

AGENDA FOR

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Contact: Chloe Ashworth
Direct Line: 0161 253 5030
E-mail: C.Ashworth@bury.gov.uk
Web Site: www.bury.gov.uk

To: All Members of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Councillors: D Berry, C Boles, A Booth, Chadwick,
 U Farooq, E FitzGerald, N Frith, Lewis, L McBriar,
 J Rydeheard, L Ryder, G Staples-Jones and M Whitby

Co-opted Members: D Lewis and H Chadwick

Dear Member/Colleague

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee which will be held as follows:-

Date:	Thursday, 15 June 2023
Place:	Council Chamber, Town Hall, Bury, BL9 0SW
Time:	7.00 pm
Briefing Facilities:	If Opposition Members and Co-opted Members require briefing on any particular item on the Agenda, the appropriate Director/Senior Officer originating the related report should be contacted.
Notes:	

AGENDA

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider whether they have an interest in any of the matters of the Agenda and, if so, to formally declare that interest.

3 MINUTES *(Pages 3 - 10)*

Minutes from the meeting held on 07th March 2023 are attached for approval.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS *(Pages 11 - 24)*

A period of 30 minutes has been set aside for members of the public to ask questions on the agenda for tonight's meeting.

5 MEMBER QUESTIONS

A period of up to 15 minutes will be allocated for questions and supplementary questions from members of the Council who are not members of the committee. This period may be varied at the discretion of the chair.

6 UPDATE ON CABINET RESPONSE - FOSTER CARERS *(Pages 25 - 28)*

Councillor Boles, Chair to provide an update to the Committee.

7 CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESTRUCTURE

A verbal update to be provided.

8 IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE *(Pages 29 - 32)*

Update to be provided from Jeanette Richards, Executive Director of Children and Young People and Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

9 URGENT BUSINESS

Any other business which by reason of special circumstances the Chair agrees may be considered as a matter of urgency.

10 WORK PROGRAMME *(Pages 33 - 36)*

The work programme is attached for consideration.

Minutes of:	CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	7 March 2023
Present:	Councillor C Boles (in the Chair) Councillors D Berry, A Booth, U Farooq, N Frith, J Lancaster, L McBriar, T Pilkington, J Rydeheard and M Whitby
Also in attendance:	Councillor E FitzGerald, Councillor L Smith (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People) and Councillor S Thorpe (Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Young People) Isobel Booler Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People Helen Chadwick, Union Representative Isobel Booler, Director of Education and Skills advised
Public Attendance:	Four members of the public were present at the meeting.
Apologies for Absence:	Georgia Murphy, Youth Representative Michael Kemp, Strategic Lead - Inclusion & Special Educational Needs & Disabilities.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies are noted above.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 02nd February 2023 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

4 MATTERS ARISING

1. A member of the public asked a question regarding the number of SEND Tribunal Hearings in Bury, this has been uploaded to the website and sent directly to the member of the public.
2. Cllr Rydeheard requested dates of expected reinspection for sponsored academies from Isobel Booler this has been sent to him.

5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No questions were received in advance of the meeting.

Questioner	Topic	Responding
Kiera Delaney	SEND Hub	Cllr L Smith
Question 2	School Transport	Cllr L Smith

6 MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were no member questions.

7 IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People provide an update on the Improvement Plan for Children’s Services.

The update focuses on Bury’s third monitoring visit undertaken by Ofsted which took place from the 18th February to the 01st March 2023. We expect quarterly Monitoring Visits from Ofsted and the purpose of the visits is to offer support and challenge to our improvement journey and the requirements set out in the ILAX framework. The visit focuses on areas of practice that are found to be less than good. The focus of the visit was around early permanence planning for our children. In summary there were significant improvements identified but still much more to do.

Some strengths identified were:

- Pre-proceedings
- Children with care plans for adoption and timely matching of children to adoptive parents.

Social work practice assessments and planning was variable in quality although some improvements were noted.

A challenge identified was:

- Placement stability

The Council’s self-evaluation was reflective of their findings which is reassuring. Members were informed that we expect to receive a letter from Ofsted in the next few days which will be published on the 04th April and will be brought back to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and young people added that scrutiny is important to check if the impact they are making is right. The Council is also prioritising placing children within their families to try and achieve better outcomes for children.

Councillor Boles opened to questions from members.

Councillor Whitby sought assurances on how improvement will be monitored to maintain improvements. Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised we have brought in quality assurance mechanisms, key performance indicators and the Children’s Improvement Board. Jeanette Richards added that there has been successful recruitment of a transformation manager to manage the quality assurance.

Councillor Boles questioned the timescales and progress of improvement. In response Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised we are likely at a ‘requires improvement’ rate currently and some of how we get to good and the improvement is

down to a workforce issue due to cultural and staff turn over issues. To get a 'good' Ofsted we would need another inspection which cannot be pre-empted, but we are aiming to be outstanding in our Children's services.

8 FOSTER CARERS UPDATE

Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee introduced the Foster Carers Update report and thanked members of the Committee for highlighting this matter. Councillor Smith advised the foster carers association have been involved in this to make sure the offer is correct. The report will be going to Cabinet on the 15th March 2023 and then out to recruitment.

Councillor Lancaster advised of an issue sharing the promoted Facebook posts on recruitment of Foster Carers. Jeanette Richards, Executive Director Children and Young People noted this and will see if this can be amended.

Councillor Frith asked if are on target to increase the number of Bury approved Fostering households by at least 20 in 2023/2024. Jeanette Richards advised she will bring back to the committee where we are in relation to this target.

Councillor Berry sought some assurances on the payments to foster carers regarding clothing, comparison to the private sector and the correlation between the payments and the increase in foster carers. In response Jeanette Richards, Executive Director advised the clothing allowance is a set allowance for children who do not have basic clothing expected of a child that age. The payments to foster carers has been mapped against the market and we find ourselves in a favourable and competitive position such as proposing council tax relief.

Councillor Pilkington also asked about the mockingbird model which is hoped to be approved in March 2023. Jeanette Richards did advise there would be a requirement to bring in a manager before the foster carers are recruited but the experienced foster carers are interested in the offer.

Councillor Whitby thanked officers the report and the work that has taken place. Assurances were sought regarding the absence of a documented uplift in maintenance fees for 5–10-year-olds and were informed this is an error and will be circulated after the meeting. In addition, Councillor Whitby questioned about placements and members were assured that sometimes it is more suitable for children to be placed under other areas and local authorities.

Councillor Rydeheard asked what other support foster carers would appreciate along side the financial offer. Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People assured members that it is viewed as a profession and money matters. In addition, support, networking, training, and development, short breaks, transition fees and retainer fees were important to the offer.

Councillor Boles questioned about the reports reference to commissioning a graphic designer. Jeanette Richards, Executive Director Children and Young People advised that £10,000 has been awarded from Greater Manchester for our publicity campaign and this will be funded from that pot of money.

Councillor FitzGerald, Chair of Health Scrutiny asked for a view on how the nonfinancial support to foster carers supports their physical and mental health. Jeanette Richards, Executive Director advised members that this is in feedback with foster carers who have described the demand of the task. The role of the supervising social workers is to develop relationships with the foster carers and to reach out if they need support.

In summary Councillor Boles, Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee said how Foster Carers had been a key priority of the Committee and it has been powerful to have this as a regular item at the Committee.

9 SEND REPORT

Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee provided a brief overview of the SEND update report. Members were then invited to ask questions.

Councillor McBriar questioned further regarding the SEND Hub as discussed under public questions earlier. Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised that the Council has not applied for funding as there is not any available at the moment. The Government and DfE speak to the council regularly regarding the deficit which is currently at £20million so most conversations are surrounding reducing the deficit. Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills advised that Bury was part of a Greater Manchester wide short breaks hub approach and she will check the outcome of this with NHS colleagues.

Councillor McBriar asked for an update with regards to funding for specialist Schools. Members were advised that Bury Council was unsuccessful in the special free school application submitted. Bury was successful in the first and second wave for a secondary ASC specialist provision and a SEMH Secondary provision.

Councillor Pilkington questioned why the Council was unsuccessful on the third wave of the special free school application. Members were informed that the application was approvable it was an extremely competitive wave.

Councillor Whitby raised concerns around SEND provisions in the Borough and the consequential impact this is having on Teachers and SEND Co-ordinators in the Borough. Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised that Project Safety Valve is difficult and Bury is an outlier for how many applications it has for EHCP plans.

Councillor FitzGerald questioned what the graduated approach is and will it help children's mental health. In response members were advised that firstly there is consideration for what the universal offer is so schools are able to early identify and meet additional need much quicker. There is an online toolkit and shared understanding of what the available provision should be and what can be added to meet need. By ensuring early identification and mental health support at a much earlier stage it is supporting Children's mental health quicker.

Councillor Lancaster asked a query regarding an epilepsy nurse and ARFID services. Councillor Lancaster asked if staff could be up skilled, we could link in without Councils or other teams to offer an ARFID service. In response Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills advised that the funding has been approved and recruitment will be taking place shortly. In addition the CAMHS pathway around eating disorders in need of review and will be discussed with CAMHS colleagues.

Helen Chadwick, Union Representative wished to raise a report she did following a visit to the Social Care team and one team she thought was working well was the Children with Disabilities Team and a good model for other teams.

In addition Helen Chadwick, Union Representative sought assurances on how an extension may impact of the roof of the building of Millwood Primary School. Isobel Booter, Director of Education and Skills the roof has be complex but the work is progressing and the School continues to work around the building.

Councillor Smith, advised that the key priority going forward for her would be children not in school as we have a duty to give children an education.

Councillor FitzGerald advised that she is at Greater Manchester Health Scrutiny on 08.03.23 is addressing the increase in children presenting mental health issues so will circulate the report on this.

10 ATTAINMENT UPDATE

Isobel Booler, Director of Education and Skills advised the report provides an update on recent developments in regard to Special Educational needs and Disabilities provision in Bury and in particular the progress in regard to the Education Health and Care Plan process. It provides an overview of the data in regard to the growth of Education Health and Care Plan in Bury and also details the service improvements made in light of the growing number of Education Health and Care Plan requests.

Members were invited to ask questions.

Councillor Pilkington questioned what the challenges are and what learning can be done from schools that have performed well. In response Isobel Booler, Director of Education and Skills advised that Math's is currently a key challenge and the school that has out preformed others has been leading on Math's.

Councillor Frith sought assurances on if the improvement journey before the pandemic. In response Isobel Booler, Director of Education and Skills advised the Schools in Bury have been on an improvement journey for some time.

Councillor Boles questioned what working closely with schools in practice. In response Isobel Booler, Director of Education and Skills advised it depends on the school. Each type of school has various ways of keeping in touch and quality assurance with the Local Authority.

11 URGENT BUSINESS

As it was the last meeting of the municipal year Councillor Smith firstly wanted to place on record thanks to Councillor Boles as Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

In addition Councillor Boles, Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee wished to note that the Committee is powerful and this year we have put children and their outcomes at the forefront of questions.

COUNCILLOR C BOLES
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.45 pm)

This page is intentionally left blank

Public Questions March Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

1. As you all know I am a long-standing advocate for children with SEND and their families. In December 2021 I asked Isobel to open a SEND Hub for families to help them navigate the complex systems and processes that are widely experienced, with the support of those services that could help. Despite the threats of the former health secretary, which are very concerning to me, can we have a commitment from the leaders of Bury Council that a SEND Hub will be created for the families in our area and when can this be implemented.

Response Councillor Smith advised that we require extra money from Government to be able to deliver this; however, we do have the Parent and Carer Hub which we have supported to open as opposed to a Hub. Alongside this offer we do have sessions where the public can attend and speak to a Council Officer directly regarding your individual cases. Isobel Booler, Director of Education and Skills advised that conversations regarding a Hub did happen around a local offer hub and a SEND hub, and there were two different meanings of what a SEND Hub was. Current offers to parents are the Bury2gether local offer hub, short breaks and SEND. We would be open to exploring and having conversations, but we would need to find funding streams. – Kiera Delaney

2. The question relates to my daughter who attends a SEND School and travels with a Local Authority Escort who also works at the same school. I made a complaint regarding this matter which resulted in a safeguarding investigation and my complaint was upheld. As a result, the staff member was required to do their safeguarding and GDPR training. The staff member was placed back on transport following the investigation. As a result my child has not been to school in over 10 weeks, as a parent working full time I am having to work from home with a six year old. The local authority have not provided any alternative provision during this time and neither have they provided alternative transport to the school. I have started pre-court action and intend to pursue this until I receive acceptable action, whilst this has been ongoing the school have advised they cannot meet my daughters needs and wish to change her EHCP. However, her EHCP should not be changed to meet needs of a School, setting, building or staff. Instead, the child should be placed in a school which is able to deliver the provision set out in section F of her EHCP. I've been advised by the Local Authority to look at alternative specialist placements, but they have then had discussions with the original school and suggest she can return. We are now confused as no proposals have been made to resolve the transport issue either. I want to know how long I should keep waiting, should I quit my job to stay at home with my child like hundreds of parents throughout Bury. I now have a six-year-old who refused to leave the house and is scared of going back to that school yet the Local Authority is pushing her to go back to a place where everyday she is feeling traumatised. My daughter has a right to education and the longer she is left at home the longer she is refusing to leave the house. I feel over the last 18 months I have had nothing but issues with the SEND team and have been subjected to my daughters data being breached and leaked and a whistle-blower that targeted me across social media and now safeguarding issue and what will be done to resolve this.

**Due to safeguarding the names of the mother and child have been removed from the webcast and minutes.

Response – Councillor Smith advised she will speak outside of the meeting with the member of the public regarding the personal matters raised and investigate the matter. Jeanette Richards added that we are in a process and have accepted apologies from Michael Kemp, and as we are in the process it is not appropriate to discuss the matters you have set out, but Jeanette wanted to provide assurances to the member of the public and the Committee is that conversations will take place outside of this meeting.

Question number	Question	Submitted by	Answer
1	What is Bury LA's policy around a prolonged transition period for a child starting reception in primary school who is a summerborn child with SEND?	Sarah Wilson	<p>Thank you for the question. The Council's admissions policy sets out the arrangements that apply to summer born children:</p> <p>Parents of children who are admitted to the school before they are of compulsory school age can defer their child's entry until later in the school year. Where entry is deferred, the school will hold a place for that child and not offer it to another child. A parent cannot defer entry beyond the beginning of the term after the child's fifth birthday, nor beyond the academic year for which the original application was accepted. Parents can also request that their child attends on a part time basis until the child reaches compulsory school age. Where parents wish to defer admission under the 'summer born regulations', parents must put their request in writing to the school admissions team, together with any supporting evidence that the parent wishes to be taken into account. Decisions on requests for admission outside the normal age group will be made on the basis of the circumstances of each case and in the best interests of the child concerned. This will include taking account of the parent's views; any information provided about the child's academic, social and emotional development; where relevant, their medical history and the views of a medical professional; whether they have previously been educated out of their normal age group; and whether they may naturally have fallen into a lower age group if it were not for being born prematurely. This request should be sent team at the time of normal application.</p> <p>Where a child has an EHCP, advice from the EHCP Assessment Team will be taken into account.</p>

<p>2</p>	<p>What is Bury’s annual spend on the professional fees of solicitors and barristers in connection with advice and representation at SENDIST Tribunal hearings, and what is the council’s success rate at those hearings?</p> <p>Supplementary Question:</p> <p>Jane Johnston asked for it to be recorded on the minutes that a response should include Bury’s annual spend on the professional fees of solicitors and barristers in connection with advice and</p>	<p>Jane Johnston</p>	<p>Thank you for the question. In 2022 we had 20 appeals in total. (12 no to assess, 1 on placement and 7 on content of the plan)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 16 of these were resolved before it got to a hearing · 3 went to a hearing (1 was upheld and 2 were partially upheld) · 1 was struck out <p>Only one has gone to tribunal this year and that was upheld in part, and was for content. All the others lodged this year are yet to be heard.</p> <p>Since last September to now, there has only been one case where legal costs were incurred, but the hearing was cancelled.</p> <p>We are seeking final confirmation of costs and will respond directly to the requestor and then publish the response in the papers for the next Children and Young People scrutiny committee</p> <p>Going forward we will seek to include the tribunal data on the SEND dashboard which is a regular agenda item at the SEND Board.</p> <p>Supplementary Answer:</p> <p>Councillor Smith confirmed this will be included in the response planned for the next Committee and will be added to the dashboard so this information can be tracked in future.</p>
----------	---	----------------------	--

	<p>representation at SENDIST Tribunal hearings.</p>		
<p>3</p>	<p>Please confirm how many complaints have been received by the complaints team in the last six months and whether or not in each case the complaint procedure set out by the local authority was in fact followed?</p> <p>What process is undertaken for lessons to be learnt from the various Ombudsman's judgements in relation to Bury LA's failings?</p>	<p>Sarah Garbett</p>	<p>Thank you for the question. In the six months 01/10/23 to 31/03/23, there were 27 complaints received relating to the SEND Team. There were an additional 14 received relating to School Transport making a total of 41 complaints in this six month period.</p> <p>It is confirmed that all procedures within the Complaints policy were adhered to.</p> <p>In this period, 68% of complaints were responded to within timescales.</p> <p>However, since April there has been an increase in complaints totaling 69.</p> <p>26 SEND complaints in April which included 2 LGO and 7 MP.</p> <p>Then there were 23 SEND complaints in May, which included 3 MP complaints and in June so far there have been 20 complaints which includes 2 LGO and 5 MP</p> <p>Under Corporate procedures, the Ombudsman's recommendations are summarised quarterly and a report is sent to the relevant Heads of Department and the Director of Education and Skills requesting an update on progress. Recommendations that the LGO confirm as complete are updated on the monitoring table.</p> <p>The SEND Development plan and wider service plan are regularly reviewed and service improvement recommendations are included and go to the SEND board</p>

4	<p>Could the LA please confirm the current structure of the EHC team, the members of that team and their reporting structure and any vacancies?</p>	Gemma Hall	<p>Thank you for the question. Current staffing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 1 x EHCP team Manager · 3 x Senior Case Workers · 3 x Case worker Assessment team · 5 x Case worker Annual Review team · 1 x Lead Assistant case worker · 4 x Assistant case worker <p>The team report directly into the Strategic Lead for SEND and Inclusion, who reports into the Director of Education and Skills who reports into the Exec Director of Children's</p> <p>We have 1 vacancy for a full-time Assistant Caseworker at present, however we do have agency staff filling some of the other roles.</p>
5	<p>When children are failed by their current named school /placement, what do the EHCP team do to ensure that children who are unable to attend that setting (named on their EHCP) are being provided an alternative education whilst they find a more suitable placement. Why are children left on roll and schools given money for them when the children have not been able to attend there, there should</p>	Kiran Hampson	<p>Thank you for the question. It is not possible to provide a generic response as this would depend on the individual case involved. However, depending on the situation, if there was a placement breakdown an annual review would be held and a resolution sought in the first instance. If agreement could not be reached the right of appeal would be open to the parent.</p> <p>The LA take their duties under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 very seriously, ensuring the child has an appropriate school place and seek to minimise the length of time a child is out of any setting. The EHC team would maintain regular contact with the alternative provision whilst consulting with other</p>

	<p>be a process in place to monitor those children unable to attend and support parents with advice on next steps in the interim period- to ensure children have some routine in place , whether academic, therapeutic to recover from trauma of a failed school placement and continue some of their education.</p> <p>Supplementary question:</p> <p>You quoted section 19 of the legislation, I can provide a number of examples where the Council and Local Authority haven't followed the Section 19 procedures. There are a number of parents here today whose children are out of education. You said at the last Scrutiny the priority was Children that are out of education. If you are saying Section 19 is upheld I can give you a number of examples where children are out of education, EHCP's aren't being followed they are not in placements and no support is being provided. I am asking what support, policies and procedures are in place.</p>		<p>placements and take into account professional advice and parent and child views.</p> <p>Children are left on roll as the school has delegated responsibility to ensure that barriers are removed to ensure child can attend. It is a parent's responsibility to ensure children can attend.</p> <p>Supplementary Answer:</p> <p>The procedures are those outlined in the answer. As far as I am aware we are following the procedures. I understand there are issues with some and that is why we have been to tribunal with one being upheld and two partially held up about how they are being executed.</p>
6	<p>Could the Local Authority please update us on the make-up of both the EHC team and the Disability</p>	<p>Jo Kinloch</p>	<p>Thank you for the question. Bury currently has 2448 Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs), with an average of 62 new</p>

	<p>Social Worker team.</p> <p>Please also provide data as to the current caseloads of the DSWs and the EHC caseworkers and their responsiveness to individual cases.</p>	<p>requests for assessment each month.</p> <p>Through work undertaken across GM it is estimated that assessments take on average take 3 working days per worker to complete, and that an Annual Review takes 1 day to complete. This does not include ongoing casework, placement identification work and liaison work.</p> <p>There is no official caseload weighting agreement for EHCP officers set out in statutory guidance. It is accepted that caseloads in the region of 300 cases per staff member while high is not uncommon. However we are currently reviewing capacity versus demand in the team</p> <p>Current staffing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 1 x EHCP team Manager · 3 x Senior Case Workers · 3 x Case worker Assessment team · 5 x Case worker Annual Review team · 1 x Lead Assistant case worker · 4 x Assistant case worker <p>Currently the caseload in Bury for the EHC Officer in the Annual Review team is at 489.</p> <p>We are currently reviewing this to ensure the team has the correct capacity.</p> <p>However, Bury Council is the fifth highest in the country for issuing EHCP plans and therefore the partnership aims to</p>
--	--	--

	<p>Supplementary Question:</p> <p>What is the current plan for improving the response time to parents because we can all sat here, vouch for the fact that unfortunately it is not currently a reasonable response time and also what the plan is for removing the out of office messages on the emails of the various case workers</p>		<p>ensure need is met earlier without an EHCP and therefore reduce the number of plans issued.</p> <p>Children With Disabilities Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · CWD Manager x1 · ATM x1 · Social Workers x6 · EHC Assessor x1 – t · Family support workers x4 full time roles fulfilled by 5 members of staff – there are currently 4 permanent family support workers on the team. Their role is to review short breaks on a biannual basis and they will keep in contact with families as a minimum every three months. In addition to this role they can also be allocated to work with social workers where there is a need for more intensive or more specific support. <p>Supplementary Answer:</p> <p>Question 4’s answer outlines that we have 1 vacancy for a full-time Assistant Caseworker at present, however we do have agency staff filling some of the other roles. It is recognised that the office support is missing and the plan is to fill that vacancy. The desired response times vary depending on the type of contact received but we do recognise that triaging the emails needs to be done. The out of office responses will be resolved as the new structure is emerging and work is taking place to</p>
--	---	--	---

	<p>and senior case workers and Head of the EHC Team which refer to being utterly overwhelmed by an influx of emails and they will hopefully get back to parents as soon as possible, this doesn't seem to be an acceptable out of office response.</p>		<p>improve the response times.</p> <p>Jeanette Richards, Executive Director advised the questions point to resourcing issues in the EHC Team. We have seen information in relation to the escalation in complaints and the need to respond to these complaints. Throughout the past 5 years, if you scale the number of EHCPs per head of population, Bury's rate has been between 15 and 25% higher than the national rate. This remains true in 2023. Bury's rate of EHCPs per 10,000 4 to 19 year olds was 576. The national rate is 486.</p> <p>Looking at the national data published last week, which reflected the position around EHCPs in all local authorities as at January 2023, Bury has the 5th highest rate for new EHCPs issued during the calendar year 2022, 78% higher than the national rate). Overall, we are the 21st highest LA for total number of EHCPs (out of 150 local authorities); and the third highest in the North West.</p> <p>Despite this high demand, Bury Council's ECHP team has continued to increase their compliance rate at 20 weeks. In 2020 Bury's compliance rate was 27% and in 2022 it had risen to 50% which was the same as the national average; currently for 2023 it is at 70%, which is 20% above the last published national data.</p>
7	<p>what does the local authority plan to do about the home to school transport crisis currently experienced by many families and when do they plan to update to outdated transport policy?</p>	Kiera Delaney	<p>Thank you for the question. The School & College Transport team provide transport to 438 children and young people across 110 routes to schools in Bury and outside of the borough on a daily basis. The shortage of home to school transport is a nationwide issue and the team are in regular liaison with Greater Manchester colleagues, Department for Education and other local authorities across the Northwest to discuss the impact on home to school transport.</p>

		<p>Unfortunately, the service we are able to provide is being severely impacted by the publicised national driver shortage as an ongoing result of the recent coronavirus pandemic. Several drivers have left employment in the transport trade to pursue a career in the HGV (heavy goods vehicle) industry and unfortunately have not returned to private hire work. In addition to the shortage of drivers there is also reduced vehicle availability, many contractors are finding it difficult to source and purchase vehicles that are suitable for use on home to school transport.</p> <p>The Council are aware of the concerns regarding the practicalities of transport and every effort is being made to minimise the impact on young people and their families. Due to the shortage of drivers and vehicles it may take us longer to put transport arrangements in place. Where there is a delay in providing suitable transport arrangements alternative forms of travel assistance are being offered to families in the form of mileage reimbursement or a personal travel budget.</p> <p>The shortage of drivers is unfortunately outside of the Council's control however, the Department for Transport and the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency are proposing to reform the driver training rules that are in place. The proposed changes are in relation to the Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC), a professional qualification that is required by all minibus drivers in addition to their driving licence. The Department for</p> <p>Transport are currently analysing feedback from the consultation, if implemented it is expected the process for renewing the CPC qualification will be more cost effective with flexibility on the training route to encourage new and former drivers to return to the transport sector.</p>
--	--	--

	<p>Supplementary question:</p> <p>I appreciate the response. I want to know what the local authority are going to do imminently about transport because if we are prioritising children out of education and without transport they cannot access that education.</p>		<p>The existing contract for home to school transport is due to expire on 31 August 2023. A new contract has been advertised and evaluation of tenders is underway, the new framework will allow new contractors to be appointment to the contract throughout the duration of the contract term (2026/2027), 19 contractors have so far been successful in their application, a further 4 applications are in the process of being evaluated. It is hoped that an increased number of contractors on the framework will alleviate some of the pressure in arranging transport.</p> <p>The team are in the process of amending the policy for Travel Arrangements between home and school or college for pupils and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability. A draft policy has been produced that is currently with the Council’s legal team to undertake a compliancy check. A full formal consultation will be undertaken with all stakeholders prior to the implementation of the policy.</p> <p>Supplementary answer:</p> <p>Currently in the short term you can use the personal budget can be used to access transport. The tender finishes at the end of August so we hope this will be completed for the next School year we will have more of a framework that is flexible to move quicker and better with the new policy which is due to come out.</p>
8	What measures does the LA take to ensure that parents and schools	Catherine White	Thank you for the question. Whilst taking into account the statutory duty to provide a suitable and appropriate education,

	<p>are aware of the legalities and possibilities around reduced timetables and flexi schooling for children who are struggling to attend?</p>		<p>the LA consider the views, wishes and feelings of the child and their parent or carer. The EHC team maintains regular contact with the school/education provider to achieve the best possible outcomes for the child.</p> <p>At present, the council is unaware for any requests for flexi schooling. Any request would need to go directly to the school. We are unaware of any flexi schooling policies, however we would provide advice for any school if flexi schooling was applied for.</p> <p>The Attendance team have now set up termly meetings with schools to review all children who are struggling to attend, and the Attendance policy has been revised and brings greater clarity around the school's responsibilities.</p> <p>The LA has invested in software to ensure that Bury Council has live attendance data from schools to improve safeguarding.</p>
<p>9</p>	<p>When it has been identified that mainstream school is not suitable for a child, how does the LA support parents in finding the most suitable place for their child?</p>	<p>Melissa Platt</p>	<p>Thank you for the question. The EHC team seek to provide as much information as possible to parents in finding a suitable placement for the child or young person using the information and advice that is made available to them. The EHC team provide details of placements to parents/carers and consult with schools/education providers.</p> <p>In co-production and consultation with the child or young person and their parent/carers, as well as any professionals involved the EHC team provide parent/carers support with meetings by phone, virtually and in person. The EHC team also provide support with meetings with education providers where required and signpost to services such as SENDIASS and our DfE approved strategic partner, Bury2Gether, the parent carer forum.</p>

	Supplementary Question:		Supplementary answer:
10	<p>Do we have a timescale on how long it is currently taking to find alternative provision?</p> <p>Could the LA please update us on the progress of the social care review that we were told would be completed by October 2023?</p>	Rebecca McCauley	<p>We will work out a suitable mean of how long it takes to find alternative provision and give an indication of this.</p> <p>Thank you for the question. The Social Care improvement journey is well documented and has been reported both through the scrutiny committee and through monitoring visits from the DFE and Ofsted.</p> <p>In the last Ofsted monitoring visit the improvements in CWD were noted.</p> <p>There is ongoing work around the short breaks offer. We are currently reviewing the 14-25 transitions offer. We will bring an update on the 14-25 transitions work to C+YP scrutiny.</p> <p>A project has been undertaken by the SEN And Inclusion and Children with Disabilities (CWD) team to develop an information pack to support practice knowledge and skills when working with children and young people with SEND. This is intended drive continual practice development across all teams as part of an implementation programme and will sit well alongside existing mechanisms such as CWD Consultations and CWD Links joining training opportunities for practice development.</p>
11	<p>Why have the LA repeatedly denied children their human rights by failing to provide suitable or appropriate full time education. Children are entitled to a full time education yet there a mass</p>	Stacey Wilde	<p>Thank you for the question. Only one question may be submitted in advance of the meeting the email below contains 3 separate questions – Questioner has been asked to re-word and ask one and one supplementary question, and to return to Julie Gallagher as a matter of urgency.</p> <p>1. The Local Authority take their statutory duty under the</p>

	<p>proportion that the LA have refused to provide, and denied, full time education by way of funding for alternative independent school providers. Also, why does the multi-disciplinary board repeatedly deny children funding for independent provision best fit for children in favour of cheaper providers. Please clarify the right to request a specific provider is the right of the parent and young person and not for the board to decide where the child goes.</p> <p>Please clarify what does the LA intend to do about the mass failings to update and amend EHC Plans within the legal timescales, or at all, denying parents the ability to evoke their rights to tribunal.</p>		<p>Education Act 1996, section 19 very seriously. This includes providing placements at alternative independent schools. It is not possible to provide an in-depth answer to this question as it would depend on each individual case and circumstance. However the SEN 2 data released last week once again shows that Bury Council place many more children in independent providers than other councils; the data shows that Bury issues more EHCP plans and has an increasing compliance rate.</p> <p>Bury Council is working with its schools to increase the SEND provision within Bury including an ambitious programme of Resource provision and Specialist provision expansion.</p> <p>Bury Council is currently going out to tender for high quality Alternative Provision.</p> <p>2. The multi-disciplinary board assess and make decisions on a case-by-case basis based on the information and advice provided and taking into account their duties under the Education Act 1996, Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice.</p> <p>3. The EHC team has undergone a restructure and training is ongoing. Whilst we acknowledge that there have been delays historically in updating and amending some plans, this is continually improving and the backlog is reducing. The team are undergoing extensive training on plan writing and also attend additional external training events.</p> <p>We are constantly striving to improve services and parental experience. In 2020, the EHCPP compliance rate was 27%; in 2022 it was 50%- national average; and currently this year compliance is at 70%. However the partnership and Local Area need to acknowledge the demand for EHCPs and work together</p>
--	--	--	--

			<p>to meet need earlier. Bury Council issued the fifth highest proportion of EHCPs in 2022 and we now have the 20th highest EHCP rate in the country.</p>
12	<p>EOTAS (Education Other Than At School) – there is currently no Bury LA EOTAS policy. Could we please be updated as to where the LA is up to with preparation of a policy and guidelines for parents?</p> <p>Supplementary Question:</p> <p>What is being done about parents who are being left to source provision and fund interim provisions whilst the EOTAS is agreed and the EHCP is amended?</p>	Aislinn Marek	<p>Thank you for the question. Currently request for EOTAS (Education Other than at School) are considered under the personal budget policy as it is considered a personal budget for Education.</p> <p>However this is an area we are aware of. The strategic lead for SEND is leading on this with the Council for Disabled Children who will be working with the Strategic Lead for SEND to co-produce with parents a EOTAS policy.</p> <p>Supplementary answer:</p> <p>Jeanette Richards, Executive Director advised that this is not something she is aware of and she was unaware this is something that parents are having to fund so will take this back and respond directly in relation to this issue.</p>
13	<p>As the LA have sought to recruit experienced social workers from overseas, what steps have they taken,</p> <p>or do they propose to take, including overseas recruitment, to secure experienced staff to manage SEND children caseloads and other</p>	Martyn West	<p>Thank you for the question. As detailed earlier, there are very few vacancies in the Education and SEND team.</p> <p>The demand for EHCps is the fifth highest in the country and therefore the focus of the Local SEND Area is on, not only meeting that demand with more timeliness but identifying and meeting need earlier.</p> <p>We are currently reviewing the capacity within the team and</p>

	vacancies in the education provision including experienced teachers and support staff?		<p>reviewing a business case to review capacity.</p> <p>At this moment in time there is no plan to use overseas recruitment and there is a competitive field for recruitment. I am delighted that there have been a number of the posts filled in the last 18 months where colleagues have lived experience.</p>
14	<p>Why is there still no confirmed date for the opening of the autism school in Bury, when this has been planned for over 4 years?</p> <p>Why has there been no communication to parents whose children have been provisionally offered this school, but have no formal offer and therefore no school place for September 2023?</p>	Paul Williams	<p>Thank you for the question. The building to accommodate the new school is being delivered by the DfE and is currently scheduled for completion in January 2024. The intention is that the school will open from that date.</p> <p>The confirmation of the official opening date is a matter for the DfE to agree with Shaw Trust, the sponsor of the new school.</p> <p>The LA is pressing the DfE confirm the January 2024 opening date without further delay.</p> <p>At that point formal offers of places can be made. The EHCP team are case-working our September offer and continue to look at solutions.</p> <p>We are unable to comment on individual cases, however no formal offers of a place at the new Shaw Trust school have been made to any parents as the formal consultation required by legislation cannot take place until the DfE agrees formal registration of the school. Further updates will be provided when available.</p>
15	Some SEND parents have huge packages of support payed for by the council. Some parents have Horse riding packages and	Philip Clarence	<p>Thank you for the question. Bury has a far higher proportion of EHCPs than at national and has a deficit in the High Needs Budget which is proving very challenging to eradicate with</p>

	<p>equestrian therapy. These parents always seem to be the rich parents, the ones that can afford to pay for private therapy reports and solicitors to secure their provision in their EHCP's.</p> <p>Their children are the ones that will be ok in life. Whereas my child is very complex and will require support for the rest of their life. It doesn't feel fair that those that can afford to shout the loudest receive provision above and beyond the rest of us.</p> <p>What happened to being in it together? What happened to shared equity of the SEND budget? What will the council do to create fairness for all?</p>		<p>ongoing demand.</p> <p>Although we cannot comment on individual cases, through service development and SEND improvement the focus is on ensuring greater equity across the system and ensuring more needs are met at universal and targeted rather than high cost individual packages</p>
16	<p>Why is the council allowing the same parents to repeatedly attend scrutiny, shouting about their own personal issues. There are over 6 thousand SEND parents in Bury. We can't all have a private audience.</p> <p>I would appreciate hearing less of the lone voices.</p> <p>When will the council say enough is</p>	Mrs Khan	<p>Thank you for the question. Children and Young People scrutiny committee falls under Bury Democratic processes in which member of the public can attend or submit questions ahead of the meeting. There is 30 minutes given to this.</p> <p>We are very conscious that almost 30000 children attend Bury schools; delighted to report that we have an improving proportion of good or better schools, and that we have approx 6000 children with identified SEND and 2400 EHCP plans. As previously stated one of the challenges is that the Local Area and partnership including parents need to work together to ensure needs can be met earlier and in the SEND Development plan there is an acknowledgement that we need to improve</p>

	enough?		<p>universal services to ensure that the high cost demand lessens.</p> <p>Bury Council is committed to its improvement journey and will continue to work with all parents in coproduction and consultation; including Bury2gether as its strategic partner.</p>
17	<p>I am aware that Early Years EHCP's in Bury are very high.</p> <p>A large nursery group in Bury, is well known for refusing SEND children placements at their nursery unless they have an EHCP.</p> <p>Not only is this Disability Discrimination but this is driving up Bury's EHCP's unnecessarily.</p> <p>What can the council do to intervene?</p>	David McGovern	<p>Thank you for the question. Our settings are private business and regulated and inspected by Ofsted. The council has an offer to settings in relation to advice and support to ensure settings are able to meet the needs of all of our children</p> <p>We are currently reviewing our approach for children 0-5 with emerging needs and how we utilize our inclusion funding to look at more group funding, training for staff on speech and language therapies as well as implementing an outreach team that will be able to support individual settings. We are currently collating the data on settings that are finding it challenging to provide places and over the summer will be seeking to meet to discuss our approach and support.</p>
18	<p>Please confirm what continuing provision development is undertaken each year by all members of the SEN team to ensure a sound understanding of the framework of SEND law and the duties of LAs to interpret and apply the legal requirements of the Children and Families Act 2014.</p> <p>As a related point, please confirm what the consequences are for staff</p>	Sara Slawycz	<p>Thank you for the question. The EHC team receive training through providers such as, the Council for Disabled Children, SENDIASS, IPSEA and Contact as well as other external training providers. As well as the Children and Families Act 2014, the EHC team are given training using the SEND Code of Practice, which is the statutory guidance the LA must adhere to. The EHC team also attend events co-ordinated by the DfE approved parent carer forum; their strategic partner Bury2Gether.</p> <p>This would of course depend on the individual case, so it would be difficult to provide a detailed response. However, where it is</p>

	when it is identified that decisions and processes aren't being made/actioned lawfully or in line with the SEND Code of Practice to ensure accountability in the workplace.		identified that there is a training issue, this would be addressed with the individual involved, so that any areas of weakness can be identified and addressed and followed up within the team for continual development and improvement.
19	There are a number of EHCPs issued by Bury LA under which the LA is knowingly and unlawfully failing to provide provision contained in Section F of those EHCPs which was secured at tribunal. Why is this being allowed to happen?	Laura Dale	Thank you for the question. It would be difficult to comment on this without more information on the cases involved and we would ask that the parent/carers involved contact the EHC team manager, Sian O'Brien following this meeting. The LA take tribunal decisions and their duties as set out in section 42 of the Children and Families Act 2014 to provide the provision as detailed in Section F of an EHC plan very seriously.
20	"I understand the LA is currently reviewing its EBSA policy. Please could we have an update on this and when the revised policy is likely to be in place? Will those with lived experience have any input during this process?"	Ms Taylor	Thank you for the question. The LA are in the process of reviewing the EBSA policy in co-production with our strategic partner, the DfE approved parent carer forum Bury2Gether, Andy Smith from Spectrum Gaming, as well as sessions with parents.
21	Could the LA please confirm the current service level agreements in place with regards to communication from EHC team to parents (i.e. returning emails and phonecalls) and data as to whether these are being met?	Donnah Buchanan	Thank you for the question. The EHC team aim to respond to emails within 48 hours. Occasionally, where cases are more complex, or require a more detailed response or input from other departments, this could take longer. Response times are currently under review and whilst training within the EHC team is ongoing, we anticipate that there may be times where phone calls may not be answered as promptly as we would like. We are constantly looking for ways to improve and in coproduction with our strategic partner Bury2Gether, and with the feedback of our

			parent/carers we will be looking to develop and improve our current service levels.
22	could the LA please update me on the progress of the social care review that we were told would be completed by october 2023	Mr M Hampson	<p>Thank you for the question. The Social Care improvement journey is well documented and has been reported both through the scrutiny committee and through monitoring visits from the DFE and Ofsted.</p> <p>In the last Ofsted monitoring visit the improvements in CWD were noted.</p> <p>There is ongoing work around the short breaks offer. We are currently reviewing the 14-25 transitions offer. We will bring an update on the 14-25 transitions work to C+YP scrutiny.</p> <p>A project has been undertaken by the SEN And Inclusion and CWD team to develop an information pack to support practice knowledge and skills when working with children and young people with SEND. This is intended drive continual practice development across all teams as part of an implementation programme and will sit well alongside existing mechanisms such as CWD Consultations and CWD Links joining training opportunities for practice development.</p>

This page is intentionally left blank

The new Foster Carer Finance and Support offer 2023 was approved by Cabinet on Wednesday 15th March 2023. The new offer will commence from 1st April 2023 and includes a broad range of enhanced support to our foster carers in recognition of the critical role they play in improving outcomes for our children in care, and reflects the Government Childrens Services Reformation agenda of "stable Homes Built on Love"

A letter from Cllr Lucy Smith will be sent to all our carers outlining the revised offer

Foster carers have made representation to Childrens Scrutiny Committee, seeking support for a review of fees and allowances, they requested that any agreed uplift be updated to April 2022.

Uplift of Professional and Maintenance fees agreed by Cabinet.

Firstly, we have increased our basic rates above the government minimum for the 'Professional fee' and 'Maintenance allowance' in relation to each child you care for. The rates for these fees are illustrated below.

Professional Fee

Child's Age	Professional fee 2021-2022	New uplifted Fee 2023		
		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
0 – 4 yrs		No longer in use	£132	£135
5-10 yrs			£150	£155
0 – 10 years	£130			
10-15 yrs			£170	£190
16+ yrs			£198	£222
11 –17yrs	£140			

The Maintenance Fee:

Child's Age	Maintenance fee 2021 - 2022	New uplifted fee 2023 <i>(inc Government Min 2.3% uplift already implemented)</i>
0 - 4yrs	£138	£159
5 - 10yrs	£152	£175
11 - 15yrs	£173	£230
16yrs plus	£202	£237

We have also uplifted Birthday, festival, holiday, clothing, and graduation allowances. The right column under each heading represents the uplifted allowance. To the left of it are 2021-2022 allowances.

Age	Birthday		Festival		Holiday		Initial Clothing Previously determined needs led basis	Graduation	
0-4yrs	£70.50	£150	£141	£200	£352.50	£400		£100	-
5-10yrs	£78.00	£180	£156	£225	£390	£450		£150	-
11-15yrs	£88.50	£210	£177	£250	£442.50	£475		£200	-
16yrs +	£103.50	£250	£207	£300	£517.50	£550		£250	-
18yrs +	-	£300 18 th & 21 st Birthday	-	-	-	-	-	-	£100

Carer Payments officers will liaise with carers to provide additional individual advice where required to changes to payments.

We have also expanded our financial support package to include the following:

50% Council Tax discount

To support existing Foster Carers/Supported Lodging Carers within the Borough as well as encourage new Foster Carers and Supported Lodging hosts to join Bury, we will provide our carers at Bury Council with a 50% discretionary council tax discount. In 2023 this payment will be paid alongside the fortnightly foster carer payments once your council tax bill has been provided to your carer payments officer.

In 2024 the discount will be applied directly to carers council tax prior to new annual bills being issued.

Adjustment Fee

Foster Carers could receive a discretionary payment equivalent to the Foster Carer Professional Fee for two weeks at the end of a challenging placement, when a long-term placement comes to an unexpected end, a difficult disruption, or at a time of bereavement, to offer some time and space to the Carers without worrying about having no income from Fostering. The payment will be requested by your SSW for approval by the Head of Service where Foster Carers have met these criteria. This will reduce the pressure Foster Carers experience to immediately accept a new placement when they are simply not ready.

Short Breaks

Foster Carers will receive an annual Short Break Allowance of 7 nights for which the Foster Carer will be paid their Foster Carer Fee whilst the child or young person stays with a different foster carer. If the Short Break has not been used by the end of the financial year the Foster Carer will not lose the allowance, it will be paid to the Foster Carer at the end of that financial year.

Retainer Fee

This is to help to alleviate the worry of Carers being unable to financially manage if there was a gap in between caring for children, especially where the carer is reliant on a fostering income. The retainer fee is linked to the day rate equivalent of the Professional Fee for 4 weeks maximum per year per Fostering household.

We are also committed to continuing to provide the following:

PAMS Assist/Silver Cloud

At Bury, we offer our Foster Carers the employee benefit scheme called PAMs Assist and Silver Cloud. This is extended to Foster Carers which covers emotional / wellbeing support as well as financial and legal advice and is a robust accessible form of support. Carers have fed back previously that they like knowing this is there for them to access if they choose and see this as an additional support for them as Foster Carers. Mental Health support following the pressures of the Covid Pandemic has been reassuring.

Max Card

The Max Card is the UK's leading discount card for cared for and looked after children. Families can use their Max Card at venues across the UK to get free or discounted admission. Bury Council already purchases the Max card for our children and young people aged 3 years and over.

New incentives to support our carers will also be rolled out from the 1st of April, these include:

Blue Light Card

This is a discount service for the emergency services, NHS, social care sector and armed forces, providing members with thousands of discounts online and on the high street. Blue Light card holders can download an App and access a huge range of discounts for the family. This is beneficial for fostering families to get discounts on a variety of different things, including activities, day trips, goods, cinema etc. The cost of this benefit is £5 fee payable every three years. We will encourage our carers to apply for this themselves and claim this back from us via their expenses.

The Mockingbird Model

An exciting new Fostering model has also been given agreement for us to progress with by Cabinet. The 'Mockingbird Model' is an evidence-based model originally developed by the Fostering Network and is being widely used by authorities across England. The Mockingbird model allows us to offer some of our more traumatized children and young people homes with highly skilled and experienced Foster

Carers, further reducing the need for high-cost specialist IFA and residential arrangements, some out of borough for our children. This model also supports placement sufficiency and efficient use of Council resources.

Taken from the DfE Evaluation Report (September 2020) *‘The Mockingbird programme aims to replicate the support available through an extended family network. It creates a constellation of 6 to 10 satellite fostering families who are supported by 1 hub home that is operated by an experienced foster carer, offering planned and emergency sleepovers, advice, training, and peer support. The Mockingbird programme worked to meet the need for continuity and support for children and young people in care and for additional support for foster carers....’*

In a Mockingbird ‘Constellation’ a group of ‘Satellite carers’ are supported by a salaried Hub Carer. This model has proven highly effective in not only supporting Foster Carers to sustain the level of care a child or young person requires but also contributes towards stabilizing the child or young person in their time of trauma. 2023 will see the launch of the first Mockingbird Constellation for Bury Fostering Service. We hope to commence this initial launch with providing all our foster carers with information in May 2023. You will receive separate information regarding this from Service Lead Annette Hope in April. The table illustrated below sets out our combined professional fees and maintenance allowances for Level 4 for Mockingbird specialist Foster Carers, bands are based on the Individual needs of the child placed and the Carers experience and skills.

	0-4 yrs.	5-10 yrs.	11-15 yrs.	16yrs plus
Level 4 band A	£594.49	£594.49	£594.49	£594.49
Level 4 band B	£605.12	£605.12	£605.12	£605.12
Level 4 band C	£615.74	£615.74	£615.74	£615.74
Level 4 band D	£626.34	£626.34	£626.34	£626.34
Level 4 band E	£636.96	£636.96	£636.96	£636.96

The Hub Carer will be central to supporting the constellation, they will be a ‘salaried’ carer and paid £33,121 per annum, the equivalent of Level 4, Band E 16yrs plus. We will recruit specifically to this role via an advertisement.

Finally, our new ‘Foster Carer Handbook’ outlining all fostering guidance and support will be published in May 2023. We acknowledge how important the Handbook is to our carers in their roles. Within this will be all support elements for 2023 onwards, plus detailed information for all circumstances. For example, family time, the different meetings Foster Carers attend, matching process, expectations of the Foster Carer role, recording and reporting information, education, disruption processes, allegations, caring for children safely, the role of the Supervising Social Worker, complaint processes and much more.

There was an ask from our foster carers via Childrens Scrutiny Committee that any agreed uplift to professional fees and maintenance fees to be backdated to the 1st of April 2022 but this in not budgeted for within this financial year and children’s services are also significantly overspent. It is recognised that foster carers have also been impacted by increased costs within the current financial year and therefore a one off £200 payment was made. This was made to 106 foster carers and 13 continuing care carers at a total cost of £23,800.

It is recognised that this is not the equivalent to the value that would be paid if the fees had been backdated. Modelling for individual foster carers identifies that depending upon the age of the child and assuming they were looking after one child for the full year the increase in fees is

O-4-year-old	£624
5–10-year-old	£1,300
11–15-year-old	£5,356
16+	£5,824

There are several variables within the business case, and it depends upon actual numbers of foster carers and individual placements, i.e., number of children in placement and circumstances but taking a snapshot in time the full costs to the Council if the proposal had been backdated to 1st April, the cost incurred would be approximately:

Foster Carer Fee	214,006
Fostering Allowance	173,160
SGO Allowance	52,868
Total	440,034

9 May 2023

Jeanette Richards
Executive Director of Children's Services
Bury Council
3 Knowsley Place
Duke Street
Bury
BL9 0EL

Dear Jeanette

Monitoring visit to Bury children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Bury children's services on 28 February and 1 March 2023. This was the third monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in November 2021. His Majesty's inspectors for this visit were Lisa Walsh and Teresa Godfrey.

Areas covered by the visit

Inspectors reviewed the progress made in achieving early permanence for children, in particular in relation to:

- Pre-proceedings.
- Recent entries into care.
- Children with plans for adoption, special guardianship or long-term fostering.

Inspectors also looked at the impact of leaders on this area of social work practice.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. A range of evidence was considered, including electronic records, performance management information, case file audits and other information provided by senior managers. In addition, inspectors spoke to social workers and managers.

Headline findings

Since the last inspection in 2021, steady progress has been made. Senior leaders have continued to develop the quality of social work practice and strengthen management oversight, to support timelier permanence for children. There is a renewed focus on securing earlier permanence for children, including through the introduction of a new strategy and framework for practice and the implementation of

a new permanence policy. This is leading to clearer expectations about permanence across the workforce and with partners, and supporting a more structured approach.

Senior leaders understand the impact of their improvement work to date. This is due to focused external scrutiny, such as peer reviews, and through more effective monitoring by the improvement board. There continues to be a strong focus on developing the workforce, by providing a range of appropriate training opportunities, including in motivational interviewing and permanence. Social workers have a clearer understanding of expectations and are embracing the new ways of working.

Despite these improvements, social work practice remains inconsistent, and some children still wait too long to achieve security through permanence. The local authority recognises that there is more to do to reduce drift and delay. Some initiatives have only recently been introduced and are not fully embedded and making a difference to all children. There is not sufficient stability in the workforce to support consistency of practice.

Findings and evaluation of progress

Senior leaders have a continued focus on the improvements needed and a clear vision to support permanence for children at the earliest opportunity. The local authority is on track with its improvement plan, which focuses on getting the basics right and seeks to deliver sustainable and improved outcomes for children.

Leaders are strengthening their oversight of early permanence for children in pre-proceedings through the introduction of more effective legal gateway panels. These are leading to timely escalation from child protection plans into pre-proceedings when circumstances for children do not change. When concerns escalate, social workers are recognising more routinely the importance of contingency planning, to support early permanence. This includes the completion of viability assessments to support children to remain in the care of their wider family when it is appropriate for them to do so. Plans made in pre-proceedings are being reviewed more effectively by senior managers to ensure that actions are completed within agreed timescales.

A recent strengthening of processes has enabled social workers and managers to have a greater focus on permanence when children come into care. For some children, different permanence options are fully considered, however, practice remains inconsistent, with others continuing to experience drift and delay.

Children's assessments are not routinely updated in preparation for looked-after reviews, or if children's circumstances change significantly in between meetings. This means that key decisions regarding permanence are often being made without the benefit of clear analysis and consideration of how past experiences inform current needs and risks.

Care plans vary in quality, with some lacking the necessary specific focus on children's long-term plans. A lack of contingency planning is contributing to drift and delay for some children, as progress is not consistently monitored or challenged

when circumstances do not change quickly enough for children. For these children, options to secure permanence are not sufficiently specific or timebound.

Some children are experiencing care from numerous different caregivers, which impacts on their ability to form trusting relationships with adults. A lack of sufficient placements to meet children's needs is leading to some children being placed in unsuitable placements, including, for example, with foster carers who only provide short-term placements. This is leading to placement instability for some children. Children's assessments for matching to new placements and decisions to move children are not consistently recorded. For these children, it is not clear whether sufficient consideration has been given to permanence in these arrangements. If accessing their files later in life, care-experienced adults would not be able to understand why social workers and managers had made these decisions.

Social workers know their children well and develop good relationships with them. The language used by social workers during home visits is child-centred and there is an emphasis on ensuring that children understand their circumstances. Social workers act on children's wishes and ensure that they contribute to important decisions about their lives.

Children's progress in respect of permanence is not consistently considered at their second looked-after review. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) are not consistently confirming permanence at this point of the child's journey, contributing to drift and delay for some children, including those who are cared for at home by their parents. Children's reviews are held regularly and IROs maintain oversight through mid-review monitoring of compliance and practice issues. Children are encouraged to attend their reviews and most meet with their IRO before their review, supporting them to contribute to the process and have a clear understanding of their plan.

A number of children are being supported to live with their brothers and sisters in permanently matched long-term foster placements. These children are experiencing consistent care from committed carers and receiving the quality of support they would from a good parent.

Social workers continue to consider special guardianship as a permanence option for children. This is supporting children to remain in their wider family and develop their sense of belonging. However, there is not a consistent approach by social workers to convey the benefits to carers of special guardianship. This reduces opportunities for permanence for some children.

When a placement order has been granted for a child with a plan for adoption, family-finding starts at the earliest opportunity. The local authority has celebrated successes in securing suitable adopters for a number of older children, and brothers and sisters together. Adoption introductions are well considered, with care taken to understand the impact on children. A range of life-story work is undertaken with children with adoption plans, and this is helping them to understand their life history

and time in care. The local authority has sustained practice in this area since the last inspection.

Leaders are prioritising workforce stability. There is now a permanent senior leadership team in place and permanent team leaders across children's services. This increased stability is supporting more consistent management oversight. However, there continues to be instability in the social work workforce, and this makes it more challenging to embed new ways of working and support consistency in practice for children. A successful recruitment drive has recently secured 23 social workers from overseas, who are due to start in April 2023.

Management oversight of children's cases in supervision does not always focus sufficiently on permanence. This is a missed opportunity to reduce drift and delay for some children.

The quality assurance framework now has a sharper focus on learning and ensuring that actions are implemented. A bi-monthly assurance meeting, along with a 'closing the loop' meeting, is strengthening accountability and contributing to a better understanding by senior leaders of the quality of practice. A transformation and improvement manager has recently been appointed to enhance the quality assurance framework.

Social workers spoke positively about the supportive team environment and the accessibility of managers in Bury. Leaders are appropriately focused on developing staff through a range of training opportunities that enhance their skills, such as in life-story work, court skills and early permanence. This is supporting social workers to develop the skills and knowledge to enable a more effective approach to planning for children. Purposeful weekly practice workshops, which are highly valued by staff, are held on a range of practice issues. A recent permanence event led by children enabled them to explain their journeys and how delays in permanence impacted on them. This event was attended by partners and the social care workforce and supported the launch of the new operational framework.

The local authority is ambitious to ensure that children's voices are central to all decision-making and service delivery in respect of permanence. Following a recent peer review and a corporate parenting workshop, children challenged effectively and changed the terms of reference, making corporate parenting board and the language it uses more accessible for all children.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lisa Walsh
His Majesty's Inspector

Items	Deadline for draft reports	Scrutiny Agenda Setting meeting date	Deadline for final reports	Deadline for Publishing Reports	CYP Scrutiny Meeting date
Brief Verbal Update Children's Services restructure – Paul Cooke Update on Cabinet response – Foster Carers Standing item: Improvement Plan Update	N/A	Tuesday 30 th May 2023 12:00-12:30	05 th June 2023 (12 noon)	07 th June 2023 (12 noon)	15 th June 2023 (7:00pm)
Pupil Placed Planning including funding element – Paul Cooke SEND Improvement Plan – Jeanette (Cllr FitzGerald) Outcome Results – Verbal Update Standing Item – Improvement Plan - update on 4 th Monitoring visit	16 th August 2023 TBC	17 th August 2023 TBC	31 st August 2023 (12 noon)	04 th September 2023 (12 noon)	12 th September 2023 (7:00pm)

Children's Services Re-Structure Update – Report – Paul Cooke Schools Funding Update Report and Academy Update Project Safety Valve Standing item: Improvement Plan Update	18 th October 2023	19 th October 2023 TBC	02 nd November 2023 (12 noon)	07 th November 2023 (12 noon)	15 th November 2023 (7:00pm)
Detailed report on Complex Safeguarding – Annon Experiences Standing item: Improvement Plan Update	13 th December 2023 TBC	14 th December 2023 TBC	04 th January 2024 (12 noon)	08 th January 2024 (12 noon)	16 th January 2024 (7:00pm)
TBD Standing item: Improvement Plan Update	08 th February 2024 TBC	12 th February 2024 TBC	26 th February 2024 (12 noon)	28 th February 2024 (12 noon)	07 th March 2024 (7:00pm)

Items for consideration within the year:

- Youth Justice Offer
- Family Hubs
- SEND

- Early Years and provision
- Care Leavers Review/Offer
- Child Protection CSE
- Detailed report on Complex Safeguarding – Annon Experiences
- Brief Overview of work over Health and Social Care
- SEND Transport

This page is intentionally left blank