

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

MEETING, 23RD AUGUST, 2023

Present – Councillors Grant (Chairman), Rigby (Vice-Chairman), Barnard, Connor, Galloway, Hon, Alaina Khan, Amjid Khan, Livesey, Maher, Meehan, Morrissey, Mort, Patel, Priest, Shaikh and Taylor-Burke

Co-Opted Members

None

Also in attendance

- | | | |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Councillor Donaghy | - | Executive Cabinet Member – Children's Services |
| Mr P. Rankin | - | Deputy Director of Children's Services |
| Ms T. Minshull | - | Assistant Director – Strategic Commissioning |
| Mrs. V. Ridge | - | Democratic Services Manager |

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Flitcroft.

Councillor Grant in the Chair

8. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved – That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 25th July, 2023 were submitted and signed as a correct record.

9. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

The Borough Solicitor submitted the Committee Work Programme for 2023/24 which had been formulated following the informal meeting of this Committee held on 21st June, 2023.

The Programme would guide the work of the Committee over the course of the Municipal Year.

Resolved – That the 2023/24 Committee Work Programme, as now submitted, be noted.

10. COMMISSIONING AND APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Ms T. Minshull gave a presentation on the Start Well commissioning arrangements in Bolton together with details of quality assurance and improvement.

The presentation advised that Bolton's strategic approach to commissioning involved outcomes that:

- focused on people, place and population;
- promoted and supported the health and wellbeing of communities, children, adults, families and workforce;
- focused on prevention and early intervention seeking to reduce inequalities and improve wellbeing; and
- were personalised and used an asset-based approach to serve the communities in Bolton.

Members were informed of the Start Well Commissioning offer in terms of the prevention and early help offer, care and support and specialist support provided.

There were currently 30 Children's placement settings in Bolton:

- 24 Regulated Childrens Homes;
- 4 Fostering Agencies;
- 1 Adoption Agency;
- 1 Boarding School; and

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- 13 Unregulated Supported Accommodation Settings.

With regard to residential, fostering and supported accommodation placements, there were:

- Residential - 7 in Borough, 16 in Greater Manchester, 29 outside Greater Manchester;
- Supported Accommodation (Over 16 placements) – 31 in Borough, 6 in Greater Manchester and 4 outside Greater Manchester; and
- Independent Fostering Agency placements – 25 in Borough, 23 in Greater Manchester and 13 outside Greater Manchester.

With regard to Start Well Quality Assurance and Improvement, members were informed that in Bolton, there was a commitment to working collaboratively with local providers to ensure that they were inspection ready and meeting contractual requirements and were supported to improve services through sharing of experiences and best practice.

The Quality Assurance and Improvement activity for Start Well was supported by a small team of officers. The cohort of providers were mainly specialists' schools, resource and alternative provisions and SEND children's homes. The aim was to work together to deliver the best possible service and outcomes for Children and Young People.

In addition, the work of the Team was underpinned by a local Quality Assurance Framework.

The presentation also outlined:

- the Start Well Team portfolio;
- the standard activities; and
- Commissioning priorities.

Following the presentation, members made the undermentioned comments/observations:

- the importance of proactive engagement with new providers coming into Bolton and the significant work that was being done to progress this;
- the joined up working that was taking place between the Children's and Planning Departments to ensure that processes were aligned and providers were located in the most appropriate areas of the Borough;
- the extensive programme of additional support given to placements requiring improvement following Ofsted inspections including the allocation of a Quality Monitoring Officer and a tailored improvement plan;
- the challenges facing the recruitment process although alternative methods including the use of social media and job fairs and advertising in family hubs/GP practices had started to improve take-up; and
- the need for greater numbers of foster carers and the ongoing recruitment campaign.

Resolved – That Ms Minshull be thanked for her informative presentation.

11. MEMBERS BUSINESS

a) The Committee was informed that a question had been submitted by Councillor Galloway for consideration under Standing Order 36, as follows:-

Question

Could the committee be updated on the arrangements for the temporary accommodation of the pupils at St Simon and Jude's following the fire.

Answer

The fire last week at SS Simon and Jude's has resulted in the loss of nearly all the school buildings. Thankfully, and most importantly, no one was injured. The fire did not spread beyond the school grounds due to the timely action of the caretaker, who raised the alarm, and the emergency services who worked tirelessly to contain the flames.

The Academy Trust has responded quickly to the fire. Working with the School, Council, Fire Service and the Department of Education, they have assessed the damage and safety of the existing structure and started to make plans for the new term. There has already been some demolition to unsafe areas of the school, and fire investigators and insurance forensic teams are working at the site to assess all the damage. We hope they will complete their work by the end of the week.

Council officers are working closely with the Trust to plan for the new academic year. All partners are in full agreement that we must aim to have face-to-face teaching for all our children as quickly as possible. Work is underway to consider how this can be achieved safely within the local community. Site options are being reviewed this week.

It will take some time to put plans in place and so, alongside our work to secure temporary classroom space, the Trust are currently developing a 'blended' learning programme for the first half term of the new school year in the first instance. This means that they will be offering a combination of online and face to face learning for pupils.

This is a difficult and uncertain time for children, families, and staff. The Trust have advised families of the progress so far and will be communicating with them next week to share details of their plans. Council officers will ensure that elected members are updated with progress.

Resolved – That the question submitted, and the response provided, be noted.

(b) The Committee received the minutes of other meetings of the Council relevant to the remit of this Committee:-

- the Executive Cabinet Member for Children's Services held on 15th August, 2023

Resolved – That the minutes of the various meetings be noted.

(The meeting started at 6.00pm and finished at 6.40pm)