

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

Date of Meeting: 7 November 2024

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

Also in attendance: Helen Chadwick (Union Representative NAHT) Councillor
L Smith (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and
Young People) and Councillor T Tariq (Deputy Leader and
Cabinet Member, Health and Adult Care) Will Blandamer
(Executive Director Health and Adult Care) Jeanette Richards
(Executive Director Children and Young People) Wendy Young
(Head of Service Children & Young People) Stephen Holden
(Director of Education & Skills) Rachael Stirk (Head of Service
Children and Young People) Robert Arrowsmith (Head of
Strategy, Assurance and Reform)

Public Attendance: No members of the public were present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: Linda Evans (Director of Social Care and Early Help)
Areeba Malik (Children's Representative)

31 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies are noted above.

32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declaration of interest was received from Councillor Rahimov, relating to the SEND update and the School results this being due to being employed by Acacium Group.

33 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 17th September 2024 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

34 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No questions were received in advance of the meeting.

35 MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were no member questions.

36 SEND UPDATE

Councillor Lucy Smith and Wendy Young provided an overview of the SEND Report, which includes six priority areas and three areas for development. The focus for the committee was on strategy, identification, and access to health services and support. The aim is to reproduce a local area SEND strategy with input from parents, carers, and young people. Workshops and partnership reviews are planned to develop a draft strategy by January 2024. A new SEND communication strategy has been launched, with a positive response to the recruitment for a SEND communication officer.

The quality assurance of EHCPs was discussed, including the development of a draft quality assurance protocol. The use of a digital tool called Fingers 360 was mentioned, which helps create a baseline around the quality of EHCPs. The importance of identifying and assessing children's needs to ensure they receive the right support at the right time was emphasized. The local authority is committed to the inclusion of all children with additional needs and has developed a graduated support approach.

An inclusion support system has been set up where schools can access support through an email inbox, guaranteeing contact from the inclusion and outreach services within the next working day. This system aims to support children at risk of permanent exclusion and those presenting risk-taking behaviours.

Will Blandamer provided an overview of the NHS partnership's efforts to improve SEND arrangements. Progress has been made in reducing waiting times for various services, including speech and language therapy and community paediatrics. The establishment of CAMHS services for 16-18-year-olds was highlighted as a significant improvement. Working with partners at Bury together and Community commissioning group.

Councillor McBriar asked about the completion rates of EHCPs. Wendy Young responded that the goal is to improve the completion rate significantly from the current 21%. Councillor Boles inquired about the impact of EHCPs on educational outcomes. Wendy Young explained that EHCPs are crucial for accurately reflecting the special educational needs of children and ensuring they receive appropriate support.

The importance of annual reviews for EHCPs was discussed, with a focus on ensuring that plans accurately reflect children's needs and progress. The local authority is responsible for ensuring that annual reviews take place and that all relevant partners are notified. Efforts are being made to improve the monitoring and reporting mechanisms for annual reviews.

Councillor Farooq inquired if interpreters could be provided for people who can't understand. Jeanette Richards assured that efforts are being made to ensure all community members can access services, including providing interpreters.

Efforts to improve recruitment and retention in children's services were discussed, along with actions to ensure better representation within SIAB. Ongoing efforts to enhance service delivery and performance management were highlighted, and there was a focus on improving educational outcomes and supporting schools.

It was agreed that:

- The report be noted
- Give an update to the committee of how many annual reviews
- Recommendation to the SIAB board to have a more diverse membership

37 IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Councillor Lucy Smith provided an overview of the improvement plan, supported by Jeanette Richards, who emphasized that due to a recent Ofsted visit, certain papers could not be made public. The improvement plan update included a part verbal update and references to resources in the agenda pack.

The meeting included a discussion on complex safeguarding, focusing on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). The importance of multi-agency collaboration and the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) were highlighted. The recent Ofsted monitoring visit, which took place on October 31 and November 1, was discussed, noting that it was the sixth and final visit before a full inspection.

The improvement journey since the ILACS inspection at the end of 2021 was reviewed. The council has been in an improvement cycle with regular monitoring visits. The recent visit focused on the effectiveness of the front door arrangements, including the initial response team, emergency duty team, and management of allegations against professionals.

Significant improvement activities were noted, including the establishment of a permanent and stable leadership team across social care and early help. Key appointments, such as the Director of Social Care and Early Help, were highlighted. The council has increased stability across team manager groups and invested in additional social work teams to reduce caseloads and support positive change.

The council's unrelenting focus on the recruitment of social workers was discussed. Challenges in recruitment remain, but efforts include engaging a recruitment partner, launching a recruitment campaign, and offering incentives for successful referrals. The council has also developed a strong apprenticeship program and continues to extend it.

The feedback from the recent Ofsted monitoring visit was overwhelmingly positive. Inspectors noted significant progress since the 2021 inspection, with improvements in the use of thresholds, timely decision-making, and the quality of social work practice. The importance of strong corporate support, including financial investment and IT support, was emphasized.

The council's quality assurance framework was discussed, highlighting the causal link between quality assurance activities and improved performance. The need for consistent feedback from families and children within the audit process was noted. The council is committed to ongoing improvement and expects a full inspection within four to six months.

Councillor Smith asked about the importance of timely annual reviews for EHCPs and whether the council is on track to meet the December 2024 deadline for accurate

monitoring and reporting. Jeanette Richards explained the importance of annual reviews in ensuring that EHCPs accurately reflect children's needs and progress. Efforts are being made to improve the monitoring and reporting mechanisms, and the council is working hard to meet the deadline.

There were discussions around complex safeguarding and how to keep the most vulnerable children safe. Considering strong conversations between our children, practitioners within our complex safeguarding team and police officers with a view to disruption. Jeanette informed the committee that there has been regular communications with the divisional commander at the police since she joined.

The meeting covered various aspects of the improvement plan, including complex safeguarding, workforce and performance management, recruitment and retention, and feedback from the recent Ofsted monitoring visit. The council is committed to ongoing improvement and ensuring that children receive the right help at the right time.

It was Agreed that:

- The report be noted
- Divisional Commander to attend the committee to provide an update

38 SCHOOL RESULTS UPDATE

Councillor Lucy Smith provided an overview of the school results and attainment report, supported by Stephen Holden. There was a discussion about the delay in some national results and the challenges in making accurate comparisons. The overall performance of schools was reviewed, noting that 78% of schools are rated good or better.

In early years, 65% of children achieved a good level of development, which is consistent with the previous year but 3% below the national average. The impact of COVID-19 on these results was acknowledged. For Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, the combined reading, writing, and maths attainment was 63%, which is 5% higher than the previous year but still 1% behind the national average.

For Key Stage 4, the good pass rate in English and Maths (5+) was 42%, which is 3% above the previous year's national average. The standard pass rate (4+) was 63%, 2% below the previous year's national average. The Attainment 8 score was 44.4, slightly below the previous year's result.

The performance of different groups of children was discussed, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those eligible for free school meals. The data showed strong performance for children with SEND and those eligible for free school meals, with improvements noted in their attainment.

Stephen Holden highlighted the support provided to schools, including 154 packages of support available to both maintained schools and academies. These packages are designed to address specific needs identified through data analysis and quality effectiveness partners. The importance of maintaining strong relationships with multi-

academy trusts and the Department for Education (DfE) was emphasized to ensure accountability and support for school improvement.

Councillor Gold asked about the performance of children with English as an additional language (EAL) and the impact of EHCPs on attainment. Stephen Holden explained that the performance of EAL students can vary widely and that EHCPs are crucial for accurately reflecting the needs of children and ensuring they receive appropriate support.

Councillor Berry discussed the importance of involving parents and grandparents in children's education, particularly in the early years. Strategies to engage parents and support early childhood development were highlighted, including the availability of books and resources through family hubs and early years settings.

Councillor Fitzgerald asked about the impact of parental involvement on children's development. Councillor Smith and Stephen Holden emphasized the importance of early engagement and the role of health partners in supporting children's development during the first 1,000 days of life.

The meeting covered various aspects of school results and attainment, including early years development, key stage performance, support for schools, and the importance of parental involvement. The council is committed to ongoing improvement and ensuring that all children receive the support they need to succeed.

It was agreed that:

- The report be noted

39 CHANGING SCHOOL LANDSCAPE

Councillor Lucy Smith presented the report on the changing school landscape, supported by Rachael Stirk. The report provided an update on the significant shift towards multi-academy trusts (MATs). By the end of the last academic year, over 55% of state-funded schools were working within MATs, with 16 conversions occurring in the last year alone. Several schools are in various stages of conversion, with more expected to convert early in the next calendar year.

Recent changes in government policy have affected the process of school conversions. Schools identified through Ofsted as requiring special measures or successive improvements are no longer automatically issued with a directive Academy order. This change has influenced how the council and its partners work with schools across the system.

The report highlighted several key points and issues, including the measures taken to influence the evolving trust landscape and the considerations needed to support schools during their conversion process. The conversion process involves significant work across various council disciplines, including HR, finance, pensions, property, and legal teams.

The increased autonomy of schools within trusts necessitates a review of strategic governance. The council aims to ensure that all schools and trusts contribute positively

to the local community. The Strategic Education Board, established in 2017, brings together key stakeholders to develop a collective vision and strategic direction for the school system.

Councillor Boles asked whether the council sees schools leaving the local authority to join a trust as a negative reflection. The response highlighted that the decision to convert is ultimately made by the governing body, and the council's role is to present the facts and support schools in making informed decisions.

Councillor Gareth Staples-Jones discussed the fees charged by the local authority for managing academy conversions and why they have increased from £3,500 in 2018 to £8,000. This increase reflects a better understanding of the full costs involved in the conversion process.

The future direction of school conversions and the role of the local authority in holding schools accountable were discussed. The council aims to maintain strong relationships with schools and trusts to ensure accountability and support for school improvement.

Councillor Berry asked about the potential impact of changes in private school enrolment on state schools. The response noted that while there may be shifts in enrolment patterns, the council is prepared to manage these changes and support all schools in the community.

The meeting covered various aspects of the changing school landscape, including the shift towards multi-academy trusts, the impact of government policy changes, strategic governance, and the fees associated with academy conversions. The council is committed to supporting schools through the conversion process and ensuring that all schools contribute positively to the local community.

It was agreed that:

- The report be noted

40 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR C BOLES
Chair

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