

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

MEETING, 27TH JULY, 2021

Present – Councillors Grant (Vice-Chairman), Abdullah, Connor, Dean, Donaghy, Hill, Hornby, Jiva (as deputy for Councillor Adia), McGeown, Murray, Pattison and Rimmer.

Co-opted Member

Reverend Canon Dr Bracegirdle – Church of England Diocese Representative

Also in attendance

Councillor Galloway	- Executive Cabinet Member – Children's Services
Ms B. Brown	- Director of Children's Services
Mr P. Rankin	- Deputy Director of Children's Services
Mrs. V. Ridge	- Democratic Services Manager

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Adia, Iqbal (Chairman), Ismail and Taylor-Burke,

Councillor Grant in the Chair.

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved - The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on 29th March, 2021 were submitted and signed as a correct record.

2. MINUTES OF INFORMAL MEETING

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the informal meeting of the Committee held on 5th July, 2021 were submitted and noted.

3. PROPOSED COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

The Borough Solicitor submitted the proposed Committee Work Programme for 2021/22 which had been formulated following the informal meeting of this Committee held on 5th July, 2021.

If approved, the Programme would guide the work of the Committee over the course of the Municipal Year.

Resolved – That the 2021/22 Committee Work Programme, as now submitted, be approved.

4. COVID-19 – EFFECT OF PANDEMIC AND MEASURES IN PLACE

Ms B. Brown and Mr P. Rankin gave a presentation on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on children and young people and outlined the leadership response and measures put in place to mitigate this.

The presentation provided details of the Council led system response which had become effective as soon as the national Lockdown commenced in March, 2020. This had coincided with the co-location of social care staff at Castle Hill whilst other staff were deployed to the humanitarian response to support the most vulnerable and to get vulnerable children back into school. There was a flexible approach to supporting vulnerable staff with a visible leadership within Council Offices and Schools and continued support for young people.

Members were informed that there had been four waves of the virus in Bolton and the Authority's social care teams had carried on providing their services throughout. It was noted that

Bolton children had lost more face-to-face teaching than in any other Local Authority.

The presentation also advised that there were currently 452 children in elective home education, with 104 (23%) stating that COVID-19 was the reason.

Members were also shown a diagram which demonstrated how various agencies had worked together to provide a response and how information had been shared and reported and the flow of communication. Main points of action were highlighted, as follows:

- linked to schools pastoral teams;
- letters to heads clarifying reporting expectations for most vulnerable;
- communication;
- daily meetings;
- keeping in touch – leaving care offer;
- foster carer support;
- role of the humanitarian hub; and
- system response to tragedy – kinship and financial support.

As of March, 2021, the following data regarding impact was available:

- 59 open cases (114 children);
- 19 cases (32.2%) with delay which was assessed to have impact on the child - of which:
 - 23.7% (14 cases) had a delay which could be mitigated
 - 8.5% (5 cases) had a delay with a severe impact on the child;
 - 10.2% of cases reported 'Expert Evidence' as the most common reason for delay in Bolton; and
 - 42.4% (25) of cases had exceeded 26 weeks in Bolton with all of the cases with severe delay having exceeded 26 weeks.

In relation to regional and national communication and coordination, members were advised that it had comprised:

- Ofsted Regional Director;
- National and Regional School Commissioners;
- Education Unions – National Secretaries;;
- Cabinet Office; and
- Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

Members were also provided with examples of how the response worked in practice, as follows:

- supporting schools with high mortality within the community;
- decision making – facemasks and transition;
- local decision making that is timely and focused on the right thing for Bolton children;
- managing emotional wellbeing across the system – providing resilience;
- humanitarian system response;
- Delta Variant – community vaccine delivery and surge testing on school sites with military support;
- Children's Commissioner visit; and
- Brave Leadership.

Finally, the presentation focused on overall actions taken by Bolton during the Pandemic and how all agencies had pulled together to continue to deliver services to children with:

- emotionally intelligent and compassionate leadership;
- resilient leadership;
- coproduction and collaboration at the heart;
- system leadership at pace – responsive;
- Trade Unions engagement and support; and
- celebrating The Bolton Family success in complex times.

Following the presentation, the Committee commended Ms Brown and Mr Rankin and all the staff in the Children's Department for their response during an unprecedented period.

The Team had provided an outstanding service to all schools and played a proactive role in ensuring that children could

continue to learn in a safe environment with as much normality as possible.

It was acknowledged that Bolton had been one of the worst affected areas and the Team had risen to the challenge with outstanding leadership, dedication and commitment to putting the needs of children and young people at the forefront.

Members also commended the work that the Team had undertaken in supporting the communities of Bolton during the pandemic and the way in which staff had adapted their skills to meet changing needs.

Resolved – That Ms Brown and Mr Rankin be thanked for their informative presentation and that this Committee acknowledges the huge impact of Covid-19 on schools and children and the outstanding response of the Children's Services Department, and that all staff be thanked for their continued efforts during the Pandemic and beyond.

5. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH

Resolved – That this item be deferred for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee scheduled for 25th August, 2021 to enable a representative from the CCG to attend the meeting.

6. MEMBERS BUSINESS

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 12th and 26th April, 14th June and 12th July, 2021

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

(The meeting started at 6.00pm and finished at 6.50pm)