



Oversight and Governance

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Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Supplement Pack

Wednesday 2 December 2020
12.00 pm
Virtual meeting

Members:

Councillor Mrs Beer, Chair

Councillor Murphy, Vice Chair

Councillors Allen, Corvid, Goslin, James, Loveridge, McDonald and Morris.

Please find enclosed additional information for your consideration under agenda item numbers 7 and 9.

Tracey Lee

Chief Executive

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 7. In House Fostering/ Impact of Service Re-design (to follow): (Pages 1 - 4)**
- 9. Participation - Work of Young Safeguarders and the Listen and Care Council (to follow): (Pages 5 - 14)**

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	02 December 2020
Title of Report:	Fostering Service Update
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Lead Strategic Director:	Alison Botham (Director for Children's Services)
Author:	Jane Anstis
Contact Email:	Jane.anstis@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

This briefing provides an update on the work of the Plymouth City Council in-house fostering service and the actions that have been taken to drive up the number of available in-house foster placements.

Update

Every local authority has a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of good quality local placements available for children and young people in care. The provision of foster care, where care is provided in a family home with skilled and empathetic carers, is at the heart of this duty. With sufficiency of foster placements, the majority of children and young people in care whose plan is for permanent long term foster care, will be able to live with a family throughout their childhood, and the best foster carers and placements provide warmth, encouragement and stability which enable children to go on to live happy and productive adult lives.

Plymouth City Council uses a range of placements to provide care and support for children and young people. Some provision is provided in-house, with other placements commissioned from a range of externally commissioned providers. Externally commissioned providers range from small, locally owned companies to large national providers working across the health and social care sectors. Providers are owned and managed in a variety of ways, from charities and social enterprise to privately financed organisations.

The preference is to be able to place children in local authority foster care where possible, prioritising the use of a non-profit making fostering service as opposed to higher cost independent fostering agency placements and enabling more children to remain in their communities. Over recent years the 'market' for foster care has become increasingly competitive, with prospective foster carers able to choose from a wide range of local authority, charitable and privately owned independent fostering agencies (IFA's).

Plymouth City Council currently operates an in-house fostering service, advertised under the slogan "Foster for Plymouth", with opportunities for prospective carers to become full time foster carers, respite carers or parent and child carers. The service also offers assessments for connected carers and private fostering arrangements.

Over a number of years, we had seen a slow decline in the number of children and young people in in-house foster placements.

The actions that have been taken over the past year have been taken to achieve improved outcomes for children and young people in care, with more children able to be supported in permanent, family-based placements provided by Plymouth City Council foster carers. An increase in the availability of local authority foster carers will also reduce overall spend by reducing the numbers of children and young people being placed in higher cost care placements.

An In-House Fostering service review in October 2019 made a series of recommendations which led to a service re-design in March 2020. This re-design and the actions taken since then have been to achieve an ambition to ensure we have enough foster carers available on an ongoing basis. There are two key aspects to this:

- Recruitment - recruiting new carers to increase the number of available placements and replace those who retire or leave fostering
- Retention – supporting and training foster carers so that they continue caring

Overall, a target was set to achieve a net increase of 21 in-house placements by April 2021. We have also set targets to achieve in the two following years, 36 new placements each year.

2. PROGRESS

Marketing:

Plymouth City Council has commissioned a national marketing agency with strong experience in the fostering sector to lead our marketing approach. Marketing activity was delayed due to the unexpected impact of the first Covi-d-19 lockdown, however since June 2020, a new website and new social media platforms have been created and are regularly updated with engaging content including films of our amazing foster carers and their families. Key campaigns including 'are you looking for a career change' have run on-one and off-line. This has included visible community placement such as bus backs and petrol pumps.

Recruitment activity:

Since the launch of this activity we have seen a five-fold increase in direct website visits per month from 584 to 2483 in October and an average of 18 enquiries per month (compared to average of 6 in preceding months).

Summary of Foster carer assessment and approvals 2020-21

Number of fostering households assessed or currently undergoing assessment	19
Number of children's placements across these fostering households?	34
How many of these fostering households have already been approved to date in 2020?	6
How many of these fostering households are due to be approved by March 2021?	All

Support and Retention of existing foster carers:

Retaining experienced carers as well as recruiting new ones, is key to achieving our overall targets for the service. In order to ensure we are offering an effective and competitive offer, further research has been undertaken to inform a new support offer for carers. This will encompass a number of layers of support.

Support for all carers will include 'around the clock' access to support and advise; a supervising social worker; a more developed 'buddy' service; monthly support groups; family support workers to work alongside carers and children at key points of change or need; additional training to support a trauma-informed approach to care; access to advanced therapeutic support were necessary, as well as extra

benefits for carers, their families and children and young people, such as discounted or free access to a range of local activities and services.

Skills to Foster training has continued in virtual format in the current Pandemic Context in common with other key elements of contact such as 'virtual bubbles' and support groups.

A review of Fostering Allowances is underway to ensure we are offering a comparable rate to support children's placements.

3. NEXT STEPS

Over the remainder of 2020/2021 and into the following year, we will continue to maintain a relentless focus on recruitment, retention and the provision high quality support to achieve the very best care and outcomes for our Children in Care. This will be achieved through the progression of our forward marketing plan and support plans as well as a wider improvement plan that sets out the training and development needs within the service.

Alternative options considered and rejected
not applicable

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan
[Click here to enter text.](#)

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

The fostering service is on track to achieve or exceed its Savings Delivery Plan targets and to work to support our placement sufficiency targets to provide family placements to children in care in and close to the city.

No adverse financial implication is anticipated as a result of the review of support and allowances since Plymouth already has a regionally competitive allowance in place.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

Local placements ensure we limit travel to locations far from the city when visiting children in care.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

Supporting a range of placement options is important to ensure we can meet all children's needs who need to be looked after.

Appendices

**Add rows as required to box below*

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							
B	Equalities Impact Assessment (if applicable)							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

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Sign off:

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Jean Kelly, Service Director CYPFS											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes Date agreed: 24/11/2020											
Cabinet Member approval: Cllr Jemima Laing – approved by email Date approved: 24/11/2020											

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	02 December 2020
Title of Report:	Participation – The Work of Young Safeguarders and the Listen and Care Council
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Lead Strategic Director:	Alison Botham (Director for Children's Services)
Author:	Stuart Hogg
Contact Email:	Stuart.hogg@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	Participation Report
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

This report, while focusing on the work and thoughts of the young Safeguarders brings in the voice of other young people involved in other participation groups and gives a review of the work undertaken by the group during lockdown 1 & 2.

Recommendations and Reasons

It is essential to understand the voices of our young people during lockdown, and this report is a reflection of the work undertaken by the participation team.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Not applicable

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The core business elements of the plan have been designed in line with the Corporate Plan's values of being democratic and fair, alongside the visions of a pioneering, caring and confident Plymouth.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

not applicable

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

not applicable

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

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		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Participation Scrutiny Report December 2020							
B	Equalities Impact Assessment (if applicable)							

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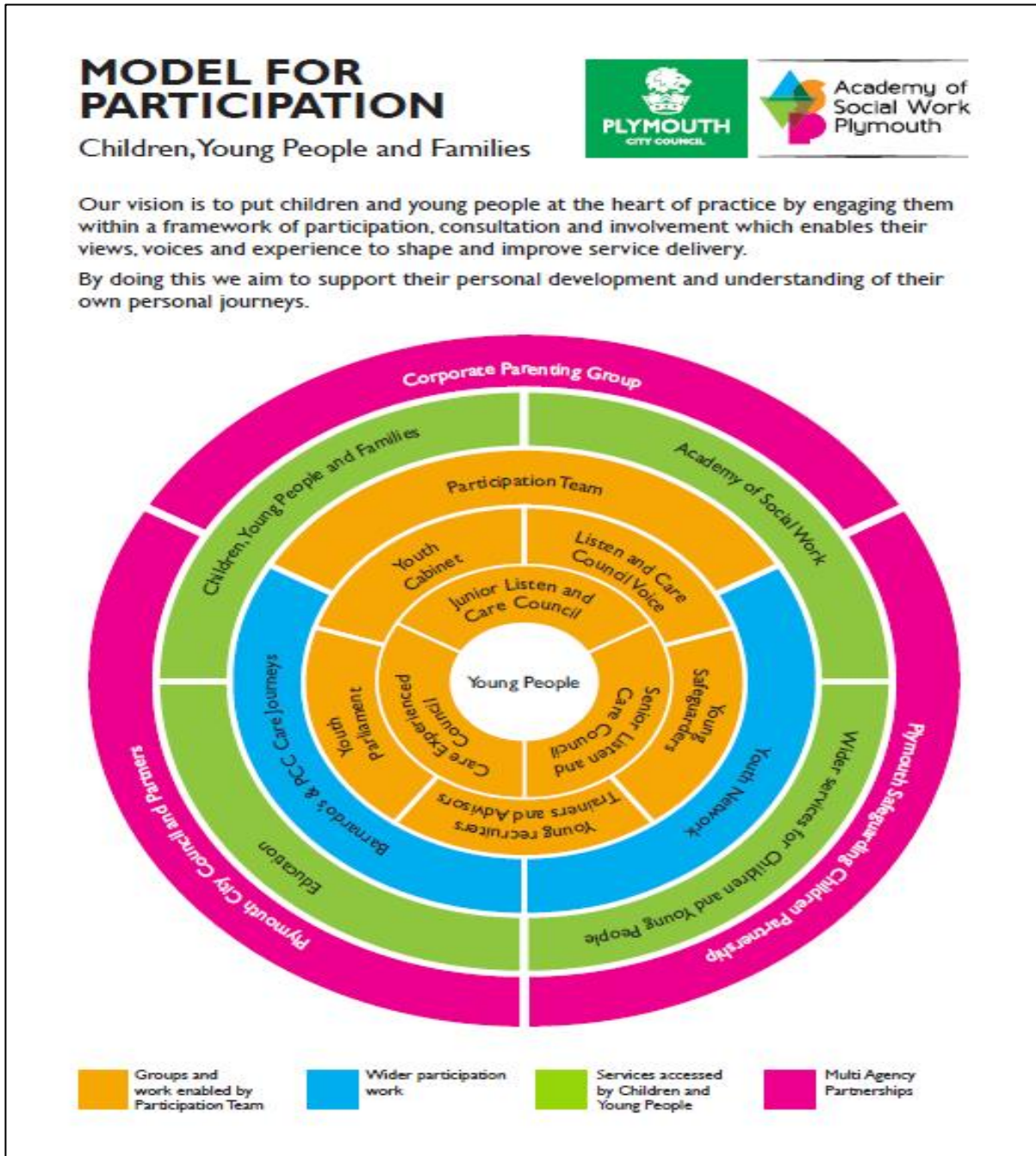
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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Jean Kelly Service Director											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes Date agreed: 24/11/2020											
Cabinet Member approval: Cllr Jemima Laing – by email Date approved: 24/11/2020											

PARTICIPATION – THE WORK OF YOUNG SAFEGUARDERS AND THE LISTEN AND CARE COUNCIL

Introduction

The Participation Team sits within Children Young People and Families Service and the Academy of Social Work Plymouth. Work is overseen through these areas as well as by the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership.

The work is delivered through a number of groups and sits within a wider framework set out below.



This report shares key messages from two key participation groups as well as the voices of other young people in a range of participation groups supported by the Participation Team.

Contact with young people

- There have been a number of challenges working with groups throughout the various periods of lockdown and restrictions.
- Most of the work has been delivered on the Microsoft Teams platform which has caused some young people to withdraw and reduce group engagement.
- Issues have included lack of technology available, not having a private space or having others present which has also impacted on some young people's openness.
- It has been difficult to engage with the younger groups as their sessions were previously very activity based which haven't recently been possible.
- Positively, we have recruited new members to Care Council and we have worked on a one to one basis, with some that have withdrawn from group work.
- Providing monthly activity packs throughout the periods of lockdown to support continued engagement.
- Comments and feedback from those who the Participation Team already had a relationship with and as such they might be considered more engaged than some of the more vulnerable cohort of children in care.
- We are however always looking to address this by engaging with a wider group of children and young people in care and care experienced young people.

Overview of the work of the Young Safeguarders and the Listen and Care Council

Young Safeguarders

- The Young Safeguarders are a group of young people aged 14-19 who live in Plymouth and are interested in improving services that deliver support to young people across the city.
- They support the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership (PSCP) to make sure that the voices of children and young people are heard and that information and the policies and procedures that affect their lives are fair and easily understood.

Over the last six months they have;

- They have produced a sound clip that has been distributed throughout the PSCP organisations highlighting the importance of language and how professionals can sound to young people.
- They have undertaken a piece of primary research amongst their peers on Instagram and received over 300 responses for each question.
- This research was triggered by comments made by professionals that contradicted their own lived experiences in their communities. They hope that the research will be able to contribute and influence the safeguarding agenda.
- The main focus of the questions were around knife crime, substance misuse, sexting and mental health. Responses have been shared and discussed in PSCP subgroups and individual agencies have taken information back for reflection in their organisations pending responses. The NSPCC have also requested that the young people link in with their Together for Childhood work. Responses will also be shared with Safer Plymouth and the Safer Families Theme Group for consideration.
- The young people have been asked to consider a review of the 'Ten Wishes'.
- Their initial view was that the wishes were still very relevant to them and the focus should be more on how the wishes could be better met and more widely adopted
- The young people involved in HYPE (Livewell South West Participation group) concurred with this few and thought the wishes remained relevant and useful to them.

- Young people involved with Youth Ascends (Plymouth's SEND (Special Education Needs and Disabilities) youth forum) had wanted a couple of additions to the wishes but had very strong views that uptake across education was sometimes lacking.

The Listen and Care Council

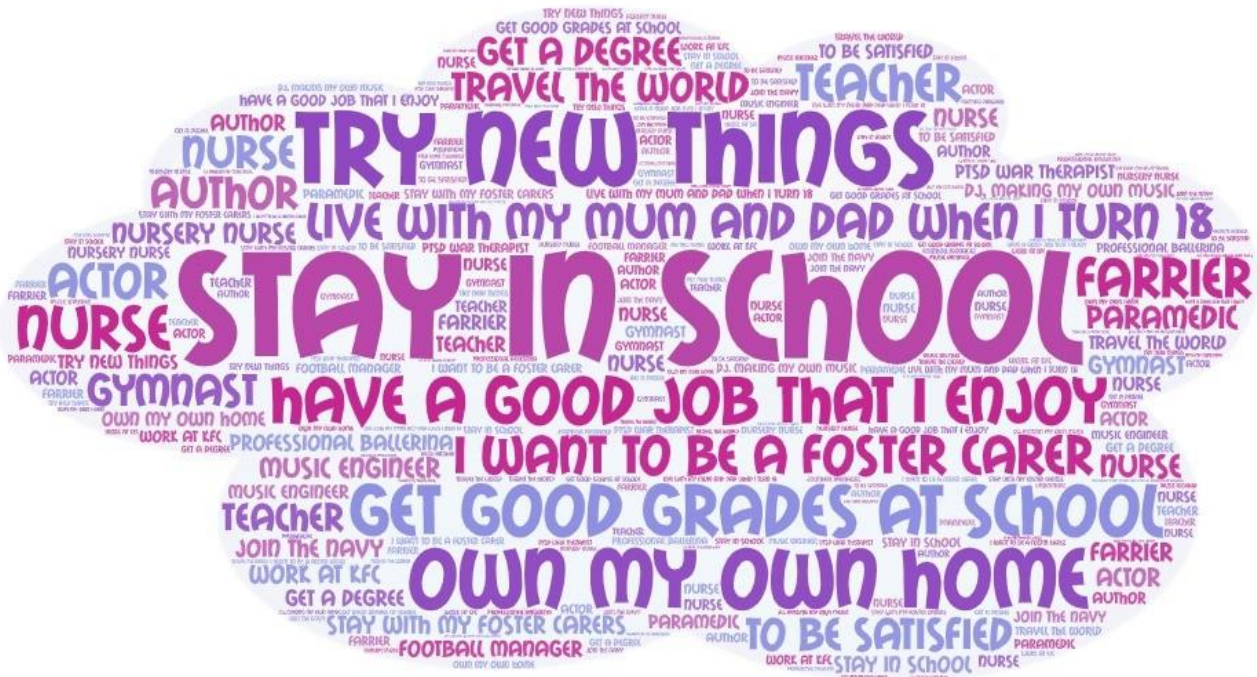
The Listen and Care Council is made up of three groups of young people who are either in care or are care experienced. These groups are;

- Junior Listen and Care Council (ages 8 to 13),
- Senior Listen and Care Council (ages 13 to 17)
- The Care Experienced Council (CEC) for young people aged 18 and over.
- Representatives from each group meet with Councillors who sit on the Corporate Parenting Group and managers from the Permanency Service before and after each Corporate Parenting Group so that their views on a range of topics are heard.

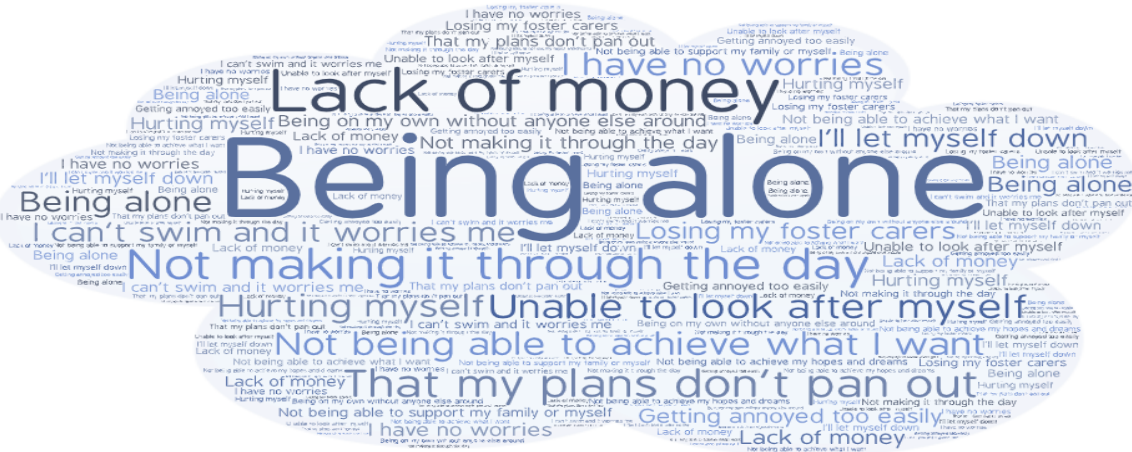
Over the last six months they have;

- Provided information on 'Life in Lockdown' to Corporate Parenting Meetings
- Senior Listen and Care Council has been working directly with two Independent Reviewing Officers from the Safeguarding Service with regard to changes in how statutory reviews are conducted and support the move towards a strength based perspective and a child led approach.
- The group have moved towards potentially creating a set of principles in respect that each young person in care has different needs and therefore a range of approaches might be required to meet those needs.
- The CEC have also begun a review of the Care Leavers Local Offer alongside young people involved the Care Journeys partnership. This is the first part of their involvement and contribution to the Permanency Accelerated Improvement Plan.
- One of their recent concerns has been timely access to services but they have agreed that whilst it is has been good to feedback about services they want to now focus on positive changes.
- They are looking forward to meeting the Permanency Head of Service to discuss their further involvement in the improvement plan. They are clearly focused on supporting service and practice improvement with the ultimate aim of improving the experience of being and going through care for those younger than themselves.
- The most recent piece of work the young people are undertaking is for the next Corporate Parenting Group where the focus will be on Care Leavers.
- The Junior and Senior Listen and Care Councils are also contributing to the work around Care Leavers for the Corporate Parenting Group but questions to them were framed more in terms of what their hopes and fears for the future were. This was to try to prevent any unnecessary anxiety they might have about the transition to adulthood.
- The following word clouds show what the young people's hope and fears for the future were with greater prominence given to the comments and words that were most frequently used in discussions.

Junior and Senior Listen and Care Council Members Hopes for the Future



Junior and Senior Listen and Care Council Members Fears for the Future



Recruitment of PCC Staff

- Members of both the Young Safeguarders and the Listen and Care Council have been involved in a number of recent recruitment and interview processes to support appointing managers with recruitment decisions.
- Posts young people have either interviewed or assessed candidates for has included a Service Director, Head of Service, Service Managers, Social Workers, Youth Workers and Personal Advisors.
- They have also interviewed prospective Foster Carers and are due to interview potential Foster Panel Members.

Life in Lockdown

Early in lockdown young people from the Listen and Care Councils were asked for their experiences and thoughts in relation to COVID-19 and lockdown. The words that were most mentioned were boredom, frustration and being lonely.

- Issues raised were often in relation to lack of education, exams being cancelled, self-isolating due to carers vulnerabilities and need to shield as well as in impact on contact with birth families and siblings.

“I can’t see my family which has been really hard. As our household is shielding there are rules about seeing others and I’m really annoyed that I can’t see my brother.”

- Older young people reflected on the feelings of loneliness and having to spend time alone with support networks and socialising opportunities being restricted.
- However, for the more introvert members of the group, they liked that they no longer had to make up excuses to avoid people.
- Some young people however benefited from employment opportunities that would otherwise not been available.
- Those younger children in foster care generally felt very supported,
- Secondary school aged young people talked of lack of schooling and missing friends and the older young people living independently and not able to work felt a sense of isolation and boredom.
- There was also a sense that returning to education would lead into a life that they had previously been used to although they knew that there would be new rules to be followed and thought social distancing would be difficult.
- Some young people had gained confidence from the period of lockdown and had felt that they had managed themselves well and that this would stand them in good stead for the future.

“I have focused on myself and the way I cope with things during lock down so I can cope with things in school. I’m glad I’m going back to school so I can see some of my friends but it’s going to be hard because you have to self-distance.” (Female, aged 15)

- Home education for young people with a diagnosis of Autism was recognised in the in the work of Youth Ascends that lockdown suited some young people and those with autism liked not going to school
- Examples of some young people moving to home tuition as their parents thought home education during lockdown had been a positive experience.
- For some young people the return to education was a worry due to the lack of contact with peers for a number of months and the feeling of being behind.

“I have been struggling to make friends and have not really spoken to anyone my age since the beginning of lockdown. I’m looking forward to college as that will be an opportunity to make new friends and also hopefully get a girlfriend. I’m in a dark cloud at the moment but there is a beam of light I can see so there is hope that things will get better.” (Male, aged 17)

- The return to school was a worry for young people and they made it clear that they were concerned that their emotional health and wellbeing should be prioritised over academic work during the return.

- Young people wanted teachers to have more patience and worry more about ensuring they follow school uniform/rules stating that *“some people lost jobs and can’t afford correct uniform so don’t punish us, find out the individual situation each case is different.”* (Female, aged 16)
- They also report that they are finding the second lockdown more difficult in terms of compliance with rules, this is in part because they feel that rules are contradictory in that for example they can be in big groups in school but not in the park.
- It is known that feelings of isolation and loneliness have been particularly difficult and exacerbated for care experienced young people and they welcomed time being spent with them by social workers, personal advisors and other professionals.
- For some, this highlighted the lack of connection of what would be more usually provided by close family. The feeling of isolation seems to have been highlighted more when there was a perceived lack of services and support from professionals.

“Lockdown was stressful and hard, having a little one and worrying about her safety and wellbeing and that of my partner. Add in my mental health issues and lack of face to face services and access to help and support and it's been really tough.” (Female, aged 21)

- Young people at times noticed less visibility of workers and in part this referred to the online nature of contact and they welcomed the return to a more usual face to face element of contact.
- Most young people we spoke to however reported that they had had good levels of practical support when needed from social workers and personal advisors.
- Examples given included sorting out food parcels, accommodation issues, education and the receiving of IT equipment. They did appear to value this contact as more than practical support and clearly also used it to meet their emotional needs that they were not always comfortable asking for.
- Care leavers aged over 21 who did not have an allocated personal advisor felt less supported and were often reluctant to seek out support.
- This was in part to the fact that on occasions they had called to ask for support they hadn’t always received what they thought was a timely response.
- Young people have been clear that they have missed direct work with the different participation groups including Youth Ascends.
- Whilst every effort has been made to continue engaging young people online, some young people have struggled with this.
- Young people have commented that the stopping of face to face sessions has had a detrimental effect on their mental health and wellbeing and isolation has been worse as a consequence.
- Young people didn’t want the importance of this to be underestimated and want the option to meet in groups as soon as is possible.
- The young people involved in wider groups such as the UK Youth Parliament have also struggled and they have also reported feeling isolated and bored as they are in main usually very active and involved in a lot of different activities.
- They are also not as supported by professionals and have commented that at times their parents are struggling both emotionally and at times financially.

All issues raised by young people have been passed to managers or their social workers to provide the best support possible to them.

Young people want to be kept updated as they try to understand the new and ever changing arrangements as they need to develop a sense of security through daily routines.

National Care Leavers Week (26 October – 1 November)

- National Care Leavers Week was used to promote Care Leaver Services across the city with an update of the Care Leavers element of the PCC website, increased social media content and a poster campaign.
- Anecdotally it is thought that there was an increase in support requests from Care Leavers aged 21-25 following the week and we are awaiting data to confirm this.
- The Bright Spots 'Life Beyond Care' survey was launched during the week.
- As part of Permanency and Participation team's commitment to hearing and listening to young people views and improve outcomes for young people leaving care, we started to distribute the survey to our care leavers.
- The survey was developed by Coram Voice with care leavers, as part of the Bright Spots Programme to measure what they feel is important to their well-being by Coram Voice with the University of Bristol and then the University of Oxford.
- This is an opportunity for us to hear the views and better understand how Plymouth Care Leavers perceive their lives, their well-being, the people they know, their rights and the opportunities they have to prepare for adulthood.
- Young people from the Care Experienced Council agreed to tell their stories throughout National Care Leavers Week to promote learning and support service reflection, learning, improvement and ultimately better outcomes for young people in similar situations that they had been in.
- There were five stories addressing a range of issues including anxiety, depression, homelessness, abandonment and grief although all had an element of hope and the strength and character of the young people came through each story.
- A range of professionals passed messages of thanks and support to the young people and reflected to them the impact their stories had had.
- One young person said that "the aim was to encourage you (professionals) to really step up take on board our comments and make things better for those you work with, because we can all do better."
- The Care Journeys team delivered some direct work with young people including a graffiti workshop in the lead up to the week with an unveiling of the final piece during the week.
- Other activities included a 'Bake Off' challenge, a visit to the Box and a movie night.
- All Care Leavers nominated for 'You Can Do It Awards' this year received them during Care Leavers Week.

You Can Do It Awards 2020

The 2020 You Can Do It Award celebration was due to take place on 18th and 19th September at Plymouth Crowne Plaza. Guidance in relation to COVID-19 meant that these events could no longer take place using the previous format. It was however considered important to still celebrate young people's achievements. Categories this year were:

- ❖ Academic Achievement (including attendance)
- ❖ Personal Achievement (including sporting and creative achievements)
- ❖ Community Achievement
- ❖ Personal Resilience

We received a total of 794 nominations (an increase of 25% on 2019 nominations) for a total of 431 young people.

- All certificates were posted direct to young people with covering letter explaining decision as to why a physical celebration was not taking place and included a link to celebration films.

- The primary aged children received an engraved medal and the secondary aged young people and care leavers received a £10 gift voucher.
- The two celebration films were a series of short speeches from a number of individuals including Jo Loosemore who has hosted the event for a number of years, the Lord Mayor, Councillor Jemima Laing, Alison Botham (Director Children's Services), Jean Kelly (Service Director, Children Young People and Families) and Jozzy Mudzingwa (Participation Team Youth Support Worker).
- The main film was aimed at 11-25 year olds with an alternative version for primary school aged children with a different introduction from Jo and the addition of congratulatory messages from Elsa and Spiderman from Music Makers.

Positive feedback has been received in relation to the film.

"All three of us have all watched the video and we all liked the video very much, we thought it was very nice of everyone to spend their time to create it for us young people. The girls were very excited and bounced around when they saw Jozzy on screen."

"The children were very excited to receive their certificates and medals when they came through (they don't often get post!), and we watched the video together... Their certificates now have pride of place on the fridge, and when they're taken down they'll go in their memory boxes. The children stayed quite engaged during the video – I explained who each person talking was – I think they were particularly pleased at the Lord Mayor having a message for them, but I have to say the stars of the show for them were definitely Spiderman and Elsa!"