

**Minutes of:** CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Date of Meeting:** 22 January 2025

**Present:** Councillor C Boles (in the Chair)  
Councillors R Bernstein, A Booth, U Farooq, E FitzGerald,  
S Haroon, G Marsden, L McBriar, M Rahimov and M Rubinstein

**Also in attendance:** Helen Chadwick (Union Representative) Councillor L Smith (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People) Jeanette Richards (Executive Director Children and Young People) Wendy Young (Head of Service Children & Young People) Stephen Holden (Director of Education & Skills) Collette Ratcliffe (Head of Service Children and Young People) Robert Arrowsmith (Head of Strategy, Assurance and Reform) Josh Ashworth (Democratic Services) Julie Gallagher (Head of Governance) Ruth Whittingham (Legal Services)

**Public Attendance:** Kiran Hampson, Kiera Delaney

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillor D Berry, Councillor L Ryder and Councillor G Staples-Jones, Areeba Malik (Child Representative)

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**41 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies are noted above.

**42 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Miriam Rahimov, declared her employment with the Acacium Group relating to the SEND update on the agenda.

**43 MINUTES**

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 7<sup>th</sup> November 2024 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

**44 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

Two members of the public attended the meeting to ask questions Kiera Delaney and Kiran Hampson.

Kiera asked In light of the findings from last years Ofsted SEND inspection in 2024, which highlighted critical deficiencies in Bury Council's provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and the cancellation of the live streams for this meeting, which is often the only way for parents to keep up to date and informed on any potential progress in service, how does the council justify the operation of the SEND Improvement and Assurance Board in private without public

input? Given the urgent need for transparency and community engagement, what specific measures will the council implement to ensure that this board is held accountable to the affected families and stakeholders, ensuring their voices are heard and that effective action is taken to address the failures identified in the inspection?

Kiran Hampson asked around the structure of the SEND team.

Responses have been circulated outside of the meeting to the questioners.

#### **45 MEMBER QUESTIONS**

There were no member questions.

#### **46 SEND UPDATE**

Councillor Smith, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, presented a brief overview of the SEND update report. The report, published before the meeting, indicated progress in most areas. The Department for Education (DFE) conducted a stock take just before Christmas, and their feedback was positive. They felt the plan was right and that progress was being made as expected. The DFE's official report is expected by Wednesday of this week.

The committee discussed the monitoring visits, including those related to dive activities and stock take sessions. These sessions are formal discussions to assess progress. Councillor Smith mentioned that the DFE was assured of the progress made in the improvement journey over the past six months. The next phase will focus on understanding the impact of actions taken and ensuring they have the desired effect.

The committee addressed the challenges with managing data for annual reviews of Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plans. Due to technical issues, the data point expected by the end of December was not achieved. The committee is now relying on Excel spreadsheets for data management, which requires manual data entry. This process is expected to take another three months to complete. The importance of accurate data systems for managing annual reviews for over 2,850 EHC plans was emphasized.

The workforce strategy was also discussed, highlighting recruitment challenges in the educational psychology team. There is a national shortage of fully qualified educational psychologists, which has impacted recruitment. The team is adopting a "grow your own" approach, recruiting and training educational psychologists and assistant educational psychologists. Despite these challenges, the team is fulfilling its statutory duties and maintaining a high percentage of EHC plans issued within the 20-week timeframe.

A member raised a question about when the data management issue will be resolved. The response indicated that it would take another three months to complete the manual data entry. A follow-up question about how many EHC plans have been transferred manually was also raised. The response acknowledged the difficulty in providing an exact number due to the manual data entry process but committed to providing an update at the next meeting.

The committee discussed the need for additional resources and the challenges in recruiting qualified staff. A member asked why the minutes of the SIAB were not on the website since October. The response indicated that the minutes were approved by the independent chair and would be uploaded to the local offer this week.

The importance of having accurate data systems to manage annual reviews and the need for a multi-year recovery plan to achieve statutory compliance were emphasized. The committee also stressed the need for a clear position on the number of completed annual reviews and the importance of providing reassurance to the public.

The committee agreed to bring the workforce strategy to the next meeting and to involve health colleagues in the discussion. The chair thanked the committee members for their contributions and emphasized the importance of continuing to make progress on the improvement journey. The next meeting is scheduled for March, where updates on the data management issue and workforce strategy will be provided.

**It was Agreed:**

- To provide the committee with data of how many EHCPs have currently been manually added to the system
- To update the committee at March's meeting of progress of adding EHCPs

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**IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

Councillor Smith began the meeting by introducing the report, emphasizing the importance of evaluating children's experiences and sharing the annual self-evaluation. This evaluation is presented to corporate parents and involves children and young people. The focus of this update was on children in care and care leavers, specifically addressing aspects highlighted by Ofsted.

A member raised a question regarding children in pre-proceedings, noting that only 24% of cases conclude within the 16-week timescale. In response, it was clarified that the 16-week timescale is a guideline to support families and make necessary changes. Sometimes, cases extend beyond this period for valid reasons, such as awaiting independent assessments or improving the quality of assessments. The focus is on giving families the best opportunity to avoid court applications. Performance improvement is a priority, and the Pre-Proceedings Impact Board, chaired by Linda Evans, will oversee this.

Following this, a member of the committee enquired about communication with young people. The response highlighted efforts to improve communication, ensuring young people are kept informed about their cases. This includes capturing their voices in social work practices and keeping them in the loop.

Another councillor raised a concern about access to apprenticeships for young people in care, expressing worry about the difficulty in accessing apprenticeships due to the lack of functional skills tutors, particularly in English. The response acknowledged the issue and assured that efforts would be made to prioritize functional skills training for young people in care.

Councillor Bernstein then asked about the stability of homes for children in care, noting that the stability is better than the national average. The response attributed this to strong matching of children with homes, support for carers, and initiatives like the Mockingbird Constellation. The focus is on providing therapeutic support to carers and children, which will also help recruit more foster carers.

A councillor raised a concern about the increasing reliance on private providers and the associated costs. The response explained that the goal is to reduce reliance on private providers by increasing the internal sufficiency of homes. This includes recruiting more foster carers and establishing local children's homes. The high costs of private placements are a budget pressure, and efforts are being made to address this.

Another councillor asked about financial planning in the face of high costs. The response acknowledged the challenge of budgeting for the high costs of private placements. The focus is on reducing the number of children in care and addressing the root causes of the increase. The government is also addressing excessive profits in the private sector.

The committee was informed that six monitoring visits had been completed. The next step is an engagement meeting with Ofsted on April 28th, followed by a potential full inspection.

In conclusion, the chair thanked the committee members for their contributions and emphasized the importance of continuing to make progress on the improvement plan. The next meeting will provide updates on workforce strategy and data management.

#### **It was agreed**

- To bring a workforce update to the next meeting

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### **EARLY YEARS SUFFICIENCY UPDATE**

Councillor Smith introduced the report, highlighting the need to ensure sufficient early years provision in the system. The report also addressed upcoming changes related to childcare entitlements and the move towards school-based childcare preschools.

Councillor Smith emphasized that the local authority does not directly run early years services but works to ensure there is sufficient provision. The report noted that the local authority has always maintained sufficiency and quality, with most provisions rated good or better. The goal is to continue this trend and improve uptake of early years provision.

The report mentioned several initiatives to increase the number of childcare places, including applications for additional places and the registration of new nurseries. The local authority is also working to support the growth of good quality childcare across the board.

Councillor Farooq commented on the importance of early years provision for school readiness and working parents. She expressed support for the initiatives and looked forward to seeing them implemented.

A Councillor raised a question about challenging discriminatory practices in early years settings. The response highlighted that there are only so many places available, and the local authority works to utilize these places better. They also work with providers to ensure they meet requirements and challenge any discriminatory practices.

A member asked for examples of discriminatory practices and how they are addressed. The response provided examples such as parents reporting that their child with special educational needs (SEN) was unable to access certain nurseries. The local authority works with providers to understand their capacity and support them in managing risk and providing inclusive services.

Councillor Fitzgerald raised a question about the economic factors affecting childcare uptake and whether there is systemic discrimination. The response noted that

individual complaints are addressed, but there is no systemic analysis of discrimination based on economic factors. The local authority focuses on ensuring that all entitled children can access childcare.

Councillor Fitzgerald also asked about the quality of childcare provision. The response assured that all current provisions are rated good or better by Ofsted. The challenge is to maintain these standards while increasing the number of places. The local authority supports providers from the initial inquiry through the registration process and ensures they meet quality standards.

A member commented on the importance of ensuring that children with SEN can access early years provision. The response highlighted ongoing work to support providers in meeting the needs of children with SEN and ensuring inclusive practices.

A Councillor enquired about the cost, availability, and quality of childcare as a national issue. The response acknowledged that these are significant challenges and emphasized the importance of maintaining high-quality provision while increasing availability. The local authority is working on a childcare sufficiency assessment to identify gaps and support providers in addressing them.

The meeting concluded with a discussion on the importance of early years provision for children's development and school readiness. The chair thanked the committee members for their contributions and emphasized the need to continue working towards improving early years sufficiency.

**It was agreed:**

- The report be noted

**49 URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

**COUNCILLOR C BOLES**

**Chair**

**(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 9.20 pm)**