

DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
WEDNESDAY 15 APRIL 2026**

Councillors Present: Dominic Boeck (Chairman), Billy Drummond, Louise Sturgess, Clive Taylor, Emily Daly, Charlie Gale, Catherine Hobbs (attending remotely), Natasha Rowe, Tony Wilson, Martin Colston (Substitute) (In place of Martha Vickers) and Richard Somner (Substitute) (In place of Paul Dick)

Also Present: Roslyn Arthur, AnnMarie Dodds, Sonia Harris, Kerrie Hiscock, Ashley Milum, James Stuart, Rebecca Wilshire, and Dave Wraight,

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Owen Jeffery, Councillor Paul Dick, Councillor Alan Macro and Councillor Martha Vickers

Councillor(s) Absent: Councillor Jane Langford

PART I

36 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2025 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37 Actions from previous Minutes

Members reviewed progress in relation to actions from previous meeting.

Additional updates were noted as follows:

- **25-2** - It was noted that data on qualifications of i-College students had been provided, but needed to be anonymised before being circulated.
- **25-11** – Any update on resources was subject to completion of the Business Service Review.
- **25-20** - The Chairman confirmed that he had written to the Leader of the Council congratulating him on the Ofsted inspection result.
- **25-24** – It was not known whether Neil Goddard had written to the members of the public before he had left, so Ashley Milum agreed to pick this up.

38 Declarations of Interest

The following declared an interest in relation to Agenda Items 6 and 7:

- Councillor Clive Taylor declared that he was a school governor at the Calcot Schools.
- Councillor Billy Drummond declared that he was a trustee at St Bartholomew's School.
- Tony Wilson declared that he was a member of the Summit Multi-Academy Trust.

As their interests were personal and not prejudicial or disclosable pecuniary interests, they determined to remain to take part in the debates and vote on these matters.

39 Petitions

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There were no petitions to be received at the meeting.

40 Education Outcomes

Councillor Heather Codling (Executive Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services) presented the report on Education Outcomes (Agenda Item 6).

Standing Orders were suspended to allow Dame Kate Dethridge (DfE Regional Director for the South East) and Leah Fernandes (DfE Schools Team Leader for Buckinghamshire and Berkshire) to address the Committee.

Dame Kate highlighted the following concerns in relation to non-academy schools in West Berkshire:

- West Berkshire's performance in relation to Good Level of Development (GLD), phonics, and Key Stage 2 combined reading/writing/maths were below expectations, with the authority placing near the bottom of national rankings on some measures.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils (including those eligible for free school meals) were extremely poor.
- While the School Improvement service had capable staff, it lacked sufficient capacity, with a very small team for such a large number of maintained schools. This limited the ability to hold school leaders to account and provide support.
- Dame Kate noted that school improvement had been a traded service and queried whether the £325,000 identified in the budget for school improvement was additional funding. Councillor Codling confirmed that it was not, but that the funding was now ring-fenced.
- Concerns were expressed in relation to a recent universal RISE offer organised by the DfE, which had a disadvantaged-focused programme. Despite being free to attend, only 16 of 20 available places were taken up.
- It was highlighted that children entered Reception broadly at/above national average levels of attainment, but attainment was not sustaining through primary school.
- The new Ofsted inspection regime had a greater focus on attendance and attainment, and it was suggested that West Berkshire schools may be negatively affected by this.
- Dame Kate discussed how scrutiny could focus on performance data and use available DfE tools (e.g., GLD breakdown, phonics trajectory, attendance benchmarking, take-up of hubs/networks).

Dame Kate responded to questions from Members of the Committee:

- It was confirmed that the DfE challenged Academy Trusts as responsible bodies, and they encouraged local authorities to highlight any concerns they may have in relation to academies with DfE staff.
- Dame Kate stated that there were no additional direct finances for local education authorities, but she highlighted existing free universal offers, school networks, maths/English hubs, and targeted support. Officers were encouraged to promote these and monitor take-up.
- It was highlighted that there were examples of good practice in West Berkshire (e.g., a local school had a RISE advisor who would be running a Reception network).

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- Portsmouth was cited as a local authority where some schools had up to 75% of pupils on free school meals, but 90% of pupils achieved GLD. Dame Kate emphasised the importance of having high expectations for disadvantaged children.
- It was noted that successful headteachers were usually happy to share their experiences, and DfE sought to match schools across the South East. Also, there were plans to expand existing networks for KS2 and KS3 and to look at transitions between primary and secondary schools.
- Dame Kate stressed the importance of scrutinising performance data in detail (e.g., understanding which parts of GLD were an issue, and looking at progress in phonics at the end of Reception not just at the end of Year 1). She indicated that all schools should look at their GLD data and engage with other schools to learn lessons.

The following points were raised in debate with officers and the Executive Member for Children and Family Services:

- Members expressed disappointment at the lack of additional funds for school improvement, which would make it difficult to deliver on local aspirations for improvement. It was noted that the Council was in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support and it would be difficult to turn things around quickly. However, funding was expected from central government at the end of September in relation to the High Needs Block deficit. This would release funds currently being used to service interest payments, which could potentially be directed to school improvement, but this would require the agreement of the Executive.

Action: Councillor Heather Codling to make the case to the Executive for investing additional funding in school improvement.

- Officers set out intended actions to improve performance, including:
 - Codifying and strengthening the school improvement visit model with greater rigour and links to outcomes data.
 - Developing earlier, non-statutory intervention before escalation to warning notices and Interim Executive Boards.
 - Strengthening governance and governor training and linking headteacher performance management to outcomes.
 - Convening system leadership to focus on equity and disadvantaged pupil outcomes.
 - Auditing schools' use of pupil premium funding to ensure it is spent effectively.
- Officers were encouraged to look to academies, including those outside West Berkshire for examples of best practice. Tony Wilson offered to provide support with this.
- It was suggested that it may be challenging to carry out a School Places Sufficiency Review alongside school improvement. Officers confirmed that this would be managed in consultation with schools and stressed that it was important to retain a focus on learning, and for schools to use the funds they received as effectively as possible.
- Concern was expressed around the mental health implications for pupils who did not reach expected levels of attainment and how they might be supported. It was noted that the Family First reforms would help pupils not currently engaged with the education offer. Work was also proposed to support disadvantaged pupils make the transition from KS2 to KS3. Dame Kate stressed that pupils who did not achieve GLD,

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generally did not catch up by age 16, which impacted on their self-esteem and their life chances, and served to highlight the importance of investing in early years education.

- Officers highlighted the need for Members to engage with schools in their wards and encourage leadership teams to engage with the RISE universal offer. It was stressed that although funding for school support remained unchanged, it would be directed in different, more evidence-based ways. The aim was to deliver the best outcome for children in West Berkshire.

Members proposed a number of actions as set out below.

Actions:

- **Officers to run a Member development session to coach them on what they could do to encourage schools to do better.**
- **Develop a performance dashboard for education services, with regular updates for the CYP Scrutiny Committee.**
- **For a progress report to be provided at the next meeting, to include greater clarity on funding for school improvement and the uptake of the universal RISE offer.**

RESOLVED:

- To note the report and the data relating to attainment.
- To endorse the activity underway to enhance the school improvement offer and improve education outcomes for all pupils.

41 Exclusions

Councillor Heather Codling (Executive Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services) presented the report on school exclusions (Agenda Item 7).

During the debate, the following points were discussed:

- Officers confirmed that there was a link between disadvantaged learners and exclusions, and that improving outcomes depended on children being in school.
- It was noted that there had been an increase in primary school exclusions linked to physical incidents. For secondary schools, exclusions were most often recorded under the DfE code 'persistent disruptive behaviour'. More detail on specific behaviours was not available.
- Meetings were held three times a year with secondary school senior leadership teams to review concerns about pupil behaviour, enabling earlier signposting and support. However, capacity constraints meant the service was reliant on schools proactively reaching out for support, and there was not enough capacity to hold equivalent meetings with primary schools.
- It was highlighted that forthcoming SEND reforms would require schools to produce Inclusion Plans, enabling more proactive discussion and clearer expectations across schools and academies. Also, work was ongoing to establish 'the ordinarily available provision', intended to set a benchmark expectation for how schools could meet Equality Act duties for children with additional needs, but this should benefit all children.

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- It was highlighted that collaborative meetings were held six times per year with deputy headteachers from all secondary schools, with strong attendance - these enabled sharing of best practice and discussion of complex cases.
- It was recognised that there was a need for co-production with secondary headteachers to ensure that the new Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the iCollege supported a reduction in exclusions. The iCollege's "in-reach" (support and training provided in schools) was seen as a strength and would be a core component of the SLA. It was acknowledged that rising exclusions had created capacity pressures for the iCollege, and challenging conversations would be required to achieve a point of equity.
- Officers were asked about their understanding of and responses to the root causes of exclusions, particularly in relation to SEND pupils. Officers agreed that there was a need to listen more to young people to understand their needs.
- Members highlighted the need for data to show the percentage of excluded pupils at each school, since significant differences in the number of pupils on roll made comparisons difficult.

Action: Officers to report exclusions as a percentage pupils on roll.

- Officers indicated that primary schools received different support to secondary schools - the PIPS Behaviour Intervention Team delivered one-to-one interventions, and support was also provided by the Autism Advisory Team. Schools were signposted to the appropriate services.
- It was explained that the iCollege could offer up to a full timetable package, but it was important to reintegrate pupils back to their mainstream school and not to have pupils full-time in the iCollege for long.
- Members indicated that supervised on-site provision within schools had previously reduced exclusions in at least one school. Officers supported the principle of inclusive approaches in schools and indicated that in-reach support from iCollege and other providers could support schools to develop such provision and enable quality assurance. It was cautioned that 'internal exclusion' should not result in arrangements that did not constitute full-time suitable education.
- It was observed that the downward trend in exclusions appeared to coincide with COVID-19, which was an atypical period.
- Members suggested that some children might benefit from blended or vocational provision (e.g., combining school attendance with time working on a farm). Officers stated that schools were already developing creative alternative provision packages (including farms, horse riding and drama workshops) and that these had delivered positive outcomes.
- In response to a question about the use of alternative provision (AP) by primary schools, officers indicated that they did not have data for how usage compared with statistical neighbours, but they offered to provide this. It was acknowledged that more primary schools were using AP in West Berkshire, but an assurance framework was needed.

Action: Officers to provide details of how use of AP in primary schools compares to that in statistical neighbours.

- It was asked what communication and support were provided to families when pupils were permanently excluded or at risk, particularly regarding the transition to iCollege. Officers stated that families were supported throughout the process. Five days after a

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permanent exclusion, responsibility for education transferred to the local authority, and the Exclusions Team contacted parents as soon as the local authority was notified, to explain the process and next steps. The iCollege also contacted families to arrange an initial meeting and run through plans for attendance and reintegration.

- Members noted the rising trend in exclusions despite previous investment in Education and SEND. It was suggested that further investment would be required to tackle the issue. Councillor Codling highlighted the challenges around identifying additional funding but acknowledging the evidence and need and undertook to discuss this with the Executive.
- Officers were asked if they were confident that the proposed measures would reduce exclusions. Officers indicated that they would have greater confidence once the SLA with iCollege had been renewed and Inclusion Plans had been developed with schools.
- Parallels were acknowledged with the earlier discussion on attainment outcomes. Also, work on exclusions aligned well with other programmes, such as SEND and education reform, Best Start and family hubs, and Families First Partnership work.

RESOLVED:

- To note the report and the data on exclusions.
- To endorse the proposed strategic response to support the reduction of exclusions and the promotion of inclusion.

42 West Berkshire Best Start Local Strategic Plan

Councillor Heather Codling (Executive Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services) and Dave Wraight (Service Lead – Youth Justice, Family Hubs and Partnerships) presented the item on the Best Start in Life Local Strategic Plan (Agenda Item 8).

During the debate the following points were discussed:

- Members noted that the target for reducing inequalities remained below 50%. Officers confirmed that targets were set by central government, but that the ambition locally was to meet and, where possible, to exceed them.
- Officers were asked if funding allocations would be sufficient to deliver the Plan. Officers confirmed that the allocations had increased following subsequent government updates, but remained lower than that provided under Sure Start. While additional funding was always welcome, assurance was provided that available funding would be spent effectively.
- Members asked how many parents/families were currently missing out on the services and outcomes described in paragraphs 4.7-4.9. Officers advised that detailed delivery plans and an outcomes framework were being developed, and that a fuller baseline picture would take time. Officers anticipated being able to provide more detailed data after six months.
- Officers were asked about a reported £40,000 pressure and the impact of this on service delivery. It was explained that this related to historic charges for some sessions, which had since been removed to improve accessibility. The current grant would cover the costs, so there was no ongoing pressure from that change.
- Members asked what had changed for the target groups and how the Plan would address inequalities. Officers explained that deprivation and isolation could be less

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visible in rural areas and that the target groups had been identified by both data and the experiences of families.

- Regarding rural access, officers indicated that urban areas had fixed hub buildings, but pop-up provision was being used to reach rural communities. Officers also referred to joint work with the voluntary and community sector to extend reach.
- Members asked what had improved in the last 12 months and what tangible changes were expected in the next 12 months. Officers indicated that Best Start had formally commenced on 1 April. West Berkshire benefited from having an established Family Hubs network, which would enable faster delivery than areas starting from scratch. Over the next 12 months, planned developments included a digital offer, expanded parenting provision, and work on home learning environments and parenting packs. Officers emphasised that the most significant impacts on children's outcomes would be expected over a longer period (five to ten years), consistent with evidence from Sure Start.

RESOLVED to note the report.

43 **Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered the Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 9).

It was highlighted that several items had already been added to the Committee's work programme for review.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

44 **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

The Committee considered the proposed Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme (Agenda Item 10).

It was explained that following a meeting between the Chairman and senior officers, a number of proposed changes had been made to the Work Programme as outlined in the agenda pack.

It was noted that while the SEND Recovery Plan did not require Member approval, it would be appropriate for this to have a public airing, so it had been added as an agenda item for the next meeting.

Members expressed frustration at the delay in the response to the Children and Young People Mental Health Task Group Report. Officers explained that at the point at which the Task Group had submitted its report, the Integrated Care Board had withdrawn funding from Emotional Health and Wellbeing Services and had moved the running of School Mental Health Teams from local authorities to Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust. This meant that funding and resources were no longer available, and it was not longer within the gift of the local authority to implement the recommendations as proposed. In addition, there had been changes made to the early intervention response for those on the CAMHS waiting lists. The officer response had been revised from that originally prepared and it was proposed that this would go to the next meeting of the Executive for approval before going back to the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee. It was confirmed that Councillor Dominic Boeck would be invited to attend that meeting in his capacity as Chairman of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee. Also, copies of the report would be made available to the CYP Scrutiny Committee Members as soon as it was published.

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Action: Circulate the Response to the Children’s Mental Health Task Group to Members of the CYP Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED to note the work programme.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.31 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature