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

Date of Meeting: 15 September 2026

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

Also in attendance: Jeanette Richard Executive Director Children and Young People
Linda Evans Director of Social Care and Early Help
Ben Dunne Director of Education and Early Years
Nick Bell Secondary Inclusion Lead
Andy Bradburn Service Manager (Connexions)
Councillor Walmsley Cabinet Member Children and Young People
Josh Ashworth Democratic Services
Noah Cashmore Youth Representative

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

Apologies for Absence: Joanne Burns Union Representative

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115 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies are noted above.

116 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

117 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 23rd July 2026 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

118 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No questions were received in advance of the meeting.

119 MEMBER QUESTIONS

There were no member questions.

120 ILACS IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Members of the committee were reminded that they were expected to have read the report in advance of the meeting.

Jeanette Richards, Executive Director for Children and Young People provided an update on the Improvement Plan for Children's Services. Jeanette provided an overview of the documents contained within the committee pack. She explained that children's services had been on an improvement journey since being judged inadequate by ofsted in 2021 and subsequently receiving a judgement of 'requires improvement'.

Following inspection and improvement plan was developed and shared with Ofsted. The plan aligns with the inspection framework and governance arrangements and is reviewed quarterly by the Local Government Improvement Adviser alongside senior leaders. Progress against key milestones is monitored through performance data, risk ratings and regular reporting arrangements, which will continue until the next full inspection. Annual engagement and self-evaluation arrangements with Ofsted remain in place.

Jeanette advised the highlight report focused on progress against key milestones and the work being led by directors and senior managers to deliver improvement.

Councillor Sheppard asked what improvements could be expected over the next 12 months.

Jeanette advised that a key area of focus was improving outcomes for looked after children, particularly the quality of children's EHCP plans. Audits had identified challenges in ensuring plans were detailed and focused on performance. Recent improvements had resulted in approximately 50% of plans being assessed as strong. Additional oversight had been introduced, including support from Warrington, t strengthen quality assurance and provide challenge to social work practice.

Jeanette added that ongoing work with team managers was focused on driving improvements in practice and the quality of plans.

Councillor FitzGerald referred to attendance figures contained within the report and asked for further detail regarding variations between year groups.

Jeanette acknowledged that attendance, particularly within secondary schools, remained a significant challenge.

Ben Dunne Director of Education confirmed attendance figures and advised that attendance remained high in the primary phase, with reception attendance at approximately 96.1%, but declined significantly throughout secondary education. Attendance data for looked after children showed a marked reduction from year 7 onwards.

Members were advised that this issue was not limited to children with SEND and reflected wider challenges across the secondary sector. Attendance would continue to be monitored through the corporate parenting board.

Ben Dunne informed members of the forthcoming 'Bury Belongs in School' strategy, which promotes the principle that the majority of children should be educated within mainstream schools where appropriate. He noted concerns that elective home education and section 19 arrangements had, in some cases, become too readily accepted alternatives, and that the strategy would seek to reinforce attendance and inclusion.

Councillor Walmsley highlighted the relationship between attendance, suspensions, inclusion and educational outcomes. She noted the importance of maintaining positive working relationships with schools to address these challenges.

Councillor FitzGerald expressed concern regarding attendance levels for looked after children and emphasised the responsibilities of elected members as corporate champions.

Councillor Walmsley advised that more detailed attendance data would be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board and subsequently circulated to Committee Members.

Councillor Farooq asked whether the improvement plan included actions to support children who had experienced domestic abuse.

Jeanette confirmed that domestic abuse remained a significant factor influencing the need for support services. She highlighted legislative changes, partnership working with third sector organisations and the use of Operation Encompass whereby schools are notified when police attend incidents of domestic abuse within a child's household. This enables schools and practitioners to provide trauma-informed support. Jeanette added that supporting families affected by domestic abuse and economic pressures remained a key priority.

Councillor Hunt asked how feedback from children and young people was informing service improvement and how the council demonstrated that their views had influenced decision-making.

Jeanette advised that children and young people were involved at a number of points across the improvement programme and that their participation was strongly supported by senior leaders.

Linda Evans Director of Social Care and Early Help emphasised the importance of capturing the lived experiences of children and young people and ensuring their voices informed assessments, planning and service development. She stated that focus was not only on listening to children but also demonstrating how their views had led to real changes.

Members were informed that children and young people regularly attend the corporate parenting board and participate in various engagement forums, Jeanette Highlighted the work of the change makers group, who had helped rewrite the children in care promise, supported recruitment, and contributed to senior management appointments. The group had also been recognised regionally for its work and was nominated for a best practice award.

Linda also referred to the services quality assurance 'Kitemark' programme, which involves young people auditing services and recognising areas of good practice.

Councillor Southworth suggested that future performance reporting should include exclusion data.

Ben Dunne explained that whilst the data existed, current management systems did not provide live information and relied on periodic updates from schools. Work was underway to improve data systems to create a more integrated approach to performance reporting.

Councillor Martin referred to delays in establishing the supported lidgings service and asked why the process had taken longer than anticipated.

Linda explained that Ofsted registration requirements were complex and required approval of a registered manager and responsible individual. In addition DBS-related requirements and administrative processes had also contributed to delays. However, the application process was now progressing and a decision was awaited.

Linda advised that Supported Lodgings would provide important additional options for young people and support a gradual transitions towards independence.

Councillor Martin asked a follow up question around interim arrangements, Linda explained that 30 young people were currently supported through supported accommodation arrangements, with access to 24-hour support where required, enabling them to develop independent living skills.

Councillor Boles enquired whether concerns regarding delays in the registration process had been raised with Ofsted.

Linda Confirmed that feedback had been provided through regional discussions with Ofsted regarding the complexity and demands of the registration process.

Councillor Boles also sought clarification regarding improvements to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) service.

Linda explained that previous inspections had identified inconsistencies in allegation management processes. In response, additional training, auditing and dip-sampling had been introduced to ensure statutory requirements were applied consistently. This area continued to be monitored.

Councillor FitzGerald requested further information regarding neglect, noting that it remained a key safeguarding partnership priority.

Jeanette advised that identifying neglect could be challenging and required professionals to recognise different forms of neglect at an early stage. A refreshed neglect strategy had been introduced approximately three years ago, supported by workforce training, it was noted that neglect could be educational, emotional and other forms of harm, and emphasised the importance of recognising continued neglect and its long-term impact on children.

Jeanette added that improving the quality of referrals into the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), strengthening assessments and ensuring effective plans remained central to improvement work. Neglect continued to be a priority for the safeguarding partnership.

Councillor FitzGerald noted that elements of neglect could be subjective and welcomed further discussion how practitioners assessed different forms of harm.

Councillor Walmsley added that the neglect strategy reflected the voices of children and focused on fundamental needs such as feeling loved, safe, cared for and having access to appropriate clothing and support.

It Was Agreed:

- The update be noted

Actions:

- Circulate the neglect strategy to the committee
- Circulate attendance information relating to looked after children be shared with the committee following consideration by the Corporate Parenting Board

121 SEND SUFFICIENCY PLAN UPDATE

Members were reminded they should have reviewed the report prior to the meeting.

Councillor Walmsley introduced the report and provided an overview of the draft SEND Sufficiency Plan. Members were reminded that the report had been circulated in advance and were expected to have read it prior to the meeting. It was noted that significant progress had been made in expanding SEND provision across the borough.

Nick Bell Secondary inclusion Lead outlined the increasing use of Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) packages, explaining that these are bespoke educational arrangements co-produced with families where appropriate. He advised that this is a complex area nationally and that the number of children accessing EOTAS provision continues to rise.

Councillor Hunt referred to the higher prevalence of EHCPs in Bury and asked about the implications of forthcoming legislative changes. Nick explained that ensuring appropriate support and health-related provision is available for children with all complex needs remains a priority and that officers continues to work closely with health partners.

Councillor Sheppard asked how the impact of recent investment in specialist provision would be measured.

Nick advised that demand for SEND provision is projected to continue increasing until around 2030 and that performance would be measured through tracking cohorts across the education system. He highlighted the positive impact of additional specialist provisions and advised that the new SEMH school, Willow Grove, operated by the Oak Learning Partnership, is planned to open in Redvales in 2028. Further work is also underway to map SEND provision and identify gaps, particularly across secondary education.

Ben highlighted the importance of balancing demand and supply through an inclusive education system. He stressed that successful outcomes for children and young people within Bury should remain a key focus of the wider inclusion agenda.

Councillor FitzGerald queried the financial implications of increasing demand, including continued reliance on out-of-borough placements.

Jeanette advised that the financial challenge is significant, particularly in relation to independent non-maintained special schools, and noted that efforts are focused on increasing in-borough provision wherever possible. Members were advised that demand pressures are projected to increase the High Needs Block deficit and that demand management projections would be circulated.

Councillor Martin asked why Bury has a comparatively high number of EHCPs.

Ben reported that there are currently just of 3,000 EHCPs, with further growth projected over the coming years. He advised that this reflects both local trends and a national picture, with SEND demand increasing across the country. The projections informing the SEND Reform Plan and SEND Sufficiency Plan were considered realistic.

Jeanette added that, historically Bury had been an outlier in relation to EHCP numbers, but projections suggest growth rates may begin to stabilise as additional capacity is developed.

Councillor Davies asked about the number of children with EHCPs educated within mainstream schools.

Ben explained that the SEND Reform Plan places a strong emphasis on inclusive mainstream provision and that improved data and forecasting now allow better planning of provision. He highlighted the importance of supporting mainstream schools, alongside string partnership working across education, health and social care.

Councillor Boles asked whether lessons could be learned from current post-16 provision. Nick acknowledged challenges in accessing appropriate post-16 opportunities and explained that work is underway to develop a wider range of pathways, including supported internships and more flexible provision to better the needs of young people with SEND.

It Was Agreed

- The report be noted

122 FAMILY FIRST PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

Members of the Committee were reminded that reports should have been reviewed in advance of the meeting.

Jeanette Richards Executive Director for Children and Young People provided an overview of the Family First Partnership Programme, outlining the governments plans to strengthen support services for children and families. Members were advised that implementation in Bury remains on track for operational delivery. Reference was made to the Family First Model, including the proposed structure of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the approach to demand management. This work will support the development of the Family Help Teams and strengthen partnership working within communities.

Jeanette Highlighted ongoing work around governance arrangements, information sharing agreements and approaches to assessing unmet need. Family Group Conferencing and wider partnership engagement form key parts of the programme.

Linda Evans advised that a report on the Family First Partnership would be considered at Cabinet on the 14th October. She explained that the approach in Bury is underpinned by the principle of ensuring families receive the right help at the right time whilst reducing unnecessary hand-offs between services.

Members heard that work is underway to ensure the MASH has sufficient capacity, staffing and skills. Linda also outlined proposals for the Multi-Agency Child Safety Team, developed in response to finging from national reviews where child protection arrangements had not always achieved best outcomes for children. The team will work closely with health partners and lead on safeguarding activity.

The committee was advised that one of the most significant developments will be the creation of Family Help Teams operating within neighbourhoods. This will bring family practitioners, social workers and partner agencies closer together to provide more responsive support for children and families. The model will also enhance opportunities for non-qualified care workers and ensure continuity of support where cases require escalation to social work intervention.

Linda Confirmed that specialist services, including Looked After Children teams and support services, would remain centrally managed whilst maintaining stronger links with neighbourhood-based teams.

The principles of the programme focus on providing robust support to families, building on family strengths and wider support networks to reduce risk and improve outcomes. Members

also heard that partnership working with the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Enterprise (VCFE) sector will be a ket component of the programme.

Councillor Duncalfe asked about advocacy support for families and whether the voluntary sector could play a role in providing advocates.

Linda Evans advised that advocacy support is already available for parents and carers where required. This support helps families to engage with statutory services and contribute to plans and decision making processes. It was emphasised that parents and carers should not feel discouraged from participating.

Councillor FitzGerald welcomed the proposals and commented positively on the flexibility of the model, noting the benefits of experienced family practitioners working more closely with families.

Councillor Southworth also welcomed the proposals, describing the approach as positive and highlighting the benefits of bringing services together within neighbourhoods. Also noted the potential impact on early help services and local partnership working

It Was Agreed

- The update be noted

123 NEET (NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING) UPDATE

Member of the Committee were reminded that they were expected to have read the report in advance of the meeting.

Councillor Walmsley Cabinet member for Children and Young People presented an overview of the report, highlighting the importance of early intervention and ensuring young people can access opportunities at the earliest stage. The report provided an overview of recent national policy developments, trends relating to vulnerable groups, re-engagement activity with education, and the support available to reduce the number of young people who are not in education, employment of training (NEET).

Andy Bradburn Service Manager Department for Children and Young People advised that the definition and scope of NEET's had broadened in recent years. He explained that the report focused on both the Councils statutory duties and support available for young people aged 16 to 24, with further work being undertaken to review and refine reporting arrangements.

Councillor FitzGerald asked about employment opportunities available to young people in Bury, the effectiveness of job training programmes, and what more local businesses could do to support young people into education, employment and training.

Andy explained that monthly reporting and monitoring arrangements were in place and included information on education, employment and training outcomes. He advised that apprenticeship numbers had increased by approximately 12% during the current year, although levels remained below those seem between 2010 and 2019. He noted that further opportunities and incentives may emerge following the publication of the forthcoming Milburn Report.

Councillor Walmsley commented that additional incentives and government funding were required to ensure that the right provisions were available locally and nationally to support young people.

Andy also highlighted developments linked to Atom Valley noting the potential benefits and future opportunities for young people within the borough.

Councillor Walmsley referred to discussions about young people leaving colleges and universities work being undertaken through the neighbour hub at the Mill Gate, which support with job applications and CV writing. It was noted that some young people required greater support in developing employability and life skills.

Councillor Boles sought clarification regarding the role of Connexions and the support available for students at risk of becoming NEET.

Andy advised that commissioned provision was being delivered through Bury EST and other partners, with work underway to broaden opportunities to young people. He outlined the targeted support provided through connexions, particularly for those identified as being at risk of becoming NEET.
The Committee heard that support was focused on ensuring successful transitions from secondary education into further education, with particular attention given to young people in Year 13, where NEET risks can increase. Members were advised that officers generally had a good understanding of where young people were and what support they required. Opportunities were available through organisations including the YMCA, Bury College and other training providers, although officers acknowledged that further work remained to be undertaken.

Ben Dunne further explained that work was being undertaken with schools and colleges to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET at and earlier stage. Partnership working with Bury College was helping to support young people into mainstream education, with the aim of improving retention and long term educational outcomes.

It Was Agreed:

- The update be noted

124 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)