

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING, 19TH OCTOBER, 2020

Present – Councillors Brady (Vice-Chairman), Connor, Darvesh (as deputy for Councillor Ismail), Dean, Donaghy, Fletcher, Gibbon, Heslop, Khurram, McGeown, Murray, Newall, Parkinson and Walsh.

Co-opted Members

None Present

Also in attendance

Councillor Galloway	-	Executive Cabinet Member for Children
Ms B. Brown	-	Director of Children's Services
Mr I. Walker	-	Assistant Director of Children's Services – Staying Safe
Ms S. Gilman	-	Assistant Director of Public Health
Mr I. D. Mulholland	-	Deputy Democratic Services Manager
Mrs S. Bailey	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Ismail, Iqbal (Chairman) and Weatherby and from Reverend Canon Dr Bracegirdle (Co-opted Member).

Councillor Brady in the Chair

9. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on 26th August, 2020 were submitted and signed as a correct record.

10. PROPOSED COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2020/2021

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report which detailed the proposed work programme for 2020/2021.

Resolved – That the proposed Work Programme for 2020/2021 be approved.

11. SOCIAL CARE INSPECTIONS

Ms Brown and Mr Walker gave a presentation which provided an overview of the Social Care Inspections Framework for Local Authority Children's Services.

The Inspections included a Youth Offending Inspection, an Ofsted focused visit and a Joint Targeted Area Inspection.

With regard to the Youth Offending inspection, members were advised that new standards had been introduced in May, 2018 and involved:

- a change in frequency of inspecting individual YOTs with some being every two years but at least every four years - the last visit to Bolton was in 2014;
- presence on site during the fieldwork would be one week (for single inspection) and two weeks (for joint inspection);
- in July 2020, the Inspection Guidance had been amended to include the inspections of small youth offending teams with relatively low caseloads of, on average, under 50;
- the small YOTs would follow the same timescale, but the inspection would only be from monday to thursday and with fewer inspectors;

- for small YOTs there would be less evidence required in advance and only three pieces of supporting documentation allowed to be submitted (to cover innovation/prevention); and
- notification of inspection would be given three weeks prior to fieldwork (a friday morning) – YOT Head of Service would be notified.

To prepare for the Inspections, there had been a refresh of the Youth Offending Service Management Board, with meetings taking place at least quarterly. In addition, a YOT Vision had been developed with plans for wide communication. Evidence in advance set was available and regularly reviewed and updated and data dashboards had been developed with ongoing development work on data taking place to enable further analysis.

The presentation went on to describe the process for the Ofsted Interim Focused Visit and what it involved. This included:

- notification of a focused visit being received on a tuesday;
- the Director of Children receiving the call from the lead inspector;
- telephone conference in the afternoon between lead inspector and Director of Children's Services;
- the day after notification the Local Authority sharing child level data, information about audits and performance and management information;
- the Local Authority providing further detail as requested on selected child cases; and
- coordination and support provided by teams in Children's Services.

It would be a longer process with a larger fieldwork team than a normal focused visit and a letter would be published with no inspection grading.

The Ofsted Focused Visit would concentrate on a particular service area (Front Door) or young people (care leavers). There

would be no 'judgement' but it would inform the content and timing of the next ILAC visit. There would also be a broader scope examining the quality of decision making regarding:-

- help and protection;
- LAC and Care Leavers; and
- Impact of Leadership.

The context of the Local Authority would be taken into account including the impact of Covid19 however, the Local Authority response to Covid19 was also likely to be a factor.

With regard to the outcome of the previous Inspection, Bolton had been judged to be 'Good' in all four aspects, but the context of global pandemic and significant budget cuts would impact on future inspection outcomes.

Other outcomes:

- improved permanence for long-term LAC - permanence panel reviewed all long-term placements and 208 LAC now long-term matched;
- better use of audits to improve practice - revised audit tool ensuring 30 case files audited/month with 30% moderated by senior managers and the Practice Improvement Lead presenting a report to Performance Board to close the loop;
- improved effectiveness at Early Help Stage. - early help review to reduce demand on social care pathway and reduce re-referrals
- improved transitional planning for CWD - Transitions Panel established with Adults Services and two dedicated Transitions Workers. Permanence Panel instigated process at 14th birthday.

The presentation went on to highlight the risks which included:

- investment in staff;
- pressure on caseloads;
- increasing volume and complexity;
- impact of COVID-19;

- school attendance, increasing elective home education and Children Missing Education;
- education outcomes – from early years to Post 16 and Education, Employment and Training;
- domestic abuse;
- neglect; and
- poverty.

With regard to help and protection, the presentation outlined the following:

- Referral and Assessment (Front Door) - current contact and referral rates back up to pre-Covid levels (145-165 contacts and 60-70 referrals per week) - however, referrals from schools remained relatively low at 60% of previous rates, increased complexity was the major issue, rise in domestic abuse, mental health and drug and alcohol issues and 16-20 Strategy meetings every week.
- evidenced outcomes for Children in Need and Child Protection Plans - restricted access to households impacting on demand and CP plans increased by 20% primarily due to delays in stepping down.
- exercise of thresholds - launch of 'Framework for Action', expectation of written follow up to referrals from partners and access to a Liquid Logic referral form and process.
- step up and step down interface with Early Help - greater partner confidence to endorse children's removal from CP plans, reduced re-referral rates, reduced CiN cases in the social work teams and increased capacity and quality in social work teams.

With regard to Looked after Children and care leavers, members were informed of the following:

- pre-proceedings process, Public Law Outline (PLO) and Letters Before Proceedings - inconsistent practice leading to too many emergency admissions, introduction of PLO Tracker reviewed at Performance

Board, Audit and best exemplar template of LBPs (SMART) to be shared across the service;

- how the physical, emotional and mental health of young people was being considered as a factor in care planning - CWD faced increased risk of admission to expensive placements due to reduced short-breaks availability (Avondale) and multi-agency trauma pathway to support children coming out of lockdown;
- how family time (contact) was being maintained - direct family time being supported where risk assessments and health needs of carers allowed and greater use of social media and technology to support contact where this was not possible; and
- placement decisions and matching processes - revised process to create more informed and child focussed decision making including concurrent education and health needs considerations, Monthly Placement Panel to review all Out of Area placement and the Home Project to support a return to, or closer to, Bolton provision for 16-17 year olds.

Following the presentation, members discussed the issues and made various comments/observations:

- the use of registered placements to enable young people to progress and become independent – members were advised that Bolton had preferred providers that were trusted to deliver the range and quality of semi-supported accommodation required to allow transition into adulthood – the services provided in Bolton were impressive and engagement with alternative providers would not take place until they could prove that they could meet the standards expected;
- it was reassuring that quality assessments of providers were undertaken to ensure they were delivering what had been promised;
- the recent transition of staff and services from the Children's Department to a single site at Castle Hill – members were advised that this would create

- improved service delivery with better accessibility and co-ordination;
- the composition of the Permanence and Transitional Panels – members were advised that both Panels were multi-agency and included senior managers, social workers, health colleagues and representatives from virtual schools;
- the benefits of an annual briefing on Corporate Parenting for all members and how they could help to support transition;
- the role of the Corporate Parenting Board – it was noted that the Terms of Reference had recently been refined to make it more purposeful; and
- it would be useful to receive an update on child sexual exploitation – members were advised that this was scheduled on the Committee work programme for the meeting in March, 2021.

Resolved - That Ms Brown and Mr Walker be thanked for their informative presentation.

12. COVID-19 UPDATE

Ms S. Gilman gave an update on the latest position regarding Covid-19 in Bolton.

It was reported that for the seven days ending 13th October, 2020, the number of positive cases amongst Bolton residents remained high with an average of 149 cases per day and a testing rate of 410/100,000.

Transmission was widespread in the community and cases appeared to be more dispersed across all age groups and increasing within older age group (65 plus). Approximately a third of the cases in the last week were aged 16-34.

Crompton and Farnworth Wards had seen the highest week on week change respectively although the number of new cases remained highest in the Rumworth Ward.

There were a disproportionate number of cases from the most disadvantaged parts of the Borough, although this was becoming less marked. Almost half of cases were of White British ethnicity with an increasing number of Asian Indian (13%) and Asian Pakistani cases (11%).

Ms Gilman went on to advise that:

- weekly webinars had taken place with education leads from primary, secondary and special schools;
- support for contact tracing in schools with advice on class bubble management;
- catch up campaigns for school aged immunisation and vaccination programmes planned;
- targeted communication campaigns – self isolation being the current campaign including letter for parents, advice poster, frequently asked questions on the Council's website, translated resources; and
- programme of engagement with local children and young people facilitated through Bolton Fund e.g. Bolton Youth Voice film.

In response to the update, a question was asked about the current capacity at Bolton Hospital and the other Covid-19 facilities such as the Nightingale Centre. Ms Gilman advised that she could not provide specific details at present but would make enquiries and advise members following the meeting.

Members also commented on inconsistencies within the data and that the statistics could appear misleading as they were not reported using a standard comparison. Ms Gilman stated that no single piece of information could provide a complete picture.

Resolved – That the update be noted.

13. MEMBERS BUSINESS

The Committee received the extracts of minutes of other meetings of the Council relevant to the remit of this Committee:-

- (a) the Executive Cabinet Member for Children held on 7th September and 5th October, 2020.

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

(The meeting started at 6.00 p.m. and finished at 7.10 p.m.)