

**CHILDREN'S AND CULTURE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

MEETING, 8TH FEBRUARY, 2017

Present – Councillors Dean (Chairman), Kirk-Robinson (Vice-Chairman), Abdullah, Darvesh, Gibbon, Gillies, Harkin, Haworth, Iqbal, Murray, Spencer, Mrs. Swarbrick, C. Wild and Wilkinson.

Co-opted Members

Mr J. Clare – Representative of Secondary Parent Governors
Mrs A. Martin – Representative of Primary Parent Governors

Also in Attendance

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| Councillor Mrs Thomas | - | Executive Member Deputy Leader |
| Councillor Cunliffe | - | Cabinet Member for Education, Schools, Safeguarding and Looked After Children |
| Councillor J. Byrne | - | Cabinet Member for Culture, Youth and Sport |
| Mr J. Daly | - | Director of People |
| Mr T. Birch | - | Assistant Director, Education and Learning |
| Mr P. Bartle | - | Managing Director, USB Bolton Arena |
| Ms S. Hayes | - | Programme Manager, USB Bolton Arena |
| Mr J. Gorton | - | Partnership Administration Manager, Leisure Trust |
| Ms K. Presto | - | Integrated Working Team |

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| Ms J. Clark | - | Adoption Team Leader |
| Mrs S. Bailey | - | Principal Democratic Services Officer |

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Hornby and Jones

Councillor Dean in the Chair.

23. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Children's and Culture Scrutiny Committee held on 23rd November, 2016 were submitted.

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

24. THE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report which put forward the proposed Work Programme for the Committee for the current Municipal Year, which had been formulated following the workshop session at the first meeting of the Committee in June, 2016.

Resolved – That the 2016/17 work programme, as now submitted, be approved.

25. BOLTON MIDDLEBROOK LEISURE TRUST

Mr P. Bartle and Ms S. Hayes gave a presentation on the background, setup, activities and finances at the Bolton Arena.

Members were reminded that the Arena was a £15m facility managed by Bolton Middlebrook Leisure Trust on behalf of the Council and was funded by Sport England and the Lawn Tennis Association with the land having originally been provided by the Council. The Arena received no revenue funding and operated as a charity. All staff were employed

directly by the trust and all revenues were re-invested in facility, activities and people.

The presentation outlined the usage of the Arena which had generated 1.1million visits this year. A detailed breakdown of activities was provided.

Members were also informed of the active role that the Arena played in supporting and promoting tennis in the community.

The Arena also provided many activities that supported the community such as:

- health walks;
- neuro, Parkinson's and dementia programmes;
- specialist weight management pathway;
- Bolton wide disability schools programme;
- Wheels for All sessions;
- walking football;
- couch to 5k and get into cycling programmes;
- free meeting facilities and support for Horwich Harriers, Lancashire Road Cycling Club, Bolton Hot Wheels and Horwich Festival of Racing Committee.

Information was also provided in relation to the partners that the Trust was currently working with and its achievements. Through a range of charitable requests, the Arena had donated £29k of value in 18 months, elite athlete memberships, sponsorship of carnival races and facility use.

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

- some of the funding for the tennis facility at the Arena was provided by the Lawn Tennis Association for the tennis facility at the Arena;
- the tennis in the community facilities were available to schools across the Borough; and
- the possible use of satellite facilities to enable expansion of the gymnastics provision.

Resolved – That Mr Bartle and Ms Hayes be thanked for their informative presentation.

26. MISSING FROM HOME AND EDUCATION

Ms K. Presto gave a presentation on children missing from home and education and outlined the Authority's multi-agency approach to tackling such incidents and strategies for prevention in the future.

Members were informed that the Authority had produced a Missing Strategy and accompanying Action Plan to track its effectiveness. Various developments had taken place to improve reporting mechanisms, to work better in partnerships, to produce clearer audits, the development of a Safeguarding Children Board focusing on missing children and contributions to the Greater Manchester Missing Group.

The presentation went on to outline the main findings and results of work undertaken to date. The majority of children went missing only once, were over 13 years old and returned on the same day. The main reasons that children went missing were also outlined and included peer pressure, family relationships and contact with family and friends.

In 2016/17, the numbers of children that had been reported as missing had reduced quarter by quarter, however, there were still ongoing challenges, namely to:

- increase the number of children who received a return interview within 72 hours of returning;
- continue to develop reporting to improve understanding of and response to children who went missing;
- continue to improve the use of the information children provide at return interviews to reduce risks and prevent further missing; and

- continue to develop a strategic approach to missing – develop strategy and implement action plan.

Following the presentation, members made comments and discussed the following issues:

- the communication across neighbouring boroughs and the emergency arrangements that were in place to ensure the flow of information;
- the percentage of children that went missing out of the Borough was very low in Bolton;
- approximately 477 children had gone missing last year;
- children in placements tended to be better at reporting children as missing than those missing from families; and
- misunderstandings appeared to account for a significant number of missing children.

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

27. EMERGING COMMUNITIES AND INTERNATIONAL NEW ARRIVALS

Mr T. Birch gave a presentation on international new arrivals and emerging communities in Bolton together with details on the work of the Achievement Cohesion and Integration Service.

The presentation provided statistical information in relation to:

- the number of induction interviews;
- the number of primary and secondary age induction interviews;
- induction interviews by ethnicity; and
- induction interviews by country of origin.

The presentation also gave an overview of the distribution of primary and secondary age children by ethnicity within Bolton and details of primary and secondary schools receiving international new arrivals between 2012/13 and 2016/17.

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

- schools with vacancies were required to take additional pupils;
- the support to schools that took large numbers of International New Arrivals and the challenges they faced;
- the difficulties faces by schools when the funding to support additional pupils came at a later date;
- people from the same community wanted to stay together; and
- one of the biggest challenges facing the Authority was the availability of school places and opportunities were always being sought to increase them.

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

28. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN INCLUDING ADOPTION

Mr J. Daly and Ms J. Clarke gave a presentation on the system of care for children who were under 18 and who were in the care of the Local Authority.

The purpose of the system was to look after children whose parents were unable to do so. Once they became looked after children, they could be placed by the local authority with family members, foster carers, or in a residential children's home.

The children could be the subject of a care order, full or interim, and those looked after by a voluntary agreement with their parents.

The presentation went on to provide statistical details on:

- the numbers of looked after children in Bolton – a steady increase over the last 12 years with a 62% increase on numbers since 2004;
- the numbers fluctuated depending on admissions and discharges – during 2015/16, discharges were greater than admissions leading to a small decrease in the looked after children cohort however the cohort was increasing again during 2016/17;
- age of children – Bolton had a higher proportion of young children entering care than the national average but this was reducing;
- placements – most of the children were placed with foster carers with a smaller proportion in residential care;
- educational attainment - % for reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 2 and those reaching 5 or more A*-C GCSEs – volatile indicators dependent on needs and abilities – Bolton ranked 5th in England in 2011-12 for GCSE indicator and had remained above England average since then; and
- absence from school – although increasing, Bolton had remained in line with England and Wales.

With regard to the health of Looked after Children, the presentation advised that the nationally published immunisation figures for 2015-16 showed that Bolton remained well above average and that dental checks were consistently high. Almost all received an annual health assessment and emotional wellbeing questionnaires were classed as in the normal range.

The presentation went on to focus on the roles and responsibilities of being a corporate parent and the advised members that the Corporate Parenting Board was being refreshed to enable key agencies and councillors to look more specifically at issues facing looked after children.

Members were also advised on the national strategy for looked after children leaving care and provided details in relation to the activity of care leavers in Bolton aged 19, 20 and 21 during 2016 and those in suitable accommodation in 2016 aged 19, 20 and 21. Bolton was now ranked 74th nationally which was an improvement from 125th place in 2012.

The presentation went on to focus on adoption and updated members on the national and regional developments, the implications for service and local outcomes.

The presentation summarised the main components of the National Reform Agenda 2011-2017 and highlighted in particular the Regionalising Adoption Service. The Government had announced proposals in May 2015 that all adoption services should be delivered on a regional basis.

The aims of the new agencies were to

- increase the number of children adopted;
- reduce the length of time the children waited to be adopted;
- improve post adoption support services to families who had adopted; and
- reduce the number of adoption agencies to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Since then, Bolton, Bury, Blackburn with Darwen, Rochdale, Tameside and Oldham local authorities had been working together with Adoption Matters and Caritas Care to develop plans for the development of a Regional Development Agency. Transitional plans had been prepared and submitted outlining how the local authorities would move forward with the current arrangements to develop a single agency.

The presentation went on to provide detailed statistics in relation to adoption in Bolton and how activity compared to the national picture and highlighted in particular:

- a comparison of performance and outcomes from 2013/14 against 2015/16;

- link maker performance;
- best performing agencies nationally – Bolton and Blackburn with Darwen had performed the best;
- Bolton was the best performing in terms of 5 year average for the % of children who left care to adoption to 2016.

The presentation concluded with a list of priorities for 2017/18 which included:

- to continue to develop practice to support timely, best interests decision making in line with Bolton's Looked after Children Strategy; and
- to preserve and promote best practice and outcomes across RAA agencies to ensure sufficiency in recruitment, timely adoption outcomes for children and high quality adoption support for families.

Following the presentation, members felt that it would be it would be beneficial to learn lessons from those children who were in education, employment or training although it was understood that each case would be different.

Resolved – That Mr Daly and Ms Clarke be thanked for their informative presentation.

29. MEMBERS' BUSINESS

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

- the Executive Cabinet Deputy Leader's Portfolio held on 5th December, 2016 and 16th January, 2017.

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

(The meeting started at 5.00pm and finished at 7.00pm)

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