

AGENDA FOR

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Contact: Chloe Ashworth
Direct Line: 0161 253 5132
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, U Farooq, E FitzGerald, N Frith, L McBriar, J Rydeheard, L Ryder, G Staples-Jones and M Whitby

Other members:
H Chadwick and D Lewis

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, 7 March 2024
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 Cabinet 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 5 - 10)*

Minutes from the meeting held on 15th November 2023 are attached for approval.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

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 SEND TRANSFORMATION PLANS *(Pages 11 - 24)*

Slides attached.

7 SEND TRANSPORT UPDATE

Verbal update to be provided by Jeanette Richards, Executive Director Children and young people.

8 BURY VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT *(Pages 25 - 54)*

Report attached.

9 EARLY YEARS SUFFICIENCY *(Pages 55 - 62)*

Report attached.

10 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN CASE - BRIEFING NOTES *(Pages 63 - 66)*

Briefing notes attached.

11 IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE *(Pages 67 - 90)*

Report attached from Jeanette Richards, Executive Director of Children and Young People

12 URGENT BUSINESS

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

This page is intentionally left blank

- Minutes of:** CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
- Date of Meeting:** 15 November 2023
- Present:** Councillor C Boles (in the Chair)
Councillors D Berry, C Boles, A Booth, E FitzGerald, L McBriar, J Rydeheard, L Ryder, G Staples-Jones and M Whitby.
H Chadwick, Union Representative and D Lewis, Youth Representative
- Also in attendance:** Isobel Booter, Director of Education, Jeanette Richards, Executive Director Children and Young People, Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member Children and Young People and Chloe Ashworth, Democratic Services.
- Public Attendance:** No members of the public were present at the meeting.
- Apologies for Absence:** Councillor U Farooq and Councillor N Frith
-

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies are noted above.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were made.

Councillor Booth advised she is employed by a College within Bury.

3 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 12th September 2023 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

Matters arising:

Councillor Berry questioned if there have been any lessons learned that could be adopted regarding the reoffending rates of young people in Bury, compared to that of other countries that have lower reoffending rates of young people.

In response Councillor Smith advised one of the functions of the national Youth Justice Board is to look at research across the UK and around the world (from countries that are similar to ours and have similar laws) and to use this research to inform evidence based interventions which are shared with local youth justice boards The issue we face is that many countries have quite a different legal framework to the UK , for example, in some Scandinavian countries the age of criminal responsibility is 15 whereas ours in the UK is 10, so this immediately means that we will have more young people within the youth justice system than those countries.

More recently the board has looked at arrest rate and there has been a drive across police forces to record youth crime at a lower level which pushes up arrest numbers. We are mindful

of this, and we are currently working with our local force in Bury to develop a clearer pathway to prevention so that more young people can be supported outside of the formal criminal justice system. We will track this to review impact over the next 6-12 months.

Councillor Berry also asked if we have an update on school attendance figures of Radcliffe children and is the council in a position to report on the reasons why Radcliffe has the highest number of persistent children's absences.

The current attendance figures for the first half term for Radcliffe schools are:

School	Term	Attendance % Exc Nursery
RADCLIFFE LOCALITY	Autumn 1	94.7%
The Derby High School	Autumn 1	92.90%
Chapelfield Primary School	Autumn 1	94.40%
Gorsefield Primary School	Autumn 1	94.90%
Cams Lane Primary School	Autumn 1	94.90%
Millwood Primary Special School	Autumn 1	90.20%
Radcliffe Hall CE/Methodist Primary	Autumn 1	94.60%
Radcliffe Primary School	Autumn 1	95.20%
St Andrews CE Primary School (Radcliffe)	Autumn 1	95.00%
St Johns CE Primary School	Autumn 1	94.70%
St Marys RC Primary School	Autumn 1	94.80%
Wesley Methodist Primary School	Autumn 1	94.20%

To improve overall attendance for all of our schools, the attendance offer that is being provided is:

- Introduced attendance forums for all schools and academies.
- Implemented training on attendance processes and guidance.
- Provided new attendance policy for all schools and academies which is available on the Headteacher Hubs for schools to download.
- Emotionally based school avoidance Pathway offered to all schools.
- Trauma Informed school training provided to all schools.
- ACES (Adverse childhood experiences) training which is offered to all schools.
- Each school has an allocated attendance officer providing the core offer – targeted support meetings, legal interventions, penalty notices, multi-agency meetings.
- School attendance orders have been implemented from September 2023

Overall attendance for all Bury schools has increased by 1.8% in the autumn term from the previous year. Overall absences has decreased by 1.8%, overall unauthorised absences have decreased by 0.4% from the previous autumn term and one secondary school has increased their overall attendance by 2% from the previous year.

Helen Chadwick, Union Representative requested a correction to word in the minutes.

Councillor Rydeheard asked if the meeting with Ms Marek had taken place. Officers advised this is yet to take place.

Members were informed since the last meeting two task and finish groups have taken place.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5 MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were no member questions.

6 ATTAINMENT HEADLINE OUTCOMES 2023 (PROVISIONAL)

Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People provided an overview of the Attainment Report. The report covers an analysis of 2023 performance data that outlines the improving school led system within the borough of Bury. Currently 91% of primary schools are judged by Ofsted to be good or better. Alongside this the percentage of good or better secondary schools has risen over 15% in the last 12 months to 61%.

Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People wished to place on record gratitude to Isobel Booler in her role in this work. Members of the Committee wished to put on record their gratitude and appreciation to Isobel Booler, Director of Education and Skills and the teams for this report and the findings.

Members wished to place on record that it is good to see SEND given the same priority within the report.

Discussions took place regarding the quality education offer to schools. Members were informed that the take-up of maintained schools is high (all but 2 schools) whereas take up of academies is not as high.

Discussions took place regarding progress eight assessments. Members were informed that The Derby and Hazlewood are both positive outliers. In addition there are three schools with below -0.5 these are Tottington, The Heys and The Elton but all have school improvement plans in place.

Discussions took place regarding the success of results for children entitled to free school meals. Councillor Smith advised 23% of Bury children are on free school meals and improved outcomes for all students is a key priority.

Discussions took place with regards to children and young people who or classed as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Isobel Booler, Executive Director of Education advised the whole cohort is a higher proportion when compared to other vulnerable cohorts. Out of the Children who are looked after 87% are in education, employment or training and 9 children are not. An area of significant priority is with regards to care leavers post 18. Support is currently available through an active Connexions Service and SEND internships.

It was agreed:

1. Officers and Councillor Smith be thanked for their update and report.

7 DETAILED REPORT ON COMPLEX SAFEGUARDING AND MISSING RESPONSE - ANNON EXPERIENCES

Councillor Smith provided a brief overview of the report on safeguarding.

Members of the committee were informed that children from another authority are placed within the Borough that go missing are included within the figures.

A member of the committee questioned the process when a missing child returns. Members were informed the first stage is to report into police who then hand over through the multi safeguarding hub. Once the child is returned the Police undertake a safe and well check a triage for a requirement for a return interview

Members were informed that governance arrangements have been strengthened through sub-groups and an action plan. Members were assured that the prevention and battle against sexual exploitation is through a partnership approach and raising awareness. Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised that strengthening families to protect children is also key.

Discussions took place regarding the effectiveness of reporting. Members were informed that the measure of effectiveness is through re-referral rates back into the service. Data to be brought back to the Committee.

It was agreed:

1. Data insights are being refined and can be brought back to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

8 IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

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

Members were informed that on the 1st and 2nd of November Children Services were subject to their fifth monitoring visit of which four have taken place in the past twelve months. The focus of the monitoring visit was on the progress and experience of our care leavers with a specific focus on pathway planning.

Publication of the letter on the 06th December 2023 and the summary headlines are:

- Unfortunately all our young people do not receive a consistently good services from our PA's
- Some older carer leavers were not receiving a service at all.
- Leadership challenges has impacted on improvement plans and service delivery

Members were informed that particular issues regarding our care leavers has been workforce, leadership and the location of the offer. Members were also informed there have been issues with the new international social workers due to hold ups with social work england.

Discussions took place with regards to care leavers housing, social housing, housing projects and the right to stay with their foster carers. Members were informed that the Council needs to move towards a joint housing protocol between the housing department and children services.

It was agreed:

1. To share a self-evaluation and an update against activity against the improvement plan
2. For all members of the Committee to support and champion the role of Corporate Parenting.

9 URGENT BUSINESS

It was agreed that members wished to share thanks and gratitude to Isobel Booler, Director of Education for her work with the Committee and Children's Services

COUNCILLOR C BOLES
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.22 pm)

This page is intentionally left blank

Public Questions 07/03/2024

1. K Hampson

Question:

Why is it I have attended scrutiny many times and in one of the meetings last year June, Lucy Smith she breached my confidentiality and my data in scrutiny meeting and I log this and since June last year I am still waiting official response despite chasing this many times.

Response:

The Monitoring Officer has responded to this complaint. If the complainant wishes to discuss the outcome of the complaint the Monitoring Officer is happy to do so.

Other members of the public were in attendance and asked questions:

2. J Kinloch

Question:

My question is to ask Councillors views on the recent turn over of senior staff in the Childrens Services Team. I would be interested to know if Councillors are aware of the hugely negative impact the departures have on SEND Parents in Bury because behind statistics presented to Councillors are parents, children and families who are struggling hugely and often find it impossible to get answers from the Childrens services team.

Response:

In response Councillor Smith Cabinet Member for Children and Young People wished to place on record a thanks to the senior officers outlined in the question for the work they have done in Bury. Members were informed that these officers have driven through improvement, and advised the Committee that as Cabinet Member I am equally confident that officers in their place in the future will build on these improvements. We have had leadership in place who are committed to change, and this will continue.

3. A Marrek

Question:

A few months ago, my MP James Daly made a comment in the press around struggling children being the result of 'crap' parenting. I understand the Committee have no jurisdiction over Mr Daly, however it is a clear example of rife parent blame that is evident across all Children's Services in Bury. My question is to know how Councillors feel with Bury being held out in the national news attracting headlines because of this type of comment.

Response:

In response Councillor Smith Cabinet Member for Children and Young People thanked the questioner for highlighting this matter. Whilst Mr Daly is not a member of the Council, I would like to put on record that his comment is incorrect and inaccurate. This was brought at a full Council meeting following the incident.

4. K Delaney

Question:

With concerning information circulating including recent findings from special needs Jungle showing that only 2% of Bury's safety valve funding for SEND can be traced to spending on actual SEND provision, the rest being spent on service transformation consultants (£1.26 million) and recruitment agencies (£500,000).

Can you please comment how this type of spending provides support for families in Bury? Can you please confirm that the reduction in out of borough placements and EHCP's refusal to assess cases are not due to a restriction imposed on the safety valve funding and if there are such restrictions, please can members of the Committee and parents be provided with a copy of those for scrutiny.

Answer:

In response Councillor Smith advised she had seen the document referred to within the question. Councillor Smith confirmed that a copy of the breakdown will be provided to the member of the public following the meeting as this had been provided to Bury2Gether.

Councillor Smith clarified that the money is for transformation and not service delivery and to bring down spend and improve sufficiency within the department.

The purpose of Project Safety Valve is to obtain efficiencies in the services. Whilst we as a Council do need to get value for money, we still have the child at the heart of everything we do.

Councillor Lancaster

Question:

What feedback have the Council had following the recent SEND Inspection?

Response:

Inspectors advised that the draft report is restricted and confidential to the relevant personnel and should not be shared more widely or published (as per paragraph 136 of the [Area SEND Inspections Framework and Handbook](#)). Findings and draft letters are therefore under embargo until publication by Ofsted - we expect a pre-publication version in early April and we will ensure Councillors are briefed appropriately.

This page is intentionally left blank

SEND Transformation Update

January 2024

1



Updates:

- Development of the Education Health Care Team
- Development of SEND support
- Progress on school placement
- Reaching out
- Development around 14-25 offer and Preparing for Adulthood
- Other achievements

2

Development and transition of the Education Health Care Team

- In the last year we have increased the establishment of the EHCP team by 1 Senior, 1 Case Worker, 6 Assistant Case workers with the aim of reducing caseloads from over 450 to 350 per worker
- We are currently recruiting on fixed 1 year basis 1 x case worker and 2 x Case Co-Ordinators to ensure we can complete all the review work
- All staff are now permanent staff, bringing much needed stability to the team and allowing them to build meaningful relationship with families and schools – all schools have a named linked case worker, and all children are linked to a case worker
- The team has moved fully onto the Liquid Logic system so that all work is correctly recorded on the child/young person's electronic record, and to support improved data reporting (ceasing the use of standalone spread sheets)
- Review of the phone and email system to improve response to calls and enquires from parents/carers and schools
- Weekly data tracking meetings to support improved performance
- Team have undertaken a range of mandatory and specialist training as part of the upskilling of the team - the team are due to undertake the IPSEA legal training next

Bury
Council

3

The biggest shift in the team has in separating out the 2 key functions of the team, establishing 2 groups of staff who then have a specific focus and protected time:

NEW ASSESSMENTS TEAM

- Responsible for carrying out the statutory assessment
- Responsible for meeting statutory deadlines and issuing a EHC plan within 20 weeks.
- Issuing a Draft EHC plan and liaising with parents/carers and professionals.
- Responsible for quality assurance of EHC plans.
- Responsible for chasing professional advice.
- Responsible for keeping communication with parents/carers/young people.

REVIEW TEAM

- Responsible for carrying out Annual Reviews and amending/ceasing & maintaining EHC plans following the review.
- Responsible for requests for change of provision, change of funding, personal budgets following Annual Reviews.
- Responsible for phased transfers for Primary Admission, Year 6 transfer to High School and Post-16.
- Responsible for liaising with parents/carers and professionals and supporting with permanent exclusions and placement breakdowns.

Bury
Council

4

Impact of changes

Timescales for new assessment has consistently improved – 2 years ago our average 20-week compliance was 27%, last year it was 52% and this year it is 72%

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Number of EHC Plans issued, excluding exceptions	47	37	40	38	40	28	54	37	33	43	37	22
Number of these issued in 20 weeks	23	25	33	33	29	18	32	31	24	32	34	21
% in 20 weeks	49%	68%	83%	87%	73%	64%	59%	83%	73%	74%	92%	95%
Cumulative % in 20 weeks for 2022	Same as above % in 20 weeks	57%	65%	70%	71%	70%	68%	70%	70%	71%	72%	73%
Total number not completed and over 30 weeks	1	5	3	2	4	5	2	3	1	1	0	0
Total number not completed and over 52 weeks	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

5

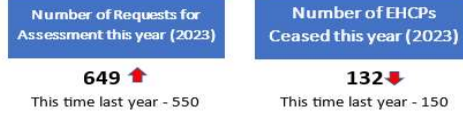
Impact of changes

- We are on track to have 100% compliance for all phased transfers to be completed this year – this means updated EHCPs for all children moving into primary, secondary and college/post 16
- We now have in place a QR code for all young people/parents so they can notify us of options re. phase transfer
- All Annual Reviews are now being tracked so that we can ensure attendance by an officer for all key annual reviews
- This year we will be able to report on the compliance of Annual review being updated with the 4 week timeline



6

EHCPs Monthly Scorecard – 1st December 2023



% requests by Parent/Setting/LA this year



% Total requests Agreed/Refused this year



Parental Request Breakdown:



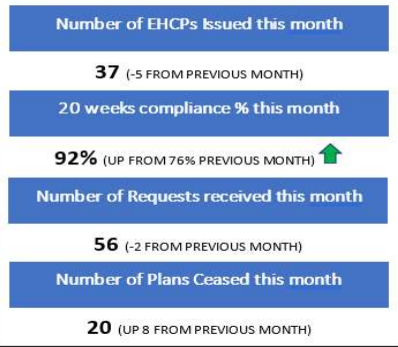
Setting Request Breakdown:



% plans agreed following assessment this year



This Month's figures November 23



This scorecard is updated Monthly on the 1st of each month.

7



8

Feedback

Bury Council

A parent shared that her lived experience was really great and that you as her Case Officer was really responsive, returned calls and emails swiftly – she really could not praise you enough and she wanted the other parents to know that her experience was positive and different.

A parent has used the Bury EHC Service for one of her own children because she lives in Bury and her child needed an EHC Plan. She was very complimentary of the support and service provided to her own child from your service. Well done all.

The EHC plan was really well written and reflected the child well.

I have been very satisfied with the support that our Caseworker has given us, how fast the EHCP process was carried out and the phone calls with updates.

Parent feedback saying how impressed she is with the EHC team and the EHC process from start to finish, especially wonderful communication.

I would like to point out that since my contact from October, I have been treated with respect and communication has been great.

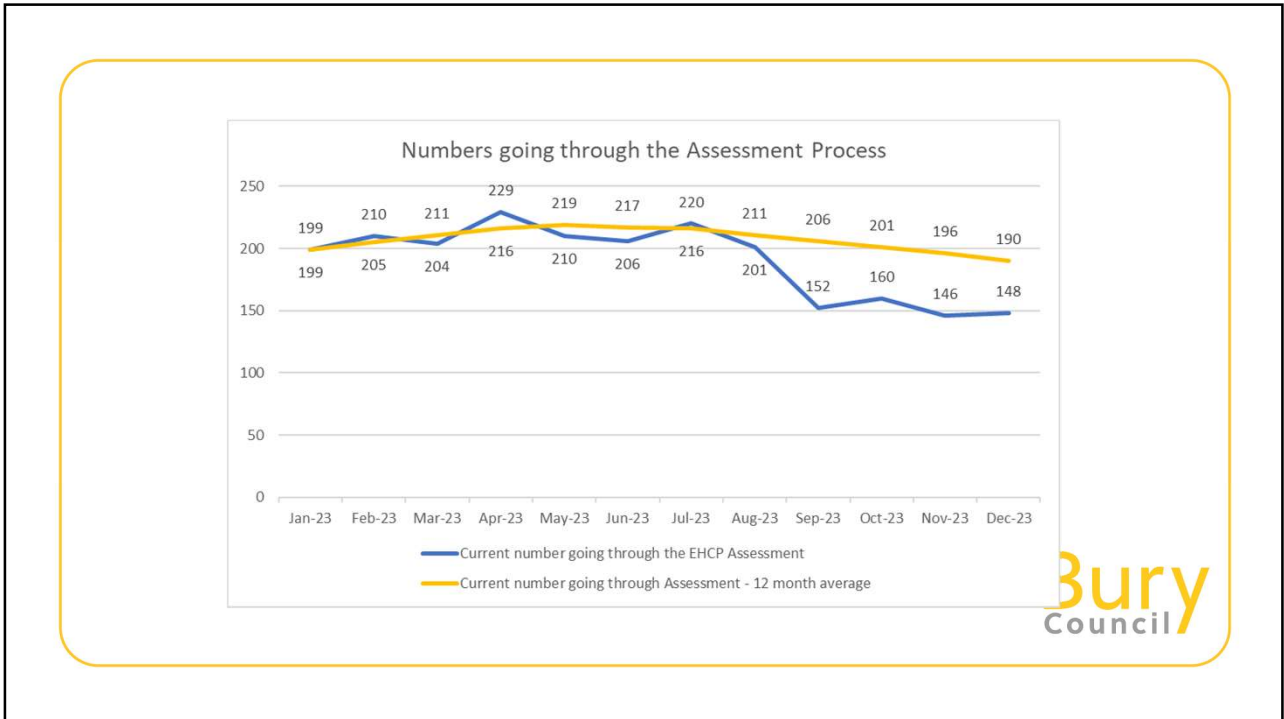
9

Number of EHCPs

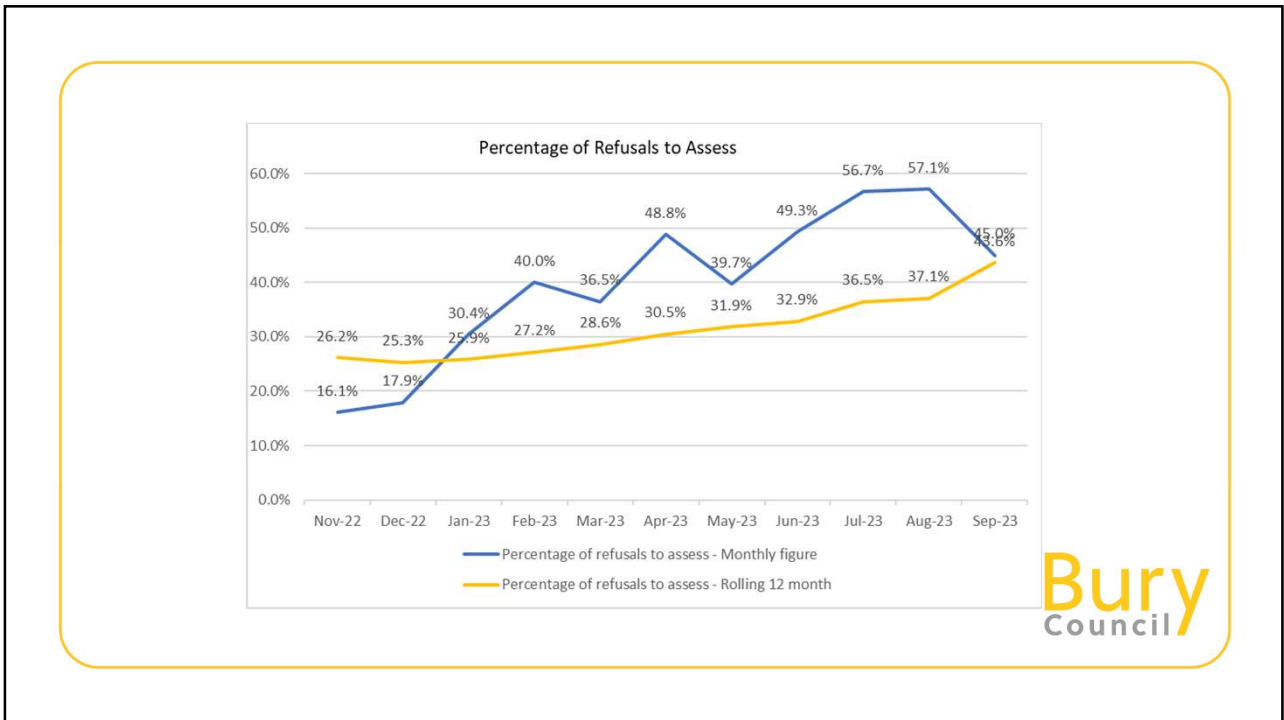
- We recognise that the number of EHCP requests remains high in Bury (15th highest in England – see data on next slide)
- Links to effectiveness of SEND Support Offer
- Need to identify needs early and trigger the right support
- Focus to date has been on the development of a strong SEND Support Offer
- Cultural shift from a medical model of disability to a social model – focus on removing the barriers, not trying to repair or fix the disability

Bury Council

10



11



12

SEND Support - Outreach

- Education restructure completed September 2023 - remodelled support to schools
- Creation of a new Outreach Team – 1 team manager, 1 senior, 6 Outreach workers and 4 outreach assistants
- The role of the team is to support settings, schools and colleges to support children and young people with SEND at SEND Support - reducing the need for seeking an EHCP
- Staff contracts changed to work from term time only to 52 weeks – providing full year support for parents
- Recruited to 5 of the posts with remaining recruitment due to be completed by end of January
- Speech and Language Therapist will be within team in addition to Occupation Therapist – significant shift from previous offer which was teaching staff only. DfE Adviser noted this as an ambitious and creative step.



13

SEND Support - Outreach



14

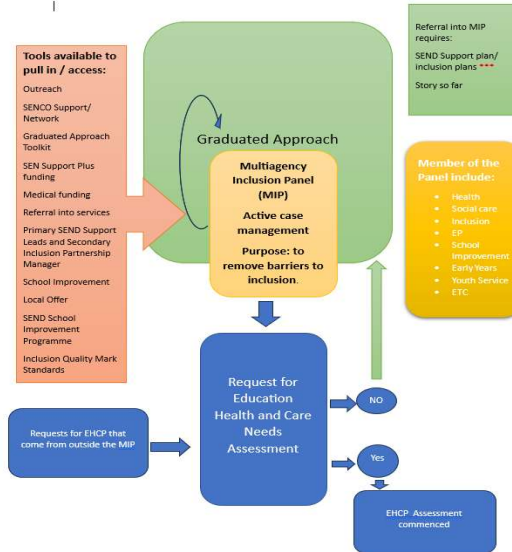
SEND Support - Multi-Agency Inclusion Panel

- New multi-agency panel (MIP) established to support the drive towards supporting children/young people at SEND Support
- Meets fortnightly
- Panel to review the current situation and consider additional support/training/intervention or recourse including some access to funding to meet need
- Aim that all children/young people are discussed at MIP before any request for EHCP needs assessment



15

Making the Graduated Approach central and embedding SEND Support



16

SEND Support - Graduated Response

We have developed a local SEND Graduated Response guidance toolkit to support Early Years settings, schools and colleges in Bury to confidently identify and support children and young people

The toolkit includes:

- **SENCO Best Practice:** covering SENCO role and SEND processes inc. EHC Assessment & EHCP processes
- **Areas of Need:** 'Top Tips' for an inclusive learning environment. Recommended interventions across each of the four broad areas of need: Getting Advice (whole class/school), Getting Help (small group) and Getting More Help (individual)
- **Getting Risk Support:** covering topics such as self-harm, exploitation, eating disorders, distressed behaviours
- The advice covers Early Years, School Age (KS1-4) and Post-16

Bury
Council

17

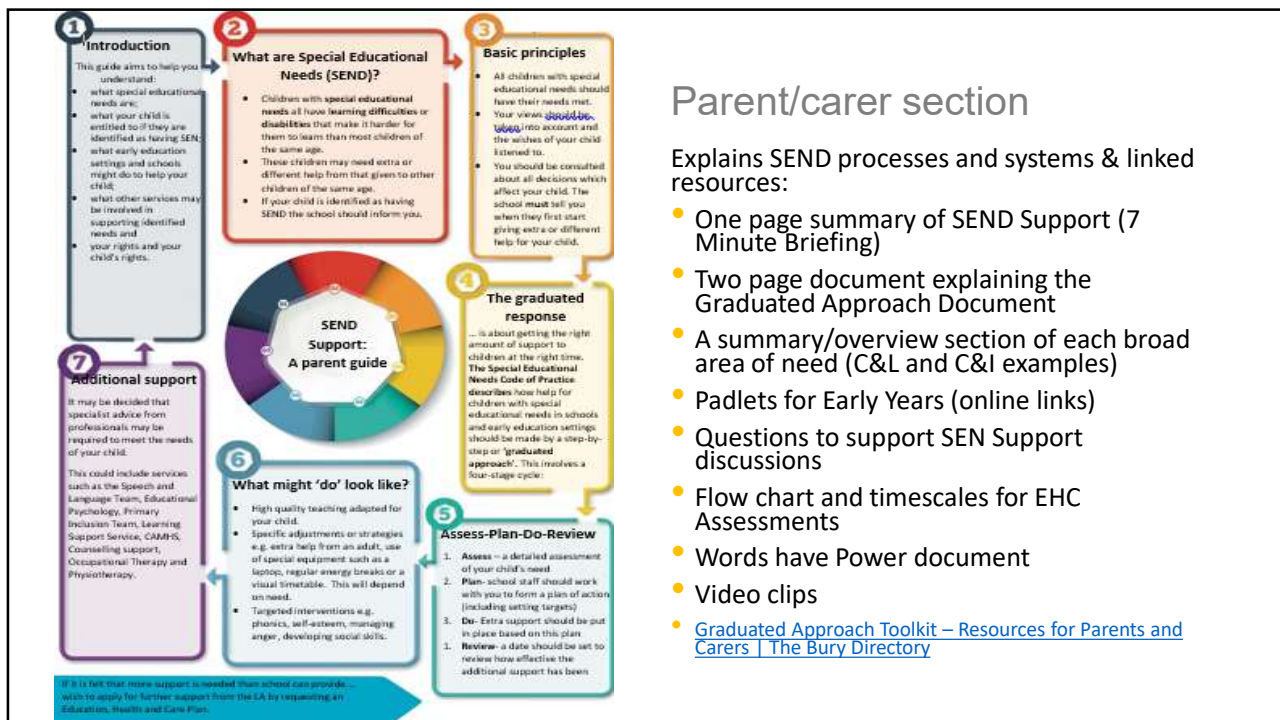
Graduated Response Toolkit

- Each area of need is broken down into Key Stage 1-4 and covers
 - Identifying needs
 - Assessment tools
 - Top Tips
 - Overview of needs in this area (version for parents/ carers and for children and young people)
 - Getting Advice (whole class approaches)
 - Getting Help (group interventions)
 - Getting More Help (individual support)
 - Intervention overview (list of all interventions inc. cost and where to find further information)
- Also, additional areas within **KS4 and 5: Transition and Preparation for Adulthood**



Bury
Council

18



Parent/carer section

Explains SEND processes and systems & linked resources:

- One page summary of SEND Support (7 Minute Briefing)
- Two page document explaining the Graduated Approach Document
- A summary/overview section of each broad area of need (C&L and C&I examples)
- Padlets for Early Years (online links)
- Questions to support SEN Support discussions
- Flow chart and timescales for EHC Assessments
- Words have Power document
- Video clips
- [Graduated Approach Toolkit – Resources for Parents and Carers](#) | [The Bury Directory](#)

19

SEND Support – Local Offer

- Central to ensure all parent/carers and professionals have access to the information they need around SEND every Local Authority as to have a Local Offer which is the single point for all information and advice is held
- Bury recognise that its Local Offer was not effective, difficult to access and navigate
- Working with Parent/ Carers and young people we have agreed a new format for our Local Offer and we are currently converting the existing Local Offer into the new version – this will be completed by February

Bury
Council

20

SEND Support – Disability register



To enable us to better communicate with Bury Parents/ Carers of children with SEND we have co-produced with Bury2Gether our Disability Register

21

Progress on School placement

Aiming to increase our ability to ensure Bury children with SEND are educated within borough and reduce our dependency on independent schools

- New Special School Brookhaven is opening on 15th January 2024 – 80 places from September
- Millwood Special School extension is due to open in 2025 – this will provide 50 extra school places
- A new SEMH Secondary is scheduled to open in 2026

Bury
Council

22

Resource Provision

We are developing and extending our Resource Provision to reduce the demand on special school placements:

- Primary:
 - Chantlers (9 places 23/24, 3 places 24/25)
 - East Ward (12 places 23/24)
 - Higher Lane (9 places Jan 24, 3 places 24/25)
 - Our Lady of Lourdes (7 places Jan 24, 3 places 24/25)
 - Summerseat Methodist (3 places 23/24, 6 places Jan 24, 9 places 24/25)
 - St John with St Mark (9 places Jan 24, 3 places 24/25)
 - Woodbank (9 places Feb 24, 3 places 24/25)
 - Whitefield (9 places Jan 24, 3 places 24/25)
- Secondary:
 - Hazelwood High School (10 places Feb 24, 5 places 24/25)
 - The Derby High School (15 places 24/25)

Bury
Council

23

Reaching out – helping to make SEND everyone’s business

- June 2023 - second SEND Parent information day, next one scheduled for October 2024
- Our second SEND Practice Fortnight will be held in February 2024 – a 2-week period of training/showcasing the world of SEND
- Delivered whole service training on SEND
- Delivered SEND awareness for elected members
- In 2024 we will establish a SEND Workforce Development Board to support the learning and development agenda

Bury
Council

24

Development - 14- 25 offer and Preparing for Adulthood

- Outcome of 2023 Ernest Young review of post-18 provision was to develop 14- 25 offer in partnership with Adult Services
- Transition Board established and meeting regularly to oversee this work
- Tracker developed identifying all young people from age 14 who will need to be transferred across to Adult Services at 18
- New draft transition policy drafted and pending final approval
- Adopted the joint use of the “My Life My Way” assessment tool, now completed for all 17 years due to transfer to Adults to support transfer and shared planning
- We are currently recruiting to a Transition Co-Ordinator Post and 2 Adult Transition Workers

Bury
Council

25

Other Achievements

- Education Psychology Service (EP) - in the process of rebuilding Bury’s own EP service with the Deputy now in post and adverts out for permanent staff
- Autism in School Project - in year 2 of the project and have just recruited another 3 schools to join in the initiative. Key to the project is the joint work of the school’s Senior Leadership working with parents of children with SEND in their school
- SEND Strategic Partnership Board - now independently chaired to provide greater scrutiny
- In 2024 we will be overseeing the role out of Dyslexia Aware Quality Mark (DAQM) across interested schools in Bury as part of the SEND Offer

Bury
Council

26

Dynamic Support Register

- **Bury Dynamic Support Register developed in 2023**
 - Criteria for a referral to the DSR is clinical diagnosis of a learning disability and/or autism
 - An immediate risk of admission to a mental health ward or unit (immediate is defined as being expected to happen within the next 24-48 hours)
 - An immediate risk of placement breakdown (residential care or foster care)
- **Purpose of the DSR**
 - Reduce the need for hospital admission and or support discharge home
 - Reduce the need for a high-cost residential care placement and/or support discharge home

Bury
Council



Bury Virtual School

Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher, 2022 - 2023



Artwork from the GCSE Art portfolio of a Bury young person in care



Report prepared by Gemma Parkes, Virtual School Headteacher
November 2023

Contents

Section	Page
1. Executive Summary	1-2
2. Introduction from the Virtual School Headteacher	2-3
3. 2022 – 23 at a Glance	4
4. The Virtual School Model	5
5. Children in Care Characteristics	6-8
6. Supporting Teaching and Learning	8-9
7. Supporting Children and Young People with SEND	9-11
8. Personal Education Plans	11-12
9. Pupil Premium Plus strategy statement 2023	12-14
10. Supporting Stability for our Children and Young People	14-15
11. Training in 2022 – 23	15-16
12. Pupil Voice	17-18
13. Supporting Education, Employment and Training for our Post-16 young people	18-20
14. School Attendance and Exclusions	20-22
15. The Virtual School’s extension to role for children with a social worker (new duties)	22-23
16. Previously looked-after children	23
17. What are we going to do next? 2023 – 24 priorities	24
Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms	25
Appendix 2: Education Attainment Outcomes	26-28
Appendix 3: The Bury Virtual School Team	29

1. Executive Summary

This report details and evaluates the work of Bury Virtual School from September 2022 to August 2024 and to set out our key priorities for the academic year 2023-24. We also share the educational outcomes of the cohort.

All local authorities in England must appoint a Virtual School Headteacher. This person’s statutory duties are set out in the 2018 legislation “Promoting the Education of Looked-after Children and Previously Looked-after Children”. The Virtual School Headteacher works to promote the educational achievement of the children in care to that local authority, wherever they live or are educated. In Bury, we have a Virtual School team who support the Headteacher in fulfilling these duties.

Bury Virtual School supports children and young people in care between the ages of 2 and 18. We monitor them as if they are a single cohort of children – a “virtual school.”

We also provide advice, guidance and support to professionals and parents/guardians of previously looked-after children, such as those who are adopted or on Special Guardianship Orders. In addition, we have a non-statutory duty to oversee the education of children who have a social worker (Child in Need/Child Protection) or have had one in the previous six years. This extended duty came in force in September 2021.

We have a clear focus on raising educational aspirations, closing the attainment gap between our children and their peers and being ambitious, proactive corporate parents. We do not replace the schools which our children attend and they are responsible for improving the rates of progress and educational outcomes of children in care

on their roll, but via the effective use of data, targeting of advice and guidance and monitoring of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process, the Virtual School holds schools to account in relation to the following:

- the educational provision in place for our children
- aspirations for their outcomes
- setting and reviewing of high-quality SMART targets on their Personal Education Plans (PEPs)
- use of the Pupil Premium Plus Grant
- attendance
- reduction of suspensions and the need to find alternatives to permanent exclusions

The Virtual School sits within the Bury Education Directorate. The Virtual School Head is line-managed by the Director of Education and Skills. We are accountable to the Corporate Parenting Board and in addition, we have established a Virtual School Governing Board to provide additional support and challenge to our work.

2. Introduction from the Virtual School Headteacher

September 2022 saw increased hope of a return to normality for our children, following two years of disrupted education as a result of the pandemic. For the Virtual School team, it was a time of excitement for us as our team expanded to include new roles: our SEND Lead, Joanne Foster, and PEP Officer, Jamila Shahzad, both joined us, followed by Lead for Children with a Social Worker (CP/CIN) Catherine Riley, Inclusion Advisor Lauren Warburton and part-time Speech and Language Therapist Sarah-Jayne Smith in January 2023. The expanded team has given us much more capacity to support our children and young people's education as well as the professionals we work with, and 2022-23 saw several "firsts" for the Virtual School, including individual quality assurance feedback for every PEP, quality assurance visits to special schools and alternative provisions and an expanded training and development offer, culminating in our first-ever Virtual School Conference in July 2023, attended by over 120 school and social care colleagues across the local authority.

We have made good progress in many areas in achieving what we said we would in our Virtual School Development Plan for 2022-23:

- Our PEPs are now individually Quality Assured and compliance has improved to 98% overall
- Our GCSE outcomes exceeded 2019 national pass rates for CLA
- 17% of young people are accessing Level 3 courses, above our target of 15%
- 87% of our 16-17 year olds are in education, employment or training as of September 2023, our best-ever rate of EET for the cohort
- Our Alternative Provision Quality Assurance processes have now been embedded
- Our KS1 and Phonics outcomes are strong

Attendance remains an ongoing priority for the Virtual School; rates for our cohort have not returned to pre-pandemic levels, which reflects the national picture for school attendance. Our focus in 2023 – 24 is on multi-agency working with our colleagues in the LA Attendance Service, Children's Social Care, SEND teams, schools, foster carers and residential placements to address this, based on the principles set out in the Department for Education guidance "Working together to improve school attendance" that attendance is a shared responsibility.

The new duty for Virtual Schools to promote the education of children who have, or have previously had, a social worker was introduced from September 2021 and 2022-23 saw us make real progress in this area, once Catherine and Lauren joined our team. Using our experience of knowing what works in education for children in care, and our existing strong relationships with social care and schools, we have begun to make real strides in driving this cultural change that will in time have a positive impact on education outcomes for this very vulnerable group of learners.

Updated Department for Education guidance relating to school attendance, suspensions and exclusions has raised the profile of the Virtual School and had a positive impact in terms of joint working to promote positive outcomes

for our children. We were able to work closely with schools to avoid any Bury child in care from being permanently excluded in 2022-23, with 14 children and schools receiving intensive support from the Virtual School to avoid a permanent exclusion for a Bury CLA. There is still work to be done to reduce the rate of suspensions for our cohort, but it is extremely encouraging that 84% of all Bury's maintained schools and academies have accessed the Virtual School training offer. 87% of our secondary schools and 49% of our primaries have now completed additional CPD and have a trauma-informed specialist holding practitioner status on their staff as part of our trauma-informed training programme. Our aspiration is for all our schools to be attachment-aware and trauma informed to help them meet the needs of all children who have had a social worker.

2023 saw some fantastic academic results for many of our children and there are some wonderful success stories. We fully utilised the National Tutoring Programme's school-led tutoring grant, and can see the impact in the progress many of our children made this year. We are not yet fully back on track post-pandemic, as is reflected in our attendance and persistent absence statistics. However, we are making good progress with an expanded team, forensic use of attainment and attendance data to inform priorities, and relentless commitment to securing excellence in education for all our children and young people. We want them to be supported to progress on to the academic or vocational pathway that's right for them when they leave school, and we aspire to be the best corporate parents we can. Our key question we always ask ourselves is, "would this be good enough for my own child?" We want the very best for our young people, and we want them to tell us we are doing a good job and they can see the impact of our work. With those key principles held firmly at the forefront of our work, we look forward to another exciting year in 2023-24.

Throughout this report, you will read examples of good practice to illustrate the work we have done with our children and young people. All names have been changed, but the details of their stories have not been altered.

Gemma Parkes

**Bury Virtual School Headteacher
November 2023**

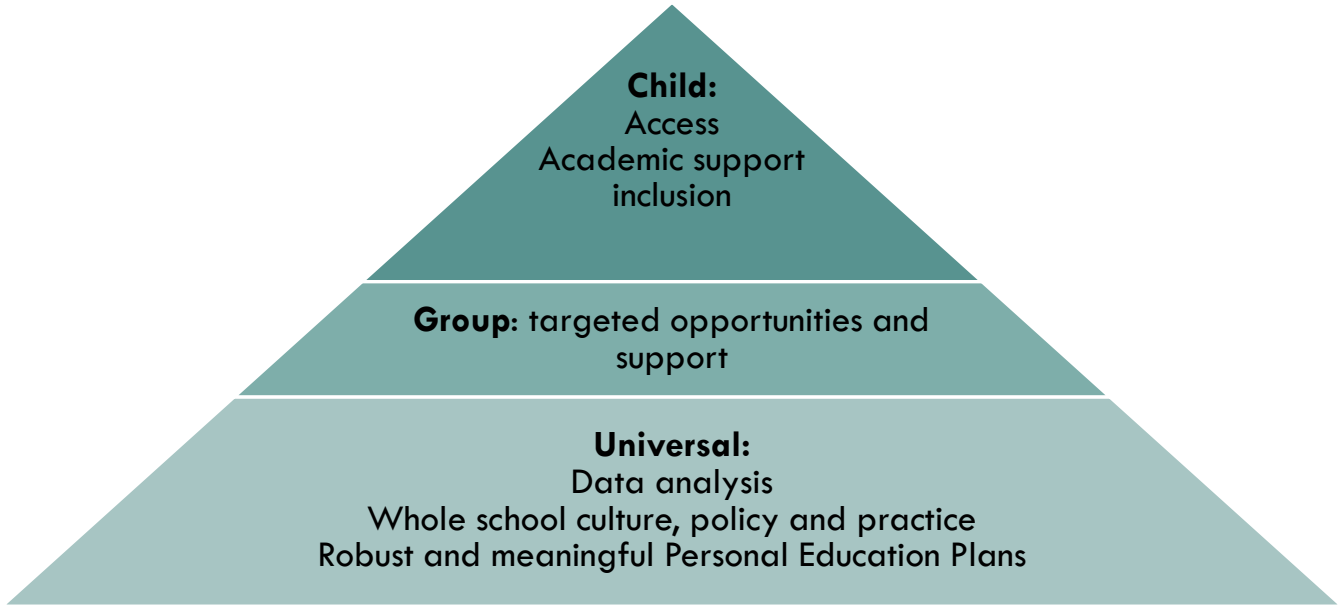
3. 2022-23 at a Glance

Good	Improving	Not yet good enough
<p>No permanent exclusions for children in care for the second consecutive year</p> <p>75% of Bury's children in care now attend schools rated Good or better by Ofsted, an increase from 61% in 2021-22</p> <p>PEP completion rate was 98% in 2022-23 (up from 96% in 2021-22)</p> <p>Young people (school leavers) in education, training or employment aged 16 in September 2023: 87%</p> <p>Young people progressing into further education at college aged 16: 72%</p> <p>Children missing in education in 2022-23: 0</p> <p>GCSE outcomes are above national for CLA</p> <p>Children working at Age-Related Expectations in Phonics and KS1</p> <p>Support provided for children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs via the dedicated VS Speech and Language Therapist</p> <p>Access to Educational Psychology services via VS commissioning</p>	<p>Bury schools' uptake of our training offer</p> <p>Achievement at Key Stage 4</p> <p>PEP quality over time</p> <p>Analysis of attainment and progress data for all children Reception -Y11, every term</p>	<p>Overall school absence rates</p> <p>Persistent absence rates</p> <p>11% of children attend schools which are rated Requires Improvement by Ofsted</p> <p>11% of children had a school move in academic year 2022-23</p> <p>Number of PEPs quality assured as Good/Green</p> <p>Number of children who were suspended from school</p> <p>Outcomes for children at KS2</p>

4. The Virtual School Model

All schools in Bury, whether or not they have CLA currently on roll, can access our training offer to support attachment-aware and trauma-informed practice. All CLA are closely monitored in terms of attendance, exclusions, attainment and progress.

This analysis informs targeted opportunities for support for some of our children. At an individual level, we put in a very high level of support for children in crisis, without a school place or where there is other significant need.

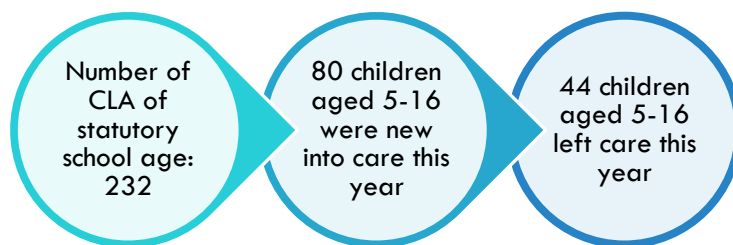


Our Guiding Principles

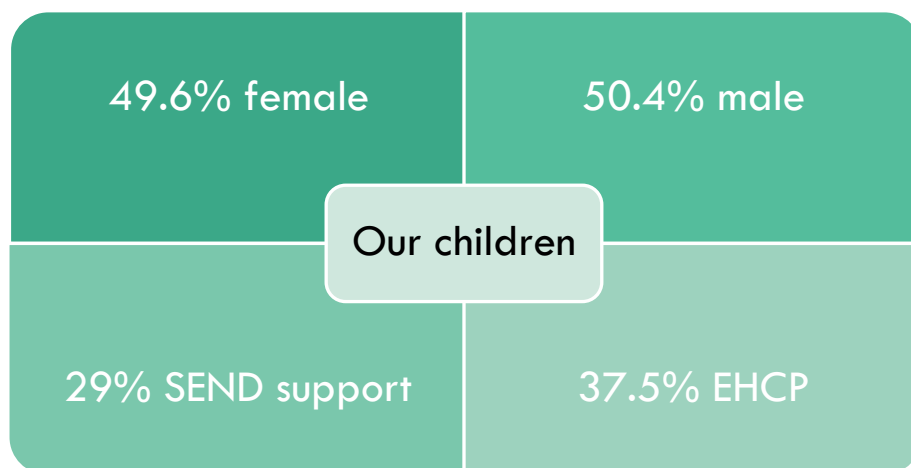


5. Children in Care Characteristics

Pupil characteristics of the children aged 5 – 16 years in Bury’s Virtual School as of 31st August 2023

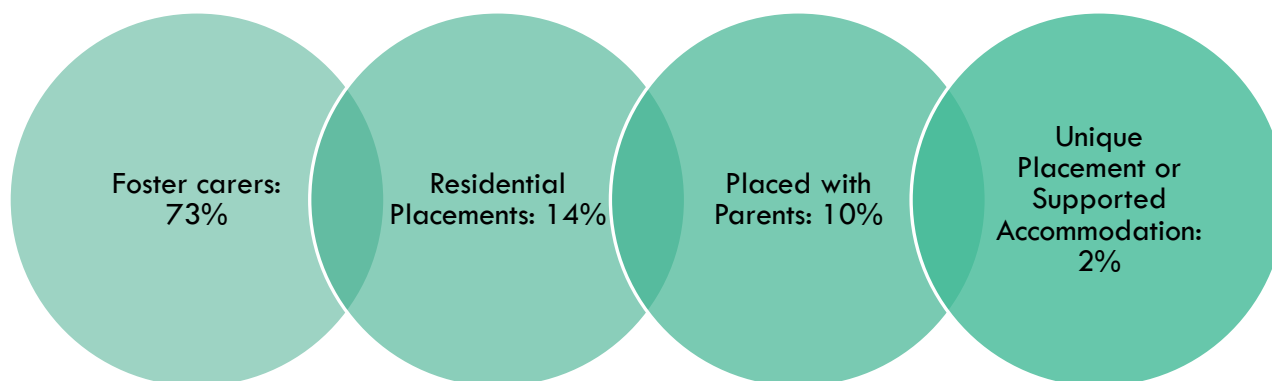


There is a high level of fluidity within our cohort, with children coming into care and leaving care throughout the year. All Virtual School officers receive this information via Children’s Social Care to enable prompt education planning for children as soon as they come into care.

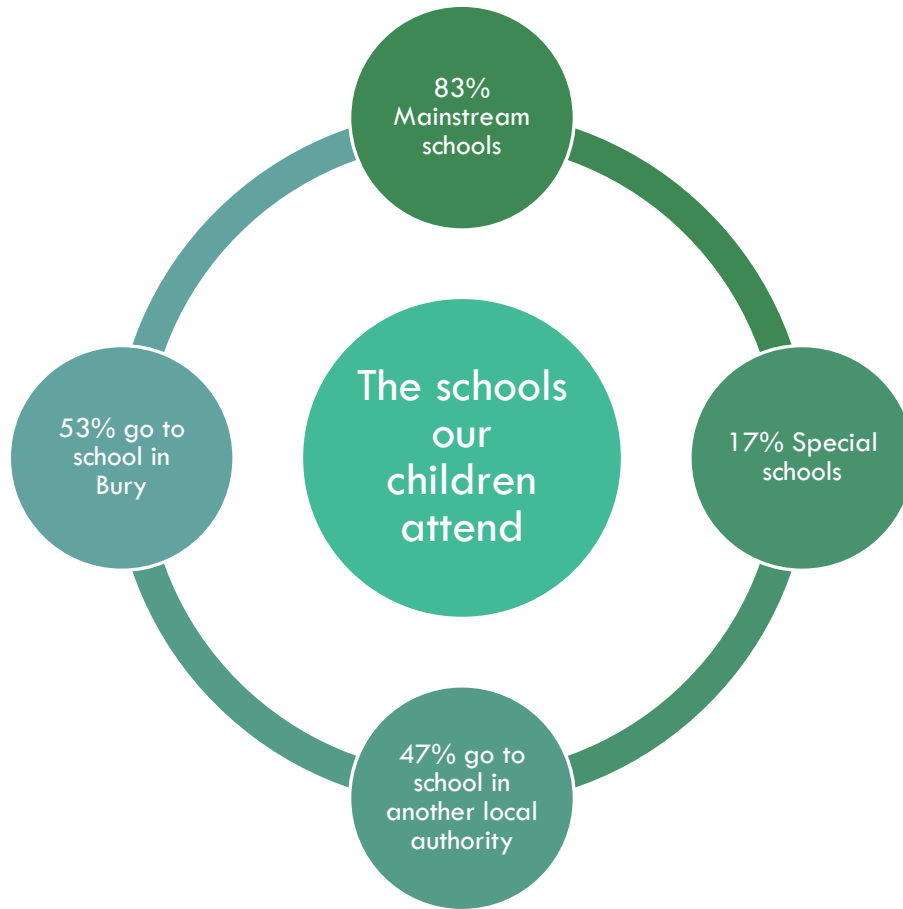


66.5% of our children overall have SEND. Nationally, 27.2% of CLA who have been in care for more than 12 months are at SEN support level, and 30.2% of CLA in care for more than 12 months have an EHCP. The most common Special Educational Need for our children is Social, Emotional and Mental Health.

The homes our children live in:



Children who live in residential placements or who are placed at home with their parents are at higher risk of persistent absence from school, so we monitor these cohorts particularly closely and they are prioritised for Virtual School Officer attendance at PEPs.



Year group breakdown as of 31.08.23

Year Group	Number of children
Reception	15
Year 1	12
Year 2	8
Year 3	12
Year 4	23
Year 5	16
Year 6	19
Year 7	15
Year 8	22
Year 9	28
Year 10	26
Year 11	36
Total	232

55% of our cohort are secondary-aged, and 45% are primary-aged. This reflects young people who come into care as older children and teenagers, and others who leave care at a younger age.

16-17 year olds as of September 2023:	Year 12:	Year 13:
81	40	41

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC): we have 13 UASC in Bury. Typically UASC are 15-17 years old when they arrive with us. If they are statutory school age, we support them into education by ensuring they are on a school roll and offering additional English tuition. If they are post-16, they typically enrol on an ESOL course at college.

Ofsted ratings of schools our children attend

Good or better	75%
Requires Improvement	11%
Inadequate or no rating	14%

The majority of the schools with inadequate/no rating have no rating due to academy conversion status. We never place children in care in schools rated Inadequate; last year a very small number of children were in 2 schools which went from a historic Good or Outstanding judgement to Inadequate. These were evaluated on a case-by-case basis and due to the children being happy and settled in school we did not automatically move them solely due to their school's change in Ofsted status. The Virtual School attends all PEPs for these children to provide additional scrutiny and undertakes an additional visit to the school throughout the academic year.

6. Supporting Teaching and Learning

Please see Appendix 1 for detailed information for all our 2023 attainment outcomes.

We are very proud corporate parents for our children and we have some wonderful success stories this year in terms of their individual outcomes and progression to the next phase of their education or training. Due to the alteration in grade boundaries in 2023 to pre-pandemic levels, pass rates should be compared to 2019 national data. In 2023, 23% of our qualifying cohort passed English and Maths at grade 4 and above, considerably above the 2019 national rate for CLA of 18%; 10% achieved 5 and above in both subjects, again above the 2019 national CLA rate of 7%. Our provisional Progress 8 score is -1.24 for the qualifying cohort; the 2022 national Progress 8 score for CLA in care for more than 12 months was -1.3, so we have exceeded this.

We also saw some pleasing results in our primary cohort, with 35% of our children in Reception achieving a Good Level of Development, 67% of our qualifying cohort in Year 1 working at age-related expectations in Phonics and 57% of our children in Year 2 working at age-related expectations in Reading, Writing and Maths. We saw a dip in performance in the KS2 tests taken by our Year 6, with 18% of the cohort working at age-related expectations in Reading, Writing and Maths. However, this was a year group with a particularly large number of children with SEND, which has affected the results. 71% of the cohort have SEND, with 60% in total having EHCPs. 30% of the cohort are on roll at special schools. Not all our children were entered for the tests as it was not appropriate for their individual needs; of those who did sit the tests, 23% achieved age-related expectations in Reading, Writing and Maths. 67% of our children with no SEND achieved this measure.

We fully utilised the National Tutoring Programme’s school-led tutoring funding in 2022-23 to support our children’s learning, and we also worked with other agencies to raise their aspirations; projects such as Success4Life and First Star Scholars which encourage care-experienced young people to aspire to Higher Education, and agencies such as Power2, who provide specialist mentoring for disadvantaged young people to raise their aspirations and promote positive attendance and engagement with school.

We continued our programme of visits to universities with our young people, offering these to Year 10 and above. Our Learning Mentor and Post-16 EET Lead accompanied them on bespoke visits to tour campuses, find out about particular courses they are interested in and meet university staff who could inform them about financial and pastoral support available to them. The destinations of our school leavers into further education demonstrates that we are providing good support to ensure appropriate pathways are in place for our post-16 young people.

The Virtual School team reviews attainment and progress data for the whole cohort of school-aged children from Reception – Year 11, every term. This analysis is used to prioritise children for interventions and targeted use of PPG, as well as to prioritise Virtual School officer attendance at PEP meetings. We also track all use of part-time timetables and Alternative Provision and this is reviewed and monitored regularly.

Working with agencies to promote aspiration: Louis is in Year 11 and has been supported by the Virtual School to take part in the First Star Scholars and Youth Leads programmes, both national schemes to promote aspiration in care-experienced young people and encourage them to apply to Higher Education in future. Louis has really enjoyed the programmes and they have hugely helped his confidence; he intends to apply to Oxbridge and aspires to complete a PhD in Astrophysics.

7. Supporting Children and Young People with SEND: Joanne Foster, Virtual School SEND Lead

I am responsible for overseeing the children with SEND within our cohort. I support and challenge schools to be proactive using Bury’s Graduated Approach and completing Assess Plan Do Review cycles to ensure that children with SEND are receiving their entitlement for education, alongside reasonable adjustments set out in the guidance of the SEN Code of Practice. I support schools and social workers with EHCP needs assessments and have very close oversight of our children who are placed out-of-borough, working with SEND teams in the LAs they are placed in to avoid drift and delay in securing them education.

I am very proud of a particular case I worked on last year for a Year 3 boy who was in a mainstream setting but hadn’t actually had a full time educational offer for over two years! The primary school were doing everything in their power to keep him at the school but his needs were too complex. I called an interim annual review with the LA, and all parties agreed that a specialist provision would be better for him. He is now in a specialist provision and he has attended every day, all day for the first time in 2 years! He is happy and he has friends (something he never had in mainstream). He has already improved his attainment outcomes in 5 weeks of being at the new school, and the staff sing his praises daily. A real success story for the child!

I am proud of my achievements over the last year, including completing my Trauma Informed Schools’ UK Diploma with a Distinction. I am proud of the Educational Psychologist strategy I have implemented as we are working really closely with an excellent provider; the reports are some of the best reports I have seen in my 22 years in education. I am proud of all the training I have delivered and received amazing feedback, so much so schools and parents want me back for more!

A summary of my main duties:

- Creating and updating the SEND Register for the Virtual School.

- Creating and updating the Alternative Provision Register
- Assisting schools and social workers with EHCP applications
- Supporting EHCP Annual Reviews
- Meeting fortnightly with the SEN team manager to ensure the right provision is in place for our young people and avoid drift and delay in their education.
- Help find specialist provisions for children who are not in mainstream schools.
- Quality Assure the Alternative Provisions that our children attend and ensure this intervention is reviewed regularly.
- Ensure school attendance of children with SEND is monitored and evaluated and appropriate interventions are in place.
- Ensure progress of children with SEND is as good as it can possibly be for the individual child.
- Delivering a wide range of SEND training to colleagues, schools, parents and other stakeholders.
- Completing the SEND information report each year.
- Commissioning and facilitating Educational Psychology consultations for our children
- Working with the Bury Educational Psychology Service to provide training/1:1 work with children.
- Attend and deliver at the SENCO 2 SENCO networking meetings at Elms Bank special school
- Providing xeam concessions/invigilation training to all stakeholders.
- Ensuring we have close working relationships with the SEND teams in our neighbouring LAs such as Oldham, Rochdale, Bolton and Lancashire.
- 1:1 assessments to help identify areas of need for SEND with our children, such as processing speeds.
- Participation in the North West Cluster of SEND Virtual Schools group.
- Helping children with SEND who are NEET post-16 to secure appropriate provision.
- Attend the Partnership meetings for both primary and secondary schools within the LA.

Key priorities for this year:

- Continue with the Educational Psychology strategy.
- Continue to reach more Stakeholders with our training and CPD offer.
- Embed the Quality Assurance strategy for Alternative Provision.

Securing the right provision: Beth was in a mainstream school which couldn't meet her needs and she was frequently suspended. The Virtual School worked with the school to implement the Graduated Approach, using Pupil Premium funding to increase the support for Beth via mentoring, counselling and tuition. While this helped to prevent Beth from being permanently excluded, it was clear that she needed more intensive support than a mainstream school could provide. The Virtual School worked with her school and social worker to secure an EHCP for Beth and ensured that consultations were sent to special schools which could meet her needs. Beth is now in an specialist SEMH school where she is thriving, making good progress and has had no suspensions. She reports how much she loves school.

Focus on Speech and Language Therapy: Sarah-Jayne Smith, Specialist Speech and Language Therapist (SALT)

I have been part of the Virtual School team since January 2023. This role was a new and exciting addition to the team. Processes needed to be rapidly established for the role of SALT to work effectively, efficiently, and ethically.

I devised a process for consent and established a process for prioritising children/young people to be seen for assessment. A lot of work went in to organizing and planning whilst establishing relationships with the VS Team and

the schools I was working with. There was a lot of learning, adapting, and changing of the processes to ensure the service provided was equitable and efficient.

Starting with a blank page was both exciting and scary. I'm proud that the SALT addition to the Virtual School has been successful. I'm looking forward to auditing the year 23-24 to establish the impact of SALT as part of the Virtual School.

Feedback from the schools I have worked with has been good. They have embraced SALT diagnosis and actively contributed to discussions around Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) and have valued the input from SALT to support the needs of the children/young people they support.

Priorities for 2023 - 24

Most of the processes are in place now for my role to work effectively within the team. The vision for this next school year is to work collaboratively with the children/young people, their families, SENCOs, Social Workers, Schools, and Medical Professionals to support the Virtual School cohort to access education at an appropriate level whilst supporting them to work towards their own aspirations.

I will administer assessments and provided diagnosis for speech, language, communication and SEMH where appropriate.

I will provide care plans and review progress in collaboration with key workers and communication partners.

I will attend PEP meetings and provide reports to support individual needs for the child/young person, their family, and the school/setting.

I will liaise with medical teams as part of an MDT approach to support differential diagnosis including ASC, ADHD and FASD where appropriate.

Throughout this academic year I am hoping to attend further training that will contribute toward me becoming an Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) accredited practitioner. This will positively impact on the work that I currently do, and support onward referrals required for some of the children/young people that we support.

8. Personal Education Plans: Jamila Shahzad, Virtual School PEP Officer

I started in post as the Virtual School's PEP Officer in September 2022. My role oversees the administration of PEPs, their Quality Assurance and liaising with the Finance team to ensure prompt payments of the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) to schools following a satisfactory PEP for the child.

In 2022-23 we revised and updated our Personal Education Plan (PEP) document, expanding the section for our children and young people to share their wishes and feelings and improving the Targets section to ensure that all targets set the previous term are reviewed to assess progress. Our PEP completion rate was excellent, with 98% of PEPs completed each term.

I am proud that since coming into post I have put systems in place to collate all PEP data, tracking which PEPs have been held, who attended the PEPs, which schools consistently have good or poor PEPs and PPG spend. This system identifies which schools need further training on submitting a good PEP. We can also track children who are attending Alternative Provision via their PEPs to ensure our records are accurate.

We have also set up a system of individual Quality Assurance so that every PEP is now rated using a traffic light system of Red, Amber or Green, and we award a Gold rating to exceptional PEPs. Schools and social workers

receive individual feedback following QA, to identify how they need to improve PEPs if they have been rated Amber or Red. If a PEP is Red, it is sent back to the school and they are asked to improve it, with appropriate support from the Virtual School. In the Summer term when this scheme was embedded, 55% of PEPs were rated Green, 38% Amber and 7% were Red. The most usual reason for Red PEPs is missing voice of the young person or lack of attendance by the social worker; either of these will result in an automatic Red status for a PEP.

Our priorities for 2023-24 are to further streamline our QA process and to ensure compliance with Virtual School and statutory timescales. I also plan to hold termly PEP training sessions for social workers and schools so we can have consistently high quality PEPs in place for our children.

Improving practice: a school submitted a PEP with targets which were not detailed or SMART, including one which stated “improve reading age”. Following feedback and support from the Virtual School, the school improved the PEP so that the target was written in a SMART way: “Kirsty’s reading age will improve from 6 years to 7 years 4 months by her next PEP, via 1:1 literacy intervention.” The PEP gave further details about the interventions and PPG costings, allowing all professionals to be able to accurately assess Kirsty’s progress over time.

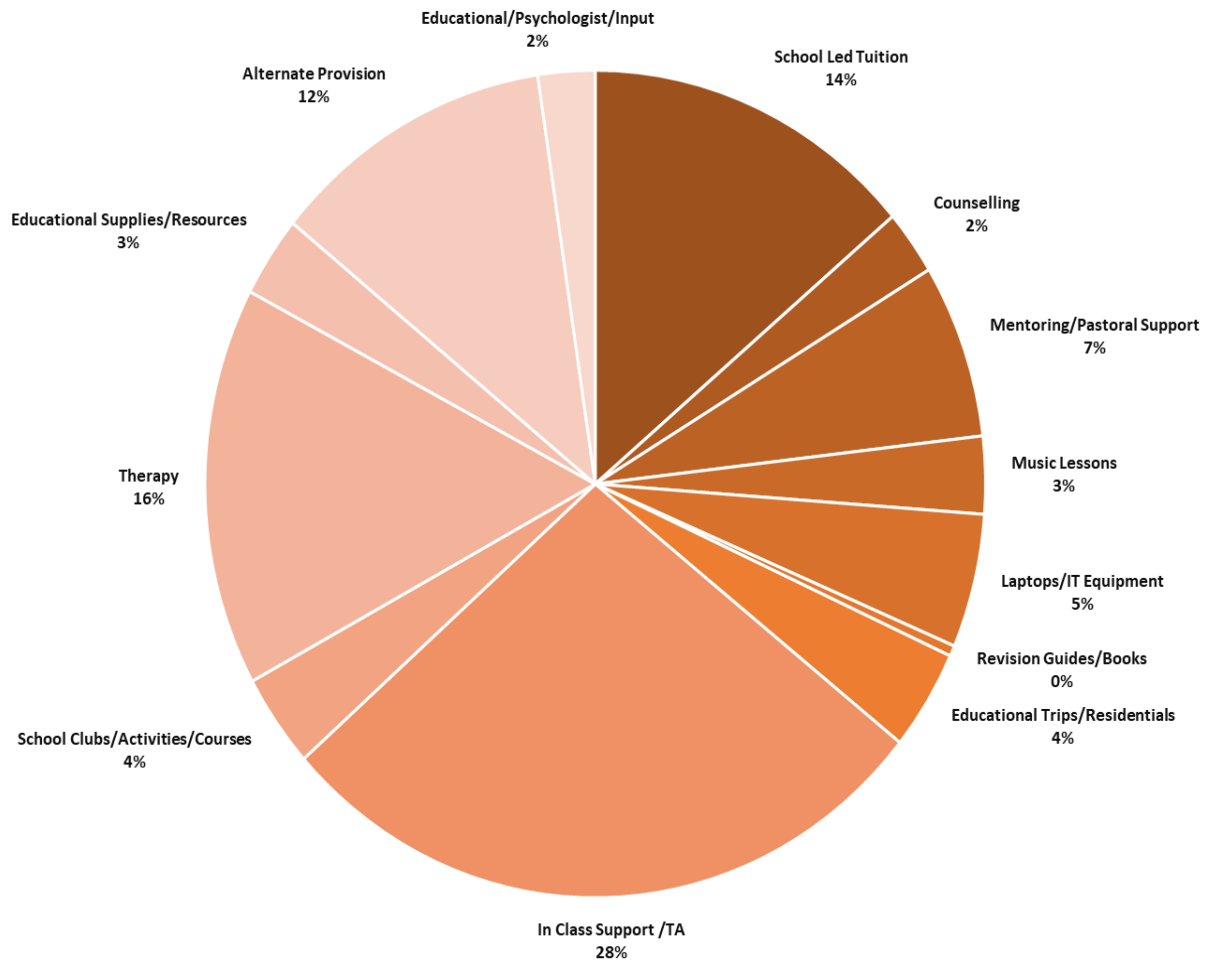
9. Pupil Premium Plus strategy statement 2023

The Pupil Premium Plus Grant (PPG) is allocated to the Virtual School Headteacher in each financial year, to be spent to improve the educational progress and outcomes for children in care in the local authority. In financial year 2022-23 the amount of PPG we received per child in care was £2410 per child of statutory school age.

The Conditions of Grant for Pupil Premium state that funding for CLA should be managed by the Virtual School Head. This means that Bury Virtual School is responsible for monitoring the use of this funding and ensuring that the money makes a real difference to the individual children looked after by Bury Local Authority. PPG for CLA cannot be carried forward into a new financial year and must be spent before the end of March or returned to the Department for Education. Therefore, this budget requires careful management.

In common with many other Virtual Schools, we top-slice our PPG and retain £610 per child centrally. The rest is reserved for schools, who can request up to £600 per term (£1800 per year) to support the education progress and attainment of their children. Specific needs might be additional tuition, music lessons, participation in a school residential trip or they might need access to the support of a Teaching Assistant. Funding which is devolved to schools should provide “over and above” their standard offer to all children. Schools must cost the interventions and resources they wish to purchase with PPG on the child’s PEP document, linked to a target which is SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely). The funding is only released on receipt of a good quality PEP, completed within expected timescales with clear details of use and impact of PPG funding linked to identified needs and subsequent interventions. Schools must cost the required interventions and they must be linked to the child’s targets.

The pie chart below shows what schools spent their PPG on in academic year 2022 – 23:



This does not include tuition which the Virtual School commissioned directly for our children.

The PPG which the Virtual School holds centrally is spent on the following:

- Alternative Provision and tuition to support children temporarily without a school place (eg following a placement move) or who are at risk of exclusion
- Educational Psychology and Speech and Language Therapy for our children
- IT equipment such as laptops
- Literacy resources such as the Booktrust Letterbox Club scheme
- Holiday activities such as Art Workshops
- A contribution towards the staffing costs of the Virtual School team

In addition, during the 2022-23 academic year, the following grants were received from the Department for Education and devolved to the schools and accounted for by the schools, through the PEPs:

- Recovery Premium Grant, to be used for the benefit of our children’s educational needs as described in their PEP
- The National Tutoring Programme’s School-Led Tutoring Grant, to help close the education gap which widened as a result of COVID-19. The grant provided was calculated to cover 60% of the cost of tuition and the Virtual School was required to contribute the remaining 40% from the Pupil Premium Plus funding. We fully utilised this grant and funded 1:1 tuition for over 120 of our children.

Examples of impact of spend of PPG

Year group	Target on PEP	PPG spend	Impact when target was reviewed
Reception	Harry will be able to blend 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and CVC words accurately	Daily 10 minute intervention plus additional phonics resources to use at home	This has been achieved as evidenced by Harry's latest reading assessment
Year 4	To be able to accurately recall times tables to 12.	1:1 Maths intervention, 10 mins daily, plus use of TT Rockstars	Rebecca's speed with her times tables has increased and she is much more confident with basic multiplication decimals. These skills are not yet embedded so this intervention will continue.
Year 7	Rachel's reading age to improve from 8 years and 4 months to at least 9 years by her next PEP	Literacy intervention in school: 20 mins x 3 times per week. Additional reading books to read at home with a reading age of 9 and above, chosen to match Rachel's interests with her input	Improved reading age by 13 months from September 2022 to May 2023
Year 11	Lucy's English grade is currently a 3. It will improve by at least 1 grade by her next PEP	1:1 tuition in English, 1 hour per week for 12 weeks	Lucy has made excellent progress as shown in her recent mock and is now working at grade 4

Use of National Tutoring Programme funding: Rosie was in Y11 at an out-of-borough school. Her GCSE target grades were 4s for English and Maths, but school identified that she was working at grade 3 for both subjects. The Virtual School used a combination of National Teaching Programme and Pupil Premium funding to identify appropriate tutors for Rosie and she had weekly 1:1 lessons. Rosie's feedback in her final school PEP was that this was really beneficial for her and she went on to achieve a grade 4 in Maths and a grade 5 in English and successfully progress to college.

10. Supporting Stability for our Children and Young People

Our mission is to improve stability in school places. Children in care have all experienced trauma; separation from birth family, experience of abuse or neglect and attachment disorders can all mean that they feel an internalised sense of rejection and shame which can result in an inability to self-regulate or to feel safe in school. Being in a constant state of fight-flight-freeze is all too often the reality for our children, and this can lead to them showing their trauma via extremely challenging behaviour. This puts them at risk of poor attendance, suspension and even permanent exclusion – all of which further increase their feelings of rejection. The more we can do to stabilise their education placements, the better their outcomes.

The Virtual School is involved in the local authorities' strategic planning for permanence and stability for our children and members of the team sit on the following Panels:

- Fostering Panel
- Adoption Panel

- Long-term Permanence Panel
- Legal Gateway Planning

We ensure that educational stability is a key part of permanence planning for children. 35 of our children had in-year school moves last year; this number is still too high. In some cases it is unavoidable, for example if a child moves a substantial distance away and would not be able to travel to school, or if they need to move to a special school which can better meet their needs. However, there were some heroic efforts to keep school stability for our children, such as a Year 11 who moved 70 miles away – her placement made the 90 minute journey with her to school every day in order to avoid disruption to her education at that crucial stage.

Focus on Learning Mentor Support: Deb Vine

I have been part of the Virtual School team since July 2012. My previous experience includes working in a high school in learning support and mentoring roles. I support our children and young people to overcome their barriers to learning and provide 1:1 support to help raise their academic attainment and achievement, particularly by promoting effective transition at KS2 and KS4.

In 2022 – 23, I offered enhanced transition support – during Year 6 and continued throughout the children’s transition to Year 7. The Year 6 children all received a transition pack with everything they needed to start at secondary school. Our Reception children also received a reading cushion and activity books as they started school in September. I oversee our praise and recognition scheme for our children and young people and send termly certificates to children who have made progress or achieved good attendance in school.

I support young people in Year 11 to prepare for their GCSE exams, often helping them to catch up with coursework and providing revision support sessions to teach strategies and help them plan their revision time, I often visit them in school and advocate for them where required, for example by working with teachers to ensure the right support is in place in lessons. Part of my role is taking our Y11s for visits to college and helping them to apply for places. I also support with bespoke university visits for our young people.

Since being awarded the Diploma in Trauma and Mental Health in 2022 I have improved my practice and been able to support schools in their approach in supporting our children. I have also completed training in Lego play and have put this into practice with 1:1 work with our children; it has proved to be a valuable resource in preparing our children for high school by enabling them to share their worries and concerns in a creative way. I am currently working with my colleague to expand our offer of Lego play sessions to our schools. We are hoping to start offering small-group sessions for children in care and children with a social worker from January 2024

Supporting school transitions: Will was in Y6 and had an EHCP. He was looking forward to moving to secondary school, but also nervous. Our Learning Mentor Deb did several 1:1 sessions with him, using Lego in a therapeutic way to explore his wishes, feelings and worries about moving to secondary school. Will used Lego to show what his hopes were for secondary school and also to explore his worries. Deb shared Will’s feedback with the Designated Teacher at his new secondary school so they could plan proactively for his transition. Deb then accompanied Will on several visits to his new school to meet key staff and visit his classrooms, and she continued to visit him in September to ensure he was settled. Will’s attendance in his first half term at secondary school was 98% and he voiced in his PEP meeting how much he was enjoying it, following his successful transition.

11. Training in 2022-23

We continued to deliver termly Designated Teacher forums this year, with guest speakers including Social Care Managers, colleagues from the Youth Service and our Educational Psychology team. In addition, we offered whole-school training for Bury schools on topics such as attachment, trauma, ADHD, autism and emotion coaching, and we

were also requested by schools to deliver training for parents and carers. We regularly attend LA SENCO networks and give advice regarding inclusive classrooms.

As part of our commitment to trauma-informed practice, we offered funded places on the 11-Day Level 5 Diploma in Trauma and Mental Health-informed Schools and Communities provided by Trauma-Informed Schools UK, for the second year. Feedback from delegates is hugely positive and we know that the skills they learn while completing this qualification are transformative in terms of the impact on children. We also funded training in use of Lego as a therapeutic intervention.

We provided training for Bury school governors on the role of the Virtual School and schools' statutory duties towards children in care and previously looked-after children, and we also provided training for Elected Members in the Council on inclusive practice in schools as part of our commitment to corporate parenting.

In 2023 - 24 we are continuing with the Diploma and have expanded our virtual training offer in conjunction with AC Education, who we have commissioned to offer a range of training sessions on topics including supporting children with unmet attachment needs, supporting previously looked-after children, creative spend of the Pupil Premium Grant and managing challenging behaviour. We are also funding ELKLAN training for schools to support children with speech, language and communication needs.

July 2023 saw our first-ever Virtual School Conference. Entitled ***Our Work Changes Lives: Supporting Children with Social Workers to Thrive in School*** we hosted a full day of guest speakers and workshops. Colleagues from East Ward Primary School and Parrenthorn Secondary School shared good practice to support children who have experienced trauma, our educational psychology team provided a workshop on supporting children with emotionally-based school avoidance and other workshops offered leadership coaching and restorative practice following suspension. Our keynote speaker was Jaz Ampaw-Farr, who is care-experienced and shared her incredibly powerful story of how her teacher and social worker changed her life for the better. It was a hugely successful day and we look forward to hosting our next large-scale event.

Delegate feedback from the Virtual School Conference 2023

“Jaz was a brilliant speaker, brought it back to the WHY of it all. Child-centred every step of the way. The speakers from schools had some useful tidbits that we can bring back to school. A really well rounded event.”

“Jaz really took our thoughts back to what we do, why we do it. She made me reflect on my own practice but also on my own wellbeing and home life - she really has impacted me - that’s from her speech and also from her group session in the afternoon. I have put some changes in already – it’s day one!”

“It was so nice to see so many familiar faces sharing common ground and sharing their passion for getting the best possible outcomes for our children. Jaz was amazing!”

“Great opportunity to hear and share great practice. Good to have the opportunity to engage with colleagues from a diverse range of services- social care, health, education. I have come away from the conference reinvigorated and feeling completely inspired by the work happening in our LA.”

“Thanks for such an amazing conference with confident and knowledgeable speakers. I particularly enjoyed the speakers using case studies within their presentations; these totally highlighted the passion and tenacity to safeguard our children and young people and made it real. I would like to highlight how much I enjoyed the input from the Virtual School team and the importance of monitoring attendance, being trauma informed and supporting vulnerable children. Jaz was amazing and in the light of what appears to be challenging times it was also very good to have humour injected into the day too, re-emphasizing why we do what we do!”

“I took something useful and inspiring from every speaker today. I came away feeling more knowledgeable about key statistics of children in local authority care, and I felt empowered hearing the success stories of exemplar practitioners locally. I shall be reaching out to Parrenthorn in the Autumn to find out more!”

“The best conference of the year!”

12. Pupil Voice

We are committed to ensuring that our children’s voices are heard and respected when planning for their education. In 2022 – 23 we improved the Pupil Voice section of our PEP document to give greater emphasis to the views of our children. We also conducted focused visits to schools to survey our children about our work. Of the children we surveyed:

- 75% knew what their PEP is
- 40% like to attend their PEP – the rest prefer to get feedback separately from their teacher or carer
- 90% were confident they could share their views before their PEP
- 70% could identify something positive that happened because of their PEP; examples they gave included tuition being arranged, Drama Therapy, laptops being provided, mentoring, being supported to get a place in college and being supported on transition visits to secondary school.
- 100% of our children surveyed could name a key adult in school who supports them

As part of the survey, we asked our children and young people to tell us what wider support or activities they would like the Virtual School to offer. They suggested theatre visits, Art classes, a residential trip and sports activities. We have implemented the sports and Art activities and are planning theatre trips this year.

You said, we did: examples of work completed in response to the wishes and feelings of our children

Pupil said: Hannah wanted to do some work experience which would support her aspirations to work in a nursery.

We did: We arranged for Hannah to take part in the Teens and Toddlers programme, which gave her 12 weeks of structured work experience in a nursery plus a Level 1 Employability qualification.

Pupil said: Michael wanted to know more about higher education options and the support available.

We did: we took Michael on a visit to a local university, where he had a tour and met student support officers who explained how care-experienced young people are supported. Michael felt really positive about higher education following this visit and is now studying A levels with aspirations to progress to university.

Pupil said: Jodie was really nervous about her GCSEs and worried about how she would manage her anxiety in the exam room.

We did: we worked with Jodie's school to put a support plan in place and ensure that she would be sitting in a separate room for her exams, staffed by key staff in school who she knew. Our Learning Mentor visited her regularly to provide additional revision support and guidance.

Pupil said: Mohammed arrived from overseas as an unaccompanied asylum seeker child. He aspired to be a doctor and wished to study appropriate qualifications at college, but college felt he needed to begin at Entry Level as he had no proof of prior qualifications from his home country.

We did: we obtained 1:1 tuition for Mohammed and fast-tracked him to sit Functional Skills as a private candidate. This allowed him to start college on a higher pathway.

Pupil said: Ryan expressed in his PEP that he would like to work with animals in the future.

We did: we funded a place for Ryan on the Animal Care Masterclass offered by a local Further Education college in October half term. Ryan learnt how to care for lots of different species and completed extension work which linked to his school's Science curriculum.

13. Supporting Education, Employment and Training for our Post-16 young people: Marion Düzgün, Virtual School Post-16 EET Lead

I have been in post since November 2021. The last 2 years have been very challenging but rewarding as this was a brand-new role for the Virtual School. I caseload approximately 80 young people aged 16- & 17-year-olds in years 12 and 13 and support with transition for our Year 11s.

Key duties:

- Work to reduce NEET figures, by offering 1:1 support to our young people with information, advice and guidance to access further education, employment, apprenticeship and training opportunities that meet their interests, aspirations and needs. Where needed I will support with visits to colleges, training

providers, universities and provide practical help such as writing CVs, helping with job applications and supporting with interview preparation

- Attend PEPs to support social workers, colleges and training providers with advice and guidance to ensure our young people are being supported to achieve qualifications, skills and to encourage their aspirations.
- Oversee the transition for our Year 11 into Post 16 education, employment and training options to ensure they have an offer of education or training for Year 12. I liaise with colleges, Designated Teachers and providers of careers advice and guidance in schools.
- Oversee spending of Post-16 PPG funding and ensure it is in line with the conditions of grant from the DfE.
- Attend the monthly NEET Forum meeting with Leaving Care Team
- Attend regular Strategy meeting and Care Planning meetings for our post-16 cohort.
- Attend the half-termly Bury Foundation Operational Group with the LA 14-19 Team and local training providers to look at local provision.
- Attend the termly GM Care Experienced Education Network termly meeting.
- Attend the termly NW Post 16 Virtual School Subgroup.
- Attend monthly NAVSH UASC Focus Group meetings

What’s Working Well:

- Use of RAG traffic light system for the cohort to identify who is a priority for intervention
- NEET figures for 16-17yrs olds are the lowest-ever achieved (September 2023)
- I deploy a trauma-informed approach with our young people following completion of the Trauma Informed Diploma in 2022.
- Post-16 PPG funding has been excellent in supporting our young people individually, for example with tuition or mentoring.
- Good working relationships with Connexions careers service in Bury.
- Improving relationships with Designated Teachers, Pastoral Staff and PEP mentors at colleges. I have regular termly meeting with Bury and Bolton College to identify if any of our young people are struggling with attendance, attainment and behaviour and explore what support could be offered.
- Aspirational university visits for Yr11 & 12.
- Positive connections with lots of training providers and alternative provisions in the areas.

Next steps and key priorities for 2023 – 24:

- Improvement to post-16 PEP quality, in particular with regard to SMART targets
- Increased usage of national programmes such as Youth Leads UK
- Working with the newly-appointed Post-18 EET Lead for Care Leavers to ensure effective transition for our young people once they turn 18

Destinations of our young people, September 2023

Number of young people	College	Apprenticeship or Training Provider	Tuition as preparation for entry into college/ Apprenticeship	Employment	In custody	NEET seeking specific course	NEET other reason
81	52	8	3	7	1	6	4

Courses our young people are studying at College

Entry Level: 17 young people. Most of these are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children who are enrolled on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses upon arrival into the UK. A small number are young people with SEND who are enrolled on courses including Entry Level Motor Vehicles and Construction.

Level 1: 11 young people. Courses include Digital Media, Business, Art, ESOL and Construction.

Level 7: 8 young people. Courses include Childcare, Beauty Therapy, ICT, Culinary Skills, Health and Social Care, Art and Design and English and Maths GCSE resits.

Level 3: 17 young people. Courses include A levels (subjects including Psychology, Economics, Drama, Music, Geography, Theology, Business Studies, Biology, Criminology and Combined Science), BTECs in subjects such as Business Studies and Health and Social Care and Level 3 Diploma courses in subjects as varied as Game Design, Music Production, Equine Studies, Public Services, Travel and Tourism and Performing Arts, among others.

A number of our Care Leavers have progressed to university colleges this year, with courses including Fine Arts, Criminology and Professional Marketing and Business Development.

We are incredibly proud of our post-16 cohort, who are fulfilling their aspirations and looking forward to successful futures.

Decision making and pathway planning post-16: Paul left school at 16 with no qualifications and a history of poor attendance and engagement. He hadn't applied for college and was NEET (not in education, training or employment). The Virtual School post-16 EET Lead Marion built a positive relationship with Paul using a trauma-informed approach and obtained his wishes and feelings. Paul voiced that he was interested in exploring a career in the armed forces. Marion supported Paul to write a CV and arranged for some voluntary work for him to build his skills. She accompanied him to visit the Army Careers Service and referred Paul to UK Military Mentors, who worked 1:1 with Paul on mentoring, fitness and employability skills. Paul began to express an interest in wanting to learn new skills, so Marion arranged 1:1 tuition for him to work towards Entry Level qualifications in English and Maths. Paul is now enrolled full-time at a training provider where he is working towards Functional Skills and Employability qualifications and he is considering applying to Army College.

14. School Attendance and Exclusions

Locally generated data for 2022-23 shows the overall attendance of Bury CLA as 90.18%, which is an improvement on the previous academic year's figure of 88.17%. This figure is subject to change when reported by the DfE as only the qualifying cohort will be reported.

The attendance data below was supplied by IRIS Looked After Call. It includes children who were only in care for a short time during 2022-23.

Overall attendance: 90.18%

Primary: 96.00%

Secondary: 85.26%

By Year Group:

Reception	94.85
Year 1	96.43
Year 2	91.24
Year 3	96.51
Year 4	97.08
Year 5	95.08
Year 6	94.72
Year 7	91.16
Year 8	86.26
Year 9	85.58
Year 10	81.51
Year 11	84.35

EYFS	94.85
KS1	96.75
KS2	95.79
KS3	87.16
KS4	83.28

Attendance by cohort

In-borough mainstream	93.23
Out of borough mainstream	92.70
Special/specialist schools	78.91

Persistent Absence

Persistent Absence is defined by the Department for Education as attendance below 90%. In 2022-23, our persistent absence rate for our qualifying cohort (those in care for 12 months or more as of 31.03.2023) was 22.5%. The national rate of persistent absence for all children in 2022-23 was 22.3% according to the Department for Education’s statistics so this is broadly in line with this measure. Our persistent absence rate for all children, including those who were in care for a short time in the year, was 24.3%. This is an improvement on 2021-22 when our overall persistent absence rate was 30%, but it remains too high and is a key priority for the Virtual School team, in conjunction with our colleagues in Children’s Social Care and schools.

43% of the children who were persistently absent last year attended special schools or Pupil Referral Units; nationally, rates of persistent absence are much higher in these vulnerable cohorts than for children in mainstream schools. The majority of children and young people who were persistently absent attended PRUs or special schools, and nationally rates of persistent absence in these vulnerable cohorts are much higher than for children who attend mainstream schools. This reflects the complex circumstances and special educational needs of these children, which we certainly see in our own cohort. In addition, 41% of the persistently absent cohort were placed with parents, that is, had Care Orders in place but lived at home with their families, and 26% lived in children’s residential homes. Both placed with parents and children’s homes are known risk factors for persistent absence from school, as is demonstrated by the fact that 67% of our persistently absent cohort lived in one of these settings.

Attendance for the cohort is reviewed weekly and all children whose attendance is problematic are reviewed, with follow-up action and liaison with social workers and schools as required. The Virtual School Learning Mentor and

Inclusion Advisor provide 1:1 support for some children and PPG is used to commission mentoring, tuition and appropriate Alternative Provision if this is required. In 2023 – 24, we have established a monthly meeting with children’s social care team managers to review children whose attendance is a concern and ensure this is reviewed in social worker supervision. We also plan to commission a dedicated Attendance Officer from the Attendance team who will work with us for two days a week to support CLA with attendance concerns.

Exclusions

	2021-22	2022-23
Number of children receiving permanent exclusions	0	0
Number of children receiving suspensions	36 (13.5%)	28 (12.6%)

13 of the children who were suspended last year are now in different schools which can better meet their needs. The Virtual School has also worked closely with the SEND team to successfully apply for EHCPs for a number of these children, to further increase the support available to their schools.

15. The Virtual School’s Extension to Role: Children with a social worker (new duties)

We know that nationally, children with a social worker are some of the most disadvantaged children in England. They fall behind their peers who have not been known to social care in every educational measure: they have worse attendance, they are more likely to be excluded and their attainment and progress are much lower. Given that approximately 10% of all children in England will have a social worker at some point in their childhood, this is a significant cohort of children who are at huge risk of not fulfilling their potential.

Following the 2019 Children in Need review, in 2021 Virtual School Headteachers were tasked with being the national strategic leads to improve educational outcomes for this cohort. In Bury, this is approximately 700 children. To support this duty, Virtual Schools have been allocated a ring-fenced grant, which we have used to expand the team and give us the capacity to support this much larger cohort of children. In January 2023, we appointed our Lead for Children with a Social Worker, Catherine Riley, and Inclusion Advisor, Lauren Warburton. Catherine’s role is strategic and intended to build on the good practice we have established with regard to the education of our children in care. Lauren’s role involves direct work with this cohort of young people, as well as advice and support for professionals.

Catherine is currently on maternity leave but has already made significant progress in this area since being in post. She has worked to form close working relationships with social care colleagues and Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) in schools, both vital partners in improving outcomes for the cohort. Below is a summary of the strategic work she has established in Bury since being in post:

- Establishment of weekly drop-in surgery for social workers to discuss education concerns and queries
- Visits to schools to audit their support for children with a social worker and support with training
- Planning for an audit of CIN/CP plans to review the effectiveness of education planning and prioritisation
- Training delivered to social workers on the importance of school attendance
- Regular attendance and presentations at Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) forums
- Attendance at the North West Virtual School children with a social worker network meetings
- Production of advisory documents for social works and schools

- Attendance at several Panels in the LA, such as Education Access Board, Legal Gateway, Complex Safeguarding Team Partnership Meetings and Family Resource Panel
- Work to improve attendance data collection and analysis for this cohort in the LA

Role of the Inclusion Advisor: Lauren Warburton

I was appointed as the Virtual School Inclusion Advisor in January 2023. My role is to maintain and improve the attendance and attainment of young people in Bury who have a social worker (CIN/CP/CLA). My background has been in helping children and young people manage their emotional health and wellbeing, using mixed disciplines such as mindfulness, CBT, trauma informed practices and talking therapies.

I have used my experience to establish “The Wellbeing Pathway” in Bury, a dedicated pathway for professionals to book on to if they have concerns for a child or young person who has a social worker and who is struggling with their emotional health and wellbeing. They book a 1:1 consultation with me and following that the outcomes can include signposting appropriate services, targeted group work, bespoke recommendations and 1:1 weekly intervention from me for the young person. The feedback from professionals regarding The Wellbeing Pathway has been overwhelmingly positive and the children and young people that have benefitted have also given positive feedback and have demonstrated improved school attendance.

I have had lots of opportunities to join and help to shape different areas across children’s social care. I sit on the newly formed Family Resource Panel in partnership with the Youth Service so that children, young people and their families can access the right service for them. I attend the LA’s Emotional Health and Wellbeing Task & Finish group created in response to our young people’s views to help create easier access to Mental Health support in the borough. I have made great connections with schools across the LA and have been asked to deliver training to school staff and share information regarding my role and the Virtual School’s role as a whole.

Key priorities for the next year are to continue to promote the education, attendance, attainment and emotional health and wellbeing of our vulnerable young people. A main area of focus for me is to develop a range of group interventions such as exam stress, managing anxiety and bereavement and loss with the aim being to offer it to schools so that young people can better manage their emotions and progress.

16. Previously looked-after children

For children who were previously looked-after but left care via a formal route such as adoption or a Special Guardianship Order, the Virtual School’s duty is to provide advice and information to professionals and parents. We do not have corporate parenting responsibility for these children so do not do direct work with them or casehold, but we offer advice and guidance on all aspects of education and specific training for schools on supporting the needs of these children. Our intention in 2023 – 24 and beyond is to increase the training on Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder we offer to schools, in recognition of the probability that at least 70% of adopted children had prenatal alcohol exposure. We also want to improve our support to adoptive parents by offering more training via the Regional Adoption Agency.

17. What are we going to do next?

Improvement Plan headlines for 2023-24

Improvement Priority	Areas of focus
Improve attendance	Reduce persistent absence by increased multi-agency working Integrated working with the local authority Attendance Service Further training for social care, schools and foster carers Emphasis on school stability within permanence planning
Improved attainment and progress for our children	Focus on SMART, aspirational academic outcomes in PEPs and Quality Assurance of these Reduce suspensions and improve attendance Strategies to accelerate progress: tuition, mentoring, strategic use of PPG Supporting children into independent schools via routes such as the Springboard Foundation More training on Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder for schools Work with our Multi-Academy Trusts – establish termly meetings with CEOs to review KPIs for CLA across the Trust Termly meetings focusing on PEP data with Head of Service
Improved PEPs	Termly training offered to all stakeholders Schools with Red or Amber PEPs asked to complete mandatory training Annual quality assurance visits to schools with higher numbers of CLA on roll PEP training to be part of the core training for all new social workers
Improved working with foster carers	Increased training offer Mandatory education training for all newly approved foster carers Regular engagement events such as coffee mornings

Appendix 1: Glossary of terms used in this report

CIN: a child on a Child in Need Plan. A Child in Need is defined by the Children Act 1989 as a child who needs additional help and protection as a result of risks to their development or health. These children are supported by social workers.

CLA: a child who is looked-after by their local authority, who become their corporate parents. The legal term for our children is looked-after child or LAC, but we choose not to use this term in line with the wishes of our children. A child who has been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 ours is a looked-after child according to the legal definition.

CP: Child Protection. A child is placed on a CP Plan if they are at risk of significant harm, as set out in the Children Act 1989. They are supported by a social worker and a team of professionals.

DSL: Designated Safeguarding Lead. The teacher in a school who takes the lead responsibility for overseeing safeguarding in the school.

DT: Designated Teacher for children in care and previously looked-after children. It is statutory for all schools to have a Designated Teacher, whether they currently have children in care on roll or not.

EYFS: the Early Years Foundation Stage, which comprises the Nursery and Reception years.

EET: education, employment and/or training

EHCP: education, health and care plan

ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages – courses in ESOL are offered by many colleges

GLD: good level of development (outcome measured at the end of the EYFS when children are 5)

KS: Key Stage. Key Stages are split as follows:

Key Stage One: Years 1-2 (age 5-7)

Key Stage Two: Years 3-6 (age 7-11)

Key Stage Three: Years 7-9 (age 11-14)

Key Stage Four: Years 10-11 (age 14-16)

Key Stage 5: Years 12-13 (age 16-18)

NEET: not in education, employment and/or training

NAVSH: National Association of Virtual School Heads

PEP: Personal Education Plan. All CLA must have a PEP, which should be reviewed every term (three times per year).

PPG: the Pupil Premium Grant. This is a grant allocated to the Virtual School Headteacher to be spent on resources, interventions and support to improve educational attainment and progress for CLA.

Progress 8: shows the progress GCSE students have made from KS2, across 8 subjects. The average expected progress score is 0.

SEND: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

UASC: Unaccompanied asylum-seeking child

Appendix 2: 2023 Attainment Outcomes

Please note that all data used is provisional and unvalidated at this stage. All CLA includes all children in care 2022-23, including those who were in care for a short period of time or left care during the year. The “qualifying cohort” are those children who had been care for 12 months as of 31st March 2023. It is the qualifying cohort who are reported on nationally.

National data for 2023 is not yet available, so where appropriate 2022 national data has been included as a guide.

Primary School Data Headlines

Early Years Foundation Stage: children reaching a Good Level of Development

Bury CLA 2023: all	Bury qualifying cohort 2023	Bury CLA with SEND 2023	Bury CLA no SEND 2023	CLA national data 2022
35%	29%	0%	58%	41%

This was a small cohort and 6 children (33%) have SEND, and are not yet working at age related expectations. 3 are at special schools. 4 children with no identified SEND did not reach GLD; we have allocated additional PPG to all of them to support additional intervention.

Year One Phonics: children working at Age-Related Expectations

Bury CLA 2023: all	Bury qualifying cohort 2023	Bury CLA with SEND 2023	Bury CLA no SEND 2023	CLA national data 2022
64%	67%	50%	80%	58%

This was a small cohort of children, 11 in total. The children who did not pass the test are all receiving additional Phonics and Literacy support. Children who do not pass the test in Year 1 are entered again in Year 2. We have four CLA who did not pass the test in Year 2, last year. Of these, two have EHCPs and are on roll at special schools so are not working at this level. The two in mainstream are receiving additional literacy support and one has input from Speech and Language Therapy.

Key Stage One attainment

Children in Year 2 are assessed by their teachers in Reading, Writing, Maths and Science. They are assessed at working at pre-key stage, working towards the expected standard, working at the expected standard or working at greater depth for the expected standard.

Cohort	Reading: working at the expected standard	Writing: working at the expected standard	Maths: working at the expected standard	Reading, Writing and Maths at expected standard
Bury CLA 2023: all	75%	75%	63%	63%
Bury CLA 2023: qualifying cohort	71%	71%	57%	57%
Bury CLA with SEND 2023	50%	50%	50%	50%
Bury CLA no SEND 2023	100%	100%	75%	75%
CLA national data 2022	44%	44%	42%	29%

Key Stage Two attainment

Pupils in Year 6 are assessed in Reading and Maths via externally-marked tests, with an optional externally-marked Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling test. Their Writing is assessed via teacher assessment. Pupils are assessed as working towards the expected standard, working at the expected standard or working at greater depth. Some children with SEND are not entered for the tests.

Cohort	Reading: working at the expected standard	Writing: working at the expected standard	Maths: working at the expected standard	Reading, Writing and Maths at expected standard
Bury CLA 2023: all	38% (10% at Greater Depth)	29% (5% at Greater Depth)	29% (5% at Greater Depth)	18% (5% at Greater Depth in all areas)
Bury CLA 2023: qualifying cohort	33% (6% at Greater Depth)	29% (6% at Greater Depth)	29% (6% at Greater Depth)	17% (6% at Greater Depth in all areas)
Bury CLA with SEND 2023	27%	7%	0%	0%
Bury CLA no SEND 2023	67%	83%	100%	67%
CLA national data 2022	52%	42%	44%	32%

This was a cohort where 71% of the children had SEND, and as a result some did not sit the KS2 tests but still appear as working below age-related expectations in the reported data. 30% of these children are at special schools and following different curriculum pathways as appropriate to their needs. We are working closely with the mainstream secondary schools where we have children now in Year 7 who did not reach age-related expectations at KS2 to ensure that additional catch-up support is in place and 1:1 tuition where appropriate.

Attainment at Key Stage Four

GCSE grades from 2023 should not be compared to 2022, as the grade boundaries saw a return to pre-pandemic levels in 2023. They are more equivalent to 2019 and this measure has therefore been included for contextual information.

There were 36 CLA in Year 11 in 2023, 31 in the qualifying cohort. All of the qualifying cohort achieved at least one recognised qualification in Year 11. 21 young people (74%) were accessing mainstream school.

27 young people were entered for GCSE. 7 others who were at special schools worked towards Entry Level or Functional Skills as appropriate curriculum pathways. 2 young people were UASC, new into the UK; one achieved Entry Level qualifications, but the other was supported in school to learn basic English and numeracy. Both have now progressed on to post-16 ESOL courses at college.

	Average Attainment 8 score	Average Progress 8 score	English average progress score	Maths average progress score
Bury CLA 2023 (qualifying cohort)	21.3	-1.24	-1.50	-1.09
2022 CLA national	20.3	-1.30	Not available	Not available
2019 CLA national	19.1	-1.23	Not available	Not available

Attainment information

	% grade 9-4 in English	% grade 9-4 in Maths	% grade 9-4 in English and Maths	% 5 or more GCSEs grade 9-4 including English and Maths
2023 Bury: all CLA	31%	22%	19%	19%
2023 Bury: qualifying cohort	32%	26%	23%	23%
2019 Bury CLA	Not available	Not available	21%	Not available
2019 CLA national	Not available	Not available	18%	Not available

	% grade 9-5 in English	% grade 9-5 in Maths	% grade 9-5 in English and Maths
2023 Bury: all CLA	25%	8%	8%
2023 Bury: qualifying cohort	29%	13%	10%
2019 Bury CLA	33%	7%	7%
2019 CLA national	Not available	Not available	7%

We had several CLA with individual high grades; 5 young people achieved at least one GCSE at grade 6 or above.

5 young people in this cohort are NEET as of September 2023, but all are being supported by our post-16 EET Lead and each has an individual plan in place to support them into EET.

Appendix 3: the Virtual School team

Bury's Virtual School Headteacher is managed through the Education service and line-managed by the Director of Education and Skills. She is also a member of the Senior Leadership Team in Children's Services in the LA and attends the social care Extended Managers' Meetings. Bury's Virtual School is a member of the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH). The Virtual School Headteacher is a member of the Bury Association of Secondary Heads (BASH) and members of the team attend the Primary Inclusion Locality Meetings.

Position	Name
Virtual School Headteacher	Gemma Parkes
Advisory Teacher and PEP co-ordinator	Sarah Metcalfe
Advisory Teacher	Karen Riazzi
SEND Lead	Joanne Foster
Learning Mentor	Deb Vine
Post-16 EET Lead	Marion Duzgun
PEP Officer	Jamila Shahzad
Lead for Children with a Social Worker (CP/CIN)	Catherine Riley
Inclusion Advisor	Lauren Warburton
Speech and Language Therapist (2 days per week, term-time)	Sarah-Jayne Smith

SCRUTINY REPORT

**MEETING: Children's
Scrutiny Report**

**DATE: 16th January
2024**

**SUBJECT: Early Years
and School Readiness**

**REPORT FROM: Cllr
Lucy Smith**

**CONTACT OFFICER: Sandra Bruce- Assistant Director Early Help and School
Readiness**

1.0 BACKGROUND

This report provides information on the work undertaken in the Early Years services since the last report to Overview and Scrutiny, 12 months ago, in November 2022. The report outlines the progress we have made in building back our early years offer and the impact of this on our youngest children. The previous report is provided as an appendix for information.

This report provides updated information on,

- Reshape of the Early Years Service and increase in the early years offer
- Roll out of the Family Hubs
- Government drivers

Finally, the report provides some detail on the current Bury picture including sufficiency, school readiness data and two year take up including areas we have seen impact from improvements made.

Finally, the report sets out some further issues for consideration which may inform future scrutiny of this area of work

Re-shape of the Early Years Service

- 1.1 Early Years is defined as children pre-birth to age 5. The council has certain duties placed on it to deliver a universal offer to children and parents within this key stage of family life, some of which include, conception to birth support and, parenting support around key development stages (weaning/walking/starting nursery/home environment, learning)

In short, as part of its duties the council should provide parents/carers access to support across a range of services to meet needs and provide children with the best start in life. This offer is usually delivered through the councils, children centres.

Children centres are defined through the Sure Start initiative and, until 2015 were inspected by Ofsted. As noted in the report in 2022 the children centre offer was significantly reduced in Bury and by 2019 there were no dedicated centres.

- 1.2 The re-shape of the Early Years Service has sought to build back some capacity to deliver against the statutory duties from some remaining centres as well as build a service that is agile and able to adapt to the new government drivers specifically in terms of the focus on the first 1001 days and the Family Hub agenda
- 1.3 The restructure in Early Years in 2022/23 has sought to bring back those functions that had moved to different divisions, to support a cohesive early years service that reflected the statutory requirements, namely the return of
 - Early Years finance Lead – managing the funding associated with childcare
 - Early Years Family information Officer – Supporting the brokerage and family information service
 - Early years lead for SEND

As well as the creation of some dedicated early years practitioners who have started to roll out the new universal offer.

The team is now established under a new service lead and is working closely together, sharing expertise and building stronger data governance and performance across the early years system.

Early Years Offer

- 1.4 Whilst Bury originally had 19 children centres situated in its most challenging wards this is now reduced to 5. Whilst there was some activity delivered from some centres this was minimal and without dedicated practitioner resource. Through the restructure and introduction of a small workforce (5 practitioners) we have worked to build back some of this offer with plans to extend this in 2024.
- 1.5 We have also looked to provide an offer from other sites to improve our reach and connectivity. We have focused on an offer in line with our LET'S strategy and delivery across the 5 neighbourhoods.
As we have built back and begun to deliver the offer we are starting to collate data and whilst this is in the early stages already, we have seen an increase between quarter 1 and quarter 2 of 2023 of parents and children accessing our sessions. At the sessions we create space for children to explore all elements of the early years foundation stages, namely
 - Communication and language
 - Physical development
 - Personal social and emotional; development
 - Literacy
 - Mathematics
 - Understanding the world
 - Expressive arts and design

If children and parents are supported to help children play and learn we know this will have an impact on our children's outcomes in terms of their readiness for school but also beyond. The early years foundation stages set a course for life and it is imperative that we continue to build our offer to provide the best start for all families in Bury. A robust early years offer is central to reducing inequalities across the Borough.

Woodbank Children Centre – Based in the north neighbourhood

In 2023 Woodbank was designated as our early years centre and all staff in the early years service are now based there so that they can collaborate, plan and deliver services across the borough.

From Woodbank we now deliver maternity services, training, networks and development opportunities for our early years providers. We also deliver a weekly Stay and Play session for children age 0-5 years, a baby stay and play session for babies 0-1 year, a parent carer drop-in session, a 5-week Sensational baby course for new babies and first-time parents aimed at support bonding and attachment, Speech language and communication and supporting parents to understand how their baby develops. We also host a monthly drop-in session delivered by the DWP.

From no delivery, in 2023 we are now averaging 23 sessions every quarter and in the last quarter 591 parents and children attended the building to take part in group sessions.

Whitefield Children Centre -Based in Whitefield neighbourhood

We are now delivering from our Whitefield centre which also includes maternity services and sessions for parents with young children. We also deliver a weekly Stay and Play session for children age 0-5 years, a baby stay and play session for babies 0-1 year, a parent carer drop in session which is co delivered by our portage team, a 5 week Sensational baby course for new babies and first time parents aimed at support bonding and attachment, Speech language and communication and supporting parents to understand how their baby develops.

Twinkle Boost also deliver 2 sessions each week to support children with emerging need and SEND in the development of their speech and language.

We also host a monthly drop-in session delivered by the DWP.

We are now delivering an average of 25 sessions a quarter and in our last quarter, 595 parents and children attended the sessions

Radcliffe Children Centre - Based in our West neighbourhood

We are now delivering maternity services We also deliver a weekly Stay and Play session for children age 0-5 years, a baby stay and play session for babies 0-1 year, a parent carer drop in session which is co delivered by our portage team, a 5 week Sensational baby course for new babies and first time parents aimed at support bonding and attachment, Speech language and communication and supporting parents to understand how their baby develops.

We also host a monthly drop-in session delivered by the DWP.

Through our sessions to parents, we reached 802 parents and children in the last quarter through 25 sessions

Prestwich

Currently we do not have a centre in Prestwich but we are currently exploring options. Through dedicating one of our roles as an apprentice family worker. Linkes to the Charedi community we now have an apprentice form the community who we are employing o work specifically to support that community and develop the parent and child offer

We are also exploring use of our building at Toodle Hill to start to deliver more parent child sessions in this neighbourhood. We are closely linked to the PSLTs and are working with leads to explore other venue options for delivery

Alternative Settings

All childrens centre sessions are full and we have a waiting list, once our new staff start in January, we will be delivering more stay play opportunities and launching a new session for children aged 1-2 years called inbetweeners.

1.6 Outdoor sessions

In addition to the offer in centres we now deliver outdoor sessions across our park areas. This is an area we are growing, and early data analysis suggests this supports greater school readiness for our boys. Where we have had park sessions, we can see improved school readiness in our male cohorts.

In the first two quarters of 2023 we have seen over 1000 parents with children attend. Each week we deliver from a larger park and one of our smaller parks within our most deprived areas. We ensure we chose and rotate the parks, so we have a presence in the north and the south of borough each week.

Portage Drop Ins

Our Portage service, Early Years workers and the SEND HV deliver a weekly stay and play session from the SEND hub in Radcliffe in conjunction with Bury together, this session supports families with children with emerging needs and SEND aged 0-5 years. All of our sessions have been full in the last quarter with 70 children attending in total.

Form a very low base and within 12 we have been able to develop a presence and to start to connect again with our families with young children. We are receiving positive feedback and have significant demand for our sessions.

Family Hubs

1.7 The last scrutiny report set out the government agenda linked to the 1001 days (support to families from conception to age 2) and the Family Hub agenda

The focus of family hubs is centred on the requirement to reform public services driven through children's partnerships and specifically to the development of the universal early years offer as well as the wider early help prevention agenda.

1.8 During the end of 2022 and 2023 we have worked with partners to develop and deliver on the first family hub in Bury, this is situated in East Bury and replaces what was the children centre, developing both the early years offer alongside the extended family offer

Whilst the hub only opened in October 2023, we have extended our early years offer form here which includes maternity services, breast feeding support, DWP drop-in session's, early attachment services as well as the more traditional stay and play sessions.

Since the opening of the hub, we have developed and delivered the following sessions:

- Sensational baby 1 full course has been delivered with a second planned to commence in January.
- Building Blocks to words a 5-week GMCA pilot programme for parents
- Parent Carer drop in sessions
- Parent stay and play session delivered by a community member

From January we will expand our offer to include further sessions for parents and families.

As we move through 2024 a work group has been established to look at other assets across the Council to support roll out of the Family Hub offer across our other neighbourhoods

Government Drivers

- 1.9 There is significant focus on early years by central government. The Family Hubs and the renewed energy on the delivery of the first 1001 days is supported through a new government initiative which extends the entitlement for access to nursery provision which will be rolled a out starting in September 24.

Currently working parents of two year olds are able to access 15 hours of childcare. This will be increased in September 2024 for all children over 9 months and from September 25 this will be further increased to 30 hours of childcare for children over 9 months

Government is investing significant monies to support local authorities to deliver this and Bury will receive 309k which will be provided directly to providers to expand their provision through extension of current buildings, through to new builds. The Council will set up a grant finding scheme to deliver this based on providers who can offer the greatest number of additional places. Internally we will be looking at birth rates to support us to predict the likely demand. A work group has been established to support this roll out

The Bury Picture

Age	Female	Male	Total
0	1,044	1,079	2,123
1	973	1,207	2,180
2	1,129	1,205	2,334
3	1,1101	1,100	2,201
4	1,135	1,268	2,447
5	1,179	1,268	2,447
TOTAL	6,561	7,043	13,604

Our Providers

- 1.10 Bury has 187 early years providers. 96 are group-based settings (nurseries) and 91 are childminders. All providers are regulated by Ofsted. We have sustained our good and outstanding ratings in the last year with 97.6% of settings rated good or outstanding, this remains slightly higher than England averages and the GM average which stands at 96%.

Our early years advisors provide universal support to the sector through early years network support and targeted training. Targeted support is delivered through specific programmes to support the ongoing development of quality of practice and drive improvement. If a setting is judged inadequate or requires improvement by Ofsted, then the setting can request targeted in-house support from their early year’s advisor. We know that settings who work with us almost always move their judgement on at least one grade. We currently only have 1 Childminder graded as inadequate, and 1 out of school club that received a not met judgement and both providers are working with the team receiving targeted support.

Sufficiency

- 1.11 Whilst our settings are private businesses and therefore not managed by the Council, the Council has a responsibility under law to:

- Secure free early education places for 2- 3 and 4 year olds in line with the government offer which provides entitlements for parents to access a number of hours free childcare dependent on their own circumstances and age of the child. All parents

regardless of circumstances should have access to some free childcare and the Council must ensure it has this available – this is called sufficiency

- Fulfil demand across the eligibility criteria including any children who move into the Borough.
- Complete a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment annually giving a picture of the different factors surrounding the supply and demand of childcare
- Proactively, provide information to parents about its childcare provision and how they can access it.
- Undertake outreach to identify disadvantaged children and promote the take up of free places
- Act as broker between parental demand and capacity in any given area.

Sufficiency of childcare settings and good take up of free places ensures that children have access to the Early Years Foundation Stage which forms the basis of early years education and prepares children for school and for school readiness

Our assessment this year evidence that there are sufficient childcare places and whilst our two year take up of childcare dropped to 69% at the start of this year, through a media campaign as well as the extension of our universal offer we have seen it rise now to 83%.

Each year we carry out a survey to review sufficiency and this year 75% of providers reported that they had no concerns about their sustainability with 71% reporting that they continue to have places within their settings. This was reflected by our childminders with 83% reporting that they were sustainable and 28% reporting that they continued to have vacancies.

- 1.11 We also use our brokerage system which supports parents to find appropriate childcare and this provides a window into our sufficiency status.
Of 68 requests for support we were able to meet 63 this included 35 requests for children with SEND where we were able to meet 32. Where we have not met needs, this was not due to there being no placement but parental choice

Take Up of Childcare

- 1.12 The more children that access their two year take up the more we can support school readiness and identify any emerging concerns.
Our current 2-year-old take up for the Autumn term is 84.1% this is an increase of 14.2% on the last term. Our two year take up is now almost back to our highest rate of 85% when we had a full children centre offer.

Take up for 3-year-olds is at 92.7%. Bury compares well in relation to take up which nationally is at 72% for 2-year-olds and is slightly lower than government target for 3-year-old take up which is at 94%

School Readiness

- 1.13 Up to 2019 Bury was above national average for children assessed as having a good level of development (GLD), the measurement of school readiness, at 71% which was in line with national averages and above the northwest which was at 69%
The first reporting on GLD post pandemic showed a decrease, nationally in children ready for school with the England average reducing to 65% and the northwest reducing to 62%. Burys grading was at 63% which was below the national average though still slightly above the region. However, it dropped further than our northwest statistical neighbour by 1%.
The breakdown across Bury is:

GLD Breakdown

.

Area	Overall GLD	Boys	Girls	SEND
National	67.2%	60.6%	74.2%	19.8%
GMCA	63.3%			
Bury	65.7%	59.3%	72.1%	19.7%
East Bury	60.0%	54.7%	65.5%	29.2%
North	71.3%	64.0%	78.2%	18.2%
West Bury	66.1%	61.0%	70.8%	17.9%
Prestwich	65.6%	56.7%	74.0%	20.9%
Whitefield	64.5%	58.6%	71.5%	9.7%

Green denotes areas of improvement

Of note is the correlation between the areas we have targeted in terms of our increased universal offer and improved outcomes for school readiness

Children with SEN achieving GLD in Bury is slightly below the national average (20%), at 19.7% overall but is higher than the GM average (15.8%) and is better than most GM localities. It is also improved on last year

Considerations and Risks

- 1.12 Universal Offer – There has been significant work to build back our universal offer in Bury and we have not only seen a huge increase in reach out in the last 12 months but we are seeing this translate into improvements in some of our predictive statistics related to longer term outcomes for our children as noted through improved two year take up and outcomes in relation to assessment of school readiness. We are also seeing a slight reduction in the requests for formal assessment in relation to SEND.
- 1.13 Sufficiency – There is availability of good childcare in Bury and now we are seeing good take up of the free childcare for 2 years and above. However, the workforce in childcare settings is some of the lowest paid and the costs of childcare provision against funding provided by government to councils to provide free places is challenging and likely to become more so in the current economic climate. The early years sector is vulnerable to market forces, and we may see some in the sector unable to continue to afford to continue delivery which may impact on future sufficiency.
That said there is good tracking of childcare sufficiency and monitoring which means we will be able to predict and respond to changes in the market. Direct meetings with Early Years lead in the Department for Education as well as Ofsted has allowed us and other localities across GM to raise issues directly on the challenges to the sector which is also now receiving national attention. The roll out of the extension of free childcare will place further pressure on the system and we will be monitoring this carefully and working with our providers to build additionality to meet demand.
- 1.14 The early years service is working at pace with partners through the development of its first family hub in East Bury to deliver a coherent and joined up offer to families especially in the 0-2 age range. As this embeds this will support children to be 'ready' for nursery and support settings to deliver against the outcome's framework of the Early Years Foundation, so our children are school ready. Whilst there is the vision to roll this out across the borough through the introduction of 4 more family hubs we need to move at pace to ensure we are track to deliver this by 2025.
- 1.15 Bury is well connected with Greater Manchester Combined Authority, School Readiness Board and has contributed to the development of a shared delivery model (8 stage delivery model) which supports the journey for children through early years to school readiness. This

will inform the early years delivery model for family hubs and ensure the seamless delivery of services to our youngest children.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1.16 Early years for children and especially the first 1001 days is one of the most crucial development stages which lays the foundation for learning and future achievements. In the last 12 months we have extended our universal offer and we are starting to see the evidence of positive impact of this on our children’s outcomes.

The expertise in the early years’ service and the high quality of the childcare in Bury will support the development and delivery of the universal offer which will support children to be ready for nursery and subsequently ready for school.

Members will want to consider how regularly they wish to scrutinise the developments in early years and the impact for children as well as consider scrutiny of the extension to the early years childcare offer and any detrimental impact on sufficiency.

Members may wish to scrutinise the changes to the extension in childcare and wrap around service as they start to roll out in later 2024.

List of Background Papers: -

Contact Details: -

Sandra Bruce -Assistant Director Early Help and School Readiness

Executive Director sign off Date: _____

JET Meeting Date: _____

Bury Council
Department for Children and Young People

Cabinet report LGO case 23005479 - Briefing

This report sets out the findings by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) made against the Council following the Council's failure to comply with agreed recommendations following two earlier investigations and the action now taken by the Council to demonstrate that it has complied with those recommendations.

An initial complaint was made to the LGO regarding the Council's failure to provide appropriate free transport.

The Council agreed with the LGO findings and to meet the recommended within agreed timescales.

The Council failed to do so and a further LGO investigation was opened, the Council agreed with the LGO's findings and agreed to meet the recommendations in agreed timescales.

However, the Council failed to do so and a third investigation was opened.

An initial complaint was made to the LGO in 2022 from the parent of a young person, in that the Council had failed to provide appropriate free transport to enable the young person to attend college named in his Education, Health & Care Plan.

The Council agreed with the findings of the LGO and to meet a number of the recommended actions by 30th June 2022, with the remaining action by 30th August 2022.

However, the Council failed to implement a number of the recommended actions within the agreed timescale:

An apology had been provided, a payment made to the young person, and the application for transport had been re-assessed.

However, no meeting had taken place with the parent and young person to consider the impact the lack of transport had on the young person's ability to attend college and complete his college course; and a review by the Council of its post-16 transport policy to ensure it clearly sets out the difference in its duties between sixth form and adult learners, had not been undertaken.

In November 2022 the LGO opened a new investigation because of the Council's failure to implement the initial recommendations within the agreed timescale.

Following that investigation, the Council agreed with the findings of the LGO and committed to:

Make a payment of £250 for additional frustration caused by the Council's failure to meet with the parents

Review its post-16 transport to education policy and confirm by 13th February 2023 when the revised policy would be finalised and approved by committee. The Council confirmed that it anticipated the revised policy to be in place for the 2023/24 academic year.

The Council has made the payment but failed to consult on and implement a revised post-16 transport to college policy within the agreed timescale.

In its final report the LGO found that the Council was at fault in not actioning the LGO recommendations within a reasonable timeframe, despite the Council having agreed to those timescales in both earlier investigations.

The recommendations set out in the final LGO report are that the Council should:

- present a report to Cabinet on the new policy in December 2023
- carry out full stakeholder consultation in Spring 2024
- present a report to Cabinet in April 2024 for a decision regarding implementation
- implement a revised post-16 transport policy by 31st May 2024

At its meeting on the 13th December 2023 Cabinet received a report on proposals to consult on changes to the Council's home to school policy.

Throughout January 2024, a series on parental engagement workshops have taken place to inform the re-drafting of the policy. From this, Officers have worked with Bury2gether to co-produce a draft policy. Consultation with stakeholders on the draft policy will commence on the 26th February through to the end of March.

The outcome of the consultation together with recommendations in respect of the adoption of a new transport policy will be presented to Cabinet for its consideration in April 2024.

The LGO confirmed that, where it finds fault and make recommendations, it expects councils to carry them out within the agreed timescales.

The LGO stated that the Council's delays in acting on agreed recommendations following the investigation could undermine public trust in the Council's ability to operate a fair system of redress and causes further avoidable distress to the complainant.

Those recommendations include the LGO being presented to the Council's Cabinet, and the publication of public notices advising members of the public of the LGO reports, and making those reports available.

Bury Council
Department for Children and Young People

Cabinet report LGO case 230006024 - Briefing

The report sets out the findings by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) made against the Council following the Council's failure to comply with agreed recommendations following an earlier LGO investigation and the action now taken by the Council to demonstrate that it has complied with those recommendations.

An initial complaint was investigated by the LGO which found that the Council had failed to act properly when the child was out of education causing injustice.

The Council agreed to remedy the complaint but failed to do so within the timescales required. This was re-investigated by the LGO which found fault with the Council causing injustice and making further recommendations.

An initial complaint was submitted to the LGO in June 2022 from a parent of a child alleging that the Council failed to act properly when the child was out of education.

The LGO findings were that:

The Council failed to consider the child's case properly at the fair access protocol meeting or provide reasons why the child could not be admitted besides saying the school was over-subscribed.

That there was no contact from the school allocated by the Panel. That the Council knew but did not take prompt action.

There was little help from the home education team or follow up.

The Council accepted the findings and agreed a number of actions. These were:

- An apology to the parent and payment of £350 for avoidable distress
- A payment of £2,400 to the parent for the child's lost education
- Discussion with parents on appropriate provision at the child's school
- That the EHE team should consider enforcement action where this is deemed necessary and appropriate
- That meetings of the In Year Fair Access Panel should be appropriately recorded
- That in accordance with the Council's own policy, there should be an assessment of a pupil's needs

However, on 11 April 2023, the parent informed the LGO that they had not heard from the Council in respect of the agreed remedy and the LGO raised this with the Council on 13th April and again on 3rd May 2023.

Whilst the Council did seek to remedy, it did not do so in full and on the 19th July 2023 the LGO confirmed that it was opening a new investigation, and consequently made further recommendations.

The Council has subsequently taken action to respond to the LGO recommendations following the second investigation:

- From September 2023, the Council introduced a new Elective Home Education (EHE) Policy
- A dedicated Officer has been appointed within the school admissions team to support families who want to reintegrate their children back into education following EHE.
- Since September 2023, the Council has issued nine School Attendance Orders (SAO) served for children who were not receiving suitable education and where parents have refused to engage with an in-year transfer.
- A new in-year fair access policy (IYFAP) is in place for primary schools.
- All EHE/CME and IYFAP processes are reviewed via our vulnerable children's group which is a multi-agency panel that meets on a weekly basis.
- The Council is providing training to staff in relation to the new policies, and in respect to the wider issues raised by the LGO.

The LGO confirmed that, where it finds fault and make recommendations, it expects councils to carry them out within the agreed timescales.

The LGO stated that the Council's delays in acting on agreed recommendations following the investigation could undermine public trust in the Council's ability to operate a fair system of redress and causes further avoidable distress to the complainant.

The LGO also confirmed that there have been issues with compliance with remedies on another case (23 005 479) and, because of this, it has made recommendations to address the systemic problems in the Council in implementing the recommendations it agrees to.

Those recommendations include the LGO being presented to the Council's Cabinet, and the publication of public notices advising members of the public of the LGO reports, and making those reports available.

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING:	Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	16th January 2024
SUBJECT:	CYP Improvement Plan
REPORT FROM:	Cabinet Member for Children & Young People
CONTACT OFFICER:	Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children's Services

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the progress of the Children's Services Improvement Plan that was put in place in response to the findings of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) carried out by Ofsted between 25 October 2021 and 5 November 2021, which judged services to be inadequate.

2.0 ISSUES

- 2.1 The Children's Improvement Board meets bi-monthly and reviews performance and audit information and discusses progress on key issues linked to improvement.
- 2.2 The most recent Ofsted monitoring visit in November 2023 focused on care leavers, and inspectors noted that they did not see the same pace of progress in relation to improvement that they had seen in other areas on previous visits.
- 2.3 The attached summary report provides a detailed overview of the plan, with areas RAG-rated to indicate current progress. These include:
- 2.3.1 Leadership – there have been some challenges with capacity of the Senior Leadership Team due to the long-term absence of two Heads of Service. These have now been filled on an interim basis by moving one of the permanent Heads of Service, and then stepping up two other permanent members of staff into the vacant roles thus providing us with no gaps nor agency within the leadership team. Team Managers are mostly permanent, with just 3 agency team managers out of 25. Additional support for our managers has been agreed with the DfE as part of the Sector Led Improvement Programme (SLIP) which will see Cheshire West & Chester beginning their work with us in January. This is part of our 'Back to Basics' approach with a focus on getting the basics right, and this extends to managers having a shared understanding of what a good manager looks like.
- 2.3.2 Recruitment activity continues with a renewed approach in the new year to ensure that we have a multi-faceted approach to recruitment. The international recruit we appointed in January 2023 are not all yet in post, due to delays in Social Work England (SWE) registrations and English competency tests (IELTS). We have 7 social workers in post with a further 2 due in February. We are working with Frontier, our recruitment partner, to ensure candidates are being supported appropriately and we have also escalated the SWE delays (a national issue) to the DfE.

- 2.3.3 Audit and performance continues to be developed, with the introduction of dashboards that are routinely shared with managers and senior leaders to develop a shared understanding of performance. The QA Framework is kept under review to ensure that it supports managers in understanding what good practice looks like and that it is a tool used for learning and development. Assurance Improvement Meetings (AIM) and Closing the Loop meetings provide the architecture to ensure discussions are taking place and actions can be taken to improve practice. There is more to do to ensure that the learning from audit is understood by front line practitioners.
 - 2.3.4 Family Safeguarding was formally launched in October 2023; adult practitioners have been part of the team since September although all adult practitioners are not yet in post.
 - 2.3.5 A diagnostic of the LCS case recording system will take place in January. This will assess whether we are getting the most out of the existing functionality and whether there are additional options we should consider that will directly impact on the quality of practice.
 - 2.3.6 A Performance Strategy & Framework was launched in February 2023, with the aim of ensuring we achieve permanence for our children at the earliest opportunity. The Ofsted monitoring visit in February 2023 noted our renewed focus on early permanence with a more structured approach.
 - 2.3.7 The Family Group Conference team is now in place and has been fully operational since October 2023.
 - 2.3.8 Our first Family Hub opened in October in East Bury (Redvale). We are hoping to roll out to the other 4 neighbourhoods by September 2025.
 - 2.3.9 Revised Elective Home Education (EHE) and Children Missing Education (CME) policies have been launched in September 2023 and the new School Attendance, Exclusions & Community Education Manager is leading on these, ensuring that there is a clear focus on these statutory areas.
- 2.4 The Business Support resource for Children's Services has now transferred back into the department and managed by the Children's Improvement and Transformation Manager. This will allow us to align the prioritisation of our business support with improvement. We are reviewing the work undertaken to consider whether there are opportunities within business support that can support social worker recruitment and retention, by providing additional support to social workers.

3.0 CONCLUSION

Members are asked to note the updates in the attached paper.

List of Background Papers:-

Bury Improvement Plan Summary (attached)

Ofsted Monitoring visit to Bury children's services - report published on Ofsted website 6th December 2023

Contact Details:-

Beth Speak
Children's Improvement Manager
b.speak@bury.gov.uk

0161 253 5115

Executive Director sign off Date: _____

JET Meeting Date: _____

This page is intentionally left blank

Children's Services Improvement Plan

Progress report: December 2023

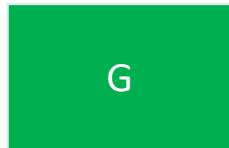
Ratings definitions used in this report



Major issues identified which may prevent priority outputs being delivered as expected



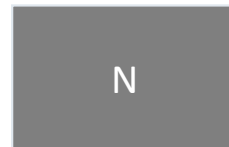
Issues identified which may delay the progress and require action but do not threaten overall delivery



On track to deliver the programme/work stream/output as expected



Finished – work stream or output successfully completed



Not started

Overview

Outcomes

Create the conditions for good practice:

1. Strengthen the effectiveness of multi-agency governance and partnership arrangements and support provided to children, young people	A
2. Establish a stable and effective leadership and management team	A
3. Build a skilled, confident and experienced workforce	A

Improve the quality of practice:

4. Improve Performance Management, Quality Assurance and Management Information Systems to develop and support good social work practice	A
5. Identify and effectively support children and families in need of help and protection	A
6. Ensure purposeful and timely care planning that directs proportionate and effective interventions for children and improves their outcomes	A
6. Ensure purposeful and timely care planning that directs proportionate and effective interventions for children and improves their outcomes	A

Key achievements

Formal launch of Family Safeguarding (October)

Launch of GM Social Work Pledge (November)

First Family Hub opened – East Bury (October)

Key challenges

Recruitment/use of agency staff

Consistency of practice

Upcoming milestones

January – SLIP support for managers (Cheshire West & Chester)

January – reconvene Workforce Board

January/February – Liquid Logic systems diagnostic

1: Strengthen the effectiveness of multi-agency governance and partnership arrangements and support provided to children, young people and their families

A

Work Stream Lead: Lynne Ridsdale
& Jeanette Richards

Impact of activity so far

Strengthened governance arrangements mean that the Safeguarding Executive and the sub-groups are meeting regularly with clear terms of reference, and priorities led by the partnership. Ofsted recognise that the arrangements for children who are at risk of exploitation have been strengthened with enhanced governance arrangements in place and greater accountability.

Upcoming milestones

-

Governance arrangements

Following review by an Independent Scrutineer of the Bury Integrated Safeguarding Partnership (BISP), there is a clear structure in place for the refreshed Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements in the form of a Bury Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP). The BSCP have agreed the following priorities:

- Complex Safeguarding
- Neglect
- Safer Sleeping in the context of safeguarding
- Embedding learning from local and national reviews
- Ensuring that the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are effective.

Agreed sub-groups are:

- Scrutiny, Performance & Assurance – chaired by Head of Strategy, Assurance & Reform (Bury Council)
- Learning & Development – chaired by Associate Director for Nursing, Quality and Safeguarding (NHS GM)
- Case Reviews – chaired by Director of Social Care Practice (Bury Council)
- Complex Safeguarding – chaired by Detective Superintendent (GM Police)

There are challenges in relation to Rapid Reviews/Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) with a backlog of reviews and historical delays. In the last 6 months, the sub-group re-reviewed all referrals which resulted in some retrospective notifications to national panel. Systems and processes have been reviewed and strengthened.

Under the refreshed partnership arrangements, key strategies have been launched including the

Continuum of Need, with virtual briefing sessions led by the PSW. These sessions were shared via the BSCP and 165 staff attended from across the partnership, mostly from schools and local authority staff. Performance data shows that there is still more to do: there has not been any sustained significant reduction in contacts, although the number declined during the last two months of 2023. There is a potential positive impact on those early help assessments being led on by other named lead professionals outside of Children's Services, however the volume of work heading to children's social care remains quite high.

SEND Strategic and Operational Boards have been collapsed into a single Strategic Partnership as part of this activity and an independent chair with regional and national expertise has been appointed to take this forward to ensure the board is appropriately focused.

Refreshed Early Help Strategy

The Early Help Strategy was launched at local neighbourhood events across October and November 2022, with a partnership approach to the launch and its delivery. The delivery of the strategic vision is overseen by the Starting Well & Early Help Board, which is chaired by the AD for Early Help. The Board has agreed refreshed terms of reference, membership and a high level action plan with a small number of task & finish groups in place to address areas of the plan, including co-producing a partnering strategy, implementation of the Family Hub, improving our early years pathways (1001 days) and extension of early help across the partnership.

Impact of the strategy in respect of a strong multi-agency offer of early help for families is reported under section 5 of this plan.

1: Strengthen the effectiveness of multi-agency governance and partnership arrangements and support provided to children, young people and their families

A

Work Stream Lead: Lynne Ridsdale
& Jeanette Richards

Partnership strategies to ensure co-ordinated response to missing & exploitation

The Complex Safeguarding Strategy and Operational Principles were reviewed and refreshed in July 2023. The Complex Safeguarding sub-group of the BSCP is chaired by Detective Superintendent and the group holds clear accountability for the refreshed Complex Safeguarding Delivery Plan.

A Missing Panel considers the most at-risk missing children in terms of formulating safety planning, disruption strategies and multi-agency approaches to manage risk and support young people and their families. The missing panel shares information which helps identify hot spots or requirements for mapping meetings, and the meeting also considers those children placed within the Bury borough by other LAs with Placing Authorities invited to attend the meetings when required.

All Missing From Home (MFH) resource has now been brought together under the Complex Safeguarding Team (CST) to ensure a consistent approach to Return Home Interviews (RHIs) for our young people. RHI templates have been reviewed and updated as part of the Strategy refresh in July 2023. Interviews are being offered but there is a proportion of children who decline, and this needs further work.

Daily Governance meetings take place with the CST Team Manager, Police, Health and the MASH Team Manager to consider information from the previous 24 hours (or weekend) in relation to complex safeguarding issues. Ofsted noted this as a strength in the August monitoring visit, however children's records are not consistently updated to reflect these discussions and so for some children there is a missed opportunity for this to be used to inform subsequent decision making.

Training to other professionals, around identification and support to victims, is underway with training to schools and some training to A&E staff and GP surgeries (approx. 30 GPs attended). There needs to be a more consistent delivery of an agreed training programme for wider partners, which remains an area for development.

Implement a Neglect Strategy to support identification of all forms of neglect

A refreshed Neglect Strategy was approved by the BSCP Executive in October 2022; the strategy includes practice guidance and links to the Council's Poverty Strategy. A number of sessions were delivered in June 2023, led by PSW and Safeguarding Team Specialist Nurse (Northern Care Alliance, NCA). The sessions were intended to ensure a shared partnership understanding of the 6 forms of neglect an impact of cumulative harm.

A Communications Plan & Training Offer is being developed by the L&D sub-group. A practice response is to be developed by the PSW/Director of Social Work Practice.

Partnership strategies to ensure a co-ordinated approach to Domestic Abuse

As part of the Domestic Abuse strategy there are 4 priorities: improving processes, improving partnership arrangements, prevention and work with perpetrators.

The domestic abuse partnership board meets on a 6 weekly basis. Data collection has been changed to ensure this now shows children affected by domestic abuse and work is underway to include wider data from all services.

We are seeking to improve local connectivity between the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board/Strategy with the emerging Bury Serious Violence Duty Strategic Needs Assessment across all specified authorities of the duty including local authority, integrated care system, GMP, Fire & Rescue and Probation.

The introduction of the Family Safeguarding Teams is expected to have significant impact, with the inclusion of a DA Officer and Practitioner in each team. DA Officers (employed by the Probation Service) will deal with domestic abuse in a different way, supporting adults in the change cycle, identifying risk and supporting change. Domestic Abuse Practitioners will work with the children and family to ensure that they do not suffer significant harm from domestic abuse. The Strategic and Operational Boards will be considering outcome measures and impact of the FS model, and as part of this will need to consider the impact on the wider offer around domestic abuse.

2. Establish a stable and effective leadership and management team

A

Work Stream Lead: Jeanette Richards

Impact of activity so far

There are no vacancies at HoS level, although some secondment and interim arrangements are in place to cover long term absence of two Heads of Service: HoS IRT is being covered by substantive HoS Family Safeguarding, HoS Family Safeguarding covered by a Family Safeguarding Team Manager on secondment and HoS CASS being covered by Service Manager Safeguarding Unit. In addition, the Practice Director is interim, pending permanent recruitment. All Team Manager roles are filled, with 3 agency staff across 20 social care team managers.

Upcoming milestones

- Recruit to permanent Practice Director
- Begin SLIP support for managers with Cheshire West & Chester (January)
- Development session for managers led by Research in Practice (January)

Permanent leadership team with sufficient senior leadership capacity

Our Executive Director of Children’s Services (EDCS) has been in post since January 2022 (interim moving to permanent in April 2022). Following the departure of the Practice Director in September 2023 an interim Director commenced in post November 2023, and recruitment to the permanent role is underway.

In July 2022, restructure proposals were approved at Cabinet which sought to ensure clear lines of accountability and responsibility, with reasonable spans of control to provide clear line of sight to practice and to support a high support, high challenge culture. This saw the dis-establishment of the Service Manager role and the creation of 5 Head of Service roles to replace Strategic Leads. A dedicated Principal Social Worker (PSW) was also established to lead on practice development and learning, recruitment and retention and development of a social work academy approach.

There are no agency arrangements at HoS level, although there are interim arrangements in place with permanent staff to cover long term absence of 2 of the HoS roles.

The majority of the social care team manager tier is permanent: 3 of the 25 team managers are agency (1x Mash, 1x Court Team 1X Safeguarding). In addition, 2 of the managers in safeguarding are in interim positions.

Leadership & management development

Monthly Extended Management Meetings (EMMs) take place chaired by the PSW as a forum to support and develop managers.

22 managers from Children’s Services have completed or are currently enrolled on the Council’s Management Development programme, with a further group enrolled for the fourth cohort which launched in December 2023.

A Head of Service recently joined the Council team participating in the North-West Tri-Sector Challenge to support their Leadership Development.

In December 2023, a SLIP proposal was agreed by the DfE which will see bespoke support for our Team Managers delivered by Cheshire West and Chester. This will focus on the fundamentals of being a social care team manager and what good looks like.

20 managers from across the department attend the bi-monthly Senior Managers Forum (SMF). This provides space to ensure all Council Leaders are updated on key topics, support cross-organisational collaboration and deliver masterclass learning in a range of areas.

3. Build a skilled, confident and experienced workforce

A

Work Stream Lead: Jeanette Richards & Sam McVaigh

Impact of activity so far

Use of agency staff remains too high at 46% (end of November 2023), despite recruitment activity underway, The number of social workers recruited is greater than those leaving and this has been consistently the case over the past 12 months, but the numbers are not substantial enough to reduce the dependence on agency workers. There has been a reduction in use of managed teams (down to 1 from 3 teams in late 2022/early 2023) but there is still a significant reliance on agency staff. Ofsted feedback in monitoring visits noted that management oversight of children's cases in supervision does not consistently focus on progression of plans and that supervision remains an area that requires improvement. Staff report that they enjoy working in Bury and feel supported, with senior leaders who are approachable and accessible. Case loads remain higher than we would want, averaging 20 per worker.

Upcoming milestones

- Re-constituted Workforce Board to reconvene (January)
- Review of induction checklists by PSW (January)
- Practice Standards (February)

Grow our own approach to staffing sufficiency

We increased our financial reward to Practice Educators (PEs) in August 2022 to grow the number of PEs available to provide support to students.

- We have 7 university students who joined us between September and Nov 2023
- We are engaged in the Step up to Social Work Programme and 2 have recently completed the programme in Bury with 2 more due to join in Spring 2024.
- There are 3 apprenticeships working in Family Safeguarding, IRT & CASS and 2 are due to complete September 2024 and the 3rd in September 2025.

Rolling recruitment

The overall direction of travel in relation to recruitment continues to be positive with progress made in relation to conversions from agency staff and external recruitment. Out of 114.5 social workers, 38 (25%) are agency workers (December 2023).

In January 2023 we appointed 23 social workers from South Africa through international recruitment. The original plan to have social workers in post by May has been delayed due to delays in SWE registrations (a nationally recognised issue) and English competency testing (IELTS). We have 7 in post and 2 more expected February 2024. The remaining 14 remain committed to Bury. A meeting with Frontier is scheduled for January to ensure appropriate support is being provided.

Analysis continues to suggest that, when these workers join us the Council's level of agency staff will align with the regional average (estimate reduction to 19.5%). The Council continues to offer an attractive employment package including agreed retention payments, agile working, free car parking and a comprehensive development offer.

In November the GM Pledge was launched, setting out a series of commitments in how we will use agency social workers across GM. The Pledge includes an agreement not to pay any agency social work staff above agreed rates of pay, to not engage with candidates leaving a permanent contract in GM to take up an agency role for a minimum of 6 months and to refrain from headhunting staff from within GM unless for a promotional role.

Key areas of future planned activity include:

- A renewed communications campaign in the new year with a new recruitment video and more proactive advertising, including positive stories from current staff and an emphasis on the Family Safeguarding model
- Development of options around the market competitiveness of our entry level social work posts (ASYE). – this is the area where Bury is least competitive regionally.
- Discussions with potential specialist recruitment partners to explore the opportunity for enhanced external support on a payment-by-results basis.
- A review of duties and responsibilities across Social Work roles and others (Business Support and Family Support Workers) to explore different models which may support a re-balancing of role.

3. Build a skilled, confident and experienced workforce

A

Work Stream Lead: Jeanette Richards & Sam McVaigh

Restorative approach to engaging with workforce

The Voice of the Workforce Board meets 6-weekly and is chaired by the PSW, with feedback from staff being shared with Improvement Board and feeding into practice development and service improvement.

“You said, we did!” - morale has been reported as improving and some of the requests by staff, for example free car parking have now been agreed. There has been positive feedback about staff morale and engagement with the improvement journey in DfE Reviews.

In July we launched our LET’S Do It Challenge, an immersive experience for staff to attend and engage in Bury vision for 2030. Staff are taken on a 2 hour tour, to learn more about the Borough, and how they play their part in delivering in our success in Bury. Almost 180 staff from the department attended the challenge.

The HR team have also supported the induction process for our new recruits from South Africa, including hosting in person sessions, along with guides to support the settling in process.

Social work academy approach

The PSW will build on work which has already commenced which has included a refresh of the Workforce Development Strategy, L&D opportunities for staff, ASYE Programme, exit interview process and work on retention issues.

We expect to the academy approach to provide:

- Defined career pathways
- L&D opportunities for staff within Children’s Services
- ASYE Support
- Formal induction process
- A wider approach to bring in other professionals (phase 2)
- Exit interview process with analysis to understand the reasons staff wish to leave, and feed this back into our cycle of learning, staff development and retention
- Clear understanding of retention issues and action plan to address these

A draft outline of the SW Academy approach document has been developed and discussed with senior leaders in December 2023 and further work will take place in January/February 2024.

Effective management oversight & reflective supervision

The Supervision Policy and associated forms has been refreshed by the PSW. The Director of Social Work Practice led a management development group in September 2022 focused on supervision and Research in Practice held a reflective supervision training session with managers in February 2023.

Audits and feedback from Ofsted tell us that supervision is mostly taking place but is not yet reflective and actions remain too generic.

Supervision is one of the Bury Commitments and as such is a priority in the Learning & Development Plan which is being refreshed by our PSW. This will also feature in the support being provided by our SLI Partner Cheshire West & Chester in Spring 2024.

4. Improve Performance Management, Quality Assurance and Management Information Systems to develop and support good social work practice

A

Work Stream Lead: Jeanette Richards & Andrea Stone

Impact of activity so far

The basic performance framework for the core of the social work service has now been in place for the past 9 months – providing a weekly overview of Team level performance in key metrics and a searchable summary of relevant information on a child-by-child basis to support Team Managers. This had a positive impact on the currency of key social work practice, such as visits, assessments, reviews and supervisions, but progress has slowed and performance remains lower than we would expect. Ofsted note in their monitoring visits that while there is progress overall in practice overall it remains too variable. In the light of this judgement and the continued prevalence of work that ‘requires improvement to be good’ in audits, we need to refocus and reconsider our approach to improving practice.

Upcoming milestones

- QA Officers commence in post (January)
- Practice standards for review (January)
- LCS System Diagnostic (January/February)

Ensure Quality Assurance Framework supports focused, ongoing improvement

Monthly audits are undertaken by Team Managers and moderated by Heads of Service, with independent moderation (re-audits) taking place each month on a small sample by the WFD team.

In January 2023 a new internal architecture was created to focus on performance, audit and improvement plan progress:

- Assurance Improvement Meetings (AIM) take place bi-monthly and are chaired by the EDCS. Performance and QA information are triangulated with stocktake style reports prepared by Heads of Service to ensure a shared understanding of issues.
- Closing the Loop meetings take place bi-monthly and are chaired by the Practice Director. These meetings focus on the learning from audit and consideration of L&D needs.

Learning circles should take place on all inadequate or outstanding audits. Managers should also discuss audits as part of supervision with explicit reference to the audit and any remedial activity that may be required. Service level data on outstanding actions is reviewed as part of the Closing the Loop meeting.

MASH sampling is taking place weekly; this includes a review of the triage and decision making. Monthly reports are shared through the MASH steering group however work is needed to ensure that this activity is part of the wider dept QAF.

Early Help locality team managers audit each month with close the loop, action tracking and monthly performance meetings all in place. Again, this needs to be included in the main QAF activity so there is a whole system approach to QA with shared learning and understanding.

In August 2023, external moderation of audits was undertaken to test the effectiveness of our QA activity and this indicated some over-optimism in audit judgements and a need for audits to be clearer in their rationale. There is not yet evidence of audits being routinely discussed in supervision. The approach to QA was reviewed in September; the toolkit has been aligned to the Bury commitments and while audits are taking place monthly, each Team Manager only audits bi-monthly so as to create the space for good quality audits and to ensure a clearer focus on audits as a tool for learning and reflection.

Policies, Procedures & Practice Standards

Practice Standards were reviewed and shared with staff in October 2022 however a further review took place in December 2023. The standards have a ‘back to basics’ approach and there will be a learning & development workstream under each commitment. This development work will continue in January/February and we will also develop a central Sharepoint site which will serve as a single point of access on a range of useful information.

Tri.x documents were reviewed and updated in February 2023. The PSW reviews all proposed amendments to procedures as part of the Tri.x update process, as well as any new procedures.

4. Improve Performance Management, Quality Assurance and Management Information Systems to develop and support good social work practice

A

Work Stream Lead: Jeanette Richards
& Andrea Stone

Develop performance reporting to ensure shared understanding

An Improvement Dashboard and revised approach to performance reporting was presented at Improvement Board in January 2023. A new system of meetings focused on performance, QA and improvement seeks to develop a greater understanding of strengths and weaknesses shared by Heads of Service.

In addition to individual child level and team level and service level reports that are available weekly. Reports for each key service area are shared monthly, along with overview reports for the whole service. There is a clear understanding of the pattern and nature of performance and the challenges and issues that the service faces

In our August Ofsted monitoring visit, it was noted that “the quality assurance and performance management frameworks are firmly embedded and making a difference to outcomes for most children. The newly established dashboards provide an additional line of sight for senior leaders on performance in practice.”

In relation to Early Help, we will utilise the family hub implementation plan to pilot joint KPIs and quality assurance. Regular updates from the contract monitoring meetings in respect of school nursing and health visiting will be shared in order that we are fully able to explore opportunities around quality assurance and interdependencies and pressures across the services.

Reduce system complexity to enable a focus on purposeful practice

All forms re. MASH, CP and CLA were reviewed as part of the exit of the Signs of Safety model. Changes to Liquid Logic have been routed via the Digital & Technology Change Partner with some examples including:

- Legal Pathway, including PLO and pre-proceedings were developed and launched in line with Public Law Working Group recommendations
- CSE Assessment form updated in January 2023 to match the CSE WISE assessment format
- IRO resolution form updated to add a new informal stage to support revised processes
- Configuration changes in respect of CP review conference outcome forms to add additional manager authorisation
- Configuration change re. CIN Pathway to be opened during the assessment period to enable CIN planning to take place at an earlier stage

In recent months a number of issues have been identified, including the workflow around pathway plans, short breaks, children with disabilities and fostering. We have secured an external consultant to complete a diagnostic of our LCS implementation, to understand any ‘quick wins’ that can be made to support improved processes. A workshop will be held in January with all HoS’ to understand issues across the child’s journey, following this a more detailed plan will be scoped with timescales.

5. Identify and effectively support children and families in need of help and protection

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone

Impact of activity so far

Aside from the early Autumn of 2023, when there was a surge of new work for assessment, overall during 2023 there has been a substantial reduction in the volume of new incoming work for Children's Social Care, with an even more marked reduction in the volume of that work that results in child protection activity. In the latter part of the year, this finally led to a reduction in the number of child protection plans and the number of plans starting and ceasing. Overall, Bury has moved from a position of being substantially above the average of similar local authorities to one in line with them. We have also seen a recent reduction in the amount of work returning to the service (re-referrals) - again moving into line with similar local authorities. Ofsted commented positively in 2023 monitoring visits on the application of appropriate thresholds for intervention and there are potential early signs of the impact of Family Safeguarding practice model.

Upcoming milestones

- Recruit to remaining adult practitioner roles in Family Safeguarding teams (January)

Implement Family Safeguarding

A Family Safeguarding Strategic Partnership Board was established in January 2023, chaired by our EDCS and including senior representation from across the Council and wider partners. A multi-agency Family Safeguarding Operations Board was established in March 2023, chaired by the Director of Social Care Practice and meeting fortnightly, to work through the detail of the implementation and escalate issues to the Strategic Board as required. Operational Board has moved to monthly from January 2024.

The model was soft launched in June 2023 with a formal launch in October; both of these events were multi-agency events. There are 5 family safeguarding teams which are not yet fully staffed:

- Substance recovery workers (Early Break) – 2 of 3 in post, recruitment underway Dec 2023
- Mental health practitioners (Pennine Care) – 0 of 3 in post, delays in approval processes within Pennine Care, hoping to go out to recruitment January 2024
- Domestic abuse officers (Probation Services) – 2 of 3 in post, recruitment underway Dec 2023
- Domestic abuse practitioners (Bury Council) – 2 of 3 in post, 3rd will join following return from maternity leave in April 2024
- Business Support Officers – 5 recruited, 4 in post

Use of the workbook remains inconsistent, and it has been agreed that workbooks will be mandatory from March 2024, with no C&F assessments triggered in the FS service after this point.

Getting the basics right

The Bury Commitments were launched in February 2023 and are the cornerstones of good practice – a Learning & Development Plan has been produced setting out a programme of learning. A new timetable for training is to be devised which will be influenced by areas of practice identified through audit activity. The main audit toolkit has been aligned to the commitments (Sept 2023) to support learning and development, and the focus on these areas.

The PSW leads Extended Managers Meetings (EMM), Teaching Tuesdays and Management Support Sessions with a continuing focus on the Bury Commitments.

Monitoring visits have identified that progress is being made in some areas, although there remains variability in social work practice. The most recent monitoring visit in November 2023 highlighted some areas which have not achieved the same pace of progress and others and there is a need to ensure the work we are doing around the Bury Commitments reaches all areas of the service.

Recent performance data shows that compliance is still not where it needs to be and this will be the focus of January's Assurance Improvement Meeting (AIM).

5. Identify and effectively support children and families in need of help and protection

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone
& Stephen Holden

Further transformation of the front door model (phase 2)

Phase 2 is focused on expansion of the front door: the addition of education, an Early Help Manager, Early Help practitioners (x3) and mental health practitioners. The aim is to develop a more consultative approach with greater community integration and support, enabling professionals to discuss before making a referral.

Early Help Manager and practitioners in post and the early help team is now completing early help assessments as part of the support at the front door. The schools lead (DSL) will be in post from Jan 2024, and will focus on supporting schools and developing relationships and a shared understanding. CAMHS have appointed 3 mental health practitioners who will rotate on duty to act as front door for mental health, which while still being separate through co-location will enable effective triage and will support shared decision making. A formal launch with partners took place in October 2023, with a soft launch having taken place over summer to test systems.

Following concerns raised in relation to health resources and the impact on decision making within the MASH/EHASH, NHS GM identified additional capacity at the end of 2023, providing an additional 2-day resource within the MASH.

Space at the Police Station remains a blocker to full co-location - there is not currently sufficient space for the mental health and early help practitioners, with an additional 8 desks required. This is currently with Detective Superintendent Rollinson.

From January the MASH performance will report directly in to the Safeguarding Partnership.

Embed restorative approaches through use of Family Group Conferencing (FGC)

The FGC team is recruited to, trained and now delivering. The manager sits on legal gateway to support in pre-proceedings and proceedings work as well as referral through to our new Family Resource Panel. Initial feedback has been positive.

Consistent offer of Early Help across universal and targeted services

The first family hub opened in East Bury (Redvale) in September 2023 with a soft launch of the programme, followed by a formal launch in October.

We are working with parents to understand what they need and forming an advisory group to develop the offer across the borough. The core offer will include early years, Holding Families (DAAT), midwifery, health visiting and an ante-natal programme.

A working group led by the DE for NHS and adult service is meeting to scope the roll out across the other 4 neighbourhoods by September 2025.

We are seeing an increase in early help led by partners (at 40%) which is an improving picture. Our locality early help teams will increase from 3 to 4, to support a stronger and more consistent reach across our neighbourhoods.

We have created a family resource arm through department restructures to develop a family offer in Bury. We now have a Resource Panel in place although it is its early days – terms of reference have been developed and the initial meetings held, although currently only single agency. The intention is to direct all requests for support from the youth service, family group conference team and Victoria Family Centre through the panel and develop a better offer.

We are working with Triple P to develop a workforce strategy in terms of support to parents and this links to our new Parenting Strategy which was signed off in August 2023.

We have completed a self-evaluation in respect of our early help offer, and we have formed a small multi-agency working group to look at gaps in delivery.

We are working on a new media platform which will support easy access to both digital services and information about our offer at the hub.

5. Identify and effectively support children and families in need of help and protection

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone
& Stephen Holden

Develop a culture of co-production & listening to the voice of the child

The co-production strategy has been re written to establish clear procedures, governance and guidelines on what effective co production means. The strategy is reviewed by the Children's Strategic Partnership co-production sub-group every six weeks.

The young people's recruitment and selection toolkit has been reviewed; the toolkit sets out guidelines of effective co-production when working with our young people to interviews new staff within the local authority.

The Co-Production Charter has been reviewed to build on good practice with SEND. The EDCS attends Youth Cabinet and regularly meets with the Children in Care Council. Our young people are now routinely involved in the recruitment of staff, including the recruitment of the Chief Executive in December 2022. Care experienced young people have been involved in many interviews for local authority staff such as Senior Practitioner for the development team, Advanced Personal Advisors, Children's rights worker, Workforce Development manager and many more.

We have established and developed a programme of training that is co-produced and co-delivered by our young people – this includes:

- Total Respect (where do you keep the ketchup) training delivered by care experienced young people a minimum of twice a year to professionals across the authority, last delivered on the 18th of July 2023
- Takeover challenge - toolkit has been co-produced by young people for partners. This explains how to set up and deliver a co-produced Takeover challenge day and acts as a guidance of how to do this effectively with our young people.

Care experienced young people have reviewed the way Corporate Parenting board functions - they have now changed the format to be more child-led. Care experienced young people have now been trained to co-chair corporate parenting board, this is well established and young people have co-chaired every corporate parenting board since April 2023.

Young people have chosen the priorities for the board which are: Mental Health, Changes in Workforce and Transitions.

Improve the effectiveness of work within pre-proceedings

New policy & procedures are now in place, along with a PLO tracker. There is much closer monitoring with the weekly Permanence Tracking Panel overseeing children's plans for permanence (including those subject to PLO). Cases are also reviewed within Legal Gateway.

In our third monitoring visit in February 2023, inspectors noted that "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.... Plans made in pre-proceedings are being reviewed more effectively by senior managers to ensure that actions are completed within agreed timescales."

A case progression officer is now in post (Aug 2023) which will increase oversight of Pre-Proceedings and any matters before the court, ensuring a consistent approach from all Bury social workers and positive representation to the courts.

5. Identify and effectively support children and families in need of help and protection

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone
& Stephen Holden

Review procedures and protocols for EHE

An Education Access Board has been established with terms of reference: NFTE, CME, EHE & all aspects of access to ED. The first meeting took place in July 2022 and monthly meetings have been taking place since September 2022.

A revised EHE policy has been agreed and will be in place from September 2023, available on the Bury Council website and via the Headteacher's Hub. Policies have been strengthened so that all children will be seen within four weeks of application, and processes are in place for School Attendance Orders to be issued where no suitable education is being provided. Training around EHE processes for schools to be implemented in localities November 2023.

Families of children who are electively home educated will receive visits twice a year from the service. As part of the launch of the new hub at Redvales (opening October 2023), we will be establishing an annual coffee morning for EHE families which we hope to move termly as our engagement activity results in more families wanting to attend. We will be arranging fire prevention training for EHE families, and we have arranged for HPV vaccines to be available via the NHS vaccination team through the new coffee mornings.

The EHE team/service works closely with other teams: close links with MASH have been established to ensure any safeguarding concerns are picked up from the initial referral. Where it is found that no suitable education is being provided, the child is referred to the CME register as per our CME Policy. Information relating to children EHE will also be shared with Connexions to avoid NEET. An additional qualified teacher has been seconded from the additional needs team to increase capacity to access whether suitable education is being provided for those students with an EHCP.

The lead for exclusions & attendance is part of the family hubs operational working group, ensuring links between EHE, CME and the community. The GRT officer will promote the coffee morning to their EHE families so as to bring together the agencies providing support.

Review protocols and procedures for CME

The Education Access Board has a focus on CME as part of its terms of reference. All CME is recorded within LCS. Group call access now has access the majority of registers across Bury schools.

Information is being shared with the DWP, and children thought to be CME are now triaged through MASH. A system is in place for re-screening all cases closed negatively after 6 months. There are weekly checks of CME against admissions.

Phase 2 of the CYP restructure was completed in September 2023, which sought to align the services within education and strengthen focus on statutory elements, including attendance, EHE and CME with increased capacity in education safeguarding. There is a dedicated new CME and EHE officer based within the school's admissions team who works closely with the Community learning CME officer. Training is currently being provided to the post-holder.

A revised CME Policy is now in place on the Bury Council website and Headteacher Hub, and the service have developed stronger working relationship with MASH in relation to new referrals. The Vulnerable Childrens Group and CME working together to ensure that complex cases are reviewed.

School Attendance Orders are processed efficiently to ensure that children are returned to school appropriately, and the CME team are working very closely with EHE team and the new policy.

Training for schools around CME processes was delivered via the school attendance forums in 4 localities (November 2023).

Links to the health service have been strengthened through training and regular meetings. Request to work with UK Border Force has been completed which will impact on any children moving abroad or extended holidays. Links with electoral registers and benefits within the Bury locality have strengthened.

Through the restructure of the School Attendance, Exclusions and Community Team, there is more support available to support the CME area. Other officers are able to carry out home visits to this vulnerable cohort.

5. Identify and effectively support children and families in need of help and protection

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone
& Stephen Holden

Develop our Adolescent offer

Through restructures we have established a new post -Service Manager for Family Resources. This post took some time to recruit but the new lead is now in post and the resources of our teenage cohort has been brought together into the Family Resource service under the service manager: youth service, youth mentoring, young carers and prevention for children on the edge of crime, reducing knife and violent crime. All of these will be accessible through resource panel.

As part of the wider development of our approach and support to young people we are looking at the offer to young people as part of the Family Hub approach. Whilst we are currently focused on East Bury our youth service is now aligned to our neighbourhoods and they are establishing youth and detached work in hotspots across our Borough.

Plans around an edge of care service have been paused pending implementation of family safeguarding and a review of how edge of care support could be provided.

Ensure practice for CwD is child focused with a timely response

The team has been expanded from 2.5 to 7 social workers in order to reduce caseloads to an acceptable level, including an Assistant Team Manager post. An experienced safeguarding team manager has been appointed to manage the team.

Social workers no longer hold short breaks work, to provide more time for safeguarding and assessment work. 50% of the expanded team is permanent, due to a shortage of social workers in the complex safeguarding field, however 2 agency workers are longer term.

CwD team attend Teaching Tuesdays, to ensure that the team are kept up to date around safeguarding and also that SEND & CwD issues are understood more widely.

In November 2022, Ofsted saw improved quality of assessments within the CwD team due to improved use of multi-agency information sharing.

Review procedures and protocols for use of Alternative Provision in Bury

QA visits have been in place since November 2021 and all providers who have students placed with them have been visited at least once and the majority, twice, since that point. The QA format has been revised for this academic year to promote increased rigour. A procurement exercise was carried out in summer 23 and a new AP Directory has been produced and shared with LA Teams.

Discussions are ongoing with new providers with a view to increasing the range of providers available in the new year, including with regard to Primary 6th day provision.

An AP Assurance board has been established in order to gather intelligence and maintain a strategic oversight of the AP landscape.

Half-termly data collections are now in place to ensure an effective overview of Bury pupils in Alternative Provision. Schools are asked to inform the LA of AP placements and secondary age placements are checked through Partnership meetings.

The hub provisions have ceased in their previous form and been replaced by the AP Directory and PRU AP placements.

The current PRU model has been reviewed, and simplified to ensure sufficiency for students who are Permanently excluded.

Section 19 policy and multi-agency panel is in place to oversee AP placements because of Section 19 duty being met.

6. Ensure purposeful and timely care planning that directs proportionate and effective interventions for children and improves their outcomes

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone

Impact of activity so far

The number of children leaving care slowed through the latter part of 2023, although it is expected to rise in 2024, with the impact of the long-term care planning panel. Across the year, we have seen tighter control of entry into care and stronger care planning – with relatively few children entering care and remaining at home with parents (only 6 at the end of December 2023), which also indicates more effective planning for those on the cusp of care and more planned entries into care where that is required. However, since May there has been a small but significant rise in the number of children entering care and being placed rapidly in residential homes – which raises questions concerning the quality of planning for children (as well as the sufficiency of local placement options for those entering care).

Upcoming milestones

- Recruitment to Psychologist for Family Safeguarding role (January)

IROs driving improved outcomes for children through permanence planning

The team was expanded to reduce caseloads and promote stronger relationships between children and their IROs. There are 3 permanent members of staff, 2 agency staff and 1 agency worker covering the FIRO post with the agency team manager's post converted to a permanent one.

LCS forms have been updated to include consistent reporting of permanence plans for children.

Work has been undertaken with the IROs to strengthen their oversight and challenge:

- There are a number of reviews that have fallen out of timescale due to agency IROs not setting dates for the next review or postponing meetings without setting a new date and then leaving the authority. This information is only now coming to light as we have new staff and a new manager.
- There is an established Final Care Planning Process in place, with IROs invited to Final Care Planning Meetings and their views are represented in the final SWETs of all children prior to their final hearings.
- IROs team manager attends the Permanence Panel each week to ensure that the IRO's view is represented and contributes towards permanence planning.

IROs are challenging where there is drift and delay and recent examples are IROs challenging care plans where children have remained on s.20 for several months and IROs have scrutinised court made decisions for long term foster care of very young children.

Achieving permanence through reunification, SGO or longer-term matching

38 children and young people are placed in registered children's homes; these are being actively reviewed to determine step-down arrangements and plans are in place to ensure that for those in therapeutic placements, they have been presented to complex care panel to ensure there is health funding to meet their needs.

- 241 are in foster placements, of these:
- 78 are with relatives/friends (51 long-term).
- 163 are living with mainstream foster carers not with relatives/friends (69 long-term).

The Head of Service, MyHome is reviewing those placed with foster carers which could potentially be SGO if we had a no detriment policy in place, and will prepare a report for ADCS/EDCS. There is currently 1 officer providing support to approximately 130 SGOs which is not sufficient, and we will need to consider the support if we wish to have more SGOs.

6. Ensure purposeful and timely care planning that directs proportionate and effective interventions for children and improves their outcomes

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone

Ensure the sufficiency of commissioned placements to meet identified need

Bury is an active member of the GM Commissioning Group and Placements North-West. A GM Sufficiency Strategy is in place for children and young people in care with a localised annex for sufficiency, which includes vulnerable children.

A weekly Placement panel is in place & is reviewing all residential placements & semi-independent accommodation. All new requests for residential placements are approved by the Director and retrospectively presented to panel for review.

A meeting has taken place with finance to review the monthly tracking of placements.

Improve permanence through delivery of Permanence Strategy & Framework

A new Permanence Strategy, Framework and tools were launched at a Permanence event which was held in February 2023. The event was led by children and young people, so that they could help practitioners in understanding what permanence meant to them.

Permanence Panels have been established and are chaired by respective Heads of Service, focusing on children at different points in their journey. These weekly panels were established in March 2023.

Inspectors have noted that there is “a renewed focus on securing earlier permanence for children ... leading to clearer expectations about permanence across the workforce and with partners and supporting a more structured approach”. (MV, Feb 2023).

Increase in-house fostering sufficiency

A development plan is in place to deliver the identified improvements in this area, including the work to increase recruitment of in-house foster carers such as:

- Increased emphasis on digital marketing which has proven most successful in generating interest and enquiries in fostering
- New website as part of the GM work
- A new Recruitment Strategy
- Implementing an improved financial package for Bury foster carers

Greater Manchester has undertaken a sufficiency analysis of placement needs for children in care which is now maintained as a [GM website](#). This brings together, for the first time, a sub-regional understanding and analysis of the placement types, needs and outcomes for looked after children. This information across the GM 10 will drive forward joint working and commissioning approaches to deliver the provision we need. This includes a shared approach to fostering recruitment, retention and utilisation.

Reduce delays in accessing bespoke support

Our Psychologist for Family Safeguarding post is vacant and our third round of recruitment closes in early January. It is hoped there will be some capacity to provide oversight to our looked after children. A Service Level Agreement is in place for referrals in to mainstream support.

Significant investment over the last 18 months has seen an increase in provision in Bury. September 2022 saw the launch of the Mental Health Support Teams - 2 new teams dedicated to supporting CYP MH in schools and colleges, reaching 30% of all schools. In line with national prevalence, Bury is still seeing an increase in demand for services.

6. Ensure purposeful and timely care planning that directs proportionate and effective interventions for children and improves their outcomes

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone

Develop role of Virtual Headteacher to cover all children known to social care

An experienced SENCO joined the Virtual School in September 2022 as the VS SEND Lead.

An overall Attendance Policy for the LA has been developed and we are now obtaining termly data for CP/CIN from Bury schools. Most schools are now supplying attendance data via Group Call. The data team are working on a system to align LCS data with Group Call and we were initially told that by September 2023 we would be able to filter Group Call data for children with a social worker (CWSW). We have now been told that the LCS/Group Call alignment will be delayed.

Other methods of attendance data collection are available but are not currently in place in Bury, therefore we do not have access to accurate and up-to-date attendance data for children with a social worker (who are not CLA).

Lead for Children with a Social Worker and Virtual School Inclusion Adviser are offering a fortnightly clinic for social workers and a weekly clinic for schools - appointments can be booked to discuss individual CWSW and gain advice and support around education.

This offer has been expanded and we have an offer of support specifically for children on CP/CIN called the Wellbeing Pathway, which can be accessed by schools and social workers. The Inclusion Adviser co-ordinates this and reports on it quarterly.

The Inclusion Adviser supports children on CP/CIN who are at key transition points (going into Y7 and Y11) to offer advice, support and small-group targeted interventions as part of our offer to schools.

Virtual School Conference took place in July 2023, and highlighted the barriers to learning which CWSW experience and strategies to overcome these to make their needs visible to schools and social workers. Feedback was extremely positive, with 99% of delegates rating it Very Useful/Useful and numerous examples of positive comments received. Over 120 delegates attended from schools and social care.

Improve the quality and impact of PEPs

The Virtual School Action Plan is in place to track and monitor progress and a Quality Assurance framework has been established. The Virtual School are active in meeting Heads and designated teachers to ensure a shared understanding of PEPs. All PEPs now receive individual QA, with ratings of Gold, Green, Amber and Red and clear explanations as to why they have been rated this way. The Virtual School uses this system to monitor school performance and provide support and intervention where PEP quality is a concern.

We have accurate attendance and attainment data for all CLA with daily live collection of data. Attendance is reviewed weekly and persistent absence is scrutinised. The PEP report on LCS allows for monitoring of academic attainment and progress and this is reviewed termly for all children and is used to prioritise VS attendance at PEPs for children causing concern. We use NCER NEXUS for analysis of external examination data.

Schools with PEPs which are identified as of poor quality are offered individual training. All new social workers are offered PEP training and while training has been available for all social workers this has been on a voluntary basis. There is planned mandatory training for social workers which will focus on attendance/exclusions, while PEP training will be built into the training delivered to CASS teams.

The PEP template has been completely updated to strengthen the section on voice of the child and allow for review of targets.

Termly Designated Teacher Forums take place and PEPs are a standing agenda item. Individual training is offered to schools with high numbers of CLA.

7. Develop a strategic and co-ordinated approach to providing support for care leavers to improve their outcomes

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone

Impact of activity so far

Outcomes achieved for care experienced young people remain relatively strong around the proportion of care leavers in suitable homes. Performance around education, employment and training has begun to improve and move more into line with similar local authorities during the last 2 months of 2023, following a sustained period of consistently weak performance. More children leaving care are staying put with their foster carers post-18, but we still have a higher proportion of our care leavers living either semi-independently (for 17 and 18 years old), or independently (for those aged 19 and over); and housing options for care experienced young people is a key area for improvement.

Upcoming milestones

- Launch new local offer for care leavers (January)

Review and develop our transitions planning

A Transitions Board has been established and meets monthly, co-chaired by the Head of Service for SEND & Inclusion and the Principal Social Worker in Adult Services. A virtual 14-25 service will be launched by the end of the year.

A tracker has been established which identifies all 16 year olds who may be eligible to receive adult services, pending a LCS systems solution which is being developed. Workers in both the children's and adult teams have been identified as transition specialists.

Our CASS team have now adopted the My Life, My Way paperwork (used in Adult Services) for all looked after children when they reach 17 years of age to support their transition.

In the Autumn term (2023) we are delivering training across all of the children's teams around PFA, supported by the DfE and including parents with lived experience.

We are seeking to establish 2 additional adult worker posts and a transitions co-ordinator to ensure greater focus on transitions; this will need approval from both Adult and Children's as these will be jointly funded (September 2023).

Access to suitable housing as part of the Care Leaver Offer

88 % of 18-year-olds & 94% of our 19–21-year-olds are deemed to be in suitable accommodation. We have a tenancy sustainment officer who has assisted care leavers with accommodation and avoiding homelessness which has provided some added resource and support to our care leavers.

Bury are collaborating with Rochdale and Oldham as part of the Greater Manchester National House Project. A cohort of 6 young people are identified and then supported to secure tenancies. The House Project Steering Group continues to meet; there is still an issue in terms of housing sufficiency. House Project Workers are developing relationships with the team and are based in the office one day a week.

A Joint Housing Protocol has been drafted by the substantive HoS CASS & Leaving Care and will be progressed by the interim HoS.

The Housing Growth Sub-Group is leading on a review of Bury's wider housing strategy and needs analysis, to ensure understanding of needs and strategy focused on areas identified and will also consider the use of voids for care leavers as part of the Housing Sufficiency plan and the Empty Homes Strategy which will link in with the wider GMCA activity. The group is also tasked with a review of the Allocation Policy to review the offer for care leavers.

In the November monitoring visit, young people told inspectors that housing was their number 1 priority but that they did not feel that this was a shared priority by all professionals.

7. Develop a strategic and co-ordinated approach to providing support for care leavers to improve their outcomes

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone

Develop opportunities for continuing education or employment with partners

EET strategy in place with monthly EET meetings chaired by the Service Manager for early intervention to divert NEET and actively move NEET to EET status.

Our Post-18 EET Worker commenced in post in November 2023 and will work in conjunction with our post-16 EET worker to create connections for our young people by targeted work with potential employers and training providers.

We are supporting young people with their employment readiness skills through partners including DWP and Ingeus.

We are considering how we work in partnership with local businesses and education providers to create a clear local area understanding of need and challenges to collaboratively provide solutions and renew the offer for young people.

All new apprenticeships are now offered as permanent posts, subject to successful completion of the apprenticeship, and are paid Grade 1/2 i.e. the real living wage, from the outset. This approach means apprenticeship opportunities provide a route into permanent employment and a clear career pathway.

Since 2017 the Council has successfully appointed 8 individuals through apprenticeships who declared they were a care leaver. These young people have undertaken apprenticeship training in areas including IT, Youth Work, Public Service Operational Delivery, Waste Management and Business Support. This represents around 10% of externally appointed apprentices during this period.

The Council's apprenticeship plan for 2023/24 includes an increased focus on the external recruitment of apprentices with plans to recruit approximately 21 new apprentices during the year which will be advertised to care leavers in the first instance. National Apprenticeship week is taking place 5th to 11th February and as part of this the Council is hosting Let's Try It Tuesday, an opportunity for care experienced young people to job shadow for the day.

The Designated LAC Nurse will revisit the offer for Care Leaver apprenticeships in GP surgeries (Tower Practices) which was previously under development.

Ensure the Council offers high quality apprenticeships to care leavers

Report shared with Children's Strategic Partnership Board in September 2022 outlining the apprentice and work experience offer being prioritised to support Children in Care and Care experienced.

All new apprenticeship vacancies are made available to children in care and care leavers alongside those at risk of redundancy, prior to wider advertisement internally or externally. When applying through this route, young people are guaranteed an interview if they meet the essential criteria and are granted a reduced assessment benchmark for appointment of 60% compared to the standard 70%.