

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

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

Present:-

Cllr B Dove – Chair

Present: Cllr O Brown, Cllr B Chick, Cllr E Harman, Cllr S Mackrow,
Cllr D Martin, Cllr A-M Moriarty, Cllr J Beesley, Cllr P Canavan and
Cllr K Salmon and Cllr K Salmon

Co-opted Members: M Saxby (virtually), D Rees-Coshan and Z Sosic

71. Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllrs Broadhead, Bull, Cooper and Peter Martin.

72. Substitute Members

Cllr Beesley substituted for Cllr Broadhead, Cllr K Salmon substituted for Cllr Bull and Cllr Canavan substituted for Cllr Cooper.

73. Declarations of Interests

Cllr K Salmon declared an interest in Agenda Item 8 but advised she had received dispensation for the meeting. Cllr Dove declared an interest as a family member was in receipt of an EHCP from BCP Council.

74. Confirmation of Minutes

The Chair raised concerns regarding the fullness of the minutes of the meeting held on 3 January 2024 and following some Committee discussion, it was Proposed and Seconded that agreement of the minutes be deferred to allow the Chair to circulate some proposed additions to the Minutes of the meeting of 3 January 2024 to the Committee for its consideration.

Voting: For – 8
Against – 1

The Chair raised concerns regarding the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January and it was Proposed and Seconded that agreement of the minutes be deferred to allow the Chair to circulate some proposed additions to the Minutes of the meeting of 23 January 2024 to the Committee for its consideration.

Voting: For – 8
Against – 1

75. Action Sheet

The action sheet was noted.

76. Public Issues

The following questions were heard at Committee with responses provided at the meeting by the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People:

The following questions have been received from Mr Sofianos:

Agenda item 8 - SEND Statutory Direction

Question 1

Last month, the Council was issued with a Statutory Direction regarding its SEND services.

In its letter, the Department for Education stated that “we expect all partners, including... schools and colleges ... *and parent and carer groups* to work together at pace to bring about the necessary improvements”.

Of course, this comes at a time when the Council is considering participation in Safety Valve – a scheme whose risks were first identified here, and brought to public attention, by parents.

Families understand these issues better than anyone. They are the victims of every lost form, every missed deadline, every budget constraint, every service cut.

Will the Council commit to fully briefing and involving parent-carers in its ongoing improvement plans?

And, will the Council coordinate a joint discussion between officers, councillors, schools, and parent-carer groups & campaigners, to ensure all voices are heard by all parties?

Answer from the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People:

There is an established SEND Improvement Board which has representation from across the partnership, including Parent and Carer representatives and Schools.

In BCP we have two Parent Carer groups; Parent Carers together, the official BCP supported group, and Parent Carer Foundation, formally Bournemouth Parent Carer Forum.

Both these parent groups attend the meetings and play a full and active part. (In the written answer I have included links to these two parent groups and would encourage interested parents to contact them and become a member)

The Board meets every 6 weeks and reviews progress against the SEND improvement plan and is chaired by an external, DfE appointed, SEND

Commissioner. The plan was co-produced with our Parent Carer organisations and schools and continues to be adapted and changed to further improve our SEND service.

The SEND Improvement plan is separate from the SEND Safety Valve application.

Home - Parent Carers Together

Parent Carer Foundation (parentcarefoundationorg.co.uk)

Question 2

The main report for agenda item 8 sets out some updated statistics on EHCP performance.

This data is very useful, although the dataset differs from previous reports, such as the Accelerated Timeliness report published in September 2023.

As the Council moves through this critical period in its improvement journey, it's essential for other stakeholders to have an up-to-date picture on how this is affecting SEND services.

Could the Council therefore agree to publish a monthly data dashboard, to provide a full, consistent overview of service performance statistics?

And would the Council consider applying this across other areas of Children's Services?

Answer from the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People:

Yes, there is an established SEND Scorecard which has been agreed by the DfE and SEND Improvement Board. This can be shared.

The following question was received from Ms Pearson:

Agenda item 6 – Early Help System

Question 1

As a single parent with two children with extra needs we find ourselves trapped between being too complex for early help and not eligible for CIN. It is isolating and we are left with no support. What is being done under this new plan to ensure families, such as mine, are not stuck between tiers of support and therefore left with nothing?

Answer from the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People:

The new Early Help Strategy and service redesign is aimed at providing greater accessibility to services.

The past 18 months has been spent working with partners to ensure that services within the community are known, and children and families are able to access the services they need at the time that they are needed.

Enhanced provision for children with SEND will be available through the Family Hub Transformation Programme. In addition, partners will be required to improve the coordination of care planning for children with

multiple and/or complex needs through the development of Family Network Meetings.

These will be multi-agency care planning meetings with families to develop the most appropriate care package available to best support a child and family's needs.

77. Children's Services Early Help System

The Early Help & Partnership Lead and Service Manager, Targeted Support and Youth 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.

The report set out the diagnostic of the Early Help system within BCP. It explained the changes that had occurred within these services to lead to a better, more efficient, and effective Early Help and prevention offer. These improvements future proof delivery methods and incorporate elements of the Care Review. In addition, it would cover Family Hubs and how we were transforming to work with all children and all age ranges within this service, with the support of our communities.

The Committee discussed the report including:

- In response to some queries regarding the financial aspects of the report the Committee was advised that the officers did not have the specifics that were requested at the meeting and would circulate them by email. **ACTION.**
- The Committee was advised that there was a need for a broader discussion about the future plans for the buildings that were previously used as Early Help Centres. However, they were assured that all the buildings would be utilised appropriately, whether they were sold or used for other purposes.
- In response to a query regarding how the work was going to be done the Committee was advised that the strategy, pathway and implementation plan would be circulated for information. **ACTION**
- The Committee was advised of the intention to maintain partnerships with already established support groups and to offer a space where they can connect with people who wished to use the support services.
- In response to a query regarding how the funding for family hubs was going to be utilised, the Committee was advised that following a successful funding bid, Children's Services would be commissioning new services as a part of the early help offer and to better some environmental aspects of the services.
- The Committee was advised that the mobile youth services mentioned in the plan included a number of mobile units varying in size that offered facilities for youth in the conurbation to contact services such as sexual health, school workers and neighbourhood police teams.

- In response to a query regarding the accessibility of a digital service, the Committee was advised that consideration was given to what parts of the conurbation had digital access and areas that may have limited digital access.
- In response to a query regarding the implementation of the service redesign, the Committee was advised of the work in this area which included building on the foundation that had been established and working on any weaknesses through the strategy.
- A Task and Finish group was proposed concerning the Early Help Service. It was agreed that the scope be considered outside of the meeting and would report back to the Committee at a later date.

ACTION.

RESOLVED that the officers invite Councillors out to the hubs.

78. Childrens Services Improvement Monitoring Visit 5 and 6 Feedback

The Chair opened the item by advising the Committee that the feedback from Monitoring Visit 6 had not yet been published by Ofsted and therefore any information given or discussions regarding it would require the Committee to go into exempt session.

The Corporate Director of Children's Services, Director for Quality, Performance Improvement and Governance and Service Manager, Care Experienced Young People 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.

BCP Childrens 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 of Education issued a Statutory Direction and appointed a DfE Improvement Adviser to support the Council in their improvement of Childrens Social Care Services.

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

Overview and Scrutiny required regular updates on themes regarding improvement in order to scrutinise. In November 2023 and February 2024, Children's Services had their fifth and sixth Monitoring Visits, the findings from the fifth inspections are presented for scrutiny. The findings from the sixth visit would published on March 27 by Ofsted.

The Committee discussed the report including:

- In response to a query regarding the continued need to improve professional curiosity, the Committee was advised that there had been a focus on making sure managers and frontline workers were

equipped to ask those important questions as well as encouraging reflection to help people develop and embed those skills.

- In response to a query raised regarding housing and what more could be done to improve the standards in the area, the Committee was advised that housing for care experienced young people included a number of different provisions. The provisions for young people were visited regularly by housing staff as well as personal advisors to check in on how young people were living and maintaining their accommodation. Additionally, work had been done to ensure they were maintaining governance over commissioned properties for young people while making sure properties were at the right standard, and in the right location for the young person.
- In response to a query regarding the use of agency staff, the Committee was advised in December 2021 after the ILACs inspection there were only 30% permanent staff in Children's Services, however this had now increased to 70% of permanent staff in the service.

It was Proposed, Seconded and

RESOLVED that the Committee request that the Director of Housing liaise with the Children's Services Directorate to prepare information, either written or in the form of a verbal presentation, about the extent of environmental health services powers and the remit to ensure housing is of good quality and fit for habitation for care experienced young people.

Voting: For – Unanimous

For the Committee to receive any information regarding the MV6 outcome, in accordance with advice from the Monitoring Officer it was:

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act and that the public interest in withholding the information outweighs such interest in disclosing the information.

The Committee received a confidential update regarding the feedback from Ofsted regarding MV6.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

79. Statutory direction in relation to special educational needs and disability services (SEND) issued 26 February 2024

The Director for Quality, Performance Improvement and Governance and Interim 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.

BCP Council received statutory direction in relation to special educational needs and disability services provision (SEND) from the Department for Education (DfE) in February 2024 following a monitoring visit in July 2023. The document, published by the Department for Education (DfE), called on all partners including Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council, NHS Dorset, schools and colleges, multi-academy trusts, early years settings, and parent and carer groups to work together at pace to improve services.

A diagnostic had taken place since this monitoring visit in July 2023 and a new SEND Improvement Plan had been created to ensure progress was made at pace. All partners across the SEND system were working together to deliver meaningful support to ensure children get the right support, in the right place at the right time, creating better outcomes for Children and young people.

Progress had been made in the SEND provision including improved timeliness of the decision-making process and requests for Education Psychology advice.

Cllr Beesley left the meeting at 8:37pm.

The Committee discussed the report including:

- The Committee was advised that before the letter of the statutory directive was received a SEND diagnostic was carried out from which an improvement plan was devised and signed off by the SEND Improvement Board. Since the plan was revised the service had seen significant improvement.
- In response to a query regarding EHCPs and the timeliness of the decision-making process the Committee was advised that the service did not make decisions on EHCPs to reduce and improve figures, in fact acceptance of EHCPs was high and that was the result of robust leadership as well as good use of efficient processes and resources.
- A councillor suggested an item for the forward plan concerning the improvement of communication with the families in BCP and parent/carers forums. It was agreed the scope would be considered outside of the meeting and would come back to the Committee at a later date. **ACTION.**
- In response to a concern from the Chair that the Send Improvement Board, which was not a public meeting, seemed to be considering items which would normally come before the Committee to publicly scrutinise, the Committee was advised that the Send Improvement Board fulfilled governance arrangements and assurance to the Secretary of State through the DfE and the membership of the Board was detailed.
- The Committee was also advised that the SEND Improvement Plan had been refreshed and could be shared with the Committee at its next meeting. **ACTION.**

- There was some Committee discussion regarding engagement with the SEND Improvement Board and it was felt that further consideration could be given to this during the Committee's annual forward planning activity.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

80. Information only items

The following items were circulated for information only with no presentation or discussion planned:

- Q3 2023-24 Corporate Performance Update – Children's Services
- Complaints and Compliments Annual Report

The Chair advised the Committee that should they have any comments or queries regarding those reports, then please email them to the Chair for action.

81. Portfolio Holder Update

The Portfolio Holder advised that part of his verbal report included his response to committee recommendations from a previous meeting relating to Safety Valve arrangements. Following concerns raised by the Chair and some Committee Members that they had not sought dispensation for this meeting to participate in discussion on matters relating to Safety Valve arrangements it was Proposed, Seconded and agreed by majority that the part of the Portfolio Holder Update for Children and Young People relating to Safety Valve, be provided after the Committee by email instead of given verbally during the meeting.

The following section was provided by email to the Committee after the meeting:

1. Notice of Recommendation from the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 3 January 2024 regarding Safety Valve, for response to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Consider what further engagement can happen upon receipt of any offers from the Department of Education. Consider as wide as possible member engagement in the final decision should one emerge from the Department of Education.

Portfolio Holder response:

- Largely events have overtaken us re these two recommendations, however, the leader and I supported the motion at Council, moved by Cllr Canavan, to bring any Safety Valve offer to a Full Council meeting either a scheduled meeting or an extraordinary meeting depending on the timing, however

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“BCP’s proposal does not, at present, meet the criteria for the Safety Valve programme.” (Quote taken from DfE letter circulated to all Cllrs)

- Looking at further member engagement you will be updated as to any further developments for consideration. Moving forward, I would welcome further consideration from this committee. Well timed and correctly targeted scrutiny helps to find solutions and makes suggestions for other approaches which is welcomed.

The following section was provided within the meeting by the Portfolio Holder in his verbal update, with points including:

- A bit of good news; the Supporting Families Team had achieved 91% payment by results performance against Funded Targets by end of quarter 3.
- The National payment by results performance table had just been released and we can see that our Performance up to the end of Q3 equates to:
16th out of 141 LAs Nationally – National average 61%
2nd out of 14 LAs Regionally – Regional average 70%
The team had also been identified as trail-blazing in the SW Region by DLUHC due to the IT and digital work that had been completed.
- During a recent Cabinet debate, the Portfolio Holder enquired about how we can engage Children and young people in consultation and requested the committee consider ways for how this could be improved.
- Forthcoming items on the Cabinet Forward Plan:
 - SEND Programme of Expansion – Canford Heath Infant and Junior Schools 10th April.
 - Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan update 22nd May.

There were other items on the forward plan relating to Children’s Services yet to have dates allocated. The Portfolio Holder concluded by advising if any members of the committee wanted to attend Cabinet to speak on children’s services items, they would be very welcome.

82. Forward Plan

The Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee was asked to consider and identify work priorities for publication in a Forward Plan.

A Committee Member highlighted the requests made during the meeting for potential scrutiny topics and the Committee was advised of the process for them to be progressed.

Following a discussion regarding any further scrutiny to be undertaken on the Safety Valve Programme, it was Proposed, Seconded and agreed by majority to consider the options regarding any further scrutiny of Safety Valve outside of the Committee.

83. Dates of Future Meetings

The dates for the 24/25 Municipal Year were noted.

The meeting ended at 21:03pm

CHAIR