

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	Tuesday, 19 June 2018
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Ennis (Chair), G. Carr, Clements, Gollick, Hampson, W. Johnson, Makinson, Mitchell, Pourali, Sheard, Tattersall, Williams, Wilson and Wright together with co-opted members Ms P. Gould and Ms K. Morritt

7 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

No apologies for absence were received in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

8 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

Councillors Carr, Tattersall and Wilson declared non-pecuniary interests with regard to items 4 and 6 on the agenda due to their positions on the Corporate Parenting Panel.

9 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th June 2018 were approved as a true and accurate record.

10 Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:-

Mel John-Ross, Service Director, Children's Social Care and Safeguarding, BMBC
 Deborah Mercer, Head of Children & Family Social Care, BMBC
 Jon Banwell, Head of Children in Care Services, BMBC
 Monica Green, Head of Safeguarding & Quality Assurance, BMBC
 Councillor Margaret Bruff, Cabinet Spokesperson for People – Safeguarding

The Service Director, Children's Social Care and Safeguarding, BMBC, introduced this item and provided Members with an overview of BMBC's Self Evaluation of Social Work Practice in Barnsley, in response to the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills' (Ofsted's) new framework for the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS).

It was explained that this is a more efficient, strength based approach underpinned by the principle of catching and supporting Local Authorities before they fall, not catching them out. A self-evaluation is completed, which must be fewer than twenty

pages long, by talking to practitioners on the front line in the first instance. The report includes full year performance, which demonstrates the distance travelled. It was felt that the new framework was a step in the right direction, as previous inspections did seem to have a negative impact.

Questions were then invited from Members and the following lines of enquiry were challenged and pursued:

Neglect is the negative behaviour which children coming into care in Barnsley are most likely to have experienced. Neglect impacts on children in many areas, including lack of boundaries, poor attachments, poor behaviour at school and social relationships and can lead to mental health and drug and alcohol problems in later life. To combat this, the Neglect strategy was developed in 2017 and includes training for partners. To date more than 500 professionals have been trained and now have a greater understanding of the implications of neglect. Work is also done with parents and a successful media campaign raised awareness with the general population. There is a link between poverty and neglect in that parents who are living in poverty may lack the capacity and motivation to care for their children adequately. Work is currently underway to further explore the linkages and this theme will be returned to by the Committee later in the year.

Barnsley is currently graded as 'requires improvement'. The inspection judgement will be received after the inspection has taken place – Barnsley's last inspection was in May 2014 so an inspection could be imminent. The Local Authority is also subject to two visits focussing on narrow and specific areas and lasting 2-3 days, which could prompt a full inspection if the results of the visits are a cause for concern. There is also the possibility of a joint targeted inspection with the CQC and the Police. An annual meeting with the Director takes place to review a self-evaluation, which will be refreshed every quarter.

It was highlighted that Elected Member challenge and scrutiny is very much a part of continuous improvement. Together with Cllr Bruff's input, this is viewed as a significant part of Barnsley's improvement journey.

Mark Riddle MBE, National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers was invited to Barnsley in May 2018 to test the offer to Care Leavers here in Barnsley. Detailed feedback from the very positive visit will be shared with the Corporate Parenting Panel. Mr Riddle visited the new care leavers' drop in and was very impressed with the offer, which was developed alongside the young people and now offers additional support up to age 25, not 21 as previously. An open day is planned and Mr Riddle's suggestions will be taken on board and included in the redeveloped offer.

A Member questioned that social workers working with disabled children appeared to have a high number of caseloads. It was explained that caseloads have significantly reduced from previous levels with the addition of new social workers. The Disabled Children's Team work with lots of children with varying levels of need. Some may only need help to review support and respite arrangements and thus the work is not as intensive as in other teams. It was also pointed out that caseloads in other teams are coming down and numbers can change on a daily basis.

It was felt that Barnsley is successful in recruiting new social workers as they ensure social workers are given ongoing support and an effective, supportive working environment so that they feel valued. Training needs are reviewed and met on an

annual basis. The management structure is efficient, with visible leaders which provides a sense of confidence. 'Home grown' social workers are supported by a three year offer of training and learning opportunities. Agency staff are no longer used.

Referral thresholds are agreed with partners, and re-referrals and those cases deemed as 'no further action' are constantly monitored. Sometimes there has to be some adjustments made, and consultations about concerns take place with partner agencies to ensure the right service is provided at the right time, with a strong 'step up/step down' process in place. Challenge is always welcome.

The voice of the child is always heard in Barnsley and the child's views and needs are placed at the centre and incorporated into any intervention. Children are involved in their own case conferences and clear feedback is obtained from children with regard to what helps and what hinders. The Care4Us Council challenges officers on performance and contributes to improvement plans. A new website for children in care was launched just last week and the Care leavers' service was developed in conjunction with care leavers. Non-verbal tools are used where a child has communication difficulties and complaints are carefully considered to pick out the key elements.

Good practice is identified and shared between the Local Authority and partner agencies and success is celebrated at a bi-monthly forum. The biggest risk to the effective delivery of services to children is the austerity measures and cuts to government funding. The budget for statutory services is protected in Barnsley but the national picture can't be ignored and preventative and early help services could be reduced, leading to more children being referred to 'high end' social care. An increase in the number of care proceedings and rising numbers of children in care could put pressure on Local Authorities.

The education and school attendance of Looked After Children is a priority, as is the ongoing delivery of the Placement Sufficiency Strategy. Barnsley has a strong ambition that children should be placed within a family setting, especially older children. Adolescents and sibling groups present a particular challenge. One recent success has been the fostering recruitment campaign run in conjunction with the North East Area Council, which has seen a phenomenal increase in the number of Barnsley carers from this area recruited to care for Barnsley children. This initiative will be rolled out across the Borough.

Members felt that Barnsley was keeping pace with other Local Authorities and had a strong, stable and committed workforce and should be thanked for their commitment to Barnsley children.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) Witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution
- (ii) The contents of the reports be noted

11 Exclusion of the Public and Press

RESOLVED that the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item, because of the likely disclosure of exempt information as described by the specific paragraphs of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) as follows:

<u>Item Number</u>	<u>Type of information likely to be disclosed</u>
6	Paragraph 1

12 Children's Social Care Performance Cover Report

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

- Mel John-Ross, Service Director, Children's Social Care & Safeguarding
- Councillor Margaret Bruff, Cabinet Spokesperson for People (Safeguarding)

An introduction was given to the report circulated, which provided information for the whole year's performance and Quarter 4 performance (April 2018).. The report provided a summary section with an overview of performance using RAG (red, Amber, Green) ratings and direction of travel for most indicators together with historical performance and comparisons with other local authorities and national and statistical neighbour averages (based on 2016/17 data) where available.

Members asked questions and challenged the following issues, to which appropriate responses were given:

- The reasons behind the relatively low number of Early Help Assessments completed in April.
- The decrease in the proportion of looked after children in the same placement for two years or more.
- Looked after children's high school attendance and exclusion rates.
- The role of the Virtual Head, Social Workers and Education Welfare in addressing education issues.
- The role of partners in supporting care leavers to engage in education, employment or training.
- The significant increase in the number of contacts received, due to changes in the recording system, not an increase in demand.
- The increase in children subject to a child protection plan for the second or subsequent time.

RESOLVED that:

- i) witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution; and
- ii) the report be noted.