

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

**EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING**

**1000 hours on Wednesday, 17 January 2024, Committee Rooms 3 & 4,  
Council House**

**Minutes**

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**Present:**

Councillor Kerry Jenkins (Chair)

Councillors: Debbie Clancy, Adam Higgs, Morriam Jan, and Jane Jones

Other Representatives: Osamugi Ogbe - Parent Governor, Rabia Shami - Parent Governor, and Sarah Smith - Church of England Diocese

**Also Present:**

Sarah Fradgley, Overview and Scrutiny Manager

Sue Harrison, Director, Children and Families

Amanda Simcox, Scrutiny Officer

Fayth Skeete, Head of Strategic Governance and Planning

**1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST**

The Chair advised that the meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Public-I microsite and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

**2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received on behalf of Cllrs Jilly Bermingham and Des Hughes.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

Members were reminded they must declare all relevant pecuniary and other registerable interests arising from any business to be discussed at this meeting, and the

Chair – Cllr Kerry Jenkins declared an interest as she was employed by the Unite union in a national role and had no direct involvement in local or Birmingham City Council industrial relations or other matters concerning employees of the Council.

#### **4. MINUTES**

(See document No 1)

##### **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **5. ACTION TRACKER**

(See document No 2)

The Chair advised the Committee that it had not been possible to hold an informal session in December for the Committee to input into the work of the Budget Task and Finish Group due to officers having to put the high level proposals together and this focused piece of work having to be completed at pace. The Budget T&F Group had compiled a report which would go to Cabinet alongside the budget proposals.

The Chair explained the role of scrutiny going forward will be to scrutinise the delivery of services within its remit and how the impact of the cuts will be mitigated and measured.

##### **RESOLVED:**

That the action tracker be noted.

#### **6. COMMISSIONER'S REVIEW AND COMMENTS ON THE AGENDA**

##### **RESOLVED:**

The Committee noted that no comments had been received from the Commissioner on this agenda.

#### **7. IMPROVING SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES PLAN UPDATE**

(See document No. 3)

The Chair welcomed Sue Harrison, Director, Children and Families and Fayth Skeete, Head of Strategic Governance and Planning to the meeting.

The Director, Children and Families set the context for the improvement plan and highlighted the commitment to bringing stability to the Children and Families Directorate and continue with the improvement journey. However, improvements

were overshadowed by the efficiencies the Directorate needed to make and the improvement plan will be recalibrated to reflect this. The Committee noted that the conditions for success included corporate HR and recruitment resources, Oracle, and finance resources which were also under pressure. The Director reassured the meeting that there was an effective partnership with the partners including the voluntary sector, schools and Children's Trust in the design and delivery of services, working closely together to keep children safe.

The Head of Strategic Governance and Planning presented the paper and explained that the Directorate was focused on the fundamentals being in place to meet the improvement priorities, and that the 'working in partnership' pillar was fundamental. In addition, the Improving Services for Children and Families Board was focused on the strategic issues, and the refreshed improvement plan was due to be completed by the end of March 2024

During the debate, the following points were addressed:

#### **Safeguarding (Statutory Duty)**

The Director assured the Committee that keeping the most vulnerable children safe was a statutory duty. Therefore, these services had to be delivered and key posts must remain, although it should be noted that some posts were not as yet filled by permanent staff. Permanent staff were being appointed as the Directorate redesign moves forward.

The Directorate was working with partners to mitigate the increased risk to children where non statutory services were reduced, looking at how services align, and ensuring children do not fall between any gaps. In addition, transparency and communication with partners was important in keeping children safe. Council officers will be able to be more transparent with partners when the final budget has been agreed and details were in the public domain.

#### **Key Roles**

Responding to a question as to how planned new recruitment accorded with the wider budget situation and potential redundancies at the Council, the Director commented that demand was growing nationally, and staff required skills, experience, and development to keep children safe. Therefore, it was important to continue to monitor the recruitment and retention of social workers with the Children's Trust, and the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) officers within the Council. The Director highlighted that she was pleased that good applicants were applying for jobs within the Directorate despite the bad publicity in the press regarding the issues faced by the Council.

#### **Statutory and Non-Statutory Services**

The Chair commented that the Committee needed to scrutinise where savings were being made and how this would affect services and children in the city. The Director stated that there were linkages with statutory and non-statutory services and there was a likelihood of an increase in demand for statutory services if capacity was reduced in some non-statutory services.

A request was made that a diagram providing an overview of the transformation to clarify which services that would be lost be provided to the Committee after the budget was set. The Director confirmed they were working on this as part of the dialogue with trade union colleagues and a diagram including the services that will be lost, timelines for the different areas, and staffing information would be provided to the Committee.

### **Improving Services for Children and Families Board**

Reassurance on the work of the improvement boards was requested and the meeting was informed that the Children and Young People's Travel Service would be incorporated into the Improving Services for Children and Families Board. The independent chair - Sally Rowe, would be producing an annual report and the Director undertook to discuss with the independent chair the possibility of sharing the action points from the Board's meetings with the Committee. In addition, the Director committed to providing membership details, Terms of Reference (TOR), and frequency of meetings of the Board.

### **Draft Attendance Strategy**

Officers were working on the initial draft attendance strategy with headteachers, and a draft would be presented to the Committee for consideration and input.

### **Future Update Reports and Next Steps**

The Chair summed up the Committee's deliberations and suggested the independent chair of the Improving Services for Children and Families Board be invited to a future committee meeting.

The Chair requested that future reports were easier to understand by the public and the Committee, which included the report being succinct, using less jargon, and being clearer on what progress was made. Also, the update on the data and digital road map should be provided once finalised alongside future improvement and performance updates to the Committee.

### **RESOLVED:**

That:

- The Committee noted and commented on the Improving Services for Children and Families Plan.
- Sally Rowe, independent chair of the Improving Services for Children and Families Board to be invited to a future meeting.
- The Director, Children and Families to discuss with the independent chair of the Improving Services for Children and Families Board arrangements for sharing action points from the Board's meetings with the Committee.
- The Committee to discuss the draft Attendance Strategy in April 2024.
- An update on the finalised data and digital road map to be provided alongside future improvement and performance updates to the Committee.
- The following to be provided by the Directorate:

- A diagram of the transformation to include services that have been lost, timelines for the different areas, and staffing information.
- Membership details, Terms of Reference (TOR), and frequency of meetings of the Improving Services for Children and Families Board.

**8. WORK PROGRAMME**

(See document No. 4)

**RESOLVED:**

Noted the work programme will be reviewed at the subsequent member workshop to ensure it aligns with the Council's improvement and recovery priorities.

**9. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

**RESOLVED:**

Noted the next meeting was to be held on 28 February 2024 at 10am.

**10. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)**

None.

**11. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

**12. AUTHORITY TO CHAIR AND OFFICERS**

**RESOLVED:**

In an urgent situation between meetings, the Chair jointly with the relevant Chief Officer has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

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The meeting ended at 10.58 hours.