

Foreword - Achieving Data Driven Scrutiny



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The Children's Services O&S Committee plays a crucial role in enhancing the decisions made on behalf of BCP residents through scrutinising policy and decisions and making recommendations for change.

Children's Services O&S councillors are mindful that there is a wealth of data available to support us in our role as effective scrutineers. This data tells a story of the needs and experiences of residents using our services as well as the performance of services, the costs associated, and the judgements formed by the council and other responsible bodies on service direction.

Following the creation of a similar toolkit by the Health and Adult Social Care O&S Committee, it became clear that a toolkit would also strengthen scrutiny for Children's Services. This toolkit will help councillors to better understand the various data sources and how these can provide a wider evidence base for the work of scrutiny.

As our data and analytical tools become more advanced, the potential for the council and its partners to leverage this information to shape and target services and interventions is immense. As our data tools continue to evolve, this toolkit will be updated and reviewed annually.

Above all else, it is acknowledged that scrutiny councillors are not expected to be data analysts or experts in the field. The strength of scrutiny lies in the ability of councillors to listen to residents and shine a light on issues of public importance, to ask the right questions of those designing and delivering services, and to draw upon the relevant evidence in response to those questions. The toolkit has been developed with this in mind and with the aim of being a resource for current and new councillors in their understanding of the data landscape.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide councillors with:

- an understanding of the purpose and benefits of data use by Children's Services (CS) O&S Committee
- access to a range of data tools that will support a proactive approach to incorporating data into scrutiny work

2. How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is focused on the data sources that will support work within the remit of the CS O&S Committee. Other O&S committees will find alternative data sets more relevant to their work.

Sections 3 – 7 provide guidance on the definitions of data, the value of data for scrutiny work, and guidance on how to request and use data.

Table 1 provides detail of the various data sources.

Data, research, reports and analysis sources have been provided in this toolkit. All may serve a purpose for scrutiny for different reasons. Sources include a brief description, advisory notes on how to use them and have been categorised in the following ways:

- Accessibility
- Local/national relevance
- The type of scrutiny work that the source will support (deep dive/horizon scanning)

Many data sources are public, with links provided for easy access. Some tools provide data with a supporting narrative, whilst others may require an account to access, or present raw data in a way that will benefit from the assistance of officers to interpret. Taking account of this, sources are categorised as 'self-serve' or 'supported access'.

Councillors can also use the sources' available information through this toolkit to support their own background research for O&S work and develop a wider understanding of children's services' issues to better inform their scrutiny enquiries and work programming judgements.

3. What is data?

Data or intelligence is the quantitative and qualitative information we gather from systems and people. It is used by the council and other service providers to understand outcomes for people and ensure the services delivered are the right ones.

Quantitative data is data represented numerically, including anything that can be counted, measured, or given a numerical value.

Qualitative data is data that cannot be represented numerically and is instead based on an observation of described lived experiences and patterns of behaviours.

Quantitative data may be more **structured** (e.g. numbers of children and young people in our care system) whereas qualitative data is **unstructured** (e.g. feedback on a service gathered through a focus group). Both types of data represent a person using the services provided by the council and its partners and are of equal importance.

To be meaningful, the use of data and intelligence needs to be **timely and measurable**. Some data is available in **real time**. Other data has been gathered, cleansed and included within overarching reports, such as quarterly or annual reports. There will be a **lag in the data** provided in these types of reports. Both forms of data will be useful to O&S, but judgements should be made regarding the timeliness of data that is required to inform O&S work.

4. Why is data important for overview and scrutiny?

The role of O&S is to **test and challenge** the assumptions and decisions of the council and its health partners, to strengthen the decisions that are made. It provides this test and challenge on behalf of the public and has a wide range of powers to scrutinise anything that affects the local area or its residents. This is a significant responsibility and the work undertaken by O&S should be **based on evidence**.

O&S work is selected by councillors and supported by officers and partners of the council (e.g. NHS) who are experts in their field. Reports to scrutiny are provided by officers and partners who can provide information and narrative on issues selected for scrutiny. By incorporating data and additional insight into their work (e.g. evidence sessions with relevant stakeholders, site visits, surveys), O&S councillors can form a broader understanding of an issue and **triangulate** information to test that what is being provided to them in reports is supported by relevant data. Through this, O&S findings become **evidence based** and scrutiny can better support the governance of the council and its partners as an effective '**critical friend**'.

There is no one person who holds all the data and answers about the performance of services in the local area. A unique **power of scrutiny** is the ability to **bring together** a range of **partners and information** to gain a picture of how well services are meeting the needs of residents, and to help find solutions where improvements are needed. Data is part of the clue package that can be drawn upon to build this picture.

Lessons can be learned from other areas of the country where data has not been used effectively by scrutiny, or councillors have not heeded the stories being told by the data provided. Where scrutiny has not been evidence led, it has been found to be a contributing factor to major service failure that has had a significant impact on the lives of residents.

5. Deep dive and Horizon scanning

Scrutiny work can be broadly divided into two categories of 'deep dive' and 'horizon scanning'. These are defined as:

Deep dive

- Detailed work focused on policy development and exploring options for the future.
- Often in the form of a working group or a series of committee-based evidence sessions.
- Framed as a series of questions or key lines of enquiry (KLOE) to which O&S seeks answers through detailed enquiry. Answers are found through the gathering of evidence, with a view to informing future policy.
- Specific and potentially more granular-level data may form part of the evidence base in answer to KLOE.
- O&S may also gather insight by talking directly to partners, officers and residents, to build a fuller picture around the data gathered.

Horizon scanning

- Regular monitoring of a range of higher-level data, outside of a committee setting.
- Data selected should assist in giving the committee high-level narratives that tell the story of need or set the context for strategies.
- Using this data the committee can build an understanding of context and trends around performance and resident experience and identify any emerging 'red flags'.
- Red flags may be elevated to committee for a report or a working group deep dive, following background enquiries.
- Horizon scanning data sources should be reviewed collectively on an annual basis to inform onward work planning.

An example of the types of data sources that support deep dive and horizon scanning work is set out in **Figure 1** below.

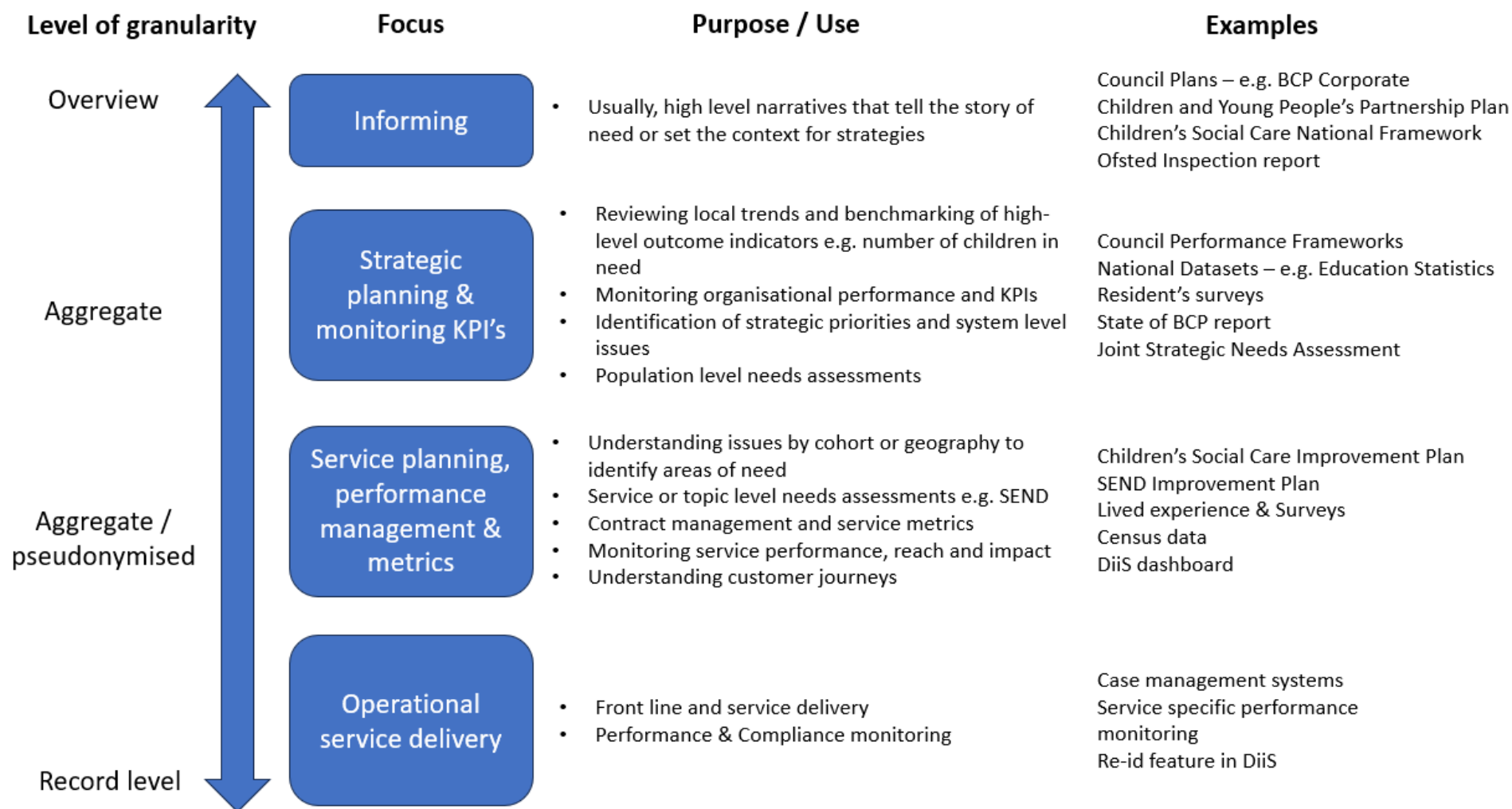


Figure 1 – Examples of data sources to support deep dive and horizon scanning (from the Adult’s O&S tool kit originally provided by Public Health). Please note all data sources mentioned in the image are in the Table 1 below.

6. Accessing data – a methodology for O&S councillors

Rights to information

Councillors, and scrutiny councillors in particular, have elevated rights of access to information held by the council and its partners. O&S committees have **statutory powers to request information** but with this right is a responsibility to **clearly set out what these requests are**, and to do so **in a reasonable timeframe** for requests to be provided. This will help to ensure that requests by O&S can be met effectively, and that relationships with officers and partners are built on mutual trust with a shared common aim of improving services and outcomes through scrutiny.

Using the following guidelines for data and information requests will assist with this. These should be followed in conjunction with the requirements of procedure rules within the BCP Council Constitution.

Key Lines of Enquiry

O&S outcomes are often most effective when work is targeted, rather than taking a broad 'oversight' approach. A good practice to achieving targeted scrutiny is the establishment of a set of key lines of enquiry (KLOE). This applies to one-off committee reports as well as more in-depth, deep dive reviews. By seeking answers to these KLOE, findings and recommendations will be evidence based and are more likely to be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound), with a tangible benefit to residents.

Committees are encouraged to outline a set of KLOE for all items on their work programme, **at least one meeting cycle (2/3 months) in advance, and ideally on an annual basis when the following year's work programme is set**. This will allow opportunity for respondents to gather and provide the requested information and to meet the council's consultation and sign off requirements for public reports. KLOE should include any specific data requests to support the subject matter under scrutiny. Committees can collaborate on KLOE informally and formalise these requests at committee.

A link to a standard proforma for Key Lines of Enquiry can be found [here](#).

Standard data inclusions for Children's Overview and Scrutiny reports -

The O&S tool kit outlines a **standard set of data inclusions** that, where available, should accompany all reports to committee to enhance the evidence base provided to scrutiny. These are as follows:

- ✓ Historical trends
- ✓ Regional and national comparisons
- ✓ Demographic comparisons
- ✓ Costings and budget
- ✓ An outline of any limitations in the data that should be taken into account by the committee

Officers will be able to provide tailored advice and support in analysing the data as appropriate for individual reports.

Additional requests for data and information

Reports to committee are published five clear working days in advance of committee meetings. After reading reports, committee members may have additional questions, over and above KLOE and standard data inclusions, that require technical detail to respond. Wherever possible, councillors should provide these questions in advance of the committee meeting to report authors, to give opportunity for supply of information into committee.

Where additional details, or further analysis of data is requested, it may be necessary to provide that information post-meeting or at the next committee. Committees are therefore encouraged to invest time in scoping scrutiny items to ensure that data requests can be identified at an early stage.

Horizon scanning and work planning

There are a variety of data sources that will support the horizon scanning role of the Children's Services O&S Committee. These are identified in the table below, with many identified as '**self-serve**' resources that councillors can easily access and research independently.

O&S is one of many bodies that maintain a close oversight of data. Some of the resources provided are in the form of strategies produced by other bodies (such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment) where data has already been assessed to give a picture of the needs and service

aspirations for the area. Sources from the policy and strategy landscape will provide a shortcut to the committee in terms of understanding where their work programme may be most valuably directed.

Of the resources considered, a set of primary sources have been identified as most useful for the group in its work. Primary sources have been identified within Table 1 and are also set out below.

Sources for O&S horizon scanning

- ✓ A Shared Vision for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole 2024-28
- ✓ State of BCP Report (2023)
- ✓ Children and Young People's Partnership Plan 2025-30 (launch April 2025 - replacing CYPP 2021-24)
- ✓ BCP Children and Young People's Joint Needs Assessment (CYP JSNA)

Primary sources for deep dive O&S work

- ✓ Children's Social Care Dashboard
- ✓ Explore education statistics - GOV.UK
- ✓ BCP hosted statistics, data and census

These sources listed in Table 1 below and will be kept under review and updated as appropriate.

O&S committees and councillors have limited resources to undertake their work. Independent, regular review of horizon scanning resources by councillors will ensure that committee time is reserved for value added scrutiny. To share the load, the committee may wish to agree rapporteurs who will take responsibility for monitoring and researching specific agreed areas and reporting back to the wider committee. This may be achieved by undertaking a skills and interests audit of committee members to match areas of interests with appropriate members.

O&S work planning will be strengthened by a collective annual review of horizon scanning resources. With support from senior officers to provide further background information on services and any areas of strategic change, this will provide an evidence base for work programme

decisions for the year ahead. Planning an annual programme of scrutiny work will provide sufficient notice for report authors to meet the data requests identified for each scrutiny item.

7. How to be an intelligent user of data tools

Where data is used to make judgements, it is essential that this is approached with some caution. Wherever possible, data should be **triangulated** across a range of sources, and **red flags in data should always be followed up with further enquiries** to understand a fuller picture - one that may not be evident from the data alone. For example, data changes may be a result of service change or a difference in the way that data is collected.

The following **'top tips'** may be useful for councillors when approaching data independently:

- Always treat high level data with some caution – consider who has produced the data or look for official statistics-type markings.
- Look at historical information and trends as well as the current data point.
- Consider the size of the data set – changes in smaller data sets will appear more significant than in larger data sets.
- Look at the description of how data has been calculated. Differences in collection and calculation of data in different councils will affect how the data compares.
- Data doesn't explain the context. Ask questions around service change or how data has been calculated to understand further what the data may mean.
- Be aware of the timeliness of data. Consider when real time data is required compared to quarterly/ annual reports, which will reflect a data lag.
- Data quality can vary, and the output is only as good as the input. Care may need to be taken if the data beneath is of poor quality. Ask questions around data cleansing to understand the quality of the data provided.
- Seek assistance from council performance and intelligence teams where a more analytical approach is required.

The council and its partners (e.g. Charities, Police, Fire and Rescue, Education, Public Health, NHS) have experts who regularly work with the data sources outlined in **Table 1**. Accessing the support of data analysts for deep dive scrutiny work will assist councillors and strengthen scrutiny outcomes. Support required can be identified at the scoping stage of a piece of scrutiny work.

Table 1 – Data Sources for use by the Children’s Services O&S Committee

General Strategies & Reports (not Children Services specific)					
Accessibility	Data Source	Description	Remit	Application	Notes
1 Self-serve	Primary Source A Shared Vision for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole 2024-28 Corporate Performance information : Scroll down to bottom of page, click view dashboard	The Council’s vision for 2024-28, setting out key priorities and ambitions for the BCP area as well as a high-level delivery plan. Click here for a high level summary . Corporate performance is updated quarterly and shows how BCP Council is working towards achieving the objectives in the Corporate Strategy. Includes updates on actions and key performance indicators	Local	Horizon scanning	Overarching Council Strategy and performance information, which includes people, health and care aims. These three sources accessed together will give a full picture of council aims and performance on working towards these. Corporate performance information is updated quarterly.
2 Self-serve	BCP Budget and Annual Accounts	Overarching BCP Council finance information	Local	Horizon scanning	See also medium-term Financial Plan reports, published throughout the year to Cabinet.
3 Self-serve	BCP Council Residents’ Survey 2021	Survey of residents in BCP area asking questions about what it’s like living in the local area. The results of this survey provide baseline information which is used to measure satisfaction and perceptions over time.	Local	Horizon scanning	Due for a refresh – new survey conducted in October 2024. Includes satisfaction in services & support for older people/ young people; carer satisfaction with BCP services; levels of social contact and isolation across a range of indicators
4 Self-serve	Primary Source State of BCP Report, 2023	‘Key facts’ document providing information on the BCP area and resident characteristics. Updated annually.	Local	Horizon scanning	Includes a range of information on wellbeing indicators (e.g. obesity, mental health, injury) as well as linked indicators such as deprivation, housing and economic factors.

Children Services specific Strategies & Reports

Accessibility	Data Source	Description	Remit	Application	Notes
5 Self-serve	Primary Source BCP Children and Young People's Joint Needs Assessment	The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment is a report provided by Public Health and is an assessment of current and future health and wellbeing issues for the local population. In January 2025 a Children and Young People specific deep dive was published which provides an evidence base, pulling from both qualitative and quantitative data, of health and wellbeing needs of Children and Young People to support planning and commissioning and preparation of bids and business cases.	Local	Horizon scanning	Report production is based on an assessment of raw data sources also listed in this document, along with liaison with local stakeholders on issues for the area. This is used to present an assessment of current needs of the BCP area. The JSNA therefore provides a shortcut to committee in terms of horizon scanning vs. accessing the data independently.
6 Self-serve	Primary Source Children and Young People's Partnership Plan	The Children and Young People's Partnership Plan is a high-level strategy that outlines how services will work together to help and support children and young people to improve outcomes across BCP.	Local	Horizon Scanning	This plan was launched in May 2025 and covers 2025-2030. This plan highlights to members of O&S priorities and focus across BCP for children and young people across the partnership.
7 Self-serve	SEND Improvement Plan How we are improving SEND services	These plans are part of the improvement journey of BCP's SEND provision. It highlights areas of improvement on a monthly basis, including partnership additions, action updates and progress made. Progress is monitored via the SEND Improvement board scorecard which is published on the local offer SEND Improvement Board key performance indicator	Local – SEND focus	Horizon Scanning	The Improvement Plans are updated on a monthly basis in advance of the SEND Improvement Boards.

8 Self-serve	Pan Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership report BCP Safeguarding Children Partnership Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements and Priorities	Statutory annual report informing readers about how the Safeguarding has carried out its responsibilities to prevent abuse, harm and neglect of children and young people with care and support needs during the reporting period. The latest published report is for pan-Dorset. The partnerships are now separated, and the next report will be for BCP area specific.	Local	Horizon scanning	It is a statutory requirement for the Safeguarding Children Partnership to publish an Annual Report each year and to present that report to the Council's Health & Wellbeing Board. Many Councils also request that the report is presented to Scrutiny as the report enables a discussion on the work of the Safeguarding Children Partnership.
9 Self-serve	Children's Services Complaints and Compliments 2023-24	The Children's Services Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2023-2024 provides an overview of the feedback received by BCP Council regarding Children's Services. It details the types and numbers of complaints and compliments, the handling processes, and outcomes. The report also highlights service improvements made based on the feedback, ensuring transparency and continuous improvement in service delivery.	Local – Children's services focus	Horizon scanning	Annual review of the report by the committee will assist the committee to identify any areas of concern that would benefit from scrutiny.

Data Portals

Accessibility	Data Source	Description	Remit	Application	Notes
10 Self-serve	Primary Source Children's Social Care Dashboard	This is a tool that will bring together various indicators and data points to track progress towards the outcomes outlined in the National Framework. The initial indicators will be developed from existing data, and the dashboard will evolve over time to address data gaps and improve understanding of outcomes.	National (but can be filtered to region and LA) Children's Social Care Focus	Deep dive	To inform the framework's principles, enablers, and outcomes, ensuring that the guidance is based on current and comprehensive data. Supports a deep dive review of performance in various aspects of children's social care.

11 Self-serve	Primary Source Find statistics and data - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK	Explore Education Statistics website allows users to search and browse a wide range of statistical summaries and associated data related to education in England including: • School and Pupil Characteristics including age, gender, free school meals eligibility • Local Authority and School Expenditure. • Pupil Attendance • GCSE and A-Level Results • Teacher Training and Workforce: Statistics on new entrants to Initial Teacher Training and characteristics of the school workforce. • SEND: data on children and young people with an education, health and care (EHC) plan in England and, historically, for those with a statement of special educational needs (SEN).	National	Horizon Scanning	Search within Themes to aid scrutiny
12 Self-serve	Statistics: looked-after children - GOV.UK	Provides comprehensive data on children under local authority care in England • This includes information on the number, placement, and legal status of looked-after children, as well as outcomes for looked after children, such as educational attainment and health	Horizon Scanning	National	National picture on Looked after children. Access to annual statistical releases, guidance documents, and historical data, helping users understand trends and patterns in the care and outcomes of looked-after children.

13 Self-serve	Statistics: children in need and child protection - GOV.UK	This page provides comprehensive data on children in need and child protection in England. It includes statistics on: • Children in Need: Information on the number and characteristics of children referred to and assessed by children's social services. • Referrals and Assessments: Data on the number of referrals to children's social care services and the outcomes of these assessments. • Child Protection Plans: Statistics on children who were the subject of a child protection plan. • Outcomes for Children in Need: Data on the educational attainment, health, and other outcomes for children in need, including those looked after by local authorities.	Horizon Scanning	National	Specific to Children in Need and Child Protection statistics The page offers access to annual statistical releases, historical data, and guidance documents, helping users understand trends and patterns in the support and outcomes for children in need
14 Self-serve	Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman	Searchable database of the decisions made on complaints relating to BCP Council Services.	Local – all categories of council services children's social care	Horizon scanning	Maintaining a review of the database will provide an opportunity for the committee to monitor any trends in the levels and types of complaints relating to Children's social care. This will assist in work programming by helping to identify any areas of concern that would benefit from scrutiny.
15 Supported Access	Primary Source BCP hosted statistics, data and census	Portal to a range of public data hosted by BCP Council.	General local data portal, surveys and key facts	Both	For deep dive - Information contained on the portal may give further background to an issue under review – e.g. deprivation and poverty indices in BCP.

16 Requires registration to access	LG Inform – Children's social care reports	Series of ready-made reports on a range of topics to provide an easy way to access a deeper level of information and intelligence about the local area or community.	Local	Deep dive	Automated reports which pull together data sets to give a picture of the key headlines for the local area, including some benchmarking. Councillors may welcome this resource for their own background research prior to scrutiny in committee, to provide some wider context to the data provided by officers within reports.
17 Requires officer/ DiiS support as use of DiiS is restricted to account holders. Technical support from specialised officers essential to also understand any limitations in the data.	Dorset Intelligence & Insight Service (DiiS)	DiiS links data from health and social care across Dorset. Highly granular anonymised data about those using services in the Dorset area. Valuable local tool as data is supplied by a wide range of clinicians and analysts including BCP Children's social care.	Local	Deep dive - reviewing selected data in response to key lines of enquiry	Wide range of health-related information including Children's social care and SEND data that can be sliced in different ways according to specific enquiries. Potential to get lost in the vast range of data available – therefore best suited as a response to clear and specific query from committee. Value of the data is only as good as the initial data that has been provided into the system. Note of caution in approaching the data, and a reason to be guided by an analyst in use of this data. Currently not possible to benchmark BCP against other local authority areas through DiiS.
18 Publicly available, best accessed via public health officers supporting the committee to help navigate the breadth of information available.	Fingertips Public Health Data from Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) Within the profiles available, Public health outcomes framework and local authority health profiles recommended by Public Health officers as particularly useful datasets for scrutiny	National profiles on a wide range of public health data e.g. Dental services, inequality tools, physical activity Provides a wider overview to operational performance in the BCP area. – e.g. by providing national context, benchmarking against other LA areas, monitoring trends over time for key performance indicators (KPIs)	National – health focus	Supports horizon scanning with ability to review our performance against other areas across a range of indicators. Red flags may give clues about areas that could benefit from deeper scrutiny investigation.	Provides a wider overview to operational performance in the BCP area. – e.g. by providing national context, benchmarking against other LA areas, monitoring trends over time for key performance indicators (KPIs). Some data may breakdown to lower levels, by ward or geographical hospital trust areas. Complements the granular local data available through DiiS to provide an evidence base for deep dive scrutiny.

19 Publicly available, best accessed via officers/ public health officers supporting the committee to help navigate the breadth of information available.	LG Inform (Upon opening the link, it will highlight Children and Families)	National profiles on a wide range of specific KPIs e.g. proportion of 5-year-old children free from dental decay, suicide rates, Juvenile first-time entrants.	National – health focus	Deep dive - reviewing selected data in response to key lines of enquiry Also supports horizon scanning with ability to review BCP performance against other areas across a range of indicators. Red flags may give clues about areas that could benefit from deeper scrutiny investigation.	Provides a wider overview to operational performance in the BCP area – e.g. by providing national context, benchmarking against other LA areas, monitoring trends over time for key performance indicators (KPIs). Some data may breakdown to lower levels, by ward or geographical hospital trust areas. Complements the granular local data available through DiIS to provide an evidence base for deep dive scrutiny
20 Available to relevant senior officers	BCP Internal Officer Data (quantitative data)	A core data set relating to Children's Social Care provides senior managers with visibility of activity, performance and risk. Provided through an interactive Power Bi Dashboard. Monitored and reported by exception into the Executive Board.	Local – children's social care focus	Deep dive	Relevant data will be incorporated into reports to O&S committee according to the subject matter (e.g. workforce recruitment and retention data). O&S committee may request specific data from officers to support deep dive investigations. This is best established through a clear set of key lines of enquiry, agreed in advance by the committee.

21 Available to relevant senior officers	BCP Internal Officer Data (qualitative data)	Data gathered and held by senior officers from a range of mechanisms such as: • Feedback from all stakeholders and staff through a number of different Quality Assurance mechanisms • Audits and Practice Learning reviews • Compliments, Stories of Difference and Our Journeys • Bespoke team level surveys • Safeguarding and serious incident reviews •	Local – Children's social care focus	Deep dive	Relevant data will be incorporated into reports to O&S committee according to the subject matter. O&S committee may request specific data from officers to support deep dive investigations. This is best established through a clear set of key lines of enquiry, agreed in advance by the committee.
22 Available to relevant senior officers	BCP Finance Data (held on Finance and Operations 'F&O' software)	Children's Social Care finance data gathered and held by senior officers	Local – children's social care focus	Both	For horizon scanning - finance related data, when paired with performance data, will provide a fuller picture around the performance of services and the impact of potential savings/ investment proposals. The committee may wish to request a regular update on an agreed set of key finance and performance measures within the adult social care area for horizon scanning purposes and consult annually when work planning. For deep dive – relevant finance data will be incorporated into reports to O&S committee according to the subject matter.