

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

Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 November 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Carr-Brown – Chair

Cllr S Bull – Vice-Chair

Present: Cllr O Brown, Cllr P Cooper, Cllr E Harman, Cllr B Hitchcock,  
Cllr S Mackrow, Cllr D Martin, Cllr O Walters and Cllr T Slade

Co-Opted Members: R Cornish, P Martin, R Simpkins and S Welch

28. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Bobbie Dove, Cllr Phillip Broadhead, Mark Saxby and Elliot Prentice.

29. Substitute Members

Cllr Toby Slade substituted for Cllr Bobbie Dove.

30. Declarations of Interests

Cllr Simon Bull declared an interest in relation to agenda item 7 as a family member was in receipt of an EHCP.

31. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2024, were confirmed as an accurate record.

32. Action Sheet

The Chair advised the Committee that a review of the actions on the action sheet would take place, with an update to be provided at the next meeting on 28 January 2025.

33. Public Issues

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

The following questions were received from Mr Sofianos:

Q1

The SEND scorecard reveals a significant change in the SEND workforce between May and September this year.

Agency workers rose from 16% to almost 27% of the team.

Permanent case officers in post fell from 56% to 38%.

And the proportion of EHCPs having a change of case officer in September soared to 30%.

This comes as PCT member parents have been advised directly by Parent-Carers Together (but not by the Council itself) that case officer teams have been restructured.

What are the causes of these changes, and how will the Council reassure parents – and inform them all – moving forward?

Answer from the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People:

Thank you, Adam, for your question

These figures are due to the SEND restructure staff changes which is now being implemented and is part of our wider improvement work.

This is a significant planned change to the system involving the reallocation of over 4000 children and case allocation structures/teams.

Many of these changes are a direct response to requests by our Parent Carers Together (PCT) and Parent Carers Foundation (PCF) Forums for new posts in the system e.g.

- Co-production Officer,
- Education Inclusion Officer (to support families and a setting when a no to assess is given),

This is to ensure more caseworkers so that the service can support children and families' needs better. This evidences that we are committed to co-production and working together better.

Throughout the summer we have shared these plans with PCT, Schools and wider settings and to ensure that families are aware of these changes. Unfortunately, as explained to the two Parent Carers Forums we have current systems limits which means that we cannot do this automatically for our parents.

To this end we have reached out in partnership with PCT and PCF to help disseminate this change and ask for parents to access the Local Offer site to find who their new Case Officer is.

We recognise that our system needs to improve, and this will be addressed in future systems development work.

Q2

AP settings have a mixed record.

A recent national survey found that in 2022/23, AP pupils missed a staggering 42% of sessions overall. 38% of pupils missed 50% or more sessions.

AP pupils travelled almost 3 times as far to school as mainstream peers – almost 9km on average. 25% of these live more than 10km from the setting.

And although by law, 100% of excluded pupils should be placed with an AP within 6 schooldays, the national success rate remains far lower.

What is the current overall rate for APs within BCP, for:

- i) sessions missed,
- ii) pupil distance travelled,
- iii) pupils allocated places within 6 schooldays of exclusion?

Answer from the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People:

In relation to elements i and ii I am not able to provide a response in the short space of time before the O&S Committee takes place.

The MIT Team is working on this data area for me, and we would look to provide a further update for the next O&S Committee once this information is clearer. **ACTION**

In relation to element iii., in June of 2024 it was reported that 1.3% of children (1 out of 77) who had experienced a Permanent exclusion were allocated within 6 days.

From March 24 a task and finish group was in place to understand the systemic issues causing this poor performance, lead through our improvement work in Education.

This position identified that this was due to delays in the commissioning process in arranging placements and not having an online tuition element able to provide appropriate education while an in-person placement was arranged, as is practice in many other Local Authorities.

Urgent remedial action was put into place from this point to address the delays and lack of online tuition.

Positively, as a result for the academic year of 2024-25 currently 68% of pupils who have experienced a Permanent exclusion have been allocated within 6 days of the exclusion. This is 15 out of 22 children and represents a significant improvement from 1.3%.

For the 7 children who have not been allocated within 6 days this has been due to them either being too young to access the online provision or not being able to access the online provision.

While this figure represents a significant improvement from previous performance, BCP will continue to work to improve this system to ensure that all children are able to receive provision within the 6 day time limit.

This will include further improving commissioning processes and ensuring sufficiency of provision available to be able to allocate places to children in a timely manner.

### Q3

The child testimonies in this paper are heartbreaking. Many speak of their struggles in hostile or unsupportive environments, particularly for SEND children – such as one child placed in isolation for wearing the wrong socks.

This follows recent media stories featuring local schools: a girl suspended for leaving a lesson to use the toilet during a heavy period flow, a boy isolated for a week for having a short haircut.

Across BCP, in 2022/23, 53% of all permanent exclusions were given by just 6 schools. Suspension rates are similarly skewed. Some schools appear to use isolation as a tool; others don't.

High-control settings are a barrier to inclusion. What is Council doing to challenge the way some schools design and apply their internal rules? And how will it interrogate and address the rise in suspensions and exclusions across BCP?

### Answer from the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People:

BCP Council has inclusion and belonging as one of its highest priorities.

BCP already challenges schools on non-inclusive practice, including working pro-actively with them to avoid exclusions wherever possible. In addition, a new co-produced Belonging Strategy will be launched as part of a suite of strategies before Christmas that emphasises the importance of children and young people having that sense of belonging in their school setting and the impact that has on their outcomes.

Moving forwards, a new Information Sharing Agreement is currently being signed up to by all schools to enable transparent and open sharing of school level data in relation to exclusions, suspensions, attendance and the like to enable constructive but challenging conversations to happen between BCP and all schools in relation to their performance in this area.

This transparency and ability to openly interrogate data with all schools in the room together will enable BCP to lead the challenge and discussion,

and also enable peer challenge between schools, with their data open for them to all see and challenge – a position we have not previously had in BCP.

Alongside this, the final proposals for the use of the £2.8 million Inclusion Innovation fund will be discussed at Schools Forum in January 2025.

Once approved this will create increased capacity for BCP to support and challenge mainstream schools with their systemic practices and approaches to inclusion.

Inclusion Consultants (ICONS) will be assigned to schools and will provide support, guidance and challenge to their schools in relation to their SEND systems in school and how they provide support to their pupils.

This fund will also provide further training to schools and increase the specialist offer of Outreach Support and BOOST training from our special schools, to provide further expert support and guidance to our mainstream settings on how to support their pupils.

Finally it will also offer schools the opportunity to bid for Innovation funding to enable them to put further support in place in their own setting for their cohorts of children with SEND. Schools will be invited to bid for this funding once the fund has been signed off by Schools Forum.

The following questions were received from Ms Stockwell:

Could the work plan please include the following-

Ensuring suitable emergency accommodation is available when police make place of safety orders for people under 18 soliciting for sex in a public place, who cannot be returned home because this would place them in danger and cannot be charged with soliciting because of their age.

Ensuring the work of the LADO includes investigating licensed sex establishments which pose a risk of harm to children. The Sex Establishment licensing regime does not include a safety of children requirement. Although entry to premises is forbidden to children, marketing through websites and window displays will reach children and case law also says that they will risk attracting people of dubious morals into an area so putting children at risk.

#### 34. Members of Youth Parliament Update

The Committee was 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:

- The Committee and the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People praised the work done by the Members of Youth Parliament at the Knife Crime event and urged them to reach out to them if they needed any assistance with their campaigns.
- The Committee encouraged the MYPs to engage with youth workers and informed them of secondary school youth surgeries run by members that could assist them with their work regarding mental health for young people in schools.
- The Members of Youth Parliament raised a question regarding the £200,000 funding designated to address homelessness in BCP, specifically regarding how much of that amount would be allocated to combat youth homelessness. The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People agreed to look into this issue and provide feedback to the Committee. **ACTION**

35. SEND Improvement Update

The Department for Education (DfE) advisor for the BCP Council gave the Committee a verbal update regarding the Children's Social Care Improvement journey.

The Committee considered the update and made the following comments:

- In response to a question regarding the root cause of the failure and the subsequent improvement journey, the Committee was informed that the focus of Children's Services Social Care had been lost due to several factors related to the restructuring of BCP Council. The Committee was also advised that the senior leadership team now in place would significantly influence the improvement and success of Children's Services.
- The Committee was informed that, as part of the improvement journey, BCP Council needed to address the funding challenges related to SEND that were linked to the high needs funding issue. The DfE advisor commended the work done in the allocation and investment of resources within the service on a systemic level. They explained that efficient management of these resources would have benefited the service and positively impacted the improvement journey for Children's Social Care.
- In response to a query raised regarding other local authorities that have a successful Children's Social care service and whether those authorities tend to outsource their requirement or own the services they provide the Committee was advised that in some instances the skill of commissioning is dependent on expertise in delivery and the further Local Authorities come from direct delivery the less skilful they become in skilful commissioning. Although there was no direct analysis on performance on this issue the balance in BCP Council was strong.

The Department for Education (DfE) advisor for the BCP Council gave the Committee a verbal update regarding the SEND Improvement journey.

The Committee considered the update and made the following comments:

- The Chair highlighted the potential benefits of adding a health representative to the Committee and agreed to explore that possibility. **ACTION**
- In response to a query raised regarding the confidence of parents and carers, and what the service could do to reassure them in the future, the Committee was advised that there was a challenge. However, they believed that implementing a system that instilled more confidence would help reassure parents. This included improving response times and ensuring that the local authority, the school, and the health service communicated effectively and with one voice.
- In response to a query raised regarding the government's planned funding for SEND the Committee was advised that while nothing had been confirmed at that time, it was assumed that the funding would be allocated through the direct schools grant to support the high needs block.

The Interim Director for Education and Skills 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 paper provided an update on the progress to date and work being carried out across the BCP place with regards to the improvements required in the Local Area SEND system. It provided an update of work across the partnership with regards to the SEND Improvement Plan and associated Performance Scorecard.

The Performance Scorecard would both identify and evidence the performance areas and improvement metrics that can demonstrate that the partnership was making sustainable improvements.

The report also outlined the current funding position for SEND services, for the Council.

The Committee discussed the report and presentation, including:

- In response to a query about the increase in requests from parents and carers, the Committee was informed that these requests often fluctuated throughout the year. They typically rose in August and September due to students transitioning while schools were closed. In October, the requests were at approximately 45%. This situation was being monitored, and the service hoped that the number of requests would decrease once children and young people returned to their school settings.
- In response to a query about the rate of EHCPs being granted when requests were submitted by schools versus those submitted by parents or carers, the Committee was informed that the service would investigate this matter and provide an update at their next update to the Committee. **ACTION**

- In response to a query regarding the recent events in the locality and how the service ensures that all individuals who could benefit from the events were informed about them the Committee was advised that Children's Services collaborated with the parent/carer forum, Parent and Carers Together and through the school system to make sure everyone was aware of the events. Additionally, they organised online events for those who were unable to attend in person.
- The Committee was advised that the service had been developing an information-sharing agreement with schools. This agreement would provide Children's Services with more information on referrals and behavioural patterns. By doing so, the service would be able to identify trends in referrals and parent/carer engagement across different localities.
- In response to a query about students with EHCPs not receiving adequate support in sixth form provisions, the Committee was advised that a sufficiency strategy was being developed to aid post-16 provision and identify improvements that had to be made.
- The Committee was advised that a restructuring was implemented to help the service better address the backlogs in EHCP annual reviews. The new structure, which included assistant positions, provided additional support and addressed issues identified in the processing system.

36. Linwood Special School SEND Post 16 Provision at Ted Webster

The Head of School Place Planning, Admissions and Capital 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.

In accordance with the council's improvement agenda and priority action to reduce high needs expenditure, this project increased the availability of local SEND places and achieved cost avoidance in the high needs budget.

The council experienced a significant increase in the number of children requiring an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) over the last 3 years. Sustained growth resulted in a greater use of independent specialist school places and a shortage of specialist provision locally. This increased unit costs of provision and intensified budget pressures in the dedicated schools grant high needs funding block. As part of the council's response to growth and improvement in the system, the council developed a draft Sufficiency Strategy. The Sufficiency Strategy was a key part of the council's work to deliver a sustainable system, working collaboratively with partners to ensure that the needs of children and young people were met without escalating costs, and supporting delivery of the DSG Recovery Plan. A key area of focus for the strategy was to develop and expand the Post 16 offer locally. In delivering the priorities identified in the SEND Sufficiency Strategy, additional Post 16 specialist provision was planned and commissioned in collaboration with Linwood Special School.

The report contained a proposal to expand Linwood Special School on a satellite site hosted at the former Ted Webster Children's Centre. The



project provided a total of 60 specialist post-16 places with a focus on supporting young people in transitioning into an independent, healthy adulthood. Capital investment was required to refurbish and remodel the existing buildings to deliver a high-quality, accessible teaching and learning space. The new facility was scheduled to open in September 2025. By increasing the availability of local specialist Post 16 places, the council estimated a cost avoidance in the region of £38K - £50K per place, per annum.

The Committee praised the efforts made in this area and acknowledged the significant investment in young people. They expressed enthusiasm for this work and its potential benefits for the students.

**It was RESOLVED that**

- (a) Cabinet approves the scheme to develop a satellite of Linwood School hosted at the former Ted Webster Children's Centre providing a total of 60 Post 16 places including the associated capital investment necessary to develop the scheme as contained in Appendix 1 (Exempt). The scheme is fully funded from the council's grant allocation of High Needs Provision Capital and will progress in line with the project programme set out at paragraph 12.**

37. Alternative Provision Update

The Interim Head of School Inclusion 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 was received as evidence of the work currently being undertaken across the wider partnership within BCP to secure improvement and transformation across Alternative Provision to support mainstream inclusion and contribute towards a sustainable SEND system and positively impact the trajectory of high needs expenditure.

The report provided an overview of the work undertaken by the School Inclusion Service/local area partnership aligned to progress of implementing our Alternative Provision Improvement Plan.

In the last 6 months, an Alternative Provision Improvement Plan and Oversight Board have been established to drive and monitor improvements in the Alternative Provision area. This update provides a narrative on the initial progress and priority areas of work, as well as the lived experience of children and young people going through the system from a permanent exclusion perspective.

The Committee discussed the report and presentation, including:

- In response to a query about how children and young people were ensured access to the necessary alternative provision, the Committee was informed that the service was aware of the existing

issues with the system. Efforts were underway to improve access, although it had been noted that not all children currently had access to the online services. The inclusion team was actively working to address this problem wherever possible. While the number of children receiving the provision within six days had increased, it was still not at 100%.

- The Committee was advised that the service intended to decrease the number of children needing alternative provision through inclusive practices that had been implemented in mainstream settings.
- In response to a query raised regarding how to motivate schools to keep the most vulnerable young people in the educational setting, the Committee was informed that reframing the OFSTED scorecard could have a national impact. An increased emphasis on inclusion within this framework would serve as a valuable tool for local authorities when assessing efforts related to inclusion. Furthermore, the ongoing peer challenge initiative would enable schools to engage with one another, allowing them to share insights and strategies for achieving their inclusion goals.
- In response to a query regarding the mental health of children and young people and the work being done in this area within the alternative provision the Committee was advised that the service had collaborated with their Integrated Care System colleagues to assess the range of needs throughout the system. While mental health issues were a national concern, it was essential to address them locally.
- The Committee was advised that throughout the improvement journey in Children's Services, there had always been an opportunity to explore different approaches and find ways to make a meaningful impact. However, this would need to be supported by ensuring that the foundations were strong enough to foster innovation.

**It was RESOLVED that The report is received as evidence of the work currently being undertaken across the wider partnership within BCP to secure improvement and transformation across Alternative Provision to support mainstream inclusion and contribute towards a sustainable SEND system and positively impact the trajectory of high needs expenditure**

38. School Attainment and Progress 2023/24 and Co-production of pathways

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 'D' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

39. High Needs Schools Grant Expenditure Forecast

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.

40. Portfolio Holder Update

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

- An update on the outstanding Cabinet recommendation from previous meetings related to knife crime and drug/alcohol use in schools. The Education Improvement Service collaborated with police and community groups to gather data on school programs addressing these issues, but challenges remained in obtaining detailed information.
- OFSTED had recommended that schools incorporate local safeguarding issues, such as knife crime, into their curriculum. There are current resources available for Personal, Social, Health, and Economic education, with additional materials being sourced from providers attending conferences. The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People highlighted that he also found free resources online through organisations like the DfE.
- Advised that he is now the Chair of the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education.
- In response to the Cabinet recommendations around earlier age-appropriate education. There was a need to assess existing educational initiatives related to this at both primary and secondary levels regarding knife crime awareness.
- Advised of upcoming events including webinars and community events focused on knife crime and related issues.
- Confirmed the appointment of the new Director of Education and Skills, providing an update on her background in education that had prepared her for this role.
- The upcoming OFSTED inspection of local authority Children's Services was viewed positively and seen as an important opportunity for improvement within the service.

41. 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 Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee was asked to consider and approve the updated Work Plan following the results of the top priority survey.

As part of this item, the Committee was asked to consider recommendations from the O&S Board meeting on 18 November. The recommendations were made during the consideration of the conclusions from the Overview and Scrutiny Budget working groups and are provided at Appendix 'F'.

**It was RESOLVED that the Committee considered, updated and confirmed its Work Plan and was asked to:**

- **Agree to hold informal briefing sessions as discussed at the work planning session; and**
- **Agree membership for the working group regarding Family Hubs across BCP**

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm

CHAIR