

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

Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 March 2026 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Carr-Brown – Chair

Cllr S Bull – Vice-Chair

Present: Cllr M Tarling (In place of Cllr O Brown), Cllr P Canavan (In place of Cllr P Cooper), Cllr E Pankhurst, Cllr B Hitchcock, Cllr S Mackrow, Cllr D Martin, Cllr T Slade, and Cllr O Walters.

Co-Opted Members: Jeremy Payne, Matt Tuddenham and Mark Saxby.

Also in attendance: Ryan Cornish, Elliot Prentice and Lillee Bedwell.

62. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Olivia Brown and Cllr Peter Cooper.

63. Substitute Members

Cllr Michael Tarling attended as substitute for Cllr Olivia Brown, and Cllr Patrick Canavan attended as substitute for Cllr Peter Cooper.

64. Declarations of Interests

No declarations of interest were received.

65. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

66. Recommendation Tracker

The Committee noted the Recommendation Tracker. The Chair advised that responses from Cabinet were expected shortly in relation to items 55 and 56, as the two-month response period was approaching. The Committee was further advised that Recommendation 12 had been captured as an action for inclusion on the Committee's Forward Plan.

The Chair provided an update on outstanding actions, and the Committee noted the actions that could be closed. Members also agreed that the Tracker would be reviewed in greater depth around June 2026.

67. Public Issues

The Committee received two public questions from Adam Sofianos, who was unable to attend the meeting and had asked Democratic Services to read them on his behalf.

Q1 – Agenda item 9, SEND improvement

Recently the Government published its plans for education reform. The SEND proposals have caused alarm among educators, charities, campaign groups and families.

These proposals have also provoked a formal judicial review challenge. Families are particularly fearful of the threat to slash the number of children receiving statutory protection, the possible removal of appeal rights, and the move to give schools liability for both the delivery and costs of most support, which may incentivise the restriction of services.

While these plans offer financial breathing-space for councils, the effect on support for disadvantaged children nationally could be a problem, making an under-performing service even worse.

The Government consultation runs until 18th May. How does Council intend to respond, and how will it engage with families and local groups, and councillors, to ensure its response is reflective of the many concerns being raised?

Cllr Richard Burton, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, provided an answer as follows:

Thank you Chair and thank you, Adam, as always, for the question. The Council is taking the Government's consultation on SEND reforms very seriously, and we are ensuring that our response is informed by the voices and experience of our local area.

To support this, we have issued a survey to all schools across the BCP area, as well as to our Local Area System Leadership Group, which includes key partners such as the Parent Carer Forum and Parent Carer Together.

In addition, our Parent Carer Forum has circulated targeted questions to parents and carers to make sure families are able to share their views directly.

We will now bring this feedback together to help shape a comprehensive Council response to the consultation. This will reflect a range of concerns and perspectives raised locally.

I also want to emphasise that it will be important for all partners, including parents and carers, to respond individually to the national consultation so that their voices are heard as part of the wider national picture.

Through this approach, we aim to ensure that the BCP submission is fully informed, balanced, and reflective of those who will be most affected by the proposed reforms.

Q2 – Agenda item 13, SEND inspection report

Ofsted is not the only party with an interest in SEND performance. During 2024, the Council was repeatedly asked at this Committee to publish regular updated performance statistics. Eventually a dataset began to be published on the Local Offer microsite. However, at the time of submitting this question, the most recent data available was for July 2025. There are 7 months outstanding. How will Council make this missing data available? And will it keep its previous promise, and continue to publish SEND performance data in the future?

Cllr Richard Burton, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, provided an answer as follows:

Thank you again, Adam, for your question.

You are absolutely right to highlight the importance of transparency around SEND performance data, and I do want to acknowledge that the Council has not kept this data set as up to date as it should have been. This is a miss on our part, and we are committed to putting this right.

We recognise that regular publication of performance information is essential, not just for this Committee but for families, partners and the wider community who rely on this data to understand how well the system is working.

We are now taking steps to bring the data set fully up to date on the Local Offer website. We are also in the process of co-producing a fully refreshed Local Offer, and this will be an opportunity for us to consider what data we publish and how we best go about presenting it.

Importantly, we will also put in place a clear and reliable process for ongoing updates, to ensure that SEND performance data continues to be published regularly, as previously committed. This will support better oversight, greater transparency and stronger accountability across the local area partnership.

Thank you again for raising this. It's an important reminder of the standards we must meet.

68. Members of Youth Parliament Update

The Committee received a presentation from the Members of Youth Parliament, including a Deputy Member, providing an update on their activity during their term of office and the campaigns they had undertaken.

The Members of Youth Parliament reported on work across several campaign areas, including mental health, knife crime, youth homelessness and student finance. It was noted that a mental health training video for teachers had been developed using feedback from young people and that a recent webinar to launch the resource had received positive engagement from schools and NHS mental health teams.

An update was also provided on local and national engagement, including a knife crime awareness event delivered in partnership with the police, participation in sittings at the House of Commons, and involvement in the Youth Select Committee, with a report due to be published later in March.

In response to a query raised regarding whether further improvements could be made, the Committee was advised that wider promotion of the Youth Parliament process would help increase awareness and participation, including stronger engagement across the Council and with elected Members.

Members thanked the Members of Youth Parliament for their presentation and commended them for their confidence, commitment and the positive contribution of youth voice to the work of the Committee.

69. Corporate Performance Report - Q3

The Committee received the Corporate Performance Report for Quarter 3.

The Chair highlighted the indicator relating to school exclusions and advised that the role of the Committee was to seek assurance regarding performance. The Committee was advised that exclusion data was improving, notwithstanding the red RAG rating shown in the report.

The Committee was also advised that discussions had taken place with the Audit and Governance Committee regarding the management of risk, and that the Corporate Risk Register would be included within the Committee's papers for future meetings to support ongoing scrutiny.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

70. Verbal update from John Coughlan on SEND improvement Journey

John Coughlan, Department for Education Adviser, on the SEND improvement journey, presented a verbal report to the Committee.

The Committee discussed the update, including:

- In response to a query raised regarding the recent SEND inspection, the Committee was advised that the inspection confirmed the local area partnership had moved out of statutory intervention, with inspectors recognising improved leadership, strengthened partnership working and tangible progress since the previous inspection.

- In response to a query raised regarding the areas where further improvement was still required, the Committee was advised that work remained ongoing, particularly in relation to support for children with social, emotional and mental health needs, development and promotion of the Local Offer, and improving support for children awaiting neurodiversity assessments.
- In response to a query raised regarding long waiting times for neurodiversity assessments, the Committee was advised that a needs-led approach was being progressed, with earlier intervention, graduated support and partnership working aimed at supporting children while they awaited formal diagnosis.
- In response to a query raised regarding practical support for children during long neurodiversity waiting times, the Committee was advised that partners were developing needs-led approaches and piloting earlier intervention models, including targeted support for those waiting the longest, to ensure children received help without delay.
- The Committee expressed concerns about how schools were supported to sustain inclusive practice. In response, it was noted that engagement with schools had improved, alongside work underway to develop inclusion bases, outreach support, and professional development to strengthen system-wide capacity.
- The Committee was advised that variation in inclusive practice between schools was being addressed through stronger collaboration, peer challenge, and shared system expectations, which were supporting greater consistency across the school system.
- In response to a query raised regarding workforce capacity and staff morale, the Committee was advised that leadership stability had improved and that continued support for staff would be critical to sustaining progress.
- The Committee was advised that, although forthcoming national SEND reforms would present challenges, the local system was in a stronger position to respond due to the improvement work already undertaken.

Members welcomed the update and thanked Mr Coughlan for his contribution to the improvement journey.

RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted.

71. Families First Partnership Programme

The Director of Children's Social Care 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 provided an overview of the Families First Partnership (FFP) programme, the Government's national reform programme for children's social care, and set out the proposed approach to local implementation.

FFP underpinned delivery of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill and the Government's Plan for Change and aligned with the NHS 10-Year reform agenda, providing a single delivery framework at place level. The programme aimed to reduce crisis-driven statutory intervention through earlier preventative measures, safely reduce the number of children entering care, and improve outcomes for children and families through family-centred practice and stronger partnership working.

The report outlined the local governance and programme management arrangements, including the establishment of a Strategic FFP Board and a multi-disciplinary transformation team, alongside arrangements for partner engagement, workforce development, and learning from national pathfinders. It set out the Council's priority delivery workstreams, including early help pathway development, front door reform, a Family Help pilot, planning for multi-agency child protection arrangements, and options appraisal for Family Group Decision Making.

The Committee discussed the update, including:

- In response to a query raised regarding alternatively qualified practitioners, the Committee was advised that this referred to practitioners with relevant professional qualifications or experience other than social work, who would work alongside qualified social workers within early help and family help pathways. It was clarified that the title "social worker" remained a legally protected term.
- The Committee was advised that success and impact would be measured through the Early Help Strategic Partnership, using a combination of existing data, new measures, and outcomes linked to the Best Start in Life programme and Family Hubs.
- In response to a query raised regarding public health involvement, the Committee was advised that public health was already a key partner in early help and prevention, with grant funding supporting this work, and that outcome measures would continue to be developed jointly.
- In response to a query raised regarding how the move away from criteria-based thresholds would operate in practice, the Committee was advised that a shared threshold would remain, but that the emphasis would shift towards needs-led conversations rather than families being redirected between services because they did not meet specific criteria.
- The Committee was advised that, to achieve greater consistency across the system, work was underway to update the existing PAN Dorset threshold model to reflect a BCP-wide approach.
- In response to a query raised regarding how data sharing would operate across partners, the Committee was advised that statutory data-sharing arrangements were already in place, but further work was required to strengthen shared data and performance measures as more partners were brought into the front-door arrangements.
- In response to a query raised regarding timescales, the Committee was advised that 2025/26 focused on implementation planning, with delivery expected to commence from April 2026.

RESOLVED that the update be noted, and that an update on the Families First Partnership Programme and the development of multi-agency child protection teams be brought back to the Committee in November 2026, or by January 2027 at the latest.

72. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 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.

73. Children in Care - Baseline of Need, Spend and Overspend with Mitigation Proposals

The Committee received a report on the Children in Care baseline position, including demand, spend, forecast overspend and proposed mitigation measures.

The Committee discussed the report.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and that a further update on the Children in Care position be brought back to the Committee at a future meeting.

The remainder of the meeting was held in public.

74. Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Inspection Report

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

75. Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2025-26

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

76. Portfolio Holder Update

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

- The Portfolio Holder advised that a number of matters had already been covered during earlier discussion at the meeting.
- The Committee was advised that an all-councillor Children's Services briefing had taken place on 11 February, hosted by the

Chair, with a presentation from the Director of Education and Skills. Fourteen councillors attended, with positive discussion and engagement. The briefing was also available on catch-up, and Members were encouraged to promote wider viewing.

- The Portfolio Holder advised that the Ofsted/CQC SEND inspection report demonstrated a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the local SEND system and set out a clear direction of travel. It was noted that, while progress had been made, the judgment of “inconsistent” meant further work was required, and it would not be appropriate to be celebratory while families continued to experience challenges.
- The Committee was advised of the Youth Parliament hustings and celebration event, with election results due to be announced on 21 March at The Life Centre, Winton. It was noted that this event coincided with the Mayor of Bournemouth’s Civic Service.
- Attended the Headteachers’ Forum, where discussions focused on inclusion and shared data. Members were encouraged to seek feedback from schools in their wards on engagement with these forums.
- The Committee was advised that the Schools White Paper had now been published alongside supporting documentation. Work on the Council’s response had commenced, including engagement at the SEND Summit and completion of a draft maturity matrix. It was highlighted that a significant programme of work was required ahead of June, and that meeting national deadlines was critical to securing the 90% High Needs Block deficit payment, with delays posing a significant financial risk.
- The Portfolio Holder advised that the service was required to design a new system aligned with long-term reforms while continuing to operate the existing system, placing additional pressure on the workforce in the coming months.
- The Portfolio Holder reported on recent school visits, including Corfe Hills School and St Aldhelm’s School.

77. Work Plan

The Committee noted the Work Plan update.

The Committee was advised that a work-planning workshop had taken place since the previous meeting, during which priorities for the year ahead were identified. Officers were now reviewing those priorities to determine an appropriate timetable, and a finalised Work Plan would be shared with Members and published with the agenda for the next meeting.

The Committee was further advised that a refreshed scrutiny lens for the Committee, focusing on nurturing children, young people and families, had been proposed at the workshop. As not all Members had attended the workshop, the proposed refreshed scrutiny lens was presented to the Committee and formally agreed.

The Committee also agreed that actions which had been completed could be removed from the actions list.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm

CHAIR