

Lead Member PDS Report 13/10/2025.

Senior Leadership changes (update)

As previously reported, there have been some key changes to the senior leadership team in Children's Services.

Following Mary Kearney Knowles retirement in March 2025, Jean Kelly is now in role as the Director of Children's Services. Jean arrived in mid- August.

Phoebe Holland is the interim Assistant Director for Children's Social Care having stepped up from her permanent role as Head of Service for Safeguarding Outcomes. We will be advertising the Assistant Director role for permanent recruitment in the coming months.

Darryl Freeman joined in early September, as Executive Director for People. He is responsible for Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Public Health. This follows Mandy Bishop's move to South Gloucestershire as Chief Executive.

Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) update

An ILACS inspection was announced and took place in June 2025. A report has been shared with this meeting for consideration and will be presented for information and discussion.

Very positively, Children's Services maintained 'Good' judgements across all 5 inspected domains, including a new judgement area for the experience and progress of care leavers.

Link to the report here: <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50283932>

New OFSTED Early Years and School Inspection Framework

OFSTED has launched a new school inspection framework, effective from November 2025, which outlines how OFSTED will inspect registered early years settings, maintained schools, academies, non-association independent schools, and further education and skills provision in England. The framework includes principles of inspection, main evaluations, and standards used to inspect providers. It introduces a five-point grading scale, ranging from 'exceptional' to 'urgent improvement', across six core evaluation areas: inclusion, curriculum and teaching, achievement, attendance and behaviour, personal development and well-being, and leadership and governance.

I welcome the focus on inclusion in this new framework and we believe this will support the Local Authorities' drive to support our most vulnerable pupils, especially those with SEND. At the same time, we realise that any new inspection framework does cause concern for our education colleagues, who balance so many competing demands as school leaders. We will do what we can locally to support schools through this transition and with ongoing training/CPD to support all children with SEND in our Schools.

For more details, you can access the full framework

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework-for-use-from-november-2025>)

Education White Paper

The Education White Paper is anticipated to be published in Autumn 2025. This will be the first significant piece of education legislation/reform for over a decade. Whilst I expect that this will mean introducing substantial reforms to the SEND system, I will not speculate on what these will be at this stage. It is a sensitive topic, and my best hope is that the changes keep children and families at the centre of any proposed changes. More updates will follow.

Free School Meals – Auto Enrolment

The Local Authority have successfully implemented our Free School Meals (FSM) Auto-Enrolment system. As a result, we have seen an additional 139 children enrolled for FSM directly or indirectly as a result of this exercise. While this number is lower than the assumed unclaimed benefit based on the dataset we gathered from our Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) system, the welfare team has manually checked all 462 cases from the original dataset and is satisfied that, other than the handful who opted out, all families in receipt of LCTS are now enrolled in Free School Meals where they are entitled.

Of 139 new cases, 55 enrolled themselves, after receiving our letter highlighting potential entitlement. The table below breaks down the number of enrolled participants by ward.

Westfield	17
Moorlands	5
Keynsham East	1
Walcot	11
Midsomer Norton North	7
Keynsham North	1
Newbridge	1
Timsbury	2
Odd Down	32
Twerton	24
Peasedown	1
Southdown	13
Radstock	14
Widcombe & Lyncombe	2
Bath North	1
Combe Down	3
Kingsmead	1
Lansdown	3

SEND Updates, the SEND team, SEF and OFSTED/CQC inspection readiness

SEND Team

I am pleased to report that, following additional council investment, our SEND team is fully staffed and caseloads have been reduced. I am very impressed with the leadership locally of our SEND service and the way staff have responded to all the challenges we have faced over the last 18 months. With strong leadership and increased capacity, I am very positive about the future of this service area.

SEND Self Evaluation

I am pleased to say that our latest self-evaluation of our joint arrangements between education, social care and health for supporting children and families with SEND is now published.

It can be viewed here <https://livewell.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-10/BNES%20SEF%20signed%20off%20by%20LAIP%20Sept%20%2725.pdf>

Whilst there is always more work to do and room to improve, I am satisfied that this document helps us prioritise and focus as a partnership on the key areas where we need to improve and with the support of our Parent Carer Forum, we can do this in an informed and collaborative way.

On the subject of self-evaluation and collaboration, the Children's Leadership team on the 9th of October 25, will be participating in a South West SEND, regional peer challenge, the focus of the day will be on self-evaluation, with an opportunity to challenge and learn from other Local Authorities on how to improve our evaluation and ultimately, the services we provide. I look forward to receiving the feedback from this event.

OFSTED/CQC SEND Inspection readiness

I anticipate that there will be a full SEND/CQC SEND inspection this academic year. The last time this area was inspected was in 2019. Alongside self-evaluation, we are undertaking a number of activities to prepare, including our 3rd Inspection Dry Run, which focuses on the deep dives into our work that inspectors will conduct during the inspection. A regular OFSTED Inspection sub-group is in place and has been meeting for some time to ensure we are ready to manage the anticipated 3 weeks of inspection.

We are always keen to learn and develop in this area. If we do not receive an inspection by the spring term, I am aware that our Senior Leadership will consider requesting an LGA Peer Review of SEND services and systems to ensure that we remain focused and informed.

Our Virtual School for Children in Care

Finally, I wanted to conclude the education updates with a positive reflection on our Virtual School and the progress it continues to make in providing not only support for children in our care, but also in supporting children in need and those in need of protection. I attended the September Virtual School Governing Body meeting and was impressed by the quality of staff now in the team, the continued praise the team receives whenever inspections

arrive, and the continued drive to ensure we lead the development of trauma-informed practice in our schools. No child in a protection plan was excluded from school in the last academic year. Well done to the team.

Families First Partnership Reforms in Children's Social Care

Following the publication of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, Children's Social Care services across the country have been asked to implement some key elements of the reforms by April 2026. These reforms are called the Family First Partnership and this links to key developments arising from The Review of Children's Social Care undertaken by Josh McAlister and the National Panel Review into the deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinje-Hughes.

There are four key elements of the Family First Programme of reform:

1. Family Group Decision Making

All families should benefit from decision making that includes their family network, in order to find preventative solutions which, support children to be supported in the community and with their family network wherever possible.

In Bath and North East Somerset, we have an established Family Group Conference service, and we are working to develop our approach to ensure families benefit from a way of working which has family group decision making at the heart of all we do.

2. Family Help and Family Help Lead Practitioner role

The reforms support a change to the way we support children in need of early help and support to reduce the number of changes of worker and to build effective relationships that lead to positive outcomes. Focusing on preventative support is important so that we work in partnership to reduce the likelihood of risk escalating and ensuring that children can remain in their family network.

In Bath and North East Somerset we are working to develop this way of working which will include a range of practitioners, including but not limited to qualified social workers, supporting children and families in this preventative way.

3. Multi agency Child Protection Teams

Where harm is suspected or occurs for children, it is important that statutory response and decision making is effective. The development of a multi-agency child protection team approach will extend the approach we already use in Bath and North East Somerset.

4. Lead Child Protection Practitioner role

The lead protection practitioner role will be part of the Multi Agency Child Protection Team approach. These practitioners will be experienced social workers and will lead decision making when there is concern that children have or are likely to suffer significant harm.

They will oversee key decisions and interventions alongside multi agency partner agencies, such as the police, education and health colleagues.

In Bath and North East Somerset we are reviewing our existing approach to develop and strengthen this further.

The Scrutiny Committee may want to consider devoting a full meeting to all of these reforms in early 2026.