

Minutes of: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 23 July 2026

Present: Councillor C Boles (in the Chair)
Councillors D Duncalfe, U Farooq, E FitzGerald, S Haroon,
C Hunt, G Martin, J Sheppard, J Southworth and J Southworth

Also in attendance: Ben Dunne Director of Early Years, Education and Skills
Wendy Young Head of Service SEND
Robert Arrowsmith Head of Strategy, Assurance and Reform
Will Blandamer Executive Director for Health and Adult Care
Councillor Walmsley Cabinet Member for Children and Young
People
Josh Ashworth Democratic Services

Public Attendance: Two members of the public in attendance
Kiran Hampson
Kiera Delaney

Apologies for Absence: Councillor P Davies
Jeanette Richards Executive Director for Children and
Young People

105 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies are noted above.

106 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

107 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 12th March 2026 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

Matters arising from the previous meeting the chair requested an update. Ben Dunne Advised

Following the SEND Transition Event, a SEND transition session was held the next day to further explore issues raised by attendees. A follow-up meeting then took place with the wider team, including representatives from SENDIAS and the Head Educational Psychologist, to review feedback and consider opportunities for improvement. Discussions focused on how information and support can be more effectively communicated to schools, young people and their families during the transition process.

Members noted that signposting to available support had not been sufficiently clear, particularly for schools and the Parent Carer Forum. In response, work has been undertaken to strengthen communication pathways and improve awareness of available services. The Local Offer has also been updated to ensure information is more accessible and easier to navigate. These actions are intended to support the development of a more effective SEND transition event in future and to ensure that families are better informed about the support available to them.

108 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No questions were received in advance of the meeting.

There were two members of the public in attendance at the meeting who each asked a question

Kiera Delaney referred to the recent Ofsted monitoring inspection and noted that improvement activity had been undertaken across all six priority areas. She highlighted continuing concerns regarding preparation for adulthood and asked what independent evidence officers had that Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) were leading to better outcomes in practice.

Kiera further asked what accountability and governance arrangements were in place to ensure that the findings of the inspection translated into improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND, and how the Council assured itself that EHCP provision was being delivered and adhered to.

Ben Dunne stated that the Council accepted the findings of the inspection and recognised that further improvement was required. He advised that progress had been made since 2024 and that the SEND Partnership Board and SEND Improvement Assurance Board were providing oversight of the improvement programme and monitoring delivery against key priorities.

Wendy Young highlighted that co-production remained an area for development. A draft Co-production Charter had been developed with input from the Parent Carer Forum, and further work was underway to strengthen engagement with parents and carers and ensure their views informed SEND improvement activity.

She added that social care contributions to EHCPs were monitored through statutory reviews and quality assurance processes. Provision within EHCPs was considered non-negotiable, and a range of mechanisms were in place to monitor delivery and take action where provision was not being secured.

The Chair thanked Kiera for her question.

Kiran Hampson asked whether the Committee would agree to allow additional time for public questions if time permits. She also asked how quarterly performance data, including the lived experiences of children and young people and their parents, would be published and whether the Council would commit to making this information available on its website.

The Chair clarified the Committee's procedure for public questions, advising that under the Committee's rules only one public question is permitted per person and supplementary questions are not usually allowed. However, where a question is submitted in advance then a supplementary question can be asked if this relates to the initial question will be accepted

In response, Ben Dunne advised that performance monitoring and governance arrangements are being overseen through the KPI and Governance Sub-Group, which is tracking progress against key measures. He explained that part of this work will include making relevant

performance datasets publicly available. He also highlighted the role of specialist sub-groups, including the SEND Sufficiency Sub-Group, and noted that other priority areas within the Improvement and Impact Plan will be incorporated into the sub-group structure.

Councillor Walmsley emphasised the importance of transparency and expressed support for publishing performance information where appropriate. She assured members of the public that she would be available to discuss any concerns or questions and agreed to follow up directly with those in attendance. Councillor Walmsley also asked officers to provide appropriate assurances and committed to being available for further discussions by telephone or email.

The Chair thanked Kiran for her question.

109 MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were no member questions.

110 APPOINTMENT OF CORPORATE PARENTING CHAMPION

The Committee was advised that each committee is required to appoint a Corporate Parenting Champion at its first meeting of the municipal year. The Champion will receive training from Children's Services and act as an advocate and spokesperson for Corporate Parenting matters within the Committee.

Cllr Walmsley outlined the importance of the Corporate Parenting role and emphasised that the position represents a commitment to championing the needs and interests of looked after children and care experienced young people.

Cllr Farooq and Cllr FitzGerald both put their names forward for the position of Corporate Parenting Champion.

111 CAPACITY REPORT - INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE TO SET THE LANDSCAPE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Committee considered a report outlining the current national and local context for Children's Services, highlighting the significant reforms and challenges facing the sector. Members were reminded that the report had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

Councillor Walmsley introduced the item and invited Robert Arrowsmith and senior officers to provide an overview.

Officers advised that Children's Services are currently experiencing the most significant period of national reform in over 20 years. The reforms include major changes to SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), the Families First Partnership Programme, children's social care delivery models, children's residential care provision, and post-16 skills and youth services. These reforms sit alongside Bury's ongoing improvement journey and present both significant challenges and opportunities.

The Committee heard that SEND reform represents one of the largest national change programmes, designed to address shortcomings within the existing system. Alongside this, the Families First Partnership Programme will fundamentally change how children's social care services are delivered. Officers explained that, by April 2027, local authorities and statutory

partners including health services, police and education providers will be required to implement new arrangements.

The Families First Partnership Programme brings together several strands of work. Under the new model, children and families will receive support through integrated Family Help Teams, with greater continuity of support from early help through to more specialist interventions. Services are expected to become more locality-based, moving away from historically centralised arrangements. Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams will bring together professionals from social care, health, police and education to work collaboratively with vulnerable children and families.

Members were advised that reforms to children's residential care will also have a significant impact. Greater regional collaboration is planned through Regional Care Cooperatives, with Greater Manchester operating as one of the national pathfinder areas. The intention is to improve sufficiency of placements, manage costs and deliver better outcomes for children in care.

Questions and Discussion

Councillor John Southworth asked for clarification regarding the Families First Partnership Programme.

Robert Arrowsmith explained that the programme is an umbrella for several related reforms. A key change is the removal of traditional distinctions between early help and children in need services, enabling children and families to receive support through a more integrated team approach. Family Help Teams will include a range of practitioners, including social workers and other qualified professionals, with services delivered more locally. Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams will include specialist professionals from health, police and education to ensure a coordinated response to safeguarding concerns.

Councillor Martin queried staffing levels, vacancies and savings targets, noting a lack of figures within the report.

Robert Arrowsmith advised that more than half of the Children's Services budget is spent on placements for children in care, particularly residential placements. The Regional Care Cooperative aims to help contain placement costs. The largest financial pressure continues to be the number of children requiring residential care. Officers reported recent progress in reducing numbers of children in care and noted that social worker caseloads had increased from approximately 16-17 cases per worker to around 18-19 cases as demand for services continues to rise. Balancing increasing demand with financial pressures remains one of the Council's most significant challenges.

Councillor Julie Southworth highlighted the need to improve communication and engagement with parents, particularly through the SEND Information, Advice and Support Service.

Councillor FitzGerald asked about the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and the Council's approach to tackling this issue.

Ben Dunne advised that early intervention remains critical. Work is underway through the SEND reform programme and broader partnership arrangements to improve outcomes from early years through to post-16 education. Officers outlined plans to strengthen transitions from secondary education into employment, training and further education, including engagement with the local business sector. It was acknowledged that reducing NEET numbers is a key priority and requires coordinated action across partner organisations.

Councillor FitzGerald requested further information on this issue and suggested it be considered as a future work programme item.

Councillor Farooq asked officers what their biggest concerns were ahead of forthcoming inspections.

Wendy advised that maintaining the improvements achieved to date whilst delivering significant reform programmes represented the key challenge. Anticipated inspection activity over the next 18 months will assess both service performance and progress against SEND reforms. Continuing improvement amid increasing demand for services remains a significant concern.

Ben Dunne added that inclusion remains the central principle underpinning the SEND reform journey. Ensuring a shared understanding of inclusion across all services and communicating this effectively to parents and stakeholders will be essential to delivering successful outcomes. Robert Arrowsmith stated that the primary challenge within children's social care is embedding the new Families First model while continuing to improve outcomes for children. This will require significant cultural and operational change across the Council and partner organisations. Inspectors will be focused on outcomes for children and families, making it essential that reforms lead to tangible service improvements.

Councillor Duncalfe asked whether appropriate systems were in place to ensure standards within children's homes.

Robert Arrowsmith explained that Ofsted is responsible for regulating and inspecting children's homes and has powers to intervene where standards are not met. He noted that there has been substantial growth in the children's residential care market across the North West, attracting placements from other areas. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority is seeking to improve regulation and coordination across the region.

Councillor Walmsley commented that there can be a misconception that local authorities are solely responsible for regulating children's homes. While planning applications may come before councils, quality regulation rests with Ofsted. Councillors were encouraged to share any concerns or intelligence relating to residential provision.

Robert Arrowsmith added that market intelligence suggests there may now be an oversupply in some areas of the residential care market, particularly at the lower end, and there are signs that placement costs may be beginning to stabilise.

Councillor Boles questioned whether achieving the required culture change would prove difficult.

Ben Dunne acknowledged the challenge, noting that large-scale organisational change is inherently complex. A stronger focus on early intervention and more aligned partnership working will be necessary. Officers expressed confidence that the plans and governance arrangements currently in place provide a strong foundation for successful implementation.

The Chair thanked officers for the comprehensive overview and noted the significant scale of national reform currently affecting Children's Services.

It Was Agreed

- The Committee noted the report and update

Actions / Future Work Programme

1. NEETs - Members requested a future report on Children not in Education Employment and Training
2. Families First Partnership Programme - Members requested further detail on implementation plans, workforce implications and expected benefits for children and families and a future meeting
3. Children's Services Capacity and Financial Pressures - Members requested future monitoring of workforce capacity, caseloads, vacancies and budgetary pressures within Children's Services.

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BURY'S LOCAL AREA SEND MONITORING INSPECTION

The Committee received a report regarding the outcome of the Bury Local Area SEND Monitoring Inspection. Members were expected to have read the report in advance of the meeting.

Councillor Walmsley introduced the report, following which Wendy Young provided an overview of the findings and progress made since the inspection. Wendy Young explained that the Local Area Partnership had worked closely with Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England colleagues through regular stocktake meetings and ongoing monitoring arrangements. The monitoring inspection took place in March and the inspection outcome letter was published on 29 June.

The report outlined the progress made against the Priority Action Plan and concluded that improvements had been achieved across a number of areas. However, it was acknowledged that, despite being subject to intervention since 2017, one priority area remained a concern. Work would therefore continue through the delivery of the Priority Action Plan to ensure sustained improvement and positive outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

It was also noted that the report had previously been considered by the Health Scrutiny Committee and that the monitoring inspection should not be seen as an endpoint, but rather as part of the ongoing improvement journey for the Bury Local Area Partnership.

Councillor Hunt noted the lack of specialist provision for young people aged 19 and over and sought assurance that this issue was being addressed. In response, Wendy Young acknowledged the challenges associated with post-16 provision. She advised that work was underway to assess sufficiency across post-16 education and support services. A SEND Sufficiency Lead had been appointed and a SEND Sufficiency Plan was currently being developed. Engagement was taking place with key post-16 providers to better understand local needs and ensure that future provision met demand. The Sufficiency Plan would be brought forward for further consideration in due course.

Councillor FitzGerald highlighted the importance of ensuring that actions identified through both the Children's and Health Scrutiny Committees were appropriately monitored and progressed. It was confirmed that minutes and actions would be circulated and that arrangements were in place to ensure effective oversight across both scrutiny functions.

Councillor Boles sought clarification regarding transition data for children educated within alternative provision settings.

Wendy Young explained that concerns raised during the inspection had related primarily to pupils attending the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and children who had been permanently excluded. Historic data collection processes within the PRU had not been sufficiently consistent. However, partnership working with primary and secondary headteachers had been strengthened, and discussions had taken place through the relevant forums to ensure that the

PRU could provide greater assurance regarding transition arrangements and performance information.

Councillor Boles also asked for an update on the tracking and completion of annual Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) reviews.

Wendy Young advised that, while performance was not yet at the level required, significant improvements had been made through the full implementation of the Liquidlogic case management system. All children and young people were now recorded on the system, enabling more effective monitoring and tracking of annual reviews. Compliance rates were improving and further progress was expected.

The chair thanked officers for the update

It Was Agreed:

- That the report be noted.

Actions

- The developing SEND Sufficiency Plan to be brought to a future meeting of the Committee for consideration.
- Continued monitoring of progress against the SEND Priority Action Plan.
- Ongoing oversight of actions arising from both the Children's and Health Scrutiny Committees to ensure coordinated improvement activity.

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SEND REFORM PLAN

Members considered the report on the SEND Reform Plan and received a presentation from Ben Dunne.

Ben Dunne provided an overview of the SEND Reform Plan, outlining that the current SEND system is costly and requires significant reform. He advised that the changes proposed were complex and represented a substantial cultural shift across education, health and social care services. The plan had been developed within a five-week timescale and was centred on increasing inclusion and improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND. He explained that the reforms sought to establish a more inclusive education system through a graduated approach to support, incorporating universal, targeted and specialist interventions. He also highlighted the proposed "Experts at Hand" model, which would provide greater support to schools through a team-around-the-school approach.

In response to questions from Councillor Southworth regarding communication with parents and carers, Ben Dunne acknowledged that improving communication remained a significant challenge and priority. He advised that engagement work had already commenced with children and young people through student councils and that four new engagement groups had recently been established. He stated that parents and carers would be central to the reforms and to the development of the "Experts at Hand" model.

Wendy Young added that improved communication across the partnership was recognised as essential and highlighted the importance of ensuring that underrepresented families were able to contribute to service development.

Councillor Sheppard asked what additional support from central government would assist the delivery of the reforms and requested information regarding the number of therapists and specialist professionals required to support implementation. Ben Dunne advised that further information would be provided following the meeting. Councillor Sheppard also sought

clarification regarding the "Experts at Hand" model and whether sufficient capacity existed to deliver the service. Ben Dunne noted that final national guidance had only been published on 10 June and that further work was required locally to determine delivery arrangements.

Will Blandamer advised that NHS Greater Manchester was undertaking work to consider strategic opportunities around services such as speech and language therapy. He highlighted workforce development as a key challenge and identified workforce planning as a significant risk area for the future.

Councillor Sheppard further referred to the Exclusion Strategy and asked how the authority would respond where schools did not engage with the reforms

Ben Dunne advised that approximately 80 per cent of schools were now part of Multi Academy Trusts, creating both opportunities and challenges. He reported that strong relationships were being developed with trusts and that engagement had taken place with 13 of the 14 secondary schools in Bury. He stated that suspension and permanent exclusion rates remained too high and that robust analysis and conversations with schools were taking place to improve inclusion. He reported that schools had generally engaged positively with the reforms to date.

Robert Arrowsmith commented that SEND reforms shared many of the challenges facing wider children's social care reforms, particularly around increasing demand and workforce pressures. He noted that some of the strongest performing authorities nationally were based in London and that inclusive practice appeared to be a key factor in their success.

Councillor Martin referred to the baseline figures contained within the report and requested further information regarding Education, Health and Care Plan numbers and future projections. Ben Dunne advised that he did not have the figures available during the meeting and would circulate the information following the meeting. Robert Arrowsmith added that the reform programme focused on establishing the necessary foundations for long-term change and that significant benefits for families may not be realised until 2029-30. Ben Dunne acknowledged that supporting parental confidence in mainstream education placements would represent a major challenge moving forward.

Councillor Martin also raised concerns regarding the complexity of an Early Years feedback form and questioned whether this may have led to applications being rejected where support was unavailable to complete the paperwork. Wendy Young advised that the form was intended to improve consistency but was not mandatory, as applications could be made through alternative routes. She acknowledged that the quality of supporting evidence could vary. It was agreed that further information would be provided to Councillor Martin outside of the meeting.

Councillor Hunt asked about potential challenges in securing commitment from Multi Academy Trusts to the reforms. Ben Dunne advised that there were currently 14 trusts operating within Bury and that regular dialogue continued through network meetings and headteacher forums. He reported that attendance and engagement levels had generally been positive and emphasised the importance of maintaining strong lines of communication.

Councillor FitzGerald queried how expectations would be managed given the long-term nature of the reforms. Ben Dunne acknowledged previous criticisms of SEND services and stressed the importance of demonstrating commitment through action and improved communication with families. Councillor FitzGerald also noted that corporate parenting responsibilities were not explicitly referenced within the report. Ben Dunne responded that the wider inclusion agenda incorporated vulnerable children and that stronger alignment between SEND services, schools and the Virtual School would continue to be developed.

Joanne Burns highlighted the relationship between inclusion and school funding, noting the significant investment made in London schools over a number of years. She questioned whether schools had sufficient resources and specialist support available to deliver genuinely

inclusive education. Robert Arrowsmith acknowledged that funding for programmes such as "Experts at Hand" was currently time limited and identified the continuation of funding as a future challenge. Ben Dunne accepted that London schools generally benefited from higher levels of funding but emphasised that strong partnership working, support and scrutiny arrangements also contributed to improved outcomes. He added that support would need to reflect the differing needs and contexts of individual schools.

Councillor Boles sought assurance regarding the co-production of the SEND Reform Plan. Ben Dunne stated that while engagement with the Parent Carer Forum had taken place, he would have welcomed greater involvement and acknowledged that the compressed timescale for submission had limited opportunities for engagement. He confirmed that co-production would be strengthened as the reforms developed. Robert Arrowsmith added that the Parent Carer Forum had been heavily involved in specific aspects of the self-assessment process. Councillor Boles welcomed these assurances and stressed the importance of ongoing co-production with parents and carers.

In response to questions regarding governance and leadership arrangements, Councillor Walmsley advised that she had recently taken on responsibility for the portfolio and had undertaken a handover from the previous portfolio holder. She reported that she held weekly meetings with the Executive Director and was continuing to familiarise herself with the issues and priorities within the service area.

The Committee noted the report and welcomed the proposed direction of travel, whilst emphasising the importance of communication with families, sufficient workforce capacity, sustainable funding arrangements, meaningful co-production and ongoing monitoring of the reforms as implementation progresses.

It Was Agreed:

- The report be noted

Actions:

- Officers to provide information regarding workforce requirements, including therapy and specialist staffing needs.
- Officers to circulate updated EHCP data and projections to Committee Members.
- Officers to provide follow-up information regarding concerns raised about the Early Years feedback form.

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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)