

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

Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 September 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Carr-Brown – Chair

Present: Cllr P Broadhead, Cllr O Brown, Cllr P Cooper, Cllr B Dove,
Cllr B Hitchcock, Cllr S Mackrow, Cllr D Martin, Ryan Cornish,
Elliot Prentice, Cllr J Clements, Cllr K Salmon and Cllr M Tarling

Co-Opted Members: R Cornish, P Martin, M Saxby and E Prentice

14. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Simon Bull, Oliver Walters, Emily Harman and Simon Welch.

15. Substitute Members

Cllr K Salmon substituted for Cllr S Bull, Cllr J Clements substituted for Cllr O Walters and Cllr M Tarling substituted for Cllr E Harman.

16. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

17. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 July 2024, were confirmed as an accurate record subject to the following amendments:

Minute 8 – Public Issues, a sentence be added to the response of the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People to the second question asked by Mr Sofianos as follows:

- It should be loaded onto the Local Offer by the end of the week. From now on the scorecard should be uploaded onto the Local Offer within a week of the SEND Improvement Board taking place.

Additionally, under the same item, a sentence was added to the response of the Portfolio Holder to the second question asked by Mr Sofianos as follows:

- There's also a link to the other letter on the bottom of the answer as well.

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Minute 10 – Child Exploitation Working Group Findings Report, a word was changed in the Committee discussion under bullet point three as follows:

- The Committee discussed the possibility of creating a new working group that included Members of Youth Parliament and would give young people an opportunity to have a voice in this matter.

18. Action Sheet

The action sheet was noted.

19. Public Issues

There were no public issues received on this occasion.

20. Members of Youth Parliament Update

The Committee were provided with a verbal update on the work of the Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) including an update regarding their campaigns.

The Committee considered the update and made the following comments:

- In response to a query regarding how the MYPs intended to engage with the public during the knife crime event, the Committee was informed that they would receive support from Children's Services. Additionally, they planned to use voice recordings to have more control over the information they released.
- The Committee was advised that the MYPs aimed to reach out to all young people in Christchurch and Poole who might not have been able to attend the event that was set to take place in Bournemouth.
- The Committee commended the MYPs for their work over the past six months and offered them support for their ongoing campaigns, encouraging them to reach out to members if they needed assistance with engagement.

21. Children's Social Care Improvement Journey - Update September 2024

The Director of Quality, Performance Improvement and Governance, the Director Safeguarding and Early Help and the Corporate Director of Children's Services 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.

BCP Children's Services was inspected, under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACs) framework in December 2021. The outcome was an overall inadequate judgement.

As a result, the Secretary of State for Education issued a Statutory Direction and appointed a DfE Improvement Adviser to support the Council in their improvement of Children's Social Care Services.

The Children's Social Care and Early Help Services Improvement Plan was in place to ensure progress was made at pace in Children's Social Care in line with the recommendations of the December 2021 Inspection and in accordance with the statutory direction notice received by the Council in March 2022.

Overview and Scrutiny required regular updates on the improvement progress.

The report detailed improvement in Children's Social Care and Early Help services over 2023/24 with an additional supporting presentation covering the most current priorities and impact up to August 2024.

The Committee discussed the report and presentation, including:

- In response to a query raised regarding how progress and success were measured the Committee was advised that there were various methods to assess the improvements made. These included the existing governance process, the quality assurance framework, feedback from our sector lead improvement partners, evaluations from OFSTED visits, reviews by local government associations, and internal auditing processes.
- The Committee was informed that residents would have access to ongoing progress updates through the OFSTED monitoring visit reports and the reports from the DfE advisor. These reports were published on the BCP website for public viewing.
- In response to a query raised regarding how all key stakeholders and partners were aligned, the Committee was advised that significant efforts had been made to establish a unified outcome framework with all partners. This year, work had begun on developing a new Children and Young People Plan, which was set to be released in 2025, prioritising the needs of children and young people.
- In response to a query regarding the speed of improvement in the service, the Committee was advised that while it was essential for the service to move quickly, its inadequacy developed over an extended period. Therefore, the service must focus on establishing strong foundations first. The pace at which the service operates would be determined by the need to build and develop these foundations.
- In response to a query raised regarding what had contributed to the improvement of the virtual school, the Committee was advised that significant efforts had been made to support young people in planning their next steps. The service would continue to focus on this aspect moving forward.
- In response to a query raised regarding whether young people were placed in suitable housing and who oversaw this process, the Committee was advised that there had been a need for further work to enhance the connection between Housing and Children's Services. It had been essential to ensure compliance with regulations and to prioritise the overall quality of housing for children and young people.

- In response to a query regarding how stronger relationships would be built with family hubs, the Committee was advised that the development and investment in the early help offer had started to show positive advancements in family hubs. Feedback from health partners was reported to be very positive and the service expressed confidence that family hubs would continue to progress and strengthen.
- The Committee was informed by the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People that while further improvements were needed, significant progress had been made in engaging with everyone in BCP Council during the improvement journey of Children's Services. He noted the positive impact of amplifying the voices of children and young people. Additionally, he acknowledged the ongoing recruitment and retention efforts, expressing a wish for BCP to be seen as a desirable workplace that prioritised skill development and attracted more high quality social workers to Children's Services.
- The Committee expressed gratitude to the Children's Service team for their ongoing work and improvements throughout the services. They wished the team well for their upcoming ILACS inspection.

22. Children's Services Budget Update

The Corporate Director of Children's Services presented the 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.

Overview and Scrutiny had requested a Children's Services Budget update, it was in the form of a presentation appended to the covering Report.

The Committee discussed the report and presentation, including:

- In response to a query raised regarding the projected £3.3 million overspend and the plan to address this issue, the Committee was advised that there were several mitigations, some of which were under the control of the service while others were not. A plan was deemed necessary to manage the challenges of placement demand and competitive bidding. The service acknowledged that improved regional commissioning, collaboration with local providers, and a comprehensive understanding of sufficiency needs were essential to address market sustainability and prevent profiteering.
- In response to a query raised regarding service overspending and the extent to which it was under the service's control, the Committee was advised that service delivery was essential. While efforts were made to reduce the number of agency staff, certain areas remained challenging, a situation that was reflected nationally as well. Ongoing initiatives focused on workforce stability, supported by a strong leadership team that guided the rest of the service.
- In response to a query about staffing schemes, the Committee was advised that a 'grow our own' program was in place. These included apprenticeships aimed at developing social work staff within BCP

Council, addressing staffing issues and retaining trained social workers.

- In response to a query raised regarding whether the service had partnered with any universities to help deliver the 'Grow our own' program, the Committee was advised that the service was now working with Solent University to help deliver the training within the programme.
- In response to a query raised regarding the placement of asylum seeking young people in the budget, the Committee was informed that they fell under the care leavers and the children in care budget. Additionally, some grant funding from Central Government was allocated to support those placements, although it was noted that this funding was not sufficient to cover all the costs.
- The Committee was advised that officers would provide a breakdown of agency staff and their positions within the service to the Committee. **ACTION**
- The Committee requested an opportunity to discuss the High Needs Block forecast report that was due to go to Cabinet on 2 October at the November meeting of the Committee. **ACTION**

23. O&S Budget working group - scoping report

The Overview and Scrutiny Specialist 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 Committee was asked to confirm the establishment of a budget working group, including membership and key lines of enquiry, to undertake detailed scrutiny work to contribute to the developing 2025/26 council budget during September – November 2024.

It was decided at the meeting that Cllr Sharon Carr-Brown, Cllr Peter Cooper, Cllr Brian Hitchcock and Cllr David Martin would form the working group membership with a view to taking a deeper dive into the following areas:

Care Growth Forecast and School Transport costs.

It was agreed the members of the working group would scope out the topics further and a Key Lines of enquiry document would be sent to them.

RESOLVED that the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider and confirm:

- a. The establishment of a budget working group, including the membership, lead member and lead officer for the group, as detailed at paragraphs 5 to 9 of the report.**
- b. Key lines of enquiry for the working group, as detailed at paragraphs 10-14 of this report.**
- c. The measures of effectiveness for the working group, as set out at paragraph 15 of this report.**

24. Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

The Committee was advised that this report was for information only as it was being considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

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

25. Pan Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2023/2024

The Committee was advised that this was an information only item and that a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'E' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

26. Portfolio Holder Update

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People provided a verbal update which included:

- An update regarding the Children's Wellbeing Bill, expected to be presented to Parliament before Christmas, which would likely empower local authorities on school admissions for SEND inclusion and require them to maintain registers of children not in school, while offering support to home-educating parents.
- Prepared for the next OFSTED inspection and emphasised the benefits of the positive learning experience monitoring visits bring.
- In response to a public issue raised at the meeting on 24 July, the Portfolio Holder advised that the three letters would be included in the Leader's report for the Council meeting on 4 June, with responses expected by that time. However, the appointment of the new leader at the July meeting resulted in the report being excluded from that agenda.
- Preparation for the Corporate Parenting Peer Review progressed well and was due to take place on the 30 September with feedback due on the 3 October.
- Acknowledged the Pan Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership 2023-2024 Annual Report due to go to Cabinet on the 2 October.
- Encouraged the committee to attend Cabinet meetings if they wished to speak on any items on the agenda.

A query was raised regarding home-educated children and support for those with anxiety returning to mainstream schools. The Committee was advised of the importance of understanding why children were home-educated. While BCP's ability to intervene was limited, the service aimed to support parents during home education. The Chair noted the availability of

the Scrutiny Request form for proposing the discussion of this item at a future Committee meeting.

27. Work Plan

The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee was asked to consider and identify work priorities for publication in a Work Plan.

The Chair advised the Committee regarding proposed items for the November meeting and highlighted the necessity for a reactive scrutiny item, suggesting the High Needs Block Forecast report discussed earlier.

ACTION

The meeting ended at 8.37 pm

CHAIR