

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

Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 January 2026 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Carr-Brown – Chair

Present: Cllr O Brown, Cllr P Canavan (In place of Cllr P Cooper),
Cllr E Harman, Cllr S Mackrow, Cllr D Martin, Cllr T Slade and
Cllr A Chapmanlaw (In place of Cllr O Walters).

Co-Opted Members: Jeremy Payne and Matt Tuddenham

Also in attendance: Ryan Cornish and Elliot Prentice

47. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Mark Saxby, Cllr Peter Cooper, Cllr Oliver Walters, Cllr Duanne Farr and Cllr Simon Bull.

48. Substitute Members

Cllr Patrick Canavan attended as substitute for Cllr Peter Cooper and Cllr Adrian Chapmanlaw attended as substitute for Cllr Oliver Walters.

49. Declarations of Interests

Cllr Sandra Mackrow declared an interest in relation to an item of business as a close family member was in receipt of an EHCP and alternative provision.

Cllr Chapman-Law declared an interest in relation to an item of business as his wife was employed by BCP Council as a Personal Assistant supporting care experienced young people.

Cllr Olivia Brown declared an interest in relation to an item of business concerning the High Needs Block and budget papers, as the school at which she was employed was currently being assessed due to a new department referenced in the papers.

50. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

51. Recommendation Tracker

The Committee noted the Recommendation Tracker. The Overview and Scrutiny Specialist outlined the new format, which replaces the action sheet. Members agreed to review the tracker in more depth around June 2026.

The Chair provided an update on outstanding actions, and the Committee noted the actions that could be closed.

52. Public Issues

The following statements were received from Ms Susan Stockwell:

Statement 1

Re Agenda Item 9 Family Hubs, could these please be well provided with secure safe cycle storage for the use of staff, visitors and clients of all ages.

Statement 2

Re Agenda Item 11 School Admission Arrangement, when setting "reasonable" school catchment areas as per Schools Admission Code 2021 1.4 please as a matter of policy always take into account available safe active travel routes for walking/cycling as well as available bus services. It is reasonable to consider these because of government request to increase journeys made actively and because of BCP council's own climate emergency declaration.

53. Members of Youth Parliament Update

The Clerk advised the Committee that, due to an administrative error during publication of the agenda, the update from the Members of Youth Parliament had been inadvertently omitted. This would be recorded in the minutes and included as a standing agenda item going forward.

The Members of Youth Parliament provided an update of all the MYPs' recent activities, which included:

- The commencement of the election process for the new cohort, which had attracted a significantly higher number of candidates than in the previous year. A selection event would take place on 12 February, after which sixteen candidates would progress to the final stage.
- Progress on the mental health campaign, including the development of a training video to be launched during Mental Health Week.
- National engagement through the Youth Select Committee, including participation in evidence sessions on PSHE, with a final report expected in March 2026.

The Committee thanked the Members of Youth Parliament for their update and commended them for their continued commitment and representation of young people across BCP.

The mental health training video would be shared with Members when available, and officers would confirm whether it would be appropriate to present the video at a future Committee meeting or to circulate it outside the meeting. **ACTION**

54. Housing for Care Experienced Young People Update

The Head of Strategic Housing & Partnerships and Head of Children in Care and 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 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

This report updated the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on arrangements to support Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) as they moved toward independent living. It responded to the Committee's recommendation in June 2025; that the Committee sought assurance that the new Joint Housing Protocol had been successfully agreed and was working effectively to ensure Care Experienced Young People were seeing an improved service and were in receipt of timely advice and safe housing that suited their individual needs and hopes for the future.

It evidenced the effectiveness of the Joint Housing Protocol review in improving partnership working, reducing homelessness, and ensuring priority access to housing options such as Staying Put, Supported Lodgings, Specialist Supported Housing, and independent accommodation.

Governance had been strengthened through the BCP Youth Homelessness Board, embedding strategic oversight and accountability. Young people's voices had shaped improvements to housing information, pathway clarity, and pre- and post-move support, while specialist and supported housing commissioning continued to provide tailored assistance for those with higher needs.

Support for planning independence was integrated across pathways, with recommissioned services to be focused upon enhancing life skills and resilience. Despite progress, challenges remained due to local housing market pressures and affordability, requiring continued learning from reviews and lived experience alongside implementation of the forthcoming Children's Wellbeing and Skills Bill to secure positive outcomes for CEYP.

The Committee discussed the report, including:

- In response to a query raised regarding data and monitoring, the Committee was advised that information on approaches, characteristics (including young people leaving custody) and repeat homelessness is collected and reviewed regularly to identify trends and inform practice.
- In response to a query raised regarding whether the statutory 56-day timeframe allowed sufficient time for planning, and the Committee was advised that earlier pathway planning is now undertaken

through regular multi-agency meetings, including probation, in order to prevent crisis situations wherever possible.

- The Committee was advised that Youth Homelessness Board data is reported regularly, and it was agreed that officers would provide the Committee with a summary of these metrics, including information on repeat homelessness and outcomes for care experienced young people. **ACTION**
- In response to a query raised regarding supported accommodation, the Committee was advised that recent challenges, including abandonment or eviction from placements, are informing forthcoming recommissioning work, and that respite options would be strengthened.
- The Committee was advised that tenancy-sustainment support is available, and where concerns emerge, agencies intervene early and update joint assessments to maintain stability or secure appropriate alternatives.
- In response to a query raised regarding young people's aspirations and voice, the Committee was advised that these are being embedded more strongly in planning and governance, including through the refreshed Youth Homelessness Board and the intention to appoint a young person as co-chair.
- The Committee was advised that long-term requirements for specialist and supported housing will be set out in the forthcoming strategy to support sufficiency and future commissioning.

RESOLVED that the update be noted and that a further update report be brought to the Committee in 12 months. ADD TO WORK PLAN

Voting: Nem. Con.

55. Invest to Save Budgets in the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

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

This report responded to the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee's second set of KLOEs on High Needs Block (HNB) "invest-to-save" activity. It distinguished: (i) initiatives funded from HNB (which impacted the in-year position unless offset by savings) and (ii) initiatives funded from the General Fund or external grants (which did not worsen the HNB position but could drive service improvement and future cost avoidance).

It summarised delivery to date (including sufficiency expansion and early-years interventions), the emerging impact, the approach to measuring cost avoidance, and the new initiatives then in development.

The Committee discussed the report, including:

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- In response to a query raised regarding forthcoming national SEND reforms, the Committee was advised that the White Paper was expected in early February and that the Council continued to work closely with the Department for Education to ensure alignment with anticipated changes.
- In response to a query raised regarding the extent to which the Council was preparing for a possible shift in the EHCP funding model, the Committee was advised that early intervention work, multi-agency support, and strengthened oversight structures were already consistent with the direction suggested through engagement with the Department for Education. Funding arrangements would become clearer following publication of the national proposals.
- In response to a query raised regarding confidence in delivering additional specialist and resource provision, the Committee was advised that strong interest had been received from primary schools, and renewed engagement with secondary schools had resulted in nine schools expressing interest in developing resource provision. Demographic changes were also supporting the availability of accommodation.
- The Committee was advised that the Portage service team was fully staffed, well-coordinated, and worked closely with early years partners to ensure earlier identification of need and appropriate placements. Officers agreed to circulate information on the Portage service to Members and, if helpful, arrange a short briefing session on the service. **ACTION**
- In response to a query raised about digital improvements, the Committee was advised that planned enhancements to SEND case management and high needs funding systems were essential, supporting clearer oversight and more consistent decision-making.
- The Committee was advised, in response to further queries, that regional learning continued to inform the programme, including forthcoming engagement with Southampton regarding targeted funding models.
- In response to a query raised regarding how future national requirements would be incorporated, and the Committee was advised that a maturity matrix was expected following publication of the White Paper, and that a further update could be brought to the Committee in September once partnership self-assessment activity had been completed.

RESOLVED that the update be noted, and that a further update be brought to the Committee at the September 2026 meeting, following national reforms and associated partnership assessment work. ADD TO WORK PLAN

RESOLVED that the Committee agreed the following recommendations and that they be passed to Cabinet:

- a.) **Note the current High Needs Block (HNB) position and the impact and cost avoidance of the initiatives implemented to date including the increased supply of specialist places, the early years inclusion**

model (Dingley's Promise) and the positive impact of the Portage Service.

- b.) Endorse the invest-to-save programme and the establishment of the High Needs Block Deficit Recovery Plan Board, including its role in approving a benefits-measurement framework to evidence cost avoidance and prevent double-counting across initiatives.**
- c.) Support the progression of the following priority initiatives:**
- **Digitalisation of High Needs funding processes (integrated with the SCM upgrade)**
 - **Synergy Case Management (SCM) upgrade to go-live (target May-June 2026)**
 - **Pre-EHCP targeted funding model (subject to affordability and governance)**

Voting: Nem. Con.

56. Family Hubs Working Group Final Report

The Cllr Olivia Brown 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 Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned a Family Hubs Working Group to better understand and review progress of the implementation of Family Hubs in BCP.

The purpose of this report was to inform the committee of the output of the working group, including suggested recommendations.

The Committee discussed the report, including:

- The Committee was advised of an error in the report, which stated that the visit had taken place at the Kinson Hub, when the Working Group had in fact visited the Poole Town and West Howe Hubs.
- In response to a query raised regarding staff engagement, the Committee was advised that staff had welcomed the opportunity to speak openly with Members, and that the visits had provided valuable insight into frontline practice.
- Members of the working group advised of the strength of community engagement, and the Committee was informed that this continued to be a notable feature of the hubs' work, with teams actively building relationships with families and local organisations.
- In response to a query regarding staff support and retention, the Committee was advised that staff feedback had been positive overall, and that ongoing professional development, wellbeing arrangements and reflective practice remained priorities.
- In response to a query raised regarding performance and impact measures, and the Committee was advised that work was underway to further develop clear KPIs relating to inclusivity, accessibility and

engagement, supplemented by improved data and feedback mechanisms.

- In response to a query raised regarding future oversight, the Committee was advised that the Best Start in Life programme would provide the framework for further development, with the first hub identified at Boscombe, and it was agreed that an update on the programme would be brought to the Committee at the June meeting following publication of the Local Plan in March. **ADD TO WORK PLAN**
- The Committee agreed in the value of maintaining dialogue, and that informal engagement, including rapporteur arrangements, would support continuous visibility and strengthen Member-officer relationships going forward.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report and agreed the following recommendations arising from the Family Hubs Working Group.

The Committee agreed the Working Group's recommendations to Officers:

1. Continue to build on the strong foundations of community engagement, with a focus on inclusivity and responsiveness.
2. Explore ways to support staff wellbeing that are informed by staff experiences and feedback.
3. Develop clear measures of effectiveness relating to Family Hubs, with key performance indicators focused on reach, inclusivity and responsiveness to evolving community needs, supported by improved data collection and feedback.

Note: These recommendations are directed to the Head of Service, Early Help and Targeted Intervention, and the Director of Children's Social Care.

The Committee agreed to make Cabinet aware that the Working Group recommended Cabinet:

4. Notes the scrutiny that has been undertaken on Family Hubs and the Working Group's finding of the strong staff commitment to community engagement.
5. Endorses continued support for Family Hubs, with future priorities to include investment in staff capacity, professional development and enhanced tools to evidence impact.

The Committee agreed the Working Group's recommendation that the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

6. Establishes regular, informal dialogue between the Committee and Family Hub teams to maintain transparency and shared understanding. This to be undertaken annually by named rapporteurs and included on the Committee's work programme. Agreed rapporteurs to maintain links to Family Hubs through

independent visits and highlight any significant progress or red flags to the Committee as they arise, to assist Members in identifying where further scrutiny may be valuable.

Voting: Nem. Con.

57. Children's Services Capital Strategy Report 2026-2029

The report was circulated for information only and noted by the Committee.

The Committee welcomed the report and noted positive feedback from recent capital works undertaken in schools, including improvements to heating infrastructure. In response to queries, the Committee was advised that capital priorities continued to be informed by condition surveys, demographic pressures and statutory requirements, with works allocated to address the most urgent needs first. The Committee was further informed that the Council continued to work collaboratively with academy trusts to support planning around capacity and estate condition, recognising their responsibilities as estate managers.

58. School Admissions Arrangements 2027/28

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

59. Corporate Performance Report - Q2

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

60. Portfolio Holder Update

The Portfolio Holder provided an update on recent activity across Children's Services, which included:

- The Portfolio Holder advised that a confirmed publication date for the SEND White Paper had not yet been provided, and that discussions with the Department for Education were ongoing regarding future national SEND funding and the statutory override.
- The Committee was informed that the SEND inspection report was expected to be published on 2 February, and that Member communications would follow once the report was released.
- The Committee was advised that active work continued in relation to the Council's budget, particularly the High Needs Block deficit and the future funding required to service associated borrowing.
- The Portfolio Holder highlighted progress on the Best Start in Life strategy, noting that the national strategy was published in July 2025 and that all local authorities must publish a Best Start local plan by 31 March. Boscombe Family Hub had been identified as the first Best Start Hub locally, with a second hub for the west of the area to be identified by April 2026.

- The Committee was advised of recent meetings and visits, including attendance at the Corporate Parenting Board, where record participation had been achieved, and confirmation that the Director of Housing had taken on a role championing corporate parenting across directorates.
- The Portfolio Holder reported that youth engagement activities had taken place, including a youth voice event at the BIC involving UNITE, INSIGHT, the Youth Forum and the Members of Youth Parliament.
- The Committee was advised of updates from the Children's Lead Members Network Meeting, including Ofsted's planned renewal of ILACS in April 2026 and the forthcoming public consultation on proposed changes for 2027.
- The Portfolio Holder concluded by summarising recent school and early years visits, including Epiphany School, Twynham School, Avonbourne Academy, Mundeford Wood Playgroup, Connie Rothman Learning Trust and Bournemouth School for Girls.

61. Work Plan

The Committee noted the Work Plan in its current form.

The Committee was advised that work programming would take place on Tuesday 17 February, and that a pack of proposed topics would be shared ahead of the workshop. It was also noted that the Work Plan would remain flexible to accommodate emerging priorities and statutory updates.

A date error within the document was highlighted, and the Clerk confirmed that this would be corrected.

The meeting ended at 7.50 pm

CHAIR