

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

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

Monday 13th October 2025

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

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

**Cabinet Member for Children's Services:** Councillor Paul May

**Also in attendance:** Jean Kelly (Director of Children's Services & Education), Christopher Wilford (Director of Education & Safeguarding), Ceri Williams (Policy Development & Scrutiny Officer), Laura Ambler (Place Director for the B&NES locality in the Integrated Care Board), Felicity Groves (Service Development Manager), Phoebe Holland (Interim Assistant Director) and Sarah Gunner (Head of the Virtual School)

#### **38 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **39 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor Michael Auton had sent his apologies to the Panel.

#### **41 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Kevin Burnett declared an other interest with regard to agenda item 10 (Ofsted Inspection Report) as he is a member of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT).

#### **42 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN**

There was none.

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

Questions were submitted to the Panel by Councillor Saskia Heijltjes and Councillor Joanna Wright. A copy of this Q&A document is attached as an appendix to these minutes.

Jon Gore, Orchestra of Everything addressed the Panel, a summary of his statement is set out below.

He said that following his previous visit to the Panel in July he had been able to arrange for a number of music festival events to be held at St Michael's Junior School, Twerton and was pleased to report increased resilience, confidence, and focus among the children who had taken part, with 86% showing a more positive attitude to learning.

He explained that a volunteer group was now also in place to attend the school every Wednesday to offer all pupils an opportunity to practice their chosen instrument.

He informed the Panel that the group had received a small amount of funding to begin work with Year 6 pupils at Roundhill Primary School, Southdown until the half term in February 2026.

He said that discussions were also ongoing with Youth Connect South West to begin a pilot local youth club for young people that had left St Michael's.

He wished to express his thanks to The Roper Family Charitable Trust, Medlock Charitable Trust and Bath Rotary Club for their support and funding.

He stated that he was very hopeful of recruiting further volunteers at the Bath and North East Somerset Volunteer Fair that was due to be held on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> October.

He said that he had also visited the Bath University Music Society regarding their potential involvement with the group, and that he planned to meet with Bath Spa University in the near future.

Councillor Liz Hardman said that his enthusiasm was inspiring and was pleased to hear that the work of the group had helped with the focus of a large number of pupils at the school. She added that she had passed on his details to the councillors for Twerton and Whiteway, Tim Ball and Sarah Moore, to see if they would be able to offer any support or funding for his work.

She asked if there was any possibility to expand the programme to other schools within B&NES.

Jon Gore replied that he had received requests from other schools, but said that at the present time the focus remains on the Primary Schools within Twerton, Whiteway and Southdown. He added that the intention was for Roundhill to follow the programme used at St Michael's.

The Chair commented that as a councillor for Southdown she welcomed the group working with Roundhill Primary School. She added that the Council were awaiting further information for how £20m of government funding, as part of the Pride in Place programme, would be used in Twerton.

Councillor Bharat Pankhania asked if the group was linked to any work with Voices for Life.

Jon Gore replied that he was aware that Voices for Life were working with pupils in Year 4 at both St Michael's and Roundhill. He added that he had raised whether it would be possible for those pupils to also receive a light touch programme from the Orchestra of Everything and planned to discuss the matter further with Tessa Armstrong (Executive Director, Voices for Life).

Councillor Pankhania stated that he had also worked with Tessa Armstrong regarding plans for a longitudinal study to evidence the impact of music interventions on young people.

The Chair said that she would welcome further updates to the Panel on this matter.

#### **44 MINUTES: 15TH SEPTEMBER 2025**

Councillor Lesley Mansell referred to page 15 of the agenda pack and asked for an amendment to be made. She stated that she had asked for a separate Equalities Impact Assessment to be provided for service users, not whether one was required.

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.

#### **45 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

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

He confirmed that he had asked officers to work with John Gore and to see if any external funding bids could be accessed for the Orchestra of Everything project.

He informed the Panel of the progress that had been made on the School Streets initiative and said that funding had been provided through the Clean Air Zone funding (£250,000), one-off revenue funding for 2025/26 (£87,000) and WECA Active Travel Fund (£75,000). He said that further information on the participating schools would be circulated when known.

He announced that the Tree of Hope sapling would be planted in Alice Park in February 2026 and that Youth Guarantee Trailblazer funding would be used to allow young people to attend the event. He thanked Councillor Wright for her work on this matter.

He stated that the Council were awaiting a ministerial response regarding the local authority's recent Safety Valve submission.

He explained that discussions were ongoing with the St. John's Foundation to see whether support for the Language for Life could be extended beyond July 2026.

He informed the Panel that Councillor Romero had been added as a board member for the Virtual School alongside himself and Councillor Hardman.

He said that the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) report was positive and that the support from officers throughout the inspection was fantastic. He added that the report gives the Council a good basis to set strategic targets.

Councillor David Harding asked about the impact of the SEND and AP Advice team on school exclusions and young people entering the youth justice system.

Councillor May responded that the team was working with schools to improve these figures, and a more detailed answer would be provided later in the meeting.

Councillor Onkar Saini asked about the number of eligible children not enrolled for free school meals following the auto-enrolment exercise and the steps needed to reach the remaining families.

Councillor May explained that a table had been circulated showing the numbers achieved and that he has asked the Director of Children's Services for figures relating to the number of opt-outs by ward.

The Director of Children's Services confirmed that further feedback would be provided.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding added that the Council had identified all eligible children, with only a handful opting out, and that the system would be ongoing to capture new eligible children.

Councillor Wright requested regular updates on free school meals, which Councillor May agreed to provide.

Kevin Burnett raised concerns about the pressures of Ofsted inspections on staff, referencing the national campaign following Ruth Perry's death.

Councillor May said that he recognised the tension that the inspections can bring and that all staff were committed to doing their best for local children.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding added that the Council was supporting headteachers and staff, providing risk assessments and wellbeing support, and working with Ofsted to promote a more supportive inspection framework.

Kevin Burnett asked about funding and resourcing for the Families First reforms.

Councillor May acknowledged concerns about sufficiency of funding and confirmed that the Council would work within the resources provided, while continuing to lobby for more support.

The Director of Children's Services explained that the Council had received government funding for the developmental year of the reforms. She added that the Council was realigning services to meet the new requirements, focusing on early intervention and multi-agency working.

The Chair reminded the Panel that Early Help Task Group remains ongoing.

Councillor Liz Hardman commented that the numbers of young people being identified with SEND or diagnosed with Autism have increased, whilst noting that all local Special Schools are full. She asked about the support for children under Section 19 of the Education Act 1996, which is a duty for local authorities to provide suitable full-time education for children of compulsory school age who cannot attend school due to illness, exclusion, or other reasons.

The Virtual School Headteacher replied that 90 children were currently accessing education other than at school, with tailored packages and regular reviews. She clarified that this provision was full time and not provided at home.

Councillor Hardman asked how schools are identified to receive support from the Mental Health Support Team.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that a range of demographic information is used to identify the schools. He said that the direct support is such a benefit, and it is the Council's wish to have the provision available to all schools.

Councillor Hardman raised concerns about post-16 education and transport provision for young people with complex needs.

Councillor May acknowledged the challenges and asked Councillor Hardman to pass to him any information relating to individual cases.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding added that there was ongoing work to expand provision at Bath College and that he was willing to discuss transport options in partnership with WECA.

Councillor Joanna Wright commented that education was an important part of the role of WECA and suggested that an appropriate officer be asked to attend a future meeting of the Panel.

Councillor May replied that he believed that their remit was more around Adult Education, but that he would make an approach on behalf of the Panel.

Councillor Wright raised the need for a dedicated update on School Streets, highlighting its relevance to public health.

Councillor May agreed to circulate further information once available and acknowledged that the issue crosses the remits of two Panels.

Councillor Wright said that she was concerned over the potential cost implications regarding the Education White Paper.

Councillor May acknowledged the concern and said any implications were currently unknown as the paper had yet to be published. He added that a joint inspection of SEND by the CQC and Ofsted, scheduled for Autumn 2025, might be delayed until the New Year because of the White Paper publication. He said that a Peer Review regarding SEND had recently taken place.

Councillor Lesley Mansell commented that the ILACS report was a fantastic achievement. She said that she recognised the work involved regarding the Free School Meals enrolment project and hoped to see the benefits for the young people involved.

Referring to the Virtual School she said that it was good to see that no child in a protection plan was excluded from school in the last academic year.

Councillor May replied that the work of the officers and young people involved in the Virtual School was to be commended.

Councillor Mansell asked what training would be made available as part of the Families First reforms, and whether the Panel would have a role on their implementation.

The Director of Children's Services replied that the reforms will require some degree of training to be undertaken around the four key areas mentioned within the update. She said that Family Group Decision Making was an important part of the reforms and that the Council already has an established Family Group Conference service.

She added that work would continue on the realignment of services alongside learning from pathfinder authorities, such as Dorset.

She said that officers will seek to support families at an early stage and provide appropriate interventions if and when required.

Councillor Mansell referred to the Equalities Impact Assessment relating to Charlton House and asked if any further information could be provided regarding a new 30 place Special School.

Councillor May replied that this was part of the original proposal for Charlton House that would include an overlap of Social Care and Education functions. He said that the Panel would be provided with an update at a future meeting.

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

#### **46 B&NES, SWINDON & WILTSHIRE INTEGRATED CARE BOARD (BSW ICB) UPDATE**

Laura Ambler, Executive Director of Place for Bath and North East Somerset, BSW ICB addressed the Panel and highlighted the following areas from within the update.

Uzoma Ibechukwu, Director of Pharmacy, Royal United Hospitals, Bath was also present at the meeting.

##### Chief Executive of new ICB cluster appointed

Earlier this month, Jonathan Higman was appointed as the new Chief Executive for the recently-established Integrated Care Board cluster covering Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire, Dorset and Somerset.

Jonathan, who is currently Chief Executive of Somerset ICB, has more than 25 years of experience in both NHS provider and commissioning organisations.

#### Winter vaccination programme

Eligible groups are now able to receive a free flu and Covid-19 vaccination. Pregnant women, along with children aged two and three, were among the first to be called forward in early September. On Wednesday 1 October, the flu vaccination offer was widened to include over-65s, people with a weakened immune system, care home residents and frontline health and social care workers.

There are a number of different ways in which people can arrange their flu vaccine appointment, with bookings available online through the NHS App and at [www.nhs.uk/bookflu](http://www.nhs.uk/bookflu), or over the phone by calling 119.

The eligibility criteria for Covid-19 vaccines has been changed, following a review by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. Now, only those people aged 75 and over, as well as older care home residents and those who are immunosuppressed, will be offered a vaccination against Covid-19.

#### Closure of the outpatients medicine courier service at the RUH

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Royal United Hospital in Bath introduced the outpatients medicines courier service to support vulnerable patients who were shielding.

As of 2025, the service is still in operation and currently carries out between 300 and 350 deliveries each month, mainly for oncology, haematology and dermatology patients.

In June of this year, the RUH agreed to decommission the service, and transition to a modern, digitally-enabled model, which aligns with the requirements of the government's 10-Year Plan for the NHS.

The current model supports only a small number of patients. An electronic prescribing service will be able to support a wider cohort of patients, with the majority of users able to access medicines through other means, such as their local community pharmacy.

She explained that a discussion about the recent hospital league tables would be followed up at a future meeting.

Kevin Burnett referred to the outpatients medicine courier service and asked if patients had yet to be informed and had there been any pre-decision discussion with them.

Uzoma Ibechukwu replied that they have been working with the Patient Advice and Liaison Service at the RUH with regard to how communication with patients could be carried out.

Laura Ambler added that the Panel were being asked their view on the proposal and confirmed that patients in receipt of the service would be written to.

Kevin Burnett commented that as it was a relatively small number of people could a more direct form of communication be undertaken before the letter was sent, particularly in rural areas.

Laura Ambler replied that they would take the suggestion into consideration.

Kevin Burnett asked if there was target for the number of vaccinations to be administered.

Laura Ambler replied that no targets have been set with regard to herd immunity and that currently the vaccination figures in B&NES were above the national level.

Councillor Bharat Pankhania commented that it was good to hear that the uptake locally is good, but said it was important to improve them as the work regarding winter pressures begins now. He asked why there were different criteria for the Flu and Covid vaccinations.

Laura Ambler replied that they do intend to keep raising awareness of the vaccinations that are available and said that teams were in place to do so across B&NES, Swindon & Wiltshire.

She added that she would raise with colleagues the matter regarding criteria to receive a vaccination and update the Panel in due course.

Councillor Pankhania said that he was also concerned about the number of older people that should receive a vaccination for Shingles. He asked if a system was in place to monitor both that and the MMRV vaccine which is a combination vaccine that protects children against four diseases: Measles, Mumps, Rubella, and Varicella (chickenpox).

Laura Ambler replied that she would follow up this point with colleagues in the vaccinations team.

Councillor Onkar Saini asked how B&NES would retain a strong local voice under the new cluster arrangements.

Laura Ambler replied that the new structure had not been fully set out yet, but assured the Panel that the new ICB Chief Executive recognises the importance of Place. She added that the current B&NES Chief Executive was part of the ICB Board and that they work with all respective Council directors and the Health & Wellbeing Board.

Councillor Saini asked if there was a contingency plan should a drop in the uptake occur.

Laura Ambler replied that the vaccinations team were in place to monitor this and suggested a member of the team could attend a future meeting of the Panel to provide further information.



Councillor Saini asked if the ICB and RUH would monitor the proposed change to the medicine courier service and what would be the threshold to trigger a review.

Uzoma Ibechukwu replied that they will be closely monitoring the activity alongside the Community Pharmacies.

Councillor Lesley Mansell asked if work would be undertaken to attempt to increase staff uptake of vaccinations.

Laura Ambler that there is a direct communications plan in place for staff.

Councillor Mansell asked how the closure of the medicine courier service fitted in with the 10 Year Plan and how would it affect those members of the public that have a lack of internet access.

Laura Ambler replied that patient engagement has and will continue to take place and reiterated the rationale behind the proposed change.

Councillor David Harding asked if an update could be provided on the funding status of the ICB following the information received earlier in the year that they needed to reduce their running costs by 50%.

Laura Ambler replied that a reduction in costs was required to be identified by December 2025 and that she was unable to give any further details at this time.

Councillor Liz Hardman referred to the transfer of some adult services between AWP and HCRG and whether this would result in a drop in provision for autism services.

Laura Ambler replied that these services were jointly commissioned between three Local Authorities and two Integrated Care Boards and are formed with an end-to-end design to provide a range of support. She added that a new inpatient facility was due to open next year and would provide 10 beds under a model of shorter, therapeutic interventions.

The Chair asked how confident was she that the new ICB cluster arrangements would be finalised in their current proposed form.

Laura Ambler replied that from an ICB perspective the clusters have been agreed and that formal merger arrangements will be required to be undertaken in the future.

The Chair asked if B&NES should expect to continue to have representation on the Board.

Laura Ambler replied that in her opinion they should.

The Chair thanked Laura Ambler and Uzoma Ibechukwu for their update on behalf of the Panel.

## 47 OFSTED INSPECTION REPORT

The Director of Children's Services, Service Development Manager and Interim Assistant Director presented the report to the Panel and highlighted the following areas.

- The local authority received 'Good' in all areas, including the new judgment for care leavers.
- Strengths included timely support, trauma-informed practice, innovative fostering, strong participation, early establishment of family networks and working with children with disabilities.
- Areas for development: Return home interviews for missing children, clarity of the local offer for care leavers over 21, and management oversight documentation. It was acknowledged that the service were already aware of these matters.
- Officers confirmed that an improvement plan would be submitted by 21<sup>st</sup> November, with an interim visit within 18 months and a future inspection expected in three years' time.

Councillor Liz Hardman congratulated the team and said she was pleased to see that no major weaknesses had been identified. She added that she welcomed the honesty of the tone of the cover report.

The Director of Children's Services said that the judgement really was a team effort and that they wanted to be honest about intending to improve services.

Councillor Hardman asked if any comment could be given regarding the finding that the protocol for assessing homeless 16- and 17-year-olds was out of date.

The Interim Assistant Director replied that it was possible that the inspection team had viewed an outdated policy. She added that they have confirmed that the correct one is in place.

Councillor Hardman commented that some people over the age of 21 could still benefit from having access to work with a Personal Assistant.

The Director of Children's Services replied that the statutory duty to provide a Personal Assistant stops once a person reaches the age of 22. She added that if there is a wish to continue to do so then a further discussion can take place.

Councillor Hardman asked if the outcomes of the Being our BEST programme would have an impact on the Council's Social Workers.

The Director of Children's Services replied that she did not expect it to and that it was good to have dedicated officers in place across the service. She added that they are looking to use AI where possible to assist officers and gave the example of

Magic Notes that is being used to reduce some administrative work by producing notes via speech.

Councillor Paul Crossley referred to one of the slides shown and the wording 'Most children live in safe and suitable homes' and asked if any specific figures could be given and how this number could be raised towards 100%.

The Director of Children's Services replied that there are currently 116 children that are subject to a Child Protection Plan because we have assessed that the risk to them is higher than we would want it to be, but we believe that support can be provided to them to enable them to remain living at home.

She added that approximately 600 young people are also subject to a Child in Need Plan who have support needs above what would be deemed a normal level for a family to cope with. She explained that within B&NES there are 229 Looked After Children.

She said that she felt that unfortunately there will always be some children who are at risk of harm, need support and children where the risk to them is so great that they need to be removed from their parent's care. She stated that the Council resolve to take these actions only when absolutely necessary.

Councillor David Harding asked what resources would be required for the Council to receive a judgement of 'Outstanding'.

Councillor May replied that he would not be able to give a fixed figure as a response. He said that if their work is carried out to the same level, alongside providing the evidence of such work then the Council would be in a strong position. He added though that caseloads and demand would potentially have an effect on the Council, but the drive is there to try to achieve more.

Councillor Lesley Mansell commented that having reviewed the report she felt that there were six areas of improvement and that administration and record keeping could be attributable much of them.

She said that she was particularly concerned with the shortage of suitable homes for children under the age of ten and the early involvement of Adult Social Care officers ahead of young people transitioning from Children's Services.

She stated that she felt that the Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) was lacking in information regarding any mitigations.

She added she felt that there had also been a shift in the type of language used and believed the words 'disabled people' should be used rather than 'young people with disabilities'.

She asked also for the format of the report to be addressed, in terms of accessibility, and to be justified only on the left.

The Interim Assistant Director replied that there was a national challenge in terms of sufficiency and said that a workstream to address this has been allocated to look at things such as how the Council recruits and retains in-house Foster Carers, residential capacity and short breaks provision for young disabled people.

She said that she felt that record keeping should be an easier issue to address moving forward and that a consistency was required across all files.

She acknowledged the points raised relating to language and accessibility and would seek for those to be addressed in future reports.

The Director of Children's Services added that further work would be undertaken on the EIA and that a workstream regarding the transition between Children's Services and Adult Social Care was ongoing.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to consider and note the findings of the inspection report and thanked all officers across the service for their work.

## **48 ATTENDANCE AND EXCLUSIONS ANNUAL REPORT**

The Head of the Virtual School addressed the Panel and presented data to them on attendance, persistent absence, suspensions, and exclusions. She highlighted the following areas to them.

- Positive trends in attendance and reductions in permanent exclusions.
- Persistent challenges with suspensions, particularly among vulnerable groups and those eligible for free school meals.
- Ongoing work with schools, trusts, and the Race Equality Charter Group to address disparities and improve outcomes.
- Earlier interventions, especially when a young person receives more than one suspension – look at the plan in place for them.

Councillor Liz Hardman commented that she was concerned about the figures in relation to suspension and attendance for those young people in receipt of free school meals. She said that she hoped work would take place alongside the Multi Academy Trusts.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that attendance was a regional priority and referred to phonics lessons being likely to take place earlier in the day, and therefore pupils arriving late might miss these.

The Head of the Virtual School said that she believed that there was always another option to suspension and that training was available for schools regarding a trauma informed approach.

Kevin Burnett referred to section 3.5 of the report and asked if the levels of authorised absence for pupils with an EHCP were as expected.

The Head of the Virtual School replied this was a pattern often seen due to health reasons.

Kevin Burnett asked if she was involved in any of the Public Health work relating to the wider determinants of educational disadvantage.

The Head of the Virtual School replied that she was.

Councillor Lesley Mansell said that she would like to see the exclusion figures reduce still, especially for those young people from ethnic minority backgrounds. She added that she felt that data regarding gender reassignment was lacking in the report and queried how much absence might be due to issues relating to this.

The Head of the Virtual School sought to reassure the Panel that issues relating to ethnicity were spoken of more widely than ever before and that she worked closely with Jason Pegg (Black Families Education Support Group). She added that no data was held by the Council with regard to gender reassignment.

Councillor David Harding asked if Multi Academy Trusts were suspending more pupils than expected.

The Head of the Virtual School replied that she felt that their numbers should reduce.

Councillor Paul May said that Multi Academy Trusts remain a competitive market place and that the Council would work with them on reducing the number of suspensions.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note;

- i) Our pupils' overall positive attendance for 2023-2024. Our overall absence rate, % persistent absentees and unauthorised absence rate sits below national and regional data.
- ii) We are aware that our attendance for children open to free school meals is an area that we need to address and this is a target that sits across the local authority.
- iii) Last year we saw a drop in the permanent exclusion rate, placing us below the national and regional average. This was despite there being an increase in most local authorities and nationally.
- iv) Last year we did see a rise in suspensions and this is a target for the local authority, working alongside schools and MAT colleagues.
- v) 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.

## 49 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel reviewed the workplan, noting items to be brought forward, including:

- Suicide Prevention update
- Long COVID
- Dementia Strategy update
- Inclusion report
- Food Access toolkit impact
- End of life - Council Tax (The Chair said this matter would be discussed at a meeting of the Panel Chairs & Vice-Chairs)

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note their current workplan and these proposals for future reports.

The meeting ended at 1.07 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**