

31 July 2025

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cc Charlotte Ramsden, Chief Executive Officer, Bradford Children and Families Trust

Dear Marium

### **Monitoring visit to Bradford Children and Families Trust**

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Bradford children's services on 1 and 2 July 2025. This was the sixth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in November 2022, and the 13th monitoring visit since Bradford Children's Services was judged inadequate in 2018. Bradford Council Children's Services' statutory functions were delegated to Bradford Children and Families Trust on 1 April 2023. His Majesty's inspectors for this visit were Ceri Evans, Louise Walker and David Cohen.

### **Areas covered by the visit**

Inspectors reviewed the progress made in the following areas of concern identified at the last inspection:

- The quality of support and planning for vulnerable care leavers aged 18 to 25.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

### **Headline findings**

Since the last inspection strong political and corporate support, together with significant additional investment in the care leaving service, is driving service improvements for vulnerable care leavers in Bradford. The trust and the council are working effectively together with a shared commitment to enabling their care leavers to thrive. There is a palpable determination by senior leaders to improve care leavers' experiences and opportunities, and ensure they have the emotional and practical support to transition successfully to adulthood and beyond.

The council's local offer has been improved. Vulnerable care leavers are now benefiting from support from a stable and permanent team of personal advisers

(PAs) providing them with a trusted adult, helping them navigate adult life and face the myriad of challenges this brings.

## **Findings and evaluation of progress**

Since the last inspection, there is clear evidence of improved senior management oversight and grip of practice in the care leavers service. Senior leaders within the trust, alongside those within the council, provided inspectors with a well-written and detailed self-evaluation. Their evaluation mirrored what inspectors found during this visit. This demonstrates that leaders know themselves and the needs of the service well.

Robust quality assurance arrangements are now well embedded and are increasingly effective in helping senior leaders understand frontline pressures. Regular use of performance data and an increase in audit activity are contributing to a more accurate understanding of care leavers' experiences and the quality of practice.

Care leavers spoken with during the visit reflected that they previously had numerous changes of workers, which meant that some care leavers lost faith in the service. Positively, care leavers told inspectors that more recent practice has improved, and they are now benefiting from increasingly stable relationships with their workers. They reflected that their workers talk about them with affection and help them to make progress and achieve their ambitions.

PAs are responsive to care leavers' needs and are highly attuned to their emotional well-being, unique characteristics and situations. PAs visit care leavers at a frequency that meets their individual needs; this includes those who live out of area. There is a proactive approach to keeping in touch with vulnerable care leavers. As care leavers approach the age of 21, a discussion is held with them about their future needs. Care leavers who need or want a PA are encouraged to remain in the service. This discussion is well evidenced in care leavers' records. Inspectors saw examples of older care leavers returning to the service during times of need. Senior leaders are in the process of reviewing and further strengthening the post-21 offer for care leavers.

Pathway plans seen by inspectors during the visit are mostly detailed and are well written. They reflect care leavers' goals, aspirations and ambitions for the future. PAs ensure that care leavers' experiences, progress and wider cultural and identity needs are reflected in their plans. Some plans are not routinely updated when care leavers' situations change, including changes in accommodation, meaning that their current needs may not always be fully assessed or understood.

PAs are curious about all aspects of care leavers' lives. While risks are known and understood by those PAs who spoke with inspectors, not all risks are identified in care leavers' records. This risks safety planning not being robust enough to reduce or mitigate any risks.

The local offer for care leavers continues to grow and develop and there is a determination to make the offer even stronger by senior leaders. Not all PAs fully

understand the breadth of the local offer. Senior leaders are acutely aware and have meaningful training plans in place to increase PAs' awareness and confidence in the detail. Positively, some care leavers have been actively involved in the development and review of the offer. They have been heard by senior leaders, and their input is helping to make the service more effective for others and has led to an increase in entitlements and resources.

Partnership working has been strengthened, in particular relationships with housing. This is ensuring that care leavers have priority status for Bradford Homes. Most care leavers live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs. PAs help young people to prepare practically for adulthood. This includes direct work around budgeting and cooking, along with how to manage friendships, stay safe at home and in the community and how to be a good neighbour. This helps to ensure that young people have the skills and confidence needed to live independently.

When care leavers are in custody, there are strong joint working relationships and protocols between the leaving care service, the Youth Offending Service and the Probation Service to provide carefully planned and well-focused support. PAs are strong advocates for their care leavers and are persistent in providing practical and emotional help. This effective multi-agency planning alongside support from extended family members helps to ensure that safe and appropriate accommodation is identified post-release. This level of preparation is helping to ensure that care leavers' rehabilitation into the community is as successful as it can be, with the care leaver's voice and needs at the forefront of planning.

Care leavers who are pregnant or have children receive sensitive care and support from their PAs. They are supported both practically and emotionally to prepare for the joys and stresses of being a new parent. When higher levels of support are required, this is provided. PAs are knowledgeable about statutory child protection processes, and they are not afraid to have challenging, yet sensitive conversations with young parents when there are concerns about their child's safety. They are fierce advocates for their care leavers throughout the process and take the right action to ensure that vulnerable parents and their children are better protected.

Care leavers who were formerly unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive a personalised and effective service. Since the last inspection, senior leaders have created a specialist team. A newly formed 'separated migrant team' is ensuring young people receive the same support from the council as any other care leaver. The team is culturally attuned and responds appropriately to the individual needs of this vulnerable group. Planning to meet their accommodation, educational, cultural, social, emotional and immigration needs is dynamic and effective.

Corporate parenting, governance and accountability have been significantly strengthened across the council and wider partnership. Leaders have recruited a corporate parenting coordinator whose role is to drive the implementation of the corporate parenting strategy, alongside listening to care leavers and delivering the agreed promises. Positively, care leavers are now active and very influential

participants at the corporate parenting board. This is enabling council members to really understand their experiences.

Leaders have created much-needed stability in the workforce and have strengthened frontline management oversight. Supervision is regular but is not always being used effectively to improve and progress plans forward for some care leavers. Workforce capacity has been significantly increased in the service. Caseloads have reduced, which is enabling PAs to support care leavers more effectively.

PAs in the leaving care service spoke very positively about working in Bradford. They reflected on the historical challenges and articulated how they now feel happy, settled and better supported with their work. PAs said that senior leaders within the trust and council are modelling behaviour that feeds down to frontline managers and practitioners. This is a significant culture shift in Bradford and is helping to create an environment where workers want to stay and are excited for the future.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Ceri Evans  
**His Majesty's Inspector**