

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

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

Monday, 11th March, 2024

Present:- Councillors: Dine Romero (Chair), Liz Hardman (Vice-Chair), Alex Beaumont, Paul Crossley, Dave Harding, Ruth Malloy, Robin Moss (in place of Lesley Mansell) and Joanna Wright

Also in attendance: Christopher Wilford (Director of Education & Safeguarding), Ceri Williams (Policy Development & Scrutiny Officer), Amy McCullough (Public Health Consultant), Julie Eden (Early Years Adviser), Laura Donnelly (Head of SEND) and Ian Tomlinson (Senior Commissioning Manager for Complex Care & Targeted Support)

Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor Paul May

95 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

96 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

97 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Lesley Mansell and Councillor Michelle O'Doherty had sent their apologies to the Panel. Councillor Robin Moss was present as a substitute for Councillor Mansell for the duration of the meeting.

Laura Ambler (BSW ICB) had sent her apologies to the Panel.

98 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

99 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

The Chair informed the meeting that Kevin Burnett had made the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Director of Education & Safeguarding aware of a statement from the Chair of the Multi Academy Trusts within the pre-meeting and that subsequent actions were anticipated to be taken.

The Chair explained that the Knife Crime Task Group had held meetings recently with the Public Health team and the Police and that further meetings were in the pipeline.

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

Councillor Joanna Wright addressed the Panel. She stated that she had received an email from a member of the public asking about the possibility of transferring the management of the Curo allotments to active local organisations to attempt to reduce the long waiting lists and therefore enable this provision to contribute to the wellbeing of adults and children within B&NES. She said that she was raising this matter with the Panel in the context of public health.

The Policy Development & Scrutiny Officer replied that the Local Food Growing Strategy Task Group were due to meet on 15th March and he could raise this with them on behalf of Councillor Wright. He added that he expected the Group's report to be a public document by the May meeting of this Panel.

Councillor Robin Moss suggested that the member of the public could consider contacting Westfield Parish Council as they had successfully transferred responsibility for their allotments to the Westfield Allotments & Garden Society around ten years ago.

Councillor Wright asked whether the Panel could discuss at a future meeting the Local Plan and the potential loss of green spaces and how this will have an impact on public health.

The Policy Development & Scrutiny Officer replied that the Local Plan Options report was due to be discussed by the Climate Emergency PDS Panel on 21st March and that he was aware that comments had already been received on this matter and that he would brief the members of this point raised by Councillor Wright.

The Chair asked if the Public Health team could provide an update on this issue at the next meeting.

Councillor Wright asked for the matter of School Streets or the lack of them to be explored further to promote better public health.

The Policy Development & Scrutiny Officer replied that the Chair of this Panel and the Climate Emergency Panel were in discussions as to how this matter should be progressed.

101 MINUTES: 5TH FEBRUARY 2024

Councillor Dave Harding commented that he had referred to the loss of provision of dual-use leisure centre services at Chew Valley School and would like this to be added to the minutes of the meeting.

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

102 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Paul May, Cabinet Member for Children's Services addressed the Panel. He offered to speak with Councillor Joanna Wright after the meeting to discuss the issue of School Streets which she had raised.

He said that he was pleased to hear that the DfE had made a decision regarding the Alternative Provision site and thanked the officers involved for their continued work on this matter. He added that this was linked to the Safety Valve project work and that he still intends to provide a detailed report on that to a future Panel meeting.

He highlighted the following areas from his update report.

Budget

The financial pressures still exist regarding the community sector, but any review will be carried out with them. The Children's Services saving in addition to the committed saving of £1.3m was £300k around Early Help which is contrary to our requirement to invest in early intervention, so this means some careful work moving forward.

He said that the Cabinet Member for Resources had listened to the concerns raised by the Panel and has asked the Executive Director - Chief Operating Officer to work with the Cabinet Member for Adult Services and himself to provide fair and proper solutions, whilst also involving the Voluntary Sector in those discussions.

Care Experienced Young People

The next Council meeting will have an item on the agenda regarding the protected characteristics for Care Experienced Young People. He said that talks were ongoing between the political groups in order to agree the final wording.

Corporate Parenting

There is a reminder for the next Corporate Parent meeting going out to all members. This will be an early evening meeting in Bath. At this stage we are considering meetings going from daytime to early evening so young people can attend from school. We trialled working in small groups at the last meeting and will continue to do this in future. We are going to invite the national lead Mark Riddell later in the year to inspire new ways of working and commitment. He added that the Council is now separately judged on this area of work by Ofsted.

Community Summit

This was a comprehensive conference dedicated to exploring the critical issues surrounding children's well-being and poverty in our region, especially in the areas of mental health, education, justice and discrimination. This event was a call to action for academic researchers, educators, policymakers, community leaders, and concerned citizens to come together to share knowledge as well as professional, personal experiences to inform policies and practices towards a better future for the children in BANES.

Councillor Robin Moss commented that there was no issue with the principle of the Council item regarding the Care Experienced Young People, it was just a matter of firming up some of the wording. He asked what role B&NES played in the Community Summit and whether it had to input any resources.

Councillor Paul May replied that in terms of resources, to his knowledge, there was nothing additional provided by the Council and that officers were involved on this subject matter prior to the event and continue to be so. He said that the main issue of the event was the commitment shown by the community towards the children and young people within B&NES.

Kevin Burnett asked what the aim of the summit was.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that the summit was driven by the St. John's Foundation and a number of other voluntary sector groups and was part of an ongoing wider piece of work.

Kevin Burnett asked if a decision had been actually taken on the savings to be made within Early Help.

Councillor Paul May replied that no decision had been made and that further discussions were planned to take place with the voluntary sector.

The Chair commented that prevention should be seen as the better action to take in the long term and asked that the Panel be kept informed as things develop.

Councillor Paul May said that the Panel intervention at its budget meeting was important and would update them when he could.

Councillor Ruth Malloy said that she welcomed the invite of Mark Riddell to future Corporate Parent meeting and asked whether he could address the full Council to enable him to address more councillors.

The Chair said that the constitution would need to be checked to see if that was allowable.

Councillor Robin Moss said that briefing sessions have been held prior to a meeting of full Council in the past.

Councillor Liz Hardman asked that the Panel be kept updated on the process regarding Charlton House and its transfer into a new residential school for young people as she said that no consultation had taken place with the staff regarding redundancies until the Cabinet had made their decision.

Councillor May said that he would discuss that matter further with the Cabinet Member for Adult Services, Councillor Alison Born.

Councillor Hardman asked if any update could be provided on whether the Free School Meals holiday vouchers were going to be extended following the Easter two week period.

Councillor Paul May replied that he had not heard of whether a future decision had been made and said he would make enquiries and feedback to the Panel.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding commented that within the recent Budget announcement the Housing Support Fund had been extended for a further six months and so was therefore likely that holiday vouchers for Free School Meals would be covered up to and including the school Summer holidays of 2024.

The Chair asked if any further comment could be given regarding the proposals for new Alternative Provision, SEND Provision and a new school within Keynsham.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that the Council had been successful in making two applications for Free Schools within B&NES and were now seeking appropriate sites for them. He said that they were looking at whether the former Culverhay site was suitable for the SEND Provision alongside the Alternative Provision as no sites for development had been found within Keynsham.

He added that the Local Authority is not responsible building these provisions and that they were working closely with the Free School team to deliver these projects as early as we can. He explained that eight Resource Spaces, as part of the Safety Valve project, were also to be put in place in schools across B&NES to support children with SEND between now and in two years' time.

The Chair asked for the potential providers of these Free School facilities to be updated as much as possible. She thanked the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Panel for his update.

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

The Chair asked if the Panel had any comments or questions regarding the update that had been submitted and said that these would be passed onto the BSW ICB for a response.

Councillor Robin Moss referred to the Dental Recovery Plan and informed the Panel that he had recently heard that a Ukrainian refugee was unable to afford dental treatment in the UK and had therefore decided to travel to Poland instead to receive it. He stated that it was his view that this was a disgrace.

Kevin Burnett referred to Pharmacies and said that he was concerned about their role, how this has been communicated to the public and the need to retain key single points of contact so that patient information is recorded correctly.

He also asked if information could be shared with the Panel regarding the role of the SEND representative on the ICB.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that across the BSW footprint the Directors of Children's Services had all identified SEND as an area that should be given a priority and to collaborate on best practice.

Councillor Paul May commented that our representatives on the ICB should be seen as a positive.

The Chair asked if information could be provided on plans for joined up communications for differing parts of the health system to enable easier access to patient information.

Councillor Joanna Wright referred to the Dental Recovery Plan and asked what was meant by an underserved area and was B&NES deemed to be within one.

Councillor Dave Harding commented that a recent survey of 3,500 pharmacists had shown that almost half of them were concerned about having enough staff in place to deliver the Pharmacy First initiative. He asked how their safety and wellbeing would be monitored within B&NES.

The Chair added by asking how can more staff be found to support this initiative.

Councillor Liz Hardman said that she believed that a major communications exercise was required to make the public aware of this initiative. She added that she would like to know what measures have been put in place for members of the public who might not have access to using a device with apps with regard to the Prescription Ordering Direct service.

Councillor Ruth Malloy commented that she would welcome receiving further information from the RUH on their five-year sustainable travel strategy and suggested that the Climate Emergency PDS Panel should also be informed of this work.

The Chair thanked the Panel for their observations and questions and said that they would be shared with the BSW ICB for their response.

104 EDUCATION PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Councillor Paul May, Cabinet Member for Children's Services introduced the report to the Panel. He wished to draw their attention to two specific areas of results, Free School Meals and Key Stage 2, and the fact that B&NES was now seen as the worst in the country in these areas.

He said that it should be acknowledged that the overall performance of all schools is superb, but that this was an issue that we recognise that we continue to need to work on.

He stated that he welcomed the support that had been received from the St. John's Foundation and that talks with the MATs and the Schools Standards Board were due to take place. He added that the DfE have developed an Area Plan in an attempt to promote greater engagement.

The Director for Education & Safeguarding addressed the Panel and said that it was important to understand the context of the education arrangements within B&NES and the role that the Local Authority can play now that 97% of our schools are academies.

He said that the Council still has a pivotal role to play and that officers would be taking part in the meeting with the Schools Standards Board tomorrow to discuss the DfE Area Plan. He added that their role was also to influence, challenge and support.

He encouraged Panel members to view the Strategic Evidence Base highlighted within the report to gain a further understanding of the demographic information.

He explained that officers from the Early Years team and Public Health were also present to help with any responses to questions.

He referred to the academic results for 2022/23 and said that they were broadly fantastic with only the Key Stage 2 results dropping below the national average. He added that results in Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 in terms of attainment and grades achieved were to be commended.

He stated that the quality of schools within B&NES was good and that this was reflected in the Ofsted ratings that have been achieved. He highlighted the following areas from the report to the Panel.

Early Years Foundation Stage

- 71% of children had a good level of development in B&NES. This is higher than both the South West (68%) and England (67%) values.
- 69% of children in B&NES were at the expected level for all 17 Early Learning Goals, higher than both the South West (67%) and England (66%) values.

Key Stage 1

- 63% of pupils in B&NES met the expected standard in Writing, higher than the South West (59%) and England (60%).
- 71% of pupils in B&NES met the expected standard in Reading, higher than the South West and England (both 68%).
- 74% of pupils in B&NES met the expected standard in Maths, higher than the South West (71%) and England (70%).
- 82% of pupils in B&NES met the expected standard in Science, higher than the South West (81%) and England (79%).

Key Stage 2

- 58% of pupils in B&NES reached the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths (RWM) combined, a decrease from 67% in 2018/19 and from 60%

in 2021/22. This figure is slightly higher than the South West (57%) but slightly lower than England (60%) for the first time since 2015/16. [Note: one of the Government's Levelling Up missions is for 90% of pupils across England to reach the expected standard in RWM by 2030].

- 8% of pupils in B&NES reached the higher standard in RWM combined, a decrease from 13% in 2018/19 but a slight increase from 7% in 2021/22. This figure is the same as England and slightly higher than the South West (7%).
- The attainment gap in RWM combined between pupils identified as Disadvantaged and those who are not, was 36% in 2022/23, higher than the gap seen in 2021/22 (33%) and 2018/19 (31%). The percentage of disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in RWM combined in 2022/23 remained lower in B&NES than England (30% compared to 44%). The percentage of non-disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in RWM combined in the same period was similar in B&NES and England (66% and 67% respectively). This pattern is also consistent in the attainment gap between pupils eligible for FSM and those who are not. In 2022/23, for pupils eligible for FSM, B&NES is ranked the worst in the country.

Key Stage 4

- In 2022/23, pupils in B&NES achieved a higher proportion of grades (9-5) in English and Maths (51%), compared to the South West (45%) and England (45%). This is higher than the 2018/19 (pre-pandemic) figure (46%), a pattern also seen regionally and nationally.
- Similarly, pupils in B&NES achieved a higher proportion of grades (9-4) in English and Maths (72%), compared to the South West (65%) and England (65%). This is higher than the 2018/19 (pre-pandemic) figure (70%), a pattern also seen regionally and nationally.
- The average attainment 8 score in 2022/23 was higher in B&NES than the regional and national average (49.6 compared to 46.3 for England and 46.2 for the South West). This is slightly higher than the 2018/19 (pre-pandemic) average score (48.9), a pattern also seen regionally and nationally.

Key Stage 5

- In 2022/23, the Average Point Score (APS) per student entered for at least one A/AS Level was 35.2 in B&NES, giving an average A level result of a grade B-. This is slightly higher than England (APS 34.0, average grade C+) and the South West (APS 33.9, average grade C+).
- In 2022/23, the percentage of students achieving at least 2 A levels in B&NES was 90% compared with 86% nationally, and 88% in the South West.
- In 2022/23, the percentage of students achieving grades AAB or better at A level in B&NES was 23% in B&NES, slightly higher than England (22%) and the South West (21%).

He said that the persistent gap for FSM pupils in Key Stage 2 needs to be addressed and he wanted to provide reassurance to the Panel that officers are committed to doing their best to reduce this figure.

Persistent School Absence

- In Primary schools there has been a sharp increase in the proportion of pupils classed as persistent absentees in 2021/22 with 14.9% of B&NES pupils being classed as persistent absentees, double the proportion seen in 2018/19 of 7.5% (i.e. pre-pandemic).
- This increase has also been seen regionally and nationally. However, B&NES remains lower than regional and national figures for persistent absenteeism in primary schools (2021/22: 17.7% England, 17.4% South West).
- In Secondary schools there has also been a sharp increase in the proportion of pupils classed as persistent absentees with 27.3% of B&NES pupils classed as persistent absentees in 2021/22, nearly double the proportion seen pre-pandemic in 2018/19 (14.5%).
- This increase has also been seen regionally and nationally. Persistent absenteeism in B&NES is now similar to the national rate (27.7%) and slightly lower than the South West rate (30.7%).

School Exclusions

- During the 2021/22 academic year the rate of suspensions increased to 8.2% in B&NES, similar to the South West (8.0%) and higher than the England (6.9%) figures. These rates are higher than pre-pandemic figures (2018/19: B&NES 6.5%, England 5.4%, South West 6.5%).
- During the 2021/22 academic year the rate of permanent exclusions decreased to 0.05% in B&NES, whereas nationally and regionally the rates increased to 0.08% and 0.09% respectively. This equates to 13 permanent exclusions in B&NES in 2021/22. This number has ranged from 4 permanent exclusions in 2007/8 to 31 in 2017/18.

He stated that the Council continues to deliver work to improve education outcomes for our Black and Ethnic Minority children and young people in B&NES by delivering the B&NES Race Equality Charter Mark.

He said that the Local Authority continues to support initiatives with the St John's Foundation across EYFS and KS2 through implementing our Language for Life Project, the Primary Empowerment Project, and our Improving Disadvantaged Educational Outcomes Project.

The Public Health Consultant addressed the Panel. She informed them that the Public Health Team were just beginning a project on a whole systems approach to improving the education attainment for disadvantaged pupils within B&NES. She

said that the project would be looking at what the various Council departments and other sectors can do to help.

She explained that the project would commence with a comprehensive analysis of the data that is currently held and a literature review to assess both the risk factors and the protective factors.

She added that the systems of other Local Authorities would also be reviewed.

She said that a series of informal interviews and focus groups involving a number of stakeholders would be held, including young people themselves, representatives from Health partners and the 3rd sector.

She stated that a project report, including key findings and recommendations would be produced at the conclusion of the project, in around four months' time.

The Early Years Adviser addressed the Panel. She explained that following an unsuccessful funding bid to the DfE and the beginning of the Primary Empowerment Project with the St. John's Foundation a decision was made to link some of the bid's elements to that project.

She explained that this new part of the project was a collaborative piece of work between St. John's, HCRG Speech & Language Therapy Services and the Early Years Service and become known as the Language for Life Project.

She stated that the project purchased a Speech & Language Toolkit to assist practitioners with guidance on how to step up or down individual cases. She added that St. John's also funded a full time Speech & Language Therapist and that these arrangements had had a significant positive impact on this cohort of children.

She said that they have applied for an expansion of the project and that St. John's had agreed to continue with its funding position over the next two years.

She added that an evidence base has been created to support the ongoing work and that it continues to make a large difference to the children we are working with.

She stated that it was important to keep our academies engaged and for them to perform cluster working and moderation together again, especially in terms of the Early Years Foundation Stage data.

Councillor Paul Crossley asked how the specific data for BME children was recorded as it appeared a little unclear as to which groups were performing better than others.

The Director for Education & Safeguarding replied that within the Strategic Evidence Base there was detailed information regarding that data. He added that there was ongoing work with schools regarding the Race Equality Charter Mark to focus on exclusions and the curriculum.

Councillor Liz Hardman began by saying it appeared that the Council by itself is quite ineffectual in what it can do and required the support of the Schools Standards

Board. She said that it was disappointing to fall below the national average for Key Stage 2 and felt that we were failing those pupils.

She commented that she welcomed the projects from St. John's and Public Health and hoped that they would make the necessary improvements. She asked what actions they are able to take as a Local Authority to address this problem.

She referred to the exclusion rate and stressed that she felt that this was a further area that required significant focus to help our children and young people gain better outcomes.

The Director for Education & Safeguarding replied that he welcomed the challenge and said they were doing more. He added that the figures in terms of exclusions were coming down and they have put in place additional resources in the form of an Inclusion Co-ordinator, with interviews due to take place for another similar position.

He added that from September 2024 they would be offering a SEND and Alternative Provision advice service. He said that over the years a number of previous services, such as the School Improvement Service had been removed from within the Council.

He said he didn't feel that the Academy system was to blame as a number of the issues were also known when they were maintained schools. He added that a focus was needed and that the report from the Regional Director to the Schools Standards Board would stress the importance of improving figures for Key Stage 2 and the attainment gap.

The Public Health Consultant said that the work needs to be actions orientated and that the governance structure was important so that the people involved will own the actions that are put in place.

Kevin Burnett asked where the overall attainment for FSM pupils in Key Stage 2 placed them compared to the regional and national averages.

The Director for Education & Safeguarding replied that he would need to clarify that information with the Business Intelligence Team.

Kevin Burnett said that he acknowledged the reduction in resources now available to the Council. He asked for any further comment on behaviour in schools leading to mental health issues, suspension and exclusion and the lack of support available to schools.

The Director for Education & Safeguarding replied that he did not have a direct answer to those points, but said that the budgets are what they are. He said that the role of the Local Authority has become harder over the past three years as the numbers of children who require support has increased. He added that through the Safety Valve project they would be looking to provide a better offer.

The Early Years Adviser added that as well as funding for the service being an issue, staff turnover has had a massive impact on their levels of service delivery. She said that a training programme has been developed for staff to take part in.

Kevin Burnett asked if both the Local Authority and the Public Health team were working with the St. John's Foundation.

The Public Health Consultant replied that they were both now working on an aligned project with the Foundation and would be using some of their already collected information as part of the project.

The Chair suggested that the Panel receives a report from the St. John's Foundation at a future meeting to hear how their work is progressing.

Councillor Paul May said that he would be happy to approach them on behalf of the Panel.

Councillor Dave Harding referred to the matter of persistent absences from school due to infection and said that he felt that there has been less focus given to children in general regarding this. He said that he felt that a large number of children are encouraged to continue to attend school when ill.

He asked what can be done locally in terms of CO2 monitors and ventilation of school sites.

The Public Health Consultant replied that currently there is less Covid circulating within the community and there are less people becoming seriously ill from Covid-19 due to the effectiveness of the vaccine programme. She added that the Public Health team do work with the ICB to support communities to access the Covid-19 vaccine where they are eligible and under-represented in take-up.

She added that the Public Health team are actively trying to prevent and mitigate with regard to Covid-19, but as one of a number of respiratory infections, and said that the Government has also issued refreshed guidance on respiratory infections with Covid-19 part of that.

She said that if schools do have concerns that they can contact UKHSA and the Public Health team.

The Chair explained that the Panel were due to receive a report on Covid at its April meeting and posed whether some additional information relating to children & young people could be added into that report.

Councillor Joanna Wright referred to the Schools Standards Board meeting and asked what do officers hope to be able to achieve over the next year.

The Director for Education & Safeguarding replied that the Regional Schools Director would be presenting their Local Area Plan at a meeting tomorrow and that they are looking to learn as much as possible from all involved to improve the figures as outlined for FSM pupils in Key Stage 2 in terms of attainment and across school settings for exclusions.

He added that it would be difficult to say by how much the gap would be closed over the next year. He said that they wanted to be able to find out what plans / measures schools were putting in place and what levels of support were required. He stated

that from April the SEND and AP advice service would be in place and that should hopefully act as a guide as to what work would be helpful.

He said that a number of the new Resource Spaces should come into use over the next year alongside the plans for the two new schools.

Councillor Joanna Wright said that she wanted to be assured that things are going to improve. She added that she felt that these issues were linked to housing and poverty and the need for this to be addressed for many families to then be able to allow their children to grow up in better and more stable environments.

The Director for Education & Safeguarding replied that he was in no doubt that the outcomes in relation to exclusions would improve over the next year as they already have some good data available and plans for further staff to be in place to assist with this. He added that the attainment gap was a real challenge and that a joined-up strategy is required involving many sectors.

Councillor Robin Moss asked if all children and young people that are entitled to Free School Meals were claiming them and if not, what action can be taken to address this.

He referred to the matter of education performance and said that issues surrounding Covid and the lockdown periods for schools were due to unroll over the years to come and that will be seen as an additional challenge to schools across all Local Authorities.

He stated that from most of the points raised so far there was a thread to the discussion in relation to housing or lack of it and said that many people will be staying in unsuitable homes because they cannot afford to move.

Councillor Paul May replied that the question relating to Free School Meals was raised at the recent Cabinet meeting and acknowledged that an answer was not fully able to be given and said that this would be followed up.

He added that the majority of children and young people in B&NES are served well by our local schools and it is recognised that there is the need to support our minorities as best we can within the system that is in place. He stated that there is a dedicated team of officers who are trying to make improvements and welcomed that they have gained DfE involvement in pursuit of finding a resolution.

The Early Years Adviser commented that in relation to outcomes after Covid the results for B&NES FSM pupils went up 3% in 2022 against a backdrop of an 8% reduction nationally and said that officers and schools had worked hard locally to achieve that.

Councillor Paul Crossley called for the Panel to receive a detailed report of the steps that are and will be taken to address the educational needs of our ethnic minority and FSM pupils.

The Panel agreed with this proposal.

Councillor Paul May replied that this information could be contained in the agenda item that would see the St. John's Foundation attend a future meeting of the Panel and inform them of their ongoing work in more detail.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to:

- (i) Note our pupils' overall positive education performance in B&NES schools for the academic year 2022/23.
- (ii) 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.
- (iii) Receive a detailed report of the steps that are and will be taken to address the educational needs of our ethnic minority and FSM pupils.

105 EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE PLAN (EHCPs) OVERVIEW

Councillor Paul May introduced this item to the Panel and stated that the increase in demand for Education, Health & Care Plans over recent years had grown so much. He added that he did feel that they were now turning the corner and making progress in the time taken to carry out assessments and the increase in issued plans.

The Chair asked if it could be explained what has been done so far to enable these initial improvements to have occurred.

The Head of SEND replied that the number of SEND practitioners had been increased to be able to analyse requests for an assessment. She added that there is also now a robust improvement plan in place, looking at six key areas to improve, alongside ongoing changes to our systems to benefit the public and officers.

She said that the turnover of SENCOs within schools was high and that where possible these roles need to be retained.

Councillor Liz Hardman asked why 24% of assessment requests were denied.

The Head of SEND replied that the applications are put before a multi-agency panel to establish whether (i) the child has SEND and (ii) whether their needs are above the level of what the school can normally provide. She added that they need to see a robust record of the offer of what the school can do.

She said that if provision can be achieved from school resources that should occur without an EHCP.

Councillor Hardman asked if since the budget discussions, had there been any changes to the numbers of children (204) with complex needs who were in receipt of out of county provision.

The Head of SEND replied that far too many young people still do travel out of area for provision and that they were putting in place Resource Spaces within mainstream schools to assist with keeping pupils connected with their local community.

She added that they were working with the DfE to move forward with new SEND, AP and residential provision. She said that discussions will take place with schools as to

whether their Planned Admission Number (PAN) can be increased, and they were also working collaboratively with other Local Authorities in terms of placements.

Kevin Burnett asked what support is offered if a needs assessment is turned down.

The Head of SEND replied that Senior Inclusion Officers would offer to hold a 'way forward meeting' with the parents / carers and the school to establish what can be done for the child in question. She added that the SEND / AP Advice Service will also play a key role in this process.

Kevin Burnett asked if the SEND / AP Advice Service replaces what has been removed in terms of support services to schools.

The Head of SEND replied that it did not and that its role was to signpost what services are available and be a place for where schools can go to find support.

Kevin Burnett asked if there was enough provision in place to support the current numbers of young people with behavioural needs and social, emotional and mental health needs.

The Head of SEND replied that within B&NES Autism was our highest need area, although social, emotional and mental health needs were increasing. She said that they were doing the best they can with the resources that they have.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding added that they were taking steps to put in place a broader and stronger offer, but stressed that budgets are an issue for all concerned. He added that not all MATs were in a position to make the same offers and that this was something they are looking to try to address. He said that targeted provision was also due to be carried out.

Kevin Burnett asked if there were enough resources in place to attempt to reduce the numbers of EHCPs.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that it was very difficult to fill certain vacancies, especially Educational Psychologists and Speech and Language Therapists. He added that he was optimistic that this could improve following recent appointments within the Council.

Councillor Ruth Malloy referred to section 3.3 of the report and asked how many staff were in the Behaviour Support Team.

The Head of SEND replied that there was one member of staff within this team currently and they were hoping to increase this to two and this would provide enough capacity to meet the current demand.

Councillor Eleanor Jackson asked what the average age was for someone to be diagnosed with Autism, how we diagnose the condition within B&NES and how we compare with national figures in this area.

The Head of SEND replied that she did not have that information to hand and would consult with colleagues to provide a response to the Panel.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to;

- (i) Note the national, regional and local picture regarding the increase in applications for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCPNA) and the increase in issued plans as detailed in the attached slides.
- (ii) Be assured that Local Authority Officers continue to work strategically with social care, health, schools and other partners in order to work within statutory guidelines and support schools in delivering the very best outcomes for our children and young people.

106 SUFFICIENCY STATEMENT - CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER, PLACEMENTS

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services introduced the report and said that it was important that the Council attempts to improve the lives of all children and young people, especially those within its care.

The Senior Commissioning Manager for Complex Care & Targeted Support addressed the Panel and gave a presentation, a summary of which is set out below.

The Sufficiency Duty: Requires Local Authorities to have 'sufficient' accommodation in terms of the number of beds provided, to secure a range of accommodation through several providers and have accommodation that meets the needs of its Children Looked After.

Pressures in the marketplace

- Increased overall numbers of children in care locally, regionally and nationally which adds pressure.
- Decrease in the number of fostering households.
- 'Staying Put' legislation, allowing young people to stay in their foster placements until the age of 24.
- UASC children, who are predominately 16 -17year-old males.

Needs

- Foster placements in central Bath and within a reasonable travelling distance of B&NES schools.
- Foster placements for children aged 14 – 17 years with complex and challenging needs, including mental health and self-harm.
- Residential step-down placements
- Residential children's homes closer to B&NES
- Appropriate placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

- Solo/specialist foster and residential placements for our most complex children.
- Parent and baby foster placements

Numbers

Number of Children Looked After as at 31st March.

- 2017: 163
- 2023: 231

Number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children as at 31st March.

- 2018/19: 8
- 2022/23: 43
-

Number of Children Placed with Independent Foster Agencies (IFA's) (Annual total).

- 2016/17: 90
- 2022/23: 105

Number of Children Placed in Residential Children's Homes (Annual total).

- 2016/17: 4
- 2022/23: 31

Number of Children Placed in 16+ Accommodation and Support (Annual total).

- 2016/17: 8
- 2022/23: 14

16 + Accommodation and Support: This type of placement involves support and accommodation, but no care element. Care entails 'doing for' rather than supporting. e.g. cooking and administering medication. This is a significantly different type of support from residential children's homes. Support can range from a few hours a week to 24/7; fees can therefore vary dramatically. This has been unregulated until very recently.

Moving Forward

- Continue to provide a core service in supporting social care teams; searching for placements, appraising offers made, negotiating costs and monitoring contracts.
- Tendering for new 16+ accommodation and support DPS
- Continue to chair the Southwest Children's Services 'Placements, Contracts and Commissioning Group' to increase our range of placements from external providers and opportunities to develop the provider markets.
- Work with South West Sufficiency Project
- Work with Regional Care Co-operatives to improve sufficiency if selected.

Councillor Robin Moss said that he had seen the pressures involved in this work area from taking part in the Council's Fostering Panel. He added that the Council needs to look at the offer it is providing for foster caring families in comparison to its neighbouring Local Authorities as well as the private sector providers.

The Senior Commissioning Manager for Complex Care & Targeted Support replied that Independent Fostering Agencies began working in the market around 15-20 years ago when it was identified that a cohort of young people with challenging and difficult behaviour were not able to find the appropriate type of provision from foster carers within the Local Authority. He added that the Independent Fostering Agencies were able to pay their carers more and provide them with training.

He explained to the Panel that generally there remained a defined split between the age groups of those children placed with the Local Authority (0-12) and those with Independent Agencies (13-17).

Councillor Paul Crossley asked if the amount of money that the Council pays its carers is the main issue in potentially increasing our numbers, and if so, what steps can be taken to address this.

The Senior Commissioning Manager for Complex Care & Targeted Support replied that this was a question he could not answer directly and would refer it back to the Family Placement Team to provide an answer in due course.

Kevin Burnett asked if whether the report could be seen as a good news story in any way or was there a real struggle to provide enough placements.

The Senior Commissioning Manager for Complex Care & Targeted Support replied that he did not think that it was a good news story. He added that the reality is now is that if an offer to provide a placement is received it needs to be acted upon quickly by the team otherwise it will be taken by another Local Authority. He said that historically they could receive seven or more offers of care for a child, but that was simply not the case now and that this was a national problem, not just a local one.

Kevin Burnett asked if the prompt acceptance of care offers could lead to future breakdowns of the placement.

The Senior Commissioning Manager for Complex Care & Targeted Support replied that it was possible that this could lead to breakdowns but was not always the case. He added that it was his opinion that the foster care demographic was an ageing one and the more experienced carers were therefore reducing, and the newer carers were finding it difficult in some cases to cope with some of the younger people now coming into care.

Kevin Burnett asked if he was responsible for the training provided to new foster carers.

The Senior Commissioning Manager for Complex Care & Targeted Support replied that the majority of the training is statutory and that a national minimum standard needs to be achieved by the carers. He added that he was not directly involved in this area. He said that most independent agencies would ask their carers to take part in further advanced training.

Councillor Liz Hardman referred to section 14.1 of the report which stated that the Council offers an extended duty to approximately 90 care leavers aged 21-25 who

have previously stepped down from having their Personal Advisor. She asked what level of responsibility do we have for this group of young people.

The Senior Commissioning Manager for Complex Care & Targeted Support replied that this issue was not within the remit of his role.

Councillor Liz Hardman suggested that the Panel receives an expanded report on this matter that considers this subject matter in a wider context.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report for information.

107 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Chair introduced this item to the Panel. Following a brief discussion, the items below were identified as potential reports to be added to their workplan.

- Accommodation for Care Experienced Young People / Responsibility for Care Leavers / Reasons for the reduction in Foster Carers
- Under 5s Health Study
- Homelessness Health Update
- Dentistry Update
- Community Resource Centres – Implementation of Cabinet decisions
- Refugee Support Update / Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)
- Safety Valve
- SEND Home to School Transport Consultation
- SACRE Annual Report
- Connecting Families
- St. John's Foundation

The meeting ended at 12.50 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services