

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

CHILDREN, ADULTS, HEALTH AND WELLBEING POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday, 14th October, 2024

Present:-

Councillors: Dine Romero (Chair), Liz Hardman (Vice-Chair), Paul Crossley, Dave Harding, Ruth Malloy, Lesley Mansell, Joanna Wright, Onkar Saini and Bharat Pankhania

Co-opted Members (non-voting): Kevin Burnett and Chris Batten

Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor Paul May

Also in attendance: Mary Kearney-Knowles (Director of Children and Education), Christopher Wilford (Director of Education & Safeguarding), Laura Ambler (Place Director for the B&NES locality in the Integrated Care Board) and Sarah Gunner (Head of the Virtual School)

34 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and those present introduced themselves.

35 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were none.

37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

38 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

39 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING

Councillor Eleanor Jackson addressed the Panel. A copy of her statement can be found as an online attachment to these minutes and a summary is set out below.

“I thought of calling this speech, ‘ The view from the wheelchair’, because although there are a number of matters of concern to me in your papers, it is the attitude which underlies the questions of disabled access and disability rights in a recent planning application which need to be addressed. Consent was given for a block of 77 ‘co-living’ studio flats, designed for ‘young professionals’. There would be 77 bicycle stands, but only five car-parking spaces, one reserved for disabled people. The assumption would seem to be that those with mobility problems are not young professionals. Three of the units could be adapted for wheelchair users, we were told. Not all the five floors had community kitchens, either, necessitating carrying meals up and down the stairs....”

“There are areas of the Council’s estate where either a wheelchair cannot move, or there is no evacuation provision for the disabled in the event of fire. This even applies to the offices in Keynsham, a modern building.”

“The problem is that rights for the disabled are ‘tacked on’ at the end of reports, or, as in the case of the planning application, not considered at all. So, the report on school exclusions does not tell us how many of those excluded have a disability, such as severe dyslexia, or autism. We do not know how many girls were pregnant, but more worrying, given the national statistics, we are not told how many children were withdrawn from school by their parents because their needs were not addressed.”

The Chair initially responded by suggesting that Councillor Jackson should also attend and address the Climate Emergency & Sustainability Panel as Housing was within their remit.

Councillor Jackson asked if Councillor Wright had received responses to her questions from a previous meeting regarding EHCPs.

Councillor Wright replied that she had and had been informed that 75% are not issued within the statutory timescale of 20 weeks. She asked Councillor Jackson if she was aware of any legal action against the Council on this matter.

Councillor Jackson replied that she was not aware of any such action.

The Chair, on behalf of the Panel, thanked Councillor Jackson for her statement.

40 MINUTES: 9TH SEPTEMBER 2024

Kevin Burnett offered the following observations on the minutes for 9th September 2024.

- He asked to be sent the presentation slides from the Community Summit held earlier in the year.
- Page 7 – He asked for clarity regarding the admissions criteria for the forthcoming Special School on the former Charlton House site.

- Page 12 – Could the Panel yet be given any feedback following the recent CQC inspection of Adult Social Care.
- Page 15 – The Panel are waiting for an update from the ICB on Winter Pressures.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that he had just emailed the presentation slides directly to him.

Regarding the new Special School admissions criteria, he replied that applications would need to be made to the B&NES Special Educational Needs Team. He added that places would not be able to be ringfenced for children & young people living within B&NES.

Councillor Dave Harding asked if any child or young person would be asked to move to the new Special School if they were currently attending a school outside of B&NES.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that discussions about placements would normally take place as part of the Annual Review process, but stated that no child would be forced to move from their current placement.

Councillor Joanna Wright asked what more could be done to establish the number of eligible children entitled to Free School Meals within B&NES.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that he would raise the matter with colleagues within the Welfare department to check on what more can be done.

Councillor Wright said that it should be seen as a priority for children to receive what they deserve and are entitled to. She also stated that the low percentage of EHCP's issued within the statutory timescale of 20 weeks (25.1%) needed to be addressed.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that he would be happy to discuss the subject of EHCP's in more detail at a future meeting of the Panel.

Councillor Lesley Mansell referred to page 11 of the minutes and asked if the Panel could be updated with regard to the Community Support Contracts, their next steps, engagement with the sector and a timescale for conclusion. She added that in her view it was important to have this resolved ahead of the next budget setting process.

The Chair replied that a joint presentation was expected at the November meeting of the Panel from the Director of Adult Services and the Director of 3SG.

Councillor Paul May, Cabinet Member for Children's Services added that he had attended a meeting with representatives from 3SG and assured the Panel that engagement with the sector was now ongoing. He added that the local voluntary sector is brilliant and that the Council does want to work with them as early intervention in many areas is key.

Councillor Mansell referred to the subject of Free School Meals and asked if research could be carried out to see how other Local Authorities have attempted to address this matter. She added that the new Labour Government had announced an initiative around Breakfast Clubs and would welcome an update on that at a future meeting.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that efforts had been made in a previous report to the Panel to address this issue. He added that he would seek to provide any additional information via the next Children's Services Cabinet Member update.

Councillor Mansell asked if the proposed new Youth Hubs would be funded by the Government.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that the Department for Education (DfE) were due to share a policy paper with them in November and that they expected Youth Hubs to be included. She added that she would share this with the Panel when it becomes available.

Councillor Mansell commented that the Voluntary Sector needs assurance from the Council, especially with regard to employee contracts. She asked what the status of the proposed interim contracts.

Councillor May replied that some contracts have been updated to provide continuity.

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record, with these comments in mind, and they were duly signed by the Chair.

41 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Paul May, Cabinet Member for Children's Services addressed the Panel and highlighted the points below from his update report.

Safety Valve Update

As previously advised, the Local Authorities' re-submission into the Government's Safety Valve programme has been on hold while the new government assesses a way forward for Safety Valve local authorities.

We don't yet know what the new Government's policy position will be in this area, but we have been asked to update our plan, tweak it, and resubmit it by the 1st of October. We have now done this, and we await instructions on the next steps.

Culverhay

The project is progressing to deliver the 120 place Special Free School and 55 place Alternative Provision School on the Culverhay site. The Council has committed to deliver a cleared site to the Department of Education and this will include moving the current Alternative Provision at Rush Hill. We have identified Dartmouth Avenue as a suitable site, a project manager has been appointed and architects are about to be appointed.

The next meeting between the Dept of Education Programme Managers for the Free Schools project is due on the 10th of October when we should have an update around the recruitment of their Technical Advisor for the project and progress of their feasibility study.

Charlton House

The deadline for submissions for potential providers to run the school will be the 14th of December and the successful provider should be appointed in February '25.

A project manager has been appointed, a design team will be appointed week commencing the 14th of October, a public consultation is planned for the end of November to allow local residents and stakeholders view the plans, and the aim is to submit a full planning application by the end of March 2025. The current projected opening time is September 2026, but if possible, we will open sooner.

Ofsted Annual Conversation

Ofsted have confirmed that they will retain an annual conversation around social care. A Local Authority Self- Assessment will continue to be required.

Ofsted have also advised that they will move to termly conversations with the Local Authority with regards to education.

Corporate Parents

The recent meeting had good member attendance, thank you. Venue and style of the room to be reviewed. He invited Councillor Wright to share her proposal regarding making an application to the National Trust to apply for one of the Sycamore Gap tree saplings from Hadrian's Wall for Alice Park.

Councillor Wright explained that as part of the Trees of Hope initiative 49 saplings from the Sycamore Gap will be gifted to communities around the country and felt that the Council should apply for one to be planted in Alice Park to establish a physical place that shows that our Looked After Children are cared for and part of our community.

Councillor May said that he and officers fully support the proposal and asked the Panel to add their support to the application.

The Chair agreed that it was a welcome proposal and asked that young people be consulted so that they are aware and supportive of it.

Councillor May replied that he was due to meet with representatives from Off The Record and would raise the proposal with them.

DfE Update

The DfE have announced match funding for Capital Development, to include residential homes. B&NES colleague and ICAS colleague attended a briefing session with DfE. Children's Services will be developing a residential homes option and have agreement to secure external specialist expertise input to progress.

Schools Streets

One pilot has been agreed and they have sought expressions of interest from other schools.

Youth Justice Inspection

The Youth Justice Service has had an HMIP (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation) Inspection announced. The Inspection will focus on the work of the Youth Justice Service and the wider multi-agency partnership work to prevent offending and to support children in the justice system.

The work towards the inspection began at the start of last week and will last for 5 weeks. 4 Inspectors will be onsite, at the Civic Centre Keynsham, for one week, starting at midday on Monday 21st October until approximately 1pm on Friday 25th October.

I will be pleased to provide feedback post the inspection.

Children with Complex Needs

The review of children with the most complex packages of support, both in the community and in care is still underway, across the 3 Local Authorities (B&NES, Swindon and Wiltshire) and the ICB. I will provide a further update when it is completed.

Councillor Liz Hardman stated that she was concerned that the Council were having to provide a third submission to the DfE regarding Safety Valve and asked if it was known what the requirements were for a successful submission.

Councillor May replied that he meets with officers to discuss this matter every two weeks and said that he believes that the Council has a good working relationship with the DfE.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding added that the third submission was just a slight tweak to the second submission and provided an update on projects and capital plans.

Councillor May said that it was not a performance issue and that clarity was being sought on the policy from the new Government. He added that a presentation from the DfE's South West Research Assistant could be shared with the Panel.

Kevin Burnett asked how the effectiveness of the SEND and AP advice service would be assessed.

Councillor May replied that an assessment on the service would take place in six months' time. He added that he had been made aware of initial positive feedback from SENCOs.

The Chair commented that she would like a further update on Safety Valve at the December Panel meeting alongside any preparatory budget discussions.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that he has noted the request.

Councillor Joanna Wright asked how the Panel could engage more with local Multi Academy Trusts (MATs).

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that a Regional DfE Director for the South West had previously attended a Panel meeting and that it might be difficult to progress such a request as MATs are not accountable to the Council.

Councillor Paul Crossley commented that the swimming pool at the Culverhay Leisure Centre is still seen as an asset for many residents in the south-west of Bath. He asked if during discussions regarding the site whether the subject of bringing the pool back into operation had been raised.

Councillor May replied that the pool has been part of the ongoing discussions. He added that the site is in the hands of the Corporate Property Team and that he was seeking a further report to come to the Cabinet on the matter.

The Chair asked if temporarily moving the current Alternative Provision from Culverhay to Dartmouth Avenue would have an impact on staff and their ability to park given the new Residents Parking Zone that is now in effect.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding has confirmed, since the meeting, that there are enough parking spaces on site at Dartmouth Avenue for the staff who would be occupying the building.

The Chair asked if there was to be any community consultation regarding the Culverhay site and would there be any additional housing involved.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that the DfE are aware the desire for leisure facilities to remain on the site and confirmed that the swimming pool has been discussed, but could not give a definitive answer at this stage regarding retention or its size.

He stated that the focus at the present time was on the clearing of the site. He added that he expected a public consultation to take place once the project reaches its design stage.

Kevin Burnett asked who decides on who the provider will be for the new school on the former Charlton House site.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that it would be the DfE that decides who the provider will be.

Kevin Burnett said that it had been recorded previously that £6m from within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was to be used to fund the works involved for the new school on the former Charlton House site. He said that he thought that the DSG was ring fenced.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that this sum would not have been from the DSG and would have been part of the initial funding from Safety Valve.

Councillor Hardman asked who had attended the consultation event held on 1st October.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that this had been a DfE arranged 'Providers event'. He added that one prospective provider had attended and that two further had shown an indication since the event.

Councillor May stated that a public consultation would take place regarding this project and that he would inform the Panel when this was in place.

Councillor Onkar Saini asked how having termly conversations with Ofsted, relating to education, would affect the Council.

The Director of Education & Children's Services replied that it would allow for more frequent conversations relating to our maintained schools and our safeguarding arrangements.

Councillor Lesley Mansell commented that she had felt embarrassed at the recent Corporate Parenting meeting as she could see how uncomfortable the young people present were in the setting for the meeting.

She added that she would like to see the role of the Corporate Parent become more defined and said there was a need for important discussions to be held with young people on the issues they value. She also suggested further equalities training be arranged for councillors.

Councillor Wright said that considering the actual number of councillors within B&NES she did not think the meeting was well attended and believed that many had never attended a Corporate Parenting meeting. She asked that this matter be discussed further by the Constitution Working Group as part of their current review and suggested a rule be put in place that a councillor should attend at least one meeting a year of the Corporate Parenting Group.

She stated that she felt that the meeting, in its current format, was not acceptable to the young people involved.

The Chair asked if officers involved in arranging the Corporate Parenting meetings could work on a better scenario for them.

Councillor May said that he agreed with the comments made and would be meeting with Off The Record to discuss a way forward. He added that the national lead for Corporate Parenting had been invited to attend their next meeting.

He added that the subject of Corporate Parenting was covered in their Councillor Induction Programme, but he was keen to learn from other areas as much as possible. He questioned whether attendance could be forced, but said that some degree of pressure should be applied, possibly from the Group Leaders.

Councillor Wright proposed a recommendation to the Panel. She asked that the Constitution Working Group discuss a form of words to include in the constitution that states that a councillor must attend at least one meeting a year of the Corporate Parenting Group.

The Chair explained that she has been advised that this type of rule would not be legally allowable within the constitution, but queried if an expectation could be set down in some form.

Councillor Ruth Malloy asked for the format of the meeting to be considered and whether it could be held in a more informal setting, such as one of the City's museums and given a more social feeling.

The Chair said that she felt that the principle behind possible changes to the meeting format and encouraged participation had broad agreement. She added that the Panel has within its remit the ability to make recommendations to the Cabinet, but felt that what was being asked was not within their power.

Councillor Crossley seconded the recommendation from Councillor Wright.

Councillor Hardman said that the meeting should be attended by more councillors.

The Panel voted and **RESOLVED** to request that the Constitution Working Group consider if a form of words could be included in the constitution that states that a councillor must attend at least one meeting a year of the Corporate Parenting Group.

The Chair asked how the effectiveness of the Knife Crime Awareness Events would be measured.

The Director of Education & Children's Services replied that these events are set to continue and that they have asked schools to share information regarding them. She added that the Police & Crime Commissioner has indicated that they will continue to fund work within this subject area. She said that additional funding had recently been referenced by the Government, but that they were awaiting further details.

Councillor May stated that five further events have been arranged and they would work closely with schools on promoting them. He asked if it was known when the Panel's Task & Finish Group report would be ready.

The Chair replied that they had been waiting for information relating to any new Government proposals and the newly elected Police & Crime Commissioner. She

added that she was due to attend a policy meeting later in the month and expected their report to be ready by Christmas.

Councillor Wright referred to School Streets and asked which school was to be involved in the pilot and which others had shown an interest.

Councillor May replied that he would supply an answer in writing in due course.

Councillor Wright asked how many press releases the Council had made regarding Black History Month as she was aware of none.

Councillor May said that he would discuss this with the Council's Head of Corporate Office.

Councillor Saini asked what improvements could be identified from the upcoming inspection of the Youth Justice Service.

The Director of Education & Children's Services replied that it had been a number of years since an inspection had been carried out and the team were busy in their preparations in advance of the visit. She said that the outcome of the inspection would be shared with the Panel.

The Chair thanked Councillor May for his update on behalf of the Panel.

42 B&NES, SWINDON & WILTSHIRE INTEGRATED CARE BOARD (BSW ICB) UPDATE

Laura Ambler, Director of Place for Bath and North East Somerset, BSW ICB addressed the Panel and responded to the following questions.

Councillor Paul Crossley asked if the Stoptober campaign could provide the same challenge towards vaping.

Laura Ambler replied that the ICB has supported the campaign through publicity, its social media channels and press releases and signposted local people to the HCRG Stop Smoking Support and Vaping Advice service.

Kevin Burnett referred to Maternity Services, and in particular, pre- and post-natal support and asked if there were any metrics that could support the good work that is being carried out within this area.

Laura Ambler replied that there should be data available that can be shared with the Panel. She added that in respect of people who had been in receipt of services from Ocean that there was a notable difference in their trauma scores.

Kevin Burnett asked who oversees the BSW Suicide Prevention Strategy from a Place level, in particular from an early intervention / prevention perspective and were schools involved at all.

Laura Ambler replied that she was aware that the Panel were due to discuss the Suicide Prevention Strategy at its next meeting in November. She added that the

BSW Suicide Prevention Group have debated the strategy and will formally oversee the actions.

She added that it was key to understand how local actions would be taken forward and who will hold that level of responsibility.

Kevin Burnett referred to the subject of pharmacies and asked if an update could be provided regarding resources and staffing. He also asked if information could be provided on the technology in place that links pharmacies, GPs and other agencies if pharmacies are now to be seen as a place to first attend with health concerns and if this information is fed back to GPs should a member of the public attend multiple pharmacies so that they can assess if that person has a wider health need.

Laura Ambler replied that she would seek to provide further information on this subject through a future update to the Panel.

Councillor Liz Hardman commented that having briefly looked at the Ocean website it was a 4 – 6 month waiting period to begin receiving their services. She asked if this could be confirmed or updated.

Laura Ambler replied that she would get further clarification on that for the Panel. She added that a need for treatment would be assessed prior to support being provided.

Councillor Hardman asked if there remains a shortage of midwives within the area and how well are they supported in their roles.

Laura Ambler replied that they are looking at workforce planning across the system to encourage and secure more resources for this work area. She said that she would ask the Workforce Lead to respond to this matter further.

Councillor Hardman referred to Suicide Prevention and asked if areas of deprivation are a factor that are considered in this work.

Laura Ambler replied that she believed that the work does address specific areas of population health data, including ages, gender etc.

Councillor Lesley Mansell asked for a response to be sourced regarding her previous enquiry regarding Physiotherapy Services provided by HCRG. She said she had asked about their uptake, waiting list and number of patients seen over the past two years.

Laura Ambler replied that she would seek responses to these questions.

Councillor Ruth Malloy referred to Stoptober and said she was concerned that people would also become addicted to using vapes. She asked to be assured that multi-use vapes were being allocated as part of the campaign to avoid additional waste.

Laura Ambler replied that from the discussions held at the Health & Wellbeing Board there was definitely a focus to deter people from using single use vapes.

Councillor Dave Harding asked if the continuity of midwifery care, 1-2-1 support during labour and 2-1 support during home births was being delivered consistently within our area and our hospitals. He also asked if there was sufficient funding to enable these services to be delivered.

Laura Ambler replied that she did not have answers to hand on these questions, but said that there is a commitment to ensuring safer staffing levels and encouragement of personalised care plans where appropriate for a patient's pregnancy journey.

Councillor Harding asked if further information regarding the data and metrics relating to cancer pathways / trends could be shared with the Panel.

Laura Ambler replied that data is collected in relation to their 28 day and 62 day standards and that dashboard information supplied to their Elective Recovery Board could be provided.

Councillor Crossley asked if data was available for people in receipt of advice services who have only ever vaped.

Laura Ambler replied that she would need to consult with Public Health colleagues regarding that question.

Councillor Onkar Saini asked how the Be Well B&NES initiative will be measured in terms of its success.

Laura Ambler replied that she could discuss this further with Public Health colleagues, but said that this was a broad Health & Wellbeing campaign identifying factors for healthy living, with a focus on prevention and avoidance. She added that metrics are captured in a number of different ways and would consider what information would benefit being shared with the Panel.

Councillor Saini referred to Social Prescribing and asked how these services can be provided to our most vulnerable members of the public in rural / hard to reach areas.

Laura Ambler replied that a range activities are provided through this service and was aware that there is a Social Prescribing Manager who has been working directly with 3SG and the ICB to target areas in most need.

The Chair asked if any update was available regarding the contract award for the Integrated Community Based Care Programme.

Laura Ambler replied that she was unable to update the Panel at this time, but would do so as soon as it was possible.

The Chair, on behalf of the Panel, thanked Laura for her update.

43 **B&NES COMMUNITY SAFETY & SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP (BCSSP) ANNUAL REPORT**

The Director of Children's Services & Education introduced the report to the Panel and highlighted the following areas from it.

Multi-agency Learning & Practice Development

- 2 serious incident notifications have been received and progressed to Rapid Reviews.
- 1 Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) has been completed jointly with South Gloucestershire.
- 4 SAR reports have been concluded and a learning event held in relation to self-neglect.
- No Domestic Homicide Reviews have been received.

What has happened as a result of reviews?

- BSW wide under 1's work and the development of new multi-agency policy and procedure.
- Implementation of the ICON (responding to infant crying) programme across BSW.
- A self-neglect and mental capacity learning event.
- Improving how we capture and reflect the voice of the child/adult/parent/carer.
- A business case submitted to the executive board to implement change in how we manage self-neglect cases.

Multi-agency Training & Workforce Development

- The appointment of a BCSSP trainer has mitigated the need to use external trainers as frequently, which has enabled greater focus on local practice issues.
- 76 training sessions held.
- 27 different training topics covered.

Commitments 2024-2025

- Community Safety Priorities: Priority 1: To develop the strategic oversight and scrutiny of the CSP arrangements.
- Priority 2: We will further develop our work with partners to prevent people from becoming involved in and reduce instances of serious violence.
- Safeguarding Children Priorities: Priority 1: We will strengthen the role of education in the partnership.
- Priority 2: Ensure a child-centred approach with a whole family focus.
- Safeguarding Adults Priorities: Priority 1: Improve understanding of and support professionals to work with those individuals who self-neglect.

- Priority 2: We will create confidence in practitioners in the application of the Mental Capacity Act and understanding of the interplay with the Mental health Act.
- Overarching Priorities: Priority 1: Have policies and procedures that are current and in line with best practice.
- Priority 2: We will create confidence in practitioners to be professionally curious and improve this practice.

Kevin Burnett commented that it would be useful to understand the exact measures / success criteria BCSSP are using to judge themselves as no specific targets have been given.

Kevin Burnett referred to further areas within the report, including Section 11 Audits, Safeguarding Adult Audits, training and risks and asked multiple questions.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that she would report back to the Partnership that a lack of year-on-year benchmarking data within the report made it difficult to analyse and assess its performance.

She added that the targets for the Partnership are set nationally and that generally there was good engagement from schools in relation to Section 11 Audits. She asked if the questions could be forwarded to her in writing to allow for responses to be drafted.

Kevin Burnett replied that he would circulate his questions to her. He added that he was concerned over the number of missing children within Avon & Somerset, particularly in B&NES.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that they had recently reviewed the Missing Children protocol and who undertakes the interviews when children have been identified as missing. She added that the numbers given will represent the number of incidents, not necessarily the number of children and therefore this may be due to a cohort of children / young people who go missing frequently.

She explained that they work closely with the Youth Justice Board in terms of identifying those children who are at risk of crime and promote use of the Compass Service which is a preventative service for those who are at risk of offending. She added that over the course of the year there have been a number of concerns in relation to County Lines and other criminal activities and that they have worked closely with Police colleagues on these issues.

Councillor Liz Hardman said that she shared the concerns that had been raised. She said that she was worried about the Child Protection figures, especially as it shows that B&NES is the worst in the country for initial child protection conferences, after the threshold has been met, being held within the required timescales. She asked if the training being received was part of the problem.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that at the next Children's focussed Panel that as well as receiving the IRO Annual Report they include a discussion in relation to Child Protection as she believed that some of the local performance figures were better than had been reported.

Councillor Paul Crossley asked how physically disabled people were being addressed within this process.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that the Disabled Children's Team works across all services and would discuss with them further about how this information can be included in future reports.

Councillor Crossley asked if there were differences to be noted from the report in terms of racial background.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that what they do know, from the Youth Justice figures, is that there is an over representation of both BAME and SEND young people. She added that a sub-group has been arranged to assess what further work can be done on this issue.

Councillor Joanna Wright referred to the Self Neglect Policy and asked within which department does it sit.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that the Policy sits within Adults Services and was formed following a number of Safeguarding Adult Reviews concerning the choices that individuals were making or presenting with self neglect. She added that work has been carried out recently to update the guidance and the training in this area. She said that she would ask the Director of Adult Services to provide a further response to the November meeting of the Panel.

Councillor Wright asked how it was to documented that information sharing and improvement of communication was being addressed. She added that she would have like to have seen 'actual children's voices' within the report and felt that issues such as Police involvement in safeguarding and domestic abuse safeguarding were also missing from the report.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that the voice of Children & Young People is heard clearly when their representatives from the Youth Forum attend an annual meeting of the Safeguarding Board and discuss their priority areas. She added that within the Sub-Groups there was always a focus on the voice of the child and particularly within the Youth Justice Board we discuss their experiences with the Police and data in relation to stop and search incidents are analysed.

Councillor Lesley Mansell said that she shared the concerns raised by Councillor Hardman. She asked what actions are being taken to address the increase in Child Abuse offences and what awareness was being carried out in schools. She also asked why an Equalities Impact Assessment was not required for this report.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that she would take those comments and inform the report author.

Councillor Ruth Malloy referred to the figures relating to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and the fact they had reduced in the past 12 months. She asked what could be done to further increase the reporting of this often 'hidden' form of abuse.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that they look to promote and ensure that all bodies are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and to report any concerns at the earliest opportunity to Children's Social Care and to remain as vigilant as possible.

The Chair asked how online CSE was recorded and how were protocols being designed to ensure a better process for Serious Case Reviews are established.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that all bodies within the Partnership receive training and support with regard to online CSE to be able to advise families / individuals accordingly. She added that there is an almost constant review of policy, procedures and training to attempt to ensure that there is good and effective communication in place. She added that she had attend a meeting with Avon & Somerset Police and said that they were looking at ways in which their communication systems can be improved with the Local Authority.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the Annual Report and Executive Summary for the BCSSP and asked that their queries and additional areas for consideration that they had raised during their debate be addressed in 2024-2025.

44 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND EXCLUSIONS - KEY TRENDS ACROSS 2022-2023 AND 2023-2024

The Head of the Virtual School addressed the Panel and highlighted the following areas from the report.

She said that it was very timely for her to attend the meeting today as in August the Government issued their 'Working together to improve school attendance' statutory guidance and said that it was everyone's responsibility to improve school attendance.

She added that they have worked very closely with the DfE on this issue and that the Council has a very clear Strategic Attendance Plan and felt that this was beginning to show in some of the figures recorded.

She stated that a particular focus at the present time was on our vulnerable pupils, children in need, children looked after and those within child protection in terms of persistent and severe absence.

She explained that this was a target that sits across the whole of Children's Services and within the Children & Young People's Plan. She added that a joint working party was in place and stated that clear targets need to be set and challenged within any plans for our children and young people.

She said that another area of concern was around the attendance of those pupils that are eligible for Free School Meals as too many are recorded as absent (40%)

and missing around 10% of their schooling. She added that meetings are planned to discuss how can this attendance gap be improved.

On the issue of permanent exclusions she stated that there had been a rise in 2022/23, but a reduction was now being seen in 2024. She added that historically ethnicity had been an issue, but currently these figures were low.

She informed the Panel that last year two Education Inclusion Co-ordinators had been appointed to provide advice to our schools regarding children that were at risk of permanent exclusion. She added that they had also introduced six Inclusion Panels that meet every 25 days.

She stated that her aim, over the next 2-3 years, was to have no children with a Child Protection Plan to be permanently excluded.

She said that number of suspensions had increased over the past three years, but that this was below the now national average. She added in relation to both vulnerable and Looked After Children the figures were also below the national and regional average. She said that a disproportionality remains in terms of ethnicity and that this is to be addressed through the work of the Race Charter.

Councillor David Harding asked if the most common reason for persistent absence over the past four years was infection.

The Head of the Virtual School replied that she would need to check the data to be able to provide an answer.

Councillor Harding asked why B&NES was worse than other Local Authorities with regard to the attendance of pupils in receipt of Free School Meals.

The Head of the Virtual School replied that this was an issue that she would be raising with her colleagues at meetings planned to take place later this week.

Kevin Burnett commented that it was good to see that in general, the trend was for a reduction in the figures. He asked if it was yet known if any reasons could be given for this.

The Head of the Virtual School replied that the majority of suspensions were for persistent disruptive behaviour and that work was taking place with our MATs to see what measures they have in place with their Behaviour Support Teams. She said that the Council needs to be involved when pupils begin to wobble and to strengthen the work of the Inclusion Panels.

Kevin Burnett asked if these resolutions were to be applied to children in need and those under child protection plans.

The Head of the Virtual School replied yes and said that the remit of the Virtual School had expanded over the last two years to have strategic oversight of children in need and those under child protection plans. She added that they have two Advisory Teachers to work alongside Social Care colleagues to target the importance of education. She added that this additional funding was only in place

until March 2025 and would therefore be interesting to see how the DfE plans to move this issue forward.

Kevin Burnett asked what key factors were being brought in to enable these changes.

The Head of the Virtual School replied that in the main it was the ability to challenge and support. She added that it was the ability to also be an advocate with the education experience to ask schools what they are able to provide.

Kevin Burnett asked if resources was a factor within these discussions.

The Head of the Virtual School replied that money will always be a factor to some degree, but said that it was for all teams to work together and to develop clear action plans.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding added that resources remain an issue for all schools. He said that he was aware that schools have said how much benefit they are feeling from working with the Education Inclusion Officers and that the overall offer in place to schools in terms of advice and support has improved.

Councillor Liz Hardman commented that it was good to see the reduction in permanent exclusions and that a focus was now on reducing the number of suspended vulnerable pupils. She asked if the Panel were receiving the most up to date figures in this respect.

The Head of the Virtual School replied that they only have published data that they are able to share at this stage. She added that internal data was showing a slight increase in this area, but that could not be quantified with a comparison to regional or national data.

Councillor Ruth Malloy asked if in a future report the numbers of children & young people that are educated at home could be included in some way and what services are in place to support them.

The Head of the Virtual School replied that within her role she oversees those young people who are being educated at home. She said that the number has increased to around 240. She added that the two Advisory Teachers will visit those young people and carry out a RAG rating. She said that a close eye was kept in this respect for vulnerable pupils, but said that this figure was low.

The Chair suggested that as part of any future report that the education of traveller's children and children in hospital be included as well.

Councillor Joanna Wright commented that she had been made aware of issues around school attendance and pupils being recorded as late and then being penalised for this and then subsequently either by them or by their families a decision had been made to not attend at all. She added that she felt there was a significant amount of pressure on families for their children to attend school.

The Head of the Virtual School replied that it was important for schools to know their families and pupils and to be able to code attendance appropriately. She acknowledged the difficulty that some families face in this respect and said that the Education Inclusion Officers would query penalties if they occurred regularly.

Councillor Wright asked what happens when a child is excluded from school and what impact does this decision have on them.

The Head of the Virtual School replied that when an exclusion is put in place the Local Authority is notified and the Alternative Learning Team will assess the paperwork submitted to form a view as to whether the decision is appropriate.

She explained that a basic provision of education would be allocated to the young person ahead of a meeting of the school's Board of Governors to see if the decision to exclude will be upheld. She added that if it is upheld then the young person will receive our alternative provision until such time as we feel that they can apply to return to school. She said that as part of this process they will look at any unmet SEND needs before returning to school.

Councillor Lesley Mansell commented that as detailed as the report is, it would be helpful if the information in the report could be broken down into ward areas. She referred to the Equalities Impact Assessment and said she was surprised that disability data was not as complete as she thought it should be, in particular there was a lack of information for pupils who were neurodivergent.

The Head of the Virtual School replied that ward data can be supplied and that in future reports more information can be included regarding areas of disability.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to;

- i) Note our pupils' overall positive attendance for 2022-2023 and 2023- 2024. Our overall absence rate, % persistent absentees and unauthorised absence rate sits below national and regional data.
- ii) Note that we are aware that our attendance for children open to CPP is an area that we need to address and this is a target that sits across the Children's Services directorate.
- iii) Note that whilst permanent exclusions rose in 2022-2023, that these were reduced in 2023-2024 to below the 2023 national average.
- iv) Be assured that Local Authority Officers continue to collaborate strategically with schools and partners and the Regional Director's office to improve educational outcomes for all pupils in B&NES.

45 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Chair introduced the workplan to the Panel and the following subjects were noted as potential future items of discussion.

- Home Education / Hospital Education etc.
- Social Prescribing
- Budget for 2025/26

The Chair announced that their next meeting on 11th November would be subject to a change in start time and was now scheduled to begin at 12.15pm.

The meeting ended at 1.30 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services