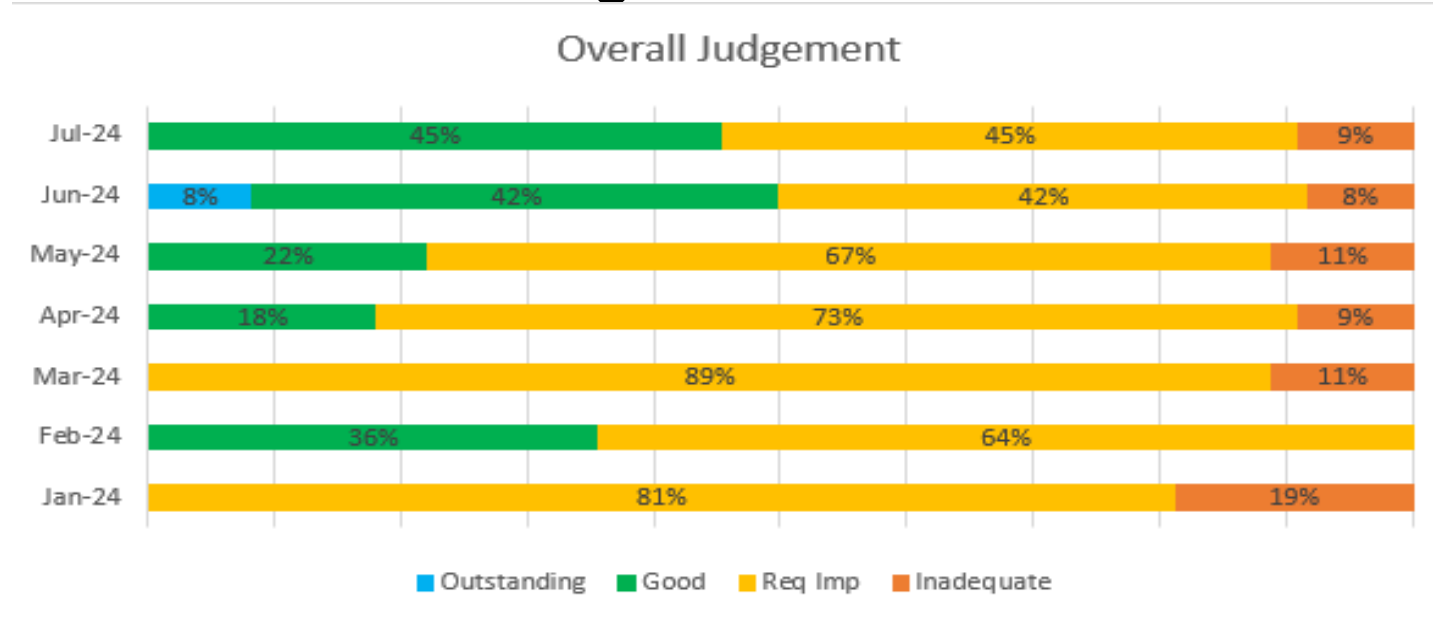
September 2024

Audits: April - July 2024 (year to date)

Audit activity	No. files reviewed
Case file audits – IRT, CST, CwD, Safeguarding, CASS, Leaving Care	45
Foster carers	11

Note: audits are not completed in August & December

Headline Audit Judgements



Analysis of Overall Audit Judgements

The majority of our work is in the requires improvement category (two-thirds to three-quarters of audit judgements) although there has been positive shift in our good or better judgements in June and July. Inadequate judgements have been consistently low over the last 5 months, at 10% (usually representing just 1 audit).



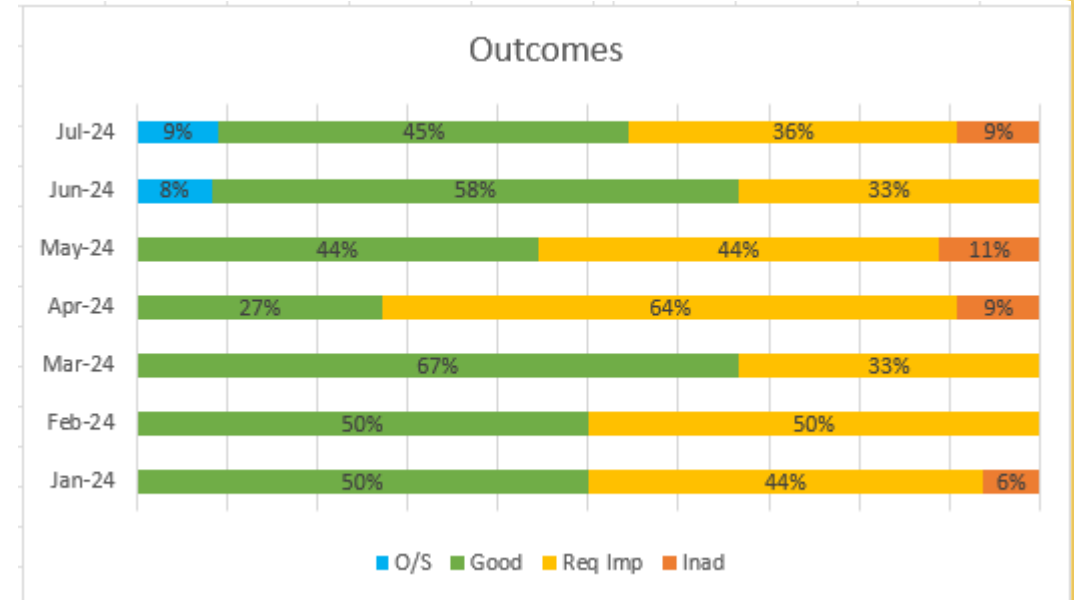
Outcomes for Children

Audit findings

Audit judgements in relation to outcomes for children are typically more positive than the overall quality of practice judgements. The overall practice judgement considers all of the different elements around both quality and compliance.

Practice analysis

We are seeing evidence that positive outcomes for children are being created by our intervention. This is based on assessed risk and need being addressed and improvements being evidenced in terms of the impact for the child. The more positive judgements reflect that positive outcomes have been achieved for a child/young person. We need to continue to improve on the consistency of compliance with practice standards and evidencing our decision making in relation to step down support.



Identification of Harm

Data

The volume of incoming work for Children's Social Care grew through the late spring into the early summer falling back during August. Changes in the operation of the MASH have had a positive impact on the speed of the flow of work for assessment and for child protection activity.

Audit findings

Judgements in relation to child safety have been mixed, ranging from a quarter to half good or better judgements each month, and in 5 of the 7 months of this year around half judged to require improvement. In the last 3 months of audits (44 audits), 2 audits have been judged inadequate and 2 outstanding.

Practice analysis

Harm and child/young people's experiences are being identified and information gathered as part of the MASH screening and in subsequent Child and Family Assessments being completed. Assessments are increasingly being completed within timescales, although more proportionate assessments are needed in some cases to ensure planning commences more quickly. Strategy Meetings and subsequent s.47 enquiries are being completed where significant harm is being identified. There has been an improvement in the timeliness of strategy meetings over the quarter. The quality of the recording of s.47 enquiries needs to fully reflect the assessment undertaken and the decisions made.

Assessment

Data

Timeliness of assessments continues to improve – 83% for the past 3 months - and there are signs of more proportionate and timely assessments being completed.

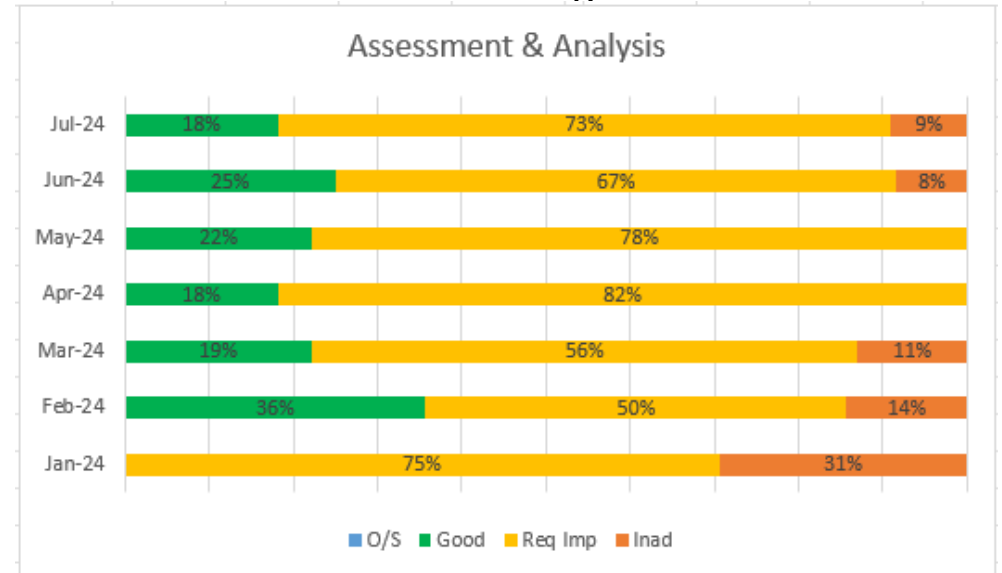
Audit findings

There has been an improvement in the quality of assessments seen through audit, with a reduction in inadequate judgements and a fifth have been judged good consistently since Spring.

Practice analysis

Assessment highlights risk/need and provides evidence to support this. Child/young person's voice is usually present within assessment and to achieve more good audit judgements

we need to better evidence the voice of children is informing plans. Assessments would be further strengthened if there was greater analysis of the capacity of parents/carers to make the changes needed to safely meet the needs of their children. Analysis needs to reflect capacity to change and what outcomes are needed.



Child Protection Enquiries

Data

Longitudinal analysis shows that the number of strategy discussions and child protection enquiries has steadied and settled around the national average and the average for similar local authorities – albeit with a bit of a rise through the early part of summer.

Performance data suggests that the timeliness of key aspects of child protection activity has improved, with the time taken from strategy discussion to initial child protection conferences particularly strong.

Recent analysis of the time from referral to strategy discussion and the involvement of key partners in those strategy discussions also shows improvement – something that the shift to the new MASH model has helped and supported.

- The median time to complete Section 47 enquiries is 13 days, with 79% completed within 15 days.
- 92% of ICPCs in 2024/5 have been held within 15 days of strategy discussion. 95% of all ICPCs relating to new referrals were in time.

Plans and Planning

Data

Performance data suggests strengthening quality of planning and support for children in care, with improving stability in their homes and a higher number leaving care through adoption and other types of permanence.

Data around children in family court proceedings and at the end of proceedings also points to better planning, with fewer children subject to interim care orders placed at home with parents; and no child concluding proceedings with a care order placed at home with parents in the last 12 months. More children are also concluding proceedings without remaining in public care.

There are also signs of lengthening periods of support for children with both CIN and CP plans and the proportion of children entering care having previously been subject to pre-proceedings remains relatively small.

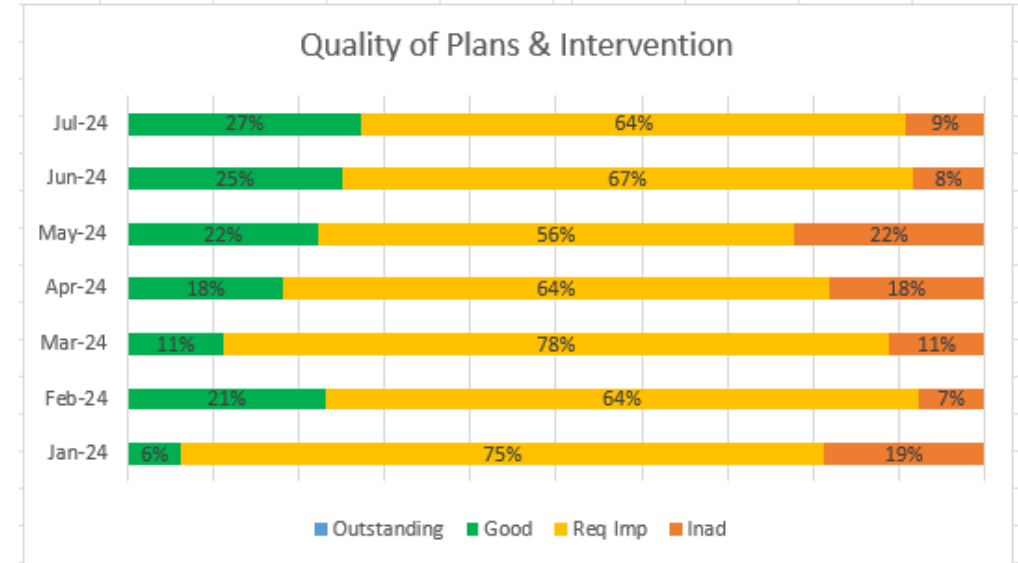
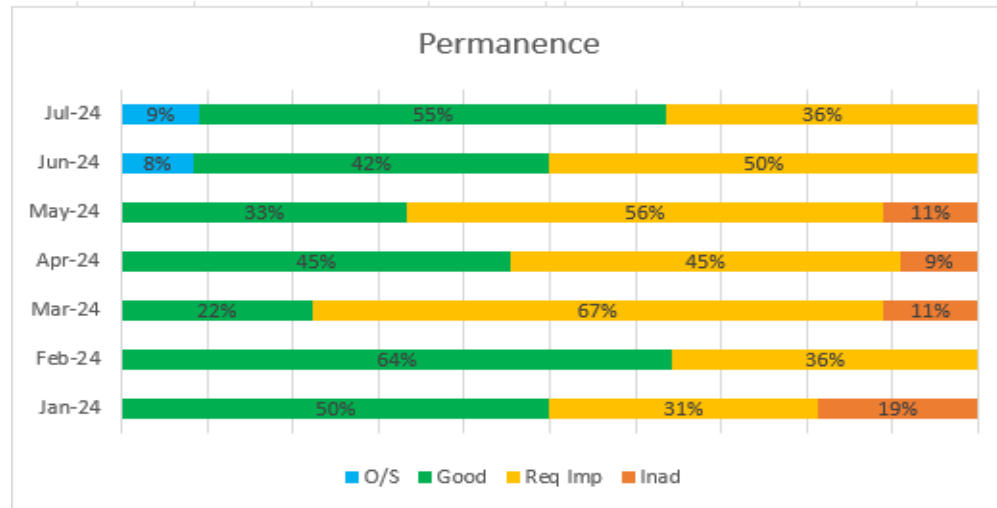
A small number of young children in care are placed in residential homes, rather than family homes– highlighting local and national sufficiency issues.

A small number of children have placement orders, but are waiting for an adoption placement.

While we are seeing good progress for younger care leavers around engagement with education, employment and training, the engagement of older care leavers (19-to-21-year-olds) remains an area for improvement.

Audit findings

There are some signs that quality of plans is improving, with 22% judged good in Q4 compared to 13% in Q3. The shift is from those moving from the requires improvement category to the good, with inadequate judgements accounting for 1 or 2 audits per month since February. Permanence planning is good in half of the Q4 audits (41% requires improvement) but dropped to 41% in quarter 1 (with 50% requires improvement). There have been 2 examples of outstanding permanence planning in the last 2 months.



Practice analysis

We are seeing some positive outcomes being achieved for our children and young people. We do see plans that are not supporting a clear path for children, young people, and families to achieve these positive outcomes. Plans need to set timescales, address assessed risks/need, show what outcomes are desired and set actions that are co-produced and support change.

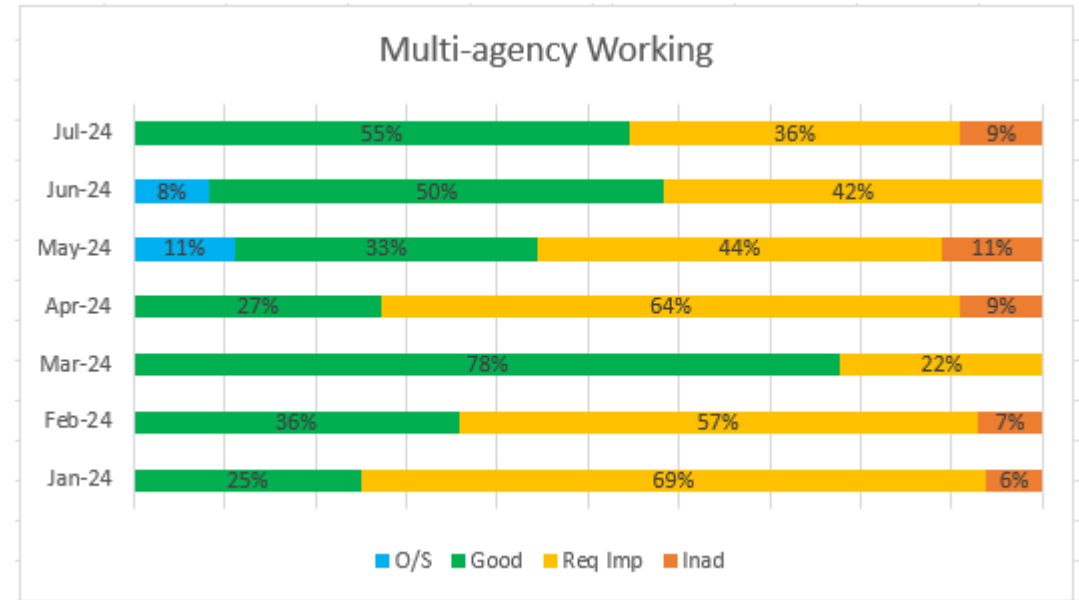
Multi-Agency Working

Audit findings

Multi-agency working was judged 41% good in Q4 and 38% good in Q1 (with 6% outstanding), reflecting an improved picture.

Practice Analysis

There is some good evidence of partnership working to support children and families. The right professionals are attending meetings and contributing to improving outcomes. Where professionals are not able to attend a meeting, we need to see more evidence that updates have been provided and agreed actions are shared. Where multi-agency working works best, the multi-agency support is regularly reviewed in well attended meetings and evidenced in timely assessment and planning, providing a strong team of support around the family. Parents/carers are part of this group and are contributing to planning and change.



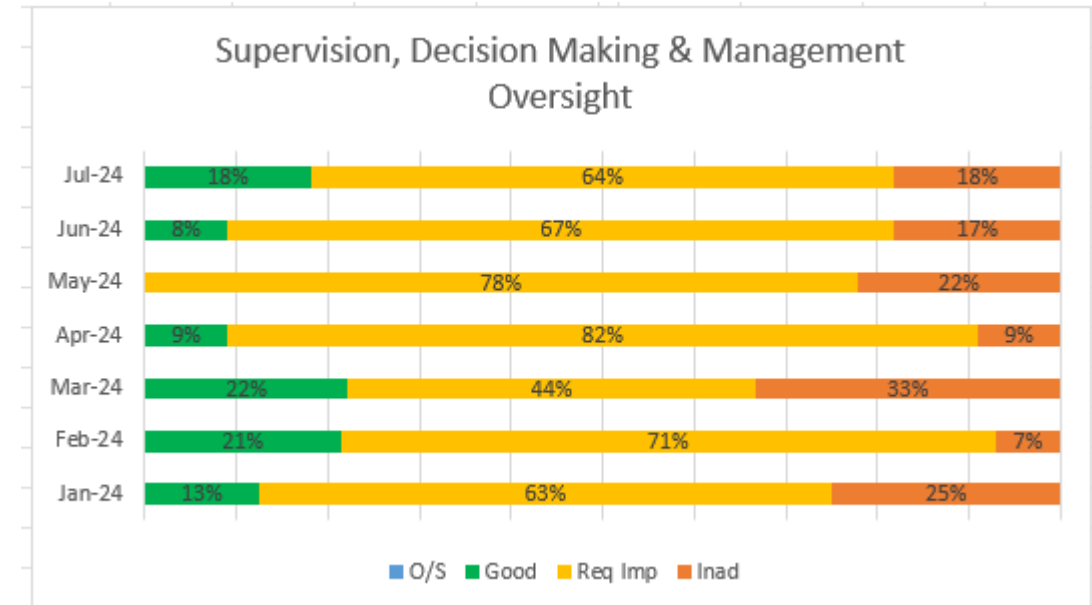
Supervision, Decision Making & Management Oversight

Audit findings

We have seen fewer good judgements in relation to supervision, decision making and management oversight this quarter although inadequate judgements over the same period have been relatively steady reflecting more work in the requires improvement category.

Practice analysis

We are seeing improvements in the timeliness of supervision over the last quarter and managers have a better insight into performance and required practice. To improve the quality of practice we need to see social workers being offered a greater opportunity to reflect on a child/young person's plan and circumstances, review their safety and set actions that make a meaningful change to a child or young person's lived experiences/outcomes.



Workforce – Caseloads, Recruitment & Retention, Consistent Relationships

Data

Caseloads have decreased to just over 19, with significant variation between service areas: CASS at 14, IRT at 18 and Family Safeguarding at 24.5. The caseloads for Family Safeguarding are a particular concern, as the model is predicated on caseloads of 17 children per social worker or less.

There is also variation between newly qualified and experienced workers, with the former being protected, which leads to higher-than-average caseloads for the latter.

The service overall remains too dependent on agency staff (over 40% of frontline professionals), with IRT and Family Safeguarding more dependent than CASS.

External recruitment has been steady: running at 10 to 12 per 6-month period, but this has been offset by 6 to 8 permanent workers in the same teams leaving over the same timeframe. This, combined with the significant increase in the establishment explains the continued dependence on agency workers. International recruitment was slower than expected and has not provided the injection of additional staff initially envisaged.

All of the above poses challenges for relationship-based practice, with less than half of children open to the service for longer than 6 months having the same worker for the past 6 months; and only a quarter open for a year or longer having the same worker for the past year.

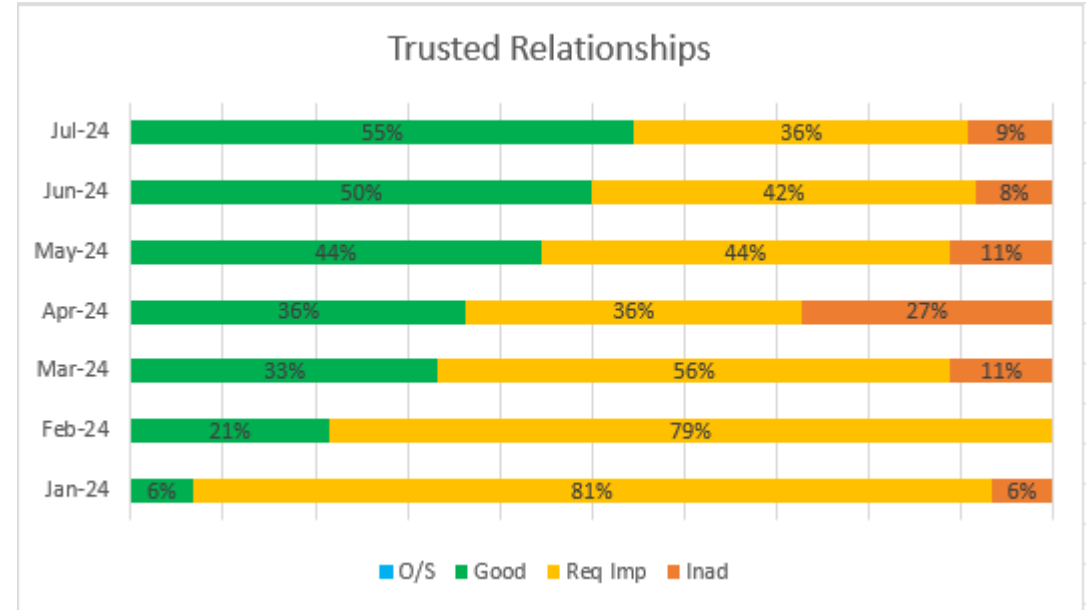
Consistent Relationships

Audit findings

The percentage of good judgements is steadily increasing month on month in relation to trusted relationships. There was a spike in the inadequate audits in April with 27% (3 audits) judged inadequate in this area.

Practice analysis

We are seeing some good evidence that we are building trusted relationships with families. The feedback we receive from contacting parents/carers is evidencing this where change has been made. There is some evidence to suggest that Fathers and wider family are being spoken to more, but this needs to happen routinely, and their views recorded.



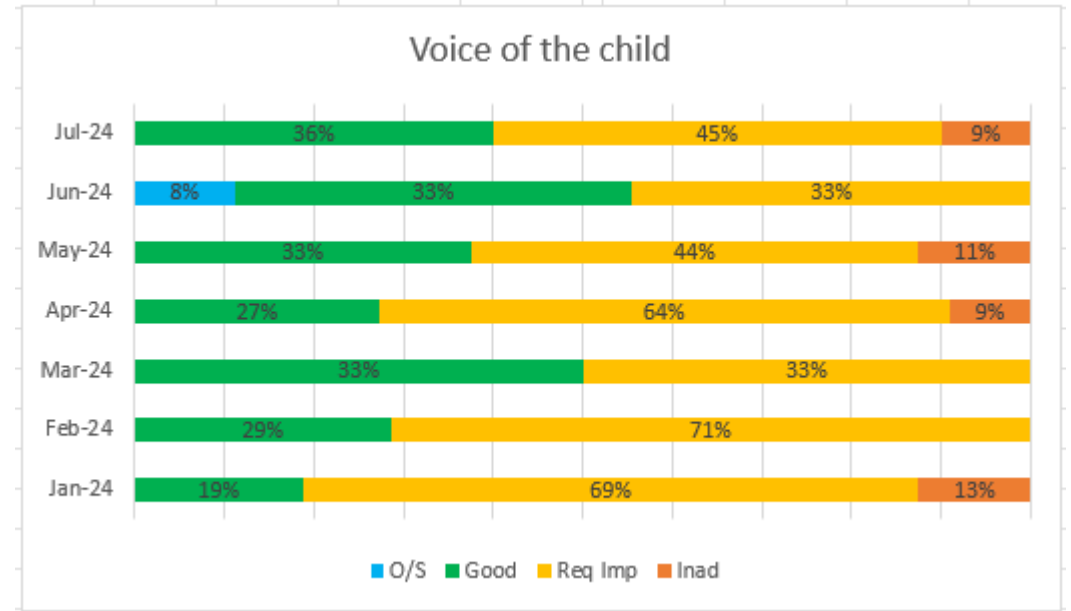
Voice

Audit findings

Voice of the child was judged good in 26% of audits in Q4, rising to 31% in Q1.

Practice analysis

We can evidence that we are building trusting relationships with our children but we are not always showing that we understand children and young people’s lived experiences and this needs to be better evidenced in assessments and plans. We also need to ensure that our safety plans are co-produced with children/young people, as that is currently not consistently clear.



Fostering

- A steady proportion of children in care are in foster homes (69%) and over 72% of those in care long-term living with foster carers have been with the same council-approved foster carer for the past 2 years.
- We have seen growth in the number of new in-house carers over the past year, with a larger than regional average number of new carers recruited after the changes made to the payment & rewards for carers.
- There is an improving picture of practice with some elements of outstanding practice discussed within recent audits.
- Fostering standards are usually being met within the Service. The supervision and support being offered to foster carers is ensuring that carers can meet these standards. Challenge is provided, where support is needed for these standards to be met by foster carers.
- Purposeful supervision of foster carers and supervising social workers is provided with some reflections noted and reviewing of plans.
- The recording of child/young person's voices and lived experiences is variable and is an area to strengthen our practice, to understand how foster homes meet our children/young people's needs.

EDT Dip sampling

Monthly EDT Dip Sampling from the EDT Team Manager for March – May 2024 is showing that:

- EDT action is safeguarding children (and adults) through the interventions being provided.
- There is evidence of good multi-agency working to provide advice and support.
- EDT intervention is generally recorded well but some records would need more detail to evidence work completed more effectively.
- Where there is a need for an AMHP, this support needs to be offered more consistently and the recording of this intervention/assessment to be recorded.
- Timescales for intervention are being met.

Current areas of focus

- Continued, relentless focus on the Bury Commitments with **tighter performance management of the basics**. Expectation that team managers provide a weekly commentary for review by HoS, Director and Exec Director providing a narrative to the weekly performance reports and identifying the actions being taken to address any areas of under-performance. These reports also form the basis of fortnightly Performance & QA SMT meetings (chaired by Director).
- Continue to **monitor the impact of changes in the MASH** (system/pathways) and the introduction of the 4-week duty cycle in IRT, to ensure that we understand the impact of changes made and that changes are being embedded.
- **Pause implementation of the Family Safeguarding workbook** to enable practitioners to focus on the cornerstones of good practice, providing a firm foundation to then re-launch the workbook at a later date.
- Engage **additional capacity in Family Safeguarding** – introducing an additional service manager post to lead on supporting practice development and embedding family safeguarding across the service.
- **External recruitment partner** appointed to work across Adults and Children's with a focus on brand and advertising, creating a buzz about Bury in the medium term.
- Working with Housing colleagues to **tighten up co-ordination and planning of accommodation for care leavers**, with key policy documents now agreed
- Impact on the lived experience of families - we have created an **online questionnaire** to be completed by parents/carers, asking qualitative questions about the impact of our intervention and our relationships with families. This is seeking to increase the volume of feedback and enable us to use this as key indicator of quality of practice and progress. This is now piloted in the Safeguarding Unit post-conference/review.

Feedback from children and families

- Examples where we have been getting it right:
 - Feedback from young person: *When I call him and he answers, and if he is busy he will call me back, I ask him about something and he sorts it out, he gets things done. I feel he listens to me, he gets back to me ..it is better.*
 - Feedback from parent: *'Enjoyed the experience of assessment – just telling you about me, didn't mind at all. Nothing was not right. Just told her what it was. A good assessment – we looked forward to her coming every week. we were always waiting for her to come!'*
 - Feedback from foster carer: *The support we receive from the fostering service is good. We have always had consistent SSW's and we have a good relationship with Laura who is visiting today.*
 - *[The PA] spent a huge amount of time and took Y to various appointments with different housing officers. [PA] had to get medical reports and all sorts of reports to get Y his accommodation. It is not easy getting supported accommodation and [PA] did it.*
 - Feedback from parent: *[The SW} is a really a good social worker, she is the best one I have had to be far. SW has my back all of the time in the Core Group Meetings. Some people (professionals) do not see me at all, they attend and give their views which can be negative towards me. Cassie will address this with professionals and highlight their lack of understanding about my family, she is polite about this but will make it clear it is not fair to judge us. I can talk to SW, I feel at ease with her in situations which are nerve racking, she will always tell me what she has written in reports in preparation for conferences. SW is advocating for my children to be taken off a Child Protection Plan.*
- Examples of where we need to do better:
 - *Better communication. Left text messages and emails but have had no response over the course of weeks. This has been the same for other professionals.*
 - Feedback from parent: *I said in a recent Child in Need Meeting, my children are struggling to build a relationship as there has been numerous changes, there is no consistency... I would like my children to build a bond and trust to speak about things that are bothering them, my children are feeling like what is the point.*
 - Feedback from family: *Meetings were often being arranged but then were changed very last minute, sometimes on the actual day. This makes me feel rubbish and as though we do not matter, it is making us feel like we do know where to turn or get support which is even more difficult when you can't get hold of your Social Worker.*