

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

Date of Meeting: 12 March 2026

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

Also in attendance: Councillor L Smith Cabinet Member Children and Young People
Jeanette Richards Executive Director Children and Young People
Ben Dunne Director, Education & Skills
Collette Ratcliffe Service Manager • Department for Children & Young People
Rachel Davis Public Health Specialist (Start Well)
Damian Kay School Assurance Officer

Public Attendance: There were two members of the public in attendance at the meeting

Apologies for Absence: Councillor A Arif, Councillor J Grimshaw and Councillor G Marsden

96 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies are noted above.

97 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

98 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 7th January 2026 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

99 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No questions were received in advance of the meeting.

There were two members of the public present at the event and both asked questions

Kiran Hampson asked a question regarding the Year 6 to Year 7 transition event held the previous day. She explained that her own child will be transitioning in September and, having attended the event, she was disappointed that there was no representation from services supporting children with SEND. She noted that while some teams were present, there was no meaningful advice or guidance offered for families of children with disabilities or those with SEND needs, including children with EHCPs. She asked whether additional transition events are planned specifically for SEND families, and when these will take place, given the short timescales before September.

Ben Dunne thanked Kiran for her feedback and acknowledged that SEND representation had been missing from the event. He confirmed that although the event had been successful overall, officers recognised the gap. He advised that a dedicated session will be arranged before the end of April or early May, with full details to be circulated once finalised.

Councillor Smith offered a personal apology for not attending the event, explaining that she had not been made aware of it, whereas she had been invited to the previous year's transition event. She noted that the timing coincided with the Council's inspection period and agreed that SEND support should have been properly represented.

Kiera Delaney raised a question regarding the eligibility criteria for the Children with Disabilities (CWD) Team. She noted that the criteria are not currently published on the Council or Local Offer website, making it difficult for families, schools, and professionals to understand who is eligible for support, what level of need the service is designed to meet, and how the CWD Team fits into the wider social care pathway.

She asked whether the eligibility criteria have been formally defined and approved; where they are currently published; and, if they are not publicly available, when they will be added to the Local Offer. She also asked how the Council ensures consistent and fair decision-making in the absence of published criteria.

Officers thanked Kiera for highlighting the lack of accessible information and acknowledged that this is unhelpful for families and partners. It was explained that the service has recently undertaken work to draft revised eligibility criteria for the Children with Disabilities Team. A draft version has been produced and shared with inspectors, but further work is required, including consultation, co-production with families, and formal approval through governance processes.

Once complete, the criteria will be published. Officers added that the Council is currently refreshing its Local Offer and transitioning to a new platform hosted through B Bot AI, which will provide more accessible and intuitive information for parents, carers and professionals, including eligibility guidance once finalised.

100 MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were no member questions.

101 SCHOOL TRANSPORT UPDATE

Councillor Smith was invited to provide an overview of the school transport policy, outlining when and for whom transport is provided, and explaining that the purpose of the review was to understand how the policy is operating in practice and how implementation has progressed to date.

Following the presentation, questions were invited from members. Councillor Berry referred to page 14, section 2.5 of the report, and asked whether the arrangement allowing pupil escorts three days of unpaid leave during term time was due to change. Councillor Smith responded that there was no evidence this arrangement was causing any recruitment difficulties and noted that pressures within school transport reflected wider national challenges. Councillor Berry sought further clarification, and Ben Dunne explained that although recruitment remained a pressure, it was being managed through flexibility on afternoon routes. He acknowledged, however, that this was not an ideal long-term solution.

Councillor Lancaster asked whether bringing school transport provision in-house had been explored. Councillor Smith explained that doing so would require significant investment in a

fleet of vehicles, although there were ongoing discussions about potential partnerships for example, with Persona, which already operates a specialist fleet. This approach could relieve pressure on families and carers by making better use of existing capacity. Councillor Lancaster questioned whether leasing vehicles would make in-house provision more affordable. Councillor Smith confirmed that a working group was already examining options and that a business case could be developed as part of this work.

Joanne Burns, speaking as a union representative, asked when the vacant Transport Supervisor post would be filled and raised concerns regarding children with EHCPs who have transport included in their plan but are currently unable to access transport to their named school. She noted the impact this can have on families. In response, Ben Dunne advised that recruitment was underway, though a confirmed start date was not yet available. He agreed to provide further information regarding children who have provision named but no transport in place.

Councillor Haroon asked when post-16 transport support had ceased. Ben Dunne confirmed that this ended on 17 April 2024, noting that many local authorities do not provide statutory post-16 transport. He added that in Bury, officers continue to work with families to support independent travel training. Councillor Boles asked what impact the change had had locally. Ben Dunne reported that NEET figures had improved and that the Council had not experienced an increase in NEET young people, unlike some other Greater Manchester authorities. Jeanette Richards added that the development of enhanced post-16 provision had also strengthened outcomes and mitigated potential negative impacts.

Councillor Farooq referred to page 15, section 4.5, and queried whether the service monitors situations where multiple SEN pupils attending the same school are travelling separately. Ben Dunne confirmed that route sharing and optimisation are continuously explored; however, any shared arrangements must consider young people's safety and individual needs, particularly for those with complex requirements.

Councillor Boles then asked for assurance that the school transport policy would continue to evolve. Councillor Smith confirmed that the Council is working collaboratively across services, continually reviewing ways to improve efficiency while maintaining inclusive and safe transport arrangements. He noted that ideas and proposals are revisited regularly as part of ongoing improvement work.

Councillor Boles further asked about the mileage payment rate of 44p per mile and how it compared with other boroughs. Ben Dunne explained that rates vary, with some authorities offering higher amounts and others lower. He agreed that higher mileage rates could act as an incentive for families. Councillor Smith added that although the commissioning of school transport sits within Children's Services, the role is closely aligned with the Transport Department.

In closing, Ben Dunne reported that Greater Manchester route optimisation had been explored previously, but the ability to combine routes is limited because many children have complex needs and cannot travel together. He noted that ongoing staffing vacancies, limited in-house capacity, and necessary safety considerations continue to present challenges to achieving further efficiencies.

It was agreed:

- The update be noted

This item was split into two parts the education and inclusion strategy and the RISE report.

Councillor Smith introduced the Education and Inclusion Strategy, presenting the detailed report and delivery plan. Ben Dunne added that pressures around delivery only arise when there is no robust plan, noting that the strategy includes clear key performance indicators and that the Education Board will oversee a strong and detailed delivery plan. Each action has been mapped with measures of success, and every member of the education team holds responsibility for specific areas, creating a comprehensive and accountable framework.

Members were then invited to ask questions. Councillor Ryder asked whether training would extend beyond teaching staff to frontline and office staff. Ben Dunne confirmed that discussions with school settings would reinforce inclusive practice across all roles, ensuring the whole school culture supports inclusion, and committed to making sure this is reflected in the plan. Councillor FitzGerald welcomed the accessible structure of the plan and the clear ownership of actions, asking how the plan would ensure critical enablers are in place. Ben Dunne explained that the changing school landscape in Bury, particularly the role of academy trusts, presents challenges but also opportunities. Strengthening relationships with trusts and CEOs, alongside establishing strong senior leadership networks, will support shared best practice and collaborative improvement across sectors.

Councillor Smith emphasised that the Education Board will own the delivery plan, ensuring unified leadership and drive. Joanne Burns raised concerns regarding the loss of the former DLA service, asking which service now leads coordination and planning, and how pathways such as ECTS and NACIA will be made clear. Ben Dunne said one service area will take responsibility for inclusion and safeguarding, with a focus on sharing best practice to improve outcomes, including for EAL pupils. Joanne Burns also queried the early years pathway and whether there will be an early years educational psychologist linked with health services. Councillor Smith confirmed that there will be such a role, fully integrated with Health to support early years provision.

Councillor Smith provided a brief introduction to the RISE report. Damian Kay explained that the Department for Education's renewed focus on improvement, signalled in correspondence earlier in the year, has strengthened the emphasis on the RISE offer. He highlighted that the local authority is actively promoting the standalone Maths and English elements of the programme. The English strand in particular is being targeted toward early years and phonics, while secondary schools are being supported to improve reading ages at Key Stage 3. From September, intensive work will begin to drive further improvements in reading outcomes, with the council confident that the offer will have significant impact. Damian confirmed that Bury maintains strong working relationships with schools, and although RISE was previously used only as targeted support, it is now being promoted more widely.

Joanne Burns asked whether the increasing number of SEND pupils in schools had influenced the capacity or effectiveness of RISE support. Damian acknowledged the point and noted that this will be considered within ongoing planning. Councillor Boles queried whether the offer was time-limited. Damian confirmed that the RISE programme typically operates on a March-to-March cycle and that discussions with the DfE are ongoing to maximise the support available, including links with the wider RISE service.

Councillor Smith added that the programme has existed in various forms for several years and aligns with the vision of creating a family of expert practitioners across schools. He noted that the approach may be strengthened further through future SEND policy developments. Joanne Burns asked whether RISE had links with attendance and behaviour hubs. Damian confirmed that it does.

It Was Agreed:

- The updates be noted

103 BEST START PLAN

Councillor Smith introduced the item and provided an overview of the report, highlighting the strong crossovers with the Best Start Plan and its links to improving Good Level of Development (GLD) outcomes. She emphasised the importance of ensuring that all related plans align effectively in order to achieve shared goals.

Collette Radcliffe presented an overview of the work taking place to drive improved outcomes as part of Bury's Best Start approach. She outlined how the programme is shaped through targeted actions across early years, from reception to school entry, and provided a summary of progress to date.

Councillor Boles asked what lessons had been learned so far and what advice could be offered to other areas. In response, Collette Radcliffe stressed the importance of knowing and understanding the local community.

Councillor FitzGerald queried how communication with the public would be managed, noting the positive opportunity to embed activities within local communities. Councillor Smith explained that the intention is to base activity within existing community spaces, including the Live Well Centre and family hubs, ensuring these are accessible and not only used at times of crisis. Collette added that a steering group operates between Live Well and wider partners to support coordinated delivery.

Councillor Boles asked for an update on the development of B Bot AI. Jeanette Richards reported that three local offers will be hosted through B Bot AI, designed to support diverse community needs. She confirmed that SEND information has been prioritised initially and that the system is expected to go live in April, after which additional local offers will be added.

It Was Agreed:

- The update be noted

104 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)