

Minutes of: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 15 June 2023

Present: Councillor C Boles (in the Chair)
Councillors D Berry, A Booth, U Farooq, E FitzGerald, N Frith,
L McBriar, G McGill, J Rydeheard, L Ryder, M Whitby, H
Chadwick and D Lewis

Also in attendance: Jeanette Richards, Executive Director Children and Young
People, Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member Children and Young
People, Jacqui Dennis, Director of Law and Democratic
Services, Julie Gallagher, Head of Democratic Services, Chloe
Ashworth, Democratic Services

Public Attendance: 15 members of the public were present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor G Staples-Jones

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies are noted above.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES

Helen Chadwick, Union Representative asked for an amendment to point 9 SEND Report to split her two points on the visit to the Social Care team and the extension of Millwood Primary School.

Following the amendment, it was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 07th March 2023 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The following questions were received in advance of the meeting:

Questioner	Topic	Responding
Sarah Wilson	Transition period for a child with SEND	Cllr Smith
Jane Johnston	SENDIST Tribunal hearings	Cllr Smith
Sarah Garbett	Complaints	Cllr Smith
Gemma Hall	EHC team	Cllr Smith
Kiran Hampson	Alternative education following a failed placement	Cllr Smith
Jo Kinloch	EHC team and the Disability Social Worker team	Cllr Smith

Kiera Delaney	home to school transport	Cllr Smith
Catherine White	reduced timetables and flexi schooling	Cllr Smith
Melissa Platt	suitable placements	Cllr Smith
Rebecca McCauley	Social care review	Cllr Smith
Stacey Wilde	Suitable or appropriate full time education	Cllr Smith
Aislinn Marek	EOTAS (Education Other Than At School) Policy	Cllr Smith
Martyn West	staff to manage SEND children caseloads	Cllr Smith
Paul Williams	autism school in Bury	Cllr Smith
Philip Clarence	shared equity of the SEND budget	Cllr Smith
Mrs Khan	Children and Young People Scrutiny Questions	Cllr Smith
David McGovern	Nursery provision and EHC Plans.	Cllr Smith
Sara Slawycz	Training for members of the SEN team	Cllr Smith
Laura Dale	EHCPs	Cllr Smith
Ms Taylor	EBSA policy	Cllr Smith
Donnah Buchanan	service level agreements in place with regards to communication from EHC team	Cllr Smith
Mr M Hampson	social care review	Cllr Smith

5 MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were no member questions.

6 UPDATE ON CABINET RESPONSE - FOSTER CARERS

Councillor Boles, Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee provided an update on the Foster Carers recommendation which went to Cabinet on 15th March 2023.

At Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 24th November, the following recommendation was put forward and agreed:

Recommendation to Cabinet that when they receive a report on Foster Carer financial support, they give consideration to whether any support should be back dated.

The response from Cabinet was that to backdate the fee would be at a cost £440,000 and within the context of an already overspent service this request was rejected.

Members were informed that the Foster Parents and Carers had been informed of this response from Cabinet.

Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People advised the Committee that the revised offer was co-produced with Foster Carers and Parents and the Foster Carers Forum was advised of the final sign off report. Members of the Forum requested that Bury Council consider the offer to back-pay and they

were disappointed with the decision not to backdate but were understanding of the financial pressures the Council are under. Members were advised that throughout different points in the year the Council will consider the impact of any cost of living crisis on Foster Carers and Parents support has been provided previously through the Housing Support Fund which will be kept under review.

At the last Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee it was asked if we are on track to deliver our projected targets around increased recruitment of Foster Carers and we are on track. Since April 2023 we have approved four fostering households with five in assessment.

It was agreed:

1. To note the response from Cabinet and the context in which the decision was made.
2. To note the response from Foster Carers on the decision

7 CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESTRUCTURE

Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People provided an update on the Children's Services Restructure.

Following the recent Ofsted inspection of Children's Services in November 2021 the Council's result and Improvement Plan identified a number of key priorities including important changes to teams and structures across Social Care and Safeguarding functions and including the need to build capacity. It is recognised to review both Education and Early Help functions also.

In December 2022 Bury's Cabinet received a report setting out the proposed changes to the structures in respect of Education and Early Help which gave approval to formally consult with the staff. The second phase of the transformation journey will focus on delivering the Council's statutory Education functions including alignment of a number of functions under a clear management structure and a focus on accountability for the delivery. In addition supporting the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and those not in School.

The core duties of the department going forward will be

- School Assurance
- Safeguarding
- Vulnerable Children including Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- Transport Travel Assistance
- The virtual school
- Attendance
- Elective Home Education
- Children not in full time education
- Children missing in Education
- Behaviour and Exclusions
- Pupil Placed Planning and sufficiency

- Admissions

The proposal aims to provide clear focus on the departments role in place shaping and the strategic planning for the Education System to support communities promoting growth and the economic regeneration through the strong local schools system linked to the skills agenda.

To focus on the core duties other activities have had to be discontinued and now sit within the School system. The proposal seeks to build capacity in a number of key areas it unfortunately means resource has to be removed in another of other areas linked to the delivery of discretionary or traded services including the Curriculum Learning Access Service which is being disestablished.

Formal consultation with staff commenced in March 2023 and is now completed and responses to the consultation resulted in changes and the Council is now underway with a new organisational structure. There are a significant number of staff who will be affected by these plans and some may be impacted by redundancy so we are working with the Unions and staff to support them through that process. Schools have been kept fully informed along the way and further detail will follow as we move to the implementation stage.

It is proposed to bring a more comprehensive update to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in the Autumn term as part of the post implementation review.

Members were informed that the service has already began the restructure and is currently in phase two which is looking at education and our schools. To measure impact it is recommended that at least one term passes to allow the Committee to measure impact which would be the autumn term.

Members were informed that there have been delays in delivering the re-structure with one issue being a heavy focus on the Social Services and the recruitment of Social Workers. Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised that whilst progress is behind the original plan she is happy with the delivery of the restructure now and it allows people in their roles time before September 01st so work can commence promptly.

A member sought assurances on capacity at a senior officer level to support the running of services through the re-structure. In response Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People advised the whole project has been run in consultation with colleagues from Human Resources and so this has been helpful. The restructure does not propose much change to Senior Leadership which is helpful to support services running. It is a large piece of work and support to the workforce and all staff impacted have been given the offer of a one to one meeting.

A member sought clarity regarding the statutory service provision and if this includes the School Improvement work and transfer of duties to Schools.

In response Councillor Smith Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised that some of the functions regarding attendance being transferred to Schools are from legislation from Government. Schools will be offered termly

meetings to look at cases of children who are severely or persistently absent to then bring in the Local Authorities support to help but responsibility will be with the Schools. In addition, we now have a database which we can use to look at attendance to review children missing from school with real time data which will continue to be reviewed. The school improvement offer will be enriched with offers to all Bury's maintained schools.

It was agreed:

1. Members note the update on the Children's Services Restructure
2. A report to be brought back to Committee following the Autumn Term
3. The follow up report to include information that identifies if the re-structure has been successful and how Schools have navigated changing responsibilities. This can be through methods such as data, surveys or feedback.

8 IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People provided an update on the Improvement Plan for Children's Services. Following the last Committee Members were advised that the Council expected publication of the monitoring visit in April 2023 however Ofsted advised it cannot be published until after the election period. The letter sets out the overview of the monitoring visit.

Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People advised that the Council continues to move forward with the improvement plan and journey and the plan has been refreshed. The Improvement Board continues to meet bi-monthly, and the alternate month Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People meets with the Department for Education for a performance challenge session. The Department for Education will have a six-monthly review in July and a further monitoring visit undertaken by Ofsted with a focus on complex safeguarding.

In addition Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People informed members that the reconfiguration of the plan looked if the correct people are on the Improvement Board and this has been aligned with the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services framework so the plan works on what areas we need to improve.

Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People advised members that the update to the Improvement Plan is to RAG (Red, Amber and Green) rated against the progress achieved in relation to the various aspects. The priorities have also been reset and shifting priorities to multiagency responses and we now have sub-plans for key partners such as Greater Manchester Police and health partners. Work is taking place to create a highlight report on the plan which will be submitted to the Improvement Board and this can be brought to the Committee at a later date.

In response to a members question Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People advised that one issue in relation to our workforce profile is we have an over reliance on agency staff. Whilst the figure has

decreased it does bring instability to the offer of support to children and families. We have recruited international social workers and the first international colleagues have arrived, in total four and are due to commence work next week and the rest will arrive over the summer months. We continue to work with colleagues in Human Resources and we continue to advertise for roles and use word of mouth to aid recruitment. As of now, most team manager roles are recruited to on a permanent basis and the service is optimistic that the managers will help recruitment to the other vacant roles. Roles have been created for advance practitioners that require practice educator training to be undertaken to facilitate university students to hopefully retain and be newly qualified social workers.

Members were reminded this is a nationally challenging issues and other authorities are in similar situations and those judged as inadequate are under enhanced challenges around recruitment. Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member Children and Young People advised we are modelling the staffing to look at being aligned with our statistical neighbours on how much agency staff we employ. The current aspiration is for Bury to aligned with our statistical neighbours and have an agency cohort of around 18%.

A member sought clarity on what is causing missed opportunities for Children and a lack of consistency in placement stability.

In response Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People advised there has been a recent launch of a permanence strategy, underneath the strategy is learning and development for the service to understand what more effective permanence planning would look like, and under this is key tasks and strong planning. What is referenced in the report is that more recent permanency planning is stronger and there is some improvement. Placement stability is around strong decision making, quality of practice, challenge and support from independent reviewing officers and court processes. Often issues arise as those component parts conspire to create a delay for children. Placement stability is the decision for children to come into care and to then match their needs with placements which is an issue in bury this is why there is a need to support the fostering case and to grow our own cohort to match Foster Carers skills to the needs of our children. Without strong social worker support around a child, it is difficult to understand when a placement is becoming fragile and that has fed into placement stability.

A member wished to highlight that the report notes a steady progress for an 18 month period during which the department has been under considerable scrutiny and the workforce under tremendous pressure.

In response to a member question regarding how trends could be viewed over the two year period. Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised the highlight report will demonstrate progress. A more detailed update could be given out of the meeting detailing specific areas. Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People advised there is a lot of data that Children's services hold and there is a list of key performance indicators which talk about the various topics discussed at Committee. The outcome of the Audit activity can be shared with the Committee to provide a summary of progress.

A member asked a question about national work to look at social worker recruitment and how to address concerns along with collaboration at a combined authority level. Members were informed by Councillor Smith Cabinet Member for Children and Young People that a Greater Manchester there is a pledge to keep agency costs down. Nationally there has been a commissioned report into social care led by Josh MacAlister and the response will be provided and give recommendations. Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People added that the combined authority and Directors of Childrens Services have come together to try and establish a Greater Manchester pledge to address mainstream recruitment to create a stronger and more compelling vision for officers to remain in local authorities rather than moving to agency workers. Original Ofsted judgement in 2021 stated that we were leaving too many children at risk of harm. A member asked if this has now changed. In response Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised you can never be one hundred percent sure there are no children at risk but every time we are monitored and expected they pick cases to review and they have never found one since Councillor Smith has been Cabinet Member that a child has been found to be at risk at that point and we had not acted.

It was agreed:

1. The highlight report for the Improvement Plan be brought to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
2. Audit activity of the service to be shared with members of the Committee

9 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

10 WORK PROGRAMME

This item was for information only.

COUNCILLOR BOLES
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.20 pm)