

COUNCIL MEETING
10 September 2014
LEADER'S STATEMENT

Child Sexual Exploitation

Madam Mayor before I brief Members on the work of the Cabinet, I would like to make a statement about the work of the Council and its Partners in tackling Child Sexual Exploitation

First of all I would wish to reassure Members and our Residents that this matter is given the highest priority with the Council

We are all aware of the serious issues so vividly highlighted recently in Rotherham and of course the consequences of not having the right culture in place across key partner agencies.

I wanted to take this opportunity tonight to brief members on the work and levels of activity being undertaken right across the Council and key agencies here in Bury.

It is a statement of the obvious but this Administration takes its responsibility for Safeguarding Children extremely seriously as I am sure each Member in this Chamber does.

The protection of vulnerable children is, as I have said absolute, but requires extensive resource inputs which demand all partners proactively participating within a single operational hub to ensure intelligence, and actions are fully co-ordinated and integrated.

Local Authority boundaries in these cases mean nothing and as such its crucial that local authorities work together to share intelligence and share learning on an ongoing basis. As a result, the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities set up Project Phoenix, which links together the multi agency teams working in each Borough to give a Pan Greater Manchester wide approach to tackling CSE. This approach ensures there is close and coordinated work between police and Children's Social Care and aims to disrupt the activity of perpetrators and safeguard victims

Here in Bury we have been very proactive over the past couple of years in seeking to learn lessons from the experience of tragic examples of exploitation elsewhere across the Country. As a result, we have strengthened our own resources to establish a unique level of partnership working with the setting up of a dedicated multi-agency Child Sexual Exploitation Team alongside the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, known as the MASH. All of this work is overseen by the Bury Children's Safeguarding Board.

We know that through improved agency working and a single reporting point this has inevitably led to a rise in referrals for CSE to the Hub over the past couple of years. However, with the range of filters we have in place this ensures that the net is cast wide to reach out early when young girls and boys are at risk and positive action can be taken to protect them. At the same time the Police will 'take out' those men involved which such behaviour such as grooming and exploitation.

To address this Bury now has in place the SEAM process - Sexual Exploitation & Missing process, which is a multi-agency response including social care, the police, youth services, schools and the voluntary sector, to which any professional can refer a child about whom they are concerned. The process allows for action plans to be developed and importantly intelligence is gathered.

The levels of activity can vary significantly and doesn't always relate to young girls or perpetrators living in Bury. However there are a small number young girls around 17 we currently regard as medium or high risk.

For security reasons I am not able to tell you how many perpetrators that are known to us and are being targeted or tracked at this time. In addition to the young people we regard as at medium or high risk, we are actively monitoring a larger group to ensure they are, and remain, safe.

Finally Madam Mayor

The work continues night and day 365 days year and I want to place on record our thanks for the diligence and dedication of our staff and our partners in ensuring that the child comes first each and every time before any other considerations and that is the culture we have successfully fostered and invested in here in Bury.

Madam Mayor, Members and Officers of the Council, there have been two meetings of the Cabinet since the last meeting of the Council.

Waste Management

Members of the Cabinet unanimously adopted the new proposals which were subsequently discussed at Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

I would like to thank Councillors Isherwood and Southworth along with a wide range of officers for the sterling work they are doing to preparing the new arrangements for the launch in the first week in October. This includes a number of 'one off' additional collections to ensure households cope with the new collection arrangements.

Alternative Services – Under 5s

The Cabinet considered proposals for a major re-design of the way Children's Centre Services are delivered across Bury. I note the scaremongering has started already via Members opposite, but nothing new there.

Bury Council are seeking to consult, over a 12 week period, on the way the Childrens Centres are to be utilised and managed in the future.

The case for change is clear as we see our resources diminish. In addition, there is a priority for the Council to make sure help is targeted on the most needy under-5s and their families and in particular under 2s. The Council is not seeking to completely close facilities but to create new opportunities for children and families to access a different range of key support services.

The new proposed arrangements seek retain 5 Childrens centres located in and accessible to vulnerable families across Bury and will come under the direct control of the council. **MC you can skip this list if you wish?**

These are:

Woodbank with Elton Children's Centre, covering the reach areas of the children's centres currently operating in Tottington, Ramsbottom, Daisyfield as well as Woodbank with Elton.

Little Oaks Children's Centre, covering the reach area of Moorside as well as Little Oaks.

Coronation Road, Radcliffe, covering the reach areas of High Meadow and Stepping Stones as well as Coronation Road

Besses, Whitefield, covering the existing reach area

Sedgley, covering the reach areas of Toodle Hill, Butterstile as well as Sedgley.

Redvales, is to operate as children's centre under the management of Little Oaks.

Up to 24 additional outreach staff will be deployed to support the new facilities.

The second aim of the proposals is to significantly increase nursery provision for under 2-year-olds. This proposal will see hundreds of under 2s and their families benefit from access to free 15-hour care for 38 weeks of the year.

The council would not directly run the 2-year-old provision, but would aim to tender individually each service to interested providers, such as schools.

Butterstile; Daisyfield; High Meadow; Moorside; Stepping Stones; Ramsbottom; Toodle Hill;

The Estate Strategy

The Cabinet agreed to a new strategy which sets out a revised and more commercial approach to managing the land and property held by Bury Council that is not actually occupied by the Council itself and which is held for non-operational purposes.

The Estates Strategy provides an overview of the existing portfolio and outlines the purposes for which the Council should hold property in the future.

It also provides a transparent framework for assessing property assets and particularly for identifying those that should be retained and those that will be put forward for disposal.

Following an objective evaluation of the let estate, all properties that do not meet the retention criteria will be deemed to be surplus to requirements and will be held on an interim basis pending disposal.

Investment Property Acquisition Strategy

The Cabinet also agreed a new strategy for future acquisitions which is aimed at increasing the financial performance of the commercial portfolio and increase revenue income stream to the Council as a result.

This means that the Council needs to strengthen the revenues it generates from the non-operational 'Let Estate' in order to both rebuild these reductions and also to generate income to help protect vital front-line services from the cuts imposed on us by central Government.

Targeted, ethical, investments will look at 'blue chip' tenants and on relatively long leases where possible these will be in Bury. In this way, the Council will be primarily buying a secure income stream.

The Council will grow its portfolio slowly and incrementally, with a variety of different property assets in order to spread sector risk.

In this respect, the Acquisition Strategy can be seen to be another element of the Council's approach to Treasury Management.

Empty Properties Update

Cabinet were pleased to see real progress being made through a sustained and focussed approach in relation to private sector empty properties, reducing the negative impacts they have on neighbourhoods and bringing about high quality, affordable housing to help meet housing need.

In Radcliffe, the pilot project has brought back into use over half of the 103 targeted properties with more in the pipeline.

Because the Council has been so successful, it has built up an excellent track record of delivery with the Homes and Communities Agency. This has led to the HCA increasing their funding to the Council by 40%, bringing the total funding for empty properties to £1m. This is sufficient to bring 52 empty properties back into use by the end of this financial year.

Adoption

I will finish as I started with talking about children.

I would like to conclude my statement with some positive and encouraging improvements within our Adoption Service.

Whilst we have been focusing in our reducing revenue budgets we have continued to encourage 'Invest to Save' initiatives. One such initiative concerned improving performance in securing increased level of adoptions and thus improving the life chance of Bury's Children in Care

In 2012 the Council responded to an Invest to Save bid by the Adoption Service to assist them to improve their capacity to recruit more adopters and place children with new adopters in a shorter timescale. In the bid they noted that the number of children placed for adoption in 2010 – 2011 was **18** and that only **33%** were placed within the Government's target for how long a child should wait from coming into care to being placed for adoption.

Following this investment the number of children placed for adoption rose in 2013 – 2014 to **26**, with **65%** of these children being placed within the target timescale and the number will improve again this year.

This improvement has been driven by two factors – careful planning for children and a vigorous recruitment drive by the Adoption Service.

Madam Mayor that concludes my statement.

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