

Minutes of: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 10 July 2025

Present: Councillor C Boles (in the Chair)
Councillors A Arif, S Arif, D Berry, U Farooq, E FitzGerald,
J Grimshaw, S Haroon, K Hussain, J Lancaster, G Marsden and
L Ryder

Also in attendance: Stephen Holden, Janet Lloyd, Robert Arrowsmith, Joanne
Burns Union Representative

Public Attendance: No members of the public were present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence:

59 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies are noted above.

60 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

61 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 13th March 2025 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

62 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Questions were received in advance of the meeting, these were dealt with outside of the committee and responded to over email.

63 MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were no member questions.

64 BURY ATTENDANCE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Councillor Smith opened the meeting by introducing the Bury Attendance Partnership report. She explained that responsibility for school attendance had shifted from Education Welfare Officers to schools themselves, and praised Janet Lloyd for her leadership in taking a collaborative and strategic approach. Janet has been actively involved in attendance groups and has worked to ensure that the partnership is embedded across the academic year.

Janet Lloyd provided further detail, explaining that the approach has involved a wide range of stakeholders and has placed student voice at the centre. A survey was conducted with over 2,400 students using Microsoft Teams Forms, with most completing it as a homework task. The data was broken down by year group and gender, and covered issues such as transport,

safety, and wellbeing. Workshops were held in schools to explore these themes further, and student councils were engaged to help act on the findings.

Councillor Arif asked how students were involved in the survey and how the data was collected. Janet explained the process and highlighted that the survey had been designed to be accessible and inclusive. However, when asked about neurodivergent students, she noted that the survey did not include a question to identify neurodivergence, so this data could not be disaggregated. Councillor Smith added that the “Change Makers” youth group, which works alongside the SEND improvement programme, helps to ensure that the voices of young people with additional needs are heard in strategic discussions.

The conversation then turned to menstrual health and its impact on attendance. Janet shared that some girls reported missing school due to their periods, and that a support group is being developed in partnership with health services to address this. Councillor Farooq mentioned the Lily Pads community group, which provides sanitary products, and stressed the importance of reducing embarrassment and stigma. Councillor Smith agreed, noting that while schools say they provide sanitary products, girls still feel uncomfortable asking for them. As a result, peer support groups are being set up, particularly for Year 7 and 8 students, to help normalise these conversations and empower young people to support one another.

Councillor Fitzgerald raised concerns about the rise in elective home education and asked how the council ensures that children are still receiving an education. Janet explained that the council maintains an updated website and holds regular attendance forums. A multi-agency panel meets fortnightly under Section 19 policy to review referrals, and information is also gathered from other services such as housing. Councillor Smith emphasised the importance of safeguarding in these cases and ensuring that national policy is implemented locally. Janet added that the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) plays a key role in these decisions and that wraparound support is available for families.

Councillor Berry requested access to the survey questions and data on excluded and suspended children. Janet confirmed that she would circulate the materials following the meeting.

Councillor Boles asked about the safeguarding assurances linked to the attendance pledge. Janet responded that regular stakeholder meetings are now well attended, and three sub-groups have been created to address emerging issues. The pledge will continue to evolve, with branding and logos being developed to support its visibility. Councillor Boles also asked about the involvement of health services. Janet confirmed that there has been strong collaboration, particularly around elective home education, although Councillor Smith acknowledged that there are still challenges in aligning health and education services and ensuring adequate funding.

Joanne Burns Union member raised the issue of transport and its impact on attendance for children with SEND. Janet confirmed that transport had been identified as a barrier in the survey and that this led to the formation of a sub-group involving the police and other partners. Joanne also asked whether data was available on looked after children. Janet explained that this data is monitored anonymously through the Virtual School.

There was further discussion about how the work could be embedded at a Greater Manchester level, particularly in relation to Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). Councillor Smith stressed the importance of capturing young people’s voices carefully and building trust, especially given the fear some may have of social services involvement.

Finally, Joanne Burns suggested extending the survey to parents, particularly those who may face language barriers. Janet confirmed that this is being trialled in primary schools, with the

aim of improving parental engagement and understanding attendance challenges from a family perspective.

It was agreed:

- To note the report, and thanks Janet for her contribution to the meeting
- To circulate survey questions and results.

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UPDATE ON CURRENT PROJECT SAFETY VALVE POSITION

Councillor L. Smith cabinet member for children and young people provided an update on the current financial position regarding the High Needs Block.

It was reported that the council is facing a significant overspend of approximately £20 million, and that the current funding model is not working effectively for schools, parents, or local authorities. The system is operating in deficit, and while the council has entered into a legal agreement with the Department for Education (DfE) to reduce this deficit, it is unlikely that the targets will be met. Councillor Smith stressed that this is not a localised issue but part of a wider national challenge affecting many councils.

Robert Summerfield provided background on Project Safety Valve (PSV), a programme introduced by the previous government to help local authorities manage increasing costs associated with children with additional needs. He explained that the 2014 SEND reforms significantly changed the landscape by extending the age range for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) from school-age to 0–25 years, and by lowering the threshold for assessment. These changes led to a substantial increase in the number of EHCPs issued, which in turn drove up costs across the system.

Councillor Fitzgerald asked whether the council was in a holding position pending the release of the upcoming White Paper on resource provision. Robert Summerfield confirmed that engagement had taken place with the Local Government Association (LGA) and referenced a substantial report by Isos Partnership. He noted that the White Paper is expected to propose systemic changes, and that the issue is now being treated as a national crisis rather than a local failure.

Councillor Fitzgerald also queried whether the issue had bypassed the usual Green Paper stage. Summerfield responded that while formal consultation had occurred, the urgency of the issue may have accelerated the process.

Councillor Boles raised concerns about whether Project Safety Valve had helped local authorities regain financial control over SEND. Robert Arrowsmith responded that while there has been no national improvement, locally the PSV programme has supported investment in provision and helped shift some support into mainstream schools. However, the rising number of EHCPs remains the key driver of the deficit.

Councillor Boles pressed further, asking whether it was feasible to regain financial control. Robert Arrowsmith acknowledged that it would be a long and slow process, and that rapid change is unlikely due to the complexity of the system. He noted that the upcoming changes in the autumn could bring about systemic reform.

Councillor Boles suggested that members review the LGA report, which includes a proposal for writing off high needs deficits. He offered to circulate this to members. Councillor Smith clarified that while Bury has a legal agreement with the DfE to reduce the deficit, it is unlikely that the council will be able to meet the agreed targets.

It was agreed:

- The update be noted

66 FORWARD PLANNER DISCUSSION

The committee convened to explore a range of emerging priorities and concerns within Children's Services, with a particular emphasis on the intersection between health and education, SEND provision, and the voice of young people in shaping services.

Councillor Lancaster opened the discussion by highlighting the importance of strengthening the connection between Health and Children's Services. She stressed the need for scrutiny to regularly engage with health-related issues, particularly those affecting children with SEND and sensory processing needs. She also raised the significance of maternity services, including prenatal care, and the broader concept of the "First 1000 Days" as a critical window for early development and intervention.

This led to a wider conversation about the potential benefits of holding a joint scrutiny meeting between the Health and Children's Committees. Members agreed that such a meeting could help address overlapping areas of concern and foster a more integrated approach to service delivery.

Councillor Fitzgerald supported this direction and proposed the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to examine the interface between health and children's services, with a particular focus on SEND. The group would aim to identify gaps, improve coordination, and ensure that scrutiny is aligned with the evolving landscape of provision.

Joanne Burns contributed insights around early identification, particularly in relation to mental health and emotional wellbeing. She emphasized the importance of timely access to CAMHS and the need for services to be responsive to the needs of children and families at the earliest possible stage.

Councillor Berry raised concerns about the quality assurance of special schools, noting that some placements come with disproportionately high costs. She questioned the rationale behind these expenses and called for greater transparency. She also highlighted issues around exclusions and suspensions, particularly during the winter months when transportation challenges can exacerbate attendance problems.

The committee then turned its attention to the curriculum and age appropriateness of learning activities. Members expressed concern that some aspects of the national curriculum may not be developmentally suitable for all children, and that more attention should be paid to how these are implemented locally. There was strong support for amplifying the voice of children and young people, with suggestions that video content could be used to hear directly from them about their experiences and ideas for improvement.

Councillor Bury emphasized the need for regular updates on persistent non-attendance, and requested reassurance around how attendance is being monitored and addressed. This tied into broader discussions about inclusion and the implementation of the Attendance and Inclusion Strategy, which several members felt should be revisited and strengthened. Councillor Smith brought forward several key themes for future scrutiny, including the development of Family Hubs, school readiness, and the importance of embedding youth voice into all aspects of service design. She echoed earlier points about the First 1000 Days and suggested that this framework could be used to guide early years policy and investment. The committee noted that the outcome of the upcoming Ofsted ILACS inspection would be presented at the next meeting. Members acknowledged that the resulting judgement would necessitate a robust Improvement Plan, and agreed that scrutiny should play a key role in monitoring its implementation.

Finally, there was a call for greater assurance around school standards, outcomes, and benchmarking. Members expressed a desire to understand how Bury compares to other areas and how performance is being tracked over time. There was also interest in exploring the Graduated Approach to SEND provision, with a request for a briefing or presentation to clarify its application and implications.

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URGENT BUSINESS

The Committee extended its sincere thanks to Stephen Holden for his valuable contributions during his time with us. His insights and commitment to improving outcomes for children and families have been greatly appreciated. We wish him every success as he transitions back into the education sector, where his experience and passion will no doubt continue to make a positive impact.

COUNCILLOR C BOLES
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 9.00 pm)