

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING, 29TH MARCH, 2021

Present – Councillors Iqbal (Chairman), Brady (Vice-Chairman), Abdullah, Ayub (as deputy for Councillor Khurram), Cunningham, Dean, Donaghy, Fletcher, Gibbon, McGeown, McMulkin (as deputy for Councillor Ismail), Murray, Newall, Radcliffe (as deputy for Councillor Connor) and Weatherby.

Co-opted Members

None Present

Also in attendance

Councillor Galloway	-	Executive Cabinet Member for Children
Ms B. Brown	-	Director of Children's Services
Mr P. Rankin	-	Deputy Director of Children's Services
Ms N. Murphy	-	Strategic Lead – Targeted Early Help
Ms J. Turner	-	Head of Service - YOT
Mrs S. Bailey	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer

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

Councillor Iqbal in the Chair

26. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on 1st February, 2021 were submitted and signed as a correct record.

27. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021

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

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

28. EARLY HELP IN BOLTON

Ms N. Murphy gave a presentation on the delivery of Early Help in Bolton and recent developments.

Members were informed that a new structure for Early Help had been introduced from 1st January, 2021 which had involved the transition of staff from Targeted Youth Support, Families First Funded Posts and the Assessment and Contact Centre.

The presentation provided details of the demand for Early Help in Bolton and explained that, as per the agreed proposal, the Targeted Early Help Service would work with 30% of whole system Early Help Demand which was predominantly Targeted/Complex/step down. This meant that the Service would have the capacity to work with 1,371 children per year (family support) which equated to approximately 571 families and offered a 20 week programme of targeted support. There was also a Targeted Youth Support offer (40 weeks) with the staff currently in post.

The presentation contained various diagrams to demonstrate the Early Help process and how it was accessed. An Early Help Access Point would be contactable directly for queries and alongside this, the Early Help Access Point Team would jointly triage cases at the Integrated Front Door based at Castle Hill.

The services would be organised into three neighbourhood bases consisting of North (Tonge or Bright Meadows), South (Farnworth or Great Lever) and West (Oxford Grove or Winifred Kettle) Teams and based in Start Well Centres. These were yet to be formally decided and as an interim measure, and with such a small number of workers, they were currently based at the Harvey Centre until the Service started to populate. Working from Start Well centres would encourage and enable partnership working, however, the long-term vision was local level integration, specifically with the 0-19 health service.

The teams would deliver front facing Family Support for Children and Young People 0-19yrs (25yrs SEND) and offer a range of methodologies including one to one support, group-based interventions and Targeted Youth Support utilising Evidence Based Programmes, consistently across the teams and aligning with partners. Evidence based programmes were currently being reviewed and once complete, there would be a targeted early help service 'curriculum' that outlined all the evidence best programmes that would be utilise and invested in, against the thematic areas of need.

During the Covid Pandemic, the Team had adapted to delivering virtual interventions although it had been possible to maintain some direct work with children in the school setting. Additionally, there had been social distanced doorstep welfare checks and some ability to meet outdoors in better weather for walk and talk, provision of vouchers during half term, support with resources home schooling/rainy day for non school age children.

Operationally, issues were being identified with CAM and partners undertaking assessment, and there had been an increase in referrals where a partner could do the work.

A Group based offer would be ideal once the Services were located in buildings as this would allow work with more families in one session and increased capacity. The Early Help offer was relatively small at the moment, but there was consistency of practice which was clear and accessible.

The presentation went on to provide details in relation to the Targeted Early Help Service and the schools that were currently engaged in phase 1.

Details of the Partnership Early Help response was also provided which currently worked with 2,550. This needed to rise to meet the demands across the Early Help system.

Details of ongoing work and future developments and initiatives were also provided.

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

29. PLAY AND YOUTH SERVICE

Mr P. Rankin gave a presentation on Play and Youth Service provision in Bolton.

The presentation informed members that the Youth Service currently worked with 500-700 children weekly and the Play Service with 700-800.

In relation to Childcare, members were advised that Schemes were currently offered at Castle Hill Young People's Centre, Tonge Moor and at Heywood Kids Club, Great Lever and provided play opportunities in a safe environment for children aged 4-12 years with parents paying for the sessions. Both schemes also offered places for children and young people with complex needs

Activities included arts, crafts, sports, games and outings were run all day from 8am-6pm. Drop-in sessions with stimulating activities for children and young people were also offered. All schemes were run by qualified and experienced staff and were Ofsted inspected.

With regard to Play Schemes, the presentation advised that there was a full programme of provision across the Borough in the North, South and West, with an extended offer in the school holidays. There were a variety of venues and sessions

provided in Local Authority centres and community buildings and were free of charge for ages 4 to 12.

The schemes were offered 6 days a week and run by small teams of 3-5 staff. They were designed to meet the needs of children and young people with opportunities for acknowledgment of informal learning.

Provision was also provided by mobile teams across the Borough in areas where there was an absence of Children and Young People's Centres. The sessions were free to 4–12-year-olds and were offered 6 days a week, with an extended programme in the school holidays. They were mainly based outdoors using play areas, parks and green spaces with children under 8 being supervised by an adults.

Junior youth clubs for 9–12-year-olds provided a chance for older children and young people to meet and were run all year round in the evenings. Schemes were free and designed to meet the needs of this age group with a focus on relevant issues and aimed to bridge the gap between primary and secondary school.

The Authority also ran Play is for All SEND schemes at Harwood Young People's Centre (for young people aged 12-19) years, Barlow Park Young People's Centre (4- 7 years) and Horwich Young People Centre (8 -11yrs) for 6 days a week. Access to these schemes was by referral only from staying safe and complex needs. Staff were trained on how to adapt and involve all children in the activities and support medical and one to one care needs.

Youth clubs were managed by qualified Level 2 Youth Workers and offered daytime sessions (holidays) and evening youth club (year-round). They were run from centres with outreach work to engage young people with sessions that offered sports, arts and crafts, information and guidance and project work with a focus on informal learning. The sessions could be challenging.

The presentation went on to outline the role of the Council's Participation Team whose focus was to coordinate participation requests and to ensure that the voice of young people was vocal to service needs and delivery.

With regard to holiday activities and food, members were advised that the Council would receive £1.48m of DfE funding towards a programme of holiday activity schemes with lunch/dinner.

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

- the benefits of working in partnership with local leisure centres and private clubs to deliver youth and play programmes – Mr Rankin advised that work was ongoing with such groups to involve them in future ventures;
- whether there was any capacity for food without activities – Mr Rankin advised that the free school meals voucher had been extended to cover the Easter break however, it was still unknown whether this would be extended to cover the summer holidays and was dependent on Government funding; and
- gaps in provision in some areas – Mr Rankin advised that other groups were operative in these parts and that the Council was working closely with external groups to ensure there was as much coverage as possible throughout the Borough.

Resolved – That Mr Rankin be thanked for his informative presentation.

30. CHILD EXPLOITATION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Ms J Turner gave a presentation on child exploitation and human trafficking and outlined the measures that had been put in place in Bolton to address this.

The presentation provided an explanation of the different forms of exploitation and types of grooming methods that were often used, particularly in relation to children.

Members were also informed of the signs that a child was being exploited, although some of these could be hard to identify or be hidden.

The presentation went on to outline the role of the Complex Safeguarding Team which aimed to identify, respond and disrupt the exploitation of children and young people through various methods. The Team was multi-agency and included Greater Manchester Police, social workers, support workers and a clinical psychologist. The Team had noted an increase in young people who were being criminally exploited and trafficked through county lines.

Although the case load altered dependant on referrals, there had been an evidential increase in Child Criminal Exploitation over the last 12 months. The increase in referral could be reflective of the training provided by the Council to social care staff in recognising the signs of exploitation. The Team also provided briefings and consultations to staff to raise awareness of both criminal and sexual exploitation.

Details of the cases currently open were as follows:

- Child Criminal Exploitation cases (18) - 17 males and 1 female
- Child Sexual Exploitation (11) - 10 females and 1 male

The Team offered intensive support to these children and young people, whilst working with GMP to disrupt any perpetrators identified.

The presentation went on to outline Bolton's response, which included:

- the Team working with the Partnership in order to respond to issues around exploitation, child trafficking, serious youth violence and county lines;
- the development of a violence, vulnerability and exploitation strategy by the Safeguarding Partnership,

- Violence Reduction Unit, Youth Justice, Children's Social Care, Health and Community Safety Partnership; and
- the VVE strategy would ensure that the the response to complex safeguarding was coordinated across the Partnership from prevention to protection.

In addition, Bolton had recently recruited: -

- a safer schools officer;
- a serious youth violence worker;
- Bolton solidarity to undertake some work around a recent operation and support the Team;
- hospital navigator for when young people presented at hospital with an injury caused by a weapon; and
- clinical psychologist .

These posts had been funded through the Violence Reduction Unit supported by the Community Safety Partnership.

Members were also informed that Bolton had recently amalgamated its criminal prevention, youth justice and complex safeguarding services. This alignment would provide a streamlined approach to respond to the complexities around adolescent safeguarding and risk and ensure that the child or young person had the correct service to respond to their needs. The national referral mechanism also supported the de-criminalisation of young people who were trafficked or criminally exploited.

Following the presentation, members made various comments/observations:

- the increasing figures in Bolton and whether this could be attributed to better detection of cases – Ms Turner advised that the work undertaken to increase awareness using a multi-agency approach combined a with a greater national awareness of exploitation of both girls and boys, had led to better recognition of abuse and increased referrals;

- the benefits of a facility where children could share experiences - members were advised of the work that was ongoing in schools to develop this;
- the importance of sharing intelligence between parties to identify perpetrators and cause disruption - members were assured that much work was ongoing in this regard; and
- the need to acknowledge the seriousness of child exploitation and to closely monitor the threat in Bolton.

Members referred to the worrying and serious threat of child exploitation in Bolton and agreed that regular updates should be provided to the Children's Scrutiny Committee to ensure its continued monitoring.

A motion was moved and seconded that a report relating to child exploitation be submitted to future meetings of the Children's Scrutiny Committee on at least two occasions during the Municipal Year and that written updates be provided to the Scrutiny Committee members on a quarterly basis.

The motion was put to the vote.

Members voting in favour of the motion (14):

Councillors Abdullah, Ayub, Brady, Cunningham, Dean, Donaghy, Fletcher, Gibbon, Iqbal, McMulkin, Murray, Newall, Radcliffe and Weatherby.

Members voting against the motion:

None

The motion was carried.

Resolved – (i) That update on child exploitation be submitted to future meetings of the Children's Scrutiny Committee on at least two occasions during the Municipal Year and that written updates be provided to the Scrutiny Committee members on a quarterly basis.

(ii) That Ms Turner be thanked for her informative presentation.

31. COVID-19 UPDATE

Mr P. Rankin gave an update on the Covid-19 pandemic as it related to schools.

Particular reference was made to the following:

- the ongoing testing across all schools;
- secondary pupils were undergoing twice weekly tests;
- pupils were in bubbles and would isolate if there was a positive test;
- ongoing maintenance of social distancing;
- continuous monitoring; and
- work with partners on plans for a way forward.

Ms Brown stated that it had been a very challenging time for all schools and that the scale of work involved to ensure the safety of children had been enormous. Staff had worked extremely hard and their efforts and commitment to ensuring that children could be safe and well and supported within their learning environment were to be commended.

Resolved – That the update be noted.

32. 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 8th February and 8th March, 2021.
- (b)

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

(The meeting started at 6.00 p.m. and finished at 7.20 p.m.)