

Bristol City Council
Minutes of the Children and Young People
Policy Committee



23 January 2025 at 5.00 pm

Members Present:-

Councillors: Christine Townsend (Chair), Katja Hornchen (Vice-Chair), Kerry Bailes, Sarah Classick, Ellie Freeman, Cam Hayward, Shona Jemphrey, Susan Kollar and Henry Michallat

1 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting and explained the emergency evacuation procedure.

2 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

None.

3 Declarations of Interest

None.

4 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

It was noted that these minutes would be submitted to the next meeting for approval.



5 Chair's Announcements

The Chair advised that an update was awaited from the national government on the position on the statutory override around the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit; high needs funding in relation to the DSG for 2025/26 had though been confirmed.

6 Public Forum

Public questions:

It was noted that 14 public questions had been received for this meeting, as follows:

- Q1 - Elizabeth Ind: Funding delays
- Q2 - Elizabeth Ind: Safeguards regarding legal obligations
- Q3 - Elizabeth Ind: School/staff training
- Q4 - Wendy Lacey: EHCP - rejections
- Q5 - Wendy Lacey: Alternative provision
- Q6 - Wendy Lacey: EBSA
- Q7 - Harriet McLaughlin: Underfunding of EHCPs
- Q8 - Harriet McLaughlin: Enacting the Children's and Families Act
- Q9 - Harriet McLaughlin: Gatekeeping
- Q10 - Sally Kent: Non-statutory top-up
- Q11 - Sally Kent: Average cost of an EHCP
- Q12 - Jen Smith: Section 17 assessments
- Q13 - Jen Smith: Budget review - SEND comments
- Q14 - Jen Smith: Number of attendees, Listening Partnership

It was noted that written responses had been supplied in relation to the questions and published on the Council's website alongside the agenda papers for the meeting.

In relation to the response given to Q12, it was clarified that in terms of the 625 contacts through First Response, 183 went on to a Section 17 assessment; 152 had the assessment and, of those, 20 went on to a child protection process.

In response to a supplementary question on Q12, it was clarified that after year 13, a small number of children, if they had an EHCP, would continue and remain the responsibility of Children's Services as the result of having a plan. There was another small group of children who would move from children's social care into adult social care, under the Care Act; taken together this represented a small number of the overall total of those turning 18 in that particular school year. The vast majority of those children, including any on the SEN register, would go on into adult skills which was led by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority.



In response to a supplementary question on Q13, it was confirmed that any child with a disability requiring an assessment from a social worker for a section 17 assessment would have that assessment, but it may not necessarily have been from the specialist learning disability social workers in the disabled children's team.

In response to a supplementary question on Q14, it was clarified that the authority was keen to capture the voices of children and young people who were seldomly heard, including for example, those not attending school, as well as also capturing the views of parents and carers who were seldomly heard.

Public statements:

It was noted that 2 public statements have been received for this meeting, as follows:

1. Elizabeth Ind: Failures in SEND support for children
2. Jen Smith: New SEND Strategy

Jen Smith was in attendance and presented her statement.

7 Children and Young People Policy Committee Update Report

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 7) providing the latest information on the delivery and performance of children's services in line with the statutory expectations of the Director of Children's Services. The report identified key challenges and risks for consideration, areas of progress, and upcoming activity.

Summary of main points raised/noted in discussion of this item:

1. The government's recently published children's social care policy statement 'Keeping children safe, helping families thrive' outlined key elements in creating a more effective and responsive children's social care system. It was noted that these proposals fitted well with the service's transformation ambitions which include a focus on family support and early intervention, the use of multi-agency child protection arrangements, and a strong emphasis on the role of schools in safeguarding arrangements.
2. It was noted that following a final monitoring meeting to review progress against Bristol's SEND Accelerated Progress Plan on 7 November 2024, the DfE had confirmed that the local area had made sufficient progress and that formal monitoring would be discontinued.
3. It was noted that provisional Key Stage 4 outcome data, as published in December 2024, showed some encouraging trends with the average Progress 8 for Bristol children further improving to -0.01, now above the national average of -0.03. Bristol's attainment 8 score reduced to 45.2 from 45.4 in 2024 and continued to be below the national average, but the gap had reduced slightly between 2023 and 2024 (-0.1). Bristol remained mid-range (5/11) in relation to its statistical neighbours for Key Stage 4 outcomes for these measures. There continued to be a key challenge around attainment in relation to children experiencing disadvantage.



4. In response to questions, it was confirmed that tackling non-attendance at school, including persistent non-attendance remained a significant issue, noting that a proposal to establish a task and finish group on school attendance would be discussed later at this meeting. A monthly performance clinic was in place to review attendance-related data.

5. In response to questions about First Response, it was confirmed that in receiving telephone calls raising issues of concern, the relevant guidance would be followed; the same approach would be taken if, for example, a call was received from a member of the public or from a professional.

6. It was confirmed that the SEND service restructure would increase the capacity of the service and reduce average caseloads. It was noted that the recruitment processes would begin once the restructure process was concluded on 24 January. Capacity would also increase in relation to Educational Psychologists.

7. In response to a question, it was confirmed that each school was able to determine how they used the Pupil Premium. Schools were also required to publish details of their use of this funding on their websites and tracked the use of the funding.

8. In relation to secondary school places, it was noted that the opening of the permanent Oasis Temple Quarter site has been delayed further to at least September 2027, meaning that the school would remain on their temporary site for longer than anticipated. The service was in ongoing dialogue with Oasis and the DfE in relation to the revised, anticipated opening date of the permanent Oasis Academy Daventry Road site, now not expected until 2026 at earliest. The Committee would be kept informed of the position.

The Committee **RESOLVED:**
To note the report.

8 Finance Report Update (P7)

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 8) presenting information and analysis on the Children and Education directorate's financial performance against the approved budget and its forecast use of resources for the current financial year 2024/25.

Summary of main points raised/noted in discussion of this item:

1. It was noted that on 3 February, the Strategy and Resources Committee would be recommending the 2025/26 budget proposals (including the 2025/26 Dedicated Schools Grant budget proposals) for onward consideration by the Full Council at its budget meeting on 25 February.



2. It was noted that at Period 7, significant pressures continued to be experienced in relation to children's social care placements and home to school travel. In relation to the Dedicated Schools Grant, the forecast outturn position was an overspend or deficit of £15.3 million (3.1%) in-year following the offset of £15.9 million from the 2024/25 DfE Safety Valve combined with the General Fund contribution. The Capital Programme forecast outturn was £18.6 million against the revised budget for 2024/25 of £18.1 million, following approval of a total £23.9 million budget revisions.

The Committee **RESOLVED**:

To note:

- 1. The council's General Fund forecast outturn revenue overspend of £21.4 million at Period 7, 2024/25 against the Council's approved budget.**
- 2. The performance on delivery of savings (Appendix A2).**
- 3. The no change to Risks and Opportunities (Section B Appendix A2)**
- 4. The forecast net outturn position of £15.3m in the Dedicated Schools Grant and that this brings the carry forward deficit to £90.5 million. Following the application of the Department for Education's 24/25 Safety Valve, combined with contribution from the General Fund, a total £52.4 million is forecast to be carried forward at the year-end in the DSG deficit reserve.**
- 5. The council's forecast position against the Capital Programme revised budget 2024/25 (Appendix A2, Section C).**

9 Corporate Risk Management Report Q3 24/25

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 9) providing an update on current significant strategic risks relevant to the Children and Young People Policy Committee. The risks related to achieving objectives set in the Council's Corporate Strategy 2022-2027 and the report summarised progress in managing the risks and actions being taken as at Quarter 3, 2024-25.

In response to questions in relation to Risk CRR9 (Possible failure of safeguarding vulnerable children), it was noted that the service was continuing with the mitigations in place to reduce risk in this area. It was anticipated that the outcome of the positive work in this area should result in a reduction of risk in the future; however, the risk level was not being reduced at this stage.

The Committee **RESOLVED**:

To note the report.



10 Performance Management Report Q2 24/25

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 10) updating on performance against the Council's Business Plan as relevant to the remit of the committee for Quarter 2, 2024/25.

Summary of main points raised/noted in discussion of this item:

1. It was noted that the indicators on reducing the percentage of children in care placed out of area (BPPM202) and increasing the percentage of children in care placed with in-house provision (BPPM204) remained below target at quarter 2. The percentage of children placed out of area had reduced slightly on the last quarter, which was positive and reflected the efforts in place to move children closer to Bristol, but the percentage placed with Bristol's foster carers had remained almost static. It was noted that the Families First transformation programme (to be discussed later at this meeting) would help support both in-house services and commissioning arrangements to continue to increase the number of foster homes and children's homes in and near the city.
2. It was noted that suspension rates for Black Caribbean, Mixed White & Black Caribbean and Gypsy, Roma & Traveller pupils (BPPM245c&d) for the academic year 2023/24 had continued to be high. Both primary and secondary schools were below the target this year. It was further noted that aspirational targets were set to be in line with the average suspension rate for all children in Bristol. Reduction in suspension rates remained a citywide improvement priority. In response to a specific question, it was noted that officers would check why Blaise High School suspension data had not been available.
3. In response to a question, it was clarified that the Inclusion and Attendance board was an internal officer board.

The Committee **RESOLVED**:

To note performance against the Business Plan relevant to this Committee, including the issues raised and measures to address performance issues to be implemented by relevant services.

11 SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 11) seeking approval to publish the final version of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028 following the feedback from the public consultation process and partnership review.

Summary of main points raised/noted in discussion of this item:



1. At the invitation of the Chair, some young people who were volunteers for the Listening Partnership run by the West of England Centre for Inclusive Living spoke about the new strategy. They highlighted the following points:

a. As a group of disabled young people, they had been working hard to make sure their voices were heard and that their views were part of the wider conversation that had shaped the SEND strategy.

b. They had looked at and discussed how other local authorities approach their SEND visions, and had shared thoughts on how they could best be supported.

c. It would be important, as the strategy was taken forward, to keep listening to the voices of young people, particularly disabled young people. The strategy should be seen as marking the beginning of a lasting partnership where young people's voices would always matter.

2. It was noted that the strategy was based on the SEND self-evaluation completed in 2023-2024. The self-evaluation had helped understanding around what was going well and what needed to improve. In terms of the engagement, this had taken account of more than 1,500 responses from children and young people, 2,000 responses from parent carers and 750 responses across schools. There has also been engagement with all teams supporting children and young people with SEND. The strategy set out the detail of 6 key priorities to be taken forward over the next 4 years; co-production had been at the heart of the development of the strategy.

3. It was noted that it was encouraging that feedback had shown strong levels of support for the 6 key priorities.

4. Noting and welcoming the comments of young people from the Listening Partnership, members agreed that it would be crucial to continue to seek feedback from young people as the implementation of the strategy and associated actions were progressed.

5. It was commented that, from a user perspective, the consultation form had been well designed and was easy to complete. The engagement and contribution through the Parent Carer Forum, and the general improvement in the authority's relationship with parents and carers was particularly welcomed.

6. It was noted that progress on taking forward the strategy and key actions would be monitored and reported to the Committee.

The Chair then moved the report recommendations.

This was seconded by Cllr Hornchen.

The Committee **RESOLVED** (unanimous vote in favour):



- 1. To approve the final strategy for publication with amendments following public consultation at Appendix A.**
- 2. To note the consultation report at Appendix F and as summarised in this report.**

12 Trading with Schools Price Increase Proposals 2025/6

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 12) seeking approval for the publication of Trading with Schools draft price increases to customers for 2025/26 (these increases were subject to Full Council approval as part of the Council's budget setting process in February 2025).

Summary of main points raised/noted in discussion of this item:

1. It was noted that this proposal was being brought for approval, recognising that advance notification of price increases would assist education settings in terms of their own budget planning and, in the case of local authority-maintained settings, avoid potential delays in meeting statutory budget setting and approval deadlines. The service view was that early publication of proposed charges was in the best interests of maintaining positive customer relationships whilst also allowing education settings to start their own budget forecasting.
2. In response to questions, it was noted that Trading with Schools aimed to continue to maintain a joined-up and valued service for schools; there was confidence around the service offer in terms of its competitiveness in the marketplace for these services and in terms of ongoing customer satisfaction with services provided.

The Chair then moved the report recommendations.

This was seconded by Cllr Hornchen.

The Committee **RESOLVED** (unanimous vote in favour):

To approve the proposal for Trading with Schools to publish a provisional price list to customers for 2025/26 that will be subject to Full Council approval as part of the Council's budget setting process in February 2025.



13 Families First Programme Business Case – Enabling More of Bristol’s Children to Stay Safely at Home

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 13) seeking approval of the Families First transformation programme business case, including the costs and benefits, together with the approach to accounting for the transformation and savings projects that sit outside of Families First.

Summary of main points raised/noted in discussion of this item:

1. It was noted that this was a key decision report as the proposals affected two or more wards.
2. It was noted that this transformation programme and investment was needed to make a step change so that services become more focused on earlier help and prevention, reducing the need for statutory interventions. The aim was to ensure that, in future, more children would stay safely at home, whilst the Council and communities in Bristol would also avoid significant costs.
3. It was noted that the proposals were subject to Full Council approval as part of the Council’s budget setting process in February 2025.
4. In response to questions, it was confirmed that the Business Case included some one-off costs of delivery, including the recruitment of an external strategic delivery partner to provide specialist support and capacity, as currently the Council did not have sufficient capacity and capability to deliver a programme of this size and complexity. This partner would be recruited under a risk/reward contract. The detail of the full programme business case was set out at Appendix H of the report.
5. In discussion, members were generally supportive of the proposals, recognising the strategic emphasis of moving to a more sustainable service and financial position through the focus on prevention and early intervention.
6. In response to questions, it was noted that the family hub model and a range of family support would be a critical part of the programme, with renewed focus on relationship-based practice and developing work across neighbourhoods. A key part of the plan was an extra £1.9 million funding to support the recruitment of family support workers, who would carry out group and individual work with families to prevent their children from going into care, including cognitive behavioural therapy. The proposals would also increase support for foster carers.
7. In response to questions, it was confirmed that all requests for help would be accessible through the same ‘front door’ to the service.
8. A particular issue was raised about whether the former children’s centre building at Fulford Road (which was now not in use) might potentially be brought back into use through the programme. It was noted that a range of services to support families in that area was currently provided through Hartcliffe



Nursery, Children's Centre and Family Hub. Opportunities to further explore local family support options across the city were an integral part of the programme.

9. It was confirmed that regular progress reports on the programme would be brought to the Committee, noting that outcomes delivered through the programme would also feed into the wider financial and performance reporting.

The Chair then moved the report recommendations.

This was seconded by Cllr Hornchen.

The Committee **RESOLVED** (unanimous vote in favour):

- 1. To endorse the Families First transformation programme, which makes a step change in the way the service operates, to one more focused on earlier help and prevention.**
- 2. To approve the business case based on the mid-case forecasts and assumptions, subject to further refinement and assurance of the unmitigated figures during the next phase (mobilisation).**
- 3. To approve the internal one-off cost of change level outlined in the report and, subject to the approval of the overall funding envelope by the Strategy and Resources Committee, to approve an allocation of the transformation funds for this purpose.**
- 4. To endorse an investment of £1.9m in additional staff that will reduce average caseloads and increase the time for practitioners to work with families.**
- 5. To approve a procurement for an external delivery partner to support the transformation programme.**
- 6. To authorise the Executive Director: Children and Education, in consultation with the Chair of the Children and Young People Committee, to take all steps required to procure an external delivery partner under a risk/reward contract, to provide specialist support and capacity to the transformation programme, as outlined in the report and the business case.**

14 School Attendance Task & Finish Group

The Committee considered a report (agenda item 14) seeking approval to establish a Task and Finish Group for School Attendance.

Summary of main points raised/noted in discussion of this item:



1. It was noted that members of the committee had indicated that they all wished to be involved in the work of this Task and Finish group, which would be chaired by Cllr Hornchen.
2. It was noted that the group would focus in particular on pupils aged 11 to 14, in years 7, 8 and 9, and as part of its work would look at best practice elsewhere around improving attendance.
3. It was suggested that as part of its work, the group should look to engage with and hear the views of young people, including those who were not attending school.

The Chair then moved the report recommendations.

This was seconded by Cllr Hornchen.

The Committee **RESOLVED** (unanimous vote in favour):

- 1. To note the report and further details supplied in Appendix A and approve the recommended approach and Terms of Reference (ToR). Any substantial changes to the parameters of the ToR should be agreed in consultation with officers and reported back to the committee.**
- 2. To agree that the Members of the Task and Finish Group will be drawn from the committee membership with any members not known/confirmed by the 6 March 2025 Policy Committee meeting to be confirmed by the Party Whips.**
- 3. To delegate the decision to agree the frequency and duration of the meetings to the Task and Finish Group.**

Meeting ended at 7.52 pm

CHAIR _____

