

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Full Committee
DATE:	Tuesday 28 January 2025
TIME:	12.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Stowe (Chair), Barnard, Bowser, Denton, Eastwood, Fielding, Green, Hayward, Holling, Hunt, Lodge, Markham, McCarthy, Mitchell, Morrell, Moyes, Murray, Osborne, Pearson, Pickering, Tattersall, Webster, N. Wright and P. Wright together with co-opted member L Iles

38 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

No apologies for absence were received.

39 Declarations of Interests on matters contained within the Agenda

Councillor Lodge declared a non pecuniary interest as an employee of an organisation that supports children in care.

Councillor Tattersall declared a non pecuniary interest as a member of the Berneslai Homes Board.

Councillor N Wright declared a non pecuniary interest due to ongoing dialogue/contact with social care.

40 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the following meetings were received and approved by Members as a true and accurate record:-

1st October 2024 – Full Committee

8th October 2024 – Sustainable Barnsley Workstream

5th November 2024 – Growing Barnsley Workstream

10th December 2024 – Healthy Barnsley Workstream

41 FOR INFORMATION ONLY - Children's Social Care Performance Report October 2024 (REDACTED)

Members were invited to consider a cover report relating to Children's Social Care Performance October 2024. The redacted report was provided for information only.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

42 Exclusion of the Public and Press

RESOLVED that the public and press be excluded from this meeting during consideration of the items so marked because of the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by the specific paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended.

43 Children's Social Care Performance Report October 2024 and Children's Services Development Programme Quarter 2 2024-2025 Report

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:-

- Ian Walker, Practice Consultant, Children's Services, Barnsley Council
- Trevor Cave, Cabinet Spokesperson, Children's Services, Barnsley Council

Members considered and questioned witnesses on both the Children's Social Care Performance Report October 2024 and Children's Development Programme Quarter 2 2024-25.

Councillor T Cave provided members with a brief overview of the items reporting that significant investment had been made in Children's Services instigated around the development plan which had been operational for two years but had since been stepped down. Following an ILACS and OFSTED inspection members heard how Children's Services was moving into a cycle of continuous improvement.

In the ensuing discussion and in response to detailed questioning and challenge, the following matters were highlighted:

Members raised queries regarding the Elective Home Education (EHE) Policy in relation to vulnerable children in Barnsley. In response members were informed that whilst there was no statutory expectation at the moment to monitor and report children on EHE, this was a practice that Barnsley had already implemented. The Local Authorities' power was limited in compelling children to return to mainstream education, however this was due to be included within legislative projections. With regards to children with additional needs such as those on a Child in Need Plan or Child Protection Plan, provisions were monitored and assessed as part of the Care Plan in place. Specific oversight was carried out with cases of particular risk where parents could potentially be withholding children from schools to divert from other factors.

The target for suspensions across secondary schools was 15% and it was reported in Quarter 1 that this remained below target at 7.4%. Work continued with schools and to work in partnership with academies to discourage and encourage other means of sanctions. It was noted that suspensions negatively affected educational outcomes, could increase the risk of involvement in criminal activities, and did not serve the interests of schools, homes, and communities for young people to be out of school.

Members noted that there had been an increase in contact and referrals. The increased rate was partly due to a lack of understanding between social care professionals and schools about each other's pressures and business views. A programme of work was being undertaken involving Heads of Service communicating

with education teams to share perceptions of threshold criteria to elicit appropriate referrals. Schools were expected to undertake early help interventions unless there was an imminent priority need, but this process was not fully embedded. There was a need for better liaison and communication to improve awareness of mutual pressures and criteria.

Members raised concerns around the targets for visits to children on protection plans. Members were reassured that in these circumstances Service Directors had oversight of the shortfalls and would challenge Heads of Service and Team Managers to rationalise why visits would not be taking place. It was acknowledged that some missed visits could be as a result of some parents who may avoid contact, accessing and persistently following up contact on these case files was crucial. It was noted that some delays could be as a result of time pressures on visits or the recording of visits which would be addressed through management systems in challenging social workers.

Members were informed that private children's homes imposed significant financial pressures on the Service as a whole. A proposed financial cap would be welcomed across the whole social care industry.

Regarding the potential collaboration with neighbouring Local Authorities to establish shared children's homes, several key issues had been identified that required consideration. Several strengths and weaknesses were observed in this approach, and increased collaborative working in placement provisions was preferable for the future.

Members requested the data around the number of EHCP students awaiting specialist provision and for how long. They were informed that this was not known at the time of the meeting but would be circulated afterwards.

Providing care leavers with protected characteristics had led to many positive outcomes. In collaboration with Berneslai Homes, a project had been created to earmark properties through band one which was for various protected groups including care leavers. Additionally, small starter homes on new estates had been purchased for care leavers, these properties would remain part of the housing stock available to them for as long as they wish to reside there. It was noted that whilst Berneslai Homes could not meet all needs, some private landlords had been engaged in order to provide additional affordable housing and in some cases share tenancies. Members were informed however that affordability would always remain a key consideration.

Barnsley had above average numbers of care leavers in employment and training. A programme of work was being undertaken to reach out to wider departments within the council to provide some care leavers with the opportunity of work experience in order to build confidence and commitment to do something more.

It was noted that demand on the service displayed notable peaks in October and February. Members were informed that these increases occurred following the summer holiday and Christmas break. As children returned to school and were observed again by teaching staff, referrals would be made in September and January with the Service responding in October and February creating those peaks.

It was reported that recruitment to social worker posts had been successful with 22 new starters this year from the created Social Work Academy.

There was a drive to increase the number of foster carers in Barnsley and it was reiterated that there were very few disqualifications from fostering so anyone should be encouraged to apply. Elected members were requested to reach out to their local communities to encourage people to step forward.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the reports be noted;
- (ii) that the witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution; and
- (ii) that witnesses provide members with data on the numbers of EHCP students waiting for specialist provision and for how long.

44 Children's Services Development Programme Quarter 2 2024-2025 Report

This item was addressed and included in the preceding agenda item.

Chair