

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

Date of Meeting: 7 January 2026

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

Also in attendance: Jeanette Richards Executive Director of Children and Young People, Ben Dunne Director of Education and Early Years
Collette Radcliffe Service Manager Children and Young People

Public Attendance: There were 6 members of the public at the meeting

Apologies for Absence: Councillor A Arif, Councillor D Berry and Councillor G Marsden

87 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies are noted above.

88 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

89 MINUTES

It was agreed:

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

90 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No questions were received in advance of the meeting.

Questions from previous meetings had been circulated ahead of the meeting.

There were six members of the public present at the meeting

A question was raised regarding the 20-week timescale for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), specifically seeking clarification on what the current position is and what data is being captured.

It was noted that minutes from the Local Offer had not been submitted and that this limited assurance. Officers outlined ongoing work around quality assurance of EHCP plans, commissioning, and the use of digital technology to better organise the SEND landscape. This includes improving the ability to capture information in one place, particularly minutes from the SEND Improvement Advisory Board (SIAB), to provide clearer assurance of the local system.

Ben Dunne advised that a regular meeting has now been established to address gaps around the Priority Improvement Plan (PIP), outcomes, and quantitative measures. These are being

reviewed on a weekly basis. He noted that SIAB will play a key role in providing independent challenge and that the absence of clear data has previously created confusion.

Action: Officers to ensure SIAB minutes are captured and made available to support system assurance.

A member of the public referred to previous meetings and acknowledged that communication is improving, but asked what specific actions Children's Services are taking. It was clarified that personal matters would not be minuted.

Further questions were raised around communication and annual reviews, including assurances on timeliness, transitions, SIAB-specific data, and how quality assurance is being applied to annual reviews. Councillor Smith responded that scrutiny, the education strategy, and governance arrangements place inclusion at the heart of the system, with clear accountability beyond the local authority, and that understanding the Council's current position is essential.

Jeanette Richards added that not all work undertaken is currently visible on the Local Offer, including SIAB activity. She stressed that this does not detract from individual reviews and ongoing work with schools, which remain responsible for leading their improvement plans. She acknowledged challenges with timely annual reviews due to resourcing pressures and confirmed that remedial activity is underway. Quality assurance tools, including emerging use of digital and AI-enabled analysis, are being used to assess the quality of plans and reviews. She added that conversations are ongoing about what good communication should look like and how engagement can be strengthened.

Ben Dunne explained that, through the Communities of Practice model now taken in-house, SENCOs have increased opportunities to contribute to system improvement and share practice.

A further public question was raised regarding children with mental health needs, poor attendance, and those not accessing education or college, including concerns that some children are not being given fair opportunities. Councillor Smith responded that building strong relationships is central to addressing these issues. He highlighted the role of Alternative Provision (AP), attendance monitoring, and safeguarding, noting that AP is currently commissioned in different ways and that greater consistency is needed. He stressed the importance of monitoring attendance for children with EHCPs, ensuring safety, hearing the voice of the young person, and establishing clear pathways back into education.

Members noted a reported 12% increase in demand in 2024 and concerns that new specialist provision does not always meet need. Councillor Smith responded that children with low to moderate needs should be supported effectively in mainstream settings, while those requiring specialist provision must have access to appropriate placements. He acknowledged that some children have been turned down for specialist schools and confirmed that future planning includes ensuring the right balance of specialist and mainstream provision.

Ben Dunne highlighted the development of satellite hub models as an opportunity to better meet needs locally. He explained that work is underway in Bury to develop these hubs, working closely with parents and schools, and that this forms part of longer-term planning to improve inclusion and outcomes.

91 MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were no member questions.

92 FAMILY HUBS AND BETTER START UPDATE

Councillor Smith introduced the item and gave a brief overview of the paper, outlining progress with the Best Start of Life programme and the roll-out of Family Hubs, including the development of a flagship hub within a ward. It was acknowledged that delivery had taken longer than originally anticipated.

Collette Radcliffe provided further detail on the programme, confirming a £2.1m investment into Family Hubs, which will continue over the funding period. She explained that ambitious targets had been set by the Department for Education, particularly around improving outcomes at primary school level and achieving a nine-point increase in school readiness. A three-year plan has been developed in response to these targets. Delivery will take place across five neighbourhoods, using a number of buildings and meeting the requirement for 70% outreach. Contractors at Chesham Fold are on site, with hubs expected to open within the next couple of months. Services will include health and safety support for families, delivery from the Prestwich hub, and use of Early Years Centre buildings. Early years sessions will be increased through four funding strands focused on learning, home learning and parenting, alongside an expansion of Portage services.

Councillor Farooq raised concerns about limited space within existing buildings and asked how this would be managed. Officers explained that the model is based on strong outreach, with plans to use community venues, preschool playgroups and other local spaces rather than relying solely on hub buildings. Councillor Smith added that historic constraints around estates and capital had limited development, but emphasised the importance of working with partners and community assets such as parks, church halls and other shared spaces, with Family Hubs acting as a point of access and direction rather than a single physical location.

Councillor Farooq asked whether community groups had been engaged in the planning process. Ben Dunne responded that getting the model right was key, stressing outreach, creativity in using existing spaces, and co-design with schools. He noted that stronger engagement with schools could provide additional opportunities to use space once the model is embedded. Jeanette Richards added that over the last 18 months delivery had been scaled up, with good examples of community engagement and a solution-focused approach. She noted that additional funding would allow further scaling up and more meaningful engagement with community groups while meeting outreach requirements.

Councillor Ryder queried the £2m funding over three years and asked about a specific funding strand that had not been received and was being challenged at a Greater Manchester level. Councillor Smith advised that it was unclear why this strand had not been secured, and Collette Radcliffe confirmed that the issue is being considered at a GMCA level. It was agreed that further clarification would be provided.

Councillor Lancaster asked how Family Hubs would be advertised to residents and how clarity would be provided on what services are available, particularly to ensure consistent communication across stakeholders. Jeanette Richards explained that the funding formula is linked to different streams over the three-year period, allowing delivery of services, capital investment and commissioning of parenting support. Funding is also being used to provide tools to support learning at home, with grant funding flowing down across longer-term plans. Officers noted that work is ongoing to improve communications, and that midwives based in the Radcliffe hubs are already helping to promote awareness of available services.

Councillor Arif welcomed the service and support at Redvales and asked how provision would be sustained once current funding ends. Councillor Smith responded that there is a clear intention to maintain the offer through a five-year plan, drawing on different funding streams and aligning with the Government's 10-year strategy and neighbourhood working. He acknowledged the complexity of reforms and the challenges posed by short-term funding

settlements, but stressed the importance of avoiding duplication and ensuring early years support is sustainable.

Joanne Burns asked how Family Hubs would link with education, Portage, CAMHS and paediatric services, and whether there would be opportunities to engage parents through schools and after-school settings. Councillor Smith highlighted the importance of continuous support throughout a child's journey. Ben Dunne added that transition points are critical, with joined-up working between nurseries, early years settings and primary schools being central to meeting targets and ensuring Family Hubs support families once children start school. Joanne Burns further asked about opportunities to link with Good Level of Development (GLD) work and improve communication between schools and hubs.

Members discussed lessons learned from existing hubs, including Redvales and Chesham Fold, with a focus on understanding community needs, effective outreach, and ensuring spaces are fit for purpose. The importance of governance arrangements that include the voice of the community was highlighted, to ensure services remain inclusive and responsive.

In closing, the Chair summarised the discussion, noting member support for the Family Hub model and highlighting key themes raised: reassurance around funding, clarification of the GMCA funding issue, long-term sustainability, effective communication with residents and stakeholders, and the importance of Portage, education links and outreach. An action was noted to clarify the funding strand not received and report back to Members.

It was Agreed:

- The update be noted

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IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Councillor Smith was invited to present an overview of the report and confirmed that the Council had officially received a letter confirming that it is no longer under Ofsted intervention, marking an important milestone in improving outcomes for children and young people.

Linda Evans, Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help, outlined that the Children's Improvement Plan submitted to Ofsted is a multi-agency plan, involving partners across education, health and safeguarding. The plan sets out a strong commitment to improving the quality of practice with children and families and creating the right conditions for a future Ofsted inspection. She explained that the plan focuses on delivering better practice and outcomes and identifies seven key priority areas.

These priorities include providing strong interventions and services, supporting care-experienced young people, strengthening relationships across agencies, and developing a stable and committed workforce that remains in Bury. Linda Evans stressed that workforce stability is critical to delivering the plan. The final priority focuses on robust quality assurance, with oversight through the Strengthening Outcomes Board and assurance via the Bury Safeguarding Children Partnership. She noted that Ofsted had returned feedback in December and that the next phase is to drive delivery and improvement against the plan.

Councillor Haroon asked how attendance by the police at Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) meetings would be ensured, noting that this had been a particular issue when the plan was drafted in November. Councillor Smith acknowledged the challenge and confirmed that this was a key issue being addressed, with reassurance that police engagement within MASH would be strengthened and monitored.

Councillor Boles asked how attendance and engagement at the Strengthening Outcomes Board would be maintained to ensure it remains effective. Councillor Smith responded that the Department for Education continues to chair and provide oversight, and noted that improvements in multi-agency working are starting earlier as part of wider reforms, although embedding consistent attendance has taken time.

Councillor Farooq asked what lessons had been learned from previous improvement plans. Councillor Smith explained that the focus is now firmly on strengthening outcomes and addressing inconsistency in practice. He highlighted the importance of good training, strong leadership, early planning and early intervention, noting that inconsistency in practice had previously limited impact despite good intentions.

Councillor Lancaster referred to Priority 6, noting that while there have been significant improvements, the area remains rated amber, and asked whether there were plans to incentivise and support staff retention. Councillor Smith responded that there has been notable success through the Corporate Parenting Board, alongside skills development and pathway work, including “Teaching Tuesday” sessions. He noted that caseloads are now consistently within expected levels and that in-work support has significantly improved, with positive feedback from Principal Social Workers.

Councillor Lancaster also asked whether looked-after children are being appropriately monitored. Linda Evans responded that children and young people have expressed frustration in the past about frequent changes in social workers, which impacts relationship-building. She confirmed that Children’s Social Care teams are now fully staffed and that consistency of social workers is a priority, with relationship-based practice placed at the forefront.

Councillor Smith added that there remain cases where children have had the same social worker for long periods, which is viewed positively.

Councillor Boles asked about training for social workers, particularly in relation to neglect and whether all staff were completing the required training. Linda Evans explained that work has been undertaken on understanding the root causes of neglect and that a training platform has been introduced. The expectation is that the entire workforce will complete this training, with additional sessions held on 19 and 21 January to increase uptake and coverage.

In summarising the discussion, key points raised by Members included the need to ensure consistent police attendance at MASH, addressing historic inconsistencies in practice, and providing ongoing assurance around workforce stability, training and retention.

It Was Agreed:

- The update be noted

EDUCATION AND INCLUSION STRATEGY

Councillor Smith provided a brief overview of the report, explaining that it brings together changes across schools and education, working closely with partners to create a more joined-up system.

Ben Dunne expanded on the *Let’s Do It* strategy, noting that it is embedded within the Education and Inclusion Strategy, with education at its core and a clear long-term vision. He highlighted that in 2019 only 11% of schools were academies, compared with 72% now, which presents both challenges and opportunities. He described positive engagement with school leaders and academy trust leaders and explained that the strategy is explicit about roles and responsibilities across primary and secondary education, transitions between settings, and accountability at every stage. The Education Board will have oversight of the strategy,

covering different types of school settings. He added that the strategy was launched in November and remains at an early stage of delivery.

Councillor Haroon asked what measurable outcomes would be used to assess progress. Ben Dunne responded that inclusion sits at the heart of the strategy and is measurable, with a delivery plan due later in the term setting out how progress will be monitored using data and performance indicators.

Councillor Smith added that listening to young people is essential, particularly in relation to confidence, future opportunities and employment, and that the strategy aims to improve outcomes and aspirations. Members asked when the strategy would be brought back to Committee for evaluation. Ben Dunne confirmed that the delivery plan and the composition of the Education Board would be reported back.

Councillor Arif asked about potential challenges arising from a complex education system across shared areas. Ben Dunne responded that the Education Board is central to managing this complexity, ensuring representation from all settings, clarity of responsibility, and strong delivery planning.

Joanne Burns raised concerns about children and young people not feeling safe on public transport and the impact this has on education and attendance. Ben Dunne acknowledged that attendance is affected by a range of marginal factors, including transport and safe travel, and stressed the importance of working with the right partners to remove these barriers. Councillor Smith added that issues around safety on public transport, including interchanges, are being addressed through wider work with Transport for Greater Manchester. Joanne Burns highlighted particular concerns relating to tram travel.

Councillor Arif asked whether the strategy is inclusive of children who are electively home educated (EHE). Ben Dunne confirmed that EHE is included, noting that it is an elective choice for parents and that engagement with families is essential. He added that there is a sector-wide challenge around understanding why families choose EHE and how to ensure they still feel part of the Bury family of schools. Councillor Arif asked whether the offer to EHE pupils could be expanded to include more subjects. Councillor Smith responded that the strategy aims to ensure no young person misses out, balancing inclusion with aspiration, and requires partners to work together to address complex cases.

Joanne Burns asked whether the Committee could receive future updates on how the strategy is working and whether there is a clear structure going forward.

Councillor Boles raised questions about oversight of alternative provision and independent providers. Ben Dunne explained that there is a focus on understanding funding spend, strengthening oversight of independent provision, and ensuring appropriate governance mechanisms. He noted that there are quarterly inspections, work linked to EHCPs, and an Alternative Provision strategy currently being progressed to retain provision within the borough.

Councillor Boles asked what assurance could be given given the scale of change underway. Jeanette Richards responded that there are currently eight change programmes running across Children's Services, making it essential to have a clear, outcome-focused plan and strong governance. She explained that family-first partnerships and public service reform are helping to align agencies around children and young people, with internal governance ensuring priorities are clear, interdependencies understood, and children's priorities reflected within the Council's corporate plan.

It was Agreed

- The update be noted

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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)