

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CHILDREN, ADULTS, HEALTH AND WELLBEING POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Monday 15th December 2025

Present:- **Councillors** Dine Romero, Liz Hardman, Paul Crossley, David Harding, Lesley Mansell, Joanna Wright, Bharat Pankhania and George Leach (in place of Michael Auton)

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

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, ICB), Phoebe Holland (Interim Assistant Director), Sarah Hogan (Head of Service Children's Quality Assurance and Safeguarding), Paula Sumner (Interim Assistant Director for Children's Transformation) and John Palmer (Managing Director, RUH, Bath)

62 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

63 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

64 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Councillor Michael Auton (substituted by Councillor George Leach), Councillor Onkar Saini and Councillor Paul May (Cabinet Member for Children's Services), Councillor Manda Rigby was present as his substitute.

65 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

66 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

There were none.

68 MINUTES: 17TH NOVEMBER 2025

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chair.

69 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Manda Rigby (Cabinet Member for Communications and Community) addressed the Panel in the absence of Councillor Paul May (Cabinet Member for Children's Services) and provided updates on the items.

Cabinet Member Update and SEND Capital Funding Announcement

She explained that the government have made a significant announcement regarding high needs capital funding for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The government has committed at least £3 billion nationally over four years, expected to create at least 50,000 new SEND places in England. She added that locally, this supports plans for two new free schools — Green Ways Academy (special school) and Sulis Academy (alternative provision) — to be delivered on the former Culverhay site in Bath. The funding will also enable further exploration of SEND capacity within existing schools and aligns with the council's "Safety Valve" programme commitments.

She stated that the council thanks the Department for Education for its continued support and looks forward to improving SEND provision in our community.

Councillor Liz Hardman queried the status of free school projects, referencing reports of a national pause.

Councillor Rigby confirmed that the recent government letter explicitly allows the release of funds for these projects, ending the previous pause.

Councillor David Harding asked about reducing delays in completing Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

The Director of Education & Safeguarding explained that increased team capacity and training should improve timeliness but said that quality would not be sacrificed for speed. He added that interim support is being provided where possible.

Kevin Burnett raised concerns about the certainty of funding and asked if the council had considered "invest to save" options should government funding fall through.

Councillor Rigby confirmed confidence in the funding but noted that detailed implications were still being worked through.

Councillor Lesley Mansell asked about preparations for the upcoming SEND inspection, evidence gathering and workforce sustainability.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that the Local Area Inclusion Partnership's self-evaluation has been carried out and that it was known where

progress is needed to be made. He added that regular performance monitoring is carried out and there has been success in stabilizing SEND team staffing.

Councillor Joanna Wright questioned the effectiveness of communication with SEND families and spoke of the impact of EHCP delays.

The Director of Children's Services & Education acknowledged communication challenges and outlined plans to improve transparency and accessibility, including joint work with the Parent & Carer Forum and articles within their newsletters. She added that advice lines are available for those needing more immediate support.

She stated that there is a national challenge regarding EHCP delivery, not just within B&NES and reiterated the importance of the quality of the plans.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding said that future general information regarding SEND for parents and carers could be shared with the Panel.

The Chair asked for an update on EHCPs to be provided at the March Panel meeting.

Councillor Wright asked if figures could be provided to the Panel for the numbers of pupils that have had to move schools or withdraw from mainstream education due to EHCP issues. She asked also for funding information for EOTAS (Education Otherwise Than At School) which provide learning outside of mainstream schools for children with an EHCP.

Councillor Bharat Pankhania asked whether the 20-week EHCP statutory timescale could be reduced.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding explained that 20 weeks is the statutory maximum, but efforts are ongoing to improve speed of delivery and sufficiency planning.

Councillor Liz Hardman raised the issues of School Streets and Home-to-School transport and the difficulty in that they overlap with other Panels within the council.

Councillor Rigby replied that the rollout of School Streets was ongoing and that all Primary Schools had been asked if they wanted to take part in the project. She added that the selected areas would be subject to a six-month trial period, prior to any permanent decision. She confirmed that a public consultation had taken place and suggested that talks about Panel overlaps be undertaken at the meeting between Chairs and Vice-Chairs.

Councillor Hardman asked if an update could be provided on the status of Charlton House.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding explained that the decision to convert the site was taken in January 2024, but that the subsequent delay had been due to no academy wishing to pursue the running of the proposed residential school. He added that it has now become necessary to deliver this as two projects on one site.

The Director of Children's Services & Education informed the Panel that one project will deliver a 30-place special school, and a second will deliver two small children's homes (4 places each) on the site. She said that the process was ongoing and that an open day had been held last week as part of the consultation.

Councillor George Leach asked what level of savings were hoped to be achieved from this initiative and what communications with the local public have been carried out.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that regular communication streams with the local public have happened and are planned to take place. She added that many views have been received so far.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding added that the project would seek to save the council money on school placements but could not provide a definitive figure at this stage. He added that the project would also seek to reduce out of county placements.

Councillor Mansell referred to the matter of Free School Meal (FSM) enrolment and asked if figures were known by ward for those families that opted out of receipt.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that this information was not retained on this occasion, but would ask colleagues in Welfare if this could be possible in a future similar exercise.

The Chair asked if FSM take up remains the trigger for schools to receive extra Pupil Premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that it was but added that, under recently announced government plans, family income data will replace free school meals eligibility as the trigger for pupil premium and other deprivation funding for schools.

Kevin Burnett asked if an update could be provided on transport associated with the Hospital Education and Reintegration Service (HERS).

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that they were looking to make efficiencies within this area and said that it was cheaper for a tutor to travel to a pupil's home, but this has difficulties in then enabling children to move back into a school environment.

The Chair asked if the pupil premium announcement would affect FSM Ever 6 which is the government's Pupil Premium designation for students who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the past six years, even if they no longer qualify.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that he had not heard of any related changes to this process.

Councillor Mansell referred to Home to School Transport and asked what measures are in place to address single use taxis, independent travel training plans and the provision of personal budgets.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that they were always seeking to see if routes to school can be joined up for pupils attending the same site. He added that he felt that the council has a good rate of personal budgets in place and said that they work hard to promote independent travel training but that this was a challenge in rural areas.

The Chair, on behalf of the Panel, thanked Councillor Rigby for attending to present the update and for the replies she and officers had provided.

70 IRO ANNUAL REPORT

The Head of Service, Children's Quality Assurance and Safeguarding presented the IRO Annual Report to the Panel, outlining statutory duties, service performance, and areas for development. Key points included:

- Disruption to service due to structure changes, impacting review timeliness.
- 220 children in care at year-end, with a majority in the 10–15 age bracket.
- Focus on placement stability, family reunification, and advocacy for children with disabilities.
- Introduction of midway reviews and strengthened dispute resolution protocols.
- Internal audit rated the service "substantial assurance" (level 4/5).

Councillor David Harding asked if increased foster carer allowances would improve the number of available placements and placement stability.

The Head of Service, Children's Quality Assurance and Safeguarding replied that while financial incentives might help, the quality of support is so crucial.

The Director of Children's Services & Education added that a plan to find additional carers was incoming as part of the work from the South-West Fostering Hub.

Kevin Burnett queried the IRO's role in the adoption process and involvement if placements breakdown.

The Head of Service, Children's Quality Assurance and Safeguarding replied that IROs provide a robust oversight that includes visits to prospective adopters, instigation of a 20-day review and that if a placement should break down an IRO would be allocated to analyse if all services were in place.

She added that she had no concerns with the timescales for the adoption process and that they work in close collaboration with Adoption West.

Councillor Liz Hardman questioned the delays in social work reports prior to a review taking place.

The Head of Service, Children's Quality Assurance and Safeguarding said that she was confident improvements will be made and that there were ongoing efforts to strengthen practice and oversight. She added that all Social Workers know their children very well.

Councillor Hardman commented that she was also concerned about arrangements for young people post 18, placement stability and visits to children in care.

The Head of Service, Children's Quality Assurance and Safeguarding replied that she was aware placement stability issues and that IROs will discuss any concerns raised with carers. She added that levels of concern over these areas had reduced since the summer.

Councillor Joanna Wright asked about out-of-area placements and local children's home provision.

The Assistant Director for Children and Young People Services explained that there is no in-house provision currently and said that ongoing sufficiency planning was being undertaken.

The Director of Children's Services & Education added that the Council were considering whether it would be possible for them to develop their own children's homes.

Councillor Hardman asked if any further comment could be made on the recently released budget proposals – savings of £390,000 through reunifications and £75,000 through optimizing commissioned contracts.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that the intention is that the savings will be delivered by an increase in family reunifications and step downs from residential placements. She added that officers would look at whether any contracts can be varied and that a review of individual care packages will likely take place.

The Chair explained that further budget discussions would take place at the January meeting.

She also requested interim updates on key areas of concern from the report, including social work practice and placement sufficiency.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to;

- i) Note the stable numbers of children in care, the improvement in child in care timeliness compared to the previous year (2023-2024) and the rigour of the IRO service in reviewing plans for children in care. IRO's continue to offer challenge where there are themes impacting on children in care evidenced by IRO's use of the revised dispute resolution protocol.
- ii) Consider the feedback received and the findings of internal audit on the IRO service, where the service was awarded level 4 – substantial assurance. The service has good awareness of the areas requiring improvement which are areas of focus for 2025-2026.
- iii) Promote the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for the children in the care of the Local Authority. Recognising the value that IRO's offer to children in care, the relationship at times being one of the most long standing and providing consistency for the child. IRO's seek to form positive relationships with the children

in which they are allocated, empowering them to participate in their child in care reviews and share their wishes and feelings.

71 FAMILIES FIRST

The Interim Assistant Director for Children's Transformation provided an update on the Families First Partnership, a national reform programme focused on early family support, integration of early help and statutory services, and development of multi-agency child protection teams.

She explained that the Council has received transformation funding from the DfE and is progressing with service redesign, with implementation planned for July 2026.

Kevin Burnett asked about referral pathways, step-down arrangements, and outcome measures.

The Assistant Director Children and Young People Services replied that the main sources of referrals were through health and educational settings. She said there was an opportunity to strengthen step down arrangements and described demand modelling, plans for seamless support, and key performance indicators (e.g., reduction in children in care, child protection plans, and re-referral rates).

Councillor Liz Hardman stated that she was much in favour of this work but asked if its implementation would affect 'business as usual'.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that 2026/27 would be an imbedding year and that some of the funding received has been used to project manage the programme to minimise risk to 'business as usual'.

The Interim Assistant Director for Children's Transformation added that a well-resourced team was now in place for the programme, including a communications and engagement officer role.

Councillor Joanna Wright raised the importance of housing and play provision and asked what the Council was doing to support these elements.

The Interim Assistant Director for Children's Transformation confirmed that housing would be a considered factor and included in new family help assessment frameworks. She added that she would discuss the matter of play provision with colleagues in respect of community assets, early years settings and schools.

Councillor Lesley Mansell commented that she would expect to see an Equalities Impact Assessment relating to the programme in the new year that sets out the risks and mitigations. She added that she welcomed the inclusion of cultural sensitivity and stated the need for appropriate staff training.

The Interim Assistant Director for Children's Transformation confirmed that staff training would take place on the matters raised.

Councillor Paul Crossley called for the wording within the equalities section of the report to be stronger in its tone.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the national requirements and local response to the Families First Programme and provided comment on the proposed approach to service design and engagement.

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

As this item began the Chair took the opportunity to thank Laura Ambler for her work with the Panel as this was to be her last meeting in her role as the Executive Director of Place for Bath and North East Somerset, BSW ICB.

Laura thanked the Panel and said it had been a pleasure to work alongside them. She provided updates on vaccination uptake, pharmacy campaigns, and digital interoperability.

Flu vaccine among health and care workers

Statistics from NHS England show that vaccination rates for health and care workers in each of the region's three localities of Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire are above the national average, which currently stands at 39.9 per cent.

Staff at all three acute trusts are continually encouraged to come forward for their vaccine, with regular clinics being held both on-site and in locations across the community.

Patients and public reminded to only order what they need

In the run-up to Christmas, the ICB is raising awareness of medicine wastage and encouraging people to only order what they need.

The NHS spends an estimated £300 million on unused medicines each year, with wastage happening when too much medication is ordered that isn't needed, items are stockpiled at home or prescriptions aren't checked before leaving the pharmacy.

People are now being reminded of how important it is to check what medicines they have at home before placing their repeat prescription order.

Councillor Paul Crossley stated that he remained staggered at the numbers of health and care workers that have not had a flu vaccination and said that there was a need to understand the reluctance.

Laura Ambler replied that they are trying to understand any concerns, including cultural and accessibility, and have asked staff to complete a survey relating to the matter. She added that targeted clinics have been put in place and staff reminded that the vaccinations are free for them.

Councillor Lesley Mansell said she would be interested to hear about any follow up information relating to the medicine wastage campaign.

Laura Ambler replied that she would relay this to colleagues.

Kevin Burnett asked if treatment provided through Pharmacy First would form part of a patient's digital record.

Laura Ambler replied that SystmOne is the computer system used in the NHS that creates a single, shared Electronic Health Record (EHR) for patients, linking data across various care settings. She said she would ask colleagues within the digital team if this was yet linked to Pharmacy First.

Councillor Joanna Wright asked if an update on dental buses was available.

Laura Ambler replied that her colleague Victoria Stanley was aware of the need / ambition to have such a service and said that it was being looked into.

Councillor Wright raised the issue of personal data being held by HCRG and asked if there was confidence in their ability to protect this and not share it without permission.

Laura Ambler replied that HCRG have strict data processes in place and that they would need permission to share any personal data held by them.

John Palmer (Managing Director, RUH, Bath) joined the Panel meeting via Teams to discuss hospital performance, winter pressures, and improvement plans. He highlighted the following areas.

- Due to combined operational and financial challenges, the RUH is in Segment 4 under the NHS Oversight Framework (NOF), quarter one of 2025/26. In the new acute trust league table published on 9 September 2025, the RUH was ranked 112th out of 134 acute providers.
- The RUH is under significant financial and operational pressure and has seen a significant increase in terms of ambulance demand and emergency department attendances during the course of the year and exponentially since September, when wait-45 was introduced, whereby ambulance crews have a 45-minute time limit to hand over patients at an emergency department before leaving to respond to other calls.
- These changes are significantly outside all planned assumptions and expectations in the order of 25 per cent for ambulance conveyances and 12 per cent for attendances.
- The RUH has responded by strengthening its leadership team, implementing enhanced financial controls, launching an executive-led call-to-action, and appointing a turnaround team to focus specifically on financial recovery. Collaborative work with the Integrated Care Board to secure funding and accelerate improvements, principally for urgent and emergency care pathways and bed capacity is also happening.

- Performance recovery plans have been implemented across all four performance areas, with positive trajectories in reducing long waits for elective care and diagnostics, and an extraordinary improvement in ambulance handover.
- The next acute trust league table is due to be published shortly, and the RUH is expecting to see an improvement in its ranked position. Strong progress continues to be made against the RUH's call-to-action recovery plan, and the trust expects to make ongoing improvements against its performance metrics and financial recovery for the remainder of the financial year.

Councillor Liz Hardman said that she welcomed the improvements that have been recently made by the RUH and asked if any direct intervention measures had occurred.

John Palmer replied that no direct interventions had taken place and described the current process in relation to tiered weekly meetings. He added that he was proud of all the staff at the hospital for showing that they want to respond to the position they found themselves in. He said that plans for both short and long-term improvements, including capital investment in emergency department facilities were ongoing.

Councillor David Harding requested detailed data on urgent care performance, including 4-hour and 12-hour waits.

John Palmer stated that further information was available via the hospital's integrated performance reports. He added that they acknowledge that their 4-hour waits were not good enough and were committed to this improving.

Kevin Burnett asked if the proposed improvements would be sustainable.

John Palmer replied that there were here and now issues that need resolving alongside those which involve 3–5-years of planning. He added that the ICB were helping with some resourcing and stated that implementing a new Emergency Department within the hospital was important to the organisation.

Councillor Mansell asked if the results of the recent A&E patient survey were known.

John Palmer replied that information relating to the survey was not yet available.

Councillor Mansell asked if any further comment could be made about the impact of ambulance handover improvements and step-down facilities.

John Palmer replied that the ability to receive patients and to release ambulance crews in a timelier manner has enabled a better flow for the hospital. He added that they were committed to the step-down model, Ward 4 at St Martin's Hospital, and ongoing work to manage demand and maintain performance.

The Chair thanked Laura Ambler and John Palmer for their update on behalf of the Panel.

73 **PANEL WORKPLAN**

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note their current workplan.

The meeting ended at 1.04 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services