

Children and Young People Policy Committee Public Forum



Date: Thursday, 23 January 2025

Time: 5.00 pm

Venue: The Council Chamber - City Hall, College Green, Bristol, BS1 5TR

Members of the public attending or taking part in Public forum are advised that Full Council meetings are filmed for live or subsequent broadcast via the council's [webcasting pages](#).

The whole of the meeting would be filmed (except where there are confidential or exempt items) and the footage will be available for two years. If you ask a question or make a representation, then you are likely to be filmed and will be deemed to have given your consent to this. If you do not wish to be filmed you need to make yourself known to the webcasting staff. However, the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 now means that persons attending meetings may take photographs, film and audio record the proceedings and report on the meeting (Oral commentary is not permitted during the meeting as it would be disruptive). Members of the public should therefore be aware that they may be filmed by others attending and that is not within the council's control.

Please note that the views and information contained within these public statements are those of the individuals concerned and not of the Council.

By participating in public forum business, we will assume that you have consented to your name and the details of your submission being recorded, published online and within the minutes.

Issued by: Johanna Holmes, Policy Committee Coordinator

City Hall, Bristol, BS1 5TR

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Date: Wednesday, 15 January 2025

www.bristol.gov.uk



Public Forum

6. Public Forum

Up to 30 minutes is allowed for this item.

(Pages 4 - 13)

Any member of the public or councillor may participate in Public Forum. Public Forum items must relate to the remit of the committee and should be addressed to the Chair of the committee.

Members of the public who plan to attend a public meeting at City Hall are advised that you will be required to sign in when you arrive. Please note that you will be issued with a visitor pass which you will need to display at all times.

Please also note:

Questions

1. Written public questions must be received by 5.00 pm, at least 3 clear working days prior to the meeting. For this meeting, this means that questions must be received at the latest by **5.00 pm on 17th January**. Public Questions should be submitted via our webform: www.bristol.gov.uk/publicforum
2. Any individual can submit up to 3 written questions.
3. Written replies to questions will be available on the Council's website at least one hour before the meeting.
4. At the meeting, questioners will be permitted to ask up to 2 oral supplementary questions.

Statements

1. Written statements must be received at latest by 12.00 noon, at least 2 working days prior to the meeting. For this meeting, this means that statements must be received at the latest by **12.00 noon on 21st January**. Public Questions and Statements should be submitted via our webform: www.bristol.gov.uk/publicforum
2. Statements, provided they are no more than 1,000 words in length, will be circulated to all committee members and will be published on the Council's website at least one hour before the meeting.

Petitions

1. Details of the wording of any petitions, and the number of signatories to petitions must be received at latest by 12.00 noon, at least 2 working days prior to the meeting. For this meeting, this means that petition details must be received at the latest by **12.00 noon on 21st January**. Please email petition details to policycommittees@bristol.gov.uk



2. At the meeting, individuals presenting petitions may be required to read out the objectives of the petition.

When submitting a question or statement please indicate whether you are planning to attend the meeting to present your statement ask your question.



Children and Young People Policy Committee

23rd January 2025



Public Forum

Public Forum Questions

The following Public Forum Questions have been received:

Number	Name	Subject
PQ01	Elizabeth Ind	Funding delays
PQ02		Safeguards regarding legal obligations
PQ03		School/staff training
PQ04	Wendy Lacey	EHCP - rejections
PQ05		Alternative Provision
PQ06		EBSA
PQ07	Harriet McLaughlin	Underfunding of EHCPs
PQ08		Enacting the children's and families act.
PQ09		Gatekeeping
PQ10	Sally Kent	Non Statutory top up
PQ11		Average cost of an EHCP
PQ12	Jen Smith	Section 17 Assessments
PQ13		Budget Review Send Comments
PQ14		The number of attendees to each meeting of The Listening Partnership

Public Forum Statements

The following Public Forum Statements have been received:

Number	Name	Subject
PS01	Elizabeth Ind	Failures in SEND Support for Children Like My Son
PS02	Jen Smith	New Send Strategy

Please note: The views and information contained within the public statements and questions are those of the individuals concerned and not of the Council.



Public Forum Questions

PQ01: Elizabeth Ind

What measures are in place to ensure that funding delays do not hinder the timely delivery of vital provisions outlined in a child's EHCP, and how will accountability be enforced when these delays negatively impact a child's progress?

Officer response:

We understand that funding delays can cause frustration and anxiety to families. We are continually reviewing processes to ensure that we are able to ensure that funding for the provision needed as set out in the EHCP is timely. In addition, we have reviewed the way we work to ensure minimal delay and disruption once the provision has been agreed. This includes increased dedicated time each week for review and confirmation of funding.

We are committed to making things better through the changes in our team and by delivering on the promises in our SEND and Inclusion Strategy. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we work to improve the experience for families, children and young people.

PQ02: Elizabeth Ind

What safeguards are in place to ensure local authorities fulfill their legal obligations under EHCPs, particularly when specialist provisions are unavailable or delayed, to prevent significant regression in a child's education and wellbeing?

Officer response:

There are times when there are delays with provision availability. When this is the case, the SEND team will work with parents and carers alongside education settings to ensure suitable interim arrangements are made, but also recognise that this can take time if a suitable setting is not immediately available.

We recognise this provision may not be the long-term solution, but we aim to ensure that children are able to access education. We are working to build more provision that is run by our schools and have a target of creating 95 new places for September 2025.

PQ03: Elizabeth Ind

How does the committee plan to address systemic delays in accessing appropriate training for school staff, such as PDA training, to ensure schools can meet the complex needs of children with additional support requirements?

Officer response:

It is the responsibility of a schools with the support of its governing body to ensure that they are accessing the relevant training and support that they require.

The local authority offers a range of training opportunities for settings through the Trading with Schools platform. In addition, Multi-Academy Trusts and the Five Counties Teaching School also offer a breadth and depth of training for each setting.

Occasionally, a child may need bespoke training to meet their needs, and we endeavour to ensure this is done in a timely manner, working with our schools and partners such as the NHS.

PQ04: Wendy Lacey

Why are so many EHCP's rejected before the assessment stage, and why is that decision taking much longer than the time it legally should take? Generally why do parents have to fight so hard to get an EHCP?

Officer response:

We understand that the current delays in processing EHC needs assessment requests are frustrating and difficult for families. At present, the number of assessment requests not carried forward is 20%, which is below the national average 24%.

The delays in publishing an EHCP are due to an increase in the number of requests. This has made it difficult for our service to respond to all requests in a timely manner. As a result we are increasing the capacity of our SEND service and our Educational Psychology service.

In 2024, Bristol City Council received a 32% increase in EHC Needs Assessment requests in comparison to 2023. This represents an increase of 60% from two years ago. This rise Bristol has experienced, like many local authority's within England, has placed pressure on the statutory SEND team and the professionals who contribute to the EHC Needs Assessments.

We are working hard to improve this. We are streamlining the way EHC needs assessment requests are handled so that children and young people can receive the support they need as quickly as possible, in line with our statutory duties.

We are committed to making things better through the changes in our team and by delivering on the promises in our SEND and Inclusion Strategy. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we work to improve the experience for families, children and young people.

PQ05: Wendy Lacey

Alternative Learning Provision should be in place for any child missing 15 days of education. Why do so many parents have to fight for this to be put in place, when it is a duty of BCC to put this in place? In some cases, the emails / letters requesting Alternative Learning Provision are completely ignored.

Officer response:

As a local authority, we believe strongly that every child and young person should have the opportunity to attend their local school where possible. Schools are not just places for academic learning but also key environments for maintaining friendships, building social connections, and achieving long-term positive outcomes.

Where children are on the roll of a school, it remains the responsibility of a school to ensure that they are supporting a child to feel belonging in their school and attend well.

When a child or young person experiences barriers to accessing their local school, we invest time in understanding these challenges and working collaboratively with families, schools, and other

professionals to address them. Our priority is to support the child to remain in their school wherever possible, as we believe this is often the best place for them to thrive.

We acknowledge, however, that for some children and young people, remaining in their current school is not suitable. We work to support schools and families where we can, to ensure reasonable adjustments are made for the child or young person to access school. Where this has not been possible, we support access to Alternative Learning Provision (ALP) for those who need it such as the Bristol Hospital Education School.

PQ06: Wendy Lacey

Does BCC know how many children are currently not in education due to EBSA? And what is being done about supporting these children, especially those with autism and high anxiety.

Officer response:

We don't presently hold the data on all children not in education due to Emotion Based School Avoidance (EBSA), as this is not currently required to be shared by schools or part of a national standard. We continue to raise this with the Department for Education as necessary to support the work of the sector. There is a deep dive activity to understand the reasons that children are missing education. The numbers of children missing education has reduced from over 500 to 378. This work is ongoing.

We have been working hard on supporting children with EBSA especially those with autism and high anxiety. Our Bristol Autism Team have been leading on vanguard support by the DfE Pathways to Short breaks funding. This has positively impacted on the attendance and wellbeing of the children and young people who have accessed the service. This project looked at supporting the children and young people directly, their families as well as building capacity in settings to support the continued engagement and progress of the children and young people affected by EBSA.

We are also working with the NHS BNSSG (Bath, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire) Integrated Care Board to ensure that their training offer to schools is well communicated, particularly through their Mental Health Support Teams and Child Adolescent Mental Health Support Teams.

PQ07: Harriet McLaughlin

Why do the LA and the SEND team continually underfund children's EHCPs, particularly in unlawfully deducting the first £6k?

Officer response:

We remain committed to working with all schools to ensure they can deliver the provision, as set out in Section F within a child or young person's EHC plan. Schools are responsible for allocating their budgets to support the pupils on their roll. Schools can request additional funding both at the consultation stage and at an annual review where the provision is reviewed and agreed.

Mainstream maintained schools and academies are notified each year of a clearly identified but notional SEN budget, within their overall budget allocation. This SEN budget should be used towards the costs of fulfilling their duty to use their best endeavours to secure that special educational provision for their pupils with SEN is made.

PQ08: Harriet McLaughlin

Why do the LA continually disregard the children and families act. Particularly sections 38 and 39, in which a parent has a right to request a specific school, leading to the continued delay to education for children?

Officer response:

The local authority always works to ensure that they are compliant with the Children and Families Act and SEND Code of Practice. Section 38 gives parent/carers and young people the opportunity to request a specific school or institution to be consulted, alongside the local authority's right to consult schools that it deems able to meet the needs and deliver the provision set out in a child or young person's EHCP.

We always seek to work in a collaborative way to capture the views of the child, young person and family through this process.

PQ09: Harriet McLaughlin

Why do the LA continue to delay issuing final EHCPs? This causes huge distress to families, children loose places offered, and it means that parents are denied their right of appeal.

Officer response:

We fully recognise the impact delays in issuing final EHCPs have on families, and we deeply understand the distress these delays can cause. The increased volume of requests for assessments (around 30%) and challenges related to a shortage of Educational Psychologists (EPs) have put significant pressure on our system. Furthermore, we are working to implement streamlined processes that will better support the timely delivery of assessments and final decisions.

We acknowledge that delays can affect the ability to appeal, and while the right to appeal may be delayed for up to 32 weeks, we are working hard to reduce this timeline. We are also improving communication with families during the waiting period to ensure they are informed and supported as we work through these challenges.

We appreciate your patience and understanding as we continue to refine our processes to better serve children and families.

PQ10: Sally Kent

Please provide a breakdown of the children and young people receiving non statutory top-up funding who are awaiting a needs assessment.

How many are there in total.

How many were on non-statutory top up funding, but the award has now ceased? And total cost of funding.

How many have 3 years left of their award? And total cost of funding.

How many have 2 years left of their award? And total cost of funding.

How many have 1 year left of their award? And total cost of funding.

How many have less than one year left of their award? And total cost of funding.

Officer response:

The answers provided to the questions below are based on Financial Years from April to March	CYP	£
How many were on non-statutory top up funding, but the award has now ceased? And total cost of funding. (This is from April 2024 to October 2024)	488	£1,997,106
How many have 3 years left of their award? And total cost of funding.	0	£0
How many have 2 years left of their award? And total cost of funding.	257	£1,907,922
How many have 1 year left of their award? And total cost of funding.	420	£4,547,877
How many have less than one year left of their award? And total cost of funding. (This is from November 2024 to March 2025)	213	£1,769,366
	1378	£10,222,271

PQ11: Sally Kent

As of the end of November 2024, there was 1,183 children and young people awaiting an EHCP needs assessment.

What is the average funding cost of an EHCP?

Officer response:

The average funding cost of an EHCP is £18,045.

PQ12: Jen Smith

On and Young People Policy Committee Update Report paper, paragraph 15 says:

'The number of contacts about children to First Response decreased to 2,120 in November 2024 (-241 from previous month). We have received 16,905 contacts about children this financial year, which is a 2% increase on the same period in 2023/24.'

i How many of these contacts referred to Disabled children/young people?

ii How many of the Disabled children/young people were referred to the Disabled Children's Team for a Section 17 assessment?

iii How many of the children/young people then had a Section 17 assessment?

Officer response:

In the year to the end of November 2024, 625 contacts were referred to Disabled children's team. Of this cohort, 183 children or young people were referred to the team for Section 17 assessment. Resulting in 152 of these children or young people having a Section 17 assessment (with a further 20 children or young people having strategy meeting which and may have gone on to an assessment).

PQ13: Jen Smith

In Budget Review - Part 1, Finance Sub-Committee that took place on Wednesday 15 January 2025, Councillor Christine Townsend said: "We are still coming out the pandemic we're still not fully understanding the impact that that's had on families and particularly children as they're growing and

we are seeing escalating need at teenage and adolescent years. I think that will continue for a good few more years coming through the system and as those adolescents go into early adulthood we don't know what impact it will have on them."

These teenagers who are moving into adulthood now were not only impacted by the pandemic, they were also the ones badly affected by Bristol City Council's historic inability to run a lawful and sustainable Send system in Bristol.

So much of what is released about Safety Valve is about targeting early intervention. But what exactly is Bristol City Council doing to ensure that those young people it failed between 2014 and 2025 who are now moving into adulthood are able to access on-going education and opportunities which have been denied to them through most of their lives so far?

Officer response:

The Finance sub-group was focused on the General Fund rather than the Dedicated School Grant that contains the High Needs Budget and therefore the focus was on Children's Social Care services not the education budget (although some elements of the General Fund is used to support education services).

When a young person reaches age beyond Year 13, a small number remain the responsibility of the local authority either by way of being in receipt of an EHCP, a small number move into Adult Social Care services via the Care Act, most young people move into the Adult Skills and Education system which is the responsibility of the West of England Combined Authority (WECA).

As a Local Authority we are aware that the pandemic and SEND system failures has impacted older teenagers and for this reason the transition and courses available are monitored regularly. There is a variety of specialist engagement, education and training courses for post 19 young people which was inspected by Ofsted and was assessed as being 'good' overall.

PQ14: Jen Smith

Bristol City Council says: 'The strategy was coproduced with CYP with SEND, parent carers, educational settings and professionals working across the partnership. As part of our SEND self-evaluation which informed this strategy, we listened to and analysed more than 1,500 comments from CYP with SEND, 2,000 comments from parent carers and 750 comments from our schools.

'We also heard from all of our teams who support CYP with SEND. Building on this initial work, we held over 30 group discussions with families, educational settings and teams to decide on our priorities and agree what we should do about them.

'Information about the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028 consultation, including a link to the survey, was shared via the following council and partner channels and networks:

- Local Offer website, newsletter, Facebook page and Local Offer ambassadors
- Bristol City Council social media: Facebook, X, Instagram and We Are Bristol newsletter
- Bristol Parent Carers social media posts and newsletter
- Headteachers' newsletters 13th September and 9th October
- Early Years newsletter 27th September
- Posters in Bristol Central Library
- Families in Focus newsletters
- Family Hubs Whatsapp channel and website
- Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership
- Listening Partnership meeting

- Autism Independence engagement session
- Email to multi-academy trust inclusion leads
- Email to Children's Centres
- GP surgeries (digital and physical poster)
- One care newsletter
- Healthier Together newsletter
- Bristol City Council (education and social care)
- Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board
- Sirona Care & Health
- Avon and Wiltshire Partnership
- Educational settings in Bristol (providing education for children and young people from 0-25 including early years settings, mainstream and special schools, alternative learning provision and further education colleges)
- Bristol Parent Carers (Bristol's strategic parent carer forum) and
- The Listening Partnership (Bristol strategic partner representing children and young people with SEND)
- Teams and services working in the community (including the charity, voluntary and social enterprise sector)

The Listening Partnership appears to be the main partner for which Bristol City Council says it captures the views of young people aged 13 -25. Clearly education settings will not be capturing the voices of those off rolled, pushed out, EOTAS, home educated or missing education.

So what exactly is the attendance number of the Listening Partnership for each of their meetings in 2024? Not the membership base number, but the exact number of attendees at their meetings? The council must hold this number considering the importance it places on the group's feedback.

Officer response:

We drew on a number of channels to capture the voice of children and young people in the Strategy.

The sessions with the Listening Partnership were attended by a focussed group of 6-10 young people. These sessions were initially focused on the development of a vision for SEND in Bristol, and latterly on hearing their views about the emerging strategy priorities.

We also drew on other sources of children and young people's views to inform the development of the strategy, including the Barnardo's Neuro-Diversity Group. Children Looked After with SEND shared their views through their termly Personal Education Plan meetings and pupils in Y4,6, 8 and 10 shared their views in the 2022 Health Schools Pupil Voice Survey. Children and young people in a number of schools also shared their views with staff to help shape the strategy.

We are grateful to all of the children and young people who gave a voice to this Strategy.

We are committed to strengthening our participation work with children and young people with SEND. We recognise that this needs to be broader than working with a single group to ensure views are representative and we have included a number of actions in the strategy in this area.

Public Forum Statements

PS01: Elizabeth Ind

I am writing to highlight the significant failings of the SEND system, as experienced by my 9 year old son, and to urge the committee to address the unacceptable delays and lack of accountability that are impacting children and families like ours.

My son is a bright and capable child with complex needs, but he has been repeatedly let down by the system that is meant to support him. Despite having an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) in place, the provisions he requires to access education and make progress have been delayed, mishandled, or ignored.

His EHCP specifies that he should receive tailored social skills sessions overseen by a specialist and that his Learning Support Assistant (LSA) should receive training to meet his specific needs. However, these provisions have been delayed for 9 months and counting due to funding issues and poor management by the local authority.

The impact of these delays has been devastating. His progress has not just stalled—it has regressed. He no longer accesses the classroom, and any demand placed on him leads to shutdowns. He is increasingly isolated and unable to engage with his peers or his education. It is heartbreaking as a parent to see him losing confidence and becoming more withdrawn while the support he so desperately needs remains out of reach.

These failings forced me to instruct a solicitor to advocate for his rights and ensure that his EHCP provisions are delivered. The need to take legal action is not only costly and time-consuming but should never have been necessary in the first place. It is unacceptable that families are being forced into this position simply to secure the basic support that their children are entitled to by law.

There has been a clear lack of communication and accountability from the local authority. Responses to inquiries have been slow, vague, and dismissive. Promises have been made but not kept, and the burden has fallen entirely on me as his parent to chase up every detail, while he continues to suffer from the absence of specialist input.

The sadness and disappointment I feel as a parent are overwhelming. My son is being failed during a critical time in his development, and the opportunities he is losing cannot be recovered. The system's inaction and indifference have left us feeling abandoned, and it is deeply distressing to know that his needs have been deprioritized.

My son's case is not unique. It reflects systemic issues that are affecting children and families across the Bristol, families are left to fight an uphill battle to secure even the most basic support for their children. This situation is unsustainable and unfair.

My son, like all children, deserves a fair chance to thrive and reach his potential. Every day that passes without the right support is another day that he is being let down. I implore the committee to take these issues seriously and ensure that no more children fall through the cracks of a failing system. Thank you for taking the time to consider this submission.

PS02: Jen Smith

My child was turned down for an EHCNA in 2016. He finally got one in 2019 after a 46 week assessment timeframe. It was entirely too late by that point because he had experienced abuse and bullying from his mainstream setting and was pushed out. From 2018, I have watched what was going on in Bristol Send. Not as a campaigner but as a parent sick and tired of having Send children and young people treated with contempt from all areas within education, Send and the Labour administration. Since then, I have seen six Cabinet leads for education come and go. Five executive directors with responsibility for education and Send. Five directors of education. I commented on a

previous Send strategy back at a Bristol Parent Carers event in 2017 or so. In 2019, I did a statement at People Scrutiny Commission about the new send strategy then. We are now in 2025. There has been tinkering. Consultations. Cuts. Strategies. Comings and goings. Highly paid consultants. Spying. Secret Safety Valves. Deep-Dives. Synergy. Silos and Matrix. Career ladder hopping. Non statutory plans. Cuts. Mitigations. Savings. Cuts to top up. It's endless. A report to Cabinet in September 2020, stated that there were 190 children and young people with EHCPs needing specialist provision. Officers at the time predicted that an additional 250 children and young people were coming through the system that would also need specialist provision. According to papers for this meeting, there are 230 children and young people waiting for a specialist place. It's not got any better. Papers also say there are 454 children and young people entirely missing. And the highest number of home educated children in Bristol falls into one of the city's most deprived areas which also has the highest instance of Send. I don't think that's a coincidence. The council says in its brand new Send strategy that it listened to more than 1,500 responses from children and young people during consultation. I can tell you for a fact that you didn't try to capture the voices of off rolled/EOTAS pupils. Every one is appearing pleased as punch with the brand new Send strategy. This is at a time when the Send deficit is £10m worse than before signing up to Safety Valve. The Committee Report for the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028 says: 'Our last SEND strategy was written in 2019. We have made progress, but we know we still have more to do. The word 'progress' doing a lot of heavy lifting there. The launch of the new strategy might be exciting for the council but in reality, it's just another circle on the Gallopers.