

Minutes of: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 23 March 2022

Present: Councillor S Wright (in the Chair)
Councillors C Boles, S Butler, P Cropper, J Lancaster,
L McBriar, T Pilkington, D Quinn, T Tariq and M Whitby

Also in attendance: Jacqui Dennis – Director of Law and Democratic Services,
Jeanette Richards – Executive Director of Children and Young
People, Kelly Barnett – Democratic Services Officer.

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

Apologies for Absence: Georgia Murphy – Youth Cabinet Chair

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence are noted above.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Lancaster declared a personal interest as she is a member of Bury2gether.

Councillor Wright declared a personal interest as his wife works with SEN Children in a local school.

Councillor Boles declared a personal interest as he works at a school, which also has a site in Bury.

3 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

4 MEMBER QUESTION

There were no member questions.

5 DRAFT BURY CHILDREN SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Before the improvement plan was presented to the Committee, members raised issues around the acronyms used within the plan and questioned the targeted audience. Jeanette Richards explained that the language in the improvement plan was deliberate, as the plan is aimed at the internal workforce, Ofsted and the DfE advisor and case officer. Jeanette Richards agreed to provide an appendix with the plan explaining the abbreviations and acronyms used.

Councillor Tariq presented the improvement plan to the Committee. It was explained that the improvement journey and plan will continually be evolving, and the tight timescales around creating the plan were highlighted. The Council has an obligation to submit the improvement plan to Ofsted before the end of March 2022. It was explained that the plan aims to cover and deal with some of the significant challenges that have been highlighted by Ofsted from the

ILAC inspection that took place in Autumn 2021. Councillor Tariq highlighted specific areas of the plan that included recruitment and retention of social workers, overreliance of agency workers, leadership and management, methods of working, reducing caseloads and multiagency engagement.

Jeanette Richards highlighted that improvement plan is not just about satisfying the ILAC framework but accepting that the community deserves a good quality Children's Services. In the construction of the improvement plan, senior leaders have collaborated with the young people from the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and their voices have impacted the content of the plan. There is a Workforce Board to ensure that the voice of the workforce is being heard, and there will be a Coproduction Group created, who will consult on and influence the process of the improvement plan going forward. Jeanette Richards explained that the plan sets out the aspirations, principles and values and speaks to how Children's Services are going to engage with the community, recognising likely future government agendas, following the Independent Review of Social Care. In order to drive the improvement plan, the conditions for good practice were explained which included strengthening the effectiveness of multiagency governance, establishing a stable and effective leadership and management team, building a skilled, confident and experienced workforce and improving performance management. There will be a lot of external scrutiny, including fortnightly meetings with the DfE, quarterly monitor visits and audit activity.

Members of the committee were invited to ask questions.

In response to Councillor Lancaster's question around agile working within Children's Services, Councillor Tariq explained that during the pandemic the Council moved to remote working. After the Ofsted inspection, it was agreed that 100% remote working for Children's Services staff was not the best way to deliver practice to children and families and a 60/40% split of working from the office and working remotely was agreed. It was explained that the 60/40% split may not be an exact split, but this would be led by team managers to ensure that team members are supported, and that staff are contributing to improving practice. There are weekly drop-in surgeries for social workers at Knowsley Place and staff members have regular supervisions with team managers. Across the workforce, agile working will differ across different teams and is subject to team managers' approval. Access to parking from specific council buildings has been highlighted as an issue for social work teams, working from the office. Councillor Tariq explained that the issues around car parking will be resolved.

In response to members' questions around measuring success and outcomes of the plan, Jeanette Richards explained that monitoring visits are a specific framework which will monitor progress and will be very detailed and focus on component parts of the framework. Measuring success around specific issues were highlighted, such as the quality of court reports, court proceedings and child protection plans.

Jeanette Richards explained that the DfE advisor will report back to the DfE every 6 weeks on the progress made. The DfE advisor will create a 6 monthly report which will directly be fed into the minister, if there are any concerns the DfE advisor can make recommendations to an alternative delivery model in Bury.

Councillor Tariq explained he is confident that the correct processes and procedures are in place to deliver the plan. Councillor Tariq explained that success will be measured by the Improvement Board, which is a significant stakeholder forum that is Chaired by Linda Clegg. There are additional members of the DfE who are present at the meeting who are able to provide challenge around the progress of the improvement journey. Councillor Tariq feels that Bury now has the key foundations to help us improve and hopes that this comes to fruition at the next monitoring visit.

Councillor Pilkington suggested that the Ofsted improvement work should be a standing item for the committee going forward.

In response to Councillor Pilkington's question around having a public version of this report, Jeanette Richards explained that there will be a planned communication strategy, as it is important for people in the community to understand our priorities and present this information to them. There will be a Coproduction Group for the community to inform and influence practice improvement. Councillor Tariq explained that local schools will be a key part of the communication strategy and highlighted the importance of working in co-production with schools.

In response to Councillor Pilkington's question around there being no mention of neurodiversity in the plan, Jeanette Richards agreed to include this within the plan.

In response to Councillor McBriar's question around timescales and establishing improvement KPIs before April 2022, Jeanette Richards explained that a suite of KPIs had been established and shared at the Improvement Board yesterday, therefore the rag rating needed to be updated in the plan.

In response to Councillor McBriar's question around the issues identified that may impact housing for care leavers, Jeanette Richards explained that this is an issue with sufficiency of appropriate accommodation. A meeting was established with colleagues in housing and there is a need to build new provisions and priority afforded to Care Leavers. Jeanette Richards agreed to bring a report back to the committee around the housing issues for care leavers.

In response to members' questions around the improvement plan being consulted on with SEND parents, Bury2gether and Councillors, Jeanette Richards explained that the plan hadn't been shared with community members at this stage, the plan will not be shared further until it has been signed off by Ofsted. The rationale for not sharing the improvement plan, at this stage, was explained. The plan has been consulted on with Councillors through the scrutiny committee and through the Improvement Board. Councillor Tariq highlighted that the communication strategy with wider partners and the community is important.

Helen Chadwick suggested that the rag rating be amended around each action on the plan so the committee can see the small changes that have been made.

In response to Councillor Boles question around the recruitment campaign that started in January, Jeanette Richards explained that there was a one-off cost around the video for the campaign. Since the recruitment campaign was launched in January, there have been 5 ASYE social workers and 1 experienced practitioner recruited. Jeanette Richards explained that Bury needs to consider alternative additional features that can attract candidates, such as car parking. The focus of the next Improvement Board is around the recruitment and retention of staff, growing apprenticeship offers and growing the student cohort. Councillor Tariq explained that it is very important to compete against other Local Authorities in terms of recruitment.

In response to Councillor Butler question around academy schools, Jeanette Richards explained that Bury Council has good relationships with academy schools and Multi Academy Trusts (MATs). Jeanette Richards will be talking to headteachers tomorrow at the headteachers conference about a range of issues including the improvement plan, priorities within children's social care and establishing stronger systems. Councillor Tariq explained that the Local Authority has good connections with all schools.

In response to Councillor Wright's question around the proportion of Children's Services staff that are agency workers, Jeanette Richards explained 43% are agency workers, these figures

are inflated as there are three managed social work teams that were commissioned to reduce caseloads.

Councillor Wright asked members to vote that the final plan is to be sent to all councillors, that the improvement plan, and a 'walk through social services' is a standing item on the agenda.

It was agreed:

1. An appendix explaining the abbreviations and acronyms used within the Improvement Plan to be created.
2. The Ofsted improvement work to be a standing item on the agenda for the Committee going forward.
3. Neurodiversity to be included within the Improvement Plan.
4. A report around the housing issues for care leavers to be brought to a future committee.
5. To look at amending the RAG rating to reflect each action in the Improvement Plan.
6. Jeanette Richards to provide the cost of the recruitment campaign video.
7. Once approved, the Improvement Plan to be sent to all councillors.
8. A 'walk through social services' to be a standing item on the agenda.

6 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business raised at the meeting.

COUNCILLOR S WRIGHT
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 5.30 pm and ended at 6.45 pm)