

SCRUTINY - 20TH JANUARY 2022 – Member Questions

Q1. MEMBER – Councillor Russel Bernstein

In the Inspection of Children's Services report (Item 6) could Councillor Tariq confirm when a first draft of the Improvement Plan (paragraph 7.1) will be available for all Elected Members to comment on?

RESPONSE – The initial plan is currently in draft and has been shared with the Cabinet.

However, it is likely that following consultation with the DfE advisor that it may be amended to include reference to agreed support via sector led improvement partners as the DfE are keen to support Bury by commissioning sector led improvement.

The LA has been afforded some time to establish an improvement plan, this reflects the need to establish the right plan.

Ofsted have requested that the plan is sent to them for review by the 30th of March, when they will offer a view as to the focus and quality of the plan, progress of the plan will subsequently be continually reviewed by the Improvement Board, where there will be attendance from partners, elected members, cross party membership and the DfE.

The Board will meet month and is independently chaired by Linda Clegg LGA Improvement Lead.

The effectiveness of the plan in driving forward on improvement and the impact upon children and families will be reviewed and considered by Ofsted via monitoring visits which will result in letters and with the exception of the first visit the letters will be in the public domain.

The 6-month formal reviews undertaken by the DfE will also result in reports in the public domain.

Scrutiny and any other council meetings could agenda Improvement updates on progress.

Q2. MEMBER – Cllr. Jackie Harris

The report into children's services refers to a focus being on recruitment and retention, learning and development and staff wellbeing.

Can the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills provide more detail to the timelines on when these priorities will be introduced and how they will differ to the policies at present?

RESPONSE – The workforce strategy and recruitment and retention strategy had been reviewed and refreshed; this will be an evolving process. A learning and development strategy and learning offer has been developed and signed off this was the work of a new workforce development board for children's services has been implemented – All of this was completed in October 2021 since then following the inspection further work has been undertaken, A more stable workforce with lower caseloads will be a crucial factor in improving the support we provide. This is challenge is in no way unique to Bury and it is something we will be working on as a key priority together with colleagues in HR, building on work already undertaken over recent weeks, to help Bury stand out as an **employer of choice for potential social work recruits**.

We have undertaken Benchmarking data looking across Greater Manchester suggests that our level of base pay is not out of step with other Councils In order to be successful our work in this area will need to take account of our wider approach to reward as well as creating the environment and conditions where social workers can flourish through our approach to development, wellbeing and workforce engagement, flexible working for example.

A number of measures have already been agreed as initial steps in our strategy here including:

- The introduction of two managed services to work within the court team and the initial response team to support reduced caseloads and assist in retention – this has reduced caseloads
- Agreement to an initial additional capacity investment of five new social workers
- Agreement to cover the costs of social workers' professional fees each year
- Agreement to pay a retention bonus after year 1 and Year 2 of £1000 to encourage retention and develop skill in the workforce.
- A simplified approach to assist in the conversion of agency social care staff to permanent employees where appropriate.

In addition to this we are working on further measures which will support a targeted recruitment campaign to launch later this month. This will include new recruitment media and be aided by a retention payment to support both candidate attraction and the retention of those we recruit.

Bury has had positive experiences of recruiting newly qualified social workers and supporting our own workforce to qualify through social work apprentices. Attracting and retaining more experienced social workers will be a key focus and, to support this, we will be undertaking work to **strengthen our learning and development offer** and also improving the mechanisms we have in place around employee voice, with a new board bringing together representatives of front-line social workers from across teams so we can properly understand the on-the-ground experience of our staff and respond to any practical issues and challenges being faced, but this will also enable staff to co-produce and influence our improvement journey.

The learning offer is refreshed every 3 months and offers a blended style of learning for staff including those specialist areas that are requirements for the role of social worker to satisfy their registration requirements. A new way of delivering learning sessions has commenced with a preferred model of small group learning aligned to practice areas and

findings from quality assurance activity – initial feedback from staff is positive.

Supervision - Regular and effective supervision is the cornerstone of good social work practice and staff support and retention – we have begun to report on the frequency of supervision, there has been some audit activity undertaken, more is planned to understand the quality and impact of the supervision. The practice standard is monthly supervision. All of this work will be the function of the Social Work Academy, governance of the Academy will be jointly shared between Childrens Services and HR.

A small working group overseen by the workforce board has been set up to look at recruitment and retention. A recruitment campaign was launched over Christmas. We have refreshed the application form, so it is much easier to complete and we have also worked on better marketing and strengthened the interview process.

We have interviews for social workers week of 24th January.

A further advert will go out which will include a marketing video and explanation of the retention payments for experienced social workers joining the council. We have a programme of recruitment through the year as we will continue to roll this out every other month
I am confident we will start to see some stability in the workforce as we progress this year.

3. MEMBER – Cllr. Nick Jones
<p>The report following the inspection into Children's Services refers to the independent scrutiny of multi-agency arrangements for children's safeguarding.</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills how the independent scrutiny will be delivered and when this will be fully developed to improve children's safeguarding in the borough.</p>
<p>RESPONSE –. The partnership has agreed that we need to appoint an independent scrutineer to both oversee provide challenge across the Bury Integrated Safeguarding Partnership, particularly the effectiveness of services in responding to safeguarding concerns, to this end the Job description has been agreed by the Bury Integrated Safeguarding Partnership Board.</p> <p>The post is due to be advertised.</p> <p>The Improvement Board is independently chaired by Linda Clegg LGA North West improvement lead, who will provide challenge and scrutiny in relation to the progress of improvement in terms of outcomes for children and families. Ofsted will evaluate progress by undertaking 5 or 6 monitoring visits over the 3-year period before full inspection.</p> <p>The DfE will provide 6-month review reports.</p>

Q4. MEMBER – Cllr. Jack Rydeheard

The report 'Virtual Schools Headteacher's Annual Report' makes reference that 'clear priorities have been identified to take the work of the Virtual School forward.

Can the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills outline what these priorities are including the number of FTEs expected to be recruited?

RESPONSE – The priorities for the Virtual School for 2021 – 22 are set out below. We plan to recruit two FTE posts initially: a PEP Officer and a SEND Caseworker. Further posts will be subject to funding.

Priorities:

Explore models to develop and expand the Virtual School team to increase our capacity and improve the service we can offer to our young people.

- Commissioning of Speech and Language Therapist and Educational Psychologist services to support understanding and practice in meeting the individual and educational needs of children in care.
- Through partnership working, reduce numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training and improve participation rates for Post-16.
- Support continued development of trauma-based practice, leading to better understanding of the needs of children in care.
- Further strengthen partnership working across Education, Children's Social Care and partners to ensure that the educational needs of children in care are understood and addressed.
- Work with Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure appropriate educational challenge and support is in place.

- Further develop the training offer to schools, carers and social workers, utilising the skills and expertise of professionals through commissioned services, key partners and the Virtual School Team.
- Establish a monthly multi-agency meeting to review cases that are a cause for concern, using education data e.g., attendance and exclusions, to target support and resources appropriately.
- Develop information about Bury Virtual School, both web-based and as documents, to ensure that partners and our young people have accessible information available to all.
- Review and continue to improve the Personal Education Plan (PEP) documents and ensure that we are able to use them to run reports and efficiently manipulate data to show the progress of the cohort.
- Develop an action plan to implement the extension to role of the Virtual School to oversee the education of all children with a social worker.
- Work with colleagues in Children's Social Care to set aspirational targets for attendance within PEPs.
- For those who are persistently absent, create attendance action plans in conjunction with the Education Welfare Service, and secure appropriate intervention.
- Integration of the PEP and Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) annual review processes.
- Ensure that PEPs focus on the voice of the young person and that their wishes and feelings are known.
- Work closely with the Children in Care Council to ensure effective co-production with our young people.
- Embed the Bury VS Alternative Provision Policy and ensure that all children in care who access AP are reviewed every three weeks as a minimum, work towards clear targets and that there is a plan for reintegration into appropriate school provision.

Q5. MEMBER – Cllr. Bob Caserta:

The cabinet report the Children's Services inspection makes reference to the Council establishing a 'Social Work Academy'.

Can the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills explain what he envisages this will look like as well as the timelines from initial idea to full implementation?

Response -

Some of the initial ideas have been implemented, via our revised workforce strategy, which is further developed with a focus upon recruitment retention, learning and development and wellbeing.

The establishment of an Academy is aspirational and is a feature of Authorities judged to be good or outstanding. The timelines of the various strands of the offer will be set out fully in the Inspection Action Plan, as we co-produce this with staff, via engagement through the voice of the workforce board, strengthen links with the Greater Manchester Teaching Partnership and the Universities.

The Academy, will be jointly owned by Childrens Services and HR within the Corporate Core,

The Academy in essence sets out our promise to staff by articulating that which social care professionals can expect from Bury in terms of support around health and wellbeing, learning and development and career pathways including management and leadership programmes and will fully considers and supports all routes into social work, via apprenticeships, Frontline, or via facilitating student placements., It will be key to attracting staff to Bury.