

AGENDA FOR

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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To: All Members of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

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

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, 10 July 2025 |
| 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 3 - 8)*

Minutes from the meeting held on 13th March 2025 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 BURY ATTENDANCE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH *(Pages 9 - 22)*

Janet Lloyd Exclusions & Community Education Manager in attendance to support this item, Report to follow

7 UPDATE ON CURRENT PROJECT SAFETY VALVE POSITION *(Pages 23 - 26)*

8 FORWARD PLANNER DISCUSSION

Discussion around forward planning for the forthcoming municipal year

9 URGENT BUSINESS

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

Minutes of: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 13 March 2025

Present: Councillor C Boles (in the Chair)
Councillors R Bernstein, D Berry, U Farooq, E FitzGerald,
G Marsden, L McBriar, M Rahimov, L Ryder and G Staples-Jones

Also in attendance: Jeannette Richards Executive Director for Children's
Will Blandamer Executive Director for Health and Adult Care
Wendy Young Head of Service SEND
Chief Superintendent Kirsty Oliver (Bury District Commander)

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor S Haroon

50 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies are noted above.

51 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

52 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd Feb 2025 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

53 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The following questions were received in advance of the meeting and responses circulated:

1. How can one afford to pay an interim thousands of pounds, for Social care when parents like myself cannot even get a suitable care package to support the grandchild that I raise.

Recruitment into social care roles is a national and local issue. Sometimes, we need to employ interims in order to continue to deliver services to our children, families and carers, demand for services means that we cannot afford to have a gap in the teams. We share your frustration at the premium cost of such appointments and would prefer a permanent substantive postholder, we continue to revise our approach to the recruitment and retention of staff, including signing up to the Greater Manchester pledge which imposes pay caps on a number of roles in social care.

As you may know, the government's new Child's Wellbeing and Schools bill clearly recognises the important role of kinship carers and seeks to improve the support available across the country and recognise the centrality of wider family in long-term care arrangements for

children and young people. I strongly endorse this approach, and we will be seeking to move to match up to new national standards as soon as we practically can do so.

2. **Current Challenges:** The increasing number of SEN children who are being moved out of mainstream schools, despite the push for inclusion, and the lack of immediate access to appropriate provisions. Is this being monitored to see which schools are repeatedly struggling to be inclusive environments.
3. **Potential Solutions:** What actions are being taken to ensure mainstream schools are better equipped to support SEN children, including potential funding, training, or policy adjustments. Will this include those schools that have joined academies ?

This issue is of great concern to many families, and I believe a thorough discussion on the steps being taken to address it will be valuable. Considering the shortage of specialist placements this is an area of concern to many families.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to your response

Yes, it is something that we monitor and we know that there is a variety of approaches in schools. We also know that there is a substantial move into special schools at the point of primary to secondary transfer.

However, it is important to note that while it is true that Bury does have a relatively high number of children with EHCPs outside of mainstream settings (or maintained special schools), it is equally important to acknowledge that Bury's Primary and Secondary schools have a larger number of children with EHCPs than is typical elsewhere. These two facts are two of the defining features of Bury's local SEND system.

For many years, the balance of local specialist SEND provision has not been right. The number of places in special schools was insufficient and there was a gap in provision between mainstream school classes or special schools, with little in between those two options. This has led to children not always being educated in the most suitable provision.

In the past year, we have begun to develop more specialist provision – a new special school and an increase in the number of mainstream schools with resourced provision to provide more support for those children that need it. We have detailed plans to continue this process, with two further special schools agreed with the DfE and further resourced provision and SEN Units in mainstream schools. We also continue to provide support and training for children and schools irrespective of whether a school is an academy. In common with all other local areas, most of the funding to meet the needs of children with SEND is provided to schools directly. In Bury the total budgeted amount to be spent on SEND in 2024/25 in Bury was £56.6 million, of which £46 million (81% of the total sum) is given directly to schools and providers, £4.6 million (8%) is spent on Home to School Transport; £730,000 (1%) is provided in Direct Payments to parents and carers, £4.5 million (8%) is spent on services for schools, children and parents, including SEN Support and Inclusion services, Advice services, the Education Psychology Service; and £1.2 million is spent on administering the SEND processes (EHCP assessment and reviewing).

We are in the process of transforming the local system to better support children with SEND. We recognise that there is still a distance to travel

Kiera Delaney asked, responses will be sent direct.

I heard in the last meeting that 92% of ehcps were completed currently in the 20 week statutory timeframe, I may have misheard from up here in the clouds, which is another reason why the live stream is so beneficial, and I am happy to be corrected, but could you break that figure down for me specifically in relation to

How many Ehcp applications for 2022- now

How many were no/yes to assessment

How many of those who received a no to assess went on to mediation or appeal.

How many of those who had a yes to assessment went on to receive an ehcp? Did those who didn't get a plan go on to mediation or appeal?

How many of those who went to appeal or mediation received an ehcp?

What is the timeframe for children receiving a plan if their parents have had to go to mediation or appeal?

How much was spent specifically on barristers to represent the LA at tribunal over those years?

Happy for the years to be broken down into months if the changes and improvements are more recent and not measurable over those timeframes.

Kiran Hampson Asked, response will be sent direct.

In the panel meetings related to SEND and CWD team why are minutes and written feedback regarding decisions made by the SEND team and the attendee list not shared with the community, and how can outcomes be better communicated to all stakeholders and families the minutes should not be have to done through a SAR request

54 MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were no member questions.

55 SEND UPDATE

Councillor Lucy Smith, the cabinet member for children and young people, provided an overview of the report, detailing the actions that had been promised. Wendy Young Head of Service for SEND mentioned that after two monitoring periods over six months, the next stocktake is planned for July.

This will involve deep dive monitoring through the Priority Impact Plan (PIP) and local area partnerships to facilitate local discussions. The report aims to combine and theme various areas to provide more accurate support while waiting, and to better understand the impact of the plan on children and families.

Councillor Ryder expressed satisfaction with the dedication and hard work evident from the outset of the letter, and inquired about the confidence in meeting the steps and receiving positive feedback. Councillor Smith responded confidently, acknowledging the challenges and outlining the next steps, hoping to see the impact and address future challenges.

Wendy emphasized that as the journey continues, the Priority Impact Plan identifies how well the team has worked and the ongoing impact, suggesting that actions may need to be adjusted. She highlighted the challenges around the SEND improvement journey and measuring impact.

Will Blandamer Executive Director for Health and Adult Care discussed the NHS contribution, noting progress but also significant waiting times for children's ADHD services, which are challenging and subject to national issues. Jeanette Richards Executive Director for Children's Services added that recognising the scale of challenges is crucial, and everything needs to be organised effectively across the wider area.

Councillor Bernstein inquired about staffing challenges and the risk they pose to the plan. Councillor Smith acknowledged staffing as a risk, noting difficulties in achieving the right results and challenges in supporting schools through a graduated approach.

Councillor Bernstein asked if there is enough proactive effort in retaining staff and looking creatively at ways to keep them. Councillor Smith admitted difficulties within partnerships and emphasized the need to attract and retain staff, particularly in the SEND team. Wendy Young added that while there hasn't been a huge turnover, there are complex casework and high-volume positions that are difficult to recruit for. She stressed the importance of investing in training and development for new and existing staff to align with knowledge and skills.

Councillor Boles focused on measuring impacts and challenges, questioning how to scrutinize effectively and ensure the voice and lived experience of children are captured. An action was noted to gather feedback from children on the impact of SEND items directly.

Councillor Fitzgerald mentioned a positive letter from the Department for Education (DFE) and inquired about the nature of EHCP plans. Wendy Young noted an increase in numbers and emphasized the importance of ensuring recovery areas and improving numbers through part-time timetables and narrative amendments.

Councillor Fitzgerald followed up on parental preferences, noting sufficiency issues and statutory deadlines that may have changed due to consultation delays. The Committee was provided with assurances of challenges and the importance of child feedback in parental reports.

It was agreed:

- The report and letter from the DFE be noted

56

SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT UPDATE

Chief Superintendent Kirsty Oliver, the district commander for Bury, delivered a comprehensive presentation on complex safeguarding in Bury. With nearly two decades of policing experience, she has developed a thorough approach to safeguarding and child protection. Her extensive background includes roles in vulnerability and partnership, serving as GMP's Director of Intelligence, and working as a child sexual exploitation expert for the College of Policing.

Chief Superintendent Oliver's strategic priorities focus on several critical areas: child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation, modern slavery involving children, and online abuse. Additionally, she addresses serious abuse, knife crime, organized criminality, and domestic abuse, recognizing these as significant concerns within the community.

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in Bury is a key component of the safeguarding strategy. This hub consists of 34 members from various agencies, including police, health, and children's services. The team is co-located within the police building, which facilitates collaboration and ensures a coordinated response to complex safeguarding issues.

The Bury Safeguarding Children Partnership oversees these priorities, ensuring effective collaboration among agencies. Regular audits and sub-group meetings are conducted to maintain governance and oversight, helping to monitor the response and impact across the multi-agency partnership.

Daily communication within the MASH team ensures that all aspects of safeguarding are covered. This routine interaction keeps everyone informed and aligned with the strategic priorities.

Councillor Berry raised concerns about drug-related child exploitation. Chief Superintendent Oliver clarified that this issue is linked within the broader category of child exploitation

offenses. Sensitive cases, such as live investigations, are handled by the force's major child exploitation team.

Councillor Bernstein inquired about the status of these investigations, and it was noted that updates are provided once the investigations are no longer live.

Chief Superintendent Oliver highlighted her dedication to creating a secure and equitable environment for both the community and her team. She regularly conducts internal surveys to ensure her staff feels appreciated and empowered to share their ideas.

Moreover, she collaborates closely with faith and community leaders to safeguard the well-being of minority communities. Her commitment to protecting children and vulnerable individuals in Bury is reflected in her strategic approach and emphasis on multi-agency cooperation.

It Was Agreed:

- Chief Superintendent Kirsty Oliver be thanked for her presentation and attendance at the meeting
- The presentation be noted

57

YOUTH JUSTICE - GMP CHILD FIRST POLICING STRATEGY

Chief Superintendent Kirsty Oliver discussed the framework for child-centred policing in Greater Manchester Police (GMP), emphasizing the importance of addressing the needs and rights of young people within the justice system. The approach is structured around nine key pillars, including district representation, stop and search, custody, violence reduction, missing persons, training, community engagement, prevention and engagement, and the command structure involving gold, silver, and bronze levels of leadership. Stephanie Parker holds the Bronze command role, while Kirsty Oliver is in the Silver command position. These roles are crucial in ensuring that all districts within GMP adhere to the nine pillars of child-centred policing.

One significant initiative discussed was the Out of Court (OOC) disposals, which aims to change the approach to child arrests. The new policy requires immediate approval for any child arrest, ensuring that the decision is appropriate and justified at the moment. This initiative has successfully reduced the number of children in custody by 25%, highlighting the effectiveness of the new approach. The Youth Voice Panel is an essential part of GMP's strategy, providing young people with a platform to express their views and influence policing policies. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) Youth Voice Panel is scheduled to convene in April this year, further emphasizing the commitment to involving young people in decision-making processes.

Kirsty Oliver provided statistics on the number of children brought into custody, noting that 153 children were detained, including those from outside Bury. This data underscores the need for continued efforts to reduce the number of children entering the justice system. Jeanette Richards discussed the Youth Justice Partnership's focus on preventing exploitation and supporting young people within Bury's youth services. The partnership aims to intervene early and provide resources to divert young people from criminal activities.

Several councillors raised important questions and concerns during the meeting. Councillor Fitzgerald questioned whether GMP has the right pool of personnel to effectively implement child-centred policing. Councillor McBriar inquired about the level of parental buy-in and

support for the initiatives. Councillor Berry asked if there are enough officers to meet the demands of child-centred policing.

Councillor Smith emphasized the need for more safe places for young people to prevent exploitation and provide supportive environments. Councillor Boles discussed creative solutions to address the problems faced by children, highlighting the importance of feeling safe and supported. Councillor Marsden inquired about the progress of Onside Youth Zones, and Councillor Smith responded that the initiative is not going ahead. Instead, resources will be directed towards outreach efforts to provide support across the borough.

Kirsty Oliver highlighted the need for officers to receive training on how to communicate effectively with children. She noted that while Bury officers are empathetic, they require confidence and skills to handle situations involving young people. Councillor Ryder suggested engaging with primary schools to educate students about social media, given that many have mobile phones by Year 6. Councillor Haroon raised the issue of engaging with BAME children, and Kirsty Oliver mentioned a recent event across the Scrutiny panel on stop and search, indicating a willingness to address these concerns. Areeba Malik discussed the work being done by youth services in primary schools and the potential for collaboration with GMP.

Jeanette Richards discussed the role of the education system in supporting expelled students, with plans to routinely communicate with these young people and provide necessary support.

It Was Agreed:

- Chief Superintendent Kirsty Oliver be thanked for her presentation and attendance at the meeting
- The presentation be noted

58

URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR C BOLES
Chair

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

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: COMMITTEE MEETING

DATE: 2/7/2025

SUBJECT: BURY ATTENDANCE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

REPORT FROM: JANET LLOYD, SCHOOL ATTENDANCE, EXCLUSIONS & COMMUNITY EDUCATION SERVICE MANAGER

CONTACT OFFICER: Janet.lloyd@bury.gov.uk

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The DfE introduced the Working Together to Improve School Attendance Statutory Guidance in 2024 which the School Attendance Team rolled out to all schools. This changed the landscape and relationship between the local authority and schools.
- 1.2 New guidance for schools was created along with supporting documents, penalty notice information, leaflets, new ICT systems, school training, attendance forums and briefings were implemented.
- 1.3 To ensure that the guidance was having an impact and that 'attendance is everyone's responsibility', an Attendance Stakeholders Group was established in September 2025 which also included CME and EHE (children missing education and elective home education).
- 1.4 Our aim as the group was to create an Attendance Partnership Approach and Pledge to support school attendance across Bury Schools providing a golden thread throughout our organisation. The group will bring forward their expertise and knowledge from various backgrounds to support this work.
- 1.5 The group worked well together in agreeing how the Attendance Partnership Approach should look. Samples were taken from other Local Authority's that had produced their Attendance Strategies. It was agreed that we would not place any data into the document as this is outdated as soon as its written, nor would we quote from the DfE Guidance as we would be repeating the protocol.
- 1.6 The Attendance Partnership Approach has the student voice running throughout the document. We understand what our young people find the barriers to school attendance and how we can support them with this.

2.0 ISSUES

- 2.1 Identifying the relevant stakeholders and requesting the stakeholders to commit their time to the group.
- 2.2 Secondary schools despite being approached as a whole and individually are not willing to participate in the stakeholder group. There is one primary headteacher who is the representative for the primary schools and this is fed back into the BAPH (Bury Association for Primary Headteachers).

- 2.3 The Stakeholders have agreed to meet every month until we the Attendance Partnership Approach was created. The group felt it was essential for traction within the group.
- 2.4 Student voice surveys have been carried out in secondary schools across Bury to identify the barriers to non-school attendance. Themes have been identified from the results. Workshops have been created with the school attendance team and the youth service and in each school, around 64 students have attended the workshops over a 6 week period.
- 2.5 Schools are receiving the results back from the surveys and workshops to help them improve their school attendance. In some instances, it may be where students are stating they don't feel safe during lesson change over, as more staff are required on the school corridors. This is an easy fix for schools to create a safer and calmer environment. Schools will be able to relook at their working processes and listen to their students voices / concerns.
- 2.6 The results of the surveys and workshops have provided the stakeholders with subgroups to support school attendance:
- 2.6.1 Bullying
 - 2.6.2 Transport
 - 2.6.3 Periods
- The subgroups will unpick the issues the students have raised and look at support strategies that can be implemented to remove the barriers.
- 2.7 The powerful work around the student voice has been recognised by the DfE. Bury School Attendance Team have participated in creating a webinar which will be available on the DfE YouTube channel for all other local authorities to access. The work is being held up as a great example for other local authorities to follow.

3.0 CONCLUSION

The Pledge for all stakeholders will be arranged in the autumn term. A consideration around the date may be considered at the headteachers conference to engage the schools in the process where lack of engagement has previously been.

The Attendance Partnership Approach is waiting to go for printing before being circulated.

List of Background Papers:-

Bury Attendance Partnership Approach

Contact Details:-

Janet Lloyd, School Attendance, Exclusions & Community Education Service Manager

Executive Director sign off Date:_____

JET Meeting Date:_____



BURY ATTENDANCE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH TO IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE 2025 – 2027



**Our Aspiration is that all Children and Young People
in Bury reach their potential, are happy, and safe
and are therefore able to make the best use of their
skills to lead independent and successful lives**



BEE NETWORK





FOREWORD

Our Partnership: Let's do it for Children

Our Attendance Partnership Approach for children and young people in Bury has been prepared in collaboration with our children, young people, our workforce and our partners.

The plan is ambitious reflecting our collective passion and determination to secure the best possible outcomes for children, young people and our communities here in Bury. The plan links to the Bury "Let's Do It" Strategy which sets out our vision for the children of the borough with 4 key outcomes:

1. Improved quality of life
2. Improved early years development
3. Improved educational attainment
4. Increased adult skills levels and employability

This Partnership is also driven by the Local Authority's Education and Inclusion Strategy 2025.

We recognise that attendance is 'Everyone's Responsibility' and that embedding transformation will require a strategic approach, working with partners and local communities, with the voice of children and young people informing and influencing the way we work together to achieve our shared priorities.

Our Partnership provides the foundations of our priorities and how these will be delivered.

Our aspiration is that all children and young people in Bury reach their potential, are happy, healthy and safe and are therefore able to make the best use of their skills to lead independent and successful lives



INTRODUCTION

The Partnership has been developed in collaboration with:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transport for Greater Manchester Partnerships• Bury School Attendance Team• Bury Markets• Bury Child Licensing• CAMHS• Bury Children's Safeguarding Partnership• Bury Children's Social Care Services• Local councillors• Bury Complex Safeguarding Team• Connexions• Early Help Teams | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education Psychology Service• NHS / Health Partners• Homelessness & Housing Services• Millgate Shopping Centre• Bury SEN Team• GM Police• Bury Primary Schools• Bury Refuge Services and Parks• Bury Virtual School• Bury Youth Justice Service• Bury Youth Service |
|--|---|

BACKGROUND

Bury is made up of 8 children's centres, 1 nursery school, 70 primary schools, 3 independent schools, 2 special schools, 14 secondary schools, 2 free schools and 2 sixth form colleges. Many of the education establishments in Bury have a 'good' Ofsted rating.

We want to ensure that all our children receive high quality teaching which will enrich their lives and provide them with good outcomes and a bright future.

Working together with our young people and creating links with the wider community, we will continue to build on self-esteem, health, education and an appreciation of their rights and values.

KEY ISSUES

These are some of the areas of concern which have lowered school attendance in Bury. This information was collated in the spring term of 2025 from student voice and raw data:



- Unauthorised leave during term time
- Increase in school penalty notices
- Since the national pandemic, an increase in students overcoming mental health difficulties.
- Some families do not value education
- A decline in some families applying for nursery places and reception school places for summer born children
- An increase in electively home educated families
- An increase of children missing in education
- Children's physical illness / low self-esteem
- Concerns about leaving parents / young carers
- Bullying
- Friendship issues / relationship issues
- Avoiding sanctions / behaviour
- Menstrual issues / period poverty
- Struggling with subjects / studies

Our children and young people told us that they value education and that they feel safe in our schools. We have listened to our children and young people and understand the areas that are important to them :

- Continuing to promote children and young people's rights and ensuring that their voices are heard
- Ensuring that school is an inclusive place to learn which promotes equality and challenges discrimination
- Provide young people with skills for life
- Ensuring that support is available with transitions at all phases of children's education journey
- Providing support with mental and physical health
- Promoting safe and independent travel across the borough
- Providing good quality careers advice, access to employment and work experience
- To live satisfying lives
- To be healthy and happy
- To live in a place where people feel safe and have a sense of belonging



WHAT WE KNOW

- Our children want to do well academically
- Our young people feel cared about in school
- Young people have opportunities to further themselves in education
- Young people enjoy the social side of education
- Young people enjoy achieving success.

OUR OFFER

Throughout their education, we want our children and young people to thrive and develop and to have opportunities to :

- Attend sporting events
- Visit Bury Town Centre
- Visit a farm, feed animals
- Visit a library, museum and art gallery
- Learn how to swim
- Visit places of natural beauty such as The Rake, Peel Tower, Burrs Country Park, Prestwich Park, Harcles Hill
- Experience different places of worship
- Enter competitions
- Take part in and / or experience a performance
- Volunteer in the local community / contribute to environment and engage in social change
- Learn how to stay safe and have positive relationships
- Experience independent travel
- Use advanced technology
- Meet inspiring people
- Raise money for charity
- Visit college or university
- Plan for the future



WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Bury is committed to securing good attendance for all our children and young people. We understand that to achieve this goal, we must work together with a range of stakeholders and agencies to address school attendance issues.

All of our professionals, partners and stakeholders will (continue to?) work together to be 'attendance curious' about our children and young people in a range of settings. Whilst we understand that some professionals' involvement will depend on the needs of the child and family, school attendance will be a focus of every child's plan.

ROLE OF PARTNERS

Working alongside the local authority, there are a number of partner agencies supporting schools, settings and colleges to improve outcomes. These include: local Dioceses, Bury Association of Secondary Head Teachers, Bury Association of Primary Head Teachers and Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). It is important that in working in partnership with organisations and education leaders, we ensure training, development and support are available when key themes and gaps are identified and that our approach is joined across the Partnership/Local Area.

Bury Local Authority also includes the following:

- Networks for headteachers and leaders
- Support for head teachers including induction, mentoring and buddying
- Leadership conferences and residentials
- Governor training
- Subject leader networks
- Safeguarding forums
- Attendance Forums
- Exclusion Toolkits
- School Attendance support
- Educational Psychology Communities of Practice
- Inclusion Support
- Training and networks



- SEND networks
- SENCO network

OUR AMBITION

1. To ensure that all children access excellent early years education
2. To ensure that all children and young people access a choice of excellent local schools settings and colleges
3. To ensure that young people are equipped for adult lives, know the opportunities available to them and have access to an excellent post 16 education offer
4. To set out clear expectations of all our educators.

NEXT STEPS

HOW WE ARE GOING TO DO THIS

We will create a multi-agency partnership so that children and families get help from the right person or service at the right time. We will ensure that attendance is everyone's responsibility, not just a school issue.

We will continue to work closely, gathering students' voices and listening to their views about the barriers to school attendance.

1. We will create working groups across health and education to target the issues raised
2. We will continue to offer whole school training
3. We will organise training for wider agencies
4. We will ensure wider publicity and communications for parents / carers and agencies
5. We will organise multi-agency transition events and support to children and families
6. We will continue to develop our Graduated Approach Toolkit to provide information and resources for educational practitioners with advice and resources for early intervention, to ensure that children and families can get the help that they need, regardless of the setting they attend.



7. The Bury Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) Neglect Strategy has been updated to include 'educational neglect'; failure to provide a stimulating environment, support learning or ensure school attendance. This will support Education and Children's Services working in partnership to secure the best outcomes for children and families.
8. Each agency will sign a pledge which commits to 'School Attendance as everyone's responsibility'
9. Agencies will continue to attend the School Attendance Stakeholders group meetings and support the issues raised.

OUR EXPECTATIONS:

Within Bury, we have a good relationship with our schools, academies and colleges and we expect our providers to support our partnership for the children and young people by:

- Listening to their voices and learning from their experiences
- Celebrating the diversity and range of backgrounds of our children and young people and to value their heritage and experiences.
- Taking collective ownership for our children and young people to ensure that they are happy, safe and feel supported.
- Promoting good attendance
- Using school exclusions as a last resort
- Identifying and responding to early to children and young people's additional needs
- Ensuring that schools and colleges are poverty proof
- Recognising all types of achievement
- Promoting equality and diversity.

PLEDGE

Bury's Pledge to ask all organisations to:

- | | |
|---|--|
| • Work jointly to improve school attendance across Bury | • Champion the benefit of good school attendance in our work |
| • Support families to help the children develop and maintain good attendance habits in the early years and throughout their school life | • Celebrate good and improved attendance |



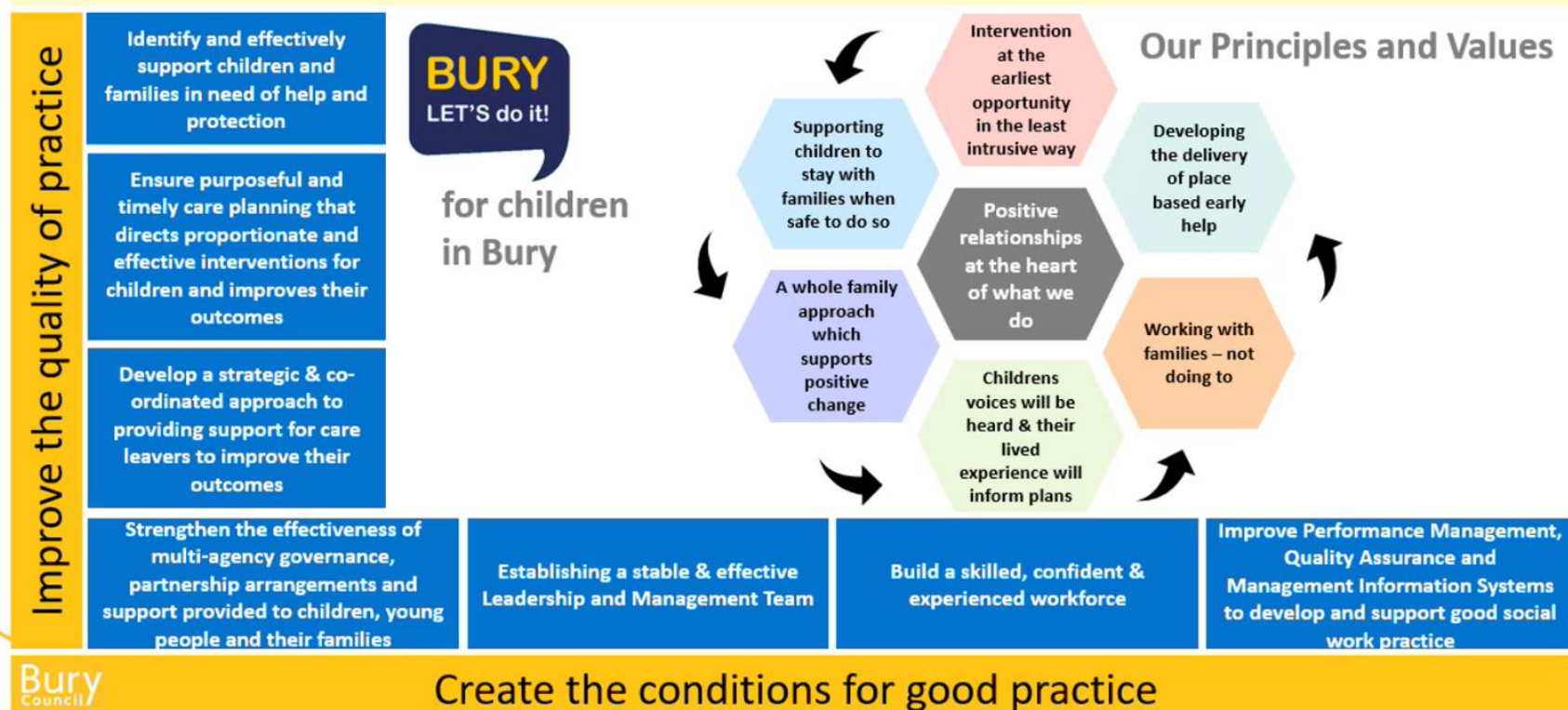
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen to children and young people's experiences and how they affect their ability to engage in school life daily | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minimize disruption to learning if children and young people are unable to attend school |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review how organisations can support all children and young people to have good school attendance in Bury | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain supporting children and young people to attend school as a clear strategic priority |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognise that poor school attendance can be the symptom of other issues in the family home and that early intervention can prevent issues becoming entrenched or worsened | |

LET'S
do it!

Bury
Council

Our children and young people improvement journey

Our aspiration is that all children and young people in Bury reach their potential, are happy, healthy and safe and are therefore able to make the best use of their skills to lead independent and successful lives





BURY ATTENDANCE PLEDGE 2025 - 2027

Bury's Attendance Pledge is a collaborative approach to promoting good attendance within schools across Bury, so that all children and young people can fulfil their potential.

All agencies signing the Pledge agree to uphold a set of joint principles and work together to implement the Pledge.

Bury Council have agreed to support the Pledge and work together with schools to ensure a partnership approach to the Pledge. The Pledge will seek to strengthen support from key multi-agencies and further support our shared approach to school attendance.

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work jointly to improve school attendance across Bury | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion the benefit of good school attendance in our work |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support families to help the children develop and maintain good attendance habits in the early years and throughout their school life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate good and improved attendance |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to children and young people's experiences and how they affect their ability to engage in school life daily | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimize disruption to learning if children and young people are unable to attend school |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review how organisations can support all children and young people to have good school attendance in Bury | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain supporting children and young people to attend school as a clear strategic priority |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise that poor school attendance can be the symptom of other issues in the family home and that early intervention can prevent issues becoming entrenched or worsened | |

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SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: Children's and Young People's Scrutiny Committee

DATE: July 2025

SUBJECT: Project Safety Valve Agreement Update

REPORT FROM: Stephen Holden, Director of Education and Skills

CONTACT OFFICER: Robert Arrowsmith, Head of Strategy, Assurance & Reform, Children's Services

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 Bury Council signed a Safety Valve agreement with the DfE in 2021, that agreed a programme of activity designed to reduce the overall level of expenditure on children with additional needs in Bury so that the expenditure remained within the national provided budget and the deficit that had grown year on year could be eliminated by the end of the agreement. As part of the agreement, Bury agreed to deliver changes of approach and new initiatives and the DfE guaranteed additional funding to pay down the deficit and support those changes, in addition to supporting the creation of new Special Schools under the free school programme and the expansion of existing special schools. The original agreement in 2021 was refreshed and revised and agreed in early 2024. The agreement covered the period up to the end of 2027/28 financial year.

1.2 Progress on delivery of the agreement is monitored by the Project Safety Valve Delivery Board, chaired by the Executive Director for Children's Services, with progress also now being reported to the Finance Assurance Board. Periodically, the council also reports to the Department for Education (DfE) on progress. Reporting requires an estimated financial position at the end of the agreement period. Following Bury's local area SEND services Inspection by the Care Quality Commission and Ofsted. The inspection team identified widespread, systemic failings in services and highlighted the challenge that we need to do more to improve the outcomes of children and young people with special educational needs.

2.0 ISSUES

2.1 In the most recent completed return (April 2025), Bury reported to the DfE that we met the expectations of the management plan last financial year and are making progress in our SEND improvement journey. At the end of the first full financial year (2024/25) of our revised PSV management plan and a year and a half after its submission to DfE we were approximately £0.7m ahead of plan. This positive story is supported by key performance indicators that have moved in a positive direction; including:

- Fewer requests for new Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) compared to this time last year
- An increase in the number of cessations compared to this time last year
- 20-week compliance to completing assessments within 20 weeks remaining high at 97%

- Growth in specialist capacity and in resourced provision in mainstream schools.

2.2 Bury is also viewed by external stakeholders as making good progress in its SEND improvement journey, with positive feedback provided by the DfE at the December and July stocktakes on progress.

2.3 Despite this progress, the pace of deficit reduction is behind the level originally set out in the PSV plan. We are projecting a significant overspend vs plan this year (~£1.5m). The in-year cost pressures are caused by higher demand and cost in two key areas:

- Higher numbers of children with EHCPs than planned.
- Higher numbers of children requiring higher band and/or special school provision, with higher numbers of children in higher cost independent special schools because of capacity issues within the specialist, maintained sector.

2.4 Elements of this are due to systemic challenges both locally and more widely. This includes a challenging job market impacting on staff recruitment and retention and consequent delays in expanding team capability (e.g. developing an outreach team).

2.5 The education provider market is also under considerable pressure, creating issues in sufficiency development, with several schools reversing their agreement to develop Resourced Provision and decisions still outstanding from the DfE on new Special Free Schools (an important component part of Bury's PSV agreement and in the PSV agreements in other councils).

2.6 Our current forecasting based on our revised plan will see the Direct Schools Grant (DSG) deficit reducing from £19 million to £11 million by the end of the plan, with the deficit continuing to reduce in following years. This would see us achieve the deficit reduction but that there is a significant risk to the current timelines. This modelling is predicated on assumptions about the number of new EHCPs issued and the increase of local specialist capacity that are built into the agreement with the DfE, but which are now subject to slippage. It is also important to note in viewing projections and agreement that there has been substantial growth nationally in the number of children with EHCPs in the last two years – up by a quarter in total in that time – and that this growth is widespread, not limited to the councils with PSV or Delivering Better Value agreements in place with the DfE.

Project Safety Valve Background & Wider National Context

Impact of the SEND reforms

2.7 The national SEN reform programme of 2014 sought to provide more joined up services for children and families -and was widely supported by the sector and parents at the time, with support from politicians with personal experience of caring for disabled children/children with additional needs. With the benefit of hindsight, the circumstances of the reform implementation and some of the key changes made by the reforms, contained the seeds of the current national financial crisis.

2.8 The reforms made two key changes that altered the balance of the previous system for supporting children with additional needs in schools:

1. They extended the age range supported by plans up to the age of 25 (previously 19) and down to pre-school ages; and secondly

2. They shifted the presumption towards assessment for an EHCP, if it was requested.

2.9 These important changes took root in a school system that was increasingly financially challenged and separate from local authority control (academisation) and strongly encouraged to focus on school standards and academic achievement (English Baccalaureate, zero-tolerance behaviour policies etc.)

2.10 Further, it was not envisaged that the proposed changes would result in substantially more children being in receipt of statutory support, so the reforms were not accompanied by substantial additional funding for local authorities to support implementation. The reforms also existed in the wider context of reduced funding for public services and large-scale cuts in non-statutory, early intervention services.

2.11 The consequence of all these issues has been a huge growth in the number of children with EHCPs. This increase was partly driven by parents seeking help for their children struggling within an increasingly academically focused school system; but have also been driven by schools seeking assistance to meet growing levels of additional need in children attending their schools.

2.12 The result of the above has been the vast growth in the High Needs Block (HNB) spend (the money within the Direct Schools Grant (DSG) spent on children with additional needs and the provision to support them) and by extension DSG deficits, which increased from almost nothing in 2014 to a projected £5.4 billion plus by the end of 2025/26.

Central Government Response

2.13 The government initially did not focus on the growth in deficits, but eventually responded more meaningfully as concerns grew from accountants and auditors about the size of the growing deficits in council accounts (and the customary expectation that council budgets must balance every year). In response, the Government adopted a two-pronged approach.

2.14 Firstly, in late 2019 the DfE launched a consultation asking for views about strengthening the arrangements for ring-fencing DSG, confirming that DSG deficits did not have to be met from local authorities' general funds and were to continue to be treated separately from main council accounts. It is important to note that throughout the existence of the Direct Schools Grant, it has sat outside of council general accounting. Initially, this prevented councils from using any DSG surplus to support themselves financially, as most local authorities had DSG surpluses.

2.15 The DfE put the ring-fencing requirement into the School and Early Years Finance Regulations 2020 to give it statutory backing. The regulations clearly stated that DSG deficits could not be paid off from general funds without first requesting permission from the Secretary of State, and that the DfE would work with authorities to enable them to pay off their DSG deficits from within DSG funds. This clarification is commonly referred to as 'the override'. This is really a mischaracterisation, as it infers that something new had been put in place, rather than an affirmation that the accounting treatment would continue as it had before. Initially, this provision was confirmed for the period up to 2022/23, but in early 2022, the override was confirmed until the end of 2025/26.

2.16 At this point in time (late 2019), the total national deficit stood at a little over £600 million, albeit up from only £2m five years before, and the DfE clearly viewed the deficits as caused by system mismanagement at a local level. Therefore, the second approach to addressing the issue by central government was to draw up a list of the local authorities

whose High Needs Block (HNB) overspend was greatest as a percentage of the annual HNB allocation. There were 5 local authorities in wave 1 2020/21 (including Bury), 9 in wave 2 2021/22, 20 in wave 3 2022/23 and 5 in wave 4 2024/25.

2.17 Eventually, Safety Valve was one of two interventions to support progress in addressing what was a growing issue, with a further 55 local authorities were included in the Delivering Better Value programme, which started in June 2022. At this point with over half of local authorities in some form of support/intervention for high needs deficits, it became increasingly challenging to argue that this was a local, rather than a national problem (by the end of 2022/23 financial year, local authority DSG deficits had more doubled to be just less than £1.6 billion).

2.18 In the spring of 2025, The Guardian published research from a survey of all local authorities in England about the expected scale of DSG deficit at the end of 2025/26.

- 131 councils replied (86% of the total).
- The total projected DSG deficit for the authorities replying at the end of 2025/26 was £5.2 billion, a 54% increase on the figure at the end of 2024/5; and suggesting a likely national deficit of close to £6 billion if the findings are generalised across all LAs.
- Seven county councils make up £1.35 billion of the total (Hampshire, Devon, Surrey, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cheshire East, West Sussex)
- Only 3 of the 79 Local authorities with an agreement with the DfE around High Needs deficits (PSV or DBV) expected to have eliminated their deficit at the end of the period of the agreement (and all three expected it to be a temporary position before the deficit began to grow again).
- Many LAs that had previously had better deficit positions, both within the region and nationally, were expecting significant negative movement during the year.

Statutory Override and Autumn White Paper on Schools and SEND Reform

It was announced on 20th June 2025 that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) statutory override, which was due to cease from April 2026, is now proposed to continue until the end of 2027-28 financial year. The announcement came as ministers launched a consultation on reforms to the funding formulas which determine councils' government funding. Launching the consultation, the government pledged to reform the funding for SEND and children's social care so that it "better reflects the level of demand of these services" and help ensure they are "properly funded to support the most vulnerable children".

The financial consultation will be followed by a White Paper in the Autumn outlining the Government's proposals for reforming the current system for supporting children with additional needs.

List of Background Papers:-

None

Contact Details:-

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