

**CHILDREN'S AND CULTURE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

MEETING, 21ST AUGUST, 2013

Present – Councillors Ashcroft (Chairman), C. Burrows, L. Byrne, Cunliffe, Mrs Fairclough, Jones, Kay, Lewis, Mistry, Radlett (as deputy for Councillor Mrs Swarbrick), Rushton, Spencer and Watters.

Also in Attendance

Councillor Mrs Thomas	-	Executive Cabinet Member Deputy Leader
Councillor McKeon	-	Cabinet Member for Schools and Skills
Councillor Murray	-	Cabinet Member for Looked After Children, Safeguarding and Early Years
Councillor A. Connell	-	Sport, Libraries, Youth and Culture
Ms. M. Asquith	-	Director of Children's Services
Mr. J. Rowlands	-	Assistant Director, Customer Services
Mr S. Young (as deputy for Ms. D. Ball)	-	Assistant Director Environmental Services and Committee Chief Officer Support
Mr. J. Livesey	-	Assistant Director Children's Services
Mr. J. Daly	-	Assistant Director Children's Services
Mrs. S. Bailey	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cox and Mrs Swarbrick

Councillor Ashcroft in the Chair.

5. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Children's and Culture Scrutiny Committee held on 19th June, 2013 were submitted.

Resolved – That the minutes be received and signed as a correct record.

6. MONITORING OF DECISIONS

The Director of Chief Executive's Department submitted a report which detailed the progress of decisions taken at previous meetings of this Committee

Resolved - That the position be noted.

7. THE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report which set out details of the updated work programme for the Committee for the current Municipal Year, which had been formulated following the workshop session at the previous meeting.

Resolved – That the updated work programme be approved.

8. ADOPTION REFORM

Mr J. Daly gave a presentation which updated members on the Government's National Adoption Reform Strategy which aimed to address the shortage of adopters.

The Government had allocated £150million to tackle the backlog of over 4,000 children who were waiting to be adopted with an additional £1million allocated to voluntary agencies to recruit more adopters.

The new measures could also require local authorities to outsource their adoption recruitment and assessment services if sufficient change in numbers of prospective adopters recruited were not to be achieved.

Currently in the North West there were 534 approved adopters and 1500 children with an adoption plan.

The presentation went on to address the numbers of prospective adopters within Bolton. 84 initial enquiries had been received which was an increase of 17 on the 2012 figures which converted to 28 applications and 25 approved adopters. In terms of initial enquiries to approved adopters ratio in 2013, Bolton was the third highest in the North West achieving 30%, with the application to approved adoption ratio being 89%.

In terms of the Adoption Reform Grant, members were advised that:

- £50m was ring-fenced to incentivise local authorities to find more adopter and address structural problems with adoption recruitment ;
- £100m was not ring-fenced and would be available to local authorities to support adoption reform – to target funding at the entire adoption process and the specialist support children required;
- the grant was for one year and Bolton's Adoption Reform Grant allocation was £1,179,544.

The presentation also highlighted that the increase in interagency fees to £27,000 per placement would significantly increase costs in 2013/14. In 2012/13, expenditure on interagency fees was £658,991 which reflected the high number of children for whom adoptive families were found. Bolton was third highest in the North West with 48 adoptions during 2012/13.

The presentation also went on to outline:

- the number of adoptions since 2000;
- the number of children who were the subject of an adoption plan as 31st March, 2013; and
- the % of Looked after Children who were the subject of an adoption plan as at 31st March, 2013.

Mr Daly went on to inform members of measures which had been put in place to increase capacity for adoptions in Bolton, including the recruitment of additional social workers, a support worker, increased management capacity in the Fostering Team, a Duty Support Worker, increased IRO capacity and the continuation of invest to save schemes in fostering and adoption. Details of regional Adoption Reform Grant collaborations were also outlined.

The risks associated with the Adoption Reform Grant were also highlighted.

Following the presentation, members made a number of comments/observations, as follows:

- concerns that the funding was for one year only and sustainability of the higher level interagency fees if there were no on-going monies;
- concern that the voluntary sector may not be able to cope with increased capacity;
- minimum levels of performance were already set out in the Adoption Scorecard;
- it was important for the children to have a voice in the process, if they were old enough; and
- Bolton had performed extremely well in terms of Adoption.

Resolved – (i) That Mr Daly be thanked for his informative presentation and that the excellent performance in terms of Adoption in Bolton be acknowledged; and
(ii) That an update on the progress of the Adoption Reform Grant and a copy of the Adoption Annual Report be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee.

9. 12 MONTH REVIEW OF NEW LIBRARY NETWORK

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report which outlined the performance of Bolton's Public Library Service during the period April 2012 to March 2013, since the implementation of the recent Library Network Review.

Information was provided in relation to the following areas, viz:-

- background and context;
- additional opening at the Central Library and Museum;
- services to Children and Young People and to Schools;
- Library Link;
- use of technology;
- Digital Services;
- Ask Bolton Libraries;
- neighbourhood Book Collections;
- Library Network Services;
- summary of the twelve month performance data; and
- financial implications

Mr Rowlands gave a presentation to supplement the report which reminded members of the background to the review and the implementation of the new operating structure for the Library and Museum Services since April, 2012 together with progress against performance measures and the response to the new arrangements by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

Following the 12 months operation of the new library arrangements, the DCMS had commented favourably on the methodology and process and stated that Bolton Council had continued to offer a comprehensive and efficient library service whilst successfully targeting the efficiency improvements.

The presentation went on to focus on the future of library services and what was expected of a modern library. Guidance has been published by the Arts Council in May, 2013 which showed that libraries were highly valued by users and non-users alike as trusted spaces which were open to all and in which people continued to explore and share the joys of reading, information, knowledge and culture.

The presentation outlined activity in the last 6 months which included:

- promotion of additional opening hours at Central Library and Museum;
- development of services to children and young people and schools;
- promotion of housebound services – Library Link;
- expansion of information and enquiry service;
- Neighbourhood Book Collection support; and
- advertising the new Library network.

The presentation also provided 12 month performance data in terms of visitor numbers, loans and IT use based on the context of a 26% reduction in opening hours and an on-going downward trend for traditional measures such as book borrowing. The figures revealed the reduction was significantly less and indicated that closed libraries were less used and/or use was migrated.

Current priorities for the Library and Museum Service were also identified which included:

- promotion and development of core service offer;
- specific projects;
- joint working with Customer Services; and
- shared working with other authorities.

Following the presentation, members made a number of comments/observations, as follows:

- user figures did not always reflect true usage of the libraries – many visitors used the libraries for reference purposes;
- the decline in book borrowing could be partly attributed to the increased use of IT equipment such as Kindles together with cheaper sales of books and increased accessibility to books;
- consideration could be given to changing some of the collection points if they were not well used; and
- encourage the use of apprenticeships for culture in partnership with other Town Centre businesses.

It was noted that other local authorities had contacted Bolton Council following the review due to its success and good feedback from the DCMS.

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

10. 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 Deputy Leader's Portfolio held on 8th and 25th July, 2013 and 19th August, 2013
- (b) The Children's Safeguarding and Skills PDG held on 23rd July, 2013
- (c) The Cabinet held on 16th July, 2013

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

(The meeting commenced at 5.00p.m. and ended at 6.30p.m.)

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