

Minutes of: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 7 March 2024

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

Also in attendance: Helen Chadwick, Unison Representative
Daniel Lewis, Youth Representative
Jeanette Richards, Executive Director of Children's Services
Andrea Stone, Interim Director of Social Care Practice
Michael Kemp, Strategic Lead
Stephen Holden, Interim Director of Education and Skills
Councillor L Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young
People
Councillor Lancaster
Jacqui Dennis, Monitoring Officer
Chloe Ashworth, Democratic Services

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

Apologies for Absence:

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies are noted above.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

3 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 15th November 2024 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

There were no matters arising.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

One question was received in advance of the meeting and five members of the public were in attendance, two members asked a question and these are appended to the minutes.

5 MEMBER QUESTIONS

One question was received in advance of the meeting and this is appended to the minutes.

6 IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Further to the publication of the agenda the Chair agreed to change the Improvement Plan to item 6.

Andrea Stone, Interim Director of Social Care and Early Help provided an overview of the Childrens Improvement Plan, the report was provided to members ahead of the meeting.

Members were reminded that Bury Council had an Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) carried out by Ofsted between 25 October 2021 and 5 November 2021, which judged services to be inadequate. Following this an Improvement Board meets every two months to scrutinise and review the performance and quality assurance auditing.

The most recent Ofsted monitoring visit in November 2023 focused on care leavers, and inspectors noted that they did not see the same pace of progress in relation to improvement that they had seen in other areas on previous visits.

Members were invited to ask questions and raised the following themes:

- New internal infrastructure – Heads of Service now complete assurance reports to the Director of Social Care and Early Help to be scrutinised and improve performance.
- Struggles in recruiting to the post of Clinical Psychologist – however, members were informed by Jeanette Richards, Executive Director that there is a successful applicant to take forward to interview.
- Consultation with young people and what they want the service to look like – Members were informed there is regular consultation with the Children in Care Council, Care Leavers Forum and Youth Council.
- Business Support – It was clarified that support is now derived from the Children and Young People Department and not the Corporate Core.
- Liquid Logic – Work is being done to improve the system and a report on outcomes will be produced in the next few weeks.
- International workers – Members were informed twenty two workers were identified, seven have joined and four start on the 11th March 2024.

It was agreed:

- The update be noted.

7 UPDATE ON SEND TRANSFORMATION PLANS

Michael Kemp, Strategic Lead provided an overview of the presentation provided within the agenda pack.

Key points raised were:

- Development of the Education Health Care Team
- Development of SEND support
- Progress on school placements
- Reaching out
- Development of the 14-25 offer and Preparing for Adulthood

Members were invited to ask questions and the following was raised:

- The joining up of the new assessments team and the review team – members were informed both teams have performance meetings with Michael Kemp which have shown performance has improved and they have a single team manager.
- Redesigning of Local Offer – The offer has been redesigned but there are delays currently waiting for the IT system to upload it.
- Autism and Dyslexia awareness – many schools wish to attend these sessions and officers are happy with uptake.
- Graduated approach and early Intervention in lowering EHCP Plans – Members were informed that the approach is not to manage numbers, it is to match need at the right time at the right place.
- Discussions took place regarding the establishment of new Schools and sufficiency.
- Members sought assurance regarding the details of Resource Provision places
- Discussions took place regarding the new Radcliffe School. Members were informed there is a plan for incremental growth which will increase capacity, an update to be provided to members at a suitable future date.

Councillor Farooq and Daniel Lewis, Youth Representative shared support to the SEN Circle of Influence Event that took place on Tuesday 27th February and the importance of a child and young person's voice in the delivery of services.

It was agreed that:

1. Helen Chadwick be provided with details of schools who have not progressed in the Resource Provision plan within Project Safety Valve.
2. The report be noted.

8 SEND TRANSPORT UPDATE

Jeanette Richards, Executive Director, Children and Young People gave an update to Committee to provide assurances on progress with the commitment to provide a refresh on home to school transport policy.

During the beginning of the year (2024), the Council has been working with Bury Parent Carer Forum and the policy is out for consultation. The policy is on track to be presented to Cabinet seeking recommendations for implementation following the consultation.

Members were advised that the co-production is being undertaken with Bury's Parent Carer Forum and the consultation has been pushed out to all our stakeholders across the local area including schools and care providers.

The update is due to a response from the Department for Education changes around requirements for home to school transport and the LGO findings.

Councillor Boles raised a matter highlighted in the SEND Task and Finish Group regarding the cost-benefit analysis of lowering the age threshold from five to allow children to start school in the September with their peers. Councillor Smith confirmed that there is consideration to when this age threshold will be varied but this can be advised on following the consultation.

It was agreed:

1. Members should note the verbal update.

9 BURY VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT

Gemma Parkes, Head of Virtual School provided an update in relation to the report. The report was included in the agenda pack to all members in advance of the meeting. The report details and evaluates the work of Bury Virtual School from September 2022 to August 2024 and to set out the key priorities for the academic year 2023-24.

Some highlights from the last academic year were:

- Strong phonics outcomes at KS1
- Secure GCSE outcomes in terms of progress 8 and attainment 8
- Expansion of training offer to schools including trauma informed practice, Speech Language and Communication needs and Social, Emotional and Mental Health.
- Now have a dedicated Speech and Language Therapist
- Grant for additional tuition for children under the virtual schools
- Dedicated SEND lead within the team
- PEP Officer in place
- Good quality post 16 Support in place
- Since the publication of the report there is now a post 18 education employment and training lead in place

Members were invited to ask questions and the following was raised:

- Members were assured projected outcomes are looking more positive for this municipal year but results are not yet final.
- Bury School Ofsted rates have improved since the publication of the Bury Virtual School Annual Report and some Children have left schools which required improvement.
- Persistent absence rates have deteriorated from the same time last year but the service is working with some children who are new into care but there is an action plan in place for all these children.

Members sought assurances regarding the accountability of the Virtual School. Members were informed statutory accountability is to the Corporate Parenting Board and Virtual School Governing Board.

Members were advised 25% of Children were unaware of their personal educational plan however this is due to the service dealing with some very young children sometimes children may be frustrated due to lots of professionals being in their lives.

It was agreed:

1. Members to be provided with the total number of children who have had a school move this year.

2. Members of the Committee were invited to inform Gemma Parkes if they wish to be on the Governing Board for Bury Virtual School

3. Jeanette Richards, Executive Director provided an offer to the Committee for Nick Bell, Secondary Inclusion Lead who oversees children in alternative provision settings and undertakes quality assurance exercises to provide a detailed report back to Committee on this work.

10 EARLY YEARS SUFFICIENCY

Jeanette Richards, Executive Director provided an overview of the early years sufficiency report. The report provides information on the work undertaken in the Early Years services since November 2022. The report outlines the progress made in building back the early years offer and the impact of this on the youngest children.

Members were invited to ask questions:

A member highlighted that Early Year's level of development for Whitefield is deteriorating and SEND is at 9.7, around half of the other areas. Members were assured that our SEND cohort of children are slightly below national average (20%) but higher than the Greater Manchester average (15.8%). The focus on early years is to create the best opportunities as possible and rebuild provision with early years providers. Health Visitor capacity has been one of the issues effecting early years checks and the impact of Covid and young children. Stephen Holden, Interim Director for Education and Skills confirmed that the quality assurance team has been investigating the matter highlighted by a member. Work is being undertaken to understand key schools in the Whitefield area to work with excellence schools in the borough to offer peer support.

Members were assured there is a Prestwich Children's Centre in contrary to the published report.

Discussions took place regarding the placement of children with suitable providers, member sought assurances on children being placed in suitable provision. Members were informed by officers that there is not a sufficiency issue but rather preference of providers placing barriers. The Council provides advice to support parents into early years settings but it is a private market. Nurseries are not required to admit all children and alternatively, parents do not have to send their child to nursery provision.

It was agreed:

1. Members note the report.

11 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN CASE - BRIEFING NOTES

Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children's Services presented the report which set out the findings by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) made against the Council following the Council's failure to comply with agreed recommendations following two earlier investigations, and the action now taken by the Council to demonstrate that it has complied with those recommendations.

Members were notified that one complaint related to the Council's failure to provide appropriate free transport and repeated failure to remedy the situation within agreed timescales. The other complaint related to the Council failing to act properly when a child was out of education causing injustice, and the subsequent remedy not being carried out in agreed timescales

In response to questions relating to both reports Jeanette Richards, Executive Director gave assurances that these related to historic complaints and since this time stronger policies and processes had been introduced which clarified staffing leads and practice changes.

It was agreed:

1. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee noted the reports, decisions made by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman and the changes that have been made to ensure this does not occur again.

12 RECRUITMENT OF A DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL CARE PRACTICE

The Chair agreed to one item of urgent business to discuss the recruitment of a Director of Social Care Practice. Members were informed by Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children's Services, that the Council has recently sought to recruit on a permanent basis to the Director of Social Work and Early Help. Members were informed that upon reaching the final part of the process today the panel was unable to recruit to the position.

A Member referenced the original public documentation that stated the interim role will be up to six months and highlighted we are now in month five, if the role is difficult to recruit to why has quicker progress not been made. Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People confirmed that two recruitment rounds have taken place in this time period.

A Member questioned when will recruitment take place due to the high cost per day for the Interim position. Councillor Smith confirmed that discussions have taken place regarding a third round of recruitment and the recruitment of a suitable candidate to provide the best leadership for the service is of highest priority.

A Member highlighted the cost of the interim role is not budgeted for and is an overspend, and sought assurances on what the process is for filling the post on a permanent basis and stopping the overspend. Members were informed that Children are not let down or at risk due to the maintenance of an interim role and a reflection on the second round of recruitment will take place.

Councillor Boles ended the meeting by taking the opportunity to thank members of the Committee for their attendance, involvement and support to the Committee for the municipal year.

COUNCILLOR BOLES
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 9:40 pm)