

Children and Young People Policy Committee Supplementary Information



Date: Thursday, 28 August 2025

Time: 5.00 pm

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

6. Public Forum

Up to 30 minutes is allowed for this item.

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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 meant that questions were received at the latest by **5.00 pm on Thursday 21 August**. 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 meant that statements were received at the latest by **12.00 noon on Tuesday 26 August**. 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.

Issued by: Policy Committee Team

E-mail: policycommittees@bristol.gov.uk

Date: Thursday, 28 August 2025



Children and Young People Policy Committee 28 August 2025 Public Forum



Public forum questions have been received as listed below (full details are set out on the subsequent pages):

- Q1. Jen Smith: Explanation behind statement in paper: Concerns about social media use (agenda item 8)
- Q2. Jen Smith: Concerns about social media use (agenda item 8)
- Q3. Jen Smith: Concerns about social media use (agenda item 8)
- Q4. Dan Ackroyd: Inquiry scope - defining an output (agenda item 8)
- Q5. Dan Ackroyd: Inquiry scope - look for the self-referential point. That's where the problem is likely to be (agenda item 8)
- Q6. Dan Ackroyd: "Automation" would be the more common description (ECHPs)

Public forum statements have been received as listed below (full details are set out on the subsequent pages):

- 1. Jen Smith: Concerns about social media use (agenda item 8)
- 2. Cllr Graham Morris: Concerns about social media use (agenda item 8)
- 3. Dan Ackroyd: If things are acting strangely, consider that you may be in a feedback situation (agenda item 8)

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



PUBLIC QUESTIONS

1. QUESTION FROM JEN SMITH

Explanation behind statement in paper: Concerns about social media use

Regarding the following paragraph:

'There is no evidence to suggest that the concerns raised in 2022 continue today. Should any concerns arise related to current practice, families are invited to bring these to the attention of senior officers.'

How has Bristol City Council arrived at the conclusion that there is 'no evidence' that surveillance continues in 2025 if an independent inquiry has not been held?

Response:

The request for an external investigation relates to concerns raised about the period 2021 – 22. We continue to welcome any more recent evidence of concerns of inappropriate use of social media by council staff which will be followed up.

2. QUESTION FROM JEN SMITH

Concerns about social media use

Again regarding this paragraph, there are senior officers still working for Bristol City Council who were instrumental in Send surveillance. How do you expect families to bring current issues to people who have actively participated in spying – and have also attempted to intimidate me in the council chamber by trying to stare me out?

Response:

Any external investigation will be carried out in confidence and anyone who wishes to engage with it can do so anonymously.

3. QUESTION FROM JEN SMITH

Concerns about social media use

In the Concerns about social media use paper it says:

'Your Corporate Strategy alignment says:

'This report demonstrate the values and behaviours which underpin our organisational culture and are set out in the Corporate Strategy.

We are Dedicated: we strive to make a difference.

We take Ownership: we accept personal accountability.

We are Collaborative: we come together to reach shared goals.

We are Curious: we ask questions and explore possibilities.

We show Respect: we treat each other fairly.'

Please can you explain against these points how you have taken accountability regarding council staff and the Sendias service spying on a coffee group I ran for carers? We can only assume these behaviours continue because there has been no investigation to prove otherwise.

Response:

These values are repeated in every committee paper as standard. We continue to try to hold ourselves to them as best we can in everything we do as a Council and this area is no exception. Should option 1 be selected and the investigated supported, any terms of reference will be in line with these values.

4. QUESTION FROM DAN ACKROYD

Inquiry scope - defining an output

Will the inquiry into the SEND spying document the actions taken by the council against members of the public and the Bristol Parent Carers, and with Council explanations of why those actions were taken?

Response:

No decision has been taken at this point on whether an independent investigation should be commissioned. This will be a matter for the committee to determine at the meeting.

If the committee decides to approve Option 1 as set out in the report included at agenda item 8, the Executive Director: Children and Education will proceed to identify a suitably qualified reviewer and to determine the specific terms of reference/scope of the investigation in consultation with members of the Children and Young People Committee.

5. QUESTION FROM DAN ACKROYD

Inquiry scope - look for the self-referential point. That's where the problem is likely to be.

Will the inquiry look at 'historic' events including the handling of the situation by the Council, or will there be restrictions in place?

Response:

No decision has been taken at this point on whether an independent investigation should be commissioned. This will be a matter for the committee to determine at the meeting.

If the committee decides to approve Option 1 as set out in the report included at agenda item 8, the Executive Director: Children and Education will proceed to identify a suitably qualified reviewer and to determine the specific terms of reference/scope of the investigation in consultation with members of the Children and Young People Committee.

6. QUESTION FROM DAN ACKROYD

"Automation" would be the more common description

Back in approximately November 2023, a report include a description of how some parts of the process for, if I recall correctly, processing EHCP plans was described as being in need of "robotisation".

That sounded very exciting.

But I later read a document, "Bristol City Council: Productivity Plan July 2024":

- > A known barrier to productivity is processes across back-office
- > and front-line services, some of which still rely on Word and Excel
- > form filling, email attachments etc., when modern methods such
- > as online forms with automated system integrations would be
- > much more efficient.

<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/7961-productivity-plan/file>

Which sounded less exciting.

My question is, how is that "robotisation" going and is it producing the productivity gains hoped for?

My supplementary, should an officer feel the urge to draft an answer, is very likely to be along the lines: Are there any other process, where members of staff are spending many hours a week forced to use "Excel and Email" as an "Integrated Technology Solution" that are in need of roboticisation?

Response:

In late 2023, Bristol City Council initiated a pilot project to explore the use of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) in the processing of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The aim was to test whether digital tools could help reduce the administrative burden on staff by automating repetitive tasks, described as "robotisation."

While the concept was promising, the project faced several challenges. As a result, the original "robotisation" project with PwC was discontinued. However, we continue to explore opportunities to improve productivity through automation. We are currently trialling Microsoft Copilot within the SEND assessment team, with a focus on supporting EHCP drafting and exploring other areas of the assessment process where administrative time can be reduced. The trial is still very much in its infancy, but early indications suggest potential to streamline workflows and free up staff capacity for more complex tasks and liaise closer with families and partners.

To your supplementary point: yes, there are still areas across the Council where staff rely heavily on Excel and email to manage workflows. These practices are acknowledged in the Council's Productivity Plan (July 2024) as outdated and inefficient. Future automation efforts will focus on low-risk, well-defined processes with better integration into existing systems.

PUBLIC STATEMENTS

Statement 1 – Jen Smith

Concerns about social media use

Concerns were raised in 2022 about how Bristol City Council staff – including some elected members - were using social media to spy on Send parents.

Concerns were raised throughout 2023, And 2024, And 2025. And concerns still continue. The concerns still continue because they have never been investigated – despite a motion to include an independent investigation democratically voted for at Full Council way back in 2022.

At every possible avenue, Bristol City Council has gone out of its way to frustrate any process to address concerns. That has been a deliberate choice.

Whenever the issue is raised in the media, the narrative is around social media and Twitter. But the problematic behaviour was far more insidious than this. Bristol City Council staff did not just read a bit of social media. They also monitored what Send families were saying in public. They profiled people. They involved outside parties. They bullied.

Funding was also spitefully withdrawn from the city's Parent Carer Forum.

My son had EHCP provision removed as a direct result of council staff behaviour. I'm sure you are well aware that I can provide evidence of this claim.

Whilst the issues around monitoring have been in the heart of education and social care, the inability to take legal action as far as court is also due to legal obstruction – you will be aware I can back this claim up with evidence.

I have never had my full SAR because even now, my data that I have never seen is coming out in other people's requests. Data which I did receive was heavily redacted to the point of useless. Ludicrous that this is coming from a local authority behaving with the same heavy handedness you would expect from the military.

Claims made from Bristol City Council leaders that people would pursue legal action to a court hearing if it was viable is disingenuous. Legal action is incredibly expensive and time consuming. And it is further time theft that the council steals from families already trying to tightrope walk through life with everything Bristol Send throws at you.

Paragraph five says: 'Improving the support we provide to children and young people with SEND is an urgent priority for the Council. We have strengthened how we work together with all stakeholders and continue to refine our approach, with the aim that that children, young people, and their families are able to experience real and lasting improvements in their lives.'

This is pointless considering that Bristol City Council staff continue to behave in shadowy ways rendering Send entirely untrustworthy.

Despite the claim in paragraph 6 about 'significant changes' there are still plenty of people who were involved in spying still working for Bristol City Council and in key places that bring them in contact with Send families and

vulnerable Disabled people.

Paragraph 7 states that there is 'no evidence to suggest that the concerns raised in 2022 continue today.' However, how can the council confidently claim this when it has had no investigation? You literally didn't investigate the concerns to see if they continue?

I'm fairly confident – considering how some staff at Bristol City Council have attempted to intimidate me in the council chamber– that spying still goes on.

You, as a council, took umbrage at families who tried to do nothing but the best for their children and young people. You forced us to go to the LGO. You forced us to go to SENDIST. You forced us to use complaints procedures, support other families, complain to the media in utter desperation.

If you hold your investigation in the 'spirit of confidentiality and transparency' do so. But don't think for one minute you are the victims here.

Statement 2 – Cllr Graham Morris

Concerns about social media use

Thank you for bringing this item to committee.

The spying on parents as part of SEND related issues is something which this council should be ashamed. The blame for this sits squarely on the Labour Party for their appalling vilification of parents of children with additional needs. It is probably correct that the independent investigation is given a wide remit, if the necessary evidence is made available.

As a council we fail to be transparent in our dealings with the public and the levels of distrust, which peaked under the previous administration, will take a long time to repair.

This is the first step. There has been a negative impact on the council's reputation from attacking parents of children with need for additional support (who are fighting for the rights of their children), and the decision to remove funding for support groups. The optics are terrible as shown in the two articles below:

[Bristol City Council scraps funding support for special needs charity in surveillance row | Bristol Live](#)

[Bristol Parent Carers special needs charity funding restored - BBC News](#)

However, I do have concerns about the results of the Inquiry as:

- there has been a change in decision making and the Mayoral position has gone.
- those responsible for the decisions are no longer in position. As such their emails have been deleted and it is only worth the enquiry if we can obtain these emails, which we know is possible, but it requires political will to make this happen.
- disciplinary action should be taken against officers if they were involved, unless they can prove where their instructions arose.
- the scope is likely to be set very narrowly so that the results will be limited.

It is about time this city stopped treating the issue of SEND as a political football. Children need help not to be used for point scoring. We should only undertake this formal exploration, which I support, if we ensure a wide-ranging remit and unfettered access to information and emails. This must include communications of the Deputy Mayor who is quoted in both of the articles cited above as clearly she is integral to the review.

Statement 3 – Dan Ackroyd

If things are acting strangely, consider that you may be in a feedback situation

There is a culture problem at the council.

Culture problems don't magically go away just because a slightly nicer group of politicians have been elected.

And if culture problems aren't permanently fixed, it is very easy for people to slip back into bad habits.

Until Councillors recognise that there is a culture problem at the council, and work together as a group to change it, the culture at the council will remain as it is – adversarial with the public.

You need to have a proper inquiry that documents exactly what happened at Bristol City Council, so that the it can be an example of what not to do at a council.

Regarding the options presented in the paper, you have been given two options.

I think this committee should ask for clarity on exactly what is being proposed in the papers. My understanding one proposal is not a new investigation and would be just a review of the previous established facts, which is not what was demanded in the Full Council motion. And the other proposal is to just drop the matter.

You're allowed to say these options are not acceptable.

If the previous Motion calling for an inquiry is "no longer valid", and a decision to carry out an external investigation needs to go back to Full Council to be "decided again" by the new Council, then send this matter to Full Council saying that it is the will of the committee for the external inquiry to be held.