

# Children & Young People Policy Committee

6 March 2025  
Public Forum



**Public forum statements have been received as listed below (full details are set out on the subsequent pages):**

1. Jen Smith: SEND
2. Robyn Silwal: How the lack of SEND support and understanding is damaging our children

**Please note:** The views and information contained within these public statements are those of the individuals concerned and not of the Council.



## STATEMENT 1 – JEN SMITH

Bristol City Council has gone to great pains this year to emphasize that Safety Valve is not about provision, it's about funding, describing it as a “bail out”.

Bristol said it would eliminate its DSG deficit by no later than 2029/30. From that point on wards, it will continue operating with a positive in-year balance.

But just one month later, that is not backed up by updated financial modelling.

Papers for this meeting say: 'The Safety Valve Agreement between the Council and the Department for Education (DfE) requires the Local Authority to achieve a zero balance on its DSG Reserve by 31 March 2030 however the most recent validated financial forecasts show that this is not currently projected to happen and that the deficit is expected to reach £41.5m at that date. The cumulative impact of the increases to meet the Council's statutory duties, delays in the delivery of new specialist provision, and settlement of historic liabilities are the main causes of this increase.'

So not a positive in-year deficit, but a £41.5m deficit instead.

There is also the on-going issue of the Statutory Override coming to an end in March 2026.

What is also alarming is that the Children and Young People Policy Committee Update Report states that in 2024, the average time to issue a final EHCP from initial request was 42.3 weeks. The year to date timeliness for 2024 was 17 per cent.

I've heard this week that there are families waiting 52 weeks for an EHCP. This is no better than the chaos of 2018/19.

The number of children and young people awaiting an EHCP assessment as of the 31 December 2024 was 1,238. So much of the blame for this lies with the former Labour Mayoral System.

On paper, the 1,238 is just a very sad number. But behind those numbers are children and young people, many of whom will have been pushed past breaking point, leaving families in crisis. I feel that is being forgotten once again.

I heard a councillor say in the last meeting that Send might be getting better because they are hearing less in public forum. That's very much not the case at all. It takes planning, organisation and time to have a say, which is a luxury families don't have. I missed the swift cut-off for questions for this meeting and I'm usually on top of those things out of habit.

In fairness, I have heard some positive changes, particularly around the early identification of Send.

But a lot of the strategy feedback from the council seems to once again have written off the 2014 cohort onwards. These are arguably the now adults who have suffered the most under Bristol's Send failure. They are also being vilified nationally by the Labour government for being the ones in need of disability benefit, despite that very party trashing their education in this city.

## STATEMENT 2 – ROBYN SILWAL

My eldest daughter has ADHD and high anxiety. Whilst she was in primary school the support she received was minimal, especially concerning her emotional wellbeing. The lack of support and understanding of her needs has resulted in severe school based trauma, lack of self esteem and lack of confidence.

After an emotional breakdown a few weeks ago I suggested to my daughter to write them a letter. This is her letter. I have changed the names to colours.

Dear Westbury-on-good for nothing-trym

I am very angry at you. Let me explain. I have been very sad for the last few years and I feel like I can't talk to anyone, not even my new amazing head of year, Miss Azure.

She helps me and she actually talks to me and supports me. Take notes. Speaking of support i remember having a chat with Mrs Yellow near the end of the school year about the support i apparently had been given but none of those things were things i necessarily needed so maybe if you had actually talked and listen to me you would've been able to figure something out and now i don't know what i need when my school asks me what i need in place to help me ( yes they do actually talk to me and want to know how to help crazy right? ) I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I NEED BECAUSE NOBODY ACTUALLY ASKED ME AND JUST ASSUMED WHAT I NEED!!!! so , circling back to my first point where i can't talk to anyone that is because i was made to feel like all my feelings are stupid and weren't important, that I wasn't important and yes i do know that in fact i do not go to your school anymore so obviously my feelings don't matter? WRONG! My feeling are very important the whole reason i wrote this is because you don't understand you never understood and yes I am fully aware that you probably don't care but yesterday i had a complete shutdown and i was crying and scratching myself and writing i hate you all over my body and that made me fully realise that most of this horrible feeling is all YOUR fault all this disgusting anxiety that makes me want to die that affects my mental health that makes me do self harm that makes me hate myself that makes me cry in my room for long hours that keeps me up at night basically all of that is because of you and every single one of you should be ashamed and if you think that doing that, making your students feel not like they're not enough, making them think they are lazy, making them think they are doing everything wrong, making them feel like freaks then you should think again about what a school is because that is NOT it. I do hope you work on talking and listening to your students. I also hope you learn to treat your neurodiverse children better instead of walking all over them.

Thank you for reading this and i hope you get better at helping kids the way they need to be helped

NOT kind regards

xxxx

P.S thanks for making primary hell!

Our primary schools need to be able to support our children emotional needs better, there needs to be better SEN & mental health care training for all teachers. There needs to be more focused training on how SEN presents differently in girls than boys.

With Primary schools being a child's first experience of education, it should be made a positive and nurturing experience whatever the child's needs. They should feel safe there and feel like they can trust their teachers. This is not something that xxxx ever felt.

I am thankful that my daughter is now in a school that has amazing support for their students, that their emotions wellbeing is just as important as their grades. Things are now coming together and xxxx is getting much better tailored support. I don't understand why all schools can't be like that. xxxx is still struggling everyday to go into school, her anxiety takes over, but I am hopeful that with her at secondary school now this

will be supported.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this.