



Oversight and Governance

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CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY PANEL

Wednesday 16 July 2025
5.30 pm
Warspite Room, Council House

Members:

Councillor Blight, Chair
Councillor Wood, Vice Chair
Councillors Allison, Krizanac, McLay, McNamara, Ney, Noble, Steel, Stevens and Taylor.

Members are invited to attend the above meeting to consider the items of business overleaf. This meeting will be webcast and available on-line after the meeting. By entering the Warspite Room, Councillors are consenting to being filmed during the meeting and to the use of the recording for the webcast.

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Tracey Lee
Chief Executive

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

1. To note the Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair for the 2025/26 Municipal Year

For the Panel to note the appointment of Councillor Blight as Chair, and Councillor Wood as Vice-Chair for the 2025-26 Municipal Year.

2. Apologies

To receive apologies for non-attendance submitted by Councillors.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillors will be asked to make any declarations of interest in respect to items on the agenda.

4. Minutes (Pages 1 - 18)

To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting held on 06 February 2025.

5. Chair's Urgent Business

To receive reports on business which in the opinion of the Chair, should be brought forward for urgent consideration.

6. Children's Services Achieving Excellence Improvement and Transformation Plan: (Pages 19 - 42)

7. Youth Justice Annual Report: (Pages 43 - 84)

8. Performance Scorecard: (Pages 85 - 102)

9. Local Area SEND Improvement Plan: (Pages 103 - 114)

10. SEND Capital Programme: (To Follow)

11. School Readiness: (Pages 115 - 122)

12. Action Log: (Pages 123 - 124)

13. Work Programme: (Pages 125 - 128)

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel**Thursday 6 February 2025****PRESENT:**

Councillor Reilly, in the Chair.

Councillor Wood, Vice Chair.

Councillors Mrs Beer, Gilmour, Krizanac, McLay, McNamara, Penrose (Substituting for Councillor Steel), Simpson, Stephens and Tippetts.

Also in attendance: Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications), Councillor Mary Aspinall (Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care), Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Participation and Skills), David Haley (Director of Children's Services), Stephen Beet (Head of Adult Social Care and retained Functions), Susan London (Performance Advisor) and Paul Stephens (Performance Advisor), Scarlett (Youth Parliament), Eden (Youth Parliament), Sienna (Youth Parliament) Rocky (Youth Parliament), Isabelle Kolinsky (Head of Education and Virtual School), Lisa McDonald (Head of SEND), Vivien Lines (Project Consultant), Ian Taylor (Service Manager for Youth Offending) and Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 14:00 and finished at 17:08.

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.

93. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

94. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting that took place on 14 November 2024 were agreed subject to amendments to minute 90, Child Exploitation and the Philomena Protocol.

95. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chairs Urgent Business.

96. **Transitions and Preparing for Adulthood**

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) and Councillor Aspinall (Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care) presented the report to the Panel and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The delivery of the transitions for adulthood project was a fundamental project in

the One Children's Services programme with the intention to help children and families at the earliest sign of need and to provide support ranging from advice through to specialist intervention;

- b) It aimed, in collaboration with all key Plymouth partners, to build on the existing transitions offer to develop a network of services, processes and interactions that were able to understand and predict the need and respond together to help children, young people and families at the earliest opportunity;
- c) Plymouth's vision, which was co-produced with young people was that all children and young people in Plymouth would have their voices heard and have the right support and ambitious opportunities for their futures;
- d) A multi-agency project board was operating since October 2024 with six key priorities with individual work streams;
- e) It was important to work hard for those transitions, starting at an earlier stage to ensure it was as smooth as possible for each individual person;
- f) The project was essential and was going towards ensuring that Plymouth was enabling its young people to live meaningful and fulfilling lives when they were reaching adulthood;
- g) Children and Adult services needed to work more collaboratively to ensure that young people could easily access the right support and advice at the right stages in their lives in order to prepare for adulthood and to live as independently as possible;
- h) Significant progress had been made and Cabinet were committed to ensuring that the project made a positive difference in delivering a better future for Plymouth's young people;
- i) At an LGA peer review in January 2025, Plymouth's direction for transitions was recognised positively.

In response to questions raised, it was reported that:

- j) Plymouth was strengthening its universal offer for all families in the city;
- k) It had been announced that Plymouth would be given a fourth year of government funding on top of the three years funding that had already been allocated to deliver the family hubs programme;
- l) Members were requested to help people understand within their communities what offers were in place as the offer was good, but not enough families or children were accessing those universal provisions;
- m) Work stream six, universal advice and guidance was behind schedule due to not having the right support in place to move the work forward. Work as part of that project would look to ensure advice and guidance for children, young people and

families was accessible to all;

- n) The transitions work took into account all factors in the families lives and was person centred to ensure that there was not an oversaturation of support which could overwhelm;
- o) The work aimed to resolve issues of silo working of agencies and the work was already seeing positive results in Children's services and Adult services working together;
- p) The Project Board, coupled with the six work streams provided the cabinet members with reassurance that silo working in the transition space would become a thing of the past;
- q) Plymouth was aspirational for its care leavers and where those young people had aspirations and interests to go to University, they were supported through the Care Leavers team as well as the Virtual School team. It was acknowledged that the gap between care experienced young people and the national average attending university, was too far apart and there were well made plans to address those issues;
- r) Care Leavers were eligible for additional financial support from the Council in accessing university and they were provided support through their Personal Advisors to ensure they were accessing everything available to them;
- s) Care Leavers were treated as a priority group by both the universities they attended as well as the Council;
- t) The Skills Launchpad had a dedicated worker that worked with Care Leavers if it was their intention to go onto university. Having that dedicated worker had already provided good positive results;
- u) The Plymouth Safeguarding Partnership had four priorities, one of which was to evaluate and improve the way in which Plymouth helped children that experienced domestic abuse. Staff were being better trained and had a range of tools and resources available to them.

Action: The Committee would be provided the total amount of financial support provided by the Council to Care Leavers when attending University.

Action: The work of the project board for Transitions would look to involve the Plymouth Parent Carer Voice with the specific theme of oversaturation of services and whether families felt overwhelmed.

Action: The Chair of PPCV would send out an invite to Councillors of the Panel to attend the Plymouth Parent Carer Voice Transition Preparation for Adulthood conference.

Action: Transitions to Adulthood update would be added to the work programme to understand the strengths of the project in six months, but also to evaluate areas they might still need to be strengthened. The relevant colleagues from Health would

be invited to address whether Plymouth had the right system in place from the new legislation in which children and young people experiencing/experienced domestic abuse were survivors in their own right.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

97. **Local Area SEND Improvement Plan Progress Report**

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

- a) The Local Area SEND Improvement Plan progress report summarised the progress made against the SEND Local Area priority action plans;
- b) The update had been collated as part of the SEND Critical Review across January 2025 and aimed to establish what progress had been made since the inspection to test what impact this had on children and young people;
- c) The review had six distinct elements:
 - A new local area SEND self-evaluation form (SEF);
 - Parent Carer Voice Survey (PPCV);
 - A critical review workshop to review progress against all the action on the Local Area SEND Improvement Plan;
 - The creation of a strategic case study from each of the nine priority areas to demonstrate progress and learning since the inspection;
 - Collaborative audits of six children including multi-agency partnership auditing of the children's files and a visit to each of the children in their schools or settings;
 - Discussion groups with children and young people in three mainstream schools about their experience led by the Participation team.
- d) The SEF had been fully updated to represent and evaluate the current work of the local area to support children and young people with SEND and to be in line with the Ofsted Local Area SEND inspection criteria;
- e) The team had robust governance arrangements in place which had a cycle of review and challenge to endorse what happened on a regular basis;
- f) The SEND Critical Review workshop was held with all partners on 09 January 2025 to review the SEND action plan. The workshop facilitated groups including the Department for Education (DFE) Advisor and the Head of SEND from Telford and Wrekin Council;

- g) The findings from the critical review were moderated by the Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills and the Head of SEND. Of the 55 actions in the plan, seven were completed with evidence of clear impact on children and young people. 31 were completed and were being monitored for evidence of impact on children and young people. 17 were deemed to not be fully complete and there were clear actions in progress. The DfE advisor had endorsed the evidence base which would grow over a further two month period;
- h) Significant progress had been made in implementing the Plymouth Local Area SEND Improvement plan with key actions being completed and on-going efforts in place to address the remaining areas;
- i) The Critical Review, in conjunction with the action plan tracker provided evidence of the impact and effectiveness of those actions, demonstrating a commitment to improving outcomes for the children and young people with SEND in Plymouth.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- j) The module of learning disability and autism had been created in partnership with the NHS, ICB, Livewell SW and PPCV and it had been rolled out across the Local Area Partnership;
- k) The Resource Directory that was also co-created would be launched for the Local Area in order to have the right resources available to those that required it;
- l) £740,000 was made available to the Education, Participation and Skills service to ensure they were processing EHCP requests on time;
- m) The 20 week timeframe for EHPC's was the biggest challenge for the service due to the significant number of out of time plans the service had coming out of the Autumn 2024 term. As of 31 January 2025, the service was showing as meeting 18% of Plans within the 20 week timescale.

This showed the service as being on the right trajectory as it had been at 0% for a considerable amount of time. The service was ensuring it hit more of the 20 week timescale for plans as well as improving the Waiting Well offer which aligned with what the NHS were doing to make sure that when families were waiting for a plan, it was not a pause for them. Plymouth had rebranded the funding, the resource and the support that was available to schools to make sure that the waiting time didn't significantly impact the progress they could be making;

- n) A recommendation from Budget scrutiny was for the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel to have the figures of EHCP plans and their progression at regular intervals;
- o) Parents told the PPCV survey that they would like an increased number of the wraparound care for older children during school holidays as what was available in school holidays with more complex needs by way of clubs was not suitable, particularly those that were deaf or visually impaired. Plymouth had woven into the plans a requirement to increase that provision into the future;

- p) There had been a reduction in the numbers of SEN children being suspended which had been due to a number of factors and one in which the Council had improved the way it tracked and monitored suspensions and then had challenging conversations with schools around why children were being suspended;
- q) The Vulnerable Pupils panel was held monthly with a very strong multi-agency partnership across the local area and had supported schools to reduce the risk of permanent exclusion for Plymouth's most vulnerable pupils;
- r) There was focussed work on helping children to attend school more regularly for those children with special educational needs and disabilities. Plymouth's trend in attendance in the 2024/25 academic year was not as strong and there were a number of parents/carers that had chosen to educate their children at home;
- s) Inclusion would be a new area looked at under the new Ofsted framework.

Action: Lisa McDonald would speak with the NHS to enquire as to whether the Oliver McGowan training for Learning Disabilities and Autism could be included within the next wave of mandatory training for the Local Area.

Action: The service would review the holiday and food programme to ensure it was inclusive off all children in the city.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

98. **Pupil Place Planning Report**

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

- a) The report summarised information produced in the latest pupil forecast model based on the January 2024 school census data;
- b) The information was used to forecast the number of school places which would be required across primary and secondary schools in Plymouth;
- c) The birth rate in Plymouth had been in decline since 2017/18 and as a result there would be a decline in pupil numbers across the city and nationally;
- d) The academic year in 2027/28 would see a reduction of 13% across the primary age cohort across all localities in the city but the localities in the west and southwest would see the largest reduction in numbers;
- e) Secondary school numbers were expected to continue its increasing trend in numbers until 2026/27 when it was expected to decline as the primary school reduction in numbers flowed through;
- f) The SEND sufficiency plan had seen the council work with schools to develop

resourced provision for children with Educational Health and Care Plans (EHCP). One primary school was confirmed and the council was moving forward with planning in respect of buildings. The council was holding initial discussions with one other primary school and two secondary schools;

- g) In addition to resource provision, the council was working with schools to develop a targeted funding model which would start in April 2025. The model was for small cohorts of children with SEND in schools and schools would need space to meet the needs of the children.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- h) A meeting had taken place with the Schools Forum to produce a strategic pupil place plan and the plan was in the process of being updated and would be available after April 2025;
- i) It was commented that the forecasting model used was as accurate as it could be and was using live data from the NHS for births in the city. The subnational data would be updated in May 2025 following Brexit and COVID-19 pandemic pausing that national work;
- j) The Targeted Funding Model was one of the streams of work which would look to redirect teaching expertise rather than losing some teachers as part of the national recruitment and retention issues;
- k) Where the local area was opening the resource provisions for children and young people with an EHCP, Plymouth was targeting those areas where there was a significant need and where families required support. Plymouth was working to ensure that there was a community approach to prevent children and young people travelling across Plymouth and out of their communities.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

99. **Q3 2024/25 Performance Report**

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

- a) The performance report gave data for Quarter three which represented October, November and December 2024;
- b) Children's Social Care Benchmarking had been updated to figures as of 31 March 2024.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- c) Children's services predicted a rise in the number of Child Protection Plans following its response to the Ofsted inspection in 2022 and as a result of improving its response to thresholds and decision making. The next phase would ensure that children and families were receiving the right help and support;

- d) It was acknowledged that there were some children that if they had received different support other than statutory child protection intervention which was earlier, harm could have been prevented;
- e) There was a high proportion of children who were experiencing neglect that were subject to re-referrals into the service. The service would see improvement, but that improvement was not sustained following the stepping down to universal services. It was acknowledged that the re-referral rate was high, but there was a high level of quality assurance in that space. The service was also building capacity better around the family to make the change and improvements more sustainable. The council was also strengthening its early help offer to ensure that when a social worker was not involved, there was sufficient support in the families community;
- f) There was a reliance on agency workers due to the vacancy rate within Children's services which was pressuring the service to maintain good caseload levels for its workforce to provide a successful intervention;
- g) Plymouth's number of children and young people in unregistered provision had decreased to two and was positive for the service in which that number had fluctuated significantly. The two young people in their provisions were in provisions that were CQC registered but not Ofsted registered;
- h) Councillor Laing had a number of conversations with Ofsted and the Department for Education to speed up the process for registering provisions as this was having an impact on children and young people using unregistered provisions;
- i) There were around 20 children and young people that were in residential placements ready to step down to high support foster placements, but those foster placements were not available for the city. The Family homes for Plymouth children was a new scheme which was developed to not just provide additional financial support to Plymouth City Council foster carers that were able to take children with more challenging and complex needs, but also a better support package wrapped around them. The model provided an additional £800 month fee to Plymouth City Council carers as there was a requirement to have at least one carer at home all the time to meet the needs of those complex children;
- j) The inaugural Fostering Summit that took place in 2024 was successful and of the actions identified most were implemented. Plymouth aimed to be a council that valued foster carers by listening and implementing changes following their suggestions.

Action: Children's Social Care workforce to be added to the work programme.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

100. **Children, Young People and Families Service Q3 Improvement Update**

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

- a) The report provided an update against Plymouth's Children's Services improvement plan which was put in place following an Ofsted visit in January 2024;
- b) There continued to be improvement in key areas highlighted by Ofsted;
- c) There was consultation on the development of an integrated front door to Children's services which was a key first step in Plymouth's implementation of the Children's Wellbeing and Education Bill;
- d) There was continued stability in the Front Door with more families receiving targeted help;
- e) There were sustained manageable caseloads within the service;
- f) Families were receiving timely assessments;
- g) There had been positive progress made from the services quality assurance work;
- h) A high proportion of children and families were being seen on time and having an up to date plan;
- i) The focussed work to improve Pathway Plans for care experienced young people was working well and there was good progress of young people being in Education, Employment or Training (EET);
- j) There would be further improvements to service including maximising family and community resources and finding earlier permanence for children in care;
- k) Further improvements to the service would continue with the support of Dorset County Council, Plymouth's Sector Led Improvement Partners (SLIP) and the independent chair of Plymouth Children's Services Improvement Board, Theresa Leavy.

Scarlett, Eden, Sienna and Rocky from Plymouth's Youth Parliament asked the following questions:

Question.	When we visited we spoke about services needing to be safe, kind and equal and it was great that this was adopted in the plan, but can you tell us about how you were doing this as it was not specifically mentioned in the report.
Response:	Keeping children safe featured strongly in the report and that had been an important focus for the service. We make sure we that any children who are at risk of any safeguarding needs are identified and protected

	<p>quickly. The report talked about numbers of children on Child Protections (CP) Plans and timeliness of reviews for those children who had CP plans and the quality assurance evidence would support that Plymouth had a safe system in place for children and young people.</p> <p>In terms of being kind, Plymouth had a real strong priority in the improvement plan around relationships between children and their worker, whether that was a social worker or a family support worker. That had been hard to achieve when Plymouth had a number of vacancies of social workers which resulted in the service bringing in a number of temporary members of staff which wasn't a good thing and didn't help to build relationships as part of a kind approach. The service had worked hard around its recruitment of permanent social workers and it had made progress in 2024/25, but more progress was required. It was still expected that those temporary members of staff were kind and a lot of work had been completed with managers and the workforce as a whole on the culture within the service which was about being respectful and being kind.</p> <p>There was not enough in the report around being equal, but you might see more in relation to Plymouth SEND improvement work where we've been thinking about children with additional needs, children with speech and language needs and how Plymouth made sure that those children were supported to engage in mainstream education to have the same quality of opportunity and the same outcomes.</p> <p>Those principles of being equal, kind and safe had gone through all our work in both education and children's social work. An away day took place yesterday with David Haley's (Director of Children's Services) senior management team and 'equal, kind and safe' was part of those discussions and whether Plymouth was really achieving it. The next head teacher conference would be called equal, kind and safe to keep that focus.</p> <p>There was probably more progress in some areas than others at this point in time, but Plymouth remained committed to that being the way we work and being committed to those three principles and delivering on them more comprehensively over time.</p> <p>Councillor Laing added:</p> <p>Plymouth was working hard to bring children and young people that were in placements outside of Plymouth back to the city to ensure all children had equal access to a placement where they ought to be. Plymouth was creating its own provision in Plymouth to ensure that there was more opportunity to have residential placements in the city. The service was also working hard to increase the number of foster carers in Plymouth so that we have fostering placements. The council was actively trying to have foster carers who could deal with young people with more complex and challenging needs that were in residential</p>
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	placements but could be in a foster placement if the foster carers were available who had the right skills to support them to be in foster care.
Question.	How are you making sure young people's voices are being heard when writing these reports?
	<p>The service had kept checking in with Plymouth's Youth Parliament and in the last quarter I (Vivien Lines) had been back to Youth Parliament and to our Young Safeguarders to talk about progress and hear your views. In specific areas of work we're really making sure that we have young people's views embedded in what we're doing. Councillor Laing talked about our children's homes developments and we are making sure that we really co-design those homes with our care experienced young people so that their views feed in all the time and not just into a report at the end, but into the work as it progressed.</p> <p>The service had young people involved in its recruitment work, children's homes development, the on-going work for the three year plan and we're just starting a piece of work in response to government reforms which will really change the way we're delivering our support to families. It was also discussed at the away day yesterday, how we get young people and families co-designing this with us and making sure that we are asking key questions and listening to the views of children and families along the way.</p>
Question.	Do you think there's any area of your work where young people's views could be better assimilated or increased?
Response:	<p>The Children's homes work presented a really crucial opportunity to get that right and do that well. We've had to get the work started quickly and so we want to make sure that doesn't mean that we do it without thinking about what children need, this is important.</p> <p>Councillor Laing added:</p> <p>David Haley and I reflected on the Listening Care Council in which I used to go periodically to the meetings and meet young people and there was a good, 'you said, we did' model. That model had dropped off, but as a result of a conversation which was had today, we would look to revive that model or look to ensure that the right channels were in place to be able to challenge Councillors or David Haley.</p> <p>David Haley added:</p> <p>We would look to provide the forward plan for scrutiny and the Corporate Parenting Board across the year and you would choose which reports to would like to be part of in writing as it would have your direct voice woven into the reports.</p>

Question.	What is the simple step by step plan for you to achieve the improvements that children, young people, parents and carers identified?
Response:	<p>A key part of the improvement plan and the approach that we've taken over the last year had been about stabilising our workforce. We've really focussed on recruiting and retaining permanent social workers across our service. We have around 200 social workers in the service and 25% of them (40) were agency social workers with some vacant posts which impacted on the things you were talking about such as relationships between the worker and the young person which helped them to understand their plan, help them to understand what was needed, what's the work that was happening and having a good relationship so they felt listened to, felt valued.</p> <p>We made good progress in stabilising our management team and all our senior managers were permanent. We've reduced the number of agency social workers and increased the numbers of permanent social workers, but there were still too many agency workers in the service. This was a national issue and not just one being seen at a local level. The service had tried to introduce a number of different ways to attract people to come to Plymouth and make sure that we were investing in their career and keeping them here, but it was still challenging so we've got a lot more to do, we're going to keep focussed on that. The other side of the plan was in ensuring that the workers that Plymouth did have were highly skilled, that they're good and knew how to communicate well with young people. Our workers have been developing the ways in which they write all of their documents, their assessments, their plans, they write them to the child now so they use language that is accessible and help the child to understand the concerns at the time and what is the plan in a family friendly and child friend way.</p> <p>Councillor Laing added:</p> <p>At the Star Awards we had three events at every year for the different age groups and our 18 plus care leavers this year was the best attended. Everyone received a certificate and their workers fed into those where you could then see the individual nature of them and their achievements and what they've done and the progress they've made in that year is celebrated with everybody in the room. That was one way for Councillors to meet and talk to young people.</p> <p>I have been a Councillor for a while and we were seeing those young people growing up and it's a really lovely way to celebrate what they do and I was taken by how many of our 18-25 years olds came to that because that not people whose foster carers or people they lived with bringing them, they come of their own accord and they want to come because they are celebratory events.</p> <p>The Corporate Parenting Board which I chair has good news stories at the end of every agenda so we could hear about young people getting</p>

	into university or someone representing the country. We will write a card back to young people and I've been to a graduation of one of our young people who kindly invited me, so we do have those connection points.
Supplementary:	Can you elaborate on the question particularly around the step-by-step plan on how you can achieve the improvements for the children, young people, parents and carers that were identified in the report?
Response:	<p>The step-by-step plan looked to ensure that Plymouth had a stable workforce, skilling them up and training them on key areas that needed to improve and the final part of that was how we would see results. The third part was to evaluate our improvement work to make sure that the difference that we were expecting was happening under the quality assurance framework.</p> <p>David Haley added:</p> <p>We did a really good piece of work with young people and parents on the SEND action plan which was to present the plan in a child and young person friendly way and I wonder if we need to do that with our plan. We do have a three year improvement plan in place which is set out in a very adult speak way and it might be helpful if we could work with you as a group, or the right group of young people to make that plan accessible to young people in a better way so if that would be something you want to work with us on, then I would delegate that to Vivien to follow that up with Stuart Hogg.</p> <p>Councillor Laing added:</p> <p>I would reiterate what I said about the Listening Care Council and was something that needed to be restored because it did work well before and young people in those groups did value.</p>
Question.	What are your priorities after this report and how can we see results having an impact and making a difference?
Response:	<p>Priorities for us in the next phase are making sure that families get help earlier so that we're working with our colleagues in education, schools and health services to make sure that when families need help that they get that help quickly so that we're not waiting for things to become really complex or problematic but that support is preventing needs from escalating and you'll see results from that by seeing fewer children needed to come into care, fewer children needing child protection support and more families will be receiving that earlier help. Families would get the help they need the first time and one time instead of families needing to come into the service three or four times before they get the help they need. So we would see some really improved patterns, trends and outcomes. Children and young people would also be telling</p>

	<p>us that they've got a good relationship with their worker and they understand what's happening. We would also expect to see fewer complaints and more positive feedback from children and young people in our audits when looking at practice.</p> <p>Councillor Laing added:</p> <p>We had an item at today's meeting which looked at data and we talked about re-referrals within 12 months which is what councillors usually go to first as a real indicator of we're getting things right because families are having the right intervention for the right amount of time which means they don't need to come back to us.</p> <p>We've done a lot of work on the MASH which is the first contact that families will have, that's been a really intense bit of work because we weren't getting things right there and we've seen that the changes are being sustained which is really encouraging, so I think those are the indicators that the plan is working.</p> <p>Care Leavers and their outcomes and their futures is something that we need to keep working on and when we see that more of those young people were in jobs or further education or education of some other kind, then that will also be another indicator that we're making improvements.</p> <p>Our recruitment of foster carers was important which would enable the service to provide stable long term relationships with that person. Recruiting more local authority foster carers would also be another part of delivering this plan and again we are making good progress on that.</p>
Supplementary:	<p>We do a national consultation called 'Make your Mark' every year that highlights young people's priorities from across the UK and sometimes here so how can you take those priorities around what we voted for into account when you're making these plans in the future?</p>
Response:	<p>When we were designing our plan we came and spoke to you and you helped us shape the priorities which worked really well and that's why we ended up with a plan that had 'equal, kind and safe' embedded in it, because that's what you told us was important so we can do that again and we can come and co-design this with you. We can agree priorities and plans with you, shape them with you through our mechanism whether that's with Youth Parliament or our children in care of young safeguarders.</p>

In response to questions raised by councillors it was reported that:

- l) There were a number of areas in which a practice auditor would advise work was not where it should be and a common factor was drift in the plan, where actions had been set but hadn't been achieved on time. This was a common factor where there

had been changes to workers disrupting progress from families and not achieving the outcomes that were set out. The plan looked to improve the supervision and management oversight of caseloads. Where it was identified that practice was not at the level required during the audits, the service would quickly put that right and feed learning back into the workforce;

- m) Within practice week discussions there was always equal weight to good practice and identifying practice that still needed improve;
- n) The service was building a better library of good practice;
- o) It was a requirement within the audit work that the service made contact with the children and their parents to seek their views as part of Plymouth's evaluation of whether something is inadequate, requires improvement or good;
- p) As part of Practice Weeks, children and young people would be spoken to a part of those weeks.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

101. **Family Homes for Plymouth Children**

Councillor 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 first Mockingbird model had been launched as there was a plan for a further three;
- b) There was good progress on the council's offer to Plymouth's Kinship carers and for its Special Guardians;
- c) The council was creating more provision in the city which would in turn look to tackle some of the services budget pressure whilst also gaining more control over provision used for Plymouth's cared for children.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

102. **Young Female Violence Prevention Programme**

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

- a) There had been a spike in October 2024 in which there were a number of girls committing violent offences which had almost doubled from 20% or the whole cohort of children pre-pandemic to 38.5% in October 2024;
- b) Since October 2024, the Youth Justice service had worked with 19 girls and their families and carers whose offending was violent in nature. Much of the

violence was outside of the home appeared to be pre-meditated in nature, being uploaded to social media;

- c) Of the 19 girls that had worked with the service, only one had re-offended;
- d) It had taken time to build trusting relationships with those young women to understand the reasons for the violence which had been predominately as a result of peer pressure;
- e) To prevent other children following a similar pattern we realised that we needed to raise awareness in schools and the council had commissioned youth workers from Plymouth Argyle Trust to engage with groups in schools;
- f) Violence involving boys had seen a 6% year on year decrease with the majority of violence involving them being linked to exploitation through county lines;
- g) Child female violence had increased in all local authorities in Devon and Cornwall which mirrored a national picture. The council therefore continued to work with schools to educate children of the consequences of violence.

Scarlett, Eden, Sienna and Rocky from Plymouth's Youth Parliament asked the following questions:

Question:	When we were discussing this the other week we felt like there was a lot of ambiguity with what was being said and we didn't really quite understand. Can we have more detail around the numbers so we can understand the issues better. What were the levels of seriousness of the offences and how many of the 19 girls were against strangers and filmed for social media?
Response:	<p>There was evidence of 11 offences that were uploaded to social media including Telegram to closed groups which were invite only. Of those 11 assaults on strangers which were filmed in various locations across the city. In terms of seriousness of those offences, there was grievous bodily harm down to physical harm of the victims receiving cuts and bruises.</p> <p>An example was shared of 15 girls attacking three girls in Drakes Circus all of which didn't know one another. The attack was premeditated and the girls had setup three points of view to record the assaults.</p> <p>It was known that other assaults happened based on differing schools.</p>
Question:	What were the numbers of girls like when compared to boys in the city. The report didn't specify the rates of male violence which was happening at a higher rate than female violence.
Response:	There had been a spike in the numbers of girls coming through the system than ever before. The numbers of boys committing violent offences had dropped by 6% and a lot of the violence had been orchestrated by adults where there had been drugs involved. It was noted that the service had a good grip on boy violence which was mirrored

	<p>through the police data.</p> <p>There were 46 boys open to the service for violent offences and there would be 11 girls with the service at the end of February as a number of their order would've concluded. 38% of boys open to the service re-offended with violence.</p>
Question:	What are Plymouth Argyle going to be doing in the work with young people and how were they going to be helping involve young people in the process?
Response:	<p>Plymouth Argyle Trust had 120 youth workers employed who were both male and female offering a wide range of programmes including sporting interventions, behaviour work and working with families. It had taken a long time to build trusting relationships with young people due to a lack of trust in the police and youth justice workers when we come in and ask questions. We were hoping to utilise the skills of the youth workers from Plymouth Argyle to go into schools and raise awareness of the consequences of what happens to these girls when they do these offences. The service was confident that the interventions were being rectified which showed in the re-offending data, but the aim was to get in their earlier with schools.</p>
Question:	What are you doing to look at the root causes and see if you need to involve more services around intervention and prevention and what else was being done to help these girls?
Response:	<p>Around offending there was a lot of support around them and indeed the victims who had been assaulted also get a lot of support. As this was a new and developing picture it was thought it was better to involve Plymouth Argyle. There was a spike nationally and there were interventions run in London but there were no accredited programmes for girl on girl violence. Plymouth was working with the Youth Justice Board to address this.</p> <p>Trevi house have been involved since the start and this topic was raised at the Safer Executive meeting which met quarterly. They had seen the spikes as well for the young women at Trevi House.</p> <p>Plymouth had seen the spike which had started to go down, but we couldn't be complacent around that and we need to continue to build a picture and work with other agencies.</p>

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- h) There had been huge difficulty in influencing national organisations to remove platforms where the violence was being shared;
- i) A social worker was doing great work around female empowerment to help

steer girls away from peer pressure environments;

- j) The Youth Justice service was able to offer the same level of support to victims as to those that were the perpetrators for the first time as a result of additional funding received;
- k) It was recognised that some of the girls instigating the violence were the ones that were recording, but were not subject to prosecution in this country;
- l) The Targeted support service aimed to intervene with children at an earlier age to prevent their behaviour escalating into something that was criminal.

The Panel agreed to write to the relevant minister requesting them to look at the laws around uploading violent offences to social media platforms.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

103. **Tracking Decisions**

The Panel agreed to note the tracking decisions log.

104. **Work Programme**

The Panel agreed to add the following to the work programme:

- Transitions to adulthood
- Children's use of social media
- Child Exploitation
- School readiness
- Female Empowerment Programme

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting:	16 July 2025
Title of Report:	Achieving Excellence 2024-27 – year one review of the strategic plan for Children’s Services
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Children’s Social Care, Culture and Communications)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Director for Childrens Services)
Author:	Vivien Lines
Contact Email:	Vivien.lines@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	Click here to enter text.
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

This report sets out a review of progress with the implementation of Achieving Excellence, our three-year strategic plan for Children’s Services which was developed in 2024 following extensive consultation with staff, young people and partners. The reports highlights significant achievements across all of the year one milestones for the ten agreed priorities in the first year and sets out the priority milestones for 2025-26. The plan has been updated to reflect significant new priorities as a result of national and local priorities including the delivery of the Families First Pathfinder reforms.

Key achievements in 2024-25 include;

- The extension of the Family Hub offer 0-18 across Plymouth as part of a wider early help response with increased take up by vulnerable families, effectively refocusing the Council’s Targeted Help offer for children and families to support more families when need is first identified.
- Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership led the development and implementation of guidance and toolkits in four priority practice areas across the partnership; neglect, child sexual abuse, domestic abuse and adolescent safeguarding.
- Improved approaches for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including implementing the Ordinarily Available Provision, supporting more children with additional needs to successfully access mainstream education.
- Improved approaches through our Place Based working arrangements to improve attendance and to reduce rates of Electively Home Education (EHE).
- Sustaining improvements to our ‘Front Door’ ensuring a timely response to requests for help and protection and improvements to the quality of assessment and planning for children open to a social worker.

- Delivering a comprehensive programme of improvements so that more children in care benefit from family homes close to Plymouth and agreeing investment for PCC to open children's homes.
- Improved practices so that Education, Health and Care needs assessment timeliness improved to 90% in March 2025 compared to 44.1% in March 2024 with a clear plan in place for completion of outstanding plans and reviews.
- £13m high needs capital allocation agreed to deliver a new SEND Sufficiency Plan to increase special school places by 88, and to increase resourced provision across the city to enable more children with an EHCP to be educated in their local mainstream school.
- An effective focus on improving arrangements for children around key transition points, leading to earlier planning and more positive transitions through collaborative approach.

Key priorities for 2025-26 include;

- Further developing our early help and Family Hub offer delivering evidenced based interventions to reach more vulnerable families and prevent their needs from increasing.
- Introducing a new 'front door' to help and protection, a multi-disciplinary 'Families First' team supporting families to access earlier help and support.
- Fully implementing a Belonging Framework to identify and support vulnerable children to be in full time education, reducing rates of EHE.
- Embedding best practice for SEND across schools and settings so that fewer children need a statutory assessment to get the support they need
- Implement the Families First Partnership reforms with partners, so that more families benefit from a stable workforce, earlier family help and a confident child protection response when it is needed and the right children are subject to CIN, CPPs, the PLO and in care at the right time.
- Ensure effective family decision making models ensuring Family Network Meetings are held with all families at an early point, and Family Group Conferences when needed, to ensure that family and community resources are maximised in the family's support plan.
- Further develop approaches so that all children in care and care leavers experience good health, accommodation, education and employment outcomes.
- Recruiting more foster carers, further enhancing how we support them, and opening our first children's home.
- Continuing to ensure EHC Plans are more timely and implement the revised model of funding to support fewer children to need a statutory plan.
- Implementation of the SEND capital strategy to develop provision to meet need in priority areas.
- Development of an updated short breaks offer, and a co-produced commissioning approach that is flexible, equitable and accessible and meets needs.
- Sustain focused partnership approaches to further improve preparation for particularly vulnerable groups including young people with SEND and care experienced young people.
- Delivery of a comprehensive workforce development programme aligned to core improvement priorities including a leadership and management development programme impacting positively on behaviours and ambition for children and young people.

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Recommendations and Reasons

- I. It is recommended that the achievements and next steps are noted.

Alternative options considered and rejected

- I. None

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

Keeping children and adults in Plymouth safe.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Achieving Excellence sets out a programme of activity aligned to Children's Services MTFP priorities and actions designed to reduce spend in high pressure areas including SEND, home to school transport, short breaks for disabled children, children's social work staffing costs and placements for children in care.

Financial Risks

A number of work areas included in the three-year plan currently create a significant financial pressure for the Council. The milestones in the plan are designed to address these pressures and reduce spend in key areas at the same time as sustaining improved outcomes for children and young people.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

None

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.*

The programme is designed to develop more preventative approaches and support inclusive approaches for children with additional needs, keep children safe in family settings, or other settings when this is required, close to Plymouth and support young people to become successful adults. These developments include tackling child poverty through a strong and effective early help and statutory offer to children, young people and families.

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 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							
B	Equalities Impact Assessment (if applicable)							
C	Climate 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.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)
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	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.						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	N/A	Leg	N/A	Mon Off	N/A	HR	N/A	Assets	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Vivien Lines Project Consultant											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes Date agreed: 08/07/2025											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Laing agreed verbally Date approved: 08/07/2025											

I. Introduction

Achieving Excellence 2024-27 was developed early in 2024 following the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services and the ten priorities and milestones for the three years of the plan were informed by extensive engagement with staff from across the service, partners and children, young people and families. The plan was designed to drive improvements in service provision, practice and outcomes for children, young people and their families across Plymouth. Young people told us that the plan should support Plymouth to be ‘equal, kind and safe,’ and there is a strong focus on these areas through the plan as a result.

Milestones for each priority were set out for each of the three years of the plan and informed the detailed service improvements plans in place across the service as well as the One Children’s Services transformation programme. A detailed review of progress has been completed at the end of the first year and this report provides an overview of key achievements. This review has also informed an update of the milestones set for 2025-26 to ensure they reflect changes since the plan was originally developed.



Achieving Excellence

A Three-Year Strategic Plan to develop, sustain and embed good and outstanding practice for all children, young people and families in Plymouth.

***Progress Against Milestones
2024-2025***



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Strategic Priority 1: Early Help		
Vision: A strong and effective early help offer which reaches children, young people and families who need it when they need it and improves outcomes and destinations for all children and young people and families.		
Agreed Milestones for 2024-25	Progress Highlights During the Year	Impact
Develop & implement Early Help Strategy & governance. Implement Family Hubs & review Children's Centre offer.	Robust strategy with key stakeholders, collaborative frameworks established. 11 Family Hubs developed, 2-year continuation contracts announced. Satellite sites in development. Increasing targeting of vulnerable groups.	Continue to extend across the City. 22,000 families part of the Family Hub network. Offer over 300 sessions per week. Deliver over 4000 weekly drop in sessions per year. Deliver over 100 courses per year. Supported over 600 families with 1:1 work. Supported over 220 Dads and Male carers. Supported 150 EAL Families.
Develop citywide database & implement Outcomes Star	Staff trained in Outcome Star. Being used to show family growth and progress.	Improved tracking of family outcomes and evidence of impact of interventions on key outcomes for priority groups (see case study).
Implement PSCP strategies in priority areas of neglect, CSA, Safeguarding adolescents, domestic abuse	Focused work across the partnership to implement partnership practice guidance and toolkits in identified areas.	Improved identification and multi-agency collaboration. Quality assurance evidence some improvement in use of toolkits (e.g. GCP2) but not yet evidencing consistently good practice.
Implement guidance on Ordinarily Available Provision	Co-production approach to develop. Resource launched in June 2024 with 80 partners, RISE partnership support for launch and implementation.	320 partners and families attended the OAP sessions. Over 80% reporting they feel that the resource will improve practice and understanding. An Increased percentage of schools are delivering a consistent universal approach. The EP team is reporting an improvement.
Implement SEND early help funding offer to schools	Targeted funding and mainstream banding proposal approved at School's Forum, 20 early adopter schools. Application window for targeted funding published and Panels established for April 2025.	Developed our targeted offer with the introduction of the expanded special schools' outreach and the targeted funding model. By September 2025 up to 30 mainstream school non EHCP internal provisions supporting 300 children in the city to access education. Targeted funding supporting up to 750 children without an EHCP to be successful in mainstream school.
Codesign local offer website with parent carer forum	Co-produced Graduated Approach to Inclusion website launched January 2025.	Over 2000 visits to the platform in its first month. Feedback from families and wider partners about the effectiveness of the resource. Reduced application for EHCNA (-25%) and increased engagement with early identification and targeted support including outreach.
Complete trials of early language development programme	A comprehensive training programme related to PEEP is being used across Family Hubs. Increased focus on ensuring that parents/carers have access to high quality information and support to develop home learning environments to help them be effective communicative partners for their children and provide	During 2024/2025, Plymouth Family Hubs successfully delivered 127 evidence-based courses, focusing on key areas such as attachment, home learning, early language development, school readiness, SEND support, and parenting skills. These courses reached and engaged approximately 1,000 parents and caregivers, providing them with practical tools, confidence, and knowledge to better understand, support, and connect with their baby or

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	conducive environments for language and communication development.	child. This offer forms a core part of our early help approach, ensuring families are supported to give their children the best possible start in life.
Develop support for vulnerable pupils to stay in education	EHE Prevention Pilot, early identification data used to work with small cohorts. FHs providing outreach. Improved support to children with SEND,	91.1% of young people SEND are in EET, an increase of 19% compared to January 2023 (72%). Numbers EHE have increased. Impact expected during 2025/26 as a result of refocused approach through Belonging Framework.

Early Help: Examples of improved experiences of and outcomes for children and families

Family Hubs providing early help and prevention to vulnerable families;

Concern: Parent needing support with behaviour strategies, child's emotional well-being/emotional regulation and mum's mental health.

Intervention: Incredible Years Home Coaching for managing emotional regulation and VIG for improving quality of attachment.

Impact: The child is now receiving frequent quality interactions with their parent which has been observed during the shared reviews. This will increase the child's sense of safety, security, and stability. Outcomes Star shows +4-5 across health, how I feel, keeping my children safe, friends and community, children's behaviour and routine.

Feedback: "At first I was nervous. However, as the sessions have gone on they have empowered me in ways I cannot believe. Thank you so much. You are awesome."

Implementation of Ordinarily Available Provision; A leader from the Council for Disabled Children has said: "That is gold standard, isn't it?! absolutely couldn't fault this...superb!". **A parent said:** "The site gave me tools to engage in a more equal conversation with the school about my child's support."

Skills Launchpad: A young person with a challenging home life, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and a young carer has been given a bus pass through to next march, and money to buy appropriate clothes so they can begin college in September and remain in education.

Father said "Thank you for the help and support to R through the funding and the work experience. It had made a big difference, R is now a lot more confident to do stuff on his own and taking control, like sending emails for information etc. and thank you so much for sorting payment for Ms Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) card."

"I can't thank the funders enough for all the hairdressing equipment they have provided. Their support means the world to me and has really set me up for success in my career. I am so excited to start college with all my new gear and I feel more than ready for it!"

Key Milestones for 2025-26

- Further develop our universal provision, Family Hubs and partnership early help in communities to better meet need in local areas and reduce the need for statutory interventions with families.
- Develop shared data and analytics to identify and reach vulnerable families early to provide early help support and prevent more complex needs.
- Increase number of assessments and interventions provided at the early help phase and reduce rates of statutory assessment.
- More families receive early help support and Outcomes Star evidences improved outcomes.
- OAP Guidance and best practice embedded, well understood and implemented by schools and settings - fewer children requiring statutory assessment.
- Local offer GATI website providing easy and accessible information fully utilised and effective implementation of targeted funding for schools.
- Evidence-based universal early language development programme in place across the city and evidence of more children accessing appropriate intervention.
- Fully implement Belonging Framework, identify and support vulnerable pupils to be in full time education reducing rates of EHE, part time timetables, exclusions and absence.
- Evidence-based packages of support are reducing rates of NEET in groups of at risk of young people.

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Strategic Priority 2: Targeted Help		
Vision: Practices which build family and community networks and support more children to remain safely in their families. Reshaping the Targeted Help offer to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and reduce the number of families receiving statutory assessments. Develop and implement clear pathways between early help, Targeted Help and statutory social work. Targeted approaches to improved educational attendance and attainment for vulnerable groups.		
Agreed Milestones for 2024-25	Progress Highlights During the Year	Impact
Continued delivery of an effective MASH response. Review criteria for 'MASH' response and develop as a single point of entry.	QA including SLIP evidence an effective 'front door'. Implementation of an Integrated Front Door model for multi-agency decision making on help and protection.	March 2025 - 70% of MASH contact decisions were made within one working day and 99% were decided within two working days. The number of referrals was sustained at a lower level - 255 in March compared to 443 in Jan 2024, as families receive earlier help (see case studies).
Extend Targeted Help offer. Develop clear and agreed pathways between services,	Family Hubs developing more targeted approaches. Targeted Help teams working closely with MASH and Children's Social Work Teams.	Refocused offer - Targeted Help Teams working closely with the MASH to identify families needing more help, 380 families receiving support from non-statutory services in March 2025 compared to 235 in May 2024.
Refocus Edge of Care to identify and support at-risk families.	Use of evidence based and relationship-based interventions working intensively to prevent young people from coming into care.	Supported 186 children this financial year; 72 homeless children - 12 were accommodated. One has been reunified, two have reunification plans.
Offer family-led support and focus Family Group Conferences (FGC) on all vulnerable families.	Increased FGC team resources and targeting of FGCs earlier; implemented guidance and training for social workers on use of Family Network Meetings.	336 children benefited of which 39% of interventions reached families as part of an early help intervention and 61% were part of a children's social care led intervention. Of the 45 families where intervention ended in one quarter two children were reunified, 12 remained with their families and 16 were placed within extended family networks.
The Virtual School ensures that the needs of children who have ever had a social worker are clearly identified, understood, and addressed	Enhanced educational outcomes and inclusion for children with a social worker (CWSW) through improved targeted support, data visibility, and strategic collaboration between the Extended Role Consultant, social work teams, schools and partners.	Early signs of positive impact, particularly in reducing exclusions and attendance for CiN (attendance +1.5% since 2023/24). Attendance within the Ever 6 cohort stable at 89.6% over the same period. Attendance for children subject to a CPP declined by 3.9%. Exclusions among children with a CiN plan reduced from 15 to 7, and for CPP decreased from 15 to 13.
Reduce repeat referrals	Focused work by managers to improve the quality of assessment and ensure support to families is sustained.	QA evidence some improvement in quality of assessment and the rate of re-referrals has reduced in March to 15.4% being within 12 months.
Improved approaches to improve school attendance particularly for vulnerable learners.	Our Place-Based Plan is focused on inclusion and belonging and is system-led by our schools, with multi-agency engagement in the plan. Strong partnership focus on priority vulnerable children including Electively Home Educated Children, introduction of Vulnerable Pupils Panel.	Overall attendance: Plymouth 1% below national. 0.3% improvement since 23/24. Primary 94.8% (National 94.8%). Secondary 90.0% (National 91.7%). Special school attendance 87.9% (National 87.1%). Persistent absence higher than the national average, +2.7% since last year. Primary persistent absence +1.5% since last year, +3.5% in secondary. Rate of severe absence increasing in secondary schools and special schools. Between 1st September 2024 and 30th April 2025 -10% in the rate of suspensions for

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		children with SEND compared to the same period in 2023/24. -33.5% permanent exclusions. Suspensions of children requiring SEN Support have fallen by 18% and suspensions of children with EHCPs by 26%. Vulnerable Pupils Panel has prevented 13/14 children from being permanently excluded.
Targeted Help: Examples of improved experiences of and outcomes for children and families		
<p>Concern: Concerns about young person's identity, self-esteem and the impact of domestic abuse and drug use in the family.</p> <p>Intervention: Working as part of a focused, persistent and well-planned Team Around the Family including FSW, Family Hub, school, Harbour, Housing.</p> <p>Impact: improved school attendance, self-esteem, stable housing, reduced DA, family relationships. Engaged with support services to sustain changes.</p>		
<p>Concern: Concerns about DA and placing young person placing themselves at risk. At risk of care.</p> <p>Intervention: Assessment completed including using Graded Care Profile 2 including impact of DA. Referral to young people's substance misuse service and for a FGC.</p> <p>Impact: school attendance has increased from around 35% up to 60%. Remains at home supported by grandparents. Improved home environment and relationships.</p> <p>Feedback: Mum said it had been difficult to engage at the start, but she was very grateful for the help and was more confident for the future.</p>		
<p>Concern: Family crisis affecting YP behaviour and her relationship with her Nan's (where she was living). At risk of care.</p> <p>Intervention: Assessment included wider family where things escalated affecting the YP's mental health and trauma. Team Around the Family put in place with a plan for direct work with the family, including wider family network, school, CAMHS, Family Matters. FGC planned to develop family plan.</p> <p>Impact: relationships and school attendance improved. Stable home arrangements.</p> <p>Feedback: Grandmother said the support had helped her to understand teenagers better and to rebuild her relationship with her granddaughter.</p>		
<p>EHE case study; 16 year old boy who suffers with poor self-esteem and mental health subject to a child protection plan as a result of concerns about neglect and education needs not being met through EHE. He was bullied in school so didn't want to attend. Through the work with health, Children's Social Care, mum and the EHE Team his mental health improved and he grew in confidence. As a result, the child protection plan ended. He is now attending college and his mental health is much improved.</p>		
Key Milestones for 2025-26		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise the partnership review of Building Support threshold document to ensure families get the right help at the right time. • Fully implement the Families First – Children's Service so that more families access earlier family help. • Ensure support enables families to make sustained change reducing the % of families experiencing re-referrals. • Extend the use of family decision making models so that the right children are subject to child protection and increasing the use of connected carers when care is needed. • Further development of family help interventions to reduce the number of children and families requiring statutory interventions. • Development of evidence-based interventions to further reduce the number of children entering care in an unplanned way. • Fully implement Extended Virtual School CPD offer across services, schools and settings. • Children at risk of poor attendance identified at the earliest point, targeted support put in place leading to a reduction in children with persistent or severe absence. • Further develop approaches with partners to increase the number of children with SEND benefiting from inclusive approaches. • Develop approaches so that more disabled children benefit from access to short breaks in inclusive universal settings. 		

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Strategic Priority 3 – Timely and Effective Social Work Practice		
Vision: A good assessment, planning and endings for every child and young person which supports needs being met in a timely way. High quality supervision and evidence of the impact of management oversight for all workers/children. Improvements in priority areas; Out Of Hours, LADO, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, Children's Disability Team.		
Agreed Milestones for 2024-25	Progress Highlights During the Year	Impact
Improved approaches in priority areas post Ofsted; LADO, OOH, UASC, CDT.	Improved practice arrangements implemented in all areas through accelerated improvement plans.	Strengthened practice evidenced in QA and SLIP reviews.
Timely and consistent quality of assessment & response in Initial Response.	Implementation of Performance Surgeries, workforce development programme and improved management oversight and quality assurance.	In March, 82% of referral visits were made within 5 working days and 96% within 10 working days. Audits are identifying more 'good' and 'outstanding' elements in assessments. At the end of the year 90% of assessments had been completed within 45 working days.
Maintain caseloads within agreed ranges.	Additional capacity agreed when needed.	Caseloads maintained at 19.4 children per worker.
Assessment, planning, and endings in line with practice standards.	Implementation of workforce development and close oversight of transfers and closures.	At the end of March, 92% of children in need, 89% of children on child protection plans and 99% of children in care had an up-to-date plan. 100% of CP and 94% of children in care reviews were on time.
Unborn baby practice and assessment tool.	Panel meetings throughout the year and development of updated pre-birth assessment tool kit.	Better early assessments and decision making. More babies supported to remain with families or experience timely decision making where this is not possible (see case study).
High quality supervision and management.	Focused attention by managers.	84% of supervision across the service on time at the end of the year.
Timely PLO practice and earlier permanence planning.	Focused tracking, oversight of practice and work with court partners.	40% experience timely pre-proceedings and 35% are within the 26 week target timescale. Focused work with partners in response.
Revised Academy offer focused on core priorities/teams.	Updated training delivered to all practitioners and managers on assessment, care planning and toolkits developed on direct work.	Quality assurance evidences some improvement in the quality of practice in key areas following training but not yet consistent for all children.
Impact of Independent Chairs on planning and outcomes.	Delivery of development programme with SLIP support to improve evidence of impact of IRO.	Increased evidence of IRO's utilising escalations to drive improved outcomes for children.
Early permanence planning with close tracking.	Best practices from SLIP and focus on matching and SG.	More children matched with long-term carers.
Support to care leavers in custody.	Improved approaches with partners.	Improved Pathway Planning includes improved support where needed.
Accommodation & EET outcomes for care leavers.	Strengthened individualised planning with partners for young people at risk of poor outcomes.	Over 93% in suitable accommodation, 10 in unsuitable reduced from 18 in May 2024. EET improved to 46%.
Timely and effective social work practice – Improved experiences of children and families:		

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Unborn baby commenced Pre-Proceedings well before baby's EDD due. Older siblings were already within Care Proceedings given considerable concerns about parental capacity and impact of substance misuse. Team ensured all assessments gave consideration to the capacity of parent's in also caring for the unborn baby in addition to as well as separately from the other children. The team were able to achieve separation at the first hearing and looking for a Fostering for Adoption placement.

Child entered into Pre-Proceedings which concluded in 14 weeks. A parenting assessment was completed alongside demonstrating that the parent's had recognised the safeguarding concerns surrounding their alcohol misuse. A Family Plan was developed setting out how the child was to be cared for safely when parent's used alcohol. This child was diverted away from care proceedings due to effective use of PLO and Family Plan.

Child subject to Care Proceedings previously and placed with her Father. Concerns now raised about her father's criminal activity placing the child at risk. The Father gave his agreement for her to come into care with her Grandmother. Care Proceedings were initiated and the social worker worked well with the Fostering Team to conclude proceedings within 18 weeks with a Special Guardianship Order being granted.

Care Leavers in EET; working intensively to engage young people in personalised plans and interventions, supporting them to re-engage in EET.

Young person had become NEET following experiences of harm and trauma in her family environment. She built a relationship with the Youth Outreach Coordinator and has enrolled onto a **Level 3 Business course at Discovery College** and settled in well. The College's Student Liaison Officer continues to support her with college life. Outreach Coordinator supported young person to take part in a **1:1 DJ tutorial session through On Course South West** funded by the Virtual School. Attended an **Employer Expectation session** with the Youth Hub, completed a CV, an interview workshop and signed up for a **Get into Music Production and DJing course**.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

- Implement the Families First Partnership reforms with partners, so that more families benefit from a stable workforce, earlier family help and a confident child protection response when it is needed and the right children are subject to CIN, CPPs, the PLO and in care at the right time.
- Implement seamless pathways between Early Help, Targeted Help and Statutory Support to ensure families are better supported when statutory teams no longer need to be involved and ensure that change is sustained.
- Implement the 'Rethink Formulation' practice model to support focused workforce development with managers and ensure assessment, planning and supervision supports reflective and focused interventions for children.
- Ensure effective family decision making models ensuring Family Network Meetings are held with all families at an early point, and Family Group Conferences when needed, to ensure that family and community resources are maximised in the family's support plan.
- Fully implement the tools developed by our Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership to improve partnership approaches when concerns are identified about child sexual abuse, neglect, domestic abuse and adolescent exploitation.
- Implement practice arrangements so that disabled children receive high quality assessments, plans and reviews which ensure they receive the right support.
- Further develop approaches so that children in care and care leavers experience good health, accommodation, education and employment outcomes.
- Refocus the One Children's Service leadership and management development programme for TM/SM/HoS to improve confidence in and application of practice standards and embed the changes being made to leadership behaviours, strategic planning and improvement.

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Strategic Priority 4 – The Right Homes for Cared for Children at the Right Time		
Vision: Use of tools and assessment to support children ready for step down from residential. Foster For Plymouth recruitment and retention and increased use of connected carers. Local market growth. Permanence for children including through reunification and support to Special Guardians and kinship carers.		
Agreed Milestones for 2024-25	Progress Highlights During the Year	Impact
Evidence-based assessment for children to step-down from residential to fostering.	Utilised BERRI tool to identify children for fostering, support planning and placement finding.	Five children progressed step downs to fostering, eight in introductions, 20 searching for foster carers.
Improved placement request forms to support improved placement finding, matching and stable care.	Training and support implemented. Strong focus on stable care in workforce development including work with Dorset.	Some improvement noted in QA. Placement finding remained very challenging due to a national shortage of foster carers and an increase in the number of children in care to 530 at the end of the year. including 18 UASC. However, most children in care continue to experience good placements stability, 10.9% have experienced three or more placements within a year and 72.7% of children experience good long-term stability.
Foster carer recruitment.	Increased recruitment activity including through SW Hub.	117 households offering 241 placements compared to 104 households offering 212 placements in April 2024.
Implement commitments from Fostering Summit.	Implemented commitments including increased support, training and Council Tax Exemption.	Increased recruitment (see above) and foster carer satisfaction.
Implement first Mockingbird constellation.	Implemented in November 2024 with plans for two more progressing well.	No placement breakdowns from foster carers within the Mockingbird.
Implement High Support foster care model to support children to step down from residential.	Developed and implemented including enhanced financial package and support. Launched to carers.	Four Foster for Plymouth carers considering becoming High Support carers. One achieved successfully realizing savings.
Implement Special Guardianship Support Team and improved support to SG carers.	Team in place, comprehensive offer to SG and kinship carers developing.	An increase in contact with Special Guardianship and kinship carers during the year.
Increase supported lodgings provision.	Included in updated Sufficiency Strategy and a refreshed market development plan.	Good sufficiency of provision for young people ready for supported living 16+.
Implement Emergency fostering model.	Model agreed, recruitment to the scheme is underway.	Emergency carers not yet identified. This is a priority for marketing plans in 2025-26.
Expand residential provision in Plymouth.	Business cases developed, capital agreed for four homes. Properties being purchased to progress agreed models. Plan for young people involvement.	First children's home to open in 2025-26.
Children in care experience improved education provision.	Virtual School service improvement plan included strong focus on ensuring children are in school.	Improved quality of PEPs and access to tuition. Improved joint working between education and SWs, and support from Virtual

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		School and Access and Attendance Officers. Reduction in number of children without a school place.
Experiences of Children and Families:		
<p>Child in Year 11 (aged 15) and has no EHCP. Missing education since the end of September 2024 when they were placed out of area to a residential setting. The Virtual School immediately gave information to the social worker regarding appropriate schools and applications were made to local, mainstream schools. Whilst awaiting a school place, the Virtual School organised two hours of daily, online English and maths tutoring. Since starting the school at the beginning of December 2024, he has made a positive start, and the school are supportive of their needs. The school is aspirational about him achieving GCSEs and are confident that he will gain English and Maths.</p> <p>Reunification; Over 6 months Reece’s reunification to Ashley’s care progressed. From May 2023 Reece started to have overnight stays with Ashley and Sharon. This went well and Reece was determined he wanted to move to live with his Dad. Over the summer Reece stayed with Ashley and Sharon more often. After thorough assessment, careful thought and consideration, Reece’s wish was achieved! Ashley has provided his views of their journey: <i>“Having Reece finally able to live with us means the world to us, we can’t believe we are finally here at the end. Being able to give Reece a secure safe and loving family environment has always been our top priority and thanks to you all we can now give that to him. On a personal note, we’d like to thank you Lucy for getting us to this point. Your hard work has not gone unnoticed, it’s been a pleasure having you as Reece’s social worker.”</i></p> <p>I am “L”, I am 15. I came into care after my SGO broke down; my grandparents struggled to understand my needs and sometimes they hit me. I have lived in a lot of places since coming into care. My social worker said some of my homes were “unregistered” but behind the scenes she had found a new home for me. When it was sure I could move, my social worker spoke to me and for once I knew about this before it happened. The staff from the home came to meet me first and I got to see information about the home before I moved there which was great. I asked if my Nan would be able to be there on the move day and this was arranged too. I am settling in quite well so far.</p>		
Key Milestones for 2025-26		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further develop provision for children at risk of care to further reduce the number of children who come into care in an unplanned way. • Further strengthen placement brokerage to maximise placement opportunities within the external market. • Further strengthen stable care arrangements for all children in care, including focused work for children at risk of unplanned placement moves. • Support a further cohort of children to step-down from residential care to a family setting in accordance with their agreed plan. • Increase the number of children experiencing successful reunification. • Deliver an effective marketing approach and achieve a net gain of at least 20 Foster for Plymouth foster carers offering placements to all age groups. • Increase sufficiency of foster placements for priority groups, including UASC, sibling groups and short breaks for disabled children. • Embed Mockingbird and implement further constellations. • Further extend the High Support and emergency foster care models. • Embed special guardianship and kinship carer support offer. • Take forward agreed approach to extending residential provision in Plymouth and develop the external market in priority areas in accordance with our Sufficiency Strategy. 		

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Strategic Priority 5 – Sufficient Provision which meets Local Needs		
Vision: Ensuring sufficient high quality provision and take up. The development of a responsibility-based model for Alternative Provision. SEND provision that meet need and emerging need.		
Agreed Milestones for 2024-25	Progress Highlights During the Year	Impact
Improved approach and timeliness for children needing an Education, Health and Care Plan.	Additional capacity and training in team. Improved processes and decision making within team providing more timely response. Implementation of improved consultation for specialist and mainstream schools. Development of targeted support funding model to improve additional support for children with SEND. Effective operation of specialist panel. Improved engagement with parents.	EHC needs assessment timeliness improving to 90% in March 2025 compared to 44.1% in March 2024. Clear plan in place for completion of outstanding plans and reviews and good progress being made each month and progress is currently above target. Through the introduction of infographics, face-to-face forums and video feedback families report feeling heard and well informed about the local improvements.
Strengthened Alternative Provision (AP) offer, governance and support arrangements	New Alternative Provision Framework to ensure that children and young people are well served by their alternative provision when it is needed. New contract monitoring model in place for ACE Schools Plymouth. Children with EOTAS provision tracked by 0-25 SEND Team.	Improved tracking and support for children with additional educational needs.
High-level costed sufficiency proposals and implementation plan for specialist SEND and AP provision	Sufficiency plan for SEND in place and development of capital programme.	£13m high needs capital allocation agreed to deliver a new SEND Sufficiency Plan to increase special school places by 88, and to increase resourced provision across the city to enable more children with an EHCP to be educated in their local mainstream school.
Review and develop plan for increased capacity for identified needs across the city	Resources provision reviewed and monitoring improvements made. One additional resourced provision identified. SEND capital programme in motion	Increased capacity for specialist resources and provision available in line with need.
Effective processes for allocating specialist resources and exceptional provision	Full monitoring processes, visits schedule and audits in place. Improved understanding of quality of provisions.	Better allocation and oversight of specialist resources.
Review current short breaks provision and develop appropriate local offer	Full review completed, plan in place to improve clarity on eligibility and monitoring of provision including planned increased investment in inclusive universal provision.	There has been an increase in demand for short breaks from 246 in 2022-23 to 320 in 2024-25, and an increase in commissioned residential hours from 3744 in 2022-23 to 5616 in 2024-25. Good inspection of Downham House residential short breaks provision.
Experiences of Children and Families:		

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Ofsted Inspection of Downham House Short Breaks Home: “Children really enjoy their short breaks at this home. Parents describe their children’s excitement when they go to the home. One parent described the managers and staff as an extended part of their family. During the inspection, staff were happy to see the children when they arrived, and their interactions were nurturing.”

Feedback from parents about the new SEND provision resource in mainstream schools: *"Since the group started, I have noticed a positive shift in his confidence, and engagement with the school. The nurturing environment made possible by small group size, enables the staff to be able to begin working on helping him understand and express emotions in a way that simply isn't possible in his classroom. The provision is able to cater for the unique challenges for each individual child – and they have been specifically working with him on important social interactions skills like sharing ideas and teamwork. What's made the biggest difference is how the group taps into special interests to spark learning. Lessons appear to be brought to life – accommodating sensory activities, movement, outdoor play, and meaningful community activities. Children like mine often carry a lot of shame – for not fitting in, for struggling in ways that are misunderstood or overlooked. The group has given him a chance to feel something different: pride."*

Key Milestones for 2025-26

- Continue to ensure EHCPs are more timely and implement the revised model of funding to support fewer children to need an EHCP.
- Implementation of SEND capital strategy to develop provision to meet need in priority areas.
- Clear vision and purpose for the Alternative Provision system which underpins the operation of day-to-day processes.
- Service level agreements embedded through the termly monitoring meetings.
- Decision-making groups and financial controls in place setting out trajectories and mitigation arrangements.
- Improve local provision to reduce demand for Home to School Transport.
- Develop an updated short breaks offer, and a co-produced commissioning approach that is flexible, equitable and accessible and meets needs.

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Strategic Priority 6 – Preparation for Adulthood

Vision: Strengthening support at key points of transition. Earlier planning with all partners. Confirming and implementing expectations for priority/vulnerable groups with partners (including young people and residents with SEND, Care leavers, young people in criminal justice system, parents and carers, young carers). Lifelong learning and delivering Unlocking Plymouth's Potential.

Agreed Milestones for 2024-25	Progress Highlights During the Year	Impact
Updated framework for Preparing for Adulthood	Monthly Transitions Meeting and Corporate Parenting Managers Operational Group established; multi-agency board created.	Improved transitions planning and support, collaborative approach.
Person-centred pathways for transitions	Task group for deferred school entry and Place-Based Work on transitions; updated CDC page and training sessions for SENCOS. Improved identification and support for young carers.	Better care plans, positive transitions, collaborative approach. Increased rates of young people in EET.
Early pathways to adulthood	Finalised Transition Protocol from CSC to ASC; added children to Tracker; drafted Transitions Pathway document.	Earlier assessment, smoother planning, clear pathways.
Apprenticeships and supported internships	Growing Supported Internships; successful Your Future Programme.	High EET status, positive transition outcomes. EET status at 90.4%;
T Level delivery	Mapped skills used by HE and FE providers to bridge gaps; new courses in nuclear engineering, construction.	Enhanced T Levels aligned to growth sectors.
Family Hubs for careers guidance	11 Family Hubs commissioned; 10 open, 1 opening April 2025; universal, early help, safeguarding, and SEND support.	Support for parents and carers with children aged 0-19 (up to 25 for SEND).
Processes for transitions of children with EHCP	Improved EHCP timeliness; reshaped decision-making panel; team training plan; 5 young people transitioned to adult social care.	More timely decisions, consistent EHCPs, improved support. 89% now EET from 72% in Jan 2023
Skills offer baseline	Mapped skills to bridge gaps between supply and demand.	Development of new courses, enhanced T levels.

Experiences of Children and Families:

Skills Launch Pad; A young person with a recent Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis and mental health issues who struggled to take part in education or even leave their most days. They were able to access 1:1 mentoring and support to help reintegrate with the world and education through the progression fund and is now on a course at the Arts University.

Your Future; C has self-diagnosed ADHD and struggles with managing her time, commitments and workload, often overcommitting and becoming overwhelmed. Working part-time in a local care home, she aspires to be a registered nurse. She was experiencing significant barriers in her place of work which were contributing to existing mental health concerns. The Your Future team re-connected her with a range of local support services including her GP, Plymouth Options, and The Zone. She is due to complete her Skills Scan at OCSW in readiness for undertaking Maths Functional Skills and has been booked on to a Careers Support Surgery session with Clarion Housing.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

- Sustain focused partnership approaches to further improve preparation for particularly vulnerable groups including young people with SEND and care experienced young people.
- Operate effective person-centred pathways and transitions for all priority groups.

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- Development of skills built across the four delivery plans within the Plan for Economic Growth.
- Join up training and skills provision across the city to deliver a united and streamlined skills offer.
- Increase traineeships and apprenticeships at higher levels and in STEM industries.
- Ensure talent pipeline of graduates and people with higher level skills is enhanced and aligned with priority growth sectors.
- Deliver improved approaches to supporting identified groups including care leavers into employment.
- Develop and implement support for entry level, basic and functional skills (including maths, English, digital, employability and transferable skills).
- Further develop approaches to support young people with an EHCP to access appropriate pathways to transition into adulthood.

Strategic Priority 7 – Workforce Development

Vision: Workforce charters based on 'High Expectations, High Support, High Challenge'. Targeted recruitment for priority groups. Retention and workforce development including a refocused Academy Offer and SEND and partnership workforce development in priority areas. Leadership and Management Development Programme to develop high performing managers and leaders.

Agreed Milestones for 2024-25	Progress Highlights During the Year	Impact
Revised Academy offer	Deliver updated content on assessment, planning direct work and supervision for the social care workforce.	QA showing some evidence of improved quality of practice but not yet consistent for all children.
Management/leadership development programme to develop skills and behaviours.	Delivered programme for all managers focusing on workforce performance and people management. Coaching and action learning delivered for HoS and SM and sustained Leaders for Excellence programme for all managers.	Good engagement in programme (90%) and positive feedback about learning and behaviours. Evidence of improved management - average days lost to sickness reduced from 15 days to 9 days.
Management 'masterclasses'	Included in the Leaders for Excellence programme.	Improved cross service approaches in key areas including school attendance and SEND.
Review team structures and implement career progression opportunities for all staff	Career progression framework reviewed and strengthened for social workers.	Improved social work retention and increased stability in the appointment of managers.
Recruit to priority groups (EPs, managers and qualified SW Workers). Retention & % of permanent SW staff.	Comprehensive programme of work to recruit experienced social workers supported by cross Council group. Including updated website, attending job fairs, events for agency staff and online recruitment events.	Recruited to management posts. 6 SW recruited. Vacancy rates reduced to 22%. 7 agency staff moved to permanent contracts. Use of agency staff reduced by 18%.

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Develop team charters & complete a skills audit based on the agreed values and behaviours framework.	All teams sign up to the Ten Wishes framework and managers have begun implementing the values and behaviours framework.	Increased workforce stability.
SW caseloads & supervision achieve target levels.	Focused management action throughout the year to ensure caseloads remained within target ranges and to ensure all workers experienced timely supervision.	Caseloads remained within target ranges across the workforce (19.4 children) and 84% of supervision was on time across the whole service at the end of the year. QA identified that more work is needed to ensure all supervision is reflective and supports progress for children.
SEND & education of children to be a focus within the social care workforce development programme.	Delivered SEND training, workshops, and e-learning across the service. Young people have produced guidance for staff. Over 1000 participants complete the baseline SEND training across the local area to provide a consistent understanding across the system as a whole	Increased understanding of responsibilities evidence in practice. Quality assurance identified support more needed for social workers with the completion of assessments for EHCPs.
Early career opportunities in place to support us to grow our own talent.	Good progress in advancing Early Career Framework, delivering Step Up to Social Work, trainee routes, and student placements.	All ASYEs progressed to year 2. Recruited 8 ASYEs and 2 trainees this year.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

- Deliver revised Learning Academy offer in light of evidence from quality assurance to focus on core practice improvement priorities and support the implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme.
- Update the curriculum and deliver a programme supporting the implementation of the Rethink Formulation practice model.
- Extend the Learning Academy to provide learning and development offer across the Children's Services Workforce.
- Improve retention and workforce stability, including for priority groups of Educational Psychologists and experienced social workers.
- Lead the implementation of an updated Children's Workforce Strategy across the partnership.
- Improve skills and confidence in SEND and education of children with a social worker across the workforce.
- Support management and leadership development programme.
- Introduce partnership workforce induction arrangements for priority groups, including supporting locality models.
- Implement effective career progression pathways for all groups.

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Strategic Priority 8 – Performance Management and Quality Assurance

Vision: Practice standards are clear and embedded across Children's Services. Strengthen quality, quantity and impact of quality assurance across Children's Services, building on practice strengths and closing the loop on learning. Strengthen partnership quality assurance processes. Performance data which measures and reports the right things and supports improvement.

Agreed Milestones for 2024-25	Progress Highlights During the Year	Impact
Quality assurance across services	<p>Significant increase in QA activity across all service areas including Practice Weeks in all areas, monthly audits, dip sampling, IRO escalations and QA with PSCP partners. Stronger focus by Practice Learning Reviewers on 'closing the loop' on learning with action planning and engagement of service meetings.</p> <p>Implementation of multi-agency QA model in SEND including decisions around EHCPs and funding approvals. Business case for Invasion 360 to improve consistency in QA.</p>	<p>Dip samples of assessments evidence improved identification of risks, protective factors, parents' views and children's histories within assessments, more consistency with the sharing of multi-agency information and more assessments being written to children. Increase in IRO escalations; 303 between April 2024 to February 2025, an increase of 300% from the previous year.</p> <p>Findings from QA addressed in training of EHCP Officer and now informing EHCPs.</p>
Track audit actions	Implemented Moving Forward Meetings, audit action tracker, reassigned audits and close tracking by PLRs.	All actions on inadequate audits addressed.
Deliver Practice Weeks	Multi-agency and service-specific practice weeks held in all areas feedback, learning sessions held following weeks and action plans produced. Follow up weeks held to review progress.	Care Leaver practice improvement plan has enabled rapid progress with Pathway Plans. Follow up practice week in Front door found improvement in quality of assessment since the previous review.
Expand EHCP quality assurance	EHCP auditor recruited, monthly multi-agency audits, training and workshops.	Specific SEND training and workshops were developed using the learning from the quality assurance activity. A new EHCP template and guide produced by young people setting out what young people want social workers to focus on when they complete the EHCP paperwork.
Improved engagement of children and families in practice and decision making.	10 Wishes remains well embedded across partnership. Children and parents' views are collected via monthly audits and all QA including via QR code questionnaires. Sustained programme of groupwork for priority groups including Youth	Young people have written various sections of the Ordinarily Available Provision resource: <i>"I love that we have been able to help and show schools what works for us – we want it to be shared with everyone"</i> . Young people attended the SEND Improvement Board in Oct 2024. In advance, they

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	Ascends and care experienced. Children and young people now part of Scrutiny arrangements. Learning from families who we have struggled to engage is being used to influence practice improvements. Young people have produced EHCP guidance for SWs. Young people video on language used shared in the newsletter. Feedback obtained from CIC about their IROs.	had created a video which presented their thoughts about inclusion. They returned to the Board in March 2025 and further regular Board attendance is planned. Attendance Survey completed by c2200 parents and 1500 children to inform the Attendance Campaign and Attendance Strategy. Feedback from young people in Practice Weeks informed practice improvement plans, e.g. Pathway Plans. CIC feedback about IROs has improved children's communication in meetings by 7%, escalation and resolution completions by 39% and IRO visits by 7%.
Operate Performance Boards and monitor priority improvements	Daily/weekly/monthly performance boards in all service areas using performance scorecards. DCS chairs monthly QA and Performance Improvement Board.	Improvements include timeliness of assessments, supervision and Pathway Plans.
Key Milestones for 2025-26		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further develop the Quality Assurance Framework to bring together a range of qualitative information from audits, complaints and engagement with children and families, to provide a full evaluation of practice strengths and drive further improvement. • Embed model of young people challenge in both Scrutiny and Corporate Parenting Board. • Feedback to staff highlights good practice and supports further improvements to be made. • Quality assurance provides evidence of impact of improvement work. • Performance Boards evidence progress on KPIs across key practice areas in line with agreed targets. • Further strengthen how children, young people and families are listened to and are holding us to account for the improvements we are making. 		

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Priority 9: Strong and effective partnership arrangements	
Vision: Strong partnerships and partnership governance arrangements deliver effective joint arrangements which improve outcomes for children and young people, particularly in priority areas.	
Agreed Milestones for 2024-25	Progress Highlights During the Year
Strengthen partnerships to drive progress through a refocused Strategic Systems Leadership Board Chaired by the DCS.	<p>Clear governance arrangements now in place with strengthened membership across the partnership. SSLB refocused in agreed areas under the leadership of the DCS who now also chairs PSCP.</p> <p>72 local area partners are invested in working groups through the Place-Based Plan, led by school leaders with a focus on inclusion.</p> <p>119 school leaders and SENCos recently participated in a consultation process for the implementation of a targeted funding model demonstrating their passion for improving inclusive approaches in mainstream schools.</p> <p>DfE monitoring has indicated strong confidence in our grip and delivery of the SEND Improvement Plan and our readiness for inspection.</p>
Refresh our partnership priorities and strategy 'A Bright Future' for 2024-26.	Progress review of the 2021-26 plan has been completed by key partners and priorities agreed for 2025-27 including early help and preparing for adulthood as additional priorities. Milestones reset and oversight of progress in place through SSLB.
Strengthen coordination between the SSLB, Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership and Safer Plymouth Partnership	Key statutory partners now meeting regularly and DCS chairs both SSLB and PSCP. Safer Plymouth Partnership reporting progress into PSCP regularly.
Develop, implement and embed effective partnership governance of early help.	Stronger governance arrangements operated through the Early Help Executive during the year. An Early Help Board is now being established reporting into SSLB to deliver developments across early help and Family Hubs
Develop a partnership accountability framework and quality assurance to support evaluation of the impact of partnership improvement work.	The PSCP operates a comprehensive partnership QAF with a programme of quality assurance and learning activity informing partnership workplans. This has focused on priority work areas during the year including child sexual abuse, neglect, domestic violence, adolescent exploitation as well as priority work areas including MASH Operational Group dip sampling decision making in the Front Door and finding good practice.
Key Milestones for 2025-26	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed partnership governance of early help building strong and effective locality networks. • Sustain effective partnership safeguarding arrangements through the SSLB and PSCP, delivering practice improvements in priority areas. • Ensure effective partnership engagement in the design and delivery of the Families First Partnership Programme. • Deliver the partnership priorities set out in A Bright Future 2025-27. 	

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- Sustain strong and effective partnership Corporate Parenting governance arrangements and delivery of ‘The Sky’s the Limit’.

Strategic Priority 10 – Effective System Enablers		
Vision: We will prioritise creating the conditions within the service that enable staff to do their jobs well.		
Agreed Milestones for 2024-25	Progress Highlights During the Year	Impact
System Development	Good progress has been made in developing the use of Capita across EPS teams in line with agreed service need with a focused programme of training. Improving data and recording to support improved planning and decision making. A new phone system has been implemented in SEND to improve response to EHCPs. Priority Eclipse developments have been delivered including Chronologies and Pathway Plans.	Improved call monitoring and reduced email backlog. Customer appreciation and increased Annual Reviews. Improved completion of high quality Pathway Plans for young people.
Recording Practices	Capita training to improve accuracy and consistency of recording. Scheduled team meetings and training sessions for Capita usage.	Enhanced buy-in, positive feedback. Improved recording and data quality for SEN2 Data.
Performance Data	SEND data cleanse for confident monthly reporting. Support for EHCP tracker and SEN2 return, training for accurate data capture.	Monthly statutory service reporting. Improved management reporting and staff training recognition. Practice improvements from improved use of data include assessment timeliness improving to 90% and EHC needs assessment timeliness improving to 90% in March 2025 compared to 44.1% in March 2024.
Commissioning	Reviewed monitoring processes and engagement audits. Reviewed Capita modules and spend for value for money. Implemented additional capacity for the children in care Placement Development of updated Sufficiency Strategy for children in care placements and development of an updated Market Development Plan to drive growth in provision in all priority areas. Updates on progress to every Family Homes for Plymouth Children Board. Brokerage Team to improve market management and placement finding. Improved capacity to ensure Contracts are in place and to support value for money. Review of contracts with health, including CAMHS, to ensure services meet identified need and deliver desired outcomes.	Value for money in Capita module purchases. Strengthened brokerage improving placement finding for children in care in the context of a national shortage of provision.

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Reducing Bureaucracy	Reviewed schemes of delegation and processes to ensure staff are freed up from unnecessary expectations.	Proposals progressed from review at Leaders for Excellence including streamlined panels and decision making.
Key Milestones for 2025-26		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System development; ensuring systems support staff to do their job, freeing them up from administration to spend more time with families. • Data, insight and AI support new and effective ways of working. • Recording practices; are clear and understood and support child focused practice. • Performance data; ensuring we are measuring and reporting the things that make a difference and tell us about the quality of practice and the impact of practice on outcomes for children, young people and families. • Commissioning; helping to us to ensure we have high quality provision in place to meet need, both now and in the future, and which represents value for money to the Council. • Maximising funding streams; maximising opportunities to bring funding into the Council. • Reducing bureaucracy; reviewing schemes of delegation and processes to ensure staff are freed up from unnecessary bureaucracy. 		

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Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	16 July 2025
Title of Report:	Youth Justice Service Annual Report
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Director of Children's Services)
Author:	Martine Aquilina
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Your Reference:	Click here to enter text.
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide information to Scrutiny Board to enable them to scrutinise and provide challenge to the Youth Justice Service.

Recommendations and Reasons

This report is to provide information to Scrutiny Board on the Plymouth Youth Justice Annual Plan

Alternative options considered and rejected

Not applicable

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

This report directly links to The Plymouth Plan 2014-2034 'to create the conditions where children, young people and families can thrive, assisting them to build resilience through the early development of good physical and emotional health and by equipping young people and parents with the skills to improve their wellbeing'.

A Bright Future 2021-2026 states that 'As partners, we want to make sure all children and young people in Plymouth have a Bright Future, supported by a system which works seamlessly to spot difficulties early, responds quickly and effectively, and makes sure that help is there for as long as it is needed'.

The Youth Justice Plan 2025 vision is to 'To develop a youth justice system in Plymouth that sees children as children, treats them fairly and helps them to build on their strengths so they can make a constructive contribution to society. Diverting Children early will prevent offending and create safer communities with fewer victims in the city.'

Implications for the Medium-Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

There is no financial implication

Fin	N/A	Leg	N/A	Mon Off	N/A	HR	N/A	Assets	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Martine Aquilina (Head of Service)											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 08/07/2025											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Laing approved verbally											
Date approved: 08/07/2025											



Annual Youth Justice Plan
Plymouth Youth Justice Service
2025 - 2026

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Introduction by Cate Hearnshaw, Chair of Plymouth Youth Management Justice Board

Welcome to the Plymouth Youth Justice Plan 2025/26. In the last 12 months we have continued to develop our service, and we are proud of the work we have undertaken with children and their families/carers in the city. We want children in Plymouth to be safe, healthy, and happy and to achieve and aspire as set out in A Bright Future, the city's vision for children and the priorities set out by the Youth Justice Boards Child First Commitment.

In 2022, we set out on a 3-year plan to improve our services and this Youth Justice plan. This plan has now concluded, and we will continue to build on this going forward. We will continue to strive to improve our current practice towards an outstanding service for children.

These outcomes are linked to eight key priorities set by the partnership. These were reviewed at the January board meeting. We have expanded our remit in terms of tackling the disproportionality of children in the criminal justice system to include children in care and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

We will continue to strengthen Strategic & Operational Multi-Agency Leadership by working to the following 8 priorities:

1. Strategic & Operational Multi Agency Leadership.
2. Placing Children at the Centre of Practice
3. Tackling disproportionality in the criminal justice system.
4. Continue to strengthen Prevention & Diversion.
5. Reducing Re-Offending.
6. Protecting the public, recognising
7. Responding to child exploitation and serious youth violence whilst protecting victims.
8. Continue to develop our Case Management, Resettlement & Transitional Safeguarding approaches.

Plymouth Youth Justice Service (PYJS) is strengthening its offer of victim work. Although we had fewer identified victims in the last quarter, all those victims engaged with our offer of support from our victim worker. Our plan is to move towards more direct work with victims, and training staff in Restorative Justice approaches, as well as support parents and carers.

We have Turnaround funding awarded for PYJS to use towards prevention and diversion. This will allow us to up-skill staff in the Child First principles and increase our participation offer which will allow children to better share their voice and engage in the development of future programs and interventions, therefore shaping the service.

There has been a reduction in children being referred to PYJS from Police where diversion is being prioritised, and our continued close working with the Child Centred Policing Team enhances our joined-up approach in providing positive outcomes for children in out-of-court processes. We are also able to report that we have good attendance at our out-of-court panel, from partners.

Going forward, we recognise that we need to continue to work with children who need education, training and employment opportunities. School attendance and aspirations for children who are receiving support from PYJS is an area we plan to develop, also recognising that by supporting their development, it is likely to impact on their ability to desist from offending behaviour and make positive life choices and changes.

We hope to work with our colleagues from HMCTS to improve time frames from charge to court hearing, which can be lengthy, and which leave children without intervention and support for several months. If we can close this gap, this will help us to provide them with the right support in a timely way, and effect change, as we await Court decisions on orders so we can plan interventions.

I would like to thank the staff of the Youth Justice Service and all key partners, on behalf of the Youth Justice Management Board, for their ongoing resilience and passion in delivering child-centred and effective youth justice services across Plymouth and for improving outcomes for the children they support. It is through their commitment, hard work, and achievements that we will achieve our goal of becoming one of the best Youth Justice Services in the country.

Plymouth Youth Justice Board Mission Statement

To develop a Youth Justice System in Plymouth that sees children as children, treats them fairly and helps them to build on their strengths so they can make a constructive contribution to society. Diverting Children early will prevent offending and create safer communities with fewer victims in the city

We will continue to evolve our practice to ensure every child feels heard, valued, and supported to thrive.

Introduction, Vision and Strategy

Welcome to the Youth Justice Plan for Plymouth Youth Justice Service for 2025 – 2026. This plan sets out the vision and priorities for the next year as required by the Crime and Disorder Act 1198 and adheres to the guidance set out by the Youth Justice Board.

The Youth Justice Plan will:

- Give an overview of Plymouth's demographics
- Summarise the Leadership and Governance arrangements, Plymouth Youth Justice Service structure and partnership arrangements.
- Update on the previous year's performance
- Set out our priorities for next year
- Update on National Priorities
- Set out our commitment to the Child First Principles

As the local authority responsible, Plymouth City Council is required, after consultation with partner agencies, to publish a Youth Justice Plan each year outlining the composition of, and funding for, their Youth Justice Service and the functions it is to carry out. This includes the steps taken to encourage children not to commit criminal offences. of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Section 39 of the Act requires the co-operation of named statutory partners, the Local Authority, Police, Health and the Probation Services to form a Youth Justice Service. Section 38 also identifies places upon statutory partners a duty to co-operate to secure youth justice services appropriate to their area. Additional partners are recruited to the joint strategic effort to prevent offending and reoffending.

The Youth Justice Plan in Plymouth aims to sit alongside the key local partnership strategies, the Safer Plymouth Partnership Community Safety Plan (CSP) and the Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Plan and the Children Commissioning Strategy. The Youth Justice Plan sets out the governance arrangements and operation of the Plymouth Youth Justice Service (PYJS). This report highlights agreed key developments and key priorities and provides details as to how Plymouth Youth Justice Service intends to deliver services to improve outcomes for children, families, and communities.

Following the Youth Justice Board Child First Principles, the strategic aims of Plymouth Youth Justice Partnership are:

- ❖ Focused on preventing offending and reducing re-offending by children.
- ❖ The delivery of integrated services that ensures children are safeguarded.
- ❖ The public and victims of crime are protected.
- ❖ Those who enter the criminal justice system are supported with robust risk management arrangements.
- ❖ Children will be supported to reintegrate into their local communities, to reduce their offending and wherever possible with support from their families.

The Youth Justice Service continues to work with partners to ensure that we provide a first-class service to children and communities and maintain the levels of supervision, risk management and safeguarding which will protect the public and support children to stop offending.

We work with the priorities of the Police and Crime Plan (PCP) for Devon and Cornwall and have focused on priority areas from the PCP in respect of victims, Appropriate Adults and reducing reoffending. We will continue to liaise closely with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) around priority areas and work streams over the next year. This plan also works to the plan set out by Plymouth Children's Services known as a Bright Future 2021-26 and the priorities of the Local Criminal Justice Board. Our Service Manager is a member of the Plymouth Safer Executive, as a result, the Youth Justice Service has been involved in the creation of the following plans: City Wide Partnership Plan, DASV/VAWG Plan, the Plymouth Serious Violence Strategy and the City Centre ASB Action Plan.

The Youth Justice Service continues to support Plymouth Children's Services aims of reducing the numbers of looked-after children, reducing the number of children not in education, employment and training and improving school attendance. We will work together with schools, academies, and alternative provisions to ensure that children of statutory school age receive full-time equivalent education. We strive to increase the opportunities to achieve better outcomes for children through earlier intervention and targeted prevention. Over the next year we will continue to work closely with the Edge of Care Team, Be Safe Team (Reducing Exploitation and Absence from Care and Home) and Family Help Service in Plymouth.

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) are also supporting the Trauma Informed Plymouth Network to develop Plymouth as a trauma informed City; this will provide a new vision for community safety in which preventing the causes of adversity becomes the cornerstone of how we collectively build a safer future for the children of Plymouth. This vision fits well with Youth Justice Services particularly for the more vulnerable cohort such as those children who are looked after or in need of protection.

Plymouth Local Context

Children living in Plymouth

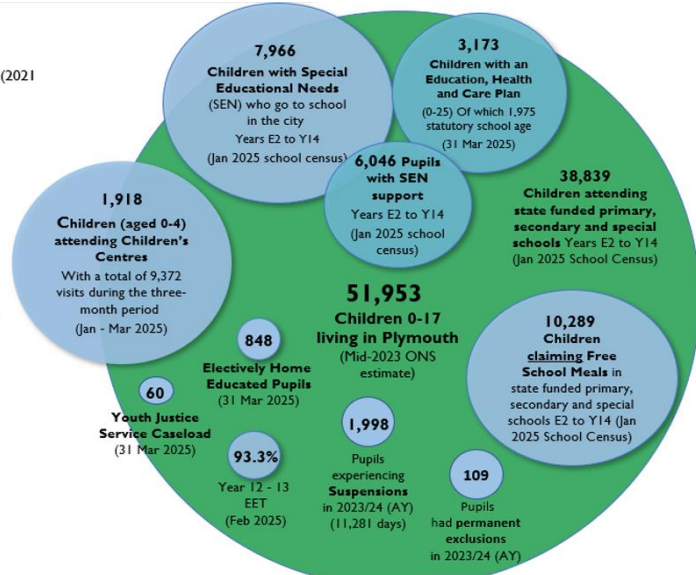
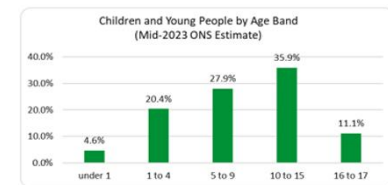
19.5% children and young people as a % of total population (2021 Census)



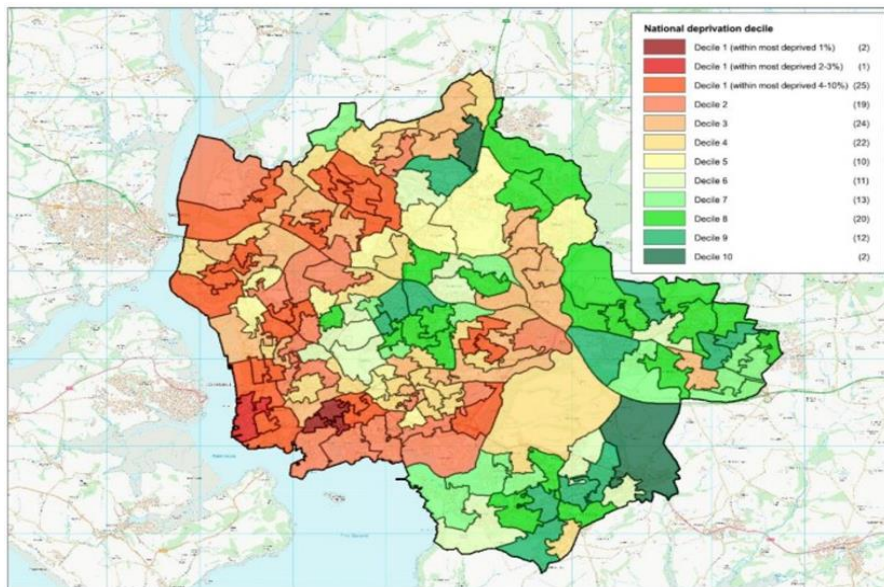
19.7% children (under 16s) are living in 'absolute' low-income families and 23.5% are living in 'relative' low-income families (DWP: FYE 2024)



23.6% pupils (state funded primary, secondary and special schools) classed as persistent absentees (2023/24 academic year)



Plymouth by ward – deprivation levels

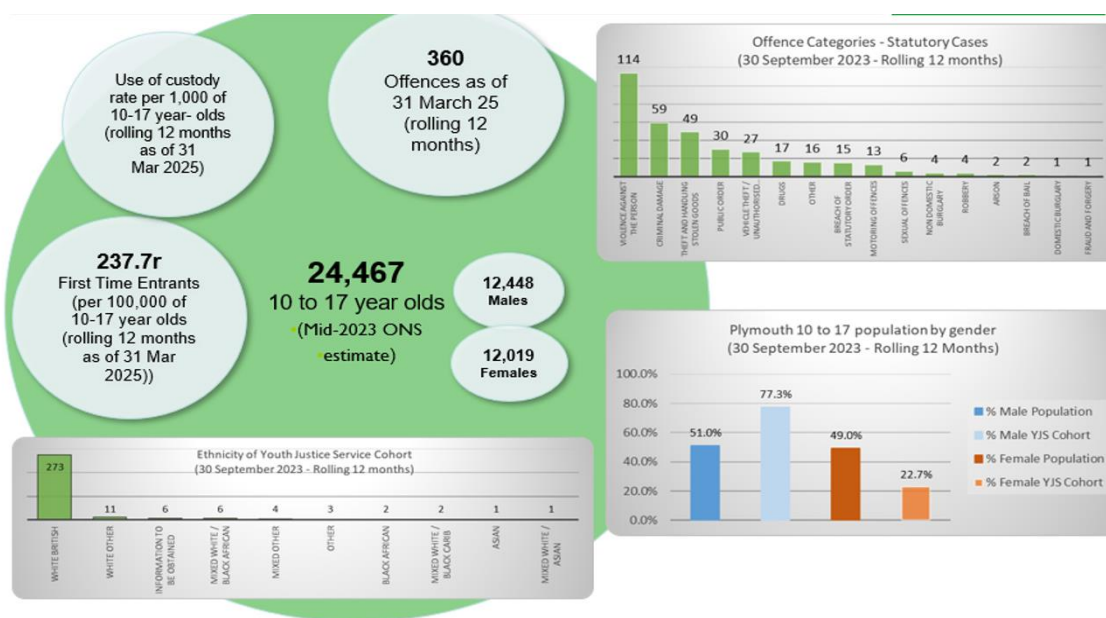


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Plymouth's most deprived LSOA, located in the in the Stonehouse neighbourhood (part of the St Peter and the Waterfront ward) falls within the most deprived 1% nationally both in the IMD 2015 and IMD 2019.

Of the 151 upper-tier local authorities in England, Plymouth ranks the 50th most deprived when looking at the average score summary measure. Compared to the other Southwest 11 official upper tier local authorities, Plymouth is the second most deprived authority behind Torbay (37th).

Plymouth Youth Justice Service Demographics



Governance and Leadership and Partnership Working

Plymouth Youth Justice Service is part of the wider Targeted Help and Youth Justice Service within Children, Young People and Families Services in Plymouth City Council.

The Head of Service for Youth Justice Service is managed by the Service Director of the Children Young People and Families Service and is a member of the Plymouth Youth Justice Management Board.

The Service is managed by Sarah Wilson who is also responsible for the management of the Adolescent Team Stronger Families, Be Safe Team, our response to missing children, Harmful Sexual Behaviour and Exploitation/County Lines. The whole service is based at the Frederick Street Centre in Stonehouse Plymouth and are a part of Plymouth City Councils Children, Young People and Families Service.

The Plymouth Youth Justice Management Board meets quarterly and reports into Safer Plymouth. The board scrutinises a broad range of data from the Youth Justice Service and partners including:

- Performance
- Budget
- Issues and themes emerging
- Staffing
- Voice of the child

The Youth Justice Service (YJS) continues to work closely with partners to deliver a high-quality, child-focused service that supports children to stop offending, protects the public, and ensures robust supervision, risk management, and safeguarding. Our approach is rooted in collaboration and continuous improvement, ensuring that children and communities receive the best possible outcomes.

Plymouth Youth Justice Management Board Membership

The Plymouth Youth Justice Management Board is responsible for Plymouth's strategy for addressing crime and anti-social behaviour by young people aged 18 and under as well as which includes transitions from child to adult services and sentenced to a Referral Order and become an adult during their sentence. The Board oversees and monitors the Plymouth Youth Justice Service and ensures that there is a robust strategy to prevent and address crime and anti-social behaviour before and when it happens. The board delivers a partnership approach to delivering system-wide improvements, achieve better outcomes and ensure that the voice of children, young people and their families is central to planning and decision-making processes.

The board is well represented from partners across our community including:

- Chair: Assistant Chief Officer for Plymouth Probation Service
- Youth Justice Board: Youth Justice Board Head of Region for Southwest & Central

- YJS: Head of Service and Service Manager
- Police: Police & Crime Commissioner, Criminal Justice Representative
- NHS ICB: Senior Commissioner for Women and Children,
- Youth Bench: Chair of Devon Youth Magistrates Panel
- Police: Detective Superintendent, Head of local policing and investigation
- Livewell: Directorate Manager CAMHS
- Housing: Community Connections Strategic Manager
- Education: Head of Service for post 16, EPS
- Finance: PCC Senior Technical Accounting Officer
- Voluntary Sector: Service Manager for Plymouth Substance Use Service, The Children's Society

All new members to the board will attend an induction session to introduce them to the work of the Youth Justice Service.

The Youth Justice Management Board also has strong relationships with other partnership boards where youth justice are areas of common priority including Safer Plymouth and Plymouth Children's Safeguarding Partnership and the newly implemented Early Help and Prevention Board.

Plymouth Youth Justice Service – Key Meetings Overview

The Head of Service, Service Manager and Team Managers' membership of the following groups ensures that the bridge between welfare, crime, public and child protection and safeguarding continues to be effective.

- **Youth Justice Management Board (Quarterly):** Oversees citywide youth justice delivery, reviews performance and budgets, and commissions deep dives into issues like ETE for reoffenders leading to initiatives such as appointing a Careers Southwest worker.
- **Corporate Parenting Operational Managers' Group:** Brings together partners to address issues like housing for 16/17-year-olds and emergency accommodation. Reports to the Corporate Parenting Group, chaired by the Lead Member for Children.
- **Young Person Access to Accommodation Service:** Multi-agency group ensuring suitable housing for children.
- **Court User Group:** Engages with youth sentencers to promote trauma-informed, child-first practices and effective out-of-court disposals.
- **Safer Plymouth Partnership:** Community safety forum monitoring progress and sharing intelligence. YJS submits quarterly reports to the Safer Executive.
- **Strategic MAPPA Board:** Reviews risk management for serious sexual and violent offenders.
- **Southwest YJS Managers' Forum:** Regional forum for sharing best practices and updates from the Youth Justice Board.

- **Devon & Cornwall Youth Justice Forum:** Discusses operational issues with peninsula partners and police.
- **Youth Detention Review Meeting:** Reviews of all overnight youth custody cases.
- **Out of Court Resolution Scrutiny Panel:** Audits youth and adult out-of-court decisions with key stakeholders.
- **Channel Panel:** Supports individuals at risk of radicalisation; YJS attends when children are involved.
- **Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Strategic Group / MARAC Steering Group:** the Youth Justice Service contributes to strategic responses to domestic abuse and high-risk cases.

Youth Justice Service Overview

Structure and staffing

Plymouth's Youth Justice Service comprises of the Youth Justice Team, Be Safe (Exploitation Team) and our Adolescent Edge of Care / 16-17 Homeless Team and sits within the larger umbrella of the Targeted Help Service. This ensures that there is a seamless approach to responding to a child's needs when the need emerges.

In accordance with the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 the Youth Justice Service consists of multi-disciplinary staff including:

- 1 Service Manager
- 1 Team Manager
- 1 Practice Manager
- 3 Social Workers
- 1 Youth Justice Practitioner (completing a Youth Justice degree)
- 6 Youth Justice Workers
- 1 Victim Worker
- 1 Business Manager
- 2 Youth Justice Admin Support
- 0.5 Probation Officer
- 1.2 CAMHS workers
- 1 FTE Speech and Language
- 0.6 Forensic Psychologist
- Police

We also have a substance misuse worker and a post 16 education worker due to join the team.

Caseload overview

The Plymouth Youth Justice Service (PYJS) currently has an active case load of 66 children. Our Court officers are working with 19 children, who are either on statutory

orders or in need of harmful sexual behaviour assessments and intervention. Our YJS practitioners are working with 56 children who are receiving interventions after receiving an out of Court resolution decision made.

7 of our PYJS children have Child in Need plans, 11 are supported with Child Protections Plans and one is a Care Experienced Young Adult (over 18)

Breakdown of Interventions

Intervention / Order	Number of Children
Community Resolution with YJS Support	17
Prevention work and Out of Court assessment	10
Referral Order	10
Harmful Sexual Behaviour assessment and intervention	8
Youth Conditional Caution	7
Early Help intervention	7
YJS support after no further actions from Police	5
Reparation	5
Diversion from Court	2
In custody	1
Referral Order with Intensive Support	1
Youth Caution with voluntary intervention	1
On remand	1

Budget and funding sources

In total, the Youth Justice Service receives multi agency funding of £1,052,635 per year. The breakdown of the contribution is shown in [Appendix 1](#). This funding has improved outcomes for our children in ways such as a review of the language we use in our literature, and the work of our Psychologist within the Enhanced Case Management delivery which has resulted in a reduction of risk and re-offending by the children who have engaged with us.

Turnaround funding from the Ministry of Justice

We have Turnaround funding awarded for YJS to use towards prevention and diversion. This allows us to upskill staff in Child First principles and increase our participation offer which supports children to better share their voice and engage in the development of future programmes and interventions, therefore shaping our service.

Review of last year's achievements

Plymouth Youth Justice Service has seen some significant changes over the last year. Most significantly we now have a new Service Manager and Chair of the Plymouth Youth Justice Management Board.

Our key achievements over the last year have been the embedding of the new Child First Principles and we continue to work with the Youth Justice Board to ensure that this commitment is central to our practice.

In 2024 – 2025 we have achieved:

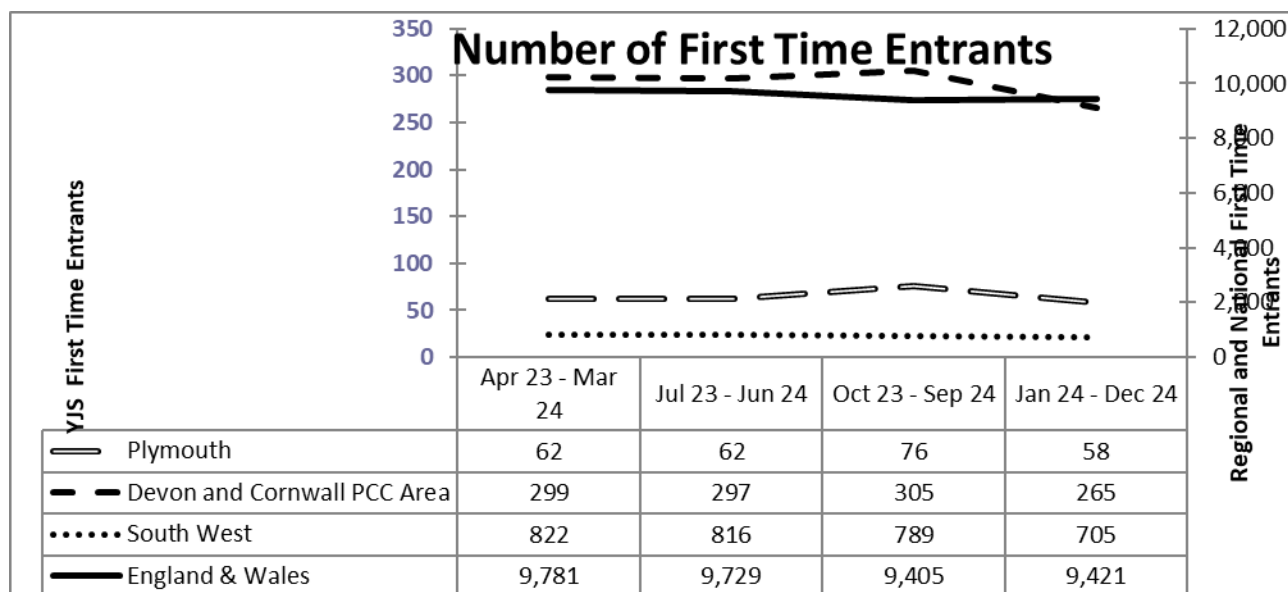
- A reduction of children in the number of children open to the service who are non-white heritage from 14.2% in April 2024 to 3.7% today.
- Built on the strengths in relationship-based practice highlighted at our last inspection and we continue to see strong engagement with our children
- Continued to work effectively with our partners to reduce harm and risk of offending.
- Positive relationships with children and their families to prevent children from entering the criminal justice system
- Low re-offending rates for the children we have supported, our own tracking of our children shows re-offending rates consistently staying at around 15%
- We have developed and improved our offer to victims of crime
- We have successfully transitioned to a new case management system
- We have improved our transitions arrangements to Probation and now have a transition meeting fortnightly to ensure that children approaching 18 years old have a seamless transfer.

Performance and data

First-Time Entrants (FTEs): Trends and interventions

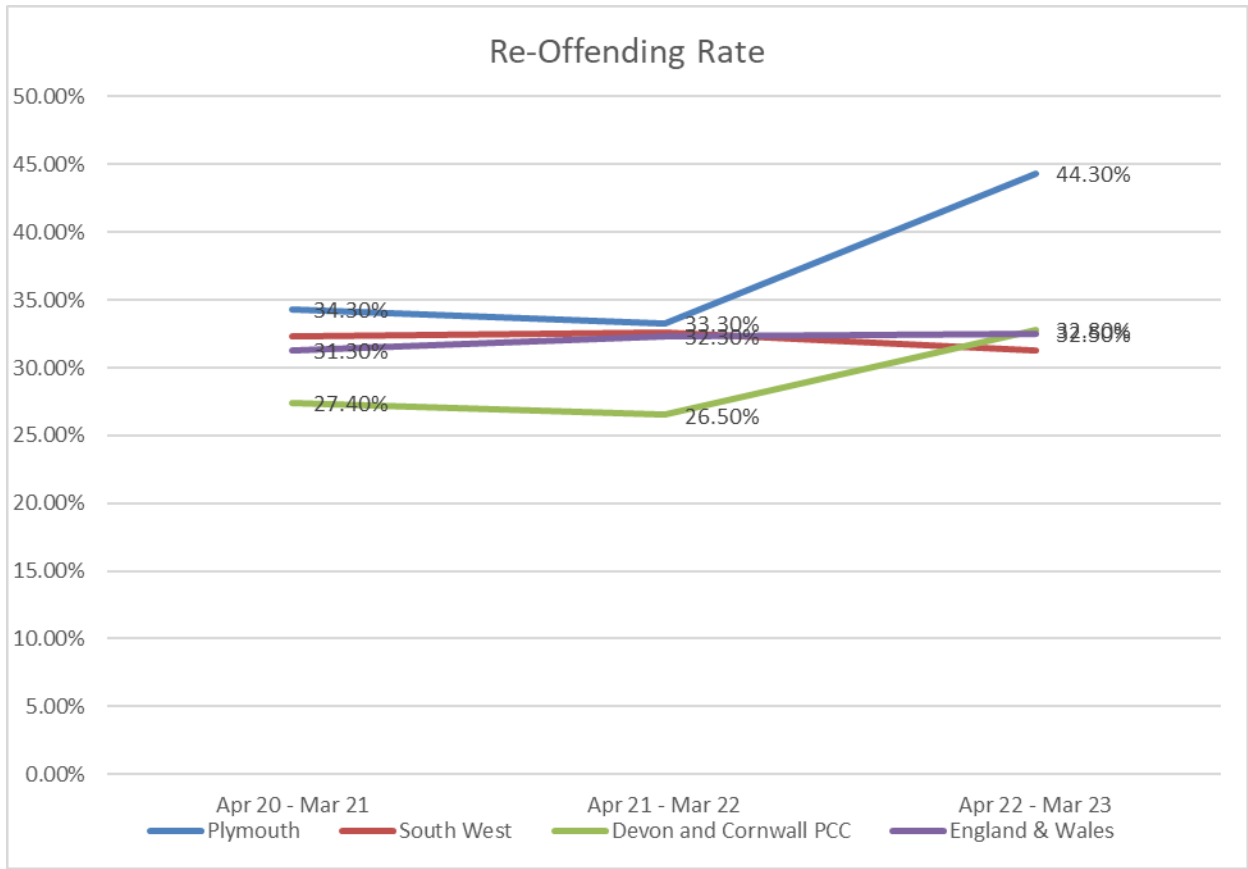
In the financial year covering 2019 - 20, Plymouth had one of the highest rates of FTEs amongst our family groups of Youth Justice Services. This was the picture when also compared locally and nationally. In June 2021 we commenced a multi-agency Out of Court Disposal (OoCD) panel at the same time. As a result, we now have a weekly decision-making meeting with the Child Centred Policing Team Sgt and the Manager of the Impact project to discuss outcomes for children. Should we agree (in this meeting) that a Youth Caution or above is required, an assessment is carried out on that child who is then discussed at a Partnership Panel (OoCD panel) to agree the decision. The Police have allocated a single investigating officer to deal with decision making for children and this is bringing a consistent approach, should a charge be required. As can be seen from the chart above, we continue to build on last year's downward trend in our FTE rate.

As previously mentioned, Plymouth saw several children involved with the immigration protest in August 2024 which led to a spike in the FTE rate in October-Sept 2024, which resulted in 9 new entrants. This was a one-off event, during which our normal charging consultation with the Police were not undertaken due to government directions on how to deal with those involved in the disorder.

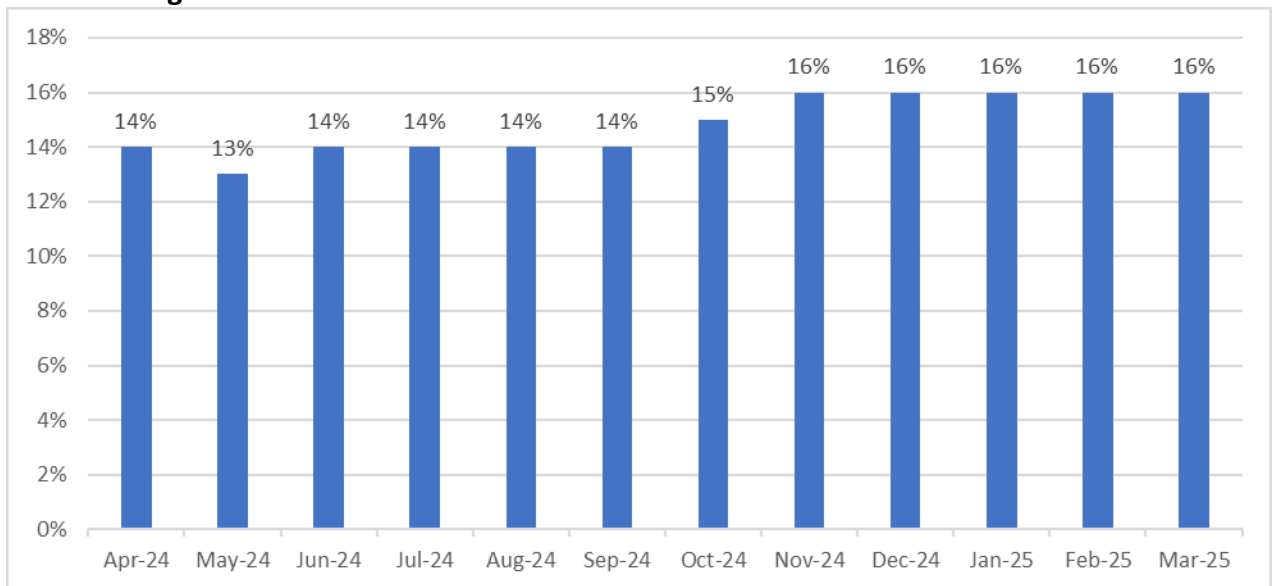


Reoffending: Rates, analysis, and strategies

The Final YJS Data Summary April 2024 – December 2024 for YJSs in England and Wales published in March 2024 show a re-offending rate of 44.4% (up from 32.3% last year) for Plymouth. However, this should be viewed in the context of the new counting employed by the Youth Justice Board from Q2 2023/24 with case level data used instead of MoJ PNC data and the new Police Charging Matrix. Meetings have been held with the Police and Crime Commissioner looking at how this Matrix has been implemented in Devon and Cornwall. As shown in the chart below, across the area, we have seen an increase in children entering the system since the matrix was introduced, an increase not seen elsewhere. A review has now taken place, and we are confident this figure will be reduced. In Plymouth, we have developed a live tracking tool on the children open to our Youth Justice Service, and we have continued to make good progress of the 138 children on statutory orders from 01 April 2021. On the 01 March 2025 the reoffending rate was 16%. This has been consistent throughout the year, averaging 15%.

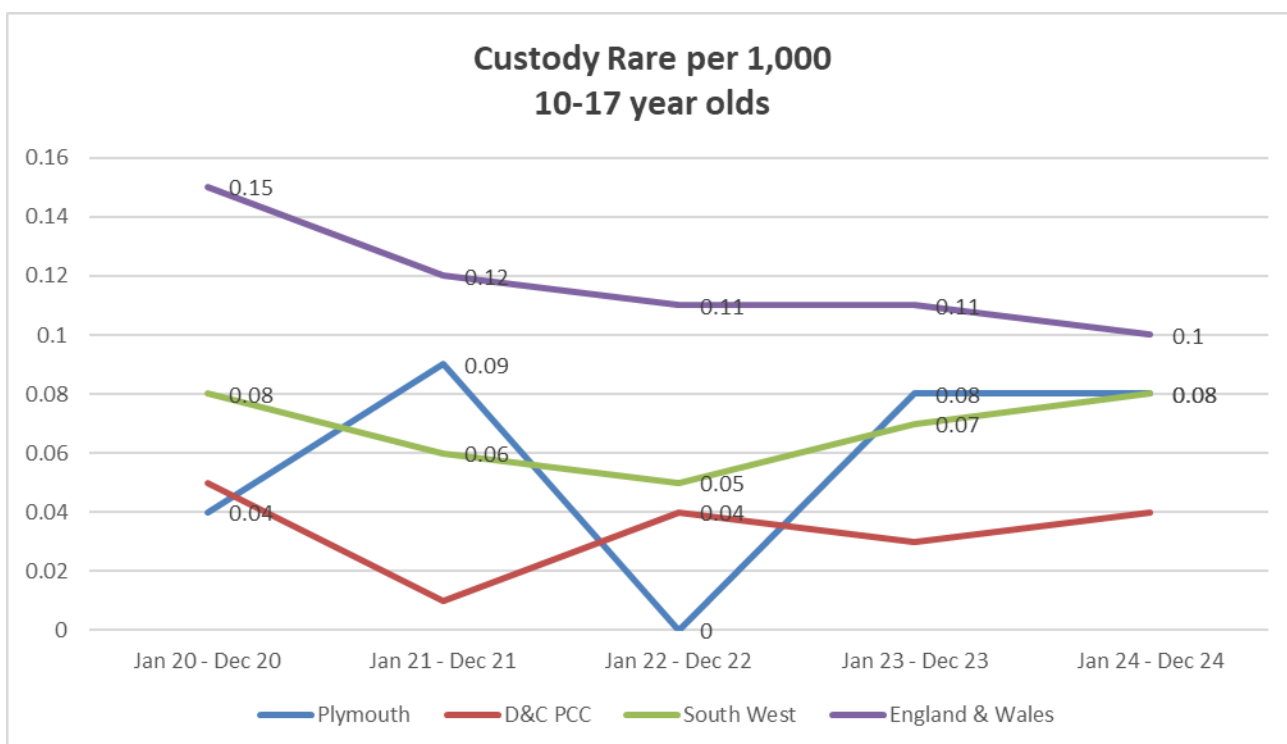


Re-Offending Tracker for PYJS:



Use of Custody: Numbers, reasons, and alternatives

In the last 12 months, two children received a custodial sentence, both were remanded to custody due to the seriousness of their offending



Disproportionality: Ethnicity, gender, and SEND analysis

We have made great progress on this issue in terms of ethnic disproportionality; however, we cannot rest on our laurels in terms of wider disproportionality. Last year, we have seen the number of children of non-white heritage open to the service reduce from 14.2% in April 2024 to 3.7% at the time of writing this report, which is well below the school role in the city. This shows 9% of children identify as ethnicity other than white British. Gypsy /Roman children remain our largest non-white British ethnic group, and we continue to work hard to engage this community and work with our colleagues in the Child Centred Policing Team to address this. The Board has recognised we have a disproportionately high number of children in the Youth Justice system who are care-experienced or are classed as having a SEND need, therefore, the board has directed this to be a priority in this new plan.

Prevention and Early Intervention

Turnaround and Impact project

We have continued to develop our diversion service. The Impact Project is a preventative project to divert young people from becoming first time entrants to the YJ system, following initial contact with the police. We now have a member of the YJS working from Devonport Police Station, with our local Child Centred Policing Team, to improve the speed of decision making which is helping to signpost children, families, and carers to support. This year has been challenging due to the Turnaround funding

ending, then recommencing which meant 3 members of staff leaving. In addition, the Immigration protest in the city in the summer of 2024 led to a large increase in the number of children entering the Youth Justice system. This also doubled the rate of first-time entrants; however the figure is now falling, and it is envisaged we will see a return to our usual level of performance this year.

During the period of April 24 – March 25 we have had a total of 7 referrals to our prevention programs, Turnaround, and Impact. This was due to a change in team structure and funding with the Turnaround programme ending in March. Unfortunately, this led to staff leaving and the Police having a reduction in confidence that referrals could be picked up swiftly. This ultimately led to a reduction in referrals. During February 25 plans were made with the Police to look at reinstating the Impact programme and how we can work in partnership to pick up children for early help and support. Whilst this was agreed the MOJ then provided more funding for Turnaround, for one year, so we are now able to continue to offer early help services under the criteria for the project.

Outcomes and impact

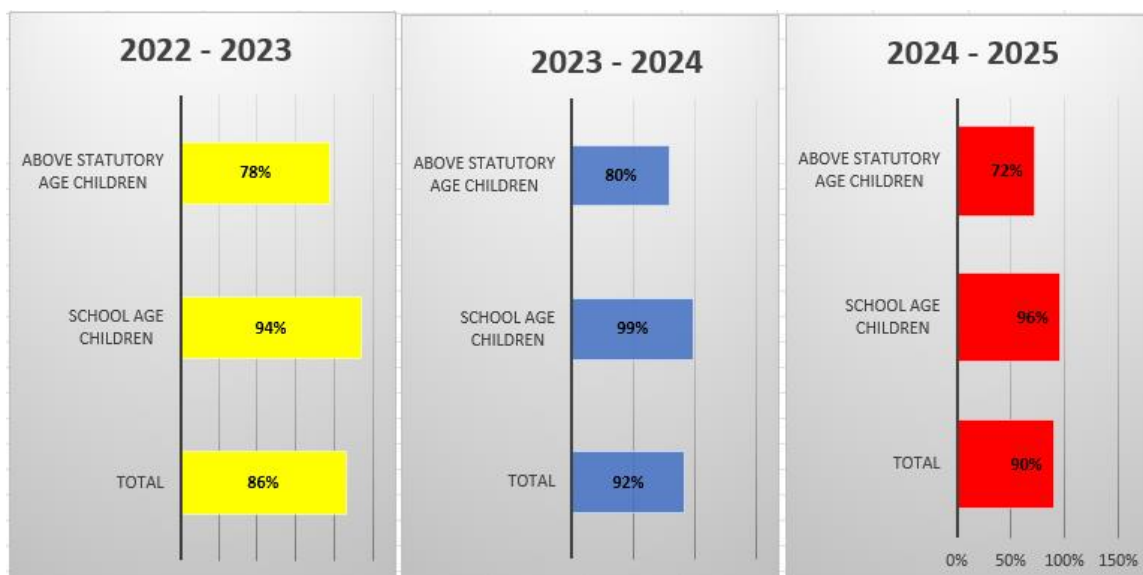
There has been a reduction in children being referred to YJS from Police where diversion is being prioritised, and our continued close working with the Child Centred Policing Team enhances our joined-up approach in providing positive outcomes for children in out-of-court processes. We are also able to report that we have good out of court attendance in panel, from our multi agency partners.

Education, Training & Employment (ETE)

Access to education and training

Plymouth Youth Justice Management Board holds a quarterly meeting to oversee the delivery of the Youth Justice Plan across the city through scrutiny and discussion of performance reports and budget discussions. The Board also requests 'deep dives' into specific areas of concern, for instance, ETE (Education Training and Employment) issues for the re-offender cohort which has provided evidence to enable the appointment of a Careers Southwest worker into YJS and regular meetings with colleagues from education including home schooling.

We have progressed membership of the Plymouth NEET Taskforce who aim to find suitable training and employment for young people above the statutory school age. The Head of the local authorities 16+ Education, Participation and Skills Service has now joined our board and is actively recruiting a member of staff to work with the service to address this.



We have engaged well with schools to ensure children are offered a full-time education. We are ambitious for all our young people and this year we have created a wide range of opportunities:

- Skills launchpad Plymouth provides online and face to face personalised support for young people to access ambitious employment opportunities or pathways
- Careers Plymouth can provide free impartial, advice personalised guidance for all young people from year 7
- From the 1 September 2025 (contract start date) an employment specialist will be focused on young people in the youth justice system
- Personalised employment pathways and training can be developed and co-designed with our in-house adult education provider, such as our award winning 'Your Future programme', linked to our Turing trips with over 12 international trips planned, and
- Supported Internships or other innovative employment pathways

'Darren' was sentenced to a community order following escalating concerns of offending and risk of re-offending as well as risks to his safety and wellbeing. Through relationship-based working 'Darren', overtime reported to have felt heard and listened to. In turn 'Darren' was able to build positive relationships with his worker who understood how best to support him. After many failed attempts, the worker was able to advocate for 'Darren', helping the college understand the court order in context and work with them to develop a safe plan that led to the college accepting him on the course he wanted.

Risks and Issues

Risks	Potential Impact	Actions and Proposed Actions
Engaging children with SEND and Care Experienced Children	<p>Children with special education needs require additional support with learning and development, as well as understanding the Youth Justice System.</p> <p>We have a disproportionately high number of children in the Youth Justice system who are care experienced or are classed as having a SEND need.</p> <p>These children are more vulnerable and at risk of exclusion from school, being exploited, and drawn into conflict with the law.</p>	<p>Stronger links will be made with the SEND team, to enhance our approaches to access to education and training, and develop stronger links between YJS, SEND</p> <p>The Board will invite a strategic lead for SEND to be a member and contribute to the Youth Justice Plan, this will seek to improve outcomes for SEND children.</p> <p>YJS Service Manager and Plymouth's Corporate Parenting Board will carry out QA work of children's assessments and interventions, to learn what we can do better to support our SEND and Care Experienced children.</p>
Governance, Leadership and accountability	<p>Many Board representatives have recently changed, and members are not fully inducted to their responsibilities as members.</p> <p>Consistent data reporting allows partners and stakeholders to challenge and support service delivery and holds service providers to account. This needs to be strengthened to continue to develop good quality services and outcomes for children.</p>	<p>PYJB meetings will include induction, training, and supervision quality.</p> <p>PYJS will have dedicated data staff to collate and present data to the Board, and stakeholders.</p> <p>Board members will be requested to present and be accountable for trends and themes affecting our children.</p>
Youth Violence	Many offences by children open to PYJS are violence	PYJS will promote a Youth Violence Champion who will

	against the person.	link directly with Plymouth Community Safety Partnership to influence and deliver programs in schools, addressing attitudes to violence and victims of serious harm.
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Areas of good practice

Following a self-evaluation of working with children, using the new HMIP Inspection framework we found the following areas of good practice:

- Partners have reported that *'The YJS staff are very highly skilled and supportive toward external agencies. Communication between operational staff and partners is strong'*
- There is good partnership representation based within the Youth Justice Service and holistic assessments of children are carried out, identifying the needs of the young person to keep them safe in the community, including any mental health, education need and substance misuse difficulties.
- The voice of the child is often understood and captured using the self-assessment tool.
- Assessments draw on children's early experiences and staff use this to think about why the child has displayed patterns of behaviours
- Assessments overall are holistic, drawing on multi agency reports, knowledge, and expertise to inform interventions
- Most assessments include historical factors and experiences in the home, family, and education, as well as access to health, such as CAMHS and Speech and Language.
- Most assessments address the child's capacity to change and what factors would influence this, including education, training, employment, access to mental health support and relationships with family. Children's engagement with assessment and factors to assist with change are also considered.
- Most assessments outline children's strengths and protective factors
- Most assessments explore diversity and how these impact on change, behaviour and support needs

Priorities for Next Year

Priority 1: Strategic & Operational Multi-Agency Leadership

The Plymouth Youth Justice Management Board will continue to set the direction and strategy for Plymouth Youth Justice Service by overseeing the implementation of the Youth Justice Plan and ensuring the services provided are of good quality, utilising data and feedback from children, their parents/carers and the professional agencies that support them.

Key Outcomes	Our commitment
The safety of children is prioritised across the entire council including partner agencies, as well as political and community leaders and this is reflected in their respective strategic ambitions and plans that influence strong strategic commitment to reducing offending and re-offending.	Ensure the YJS Management Board functions effectively with active involvement, contributions, and participation from all members. Using the Youth Justice Board Guidance, we will refresh and update our Board Induction
Children are invited to meaningfully participate, contribute and influence our strategic priorities, plans and activities to ensure their voices are heard, listened to and acted upon	Involve children in monitoring the effectiveness of youth justice provision and shaping the future delivery of services. We will recruit a Participation worker to strengthen how we engage and participate our children and their families.
Risks to children are considered in the systems and contexts in which they live, learn and grow and which recognise the valuable contributions their families, schools, neighbourhoods and communities make towards achieving successful outcomes.	Take a whole system approach to problem solving and driving innovation. Continue to strengthen our integration and collaboration with the wider system including Early Help and the new Families First Front Door.
Effective practice is recognised and evaluated, leading to cross-sector learning, innovation, and development.	The Board will take active participation in the quarterly QA activity to ensure that practice is consistently of a high standard.

Priority 2: Placing Children at the centre of practice

This strategic priority sets out our commitment to see children involved in the Youth Justice System as children and ensure that children's voices are heard and included in all our decision-making processes.

Key Outcomes	Our commitment
Intervention approaches recognise that children who have offended are seen as children first and interventions and plans will be developed with them, for them and focus on their strengths.	<p>We will be open and honest with children and their families in a language that children and their families understand.</p> <p>We will develop trusted relationships with children to empower them and engage them in their assessments, plans, and outcomes.</p>
Children are, through interventions with the Youth Justice Service, provided with opportunities to aspire and achieve and we listen to and respond to their individual needs.	<p>We will ensure children access education commensurate with their learning needs and advocate robustly when they are not provided with the appropriate support</p> <p>We will encourage children's engagement and participation in positive activities aimed at building their resilience and strengths.</p>
Children are empowered to define and guide how they engage with Plymouth Youth Justice Service.	<p>Ensure that children's views, wishes, experiences and aspirations are heard and embedded in their AssetPlus assessments, reports, and intervention plans.</p> <p>We will listen to children's stories and feedback to improve our practice and match service provisions based on their expressed needs within the 'youth offer.'</p>
Children are safeguarded and equipped with the skills to thrive in critical social contexts such as school, family, and their community.	We will be alongside children from arrest until the end of their youth justice journey, advocating their views and working effectively and collaboratively to safeguard them from harm.

Priority 3: Tackling disproportionality in the criminal justice system.

This strategic priority recognises the issue of over-represented groups in Plymouth who are in the Youth Justice System. These groups are children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), children who are care-experienced and children from minority ethnic backgrounds

Key Outcomes	Our commitment
Plymouth Youth Justice Service will ensure we create opportunities for all children which include those children who are from ethnically diverse communities, those who are care	<p>We will recognise unconscious bias and challenge discrimination within agencies involved in the Youth Justice System.</p> <p>We will ensure children receive fair</p>

experienced and those who may have additional needs, to promote a strong sense of self, and build their self-esteem through access and inclusion in education, employment, training, and positive activities.	<p>treatment at all stages of the youth justice system and their rights are promoted using Quality Assurance and feedback from the children and their families/carers.</p> <p>We will always be actively recruiting a workforce which includes volunteers reflective of the communities we serve.</p>
Children and their families/carers will benefit from relationships with informed and culturally competent and confident professionals, who are operating in a policy and practice context that promotes diversity and inclusion.	We will ensure our staff have appropriate training and champion good practice when working with marginalized communities.
<p>Children from ethnically diverse communities, those children who are care experienced and children who have additional needs will have the appropriate support and interventions they need if they are at risk of contextual harm.</p> <p>Professionals will have a strong understanding of the risks that marginalized communities face and be active in tackling disadvantage</p>	<p>We will continue to ensure that we work alongside our colleagues in Be Safe and our partners to ensure we understand the risks and issues that children face.</p> <p>We will ensure our staff have a strong understanding of contextual safeguarding risks that our children face.</p> <p>We will continue to be active participants in the Safeguarding Adolescent Working Group.</p>

Priority 4: Strengthening our Prevention and Diversion Offer

Using the Impact Project, we will continue to ensure that multiagency information and intelligence is gathered and shared to identify those children at the greatest risk of entering the Youth Justice system at the earliest opportunity. Our focus is to ensure that early intervention is targeted at children at risk of entry into the Youth Justice system by building resilience and preventing vulnerabilities from escalating into offending, social or educational exclusion, neglect, and abuse.

Key Outcomes	Our commitment
Children will be diverted from entering the Youth Justice System through good multi-agency working and identification of those children at risk	<p>We will work closely with our colleagues in the Child Centred Policing Team and Children's Services to identify children who would most benefit from early help and prevention.</p> <p>We will ensure that children at risk of</p>

	<p>entering the Youth Justice System are provided with support at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>We will ensure that we provide approaches and interventions that reduce the risk of offending.</p> <p>We will equip staff to build resilience, promote healthy relationships, and prevent escalation.</p>
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Priority 5: Reducing Re-offending

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 section 5 states that it is the responsibility of the local authority to have a strategy in place to reduce offending and anti-social behaviour.

We believe the best way to reduce the levels of youth crime is to intervene early to prevent children from committing offences in the first place and will continue to utilise the Impact Project to achieve this.

Key Outcomes	Our commitment
Children are provided with good quality relationship-based interventions that support behaviour change and an improved sense of belonging	<p>Staff training, development, and support to work towards a fully integrated trauma-informed model of practice. Our Trauma Champion will be attending regional events and training, and this learning will be cascaded down to the team.</p> <p>We will use data from a range of sources to measure local activity as it relates to crime, violence, poverty, health inequalities, school exclusions and access to preventative services to understand the causal and secondary factors that influence re-offending.</p> <p>We will further develop our Enhanced Case Management approach.</p>
Children involved in offending behaviour are supported to re-engage, re-integrate, or attend school and reduce their risk of exclusion.	We will work closely with Education providers to reduce the risk of children being excluded from school and improve their opportunities and access to higher/further education.

Children's conditions are improved by recognising and addressing parental mental health, domestic abuse, poverty, substance misuse, criminality and the quality of relationships parents have with their children which can affect their outcomes.	<p>We will always adopt a whole systems approach to re-offending by working closely with children and their families and wider partners to address risk and need at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>The Impact Project is a multi-agency partnership that includes substance misuse, domestic abuse, housing, and welfare advice services to ensure parents have access to support that improves their capacity to support children in their care</p> <p>We will continue to work closely with our Adolescent Team to provide specialist support</p>
Parents and communities are involved in finding solutions.	<p>We will engage parents in children's plans and interventions.</p> <p>We will utilize Family Group Conferencing and Family Network meetings to ensure children have the support they need</p>
Children are provided with appropriate housing and appropriate support on release from custody.	<p>We will ensure early planning is in place for children leaving custody.</p> <p>We will continue to attend the Youth Housing Hub to ensure that any child being released from custody will be considered</p>

Priority 6: Protecting the Public, recognising and responding to child exploitation and serious youth violence.

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Devon and Cornwall Police launched the Serious Violence Prevention Partnership in January 2024 and is focused on Breaking the Cycle of violence in under 25-year-olds. Safer Plymouth and the Plymouth Youth Justice Service are at the forefront of this partnership and seek to reduce violence in the city.

Key Outcomes	Our commitment
Serious violence incidents will reduce and children, their families and the communities will feel safer.	We will work closely with our partners to share resources enabling us to effectively intervene with children involved in complex

	<p>criminal exploitation/ abuse networks and assist children in disclosing harm and accessing support for physical and psychological recovery.</p> <p>We will coordinate and respond with intelligence-led disruption in the community, utilising available Youth Orders to protect children (i.e. Referral Order Contracts / Youth Rehabilitation Order requirements, etc.)</p> <p>We will support children demonstrating harmful sexual behaviour and address their behaviour using evidence-based approaches and interventions.</p> <p>We will seek to address intergenerational violence and exploitation by intervening at the earliest opportunity to work with families to divert children away from violence and crime, whilst reducing their risk of exploitation.</p> <p>We will continue to ensure children subject to early release, Detention and Training Order License and post-conviction have effective intervention strategies to reduce the risk presented to the public and victims.</p>
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Priority 7: Promote the rights of victims to help them recover from any trauma they have suffered because of others' behaviour

The Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Commissioner chairs the Local Criminal Justice Board; their current plan states victims of offending behaviour must be offered the best service possible to help them overcome any trauma they have suffered as victims of crime. We have recognised we offer a better service to a child who has offended, than we do to their victims. Therefore, we will offer any children who are the victims of crime an improved service to address their needs.

Key Outcomes	Our commitment
Victims receive a comprehensive range of support and intervention.	We will work closely with our partners to share resources and effectively intervene with children who have been victims of

	<p>crime.</p> <p>We will work with the Office of the Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Commissioner. We are building a directory of 3rd sector agencies commissioned by the Police and Crime Commissioner to work with victims to prioritise the intervention we offer these children.</p> <p>We will work with Victim Support (Devon and Cornwall) to share information and reduce the need for victims to tell their story numerous times.</p> <p>We will continue to work with services to provide an enhanced service to the victims we work with, including commissioned services that provide restorative justice approaches</p> <p>We will continue to develop our transitions pathway with the Probation Service to ensure child victims views are heard and understood.</p>
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Priority 8: Workforce development

Plymouth Youth Justice Service is committed to delivering high-quality, trauma-informed, and child-centred services through continuous workforce development, strong transition planning, and robust quality assurance.

Key Outcomes	Our commitment
All staff working with children are provided with the necessary training and development opportunities required to work meaningfully with children and their families. Children and their families receive effective interventions that meet need and reduce risk of re-offending	<p>We will ensure all staff attend the Child First Principles training.</p> <p>We have committed to providing HSB Assessment and Intervention Training for key staff.</p> <p>We will encourage our second practitioner to undertake the new Youth Justice Apprenticeship.</p>

	<p>We will continue to deliver the core rolling training programme</p> <p>We are committed to ensuring training and development is a key part of our work.</p>
There is evidence of positive outcomes for children through our data.	<p>We will further develop our quality assurance framework to ensure that good practice is highlighted and learning opportunities are identified and addressed.</p> <p>We will ensure that we capture children's and families feedback monthly as part of our framework.</p> <p>We will actively seek opportunities to engage in peer reviews with our colleagues in other areas of the country.</p>

Resources and services

Plymouth's Youth Justice Service comprises of the Youth Justice Team, Be Safe (Exploitation Team) and our Adolescent Edge of Care Team and sits within the larger umbrella of the Targeted Help and Prevention Service. This ensures that there is a seamless approach to responding to a child's needs when the need emerges.

The Youth Justice Service includes Social Workers and Youth Justice Practitioners as well as a Probation Officer (0.5FTE), CAMHs workers, Substance use worker, Speech and Language workers, Victim worker and a Police Officer, we will also be joined by an education worker from the Participation and Skills service by July 2025.

This enables the service to make a significant contribution towards partnership activity that extends beyond the direct delivery of youth justice service functions. In total, the service receives multi agency funding of £1,052,635 per year. The breakdown of the contribution is shown in [Appendix 2](#) This funding has improved the outcome for our children in ways such as a review of the language we use in our literature and the work of our Psychologist within the Enhanced Case Management delivery which has resulted in a reduction of risk and re-offending by the children who have engaged with us.

Plymouth Youth Justice Management Board have developed a Partnership Agreement that formalises our working arrangements and agreements and sets a clear expectation on how each agency will work preventing children offending and re-offending in the city.

Previously, Plymouth Youth Justice Service utilised the Capita case management system. Capita gave notice that they are withdrawing from the Youth Justice sector from April 2025. As a result, in February 2025, we moved over to the Child View case management system at a cost (at the time of writing this plan) of £86,000, this funding has been taken from our reserve after the Youth Justice Board raised a concern that our reserve was too high.

Service development

This year's plan is the first year of our new 3-year plan to improve the outcomes for the children we work with in Plymouth and the wider community we serve, and over the coming twelve months this plan has set out our priorities over this period. As well as these, the continued improvement of the transition between the YJS and Probation Service remains a priority. As the Probation Service develops their Young People team over the next twelve months, we will prioritise our procedures during this change and work closely with our colleagues there.

We have produced a Resettlement policy and procedures document; however, these are yet to be utilised as we have not had any children sentenced to custody and then released as a child. Should a child be released from a custodial sentence in the next twelve months, we will closely scrutinise these procedures to ensure they are suitable. We want any child in custody to know that; 3 months prior to their release, or at the midpoint of any short sentence, where they will live when they are released, what educational provision will be offered, that they will have continuous medical treatment, and they will be financially secure. Therefore, we will work with the secure estate when a child is sentenced to custody to ensure they have the best opportunities whilst serving their sentence, to help them achieve a successful, crime free, resettlement.

Exit planning continues to be prioritised this year, as stated previously, the 'drop ins' at Frederick Street are designed to offer support to children no longer open to us, we will be expanding this offer this year once the refurbishment of the centre is completed. Whilst we have trained staff to ensure practitioners have current and relevant training, we now have a regular manager meeting where we focus on continued practice development to ensure we utilise evidence-based research to respond to emerging practice, again, part of a 3-year plan.

We have received funding from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to enhance our diversion and prevention offer as part of the Turnaround project to support children believed to be at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

We have received £1.4M from the Youth Investment Fund to significantly improve the facilities at Frederick Street and make the centre accessible to children outside of traditional office hours. At the time of writing this plan, we are awaiting a move in date for the team to work from the centre. As well as improving security, we have developed

an education suite, gym, sensory room, child friendly waiting area, appointment rooms and a training kitchen.

Training and workforce development

All staff within the Plymouth Youth Justice Service have a development plan. This is reviewed according to identified delivery needs, as well as on a yearly basis to ensure training remains in line with current best practice. In addition, there is a proportion of the annual budget dedicated to training and staff are asked to identify any learning areas to improve their development. This is reviewed in annual appraisals.

We are very proud to announce that our first Youth Justice Apprentice passed her Youth Justice Practitioner Apprenticeship with distinction and has now started the new Degree in Youth Justice. She is due to complete it in January 2026.

We have also dedicated part of the training budget for staff to complete the specialised AIM 3 (Harmful Sexual Behaviour Assessment), AIM Supervisor, Harmful Sexual Behaviour Intervention training, and Sibling Sexual Abuse training (Victim focused work). Plymouth Youth Justice Service has a structured 12 month rolling programme of training and development. The development plan is led by a Team Manager and made up as follows:

- Underpinning Legislation and Policies that inform good practice – ‘Why do we do what we do.’
- Case Management – What’s New ‘How do we do good practice.’
- Record Keeping
- Assessing/Planning/Reviewing – how to be child’s needs outcomes focused.
- Understanding the relations between adversities and crime – so what do we do? ‘So, what difference can we make.’
- Risk of Harm and Managing Risk for the child and in the community ‘How do we keep children and the community safe?’
- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.
- Transitions: Supporting effective transitions of children in the YJS (including resettlement)
- Compliance and Engagement
- Court and Custody
- Victim work

In line with the new Social Work reforms and new HMIP inspection criteria, published in March 2025, we are developing new workshops for staff in the Youth Justice Service to continue to focus on Child First Principles, and children’s experiences of access to the Youth Justice Service.

As a service, although we have an experienced workforce, we continue to strive to ensure practice is of a high standard to improve the outcomes for children open to our service.

We want to further improve our offer by ensuring that we are consistent in our approach to encouraging children who we work with to have aspirations for the future. The recruitment of a dedicated education, employment, and training (EET) advisor, to offer support to children who are experiencing barriers to accessing services, will provide additional resources and expertise to ensure we can achieve this. Additionally, stronger links will be made with our SEND team, to enhance our approaches to access to education and training, and ensure all children have opportunities to thrive.

Finally, we want to ensure that we offer improved outcomes for victims of crime, therefore we are working with the other Youth Justice Service's within the Devon and Cornwall peninsula and the Police and Crime Commissioner to develop a directory of victim services in the region to help ensure the victims receive the support they need from commissioned services.

Developing Trauma-Informed Practice

We are deepening our trauma-informed approach through the Enhanced Case Management (ECM) model:

- A trauma champion has been appointed—our Harmful Sexual Behaviour Lead and Team Manager for Be Safe and the Daily Intelligence Briefing.
- The trauma champion and our Forensic Psychologist will complete Enhanced Case Management training via the Trauma Recovery Network.
- This work will support staff in producing trauma-informed supervision, court reports, assessments, and intervention plans, with a strong focus on child development, trauma, and neurodiversity.

Speech, language, and communication needs

In the last 12 months, the board has helped our partners to identify ways we can better collaborate to ensure good outcomes for our children. The fall within our disproportionality figures evidence what can be achieved and, notably, we increased our Speech and Language provision by 1 worker to address a waiting list of children in need of accessing this service.

Evidence-based practice and innovation

Child criminal exploitation continues to be a concern. In 2024-25, 22% of the children who had received a statutory intervention reported being exploited or had missing episodes. As a result, we created the Daily Intelligence Briefing (DIB) with the Police. The briefing discusses all children who have been reported missing in the last 24 hours, those who have been arrested, and children presenting as homeless (we recognise this increases the chances of a child being exploited). Partners in attendance are expected to discuss any child for whom we are concerned about exploitation. The meeting is

attended by 7 partner agencies/teams, each child discussed is given an action plan to reduce their risk and was recognised by OFSTED as good practice.

A weekly decision-making meeting with the Child Centred Policing Team Sgt and a Youth Justice Manager discusses outcomes for children. Should we agree (in this meeting) that a Youth Caution or above is a likely outcome, an assessment is carried out on that child who is then discussed at a Partnership Panel (OOC panel) to agree the decision, the Police have allocated a single investigating officer to deal with decision making for children and this is bringing consistency in approach should a charge be required. All children are offered voluntary contact, and two additional staff members have been recruited to undertake this work with one member of staff seconded to the child centred policing team to offer instant advice/consolations on children.

Our trauma informed practice will continue to develop. We have identified a trauma champion; our Harmful Sexual Behaviour Lead and Team Manager for Be Safe and the Daily Intelligence Briefing. The champion role will involve accessing Enhanced Case Management training through the Trauma Recovery Network, alongside our Forensic Psychologist, and both will support each other with our Enhanced Case Management approach over the next 12 months to build upon the support for our children in the Youth Justice System. The ECM work includes support for supervision, Court reports, assessments and formulating plans, whilst using an in-depth understanding of child development, trauma and neurodiversity support needs.

Child First Service

At the heart of Plymouth Youth Justice Service (YJS) is a commitment to the **Child First** approach, aligning with the Youth Justice Board's vision to treat children as children. We adopt the four core principles from the YJB's *Child First* guidance (2022):

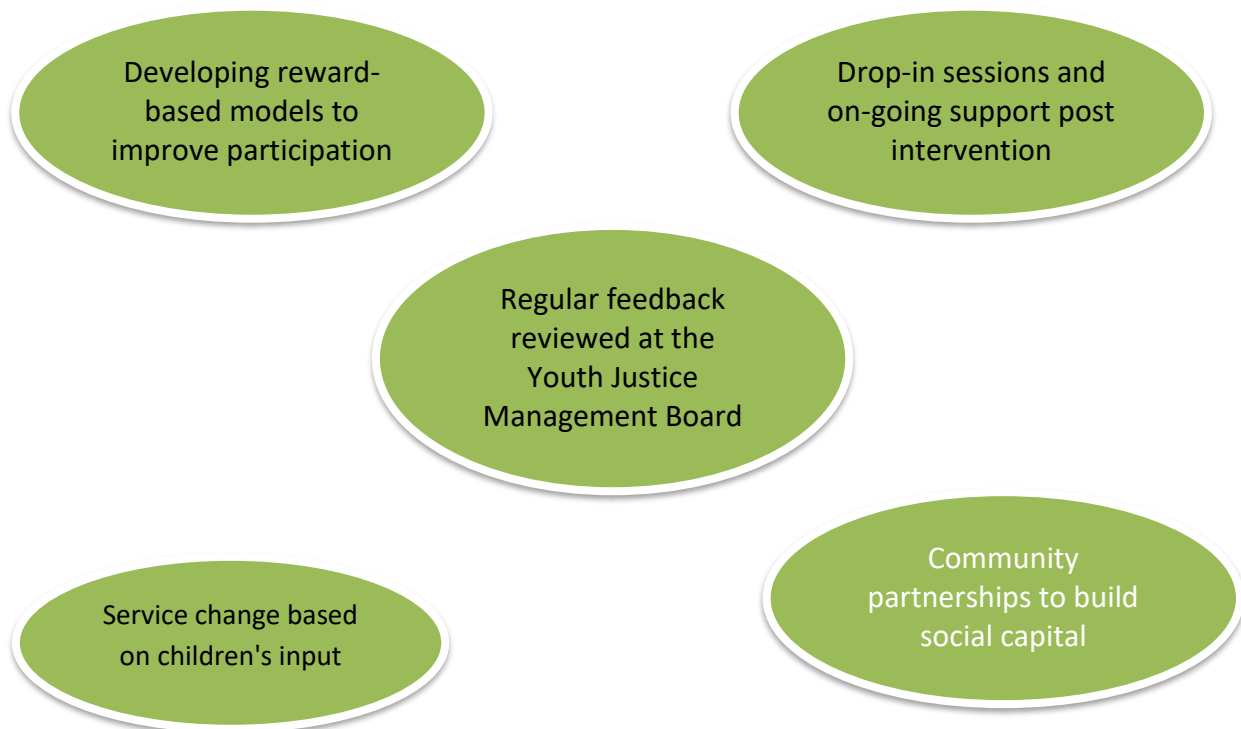


Over the next year we are committed to:

- Prioritise children's best interests and development
- Promote strengths and resilience
- Involving children and families in planning and decision-making
- Designing services based on lived experiences
- Ensure accountability through "You Said, We Did" reporting

Support and Participation

We are committed to ensuring children's voices shape both their individual plans and our wider service delivery. This includes:



Children and Families Voice

I'm thinking about
doing what you do
when I finish school

Excellent support through a
difficult process, good advice and
support throughout. Keeping
promises and communicates
throughout

Just wanted to say thanks
for your help with * you
are amazing at what you do

M Engaged which isn't
something she does easily, you
had a positive impact and
made her feel comfortable

Totally appreciate the support
and time you have given us,
made a really difficult situation
seem easier to handle

National Priority areas

Children from groups which are over-represented

The issue of disproportionality has now been raised with Safer Plymouth, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Youth Justice Board. Going forward, a participation group has been formed to seek the views and experiences of these children to feedback to partners in the Youth Justice System. We will continue to utilise the Youth Justice Board Disproportionality tool as well as the local authorities' school role to monitor disproportionality in the city and report this quarterly to the Plymouth Youth Justice Management Board. We recognise we have seen an emerging pattern of children open to Children Social Care also being open to the Youth Justice Service. At its peak, these children represented 41% of all of the children we worked with. Of these, Children in Care make up 24.6% of our work. We meet daily to look at children at risk of entering the Criminal Justice System, Social Workers regularly attend our Daily Intelligence Briefings to discuss child open to them.

Policing

In Plymouth, we are fortunate to have a Child Centred Policing Team consisting of a Sargent and 7 Police Officers and a Youth Charging Decisions Officer, to ensure consistency of decision making when dealing with children. To aid this, a Youth Justice worker is based in the Police station with the team.

As previously stated, 22% of the children open to the Youth Justice Service in the last 12 months also had missing episodes. The Daily Intelligence Briefing is a multi-agency approach to address this at the earliest opportunity, its purpose is to ensure that agencies and commissioned services work together effectively and consistently to identify risk, prevent harm, disrupt the exploitation of children and reduce the risks faced by those who go missing from home, care, or education. This briefing also includes seeking assurance from agencies and commissioned services in relation to the quality of service, risk assessments and service thresholds.

All children discussed are tracked utilising the DIB tracking tool to ensure we are aware of any ongoing interventions, Once the chair is content a plan is in place, the risk is reduced, or the multi-agency partners have mitigated risk the child is closed on the tracker.

Membership of the DIB

- ❖ Chair – Team Manager Be Safe
- ❖ Stronger Families (Adolescent Service)
- ❖ Youth Justice Service
- ❖ Child Centred Policing Team
- ❖ The Children's Society (Drug and Alcohol Service)
- ❖ CAMHS
- ❖ Families First Children's Service (Integrated Front Door)
- ❖ Designated Safeguarding Lead – ACE

- ❖ Community Connections (Community Youth)
- ❖ Livewell (Health)
- ❖ Education
- ❖ Permanence and Care Leavers

Diversions

During the period of April 24 – March 25 we had a total of 187 children come to the partnership panel following the point of arrest. This is a lower number than the previous 12 months however the complexity of the cases has increased as have the number of children receiving a substantive outcome or being charged to court. This was mainly due to an increase in the number of more serious offences coming through and no comment interviews.

There has been a significant improvement in the process and handling of children involved in low level offences. This is due to the Child Centred Policing Team now having 2 criminal investigators who actively work through the cases of children who have been arrested each day. This in turn allows more timely access to the Youth Justice Service with cases being allocated within a matter of weeks and not months. We continue to experience many challenges in more serious offences where forensics and investigations take a lot longer and sometimes it is felt that opportunities are missed to work with children released under investigation.

Restorative approaches and victims

Following a recommendation during the 2022 inspection, a review of work with victims has resulted in the delivery of victim specific interventions by a newly appointed, full time Victim Worker to ensure a clearer focus on victim safety. We continue to develop this offer, especially in the area of restorative conferences. We have undertaken a themed audit in February 2024 to look at 10% of our victim work, which showed 80% of the victims we work with were very satisfied with the service they have received. As stated in Priority No 7, we will expand this offer of our work this year.

Use of Custody Services

The Youth Justice Service has had two children receiving custodial sentences. There is a process in place to report all custodial remands and sentences to both the Youth Justice Board and Director of Children's Services for One Children's Service. There are also clear processes in place with the Youth Custody Service to ensure appropriate exchanges of information to enable suitable placement of vulnerable children. The Youth Justice Service is represented on the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership Board by the Service Director. However, it also reports to the Safeguarding Children's Partnership Quality Assurance and Performance group with regard to performance and areas of specific concern. As a member of the Strategic MAPPA Board the Youth Justice Service focusses on protecting people within our community from harm in terms of serious crime. Reformed in December 2020, the Management of Risk Panel has the authority to

amend Risk Management plans and escalate to other agencies at senior level were deemed necessary.

Remands

Last year, we had 2 children remanded in custody due to the seriousness of their offending and continued risk to their current and potential victims. We continue to work with the courts and police to produce alternatives to remand which have worked well. If we believe the risks posed by the child's behaviour can be safely managed in the community, we will offer robust alternatives to custody such as Bail, Intensive Supervision Surveillance (ISS), Intensive Referral Orders, or a Youth Rehabilitation Order. The requirements with an ISS, will include curfews, exclusion areas, or non-associations to manage the risk posed.

We meet with the local magistrates six monthly to discuss procedures and custody rates (including remands), report quarterly to the Safer Plymouth Executive and the Plymouth Youth Justice Management Board.

Use of custody and constructive resettlement

In December 2020, the Plymouth Youth Justice Management Board requested a specific Resettlement Policy so agencies can be confident of their respective responsibilities in respect of resettlement and the procedures involved. This policy was praised in our inspection and, following feedback, reviewed in February 2023 and 2024. Since the inspection we have not had any child released from custody, however we are confident this is a robust policy.

Last year, we had one child sentenced to a custodial sentence. At the time of sentencing, he was 18 and transferred the Probation Service to plan his release.

Serious violence, exploitation, and contextual safeguarding

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 set out a Serious Violence Duty in which 'specified authorities' are required to collaborate in local efforts to reduce and prevent serious violence, the Youth Justice Service is named as a specified Authority. As a result, a Youth Justice Manager now sits on the Safer Plymouth Serious Violence Group.

The Serious Violence Duty, as outlined in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 places a new statutory duty on designated public sector agencies to tackle and prevent violence, by developing a multi-agency approach to violence prevention. Furthermore, the duty requires agencies to consult with young people across their region in order to understand perceptions and experiences of violence.

The group will provide strategic leadership and oversight to reducing and preventing serious violence in Plymouth. They will lead the local implementation of the Serious Violence Duty as defined in the forthcoming Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Act.

This will be within a public health model that recognises the wider determinants of violence and prioritises prevention.

The group functions of the group include:

- ✓ Taking a whole system view to violence prevention
- ✓ Being responsible for developing performance measures against the agreed delivery priorities and monitoring their effectiveness
- ✓ Having an overview of workforce development relevant to the group's priorities
- ✓ Being responsive to emerging issues, for example; from national policy developments, local safeguarding reviews, domestic homicide reviews and national inspectorates. Reports and findings are shared to ensure learning arises and good practice is effectively shared across the partnership.
- ✓ Providing an environment in which effective multi-agency practice can flourish
- ✓ Implementing communication priorities in line with the Safer Plymouth Communication Plan
- ✓ Continuing to identify and maximise funding and investment opportunities for serious violence prevention work

The Youth Justice Service have developed a preventative project to divert young people from becoming first time entrants to the Youth Justice system, following initial contact with the police known as the Impact Project and children who commit violence are a primary focus of this project. A key concept of this is our response to Contextual safeguarding. Within our Daily Intelligence Briefing, any child reported missing in the previous 24 hours or over a weekend, any child missing over 24 hours, any child arrested over night, and any child reported as homeless is discussed and their relationship with the Youth Justice Service and Police is considered to understand how best to intervene and safeguard them. Other themes are also raised, such as; adults of concern, places and spaces where harm takes place, peer groups and substance misuse concerns across the city.

We will now work with our Community Safety Partnership to bring themes and concerns linked with exploitation to our Safer Communities Forum, where our partners can become involved with safeguarding our children within the context of Risk Outside the Home. This will be a priority for 2025 and will raise awareness of child criminal and child sexual exploitation in Plymouth and across the peninsula.

Working with families

The Plymouth Youth Justice Service offers a whole family approach when working with children to offer the carers and parents support with housing, benefits, and parenting which can be seen throughout this plan.

The Youth Justice Service Manager also holds responsibility for the Adolescent Team and the Be Safe Team, all work together to provide wrap around support for children at

risk of contextual harm. The Service sits within the Targeted Help and Prevention Service in Children, Young People and Families.

Plymouth is also proud to offer **11 Family Hubs** across the city, providing welcoming, one-stop spaces where families with children and young people aged 0–19 (or up to 25 for those with special educational needs and disabilities) can access a wide range of support, including parenting, help with school attendance, guidance on housing and benefits or simply a place to connect with others and reduce isolation. Each hub offers access to health services, education and development programs, social support, and community activities tailored to local needs.



Family Hubs are located throughout Plymouth, including North Prospect, Morice Town, The Barn (Barne Barton), Four Woods (West Park), Manor Street (Stonehouse), Southway, Green Ark (Devonport), Four Greens (Whitleigh), Rees (Plympton), Nomony (Cattedown), and Efford (opening September 2025).

In addition, Plymouth is developing a network of Satellite Hubs to bring services even closer to the communities that need them most.

Sign off: Submission and Approval

This Youth Justice Plan has been shared with the Youth Justice Partnership Board for review and endorsement. The Plan has been signed by the YJS Partnership Board Chair on their behalf and confirms that it covers all sections required by the Youth Justice Board.

In accordance with 'Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Functions and responsibilities) England Regulations 2000', Youth Justice Plans must be approved by the full council of the local authority. This Youth Justice Plan is subject to the scrutiny and approval processes of Plymouth local authority.

Plymouth Youth Justice Plan signatories		
Chair of the Plymouth Youth Justice Management Board: Cate Hearnshaw		Date: 30/06/25
Head of Service – Targeted Help and Youth Justice Service: Martine Aquilina		Date: 28.06.25

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	16 July 2025
Title of Report:	Q4 2024/25 Performance Report
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Director for Childrens Services)
Author:	Paul Stephens & Susan London
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Your Reference:	PSCSS-2024/25(Q4)
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

To share key performance data information related to Children Services (Children, Young People and Family Services and Education, Participation and Skills)

Recommendations and Reasons

To note the attached briefing paper for information and discussion

Alternative options considered and rejected

Not applicable

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

Not applicable

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

For information

Financial Risks

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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Fin	N/A	Leg	N/A	Mon Off	N/A	HR	N/A	Assets	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
<p>Originating Senior Leadership Team member: David Haley</p> <p>Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes</p> <p>Date agreed: 26/06/2025</p> <p>Cabinet Member approval: Yes - Cllr Laing</p> <p>Date approved: 26/06/2025</p>											

Q4 2024/25 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

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I. CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILY SERVICES

I.1. REFERRALS & RE-REFERRALS

I.1. REFERRALS & RE-REFERRALS				Previous Year & Benchmarking			Current Period
Ref	Indicator Name	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	England	Statistical Neighbours	Q4 2024/25
1	Number of referrals received within the last 12 months	3,285	2,415	3,879	518.3 (2023/24)	728.5 (2023/24)	2,848
	Referrals received within the last 12 months - Rate per 10,000 children	616.4	467.7	748.2			548.2
2	Number of re-referrals within 12 months (last 12 months)	743	483	780	22.4% (2023/24)	24.4% (2023/24)	765
	% of re-referrals within 12 months (last 12 months)	22.6%	20.0%	20.1%			26.9%

Plymouth processed 2,848 referrals in the 12 months ending quarter four. This represents a decrease of 1,031 referrals compared to March 2024, but an increase of 433 referrals from March 2023 levels.

The referral rate per 10,000 children was 548.2 at quarter four's end. This rate has decreased from Plymouth's 2023/24 published position of 782.2 and sits between our statistical neighbour average (728.5) and the England average (518.3).

Re-referral rates have increased, presenting a key area of focus. At quarter four's end, 26.9% of referrals were re-referrals (cases where the same child had been referred within the previous 12 months). This represents:

- A 0.7 percentage point increase during the last quarter
- A 6.8 percentage point increase from Plymouth's 2023/24 published figure
- A rate higher than both statistical neighbours and the England average for 2023/24

Since June 2024, we have refined our Public Protection Notice (PPN) process at the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). We now only progress PPNs that meet the statutory threshold. When a PPN doesn't require this level of response, we inform our police colleagues so they can update their records accordingly.

The MASH and Targeted Help Service now work more closely together. This alignment ensures children and families receive appropriate support that best meets their needs, including families who don't require statutory intervention.

We continue working with team managers to ensure interventions are sustained before ending Children's Services involvement. The MASH Operational Group regularly samples practice and shares learning with the wider partnership. This ensures all partners understand assessment outcomes and plans before we conclude involvement with a family.

Our target is to maintain monthly re-referral levels below 23%. April 2025 showed encouraging progress at 21.4%. Achieving this target will help stabilise our rolling 12-month position, as reflected in the performance data above.

1.2. CHILDREN IN NEED

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1.2. CHILDREN IN NEED				Previous Year & Benchmarking			Current Period
Ref	Indicator Name	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	England	Statistical Neighbours	Q4 2024/25
3	Number of children subject to a Child In Need Plan (snapshot)	965	944	1,379	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	857
	Children subject to a Child In Need Plan - Rate per 10,000 children	181.1	177.1	265.4	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	164.9

Plymouth's Child in Need caseload increased slightly by 26 children in quarter four compared to quarter three. This caseload excludes children subject to Child Protection Plans or Looked After Children. Despite this quarterly increase, the current figure remains lower than the last three year-end positions.

However, we note that children subject to Child Protection Plans or Child in Care Plans (covered in the next two sections) are currently at higher levels than the previous two year-end positions.

Practice Improvements and Impact

Our department-wide practice improvement work has successfully reduced the number of children with Child in Need plans. This reduction reflects ongoing improvement work and enhanced scrutiny of plans by senior management. Key changes to our approach include:

- Children needing intervention following assessment are now transferred to Targeted Help from Initial Response, rather than to longer-term social care teams
- Children with CIN plans in longer-term teams have their plans reviewed monthly with the Service Manager to assess suitability

We recognize that children needing additional support benefit from early intervention, which can prevent the need for statutory services. We have developed a workstream with partners to create clear pathways for families to access early help and targeted early help without requiring social work intervention.

The impact of this approach is already visible in referral volumes and subsequent assessments. This is positive for families, as we want to ensure they receive the least intrusive interventions possible.

The Children's Social Work Service holds regular Child in Need tracker meetings chaired by service managers. These meetings enable reflective discussions and ensure there is no drift or delay in support and intervention for families.

Training and development continues for all managers. We are currently running a specific management programme for aspiring team managers, with Heads of Service supporting them to develop the skills and confidence needed to manage and lead teams. This runs alongside the 'Leaders for Excellence' programme, which focuses on practice improvement.

In November 2024, the Government published 'Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive'. This has led to Families First Partnership reform and a commitment to rolling out family help and multi-agency child protection teams. Our approach and practice for supporting children in need will likely change during 2025/26 as we implement the Government's social care policies.

1.3. CHILDREN SUBJECT TO A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

1.3. CHILDREN SUBJECT TO A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN				Previous Year & Benchmarking			Current Period
Ref	Indicator Name	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	England	Statistical Neighbours	Q4 2024/25
4	Number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan (Snapshot)	326	230	299	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	361
	Children subject to a Child Protection Plan - Rate per 10,000 children	61.2	44.5	57.7	41.6 (2023/24)	54.4 (2023/24)	69.5
5	Category of abuse for current Child Protection Plan: Neglect	51.5% (168)	45.9% (107)	50.2% (150)	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	52.4% (189)
	Category of abuse for current Child Protection Plan: Physical Abuse	7.7% (25)	6.4% (15)	8.4% (25)	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	8.6% (31)
	Category of abuse for current Child Protection Plan: Sexual Abuse	3.7% (12)	4.3% (10)	8.4% (25)	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	5.8% (21)
	Category of abuse for current Child Protection Plan: Emotional Abuse	37.1% (121)	43.3% (101)	33.0% (99)	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	33.2% (120)
6	% of children subject to multiple child protection plans - Within lifetime of the child (new plans starting in last 12 months)	27.5% (103)	25.8% (65)	30.1% (112)	24.7% (2023/24)	25.5% (2022/23)	19.7% (81)

As of 31 March 2025, 361 children were subject to Child Protection Plans, representing a rate of 69.5 children per 10,000. This is higher than Plymouth's published 2023/24 rate of 57.7 (299 children). The current rate exceeds both the England average by 27.9 per 10,000 and our Statistical Neighbour average by 15.1 per 10,000.

The proportion of children who became subject to a Child Protection Plan between April 2024 and March 2025, and who had previously been on a Child Protection Plan, was 19.7%. This represents a significant decrease of 10.4 percentage points from 31 March 2024.

Over the past 12 months, 81 children and young people have started repeat Child Protection Plans. This is an improvement from the end of 2023/24 and is currently better than both the statistical neighbours average of 25.5% and the England average of 24.7% (both of which increased from their previous year positions).

We maintain strong focus on requests for repeat Child Protection Plans, with greater oversight by Service Managers. This provides more consistency and creates opportunities for reflective discussions to ensure care plans are appropriate for these children and to explore whether we can work differently with families.

We also focus strongly on Child Protection Plans lasting over 12 months. Monthly meetings are chaired jointly by the Service Manager for Safeguarding and the Service Manager for Children's Social Work Service to ensure effective oversight and timely decisions for children.

The department is working with the Plymouth Safeguarding Partnership Board to continue rolling out the 'NSPCC Neglect Graded Care Profile 2 Assessment Tool'. This supports all staff and volunteers across the system to identify and improve support for children and young people who may experience neglect. Staff within the Children's Social Work service have completed the assessment training, and we ensure new staff attend this training as part of their induction.

As part of our improvement journey, we are equipping social workers with better understanding of sexual abuse identification. Workshops ran from November to April for staff across Initial Response Teams, Children's Social Work, and Children with Disabilities Teams. The main aims of these workshops were to:

- Share partnership work that supports practitioners working with families where sexual abuse is a concern
- Help staff develop confidence and skills to carry out direct work with children where there are sexual abuse concerns
- Strengthen collaboration with the centre of excellence

The Children's Social Work Service Manager now chairs the child sexual abuse working group and continues to ensure learning and development is integrated into monthly service meetings with staff.

1.4. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (ALSO REFERRED TO AS CHILDREN IN CARE)

I.4. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (ALSO REFERRED TO AS CHILDREN IN CARE)				Previous Year & Benchmarking			Current Period
Ref	Indicator Name	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	England	Statistical Neighbours	Q4 2024/25
7	Number of children subject to a Care Plan - Looked After Children (Snapshot)	490	500	513	70.0 (2023/24)	94.0 (2023/24)	530
	Children subject to a Care Plan - Looked After Children - Rate per 10,000 children	91.9	96.9	99.0			102.0
8	Number of Looked After Children in an unregistered placement (snapshot)	4	6	9	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	7
9	% of Looked After Children placed outside of the city of Plymouth (i.e., the placement is not within PL1 to PL7 or PL9)	38.0% <small>(23% DfE: +20 miles of LA boundary)</small>	39.9% <small>(25% DfE: +20 miles of LA boundary)</small>	42.7% <small>(23% DfE: 20+ miles of LA boundary)</small>	Within boundary not benchmarked <small>17.0% DfE: 20+ miles of LA boundary)</small>	Within boundary not benchmarked <small>20.1% DfE: 20+ miles of LA boundary)</small>	44.2% (234)
10	Placement Type: Family Placement (fostering or connected carers)	325	339	368	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	343
	Placement Type: Children's Homes, Residential Care Homes & Residential Schools	56	57	57	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	64
	Placement Type: Hostels & other Supportive accommodation	33	48	47	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	54
	Placement Type: Lodgings or Independent living (16+)	16	x	x	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	x
	Placement Type: Other Placement	x	5	8	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	6
	Placement Type: Placed for Adoption	24	18	5	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	13
	Placement Type: Placed with Parents	28	32	26	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	42
	Placement Type: Other accommodation - NHS, Family Centres, Parent & Child	7	x	x	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	6
	Placement Type: Secure Units & Youth Offender Institutions	x	x	x	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	x

Please note: where the number of children is below five, the actual figure is suppressed and shows 'x'.

As of 31 March 2025, there were 530 children and young people in care. This represents a net increase of 30 from the published 2022/23 figure and 17 more than the published 2023/24 figure of 513. The average month-end position over the past 12 months was 525 children and young people.

Of the 530 children in care, 296 (55.8%) were placed within the city, while 234 (44.2%) were placed outside the city. This is slightly higher than our internal 2023/24 figure of 42.7% and higher than the positions at the end of 2021/22 and 2022/23.

This measure is based on the postcode of the child's placement address. Postcodes outside PL1 to PL7 or PL9 are considered outside the city. For example, PL12 refers to Saltash in Cornwall and is considered outside Plymouth, even though it may be less than a mile from a child's home address.

Using provisional information, approximately 24.7% of children in care (131 out of 530) are placed more than 20 miles from their home address.

The number of children in unregistered arrangements increased to seven at the end of quarter four, compared to four at the end of quarter three. This has further increased to ten currently, of which four are registered by CQC.

The Family Homes for Plymouth's Children programme continues working to build sufficiency of local foster homes, develop our own residential provision, and support reunification to family where it is safe to do so.

Sufficiency of fostering homes for children and young people remains a challenge both locally and nationally. However, we have seen positive developments:

- One child successfully stepped down from residential to an in-house foster home
- Two further plans are actively progressing from residential to in-house fostering
- Two children avoided residential placement due to additional support provided to in-house foster carers

While the overall number of fostering households has not significantly increased (due to carers retiring as new carers are registered), the number of children placed in in-house fostering arrangements has grown from 138 at the end of January 2025 to 151 at the end of April 2025. More children now live with in-house foster carers than with Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) foster carers.

The Fostering Summit took place on 7 February 2025 and received positive feedback about the support and financial offers provided. We are developing our work with Reconnect to increase specialist fostering recruitment as part of the STEPS programme, complementing the work of our in-house fostering and brokerage teams.

The Special Guardianship Support Team continues reaching out to Special Guardians to ensure they are aware of the new SGO Support Offer. A proposal for an updated financial offer for special guardians will be presented to the next Family Homes Board in June 2025.

Two children were successfully reunified with their parent from long-term care in May 2025. A further two young people have plans to return to their parent's care over the school summer break, one of whom will be moving out of residential care.

The percentage of children in care placed more than 20 miles from home (based on placement postcode compared to home postcode) has increased slightly in the last quarter.

A review of children and young people placed outside Plymouth, more than 20 miles from home and outside Devon and Cornwall, was undertaken to understand the impact. This report was presented to the Quality Assurance, Performance and Improvement Board in May. Currently, 13% of our children in care live outside Devon and Cornwall.

1.5. CARE EXPERIENCED (ALSO REFERRED TO AS CARE LEAVERS)

1.5. CARE EXPERIENCED (ALSO REFERRED TO AS CARE LEAVERS)				Previous Year & Benchmarking			Current Period
Ref	Indicator Name	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	England	Statistical Neighbours	Q4 2024/25
11	% of Care Experienced young people in Unsuitable Accommodation (Statutory Service (aged 18 to 20))	6.1% (11/181) (11% DfE)	4.1% (8/192) (12% DfE)	9.5% (19/201) (15% DfE)	12.0% (2023/24 DfE)	12.4% (2023/24 DfE)	7.0% (14/2081)
12	% of Care Experienced young people in Education, Employment and Training (Statutory Service (EET aged 18 to 20))	56.4% (102/181) (49% DfE)	50.0% (96/192) (47.0% DfE)	43.3% (87/201) (45.0% DfE)	54.0% (2023/24 DfE)	52.2% (2023/24 DfE)	46.8% (94/201)

Plymouth's fourth-quarter data shows that 7.0% of care-experienced young people are in unsuitable accommodation. This is lower than both the England average and the statistical neighbours' average for 2023/24. While the number of young people in unsuitable accommodation has improved compared to our published 2023/24 figure, it remains slightly higher than the figures reported for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

The Housing and Preparation for Adulthood meeting continues to ensure timely plans are in place for young people approaching 18. This is supported by the Transitions Meeting for young people who may require Adult Social Care or Health-funded support after turning 18. The Care Leavers Team collaborates with colleagues through the steering group for new SHAP-funded housing provision. Although the opening has been delayed, planning continues to ensure young people with the greatest need are prioritised when it opens in August 2025.

The proportion of care leavers in Education, Employment, and Training (EET) was 46.8%, which is 3.5 percentage points higher than our internal 2023/24 figure. Our DfE published figure of 45.0% for 2023/24 (which uses slightly different criteria than our internal reporting) was approximately 8.9 to 10.7 percentage points lower than the published figures for our comparators.

While our NEET rates remain below England and statistical neighbours' averages, we have seen steady improvement in reducing the number of young people recorded as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

We held a focused workshop to increase aspirations and engagement for care-experienced young people. This brought together key leaders from One Children's Service and DWP to agree strategic priorities for enhancing our work in this area.

Agreement for a coordinator post has been given alongside agreement for the Virtual School to extend their support to care experienced young people aged 18 - 25. This coordinated support will help individual young people progress from NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) through SEET (Supported Employment, Education or Training) to EET (Education, Employment and Training). The Connect to Work programme will further improve outcomes when it launches in September 2025.

Please **note:** The DfE calculation differs from our local figures. We include all care leavers (Qualifying, Relevant & Former Relevant) and use the latest information available for those aged under 21. The DfE only include Former Relevant care leavers and use information held around the young person's 19th, 20th or 21st birthday.

2. EDUCATION, PARTICIPATION AND SKILLS

2.1. OFSTED OUTCOMES

				Previous Year & Benchmarking			Current Period
Ref	Indicator Name	2020/21 Actual	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	England	South West	Q1 2024/25
1	% of all schools judged by Ofsted as good or outstanding	Inspections paused due to COVID	76.0%	77.6%	89.6% (pub. Dec 2023) 90.4% (End of August report)	86.9% (pub. Dec 2023) 86.6% (End of August report)	90.8% (89/98) End of August position
2	% of pupils attending Plymouth schools judged by Ofsted as good or outstanding	Inspections paused due to COVID	77.1%	81.0%	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	90.5% (32,201 / 35,576)

PLEASE NOTE: From September 2024, OFSTED no longer provides a one-word judgement on the overall effectiveness of a school. Therefore, the figures will remain static for future reporting until it can be established how OFSTED will be using inspection data for monitoring purposes.

There are 98 state-funded schools in Plymouth and at the end of quarter two for 2024/25, 90.8% of schools are judged as Good or Outstanding. When we break this figure down into the number of primary, secondary, and special schools judged as Good or better, we can see that there are:

- 2 out of 2 Nurseries (100% compared to 97.4% nationally)
- 65 out of 69 Primary Schools (94.2% compared to 91.6% nationally),
- 16 out of 19 Secondary Schools (84.2% compared to 83.8% nationally), and
- 5 out of 7 Special Schools (71.4% compared to 90.5% nationally).

2.2. ABSENCE MONITORING

				Current published data & Benchmarking			Current Period
Ref	Indicator Name	2021/22 Plymouth	2022/23 Plymouth	Plymouth	England	South West	Jan to Apr 2024/25
3	% of overall absence in all schools	8.8%	8.2%	8.3% (Academic Year 2023/24)	7.1% (Academic Year 2023/24)	7.6% (Academic Year 2023/24)	7.9% (View Your Education Data, Spring Term)
4	% of persistent absence (less than 90% attendance) in all schools	28.1%	24.1%	23.6% (Academic Year 23/24) (Of which 3.2% were severely absent)	20.0% (Academic year 23/24) (Of which 2.3% were severely absent)	20.8% (Academic year 23/24) (Of which 2.8% were severely absent)	18.8% (Of which 2.1% were severely absent) (View Your Education Data Spring Term)
	% of persistent absence (less than 90% attendance) of pupils with Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs)	45.0%	40.5%	40.5% (Academic Year 23/24) (Of which 8.5% were severely absent)	35.5% (Academic Year 23/24) (Of which 6.8% were severely absent)	38.6% (Academic Year 23/24) (Of which 8.5% were severely absent)	38.2% (721) (Of which 9.3% (176) were severely absent) (View Your Education Data, Spring Term)

The benchmark information provided above is provided from the Department for Education; compiled from the statutory school census return completed on a termly basis. The best available report for the three indicators above is the 2023/24 academic year data.

The data source for local absence statistics continues to be taken from 'View Your Education Data' (VYED) website, the DfE site for collating school absence. All Plymouth schools are now reporting daily attendance figures to this site and therefore the most reliable source for collated statistics.

VYED presents absence data cumulatively from the beginning of each term and therefore the following data represents the period from 01/01/2025 to 30/04/2025. In the Spring term of 2024/25:

- The Overall absence rate was 7.9% (0.2pp higher than the Autumn Term)
- The percentage of those persistently absent was 18.8% (3.7pp lower than the Autumn Term)
- The percentage of those with an EHCP who were persistently absent was 38.2% (2.2pp lower than the Autumn Term).

In comparison to the same period in 2023/24, attendance is higher for all pupils. When looking at persistent absence in the same period last year, this has reduced. However, in comparison, severe absence was lower at the same point last year, than in this year.

Work continues by the Inclusion and Welfare Service to reduce school absence.

A School Attendance research project has been delivered in partnership with Marjon University. The parent survey received over 2000 responses and the child survey 1500. The survey explored themes in respect of belonging, part time timetables and school absence. The 'Belonging' strand lead of the place-based working group has been involved in the development of the surveys and the learning from the project will both feed back into the place-based working group and inform future media campaigns promoting the importance of school attendance. The DfE have asked for the research findings to be shared with them, and Plymouth is one of four local authorities helping to shape the national attendance campaign.

After establishing and helping to rectify an error which prevented successful data uploading, all schools in Plymouth are now reporting attendance data daily to VYED (View your education data); therefore, our data set is complete and as such city averages are meaningful.

Following the creation of the Extended Role within the Virtual School, monitoring is now taking place with regard to the attendance of CPP (those on a Child Protection Plan) & CIN (Children in Need) children. This will enable the LA to get a better understanding of this vulnerable cohort. The Extended Role Co-ordinator regularly meets with Social Workers and offers drop-in sessions, in order to promote that a focus on Education is key when considering the safeguarding of children and young people.

The Inclusions Service has worked with SEN Service to help launch the new GATI (Graduated Approach to Inclusion) and OAP (Ordinary Available Provision) resources. This is to improve the support of those with additional needs, with the goal to keep pupils in school and maintain good attendance. In addition to this, a SEN Support working group has been established which, in collaboration with schools, will work to better understand the cohort of K support children in schools.

Reducing the rate and duration of part time timetables and Elective Home Education is a strategic priority for the city. Home educating parents will be invited to meet 1:1 with the Head of Education and Virtual School, in series of Listening Events, so that we learn from the experiences of families who home educate. This will inform our approach to early help and prevention within the Home Education Policy and Attendance Strategy. A focus for the remaining academic year will look towards tightening up reporting processes and length of time pupils spend on part-time timetables, which could be inadvertently hiding attendance issues.

2.3. EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

				Previous Year & Benchmarking			Current Period
Ref	Indicator Name	2022 Plymouth	2023 Plymouth	2024 Plymouth	2024 England	2024 Regional	Q4 2024/25
6	% of 16- and 17-year-olds in Education, Employment and Training	91.1%	90.4%	93.3%	94.6%	94.6%	92.3% (End of April 2024/25)
7	% of 16- and 17-year-olds with SEND in Education, Employment and Training	83.2%	81.4%	89.2%	90.2%	90.0%	91.0% (End of April 2024/25)

By the end of Q4 (April 2025), 92.3% of 16-and 17-year-olds are in Education Employment and Training. By the end of the Spring Term of 2024/25, this figure is 3% lower than the figure seen at the end of the Autumn Term 2024/25 (95.2%).

The percentage of 16- and 17-year-olds with SEND in Education, Employment and Training at the end of April 2025 is 91.0%. This is 0.7% higher than the figure seen at the end of the Autumn Term 2024/25 (90.4%)

Continuing the positive engagement of 2023/24, the target for 16- and 17-year-olds with SEND, being in Education, Employment and Training has been raised to 92% for 2024/25. Data is evidencing that the Post 16 team is on target to achieve this with 91.0% of SEND 16 and 17 years olds in EET status. Moving young people from not being in education, employment, and training (NEET) to seeking (SEET), education, employment, and training remains the focus of the team.

As the academic year 2024/25 progresses, the post 16 team continue to widen their offer of extensive support to transition into employment, education or training to groups who may experience disadvantage, which now together with the SEN cohort includes (but not exclusive to) those in care, care leavers, young carers and young parents.

- NEET numbers across all cohorts of 16 and 17 years old, remain low at 4.5%
- 68% of post 16 young people in Care are in EET; 88% of those who are not are seeking education, employment or training
- 68.5% of care leavers are either in EET or are seeking EET
- 50% of young parents are in EET or seeking EET
- 67 EHCP young people are on a supported internship. The number of providers offering supported internships has increased from one to four, with three more providers delivering from September 2025 and discussions taking place with two more providers who are looking to deliver in the next academic year.

2.4. KEY STAGE 4 OUTCOMES

				Current published data & Benchmarking			Current Period
Ref	Indicator Name	2021/22 Plymouth	2022/23 Plymouth	2023/24 England	2023/24 Regional	2023/24 Statistical Neighbours	2023/24 Plymouth
8	Key Stage 4 - % of pupils achieving 5+ in English and Maths	46.0%	41.7% (1,214/ 2,912)	46.2% (23/24 revised)	45.8% (23/24 revised)	44.4% (23/24 revised)	46.3% (1,328/ 2,869)
9	Key Stage 4 - Average Attainment 8 score	47.6 points	44.9 Points (Average score for 2,912 pupils)	46.1 points (23/24 revised)	46.0 points (23/24 revised)	45.0 points (23/24 revised)	46.2 Points (Average score for 2869 pupils)

Outcomes for the end of Key Stage 4 (the point at which the majority of 15- & 16-year-olds complete GCSEs at the end of their statutory education) are measured primarily through numerical values assigned per GCSE subject (or an equivalent value for a non-numerical qualification outcome such as a 'pass' at BTEC).

For each pupil, for each GCSE subject completed and assessed, a value will be provided between one and nine (nine being the highest achieved level). A 'level 4' is considered to be a 'standard' pass, a 'level 5' is considered to be a 'strong' pass. Attainment 8 is the sum of the eight highest achieved passes by a student; these figures are then averaged per school, per Local Authority and nationally to create performance measures. Further information can be found in Annex 1 – Indicator Definitions

Revised data released by the DfE for 2023/24 is showing that 46.3% of all KS4 pupils achieved a strong pass in English and Maths at Key Stage Four. This is a 10.9% increase from 41.7% achieved in 2022/23; 4.6pp higher.

In 2023/24, Plymouth's average for those achieving a strong pass in English and Maths is 0.1pp above the National average (46.2%). Plymouth is above the statistical neighbour average of 44.4% and the regional neighbour average of 45.8%

Revised data released by the DfE for 2023/24 is showing that the average attainment 8 points score for KS4 pupils in Plymouth is 46.2. This is 1.3 points higher than the average in 2022/23 (44.9) This is 0.1 points above the national (46.1), 1.2 points above the statistical neighbour (45.0) average and 0.2 points above the regional neighbour average (46.0).

In 2023/24, 23.8% of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) achieved 'the basics' (5+ in English and Maths). This is a 28.6% increase from the 18.5% achieved in 2022/23; 5.3pp higher. When compared to the national average Plymouth is 2.2pp lower (26.0%), but 1.3pp higher than the statistical neighbour average (22.5%) and 1.5pp higher than the regional neighbour average (22.3%). Although Plymouth is below the national average of 26% of FSM pupils achieving 'the basics', Plymouth's gap in achievement between FSM and non-FSM pupils has narrowed due to the increased achievement of FSM pupils in 2023/24. In 2023/24 this is 29.1pp (52.9% – 23.8%) compared to 30.1pp (48.6%-18.5%) in 2022/23.

In 2023/24, 6.7% of pupils with an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) achieved 'the basics'. This is a reduction of 18.3% compared to 2022/23 (8.2%); 1.5pp lower. This is below the national average of 7% for EHCP pupils and regional neighbour average of 7%, but above the statistical neighbour average of 4.4% for EHCP pupils

In 2023/24, 24.5% of pupils receiving SEN (Special Educational Needs) Support achieved 'the Basics'. This is an increase of 31.0% compared to 2022/23 (18.7%); 5.8pp higher. This is above the national average of 21.6%, the regional neighbour average of 21.3% and above the statistical neighbour average of 19.7% for pupils receiving SEN Support.

3. ANNEX 1: INDICATOR DEFINITIONS

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILY SERVICES
Referrals & Re-Referrals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where concerns about a child have been raised to Children, Young People and Family Services, once the initial contact has been screened by our multi-agency hub, if appropriate, referrals will be accepted. The rate of referrals per 10,000 children is based on the number of referrals received in the 12-month period divided by the number of children aged 0 to 17 in the city (ONS estimate this at 53,291 for Mid-2021) multiplied by 10,000. This gives a rate that can be benchmarked against other authorities. A re-referral is where we receive a new referral for a child within 12 months of a previous referral. The indicator is based on a rolling 12-month period (e.g., 01 December to 30 November).
Children In Need – CIN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For the purposes of this report, the number of children within the CIN cohort are those that have been assessed as being in need (but not CP or LAC) and the number of children who are in the process of being assessed to understand their level of need. The rate of CIN per 10,000 children is based on the number of CIN at the end of the period divided by the number of children aged 0 to 17 in the city (ONS estimate this at 53,291 for Mid-2021) multiplied by 10,000. This gives a rate that can be benchmarked against other authorities.
Children subject to a Child Protection Plan - CP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Child Protection Plan should assess the likelihood of the child suffering harm and look at ways that the child can be protected. It should decide upon short and long term aims to reduce the likelihood of harm to the child and to protect the child's welfare, clarify people's responsibilities and actions to be taken; and outline ways of monitoring and evaluating progress. The rate of CP per 10,000 children is based on the number of CP at the end of the period divided by the number of children aged 0 to 17 in the city (ONS estimate this at 53,291 for Mid-2021) multiplied by 10,000. This gives a rate that can be benchmarked against other authorities. There are four categories for a Child Protection Plan; Neglect, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse and Emotional Abuse. The table shows the number and proportion under each category. The % of children subject to multiple child protection plans is the proportion of new Child Protection Plan starting within the period, that are for a child who has had a previous Child Protection Plan at any time in the child's lifetime. The indicator is based on a rolling 12-month period (e.g., the proportion of new Child Protection Plans that started in the period 01 December to 30 November).
Looked After Children (also referred to as Children in Care) - LAC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The table shows the number of Looked After Children at the end of the reporting period. The rate of LAC per 10,000 children is based on the number of LAC at the end of the period divided by the number of children aged 0 to 17 in the city (ONS estimate this at 53,291 for Mid-2021) multiplied by 10,000. This gives a rate that can be benchmarked against other authorities. The proportion of placements outside of the city is simply based on the postcode of the child's placement address. Those not within PL1 to PL7 or PL9 are considered outside of the city. For example, PL12 refers to Saltash in Cornwall, which could potentially be less than a mile from a child's home address, but it is outside of Plymouth. The figures provided for the placement types follow the Department for Education and Ofsted definitions, grouping multiple types into nine groups (for example, Family Placements contains six different placement types).
Care Experienced (also referred to as Care Leavers)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is deemed as 'Unsuitable' accommodation has been defined by the Department for Education. The following are examples of unsuitable accommodation: Bed and Breakfast / Emergency Accommodation, Prison, Temporary/No fixed abode/Street Homeless, Unknown/Not in Touch. The proportion of Care Experienced young people in Education, Employment and Training is based on our statutory service and therefore covers those young people ages 18 to 20. Whilst we work with Care Experienced young people aged 21 to 24, support is optional for the young person. Please note: The figures are likely to be different to the published Department for Education figures as they look at the age of the young person during the year at the period around their birthday and not at a specific snapshot.

EDUCATION, PARTICIPATION AND SKILLS**Ofsted Outcomes**

Ofsted is responsible for inspecting schools and other social care services for children. There are four possible Ofsted ratings that a school can receive; Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement or Inadequate. These Ofsted grades are based on inspectors' judgements across four Ofsted categories – quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development of pupils, leadership and management as set out under the [Ofsted framework 2019](#).

Absence Monitoring

It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school. Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. Some pupils find it harder than others to attend school and therefore at all stages of improving attendance, schools and partners should work with pupils and parents to remove any barriers to attendance as set out in [Working together to improve school attendance](#).

Education, Employment or Training

The law requires all young people in England to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday, although in practice the vast majority of young people continue until the end of the academic year in which they turn 18. The responsibility and accountability for young people not in education, employment and training (NEET) lies with the local authority and is set out in [Participation Statutory Guidance](#). The Department for Education (DfE) monitors the performance of local authorities in delivering their duties, and specifically in their tracking and supporting of 16 and 17 year olds.

Key Stage Four Outcomes

Key Stage 4 (KS4) is the legal term for the two years of school education which incorporate GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education). During this time, pupils must follow relevant programmes of study from the National Curriculum. At the end of this stage, pupils are entered for a range of external examinations. Following a phased introduction since 2017, GCSEs taken in 2020 and 2021 are all reformed GCSEs graded on a 9-1 scale. Two particular measures are commonly reported on at key stage four:

- percentage pupils achieving 5-9s at English and Maths GCSE in the city, and
- average Attainment 8 scores achieved by schools across the city.

Attainment 8 is calculated by adding together pupils' highest scores across eight government approved school subjects. While these numbers are not made publicly available on a pupil-by-pupil basis, scores taken from across a school year group are averaged to produce a school's overall score. The eight subjects are divided into three categories, called "buckets":

- Bucket 1 - English and maths, which are worth double marks, but English will only count for double marks if both English literature and English (i.e., English language) are taken. The higher grade of the two is used;
- Bucket 2 – The top three scores from the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects taken, i.e. sciences, computer science, history, geography and languages;
- Bucket 3 – The top three scores from remaining EBacc subjects or other government approved qualifications (e.g., other GCSEs or Level 2 Certificates in some technical subjects).

The grades are converted into points, put through a formula and finally out comes the school's Attainment 8 score.

4. ANNEX 2: OTHER SOURCES OF PUBLISHED INFORMATION

LG Inform The local area benchmarking tool from the Local Government Association	https://lginform.local.gov.uk/
GOV.UK - Explore education statistics Find related information and other statistical services provided by the Department for Education (DfE)	https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/
Children's Social Care - Outcomes and Enablers This dashboard displays data indicators to help both local and central government understand progress towards the outcomes and enablers set out in the Children's Social Care National Framework	https://department-for-education.shinyapps.io/csc-outcomes-enablers/

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Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	16 July 2025
Title of Report:	SEND Local Area Improvement Plan
Lead Member:	Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Apprenticeships and Skills)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Director of Children's Services)
Author:	Lisa McDonald & Fiona Fitzpatrick (NHS Devon)
Contact Email:	Lisa.mcdonald@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	LMcD
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I – Official

Purpose of Report

This report provides an update on the progress of the plan to improve the quality, timeliness and outcomes of our SEND Services across the Local Area partnership. The improvement plan was co-produced and co-developed with all our key partners following the Local Area SEND inspection in July 2023 and takes forward our ambitious priorities outlined within our SEND Strategy 2023-2026.

Progress of our improvement journey is reported into our Local Area SEND Improvement Board and has been outlined within this report.

Recommendations and Reasons

It is recommended that the progress, key challenges and priorities for the next quarter are noted.

Alternative options considered and rejected

None

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

Ensuring that the children and young people with SEND and their families receive the earliest support with the right help, at the right time.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

The Special Educational Needs spend on independent placements for children and young people with SEND create significant financial pressures on the Local Authority Designated Schools Grant.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

Increased travel across the City and out of area due to capacity of specialist placements

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

No other implications

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.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)						
	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.						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	N/A	Leg	N/A	Mon Off	N/A	HR	N/A	Assets	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Lisa McDonald											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? YES											
Date agreed: 4 th July 2025											
Cabinet Member approval: YES , approved by Email											
Date approved: 4 th July 2025											

Introduction

This report provides an update on the progress of the plan to improve the quality, timeliness and outcomes of our SEND Services across the Local Area Partnership. The improvement plan was co-produced and co-developed following the Local Area SEND inspection in July 2023 and takes forward our ambitious priorities outlined within our SEND Strategy 2023-2026. Plymouth is now over 18-months into delivery of the SEND Improvement Plan with the majority of the original actions completed.

Progress of our improvement journey is reported into our Local Area SEND Improvement Board and has been outlined within this report.

Since the inspection Plymouth local area partnership has embarked on a learning and self-reflection journey. Collectively we hold high ambitions for our children and young people with SEND, and we keep our children and young people at the heart of what we do. Our local partnership is made up from:

- Plymouth Parent Carer Voice
- Youth Ascends
- Plymouth Young Safeguarders
- NHS Devon Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Plymouth Public Health
- University Hospitals Plymouth
- Livewell Southwest
- Education settings and providers
- Plymouth City Council
- Voluntary and Community sector

The SEND Improvement Journey

To achieve the ambition set out in the Local Area SEND Improvement Plan we knew we needed to strengthen our governance and partnership arrangements. We have reviewed and restructured our governance across Plymouth to strengthen our accountability, oversight and transparency across the whole system. This updated governance structure aims to:

- Keep co-production at the heart of all we do.
- Refocus our improvement programme, holding firm to the good work we have started through our SEND Strategy Delivery Board, while giving the priority improvement actions the capacity and attention needed to drive improvement forward at pace.
- Establish robust Partnership accountability for delivery of the plan.
- Ensure effective monitoring of progress and the impact this has for children and families in Plymouth.
- Strengthen professional development, learning and training.

Our commitment to children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families has been agreed based on the Ten Wishes ([here](#)) which focus on what children and young people want from professionals. There is a methodical plan for regular and meaningful engagement activity with children and young people. The Ten Wishes provides a vital framework to hold Leaders to account as part of a feedback loop, as well as children and young people attending meetings with decision makers and asking challenging questions in order to influence strategy and plans.

Our commitment as we continue with our improvement journey is to:

- Put children and young people (CYP) at the heart of everything we do
- Help CYP much earlier
- Work together to help CYP in school
- Work together to support CYP when you are waiting for the care you need
- Ensure they get the additional specialist help and support they need at the right time
- Reduce the long waiting times for the care that CYP need
- Make sure everyone working with CYP has the right training and development
- Ensure the right services and support are in place for the future

The recent DfE/NHSE stock take stated that: *The Partnership has made good progress in responding to the recommendations in the inspection report. Most of the actions in the improvement plan have been completed and there is evidence of impact in key areas.*

Following feedback from the internal critical review of SEND progress, and the 6-month DfE/NHSE stock take, the SEND team with key partners have completed a deep dive into the status of all action areas.

This has included cross referencing of the original SEND Local Area action plan, the SEND Strategy document 2023-2026, and the feedback from all reviews.

SEND Self Evaluation Framework (SEF)

The SEND SEF has now been refined in collaboration with all partners. This has included a multi-agency workshop, and key meetings with family representatives, health partners and schools.

We have embedded co production through this work so that the voice of children, young people and their families are the building blocks for our transformation. This has been reflected in feedback and testimonials about the impact of our improvements, alongside key information about how we can continue to progress.

The final iteration of the SEF has been audited by the DfE SEND advisor and has been presented at the Local Area SEND Improvement board meeting on the 8th July 2025.

The SEF demonstrates a broad range of improvements to the leadership, management and delivery of our SEND strategy with feedback of impact from children, young people and families.

Key achievements since the SEND inspection that are outlined in the SEF are as follows:

1. Communication and listening
2. Co-production
3. Governance & oversight
4. The graduated Response
5. Health Services
6. Skills and Post 16

In addition, the document outlines our commitment to the next steps and the continuing progress through ambitious target settings and planning.

Communication with Families and professionals

A new SEND duty system has been implemented from the 5th May 2025 to improve communication with both families and professionals. The duty system comprises of a Caseworker, two EHCP Officers and two Annual Reviewing Officers each day. The team are responsible for managing telephone calls to the help line, answering queries that are received in general inboxes alongside conducting normal duties connected to individual children. Data captured through the system demonstrates that families were previously waiting to have their calls answered with many abandoning their calls. Since introducing the duty system the experience for families has been significantly improved.

The chart below details the telephone performance information both pre and post the duty system.

Month	Calls Answered	Calls Abandoned	% Answered	Average call time	Average time to abandon call
February	251	126	50%	27min	10.40min
March	351	160	54%	9.37min	9.35min
April	198	31	86%	8.22 min	7.32 min
May (Duty started)	269	21	93%	6.42min	3.26in

In addition to managing telephone communications, the team have also completely reduced the backlog of the SEND Admin Inbox and Annual Review Inbox. These workstreams now function live each week.

Annual Review Officers and EHCP Officers are now issuing their own draft plans to families, providing direct contact details for both parents and professionals. This ensures that family concerns and feedback returns requiring amendments or decisions are being actioned in live time and placed on appropriate panels for swift decision making.

Complaints are now being dealt with promptly within timescales, and where concerns are raised meetings with families are taking place to weave into the continued learning and development for the SEND team.

To develop our service even further we have increased engagement from children and young people with SEND through the invaluable work of our Participation Team and wider Partnership. We have listened to children and young people and strengthened our awareness of our early help support through our Waiting Well offer. We have received positive feedback from children, young people and families. Read [Children and Young People's Voice on Health Waits](#).

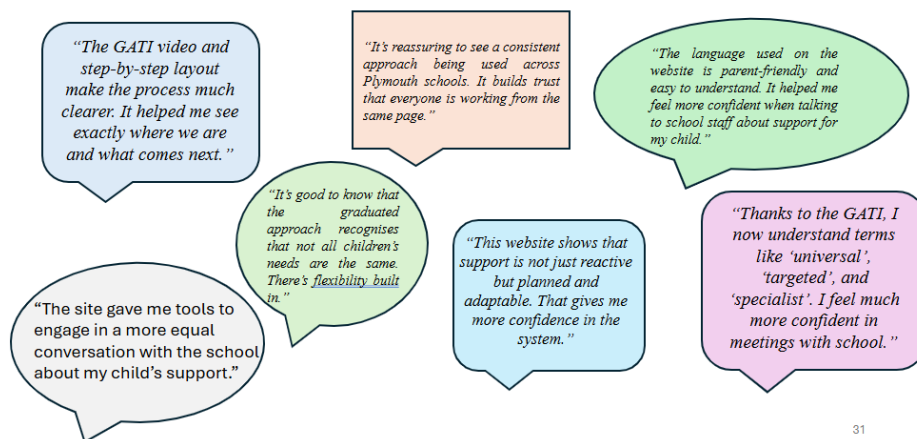
Headteachers and school SEND leaders now frequently report that they feel there is much improved communication and that they are better supported to include children and make a positive difference to their lives.

We have made a difference in the way in which we listen to and respond to parent voice fed back through the Parent Carer surveys. Through the introduction of infographics, face-to-face forums and video feedback we have continued ambition to expand our communication and engagement from all of our families.

New Targeted funding in mainstream schools

The new Plymouth graduated approach (www.plymouthgati.co.uk) is receiving a wide range of positive feedback from families with more than 4000 visits to the site since launching in April. Feedback is being received from families, partners and young people.

The New Graduated Approach – Family Feedback



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The next step for the website is the launch of the children and young person tab which is currently in development with our young person advocates.

As part of the graduated approach to inclusion in Plymouth, we have introduced the targeted funding model in mainstream schools for children and young people without an EHCP. The purpose of the funding is to ensure the right support is in place, at the right time without the need for a statutory plan.

Currently, there are 5 early adopter schools with the funding in place, with a further 25 schools live with the bespoke curriculum pathways in September. This strand of the funding supports schools to implement an alternative approach to learning for up to 10 children at any one time, supporting more than 290 learners across the academic year.

Parental feedback has been gathered as part of the initial monitoring & evaluation of the early adopter schools and demonstrates clear impact on the lives of children in schools:

"The Provision has been nothing short of transformational for our son. Before, he found it so hard to explain how he was feeling. It was difficult as a parent watching him struggle with emotions he couldn't name. Thanks to the incredible support, coupled with his play therapist, he can now not only tell us how he feels but also explain why. He's more confident, calmer, and so much happier in himself. We see a little boy who feels understood, valued, and safe, both at school and at home. Words can't express how grateful we are for the care, love, and belief that have helped him find his voice and we are now starting to see the light shine in ways we only dreamed of before."
(Parent)

"Since the group started, I have noticed a positive shift in his confidence, and engagement with the school. The nurturing environment made possible by small group size, enables the staff to be able to begin working on helping him understand and express emotions in a way that simply isn't possible in his classroom. The provision is able to cater for the unique challenges for each individual child – and they have been specifically working with him on important social interactions skills like sharing ideas and teamwork. What's made the biggest difference is how the group taps into special interests to spark learning. Lessons appear to be brought to life – accommodating sensory activities, movement, outdoor play, and meaningful community activities. Children like mine often carry a

lot of shame – for not fitting in, for struggling in ways that are misunderstood or overlooked. The group has given him a chance to feel something different: pride." (Parent)

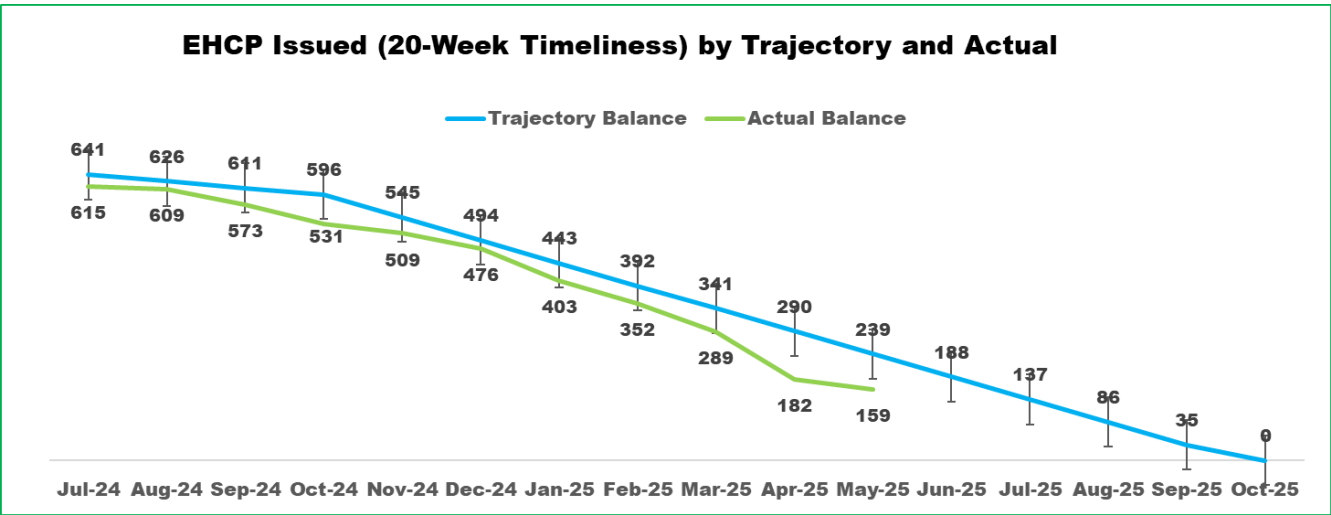
Education, Health and Care Plan Statutory Timescales

At the end of May 2025, 3362, children and young people (CYP) in Plymouth have an EHCP, compared to 3287 in April 2025. This includes the increase for completed new plans, transitions in and out of the local area and the ceasing of any appropriate post-18 plans.

108 final EHCPs were issued in April having received all amendments from settings and families, and a further 80 final plans were issued in May. This represents a significant increase compared to an average of 40 plans per month previously being issued for this academic year, an 16 per month this time last year (June 2024).

The chart below demonstrates that we are ahead of our trajectory to deal with the backlog of EHCP plans.

We are making faster progress towards our 20-week timescale than our planned trajectory which should lead to plans being issued at a greater rate within the statutory timescale.



The team are now embedding quality assurance across all elements of the statutory process to ensure high quality in line with the pace of support. There is also a focus to increase capacity in the Educational Psychology team to ensure the timescales can continue to improve.

Also, with the EHCP Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) now in place for the health input and statutory processes, this will lead to a more standardised approach and improve the quality and timeliness of our health contribution to EHCPs.

Health Partner Update

Health Waiting Times

Across NHS Devon, we are addressing the situation of long waits, increasing demand, and understanding the complexity of demand, by working with our NHS providers and partners to undertake specific immediate pieces of work to address urgent priorities across our system. This includes neurodiversity transformation, speech, language and communication needs, transformation and emotional health and wellbeing.

In 2024/25, £550k investment was agreed by NHS Devon ICB Board to significantly reduce waiting times for autism assessments across Plymouth, Devon and Torbay. For 2025/26 investments have been set at the same level on a non-recurrent basis.

We have increased capacity to complete 50% more neurodiversity assessments at University Hospitals Plymouth. For Autism assessments the overall time from referral to assessment outcome has improved but currently remains static due to an increase in demand. The Community Paediatric team continue to have a vacancy for a Consultant Paediatrician with active plans for recruitment. When this post was covered by a Locum Paediatrician, a clear fall in new patient waiting times was seen.

For speech and language, with the increased capacity of five additional posts the projected trajectory to achieve the 18-week referral to treatment target will be reached by March 2026, which is reducing the wait for children and young people to access the speech and language service.

We have consistently achieved over the last year the national waiting time standard of 95% for physiotherapy and occupational therapy at University Hospitals Plymouth, as demonstrated by the SEND Scorecard and Healthy & Happy Dataset.

Livewell Southwest continue to fill vacancies within CAMHS Early Help to support the 21.5% increase in demand and current vacancies in the service, this will support the recovery enabling children to be seen in a timely way, however the 35% access target is overachieving and now at 53.85% which demonstrates that increased numbers of children are accessing the service.

The Public Health Nursing service have continued with the 'grow your own' recruit to train project, which has been positive in reducing the vacancies across the service. This can be demonstrated by the increase in the 5 mandated reviews as part of the healthy child program.

Working in partnership with local authorities across One Devon, NHS Devon led the review of wider CYP emotional wellbeing and mental health provision which included all offers outside of CAMHS (provided by Livewell Southwest). The review and an assessment of need resulted in a decision to bring together existing provision as a single integrated service and expand the offer. The new service includes digital and face to face offers across the 'getting advice and guidance' and 'getting help' domains of iTHRIVE.

The service was collaboratively procured through a competitive process by an evaluation team which included local area and subject matter experts from across One Devon. The procurement resulted in the contract being awarded to Young Devon working in Partnership with Kooth and a range of public and VCSE providers with presence across One Devon. The service will commence delivery from 1st July 2025.

Early Help and support for Children, Young People and Families

Within health we have strengthened our early help support to ensure children and young people needs are identified early and supported whilst on the waiting list with our 'waiting well offer'.

We now have in place, several improved multi-agency panels and processes that are supporting us to risk assess children, such as Access (448 requests discussed in 2024), Vulnerable Pupil Panel, Unborn Baby Panel and the One Devon Escalation Process. This has resulted in children and young people receiving the right help and support at the right time.

Health services in Livewell Southwest are delivered in line with the iTHRIVE model, where all children, young people and families across Plymouth at anytime can complete a request for help directly into services to ensure families are getting advice, getting help, getting more help and risk support. This model aligns with graduated response.

We have delivered an offer for families while they are waiting (waiting well) within Plymouth including: a digital neurodiversity resource hub, neurodiversity wellbeing team, co-produced information for children and young people and a helpline to support families.

Livewell Southwest Children's speech and language therapy service has introduced an Early Help pathway, in line with the iTHRIVE model, supporting Children and Young People to access help and support early. The service has received positive feedback from families who have accessed the early help offer.

We have established a Child and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Early Help Pathway, in line with the iTHRIVE model, has open access and there is no need for a professional referral. There is an advice line that professionals are able to access for advice and there is also a 24/7 crisis line in place. We have also increased the crisis home treatment offer in the community.

We have established a Children and Young People's Neurodiversity Wellbeing Team have launched a confidential, free advice line to all children, young people and their families who have a neurodiversity diagnosis or are on the neurodiversity pathway within Livewell Southwest and University Hospitals Plymouth.

We have increased our support to schools via Mental Health Support Teams (MHST). Since the inspection, Plymouth now has 3 teams within the City, covering 8 secondary schools and 51 primary schools. Following further confirmation of funding, LSW are currently recruiting to an additional team which will support a further school population of 8000, with training commencing January 2026.

Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS)

The PINS is part of the Department for Education's (DfE), wider ambition to build capacity in mainstream education so all those working with children and young people with SEND, have the knowledge and skills to do so. Projects locally are being overseen by NHS Integrated Care Boards, who are supported by a National Delivery Support Team which includes officials from the DfE, Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and NHS England (NHSE).

In Plymouth we were allocated funding for 9 schools to take part in the project. All settings completed the project with hours ranging from 37 to 73. Items for the Menu of Support were pulled from the self-evaluations completed by schools, delivered in a variety of ways by a range of practitioners.

Plymouth schools have reported that they are experiencing raised understanding and confidence in their teaching staff around Neurodiversity, a greater understanding of coproduction and its benefits when

working with families and a greater understanding of mental health in teachers of children with Neurodiversity. Nationally, there is also some evidence to show that the schools who have taken part in the PINS Project submitted less requests for EHCPs. The national results of year one of PINS are expected in Autumn 2025.

For the academic year 2025-2026 Plymouth have been allocated an additional 7 school to be in the PINS Project allowing further development of neurodiversity training across our settings.

EHE Update

The Send Improvement Board members requested a further update to investigate the link between permanent exclusions, the risk of exclusion, and the parental decision to home educate.

In the academic year 2024/25 to 28th March 2025, 365 children were deregistered from school to Elective Home Education (EHE), taking the total number of Electively Home Educated children to 848 at the end of March 2025.

Between 1st September 2024 and 28th March 2025, 125 permanent exclusions were prevented in partnership between the Local Authority and schools.

Of the 365 new registrations to Elective Home Education, 3% (12) children were at risk of permanent exclusion prior to the parental decision to home educate. All 12 children are secondary school aged.

Of the 12 children who were at risk of permanent exclusion, 58% (seven) have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) requiring SEN Support in school. None of the children have an Education Health and Care Plan.

Three children are currently on a University Hospitals Plymouth (UHP) waiting list.

Of the 365 new registrations to Elective Home Education, three children (1%) of the were permanently excluded from school prior to the parental decision to home educate. All three children are secondary school aged.

Of the three children who were permanently excluded, two (66%) required SEN Support in school. Of the two, one child now has an Education Health and Care Plan.

The Priority 3 'Reducing permanent exclusions of children with an EHCP' Task and Finish Group of the SEND Action Plan has now merged with the Elective Home Education Task and Finish group. The group has representation from across the Local Area Partnership. The group is leading a joint action plan which strengthens existing practice and prevents vulnerable children from being withdrawn to elective home education.

The Plymouth City Council SEND Service is working with families of children who are home educated and who have an EHCP to build parental confidence and support children to return to mainstream school. Following the success of a trial, the approach has now expanded to include more children.

In addition, the Vulnerable Pupils Panel is a Local Area partnership which includes the Integrated Care Board, Police, Youth Justice Service, Children's Social Care, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and The Child Development Centre. Since its implementation in November 2024, the partnership has worked together to prevent 11 permanent exclusions; the children referred to the panel continue to attend their registered school, and the children are monitored by the partnership monthly to ensure stability.

Preparation for Adulthood

The Local Area now has 67 supported internships in the city and have been recognised as a leading example in this area. 100% of young people working within this programme and the Your Futures scheme have moved into employment and training.

The team recently won the LGC award for recognition of the strong work in this area which is an example for all Local Areas. The judges commended the work in Plymouth:

Plymouth City Council stood out as this year's winner for their transformative work in supported internships, expanding placements from 9 to 67 in just two years. Their partnership with Discovery College, which achieved a 100% employment success rate, showcases what's possible with vision, collaboration, and inclusive practice. Plymouth's commitment to empowering young people with learning disabilities is not only exemplary, it's reshaping expectations across the sector.

In addition, one of our supported interns won an award at this month's Youth Award and his story was shared with the SEND Improvement board as a great example of what can be achieved with the right support.

Plan for next quarter

In response to this feedback and the deep dive, the team are now developing a new iteration of the action plan that extends beyond the original delivery expectations, and one that is aspirational with further improvements to be made. This plan has been developed with knowledge of the new SEND Ofsted Local Area Inspection Framework: [Area SEND inspections: framework and handbook - GOV.UK](#) with a working draft presented to the SEND improvement board on the 8th July, and a final plan to be approved at the September board.

We are now in the evidence collation phase to share a clear impact on our children and young people from the original actions completed, whilst ambitiously planning for further improvements with a key focus on all phases of education from early years through to adulthood.

Inspectors will account for any actions taken by our leaders since the initial inspection and expect to be reassured of the action taken by the local area partnership that impacts on the lives of children and young people against each of the action areas.

Over the next few months the team will focus on inspection readiness and this will include fortnightly targeted meetings, a review of all evidence collation and preparation of impact statements. The data team will support production of the Annex A and our DfE SEND adviser will lead several sessions to support staff practice and preparation.

Whilst we embed and sustain our achievements, the key priorities for the future are:

- To ensure that all children and young people have access to a well-planned, inclusive and appropriate education pathway.
- To ensure the effective implementation of our EHCP timescales recovery plan and improve our trajectory for annual reviews in line with our priority plan.

- To refine the while-you-wait offer across the Partnership to support children, young people and their families at the right time.
- To continue to improve the attendance of pupils with SEND and reduce the number of suspensions across our schools.
- To develop our response to rising numbers of children with SEND who are in home education, missing education or are on part-time timetables.
- To evaluate the impact of our 2023-26 SEND Strategy and start work to co-produce a revised strategy for 2026-2029 reflecting national policy likely to emerge during 2025.
- NHS Devon with our health partners will continue to tackle wait times for neurodevelopmental diagnostic assessments. This approach is brought together in the DRAFT One Devon Neurodiversity Strategy, this is due for consideration in a range of Plymouth City Council forums over the coming months. Following this consideration the development of a Local Authority aligned implementation plan will be proposed, this will promote shared ownership, delivery and oversight of the strategy in each Local Authority within NHS Devon.

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting:	16 July 2025
Title of Report:	School Readiness
Lead Member:	Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Director for Childrens Services)
Author:	April Davies
Contact Email:	april.davies@plymouthcouncil.gov.uk
Your Reference:	ADavies
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

This report will inform the Scrutiny Panel of current initiatives, progress, and impact regarding school readiness in Plymouth, with a focus on children being ready to start school. However, we recognise that school readiness is not just about starting school in reception but around staying steady in school across the key stages.

The report highlights strong partnership working, effective practice, and forward plans that contribute to ensuring children are prepared to thrive in school.

Recommendations and Reasons

1. It is recommended that the panel note the initiatives that have been developed across multiple partners and the impact of these approaches to date to enable continuous development of this work on behalf of the youngest children in our city.

Alternative options considered and rejected

1. None

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The activity described in this report aligns with key strategic priorities of the partnership, as shown below:

Achieving Excellence

The work outlined in this report contributes by:

- Ensuring a data-informed, standardised transition approach through the Transition Portal.
- Providing a framework for equitable support at universal, targeted, and specialist levels.
- Offering high-quality professional development and cross-sector collaboration.

Bright Future

School readiness initiatives support the city's goal that *every child has the best start in life* by:

- Promoting inclusive practices from early years through school entry.
- Engaging families and communities to support communication, wellbeing, and development.
- Supporting timely, child-centred transitions that reduce gaps and raise long-term outcomes.

Implications for the Medium-Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

None

Financial Risks

There are no current financial risks. The transition portal has been funded by the Virtual School and this funding will continue based on the efficacy of the approach. This is within the parameters of the grant for the virtual school.

Additionally, Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs funding has been extended for another year by government, and this has supported the Transition Networks.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

Potential increase in travel across the city as families access support in community-based settings such as Family Hubs and practitioners access training. Where appropriate, online events are also held.

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.*

Research shows that education plays a crucial role in counteracting child poverty as education can provide children with knowledge and skills that can lead to higher incomes and better life outcomes. Furthermore, through these approaches, families are linked to community-based support such as Family Hubs that provide support beyond school readiness and include access to other services that support low-income households.

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)							
C	Climate 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.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)
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Sign off:

Fin	N/A	Leg	N/A	Mon Off	N/A	HR	N/A	Assets	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
<p>Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Amanda Davis, Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills</p>											
<p>Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes</p> <p>Date agreed: 08/07/2025</p>											
<p>Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Cresswell agreed verbally</p> <p>Date approved: 08/07/2025</p>											

Introduction

Good levels of development (GLD) at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in Plymouth are slightly below the national average in some areas of learning. In addition to this, since the pandemic, some children and families have required additional support to be ready for formal education in school across the country and within our city.

This report highlights the approaches we have taken to supporting our children in the earliest years, to achieve a steady start to their school life.

The Transitions Portal

A significant part of our school readiness strategy has been the development and use of a transitions portal. This is a secure online platform enabling Early Years settings and childminders to share holistic child information with primary schools to enable the children's skills, preferences, learning styles and any specific needs to be understood and planned for in advance of the beginning of the school year.

For the Year 1 (2023 intake), 127 settings used the portal. 91 were Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI settings) and 36 were school nurseries. 2,132 children supported through detailed transition planning. 696 children were flagged via the Early Intervention Indicator (EII) for enhanced supporting school, giving them a steadier start to their Reception year.

For the Year 2 (2024 intake), 111 settings used the portal. 75 were PVI and 36 were school nurseries. 1,974 children were supported in total and 545 flagged for enhanced EII transition. The reduced figures in year 2 are attributed to the fact that there were lower birthrates and therefore a reduced cohort. There was also a small number of PVI closures. Schools with their own nurseries managed internal transitions due to the seamless nature of interaction with colleagues and children already being part of the school community, with their skills and needs already understood.

Additionally, a small number of settings on the site of feeder primaries felt they already had close links and could share key information outside of the portal. A very small number of PVI settings did not engage with the project and nine childminders did not have Reception aged children moving up this year.

The impact of the use of the Transitions Portal has been earlier identification of vulnerabilities to enable improved transition planning and classroom readiness, as well as more consistent practice across providers, gathering and sharing the same key information.

Here are some reflections from users of the portal:

“The Transition Portal is a very effective tool for schools to use.”

“Speeding up the process of information sharing.”

“Giving vital information to schools to help the transition process and hopefully aiding schools to help settle the children into their new classes / routines.”

“Helps with needs of incoming children being known, affects staffing and budgetary requirements.”

“Having everything all in one place. It is set out clearly to include all the important information necessary for a transition with the added extra of being able to upload additional documents is great.”

“The schools our children are attending who were flagged as having extra support all contacted us.”

The Plymouth Enhanced Transition Framework

The second element to enhance school readiness is The Plymouth Enhanced Transition Framework. This is a key tool developed collaboratively by Plymouth City Council and education partners to ensure all children experience smooth, well-planned, and inclusive transitions from Early Years into school and between educational phases.

The Framework supports practitioners to plan structured, child-centred transitions across educational stages. It does this through identifying levels of support required—Universal, Targeted, or Specialist which is based on vulnerability, complexity, or need. It ensures early identification and joined-up communication between settings, schools, and families and reduces the risk of poor transition outcomes for vulnerable groups such as children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) or English as an additional language (EAL) as well as children in care.

The framework covers transitions from early years settings to Reception and year-to-year transitions within primary and secondary schools. It also includes transitions between key stages, including Year 6 to Year 7.

The Framework contains tools and appendices to guide and standardise practice. These are the vulnerability identification tool which helps assess the level of support a child may need and the planning checklists and proformas which help to ensure clear communication of key information such as learning needs, emotional and behavioural considerations and health or safeguarding information. The framework also includes pupil profile templates to provide consistent, succinct information from settings to schools. Additionally, it includes parent and carer information leaflets to support understanding of what transition means and how families can be actively involved.

A clear set of definitions within the framework helps practitioners differentiate between:

- Universal Support: For all children (e.g., visiting the new school, shared stories, transition books).
- Targeted Support: For children who need some additional preparation (e.g., transition passports, extra visits, small group sessions).
- Specialist Support: For those with complex needs (e.g., multi-agency meetings, individual transition plans, personalised resources).

To enable robust implementation and reach across the education community all Plymouth schools and Early Years settings are expected to use or refer to the Framework when planning transitions.

The framework is promoted consistently through Plymouth City Council's Early Years and School bulletins, the Inclusion and SENDCO networks and the Early Years forums and leadership briefings. Guidance is routinely referenced during transition planning meetings and is embedded into the work of inclusion staff.

The impact of the framework and the benefits identified through feedback and local case studies shows that there is greater consistency in information-sharing between settings and schools. There has been earlier identification of needs, allowing schools to prepare staffing, resources, and support plans, where required. It has reduced anxiety for children, particularly those with SEND or additional vulnerabilities. There has been increased confidence supported among practitioners and parents in the transition process.

In practice, the framework ensures that transition is not a one-off event, but an ongoing, planned process. It also ensures that all stakeholders including families, settings, schools, and any services supporting the child or family are involved in preparing the child for school. Through the framework, children and their lived experiences are seen holistically, beyond attainment or snapshots of information about their behaviour.

As part of our commitment to ongoing improvement and development, the Framework is currently under review as part of the Place-Based Plan, with the following planned improvements to strengthen inclusion guidance, especially for children with complex needs and English as English as an additional language (EAL). There will be updated digital tools for easier sharing and recording and greater integration with the Transition Portal, ensuring that schools not only receive data but can align this with graduated transition planning.

Transitions Networks

The third element of our approach to school readiness is our development of Transition Networks for supporting children from early years to reception. Held twice each year, these events offer reflective learning, shared practice and evaluation of existing approaches. The latest event took place on 11th March 2025 at Plymouth Marjon University and was jointly delivered by Plymouth City Council, the Early Years South West Stronger Practice Hub, and Marjon University. It included a lecture on the emotional and developmental impact of transitions on children and families. Workshops at the event explored play-based transition methods and the role of practitioner-parent partnerships. A dedicated evaluation space enabled settings to reflect on last year's transition outcomes.

Some of those captured were:

‘It was beneficial to share transition ideas and reflect on our current practice’.

“Perfect reminder of what school readiness is and an opportunity to discuss transitions ensuring we also now liaise more with other settings”.

“Made us evaluate more and think about what we want from nurseries and how to reach out”.

“Helps to ensure that communication between settings is consistent”.

Smooth Start – Communication and Play Webinars

The fourth element of our approach is two online webinars run by the Early Years South West Stronger Practice Hub. The hub offered morning and evening sessions to maximise access for practitioners. It was attended by 87 early years professionals and topics included supporting anxious children, using play to develop school readiness and embedding “school-friendly” language into everyday routines.

Whilst not provided directly by Plymouth City Council, we actively promoted this opportunity to settings in our city and learned from the event, to strengthen our collective approaches.

Let's Get Chatting Campaign 2025

In addition to all the above approaches, there has been a social media and outreach campaign aimed at parents and carers of children from pre-birth to age 5, supporting home communication and early development. This was re-launched in April 2025 and delivered via Early Years setting bulletins and packs and weekly social media themes and ready-made content for providers.

The topics covered include “Notice and respond” to maximise communication with young children and interact at opportune moments to encourage good spoken language (where appropriate) and communication. It also includes the importance of everyday chat with children as well as bespoke focus on how to support school readiness. It advises parents and carers when and where to seek further help.

Through this approach, families are also signposted to the offer in our Family Hubs, the Peep Learning Together programme and Healthy Movers. These programmes are evidenced-based and therefore proven to support school readiness.

The Healthy Movers Programme is led by Active Devon and promotes physical literacy and enhances communication development. It is evidenced to support social-emotional readiness for school.

The Healthy Movers training offer includes a one-day practical course for Early Years practitioners with a printed handbook and 16 activity cards for settings to utilise with children and access to an online practitioner network.

It is targeted at early years staff, family hubs, and school-based settings.

The Graduated Approach to Inclusion and Plymouth Ordinarily Available Provision (Early Years) provides a range of information for practitioners and includes Early Years SENDCo Briefings to support leadership for our youngest children with special needs or emerging needs.

We continue to seek opportunities to enhance the experiences of our youngest children, helping them and their parents and carers feel confident about starting school and maximising the opportunities of this key phase of development. As such, we continuously seek new opportunities and to strengthen and develop our collective approaches in Plymouth. The Nasen Whole School SEND Project which will run from September 2025 to Feb 2026 is a new collaboration with the Local Authority and Nasen to embed inclusive and effective transition practice.

It will focus on inclusive, timely, and person-centred transitions. The participants will be Early Years SENDCOs, Reception teachers, and leaders across the system. There will be 5 online sessions to support practice over the 6 months and there will be a balance of Early Years and school professionals.

We are also creating a School Readiness Video with Early Years South West to support curriculum planning and to further embed a shared understanding of expectations for supporting Plymouth children into school and giving them a steady start.

Further to this there will be a SENDCO Transition Event in early spring 2026. This will be a half-day conference jointly hosted by Early Years South West and Plymouth City Council. There will be a continuous professional development component and transition strategies for children with SEND will be explored.

Currently there are a low number of Education, Health and Care Plans for children in the early years, and we want to ensure, as part of our wider strategy for SEND, that needs are identified early and supported robustly and we believe such events will support us in highlighting the importance of this.

The event will also be an intentional networking opportunity, offering time for nursery and school staff to meet and discuss transitions for specific children.

Conclusion

Plymouth continues to demonstrate a strong, coherent, and child-centred approach to school readiness. These efforts promote equality, inclusion, and confidence, all hallmarks of the Achieving Excellence and Bright Future visions.

Through early identification, improved communication, and cross-sector collaboration, Plymouth is ensuring that more children are entering school have been emotionally and socially prepared and recognised and supported for their individual needs.

This work has been widely appreciated by the education community and is seen as a strength of the partnership. The value and impact of each element is individually assessed, and we would hope to see an improvement in outcomes for children at the end of the Foundation Stage and the Good Levels of Development measure.

To further strengthen our focus, we have added a specific early years element to our Special Educational Needs and Disability Delivery Plan. We will also ensure that once Good Levels of Development are reported, the Plymouth Education Board will oversee plans in response to the outcomes.

Furthermore, we are ambitious to explicitly embed the voices of parent and carers and our youngest children into this work, to ensure we co-create initiatives and evaluate impact based on lived experiences of children and their families.

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel – Tracking Decisions 2025/26

Resolution	Target Date, Officer Responsible and Progress
A whole Council Councillor briefing would be arranged on early help in Plymouth.	Date: 06 February 2025 Progress: This has been delayed due the new government reforms with changes to the structures of the team delivering Early Help. Officer: Jake Metcalfe
Councillors of the Panel would be invited to be introduced to the detached youth service team before receiving a briefing and then having the opportunity to go out with them and be part of some of the work undertaken.	Date: 06 February 2025 Progress: On hold. Officer: Jake Metcalfe
Education officers would advise how protected playing fields were, to allow for the provision of physical education.	Date: February 2025 Progress: Officer: Amanda Davis
The Committee would be provided the total amount of financial support provided by the Council to Care Leavers when attending University.	Date: February 2025 Progress: Officer: Amanda Davis/Lee Earnshaw
The work of the project board for Transitions would look to involve the Plymouth Parent Carer Voice with the specific theme of oversaturation of services and whether families felt overwhelmed.	Date: February 2025 Progress: Officer: Lisa McDonald
The Chair of PPCV would send out an invite to Councillors of the Panel to attend the Plymouth Parent Carer Voice Transition Preparation for Adulthood conference.	Date: February 2025 Progress: Complete Officer: Lisa McDonald

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel – Tracking Decisions 2025/26

Transitions to Adulthood update would be added to the work programme to understand the strengths of the project in six months, but also to evaluate areas they might still need to be strengthened. The relevant colleagues from Health would be invited to address whether Plymouth had the right system in place from the new legislation in which children and young people experiencing/experienced domestic abuse were survivors in their own right.	Date: February 2025 Progress: Complete Officer: Jake Metcalfe
Lisa McDonald would speak with the NHS to enquire as to whether the Oliver McGowan training for Learning Disabilities and Autism could be included within the next wave of mandatory training for the Local Area.	Date: February 2025 Progress: The Oliver McGowan training was free for all NHS staff but had a cost to anyone outside of their organisation. It was expected to cost £7 per person. Officer:
The service would review the holiday and food programme to ensure it was inclusive off all children in the city.	Date: February 2025 Progress: Officer: Amanda Davis
Children's Social Care workforce to be added to the work programme.	Date: February 2025 Progress: Complete Officer: Jake Metcalfe

Recommendations: No outstanding recommendations to be actioned.

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel
Work Programme 2025/26



Please note that the work programme is a 'live' document and subject to change at short notice. The information in this work programme is intended to be of strategic relevance.

For general enquiries relating to the Council's Scrutiny function, including this Committee's work programme, please contact Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor) on 01752 305155.

Date of Meeting	Agenda Item	Prioritisation Score	Reason for Consideration	Responsible Cabinet Member/Lead Officer
16 July 2025	Children's Services – Achieving Excellence Improvement and Transformation Plan	4	For the Panel to scrutinise the improvement and transformation plan of Children's services to ensure the service is delivering the Achieving Excellence Plan.	Vivien Lines + Cllr Laing
	Local Area SEND Improvement Plan: Progress and impact report.	4	For the Panel to scrutinise the delivery and impact of the Local Area SEND Improvement Plan.	Amanda Davis / Cllr Cresswell / Tracy Clasby / Rob Williams
	Pre-decision scrutiny – SEND Capital Programme	4	Expanding SEND places and alternative provision	Amanda Davis
	School Readiness	4	To examine the state of play for children beginning school and how ready they were to start primary school classes.	Cllr Cresswell / EPS Amanda Davis + Heidi Price (Headteacher)
	Youth Justice Annual Report	3	For the Panel to understand the work undertaken by the Youth Justice Team and understand challenges celebrating strengths.	Sarah Wilson/Martine Aquilina/ Cllr Laing
09 October 2025	Child Exploitation Annual Report	4	Continued focus on Child Exploitation and a commitment to have at least one report heard at the Panel meeting during the municipal year.	Martine Aquilina / Cllr Laing

			(Agreed to add to the work programme at all Scrutiny Panel meetings in 2024/25. Agreed to have an annual report for all future municipal years)	
	Transitions to Adulthood	4	To review the work following actions and recommendations at the meeting in February 2024. Whats the impact of the work, whats better than expected and what issues were stubborn. To examine how much of an impact the new legislation would have on current services. (Agreed at the 06 February 2025 Scrutiny Panel meeting)	Cllr Aspinall/ Cllr Laing / Stephen Beet/ Health/ David Haley
	Annual Education Outcomes Report (Provisional)			
11 December 2025				
12 February 2026	Annual Education Outcomes Report (Final Report)			
Items to be scheduled for 2025/26				
2025/26	Childrens Social Media use and impact on education	3	To understand the impacts of children's social media use in school and what the issues were being faced in school. (Agreed to add at the 06 February 2025 Scrutiny Panel meeting)	Cllr Cresswell / Cllr Aspinall / EPS / School Reps / Young people`
	Female Empowerment Programmes	3	For the Panel to receive a report on the empowerment programmes and to have young people involvement. (Agreed to add at the 06 February 2025 Scrutiny Panel meeting)	Cllr Laing / Martine Aquilina
	Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) update	4	For the Scrutiny Panel to receive a regular update on the progress of the backlog. (Budget scrutiny recommendation agreed by Cabinet on 10 February 2025)	Cllr Cresswell / Lisa McDonald
	SEND Capital Programme	4	For the Panel to review the robust monitoring framework which oversees the	Cllr Cresswell / Cllr Lowry /

			SEND Capital Programme to ensure clear accountability for project milestones and progress. <i>(Budget scrutiny recommendation agreed by Cabinet on 10 February 2025)</i>	Oliver Woodhams / Amanda Davis
	Implementation of the Government Reforms for Children's Social Care	5	For the Panel to review the service and whether there were any issues with the implementation of government reforms. <i>(Lead officer recommendation to add to the work programme on 26 February 2025)</i>	Cllr Laing/ Martine Aquilina
	Elective Home Education + Metrics			
	Children's Social Care workforce			
Items to be scheduled for 2026/27				
2026/27				
2026/27				
Items Identified for Select Committee Reviews				
	Children's Emotional Health and Wellbeing	5	Agreed by Scrutiny Management Board in February 2025.	Health, CYPFS, EPS, Voluntary Sector, young people, Cllr Aspinall, Cllr Laing, Cllr Cresswell.

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