

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 September 2025 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Carr-Brown – Chair

Present: Cllr O Brown, Cllr P Cooper, Cllr D Farr, Cllr E Harman,
Cllr S Mackrow, Cllr D Martin, Cllr T Slade, Cllr O Walters and
Cllr S Armstrong.

Also in P Martin, Parent Governor Representative
attendance: M Saxby, Diocesan Representative
L Bedwell, Deputy Member of Youth Parliament

16. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Simon Bull.

17. Substitute Members

Cllr Sara Armstrong substituted for Cllr Simon Bull on this occasion.

18. Declarations of Interests

Cllr Armstrong declared that she was employed by an alternative provider provision who delivered Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) and would therefore leave the meeting following the conclusion of Agenda Item 7.

Cllr Mackrow declared a personal interest as a close family member is in receipt of an EHCP and accessed alternative provision.

Cllr Walters declared a personal interest as his wife worked for Dorset CAMHS.

19. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2025 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

20. Action Sheet

The Chair highlighted the action sheet and advised the Committee that items highlighted in yellow would be removed.

21. Public Issues

The following questions and statement were received from Mr Adam Sofianos with the answers from the Portfolio Holder set out in response:

Question 1 – Agenda Item 9: Alternative Provision Improvement Plan

The data provided in the paper is alarming.

1372 children are accessing Alternative Provision – a headcount larger than all but 4 schools in BCP. 95% of these have SEN. 15% have been in AP for 3 or more years.

Equally critical is the experience of children during placement. At November 2024's meeting I requested some data on this, but was told it would be provided at a later meeting. 10 months later, I'm not aware of a full response.

So: what is the current overall rate for APs within BCP, for:

- i) sessions missed,
- ii) pupil distance travelled,
- iii) the proportion of pupils allocated places within 6 schooldays of exclusion, as required by law?
- iv) And of the current AP placements, what proportion is being fulfilled through an online provision?

[Ref for Nov 24:

<https://democracy.bcpccouncil.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=17866>]

Response from the Portfolio Holder:

- i) Attendance: We are currently implementing a system for capturing the attendance of children and young people who are placed in unregistered provision and not on a school roll. Attendance for State funded Alternative Provision Schools 2024/25 Academic Year:

Christchurch	Learning	Centre	–	50.38%
The Quay School				64.3%

National Average – 41.7% (2022/23 - latest Published from the DfE)

- ii) Some providers offer provision in different locations, so we are not able to currently report on this.
- iii) Of the 108 C&YP that went on to alternative provision in the 2024/25 academic year, 48% (52 C&YP) were allocated places within 6 school days of the exclusion. This is a figure that we are not happy with and we are addressing this through our service improvements.
- iv) We aren't able to currently report on this due to some providers offering online and face to face provision or a mixture of the two. We are setting up methods on how we can capture this going forward and aiming to implement this by October half term.

Question 2 – Agenda Item 8: SEND Improvement update

The outlook for SEND is grim. Costs continue to rise well above the government's appetite for funding. Service delivery fluctuates. Yet the need among our children is undeniable. Last year in BCP, 97% of needs assessments resulted in a plan. Nationally, over 98% of tribunal hearings end in a win for families.

With mounting political pressure to reduce children's rights, there's the potential for catastrophe. And far from reducing costs, this could turbocharge them.

Across both SEND and AP papers, and in national studies, we see one of the key drivers: that overall, schools and policies are not inclusive enough. But by securing more supportive cultures within schools, the Council could provide some resilience against any future attack on children's rights.

So, how is the Council addressing this, and in particular, what's happening with its Inclusion Strategy?

Response from the Portfolio Holder:

Thank you for your thoughtful and passionate reflection on the current landscape for SEND.

I share your concern about the pressures facing the system and the importance of protecting the rights and futures of our children and young people.

At BCP Council, we recognise that inclusive practice is not the responsibility of individual schools alone—it requires system leadership, shared accountability, and a culture of collaboration across education, health, care, and communities.

Our approach is rooted in partnership and co-production, and we are committed to working alongside schools rather than criticising them. I would like to emphasise that point as my background means that I understand the pressures and workings of schools. Working together always puts Children and young people first.

The Council's approach to inclusion is embedded through our Belonging Strategy, which launched in June 2025.

This strategy sets out our ambition for every child and young person to feel a sense of connection and belonging in their school and community.

It promotes inclusive values, early identification of need, and high-quality provision across all settings.

Our refreshed SEND Improvement Plan (2025–2027) is central to this work. Developed with partners including Parent Carer Forums, NHS Dorset ICB, and education providers, the plan focuses on eight priority areas, including:

- Early Identification and Intervention: Strengthening pathways to ensure children receive support before needs escalate.
- Inclusion: Supporting schools to develop inclusive cultures and practices, with targeted outreach and professional development.
- Communication and Co-production: Ensuring families are active partners in shaping services and provision.

We are also investing in system-wide support through initiatives such as:

- The development of a three-tier Alternative Provision model, aligned with national best practice.
- The creation of an Education Partnership Board, to provide strategic leadership and accountability.
- A renewed focus on trauma-informed and relational approaches, particularly for children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs.

We agree that reducing children's rights would be both ethically and economically damaging. Instead, our strategy is to build resilience through inclusive systems, earlier support, and strong relationships—with schools, families, and communities.

We welcome continued dialogue and scrutiny, and we are committed to reporting regularly on progress and impact.

Statement 1 – Agenda Item 11: CSCC Annual Report

On the subject of compliments, I'd like to add mine, for the incredible support given by officers to the Mudeford Wood Playgroup. As members will recall, the Group was given notice to leave its previous premises, and was weeks away from folding. Just before the summer, the Council offered to reopen the vacant Highcliffe Day Centre, and make accommodation for the Group and its families there.

Since then a huge amount of work has been done to get the site ready on time. I visited the Playgroup team recently, as they were putting the final touches together, and it looks amazing.

This is a reminder that the Council's portfolio of properties retains huge community value, and even vacant sites can solve so many challenges.

And it's a great example of what can be done together. I know how grateful everyone is.

22. Members of Youth Parliament Update

A Deputy Member of the Youth Parliament provided an update of all the MYPs recent activities, which included:

- Details were provided of the collation of young people's mental health experiences within schools and how they used the responses to create a video, which included filming at a CAMHS training facility.
- Planned video release for World Mental Health Day (10th October), with Children's Mental Health Week (9–15 February) as a backup.
- Scheduled a webinar the day before the video launch with a taster and Q&A session; and produced a promotional poster.
- Attended the UK Youth Parliament Annual Conference in Brighton in July and shared updates via BCP Council's social media.
- Worked on a Knife Crime Campaign, including planning a rugby/knife crime event with schools, police, and rugby organisations, which had to be postponed, however it had been rescheduled for 1st October at Meyrick Park with confirmed attendance from key stakeholders.
- Explored a pilot program to connect local armed services with young people through martial arts and knife crime education.
- Engaged the Police Crime Commissioner through a social media campaign to share responses with young people.
- Appointed as South West representative to the Youth Select Committee; advocated for standardizing PSHE curricula.
- Travelled to the House of Commons for committee induction and chair candidacy.
- Served on the Nightstop Dorset Board to represent youth perspectives in homelessness planning.
- Led sessions at BCP Youth Forum to gather diverse viewpoints on homelessness.

The Deputy MYP and Participation Worker responded to any questions raised and the Committee welcomed the update and offered to support the MYPs in any way they could.

Before moving on to the items of business, the Chair welcomed Cllr Farr to the Committee as a new member and also highlighted that Democratic Services were undergoing the process of electing new parent governor representatives due to the maximum term being reached by the current one and thanked the parent governor in attendance for all of his contributions to the Committee during his tenure.

The Chair also advised that following advice regarding good practice, it was her hope to invite a Parent Carer Forum representative to attend relevant Committee meetings moving forward. **ACTION.**

23. Children and Young Peoples (CYP) Mental Health (MH) Transformation update

The Head of Children's Services, NHS Dorset, NHS Mental Health Programme Lead and the Consultant Clinical Psychologist/ Clinical Lead presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The CYP Mental Health Transformation Programme ("Your Mind Your Say") had progressed into the Mobilisation and Implementation phase following full business case approval and Phase 1 funding. Built around the THRIVE Framework, the programme represented a strategic, co-produced model for delivering integrated mental health support across NHS Dorset, Local Authorities, VCSE partners, and schools.

Key priorities included mobilising early help and crisis response teams, expanding community (VCSE) access, Governance had been identified to ensure oversight and alignment with BCP's Early Help Strategy and the Families First Pathfinder.

Funding had been approved, with future investment prioritised for MHST expansion. A Population Health Management dashboard would support outcome tracking and equity monitoring.

CYP and family voices remained central, with feedback mechanisms embedded throughout. Interdependencies such as the Neurodevelopmental Review and Tier 3.5 services were acknowledged but remain outside the programme's direct scope. Crisis alternatives were under review, with youth worker pilots informing future service design.

This transformation marked a significant shift in how mental health services were commissioned and delivered for children and young people in BCP.

The Committee discussed the report, including:

- Members found the presentation insightful and appreciated the context behind the sharp rise in demand and service gaps.
- It was noted that financial constraints were acknowledged, but the focus remained on adapting service delivery to support as many young people as possible.
- The Thrive model was praised for recognising individual journeys and offering a more personalised approach to care.
- Positive developments included reduced assessment and waiting times and increased face-to-face interventions.
- In response to a query about how feedback from users was being gathered, the Committee was advised that engagement with young people and families was embedded throughout the rollout, including regular check-ins and challenge sessions.
- Clarification was provided on how the Thrive model would be practically implemented and how staff were being brought on board.

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- Officers explained the four needs groupings within the Thrive model and highlighted the current gap in early help provision.
- Plans were shared to create an integrated front door service, offering a single point of contact for families and professionals across health, education, and social care.
- The Committee was advised that the new service would operate seven days a week, with extended hours to improve accessibility for children and families.
- Recruitment of over 100 staff was planned, alongside workshops and consultations to support the cultural shift required.
- The Committee welcomed the enthusiasm for the model and raised questions about barriers to self-referral and access to youth work and creative activities.
- Officers confirmed that youth workers would be integrated into the early help teams and that digital access options were being explored.
- The importance of trusted, safe information sources was discussed, with plans to involve young people in shaping digital guidance platforms.
- Cornwall and Berkshire were cited as influential partners in developing the model, with Dorset adopting best practices to suit local needs.
- The model was described as flexible and collaborative, with a commitment to whole-system change supported by leadership and the Integrated Care Board.
- In response to a query about the potential increase in referrals and their impact on waiting lists, the Committee was advised that there potentially would be an increased demand but it was emphasised that early intervention would help reduce long-term complexity.
- Efforts were underway to rebalance the system and reduce reliance on long-term therapy.
- In response to a query about transition arrangements from CAMHS to adult mental health services, the Committee was advised that a working group had been established to align transformation programmes and improve transition pathways.
- Concerns were raised about SEND needs and the interface between health and local authority services and it was highlighted that joint commissioning was not yet fully developed but details were provided about ongoing collaboration and future opportunities.
- A question addressed how the impact of the new model would be measured, with the Committee being advised that both internal and external data reporting mechanisms were in place, and that new outcome measures were being explored.
- Empowerment, understanding, and validation were identified as key indicators of success, with plans for regular reviews and family engagement.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the report and request an update be provided in 18 months. (ADD TO THE WORK PLAN).

Voting: Nem. Con.

The Parent Governor Representative and Cllr Armstong left the meeting after the conclusion of this item at 7:30pm.

24. SEND Improvement Update

The Director of Education and Skills presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Improvement programme of work had made significant progress over the past 6 months, including stabilising the workforce, improving plan quality, and continuing to implement the SEND Sufficiency Strategy. However, challenges remained in maintaining assessment timeliness and managing the growing demand for support at a statutory level.

Key focus areas include:

- Assessment process and timeliness including AI solutions
- Resolving disagreements including Tribunals
- Complaints /Improved communication with our families
- Addressing the high use of Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) and Alternative Provision (AP)
- Improving Co-Production across the system

The Committee discussed the report, including:

- Concerns were raised about the broken national SEND system and the impact of future funding uncertainties.
- Members discussed the importance of sustainability and risk planning, referencing national budget constraints and local inequalities in service access.
- It was noted that national direction supported early intervention and multi-agency collaboration, aligning with local plans to build inclusive leadership and support structures in schools.
- In response to a query, the Committee was advised of the need to provide support before an EHCP becomes necessary, aiming to reduce reliance on top-tier interventions.
- Questions were raised about lobbying efforts and long-term financial planning, with officers confirming ongoing representation at various levels of government.
- Tribunals were discussed as costly and emotionally taxing; early dispute resolution and mediation were highlighted as effective strategies to reduce tribunal rates.

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- Clarification was provided that 26% of EHCP assessment requests came from parents, with the remaining 74% from schools.
- Concerns were expressed about inconsistent school cultures and communication challenges; officers outlined efforts to improve warmth and efficiency in communication.
- Plans to introduce inclusion advisors and a portal for shared access to EHCP information were shared.
- The Committee discussed the importance of supporting schools through outreach, training, and inclusive leadership programmes.
- Staffing levels were reviewed, with permanent staffing reported at 93%; concerns about statutory review timeliness were acknowledged.
- Timeliness of EHCPs was reported at 68.5%, which was above national averages but lower than previous performance; system improvements including AI use were being implemented.
- Officers confirmed that AI would enhance plan consistency and free up staff time for better communication.
- Suggestions were made to explore graduate schemes and immigration sponsorship to address educational psychologist shortages.
- Trading of services to schools was discussed, with the Committee being advised of existing traded elements and ensuring high-quality offers where available where appropriate.
- The Committee explored the role of the ordinarily available provision and graduated approach, with plans to co-produce tools with SENCOs.
- The Inclusion Fund was discussed, with updates on recruitment for inclusion advisors, outreach agreements, and training rollouts.
- Suspension and exclusion data was reviewed; targeted support for schools with higher rates was being implemented.
- Questions were raised about equitable access to services across different SEND groups, and the Committee was advised this could be explored further.
- Concerns were expressed about the need for 800 new specialist places; contingencies including the Parkfield site were being pursued.
- The Committee discussed the importance of early intervention to reduce long-term demand for specialist placements.
- Members asked about data gaps in the dashboard; officers explained term-based reporting and confirmed availability of full-year data.
- The Committee concluded by noting the report and acknowledging the thorough discussion.

The Chair came back to this item later in the meeting to ask the Committee and Officers if they would be agreeable to adding the Inclusion Fund Progress to the work plan for monitoring and there was no dissent. **ADD TO WORK PLAN.**

RESOLVED that Members note the progress and challenges of the SEND Improvement Programme.

Voting: Nem. Con.

25. Alternative Provision Improvement Plan

The Director of Education and Skills presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'C' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The report provided an update on the Local Authority's work to improve the quality, consistency, and oversight of Alternative Provision (AP) for children and young people who were unable to access mainstream education.

In response to national policy direction and local priorities, the Council was developing a three-tier model of AP that promoted early intervention, targeted support, and specialist provision. The model was designed to reduce exclusions, improve outcomes, and ensure that AP was used as a short-term, purposeful intervention rather than a long-term destination.

The report outlined the rationale for change, the options considered, and the preferred approach. It also set out the implications of the proposed model in relation to sustainability, public health, legal compliance, workforce development, and commissioning. The report was presented for information only and provided an overview of progress to date and the next steps in implementation.

The Committee discussed the report, including:

- A member queried the spike in AP placements in Years 7–11 and was informed that this reflected curriculum challenges, mental health issues, and delays in accessing specialist placements.
- Concerns were raised about younger learners in AP and the nature of their provision, which the Committee was advised included therapeutic packages and tutoring.
- Questions were asked about unregistered AP providers, with officers confirming that a new Dorset-wide quality assurance framework was being launched to ensure consistency and oversight.
- The Committee was informed that a multi-agency AP panel had been established to assess individual placements and monitor value for money.
- Tracking of individual children in AP had improved through the use of Welfare Call system and dedicated teams within the SEND service.
- A member raised concerns about attendance rates in AP, which stood at 50% for registered providers, and officers explained the rationale for using Welfare Call to monitor attendance.
- Clarification was provided on the composition of the AP panel and AP working group, which included schools, health, colleges, and parent carer forums.

- The Committee discussed the routes into AP, including exclusions and EHCPs, and officers agreed to provide further data on this breakdown. **ACTION.**
- It was noted that 81% of children in AP had EHCPs, which was not unusual nationally, but the overall number of children in AP was high.
- Questions were raised about the safeguarding and quality audit for AP providers, with officers confirming it was reported to the Education Quality and Performance Board.
- The Committee discussed the implementation of a three-tier AP model and the collaboration required across schools, the local authority, and health partners.
- Officers described engagement with headteachers, trust CEOs, and external trusts to support the AP model and reduce costs.
- The Committee asked about monitoring and quality assurance processes for AP placements, including visits and feedback from children and families.
- It was confirmed that the children's rights and engagement team would be involved in developing these processes.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee support:

- a. the progress made in developing a three-tier model of AP in line with national guidance and local strategic priorities.**
- b. the preferred model and the rationale for its selection, as set out in the options appraisal.**
- c. the next steps in implementation, including further stakeholder engagement, development of service specifications, and alignment with wider SEND and inclusion reforms.**

Voting: Nem. Con

26. BCP Safeguarding Children Partnership Yearly Report 24/25

This report was circulated for information only with no discussion in Committee.

The report for the period April 2024-March 2025 set out that since the dissolution of the 'Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership', the new BCP Safeguarding Children Partnership has focussed on implementing new arrangements to fulfil the statutory responsibilities of the three statutory safeguarding partners who had joint responsibility and accountability for the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in the BCP geographical area. The three statutory safeguarding partners were BCP Council, NHS Dorset ICB and Dorset Police. Within this period of significant change, partners had maintained a focus on safeguarding children and through the new arrangements had gained insights on the effectiveness of how well partners worked together to safeguard local children and young people, and

areas to be developed. Full details of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements could be seen [here](#).

The report provided an account of:

- What we had done as part of our local arrangements, including any child safeguarding practice review
- Impact of learning from local and national reviews
- How we had applied independent scrutiny to review and challenge our safeguarding practice
- How education partners were engaged with
- Future improvements that could be made as to the effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements.

The report would be submitted to the [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel](#) by 30 September 2025 and would be published on the BCP Safeguarding Children Partnership website.

27. Children's Services Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2024-25

The report was circulated for information only with no discussion in Committee and provided an update on the compliments, complaints and representations made to BCP Council about Children's Services during 2024-25.

28. Portfolio Holder Update

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Education and Skills provided an update including:

- Noted that the SEND inspection had still not taken place.
- Highlighted that the Headteachers (Schools) Forum was scheduled for the 29 September 2025.
- Officers met with the DfE to review progress on the Families First Program; feedback was positive and a range of partners were supporting the initiative.
- Confirmed establishment of the new Quality Assurance Board for children's social care, replacing the Improvement Board; significant work had been undertaken to ensure appropriate membership and governance.
- Attendance at both the new Quality Assurance Board and the updated SEND Improvement Board.
- Safeguarding training for all Councillors was scheduled for 28 October; members were asked to emphasise its mandatory nature to colleagues. **ACTION.**
- Welcomed the new Chief Executive on his first day and ensured Children's Services was prioritised.

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- Acknowledged release of exam results in August for A/AS/T levels and GCSEs; congratulations were issued via media and provisional results suggested strong performance by BCP schools.
- Noted that validated DfE data would be available in time for the 26 January committee meeting, should members wish to review it.
- Confirmed attendance at the Smartphone-Free Childhood event on 7 October; all schools had been notified and invited.
- Announced the BCP STAR Awards for care-experienced young people aged 16–25, scheduled for Saturday 7 November at the Bournemouth Life Centre.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder for his update.

29. Work Plan

The Committee was asked to consider its work priorities for publication in a Work Plan.

The Chair highlighted the budget item due to come to the November meeting and the suggested topics received and advised that they fell within the inclusion area and SEND overspend and that she would circulate a Key Lines of Enquiry form to the Committee to help shape the report as soon as possible, before sharing with Children's Services. **ACTION.**

The Chair also highlighted two reports due to go to Cabinet in October as the Home to School Transport Policy and Special School Funding Review and that these would be shared with the Committee once published and any comments can be shared with the Chair or taken directly to Cabinet. **ACTION.** The Chair advised the Committee she had requested both Cabinet reports come to the next meeting for a brief update. **ADD TO WORK PLAN.**

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

CHAIR