

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Thursday 14 November 2024

PRESENT:

Councillor Reilly, in the Chair.

Councillor Wood, Vice Chair.

Councillors McLay, McNamara, Ney, S.Nicholson, Raynsford, Simpson, Steel and Stephens.

Also in attendance: Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships), Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications), Lisa Linscott (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills), Vivien Lines (Project Consultant), Jim Barnicott (Head of Education and Virtual School), Isabelle Kolinsky (Service Manager Inclusion and Welfare), Martine Aquilina (Head of Service), Naomi Sutton (Practice Manager Besafe), PC Dani Albany (Devon and Cornwall Police), Susan London (Performance Advisor), Paul Stephens (Performance Advisor) and Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 11.00 am and finished at 1.21pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

81. **Apologies**

There were apologies from:

- Councillor Mrs Beer, Councillor Sally Nicholson substituted;
- Councillor Gilmour, Councillor Ney substituted;
- Councillor Krizanac, Councillor Raynsford substituted;
- Councillor Tippetts

82. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

83. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting that took place on 10 October 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

84. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

85. **2023/2024 Education Attainment in Plymouth**

Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) introduced the report to the Board and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The report presented unvalidated data of the achievement of children in Plymouth;
- b) Overall there was a stable and improving picture across the phases of Education in the city;
- c) Early Years outcomes for 2024 were improved on the previous year with 66.7% of children achieving an overall good level of development within a trajectory of moving closer to the national average of 68%;
- d) Year one phonic screening check outcomes remained strong at 81.2% achieving the standard score above the 2024 national average of 80%;
- e) At Keystage Two overall results for reading, writing and maths combined were improved on the previous year and indications were that they would remain above the national benchmark;
- f) Early Key Stage Four indications are that Plymouth would draw closer, if not, matching national progress measured benchmarks;
- g) For Plymouth cared for children, Plymouth needed to continue to focus on ensuring that strong individual programmes of support were in place so that every child fulfilled their potential and progressed to a positive destination. Additional opportunities to strengthen numeracy and literacy skills would be key to ensuring this through high quality personal education plans (PEP);
- h) Whilst the results were promising, Plymouth would not be complacent and there were specific areas for development including ensuring that children developed the language skills required that would provide them with a strong basis for literacy.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- i) Best practice was shared through three strands including Plymouth's place based plan, the school effectiveness framework and then through multi-academy trusts (MATs);
- j) The Council was meeting with the city's MAT's to understand what resources they were putting into early years provision to support children;
- k) The Plymouth place based plan had two strands which focussed on and targeted transitions amongst the key stages including those transitioning from early years settings. There was a transition portal in place between settings and schools and ensured as much information as possible was passed

between them to ensure a smooth and detailed transition took place;

- l) The other strand focussed on early language acquisition and was being worked on with Health colleagues to ensure the best possible start for Plymouth's children. This strand would be key to Plymouth raising the bar across the school system;
- m) Service children analysis would be included when evaluating the validated results;
- n) Data in relation to pupils at ACE and looked after children were kept as headline data, to avoid them being identified;
- o) All Saints Academy was opening a community based hub to bring the community together around the school and would welcome Councillor visits to see the provision.

Action: Education officers would advise how protected playing fields were in the city to allow for the provision of physical education.

The Board agreed to note the report.

86. **Educational Attendance in Plymouth**

Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) introduced the report to the Board and highlighted the following key points:

- a) Improving schools attendance for children was a national focus with Plymouth highlighting it as a key priority;
- b) The Council's school attendance campaign undertaken in 2023 did not land well. Learning had been adopted and a much more gentle approach called 'The Strong Start' had early indications of falling much better by Plymouth residents;
- c) The message behind the campaign was to ensure children and families felt a sense of belonging in school;
- d) Issues around attendance were about recognising and understanding why families chose to keep children away from school or why children did not feel that they could attend;
- e) The attendance strategy and the place based plan were designed to tackle the underlying causes that impact school attendance.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- f) 2019 data for children attending schools in the west of the city indicated that they would achieve one grade below expectations. The most recent data was

now indicating that they would achieve a third of a grade below expectations. The Council was aware that it had much further to go in supporting children who were experiencing disadvantage to achieve their potential;

- g) Children who were experiencing disadvantage were more likely to move schools affecting their school attendance. Research evidenced that the first few weeks of the term were critical in how a child's attendance pattern would formulate;
- h) The Council was trying to change the messaging to children and families in relation to poor school attendance that the school valued them and wanted them part of their community and to provide the opportunity to develop relationships;
- i) Plymouth was in line with national and regional benchmarking in relation to authorised absences but Plymouth had higher unauthorised absences that weren't related to unauthorised holidays;
- j) Early intervention and support work for children that have, or may have special educational needs or disability, needed to happen more, and earlier, to ensure children and young people engaged fully in their education at an earlier stage;
- k) A parent survey to understand the factors of non-attendance at school would go live on 15 January 2025. This would inform the school attendance strategy and would also provide a clear understanding of what the barriers were for children and families;
- l) Bullying was a significant reason as to why parents were electively home educating their children. The parent survey would be able to clearly advise if bullying was a prevalent theme for non-attendance at school;
- m) The Council had robust procedures in reviewing children that were Electively Home Educated (EHE) within the boundaries of the Department for Education (DFE) guidance. The previous ILACS inspection identified this area to be positive for the Council;
- n) Access and attendance officers would meet with schools to discuss children that were on part time timetables. Early Help link workers would also be present at those meetings to have joint planning sessions around those children.

Action: Three-year trend data of absences would be provided to Scrutiny Members.

Action: Data on how long a child/young person would wait for a school place would be provided to the Panel. Cllr McNamara would be provided data of how many children were waiting at the upper end of the wait time.

The Board agreed to note the report.

87. **Alternative Provision Assurance Report**

Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) introduced the report to the Board and highlighted the following key points:

- a) By law, those children and young people that were permanently excluded must have education arranged for them by the local authority as soon as possible and by the sixth day at the latest;
- b) In Plymouth, day six provision was provided by ACE, part of the Transforming Futures trust;
- c) The role of ACE was to support children to transition back into mainstream school as quickly as possible, however for some children where needs were particularly complex, they may transition into special schools or for some who joined ACE during years 10 and 11 they would remain there and complete their examinations;
- d) The development of an alternative provision (AP) specialist task force would further support good planning and outcomes for children who had been permanently excluded.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- e) The transition strand in the place-based plan included transitions into post-16 and there had been representation in the place based working group from Plymouth's colleges;
- f) There were termly monitoring visits in place with colleges to look specifically at cohorts of vulnerable young people to ensure that they were attending well and making good progress;
- g) SHARP were working directly with schools to put on workshops with young people to address vaping and attempt to reduce its usage by young people in Plymouth. Vaping use amongst children and young people would be addressed through the place-based plan to address the issue across the phases of school from primary through to secondary. Since the work had been in place, there were no instances of permanent exclusions in relation to drug related vaping;
- h) Children and young people who were stepping down from Alternative Provision would be managed by the Fair Access Panel, a partnership between the local authority and Plymouth schools. This partnership would meet once a month to review children that were ready to step back into mainstream education.

The Board agreed to note the report.

88. **Q2 2024/25 CYPF and EPS Performance Report**

Paul Stephens (Performance Advisor) and Susan London (Performance Advisor) presented the report to the Panel and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The report reported on quarter two of 2024/25, July to September and there were additions to the standing item report which provided links to alternative sources of published data which provided an opportunity to review historical information;
- b) The next quarter of information would have more up to date benchmarking as data would be available from 2023/24.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- c) The service was working through an assessment backlog of which the service was making rapid progress following additional staffing and more coming on board in January 2025. The service had been hitting its deadlines for six week assessments since the additions and 20 week deadlines were significantly improved. The full backlog would be completed by October 2025, which included any new assessments for plans coming in. Scrutiny of this work was undertaken by the independent SEND Improvement Board which received a monthly report on all the detail that sat within;
- d) The Council continued efforts to increase in Kinship care support;
- e) The social worker workforce was being trained to use the family network meetings routinely as part of every intervention with families;
- f) The Council continued to work with early partners to build the capacity in the system to support families at that early stage. Pilots were developing in Stonehouse where it was the intention to bring together partners to offer a more integrated model of early help delivery, early in the life of problems to meeting family's needs;
- g) Plymouth's targeted support service organised a marketplace for professionals across the city to come together and learn about what services were available from the community voluntary sector as well as statutory agencies;
- h) The Council was looking to have additional support in the MASH around domestic violence and substance misuse. The Probation service was now in the MASH one day a week;
- i) The Council continued to work in a relational way with its families which has been known to be more effective in creating change within families. When families come back through to Children's services quickly following a period of closure, they would usually return to the same team and they were not expected to go through the front door.

The Board agreed to note the report.

89. **Children, Young People and Families Service Quarterly Improvement Update**

Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) introduced the report and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The Children, Young People and Families Improvement Plan had been in place since the inspection of the local authority children services in January 2024;
- b) Progress had been overseen by the Plymouth Children's Improvement Board and put in place as part of the statutory intervention following the focus visit in December 2022. The improvements noted by Plymouth's improvement partner and the DfE, the intervention was lifted earlier in the year;
- c) The Council and its partners agreed to the continuation of a Board, to meet in order to ensure that progress continued to be made in key areas, in particular the Out of Hours service, the local authority designated officer (LADO) arrangements and the response to unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). These areas were identified by Ofsted as 'in need of improvement' and the remedial work had progressed well so much so that Dorset County Council, Plymouth's sector-led improvement partner, was able to confirm to the Board in September that good progress was made;
- d) Improvements at the Front Door were sustained and the refocusing of Plymouth's targeted help services were seeing positive impacts on more families receiving earlier help;
- e) There was however more to do in order to further strengthen the Front Door to children's services, improving the journey of children and families from needing to receiving help;
- f) There were improved timeliness of the completion of assessments and the workforce development undertaken to ensure that they were all of high quality;
- g) In addition, maintaining caseloads within an acceptable range was a key part of enabling social workers to complete consistently high quality practice;
- h) Quality assurance work continued to provide the bedrock of practice improvement;
- i) The particular challenge faced by the service included the recruitment of experienced social workers.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- j) The service faced issues of re-referrals where families received support from early help and they were then closed after a period of intervention to earlier help or more universal services. Those families then did not take up that support and their situation deteriorated again which required further intervention. The service was working hard to address this by ensuring professionals from universal services were involved from the very beginning;
- k) The service was always trying to build capacity in family networks in order to support sustained change over the long term;
- l) The service was successful in recruiting a permanent LADO;
- m) There were 18 UASC and it was commented that Plymouth's numbers were low compared to the formula that was used and it was expected that Plymouth would receive more UASC in the future;
- n) The values and behaviours framework was in its final draft and was being socialised with managers and staff across the service. It was designed in partnership with staff and work on it began when formulating the services' three-year plan. The service in Plymouth would have high expectations, high support, high challenge as its philosophy but this framework would provide detail behind what it meant day to day for all staff in children's services.

The Board agreed to note the report.

90. **Child Exploitation and the Philomena Protocol**

Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) introduced the report and highlighted the following key points:

- a) As with all cities, the nature and scope of child exploitation was changing rapidly and Plymouth had 17 active drug lines for organised crime groups. Those criminals often targeted children's vulnerabilities to exploit and criminalise them;
- b) Over a two year period the team had worked closely with the child centred policing team and made great strides in terms of identifying children at risk of sexual and physical exploitation, offering those children interventions as well as targeting the adults who perpetrated those crimes;
- c) The Philomena Protocol was a police initiative to help, locate and safely return a young person as quickly as possible when they are missing. The basis of the scheme was for vital information about the young person to be recorded on forms which could be used to locate them safely and quickly;
- d) Carers, parents and guardians were encouraged to complete the form with as much detail as possible and to keep that safe somewhere, along with a recent photograph. The form would then require regular updates with new information on description, friends, associates, locations, frequented phone

numbers and identifiers to maximise the opportunity for the young person to be found.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- e) Children and young people that were known to the Youth Justice service were more likely to have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACE) and therefore more likely to have been known to children's services;
- f) 60 – 75% of children that went missing that were responded to by the BeSafe team were known to children's services;
- g) The Adolescent Safety Framework (ASF) gave the service the ability to look at indicators and vulnerabilities that were associated with young people being at risk of exploitation;
- h) When police officers engage with children or young people on the street, they would complete a PPN, a safeguarding form which would highlight any concerns which would then be shared with school, Health and Social services;
- i) Children or young people already involved in violent or aggressive behaviours were already likely involved with exploitation and being targeted by particular people;
- j) Councillors would receive a briefing on exploitation in December.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

91. **Tracking Decisions**

The Board agreed to note the Tracking Decisions Log.

92. **Work Programme**

Members of the Panel added the following to the work programme:

- Family Homes for Plymouth's children. This would include the residential provision plan.

Members of the Panel agreed to recommend to the Scrutiny Management Board that:

The Housing and Community Services Scrutiny Panel has an item from the Plymouth Schools Sporting Partnership to look at the provision of sport and physical activities delivered to schools, including early years.

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