



Oversight and Governance

Chief Executive's Department
Plymouth City Council
Ballard House
Plymouth PL1 3BJ

Please ask for Jake Metcalfe
T 01752 305155
E democraticservices@plymouth.gov.uk
www.plymouth.gov.uk

Published 01 December 2025

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY PANEL

Tuesday 09 December 2025
6.00 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.

The Council is a data controller under the Data Protection Act. Data collected during this webcast will be retained in accordance with authority's published policy.

You can watch any of our webcast meetings on [YouTube](#). For further information on attending Council meetings and how to engage in the democratic process please follow this link - [Get Involved](#)

Tracey Lee
Chief Executive

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

1. Apologies

To receive apologies for non-attendance submitted by Councillors.

2. Declarations of Interest

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

3. Minutes

(Pages 1 - 12)

To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting held on 08 October 2025.

4. Chair's Urgent Business

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

5. Q2 2025/26 Performance Report:

(Pages 13 - 34)

6. 2025/26 Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny - Quarter 2 Finance:

(To Follow)

7. Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2024-2025:

(Pages 35 - 132)

8. Families First Partnership Programme of Reforms:

(Pages 133 - 142)

9. Children's Homes for Plymouth Programme:

(Pages 143 - 158)

10. Achieving Excellence - Children's Services three year strategic plan, review of progress in year 2 Quarter 1 & 2:

(Pages 159 - 178)

11. Elective Home Education Deep Dive:

(Pages 179 - 202)

12. Action Log:

(Pages 203 - 210)

13. Work Programme:

(Pages 211 - 216)

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel**Wednesday 8 October 2025****PRESENT:**

Councillor Blight, in the Chair.

Councillor Wood, Vice Chair.

Councillors Allison, Krizanac, McLay, McNamara, Ney, Noble, Steel, Stevens and Taylor.

Also in attendance: Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships), Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications), David Haley (Director of Children's Services), Amanda Davis (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills), Lisa Davies (Interim Service Director for Children, Young People and Families), Isabelle Kolinsky (Head of Education and Virtual School), Lisa McDonald (Head of SEND), Matt Fulton (Lead Accountant), Rob Williams (Director of Education, Tedd Wragg Trust), Hannah Pugliese (NHS Devon), Martine Aquilina (Head of Service), Participation Team, Stuart Hogg (Practice Manager), Paul Stephens (Performance Advisor), Susan London (Performance Advisor) and Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 5.30pm and finished at 8.15pm.

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.

13. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

14. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting that took place on 08 October 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

15. Chair's Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

16. Plymouth Attainment Report

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Apprenticeships and Skills) introduced the item and highlighted the following key points:

- a) While teachers and families had provided significant support, the success was down to the young people for their hard work;

- b) There was a collective journey and expressed deep sense of pride and gratitude for the progress made in Plymouth during the year. The progress was attributed to the commitment and collaboration of school leaders, children, families, and local partners, but most of all to the children and young people;
- c) Tangible changes had been seen in classrooms, communities, and the lives of children and young people across the city with key achievements from 2024/25 including:
 - i. More children achieving a good level of development in early years, with stronger outcomes in literacy and maths.
 - ii. Improved phonics screening results in Year 1, with over half of pupils achieving a higher score.
 - iii. Attainment improvements across all areas at Key Stage 2.
 - iv. Rising Attainment 8 scores at Key Stage 4, with Plymouth expected to be in line with national averages.
 - v. Basic measures projected to be in line with or above national averages, with outcomes for disadvantaged pupils well above national in the “4+” GCSE measures.
 - vi. At Key Stage 5, progress measures in A-level and applied qualifications were expected to be above national averages, indicating aspiration and achievement.
- d) Achievements for children in care were noted with more had gaining the qualifications required to secure post-16 pathways. Additionally, more care leavers were choosing to continue learning beyond the age of 18, demonstrating confidence in their potential;
- e) These outcomes were not just numbers but represented real stories, lives, and futures, reflecting the resilience of children, the dedication of educators, and the strength of the community in Plymouth;
- f) It was acknowledged that while progress was good, there was ambition to achieve even more for children and young people.

Stuart Hogg (Practice Manager) and Members of the Participation Team presented questions at the Panel meeting and following discussions it was reported that:

- g) The Participation Team had worked with young people to critically engage with the attainment report through a series of workshops. These sessions aimed to make the data more accessible and link it to previous youth-led campaigns and feedback from forums such as Youth Parliament and Listening Care Councils;
- h) Amanda Davis (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) had agreed to attend individual groups to answer further questions once the final validated data was available;

- i) The attainment report was difficult to read and contained jargon, making it inaccessible to young people. It was suggested that a simplified version be produced, including breakdowns by gender and SEND. Officers agreed that this would benefit not only young people but also parents and carers, and committed to taking this forward;
- j) 'Disadvantage' referred to children eligible for free school meals in the last six years, children in care, and previously looked-after children. The relevant data was not available but would be included in the final validated report;
- k) Progress 8 data was missing due to the lack of baseline data caused by COVID-19 disruptions. It was confirmed that this measure would return in 2026;
- l) The Council had strengthened its oversight and ambition through a new leadership group involving Multi Academy Trust CEOs. An education strategy was being developed to ensure no child was left behind, the strategy aimed to build momentum and ensure all children could succeed;
- m) Councillor Cresswell emphasised the importance of maintaining ambition for all children and avoiding complacency;
- n) There were concerns raised around the low attainment of children in care, with only 8% achieving grade 4 or above in English and Maths GCSEs. The Committee discussed how improvements could be made and whether the top tips from care-experienced young people could help. Officers agreed the tips were excellent and should be shared widely with schools and Multi Academy Trusts. The Virtual School committed to embedding these tips and prioritising improvement in foundational subjects;
- o) The Committee considered how secondary schools were supporting students affected by the cost-of-living crisis, particularly regarding access to equipment, uniform, and online resources. A survey would be conducted across schools to gather data on current support and to also identify gaps. Young people offered to assist in designing the survey and confirmed their attendance at the next Headteachers' Conference to present their campaigns;
- p) A glossary would be appended to future reports to improve accessibility;
- q) Placements outside the city were sometimes necessary due to a lack of available homes in Plymouth or the need to meet individual needs. Lisa Davis (Service Director for Children and Families) added that while the priority was to keep children local, some Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children were placed across the UK, including in London.
- r) Children were placed outside of Devon and Cornwall and a briefing report with granular data on the number and location of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children placed outside the city would be written;

s) The Council worked closely with Multi Academy Trust CEOs to identify successful strategies and scale them across the city. Councillor Cresswell cited the Plymouth Oracy Project as an example of a successful initiative that had positively impacted phonics outcomes.

Actions:

1. The service would produce a young person-friendly version of the attainment report, including breakdowns by gender and SEND.
2. The service would ensure the top tips from care-experienced young people are promoted and embedded across all schools and MATs.
3. The service would design and conduct a survey of schools to collect information on support provided to students affected by the cost-of-living crisis. Young people would assist in designing the survey and participate in the next Headteachers' Conference to present their campaigns.
4. Officers to append a glossary to future reports to improve accessibility.
5. Future reports would include actual numbers alongside percentages in future reporting, particularly where small cohorts were involved.
6. Officers to provide a briefing note to Committee members with granular data on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children placed outside of Plymouth.

17. **A Belonging Framework for Plymouth and the Place Based Plan**

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Apprenticeships and Skills), supported by Rob Williams (Director of Education for a Multi-Academy Trust and Lead for the Plymouth Place Based Plan) presented the report to the Panel and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The Belonging Framework and the Plymouth Place-Based Plan, both aimed to improve school attendance and educational outcomes by fostering a sense of belonging among children and young people. Belonging was central to school improvement and when children felt safe, recognised and valued, they were more likely to attend, engage, and succeed;
- b) The Belonging Framework offered practical strategies across eight areas, including leadership, curriculum, and transitions, to help schools build inclusive cultures tailored to their communities. The Place-Based Plan sought to address the root causes of poor attendance through six evidence-informed priorities and tools such as the predictive risk model and the resilience enablement framework;
- c) Plymouth children's attendance had risen by 0.8% in 2024/25, while national attendance had declined by 0.3%, indicating the effectiveness of the approach. Permanent exclusions had also decreased, and outcomes for disadvantaged learners were improving.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- d) There were concerns that some children were unable to attend their preferred schools. The issue was due to capacity constraints and planned admission numbers, but it was noted that the majority of children did receive their first-choice school;
- e) Attendance, outcomes, exclusions, and elective home education were key metrics to measure success. There was a collaboration with ImpactEd and the Engagement Platform to develop a belonging score based on student surveys. The current framework was a first draft and would evolve to include more groups and case studies;
- f) The predictive risk model used compounding factors (e.g. attendance at Key Stage 1, household deprivation) to predict future persistent absenteeism. The model was being trialled in schools and would be digitised for integration into the school transition portal;
- g) There was a commitment to expand the framework to include systemic barriers like poverty and a cross-agency collaboration was underway to address those issues;
- h) The approach was nuanced and acknowledged the need for flexibility. The school system required teacher consistency, particularly for children with additional needs however there were recruitment challenges in Plymouth;
- i) The framework provided suggestions in relation to cultural and religious representations, not mandates, and that implementation would be at the discretion of individual headteachers in consultation with their communities;
- j) The underperformance of white working-class British pupils was a national issue under investigation by the Department for Education. The causes were complex and multifaceted, and a national commission was expected to report in 2026.
- k) The belonging score was derived from surveys measuring students feelings of being valued and listened to. This would be used alongside hard metrics such as attendance and attainment to assess progress;
- l) The importance of creating a safe and supportive environment for all pupils was affirmed and it was reiterated that implementation would be context-specific. The Panel were reminded of schools' legal duties under the Equalities Act;

Actions:

- Education officers to provide statistics on the percentage of children receiving their first-choice school placement.

The Panel agreed that:

1. That metrics for measuring progress in belonging be included in the framework, along with contextual information on how belonging is defined and assessed.
2. That poverty-related barriers to school attendance be explicitly addressed in the framework.
3. That the Committee receive a future update on the implementation and impact of the Belonging Framework and Place-Based Plan, including examples of best practice from schools.

18. **SEND Local Area Improvement Plan**

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

- a) The Council's had an on-going commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND. SEND had become a top priority for the local authority and the engagement of elected Members and the work of officers were praised;
- b) The report focused on two key areas: improvements to the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) processes and the strategic development of SEND capital projects, sufficiency, and support across the city. There were improvements in statutory compliance, decision-making timeliness, and quality assurance, alongside strengthened communication with families and professionals;
- c) There was a significant decline in complaints from parents and carers which was attributed to quicker responses and improved confidence in the system. The report outlined targeted outreach initiatives aimed at reducing reliance on EHCPs and independent placements;
- d) The capital programme update detailed progress against the multi-year SEND sufficiency strategy, including the creation of new specialist places and planning for future provision. The report referenced the Graduated Applied Approach to Inclusion (GATI), for which Plymouth had been shortlisted and named runner-up in the National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN) Awards;
- e) There was a collaborative nature of the improvement work, with Hannah Pugliese (NHS Devon ICB) commending the strength of the partnership between the Council and health providers. It was noted that for every EHCP issued, corresponding health assessments had been delivered in a timely manner, and the alignment of strategic approaches across education and health was praised.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- f) EHCP officers had been redeployed to support tribunal bundle preparation, and delays were minimal. A second tribunal officer had also been appointed to address the gap in the tribunal team;
- g) There was a national and regional shortage of Educational Psychologist (EP's) and mitigations were outlined, including the recruitment of assistant EPs from local psychology students, use of locums, and a business case for additional agency support was being prepared. Strategic efforts were also underway to reduce demand through early intervention and targeted support in mainstream schools.
- h) Data in relation to a BBC report that ranked Plymouth fifth worst nationally in issuing EHCPs within the statutory 20-week timeframe, was accurate but historic, and significant progress had been made, including issuing over 700 plans in the past year. A backlog had been cleared, and the service was now moving towards meeting the 20-week target.
- i) A Recovery plan for annual reviews was in place, with each school being allocated an annual review officer. Reviews were being processed in real time using the most up-to-date information and emergency or urgent reviews were being prioritised;
- j) There were positive outcomes from the initial targeted support pilot in five schools, which included reduced behavioural incidents and strong parental feedback. The programme had since expanded to 30 schools, with ongoing monitoring and peer support in place;
- k) The importance of creativity, partnership, and strategic alignment in overcoming national workforce shortages and improving outcomes for children and families was reinforced;
- l) The Panel raised concerns regarding a capital project for a new special school, which was expected to exceed available funds. A letter would be written to Bridget Phillipson MP and the Department for Education in an attempt to address the concern;
- m) The Panel thanked Lisa McDonald for her work in Plymouth and wished her well for her future role.

Action:

- The letter regarding capital funding for the new special school to be finalised and sent to the Department for Education.

Recommendations:

The Panel agreed:

- I. That the progress, key challenges, and priorities for the next quarter be noted.

19. **Children's Services Budget Quarter One Outturn Position**

Matt Fulton (Lead Accountant) introduced the report to the Panel and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The service continued to face financial pressures, particularly due to rising costs in independent specialist and residential placements. Those pressures were exacerbated by limited placement availability both regionally and nationally, resulting in increased demand and higher per-package costs. Similar issues were noted within Plymouth's short break service;
- b) Strategic responses included the Family Homes Programme, an enhanced fostering and recruitment campaign, and strengthened collaboration through the Reconnect Partnership;
- c) Staffing challenges persisted, with reliance on agency and interim staff to maintain continuity. A service redesign was underway to align with the Families First Partnership, aiming to resolve recruitment issues and reduce agency dependency;

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- d) Gross agency spend in quarter one was £573,000. The department had reduced its agency staff spend by more than half compared to 2024/25. The target was to reduce agency staff to 11 by year-end, primarily social workers and advanced practitioners, though statutory requirements might necessitate temporary increases;
- e) There was a national cap on agency rates which was introduced on 01 October, with a transition period until March 2026. The agreed regional rates were £38/hour for social workers, £42/hour for team managers, and £45/hour for senior managers. These rates aimed to ensure value for money and consistency across local authorities;
- f) While agency staff were sometimes necessary, performance management processes were in place to ensure quality. Poor performance would result in termination of contracts, though such decisions were balanced against the impact on children and families;
- g) A regional Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was part of a national effort to manage increasing costs. All local authorities in the South West had agreed to the cap, with similar arrangements in other regions;
- h) There was a need to balance the importance of recruitment and retention, noting that increased caseloads for permanent staff could lead to turnover. There had been a significant reduction in the numbers of agency staff following the staffing structure redesign aligned with the Families First Partnership;

- i) A 59% increase in the Children's Services budget over four years, amounting to a £31 million annual rise was consistent nationally. Benchmarking with North Tyneside revealed identical pressures and budget growth.

The Panel agreed to acknowledge the significant reduction in agency staff and the strategic work undertaken to achieve this improvement.

20. **Child Exploitation Annual Report**

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

- a) Child exploitation referred to situations where children and young people were manipulated, coerced or forced into activities for the benefit of others. This included sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation (such as gang involvement or drug trafficking), and other forms of abuse;
- b) Plymouth took child exploitation very seriously and offered a robust safeguarding response, working closely with the child-centred policing team and schools to reduce or mitigate risk;
- c) Between September 2024 and August 2025, there were 905 missing episodes involving 612 children, compared to 1,095 episodes involving 679 children in the previous year. While the reduction appeared small, it was described as very welcome and indicative of progress;

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- d) Missing episodes were a key indicator of vulnerability and often corresponded with exploitation risks, although not all missing children were at risk of extra-familial harm. A consistent annual pattern had been observed in missing episodes by gender, with more boys going missing in the run-up to Christmas and more girls in the summer months. This trend had been tracked over several years. The participation team was working with young people to better understand the reasons behind this pattern;
- e) Repeat missing episodes were often linked to a specific cohort of young people, particularly those in care or at risk of exploitation. Persistent engagement was required to build trust with adolescents, many of whom did not perceive themselves to be at risk. The service aimed to intervene early and reduce repeat episodes through sustained engagement;
- f) Large volumes of data were collected daily, including through the Daily Intelligence Briefing, which highlighted children who had gone missing, been in custody, or been referred due to exploitation concerns. Exploitation was often hidden and difficult to detect, and intelligence gathering required trust and persistence. The service was working to strengthen its ability to identify children on the cusp of exploitation and criminality, with a focus on community intelligence and early intervention;

- g) While additional resources were always needed, particularly for 16–17-year-olds presenting as homeless, the Council had made significant progress in working preventatively with families. In the previous six months, four young people had entered care following homelessness presentations, with the majority being supported to return home safely. The service was proud of this achievement and continued to work closely with families and communities;
- h) The homelessness team, criminal justice system, edge of care teams, and BeSafe teams were being brought together to expand the range of support available to vulnerable young people. Young Devon was highlighted as a strategic partner providing accommodation and support for young people in the city;
- i) While it was difficult to quantify the presence of grooming gangs due to their covert nature, there had previously been seven known county lines into Plymouth, primarily from Manchester and London. Any single line was considered a serious concern. The Council worked with schools and communities to offer positive alternatives and disrupt exploitation networks;
- j) The Council welcomed any national initiative that raised awareness of exploitation, including the government's national inquiry into grooming gangs. Plymouth was described as a relatively safe city with a strong child-centred policing team, but it was reiterated that one child impacted was one child too many;
- k) PL4 and PL5 postcodes appeared more frequently due to their larger population sizes. The Council had worked with schools in those areas to raise awareness and was finalising analysis to confirm the proportionality of the data. It was suggested that future reports include actual numbers alongside pie chart segments to aid interpretation;
- l) The Outside Plymouth segment of the pie chart within the report referred to Plymouth children in care who were placed outside the city.

The Panel agreed to:

1. Note the information contained within the report.
2. Endorse the continued work of the service to provide a response to children who go missing and are at risk of harm outside the home.

21. **Performance Scorecard**

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

- a) The report covered the period from April to June 2025;

b) There has been a revision of Plymouth's statistical neighbours by the Department for Education (DfE). A new annex had been added to the report to reflect those changes and list the updated statistical neighbours. Additional indicators had also been introduced within the Education, Participation and Skills section.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- c) The Department for Education (DfE) used a complex formula to determine statistical neighbours. This formula considered multiple factors, including population characteristics, deprivation indices, and other demographic data. He acknowledged that the methodology was not fully transparent and could result in Plymouth being listed as a neighbour to certain authorities without reciprocal listing;
- d) Cornwall and Torbay were listed as statistical neighbours, which could present opportunities for shared practice.

Action:

- Paul Stephens would provide a detailed explanation of how the Department for Education determined statistical neighbour groupings.

The Panel agreed to:

1. Note the report.

22. Action Log

The action log's progress was noted by the Panel.

23. Work Programme

The were no additions made to the work programme.

This page is intentionally left blank

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	09 December 2025
Title of Report:	Q2 2025/26 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
Contact Email:	paul.stephens@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	PSCSS-2025/26(Q2)
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

No specific financial risks arise from this report

Legal Implications

No specific legal implications arise from this report

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.

None.

Appendices

**Add rows as required to box below*

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Performance Scorecard Scrutiny Committee							
	Q1 2025-26							

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)							
	<p><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></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="740 813 1325 842"> <tr> <td data-bbox="747 815 819 842">1</td><td data-bbox="819 815 890 842">2</td><td data-bbox="890 815 962 842">3</td><td data-bbox="962 815 1033 842">4</td><td data-bbox="1033 815 1105 842">5</td><td data-bbox="1105 815 1176 842">6</td><td data-bbox="1176 815 1248 842">7</td></tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7		

Sign off:

Q2 2025/26 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and
Scrutiny Committee



PLYMOUTH
CITY COUNCIL

CONTENTS

I. CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILY SERVICES	2
I.1. REFERRALS & RE-REFERRALS	2
I.2. CHILDREN IN NEED	3
I.3. CHILDREN SUBJECT TO A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN	4
I.4. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (ALSO REFERRED TO AS CHILDREN IN CARE)	6
I.5. CARE EXPERIENCED (ALSO REFERRED TO AS CARE LEAVERS)	8
2. EDUCATION, PARTICIPATION AND SKILLS	9
2.1. OFSTED OUTCOMES	9
2.2. ABSENCE MONITORING	10
2.3. PRIORITY AREAS OF FOCUS	12
2.4. EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING	14
2.5. KEY STAGE OUTCOMES	15
3. ANNEX I: INDICATOR DEFINITIONS	17
4. ANNEX 2: OTHER SOURCES OF PUBLISHED INFORMATION	19
5. ANNEX 3: CURRENT STATISTICAL NEIGHBOURS	19

I. CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILY SERVICES

I.I. REFERRALS & RE-REFERRALS				Previous Year & Benchmarking			Current Period
Ref	Indicator Name	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Provisional	England	Statistical Neighbours	Q2 2025/26
1	Number of referrals received within the last 12 months	2,415	3,879	2,848	518.3 (2023/24)	536.7 (2023/24)	2,577
	Referrals received within the last 12 months - Rate per 10,000 children	467.7	748.2	548.2			496.0
2	Number of re-referrals within 12 months (last 12 months)	483	780	765	22.4% (2023/24)	24.4% (2023/24)	575
	% of re-referrals within 12 months (last 12 months)	20.0%	20.1%	26.9%			22.3%

Plymouth processed 2,577 referrals in the 12 months ending quarter two. This represents a decrease of 271 referrals compared to March 2025, returning to levels on par with the volumes seen in 2022/23.

The referral rate per 10,000 children was 496.0 at quarter two's end. This rate has decreased from Plymouth's 2024/25 provisional position of 548.2 and is currently at a lower level than our statistical neighbour average (536.7) and the England average (518.3).

Re-referral rates have decreased when compared to the provisional figure for 2024/25, but they remain a key area of focus, especially with the move to the Families First Front Door model. At quarter two's end, 22.3% of referrals were re-referrals (cases where the same child had been referred within the previous 12 months). This represents:

- A 1.7 percentage point decrease on the last quarter,
- A 4.6 percentage point increase from Plymouth's 2024/25 provisional figure, and
- A rate that is just under our statistical neighbours and the England average for 2023/24

July 2025, saw the full introduction of our Front Door Service in response to the Government's reform agenda for Children's Social Care. This supports the principles outlined in Stable Homes, Built on Love. This new approach brings together a diverse range of practitioners from across the city into a single, co-located hub. The aim is to provide timely, coordinated responses and ensure a shared understanding and agreement on which service is best placed to meet the needs of each child and young person without unnecessary delay.

All Front Door practitioners, including those co-located from the partnership have received training in the 'Rethink' formulation model. This strength-based model enhances accessibility and promotes relational practice, family-led decision-making, and timely, proportionate responses. Further training for the wider partnership is in progress.

In terms of performance, the total number of referrals received during this period was 608, reflecting a second stable quarter. The re-referral rate stands at 21.2%, which is a positive indicator of effective initial response and support. However, we continue to monitor this closely through monthly desktop audits to identify trends, improve practice, and maintain a strong rolling 12-month position.

Families First Front Door Practice Week will take place from 3rd to 7th November 2025, led by the Quality Assurance Team. Our Dorset Sector Lead Improvement Partnership (SLIP) will join for a two-day on-site visit. The focus will be on evaluating the effectiveness of the new working model,

particularly how well multi-agency decisions are made to support and protect children using the right support, right time approach.

A tentative launch date for raising the awareness of the Families First Front Door has been agreed for 3rd December 2025. Formal invitations are yet to be issued for confirmation.

1.2. CHILDREN IN NEED		Previous Year & Benchmarking				Current Period	
Ref	Indicator Name	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Provisional	England	Statistical Neighbours	Q2 2025/26
3	Number of children subject to a Child In Need Plan (snapshot)	944	1,379	857	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	771
	Children subject to a Child In Need Plan - Rate per 10,000 children	177.1	265.4	164.9	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	148.4
<p>Plymouth's Child in Need caseload decreased by 101 children in quarter two compared to quarter one. This caseload excludes children subject to Child Protection Plans or Looked After Children. The current figure remains lower than 2022/23 and 2023/24 but at a similar level to our provisional figure for 2024/25.</p> <p>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 published year-end positions (2022/23 and 2023/24).</p> <p>In June 2025, our new Integrated Front Door was launched. At the same time, we also implemented the first phase of the Families First Reforms which saw our Targeted Support Teams now taking most of the Children in Need work alongside the Early Help and Prevention work. The teams have increased to seven teams of eight Family Help Lead Practitioners providing a significant increase in resource to ensure that children and their families receive timely and responsive support at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>The teams have worked closely with our social work teams to support with reducing the number of transitions for families which will support in building relationships, enabling practitioners to provide a more intensive package of support. We believe this will reduce escalation and subsequently support children to remain within their family.</p> <p>Training is being closely developed with our Academy for staff to ensure that our workers have the right skills and confidence to work proactively with families. This will ensure that Children Social Care staff and partners have a shared understanding of need and how to respond.</p>							

1.3. CHILDREN SUBJECT TO A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

				Previous Year & Benchmarking		Current Period	
Ref	Indicator Name	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Provisional	England	Statistical Neighbours	Q2 2025/26
4	Number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan (Snapshot)	230	299	361	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	338
	Children subject to a Child Protection Plan - Rate per 10,000 children	44.5	57.7	69.5	41.6 (2023/24)	49.2 (2023/24)	65.1
5	Category of abuse for current Child Protection Plan: Neglect	45.9% (107)	50.2% (150)	52.4% (189)	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	50.9% (172)
	Category of abuse for current Child Protection Plan: Physical Abuse	6.4% (15)	8.4% (25)	8.6% (31)	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	8.3% (28)
	Category of abuse for current Child Protection Plan: Sexual Abuse	4.3% (10)	8.4% (25)	5.8% (21)	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	4.4% (15)
	Category of abuse for current Child Protection Plan: Emotional Abuse	43.3% (101)	33.0% (99)	33.2% (120)	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	36.4% (123)
6	% of children subject to multiple child protection plans - Within lifetime of the child (new plans starting in last 12 months)	25.8% (65)	30.1% (112)	19.7% (81)	24.7% (2023/24)	24.6% (2023/24)	27.1% (119)

As of 30 September 2025, 338 children were subject to Child Protection Plans, representing a rate of 65.1 children per 10,000. This is higher than Plymouth's published 2023/24 rate of 57.7 (299 children) but less than the provisional figure of 361 for 2024/25. The current rate exceeds both the England average by 23.5 per 10,000 and our Statistical Neighbour average by 15.9 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 27.1%. This represents an improvement 3.0 percentage points from 31 March 2024, but is a significant increase on our provisional figure for 2024/25. The increase seen in 2025/26 sees Plymouth return to a level that is higher than both the statistical neighbours average of 24.6% and the England average of 24.7% (both of which increased from their previous year positions). Over the 12 months ending 30 September 2025, 119 children and young people have started repeat Child Protection Plans.

The Families First Partnership reforms that will be embedded fully by April 2026, should bring about change in ensuring earlier help and intervention take place, with better partnership working and sharing of information to identify the help and protection family's needs without there being a need to escalate. There are working groups and engagement sessions across the partnership, and this is

highlighting several practice areas to strengthen and better ways of working together to support families, this will be embedded into the new model ready for April 2026.

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.

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

1.4. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (ALSO REFERRED TO AS CHILDREN IN CARE)				Previous Year & Benchmarking			Current Period
Ref	Indicator Name	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Provisional	England	Statistical Neighbours	Q2 2025/26
7	Number of children subject to a Care Plan - Looked After Children (Snapshot)	500	513	530	70.0 (2023/24)	92.3 (2023/24)	534
	Children subject to a Care Plan - Looked After Children - Rate per 10,000 children	96.9	99.0	102.0			102.8
8	Number of Looked After Children in an unregistered placement (snapshot)	6	9	7	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	9
9	% of Looked After Children placed outside of the city of Plymouth (i.e., the placement is not within PL1 to PL7 or PL9)	39.9% (25% DfE: +20 miles of LA boundary)	42.7% (23% DfE: 20+ miles of LA boundary)	44.2% (234)	Within boundary not benchmarked 17.0% DfE: 20+ miles of LA boundary)	Within boundary not benchmarked 17.0% DfE: 20+ miles of LA boundary)	43.3% (231)
10	Placement Type: Family Placement (fostering or connected carers)	339	368	343	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	343
	Placement Type: Children's Homes, Residential Care Homes & Residential Schools	57	57	64	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	70
	Placement Type: Hostels & other Supportive accommodation	48	47	54	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	60
	Placement Type: Lodgings or Independent living (16+)	x	x	x	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	x
	Placement Type: Other Placement	5	8	6	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	7
	Placement Type: Placed for Adoption	18	5	13	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	9
	Placement Type: Placed with Parents	32	26	42	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	41
	Placement Type: Other accommodation - NHS, Family Centres, Parent & Child	x	x	6	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	x
	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 30 September 2025, there were 534 children and young people in care. This represents a net increase of 21 from the published 2023/24 figure and four more than the provisional 2024/25 figure of 530. The average month-end position over the past 12 months was 530 children and young people.

Of the 534 children in care, 303 (56.7%) were placed within the city, while 231 (43.3%) were placed outside the city. This is higher than our internal 2023/24 figure of 42.7% but lower than our provisional position at the end of 2024/25.

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 24.0% of children in care (128 out of 534) are placed more than 20 miles from their home address. A more detailed breakdown is provided:

- 76% (406) placed within 0 to 20 miles,
- 14% (75) placed between 20.1 and 100 miles,
- 6% (32) placed between 100.1 and 200 miles, and
- 4% (21) placed more than 200 miles.

The number of children in unregistered arrangements remained at nine at the end of quarter two, of which a small number are registered by Care Quality Commission due to the complexity of the children's health needs.

The Family Homes for Plymouth's Children programme continues to address placement sufficiency issues through fostering recruitment and retention, developing our own residential provision, progressing plans to reunify children with their families and stepping children from residential to family-based care. The sufficiency of fostering households continues to be a challenge locally and nationally; however, we have seen several new fostering applications in quarter two, including through the Reconnect campaign, with two new carers approved in September and a further six fostering households booked to attend fostering panel by the end of quarter three.

There have been young people who have been supported to move from their residential Children's Homes to supported accommodation and back into their parents' care with a robust package of support from Reconnect.

During quarter two the number of approved households and placements has reduced, however the percentage of placements used to provide homes for children has increased. This reflects a thorough review of each fostering household and maximising approval for those who are actively fostering, supporting the conditions for them to increase the number of placements available in their home and reducing approvals for those who are no longer accepting the placements that they are approved to care for.

The number of children living with in-house foster carers continues to remain above the number living with Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) foster carers and we have continued to see IFA foster carers transferring in house.

The Financial Offer to Special Guardians was presented and agreed at the Family Homes Board in June 2025 and was due to be further reviewed in quarter two. This has been delayed as the outcome of a bid for a Department for Education pilot in relation to Special Guardianship has not yet been received.

A Registered Manager has been appointed and is progressing the development of our own Residential Children's Homes. The first property purchase is progressing, and searches continue for suitable properties in Plymouth.

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

Ref	Indicator Name	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	Previous Year & Benchmarking		Current Period
				2024/25 Provisional	England	
11	% of Care Experienced young people in Unsuitable Accommodation (Statutory Service (aged 18 to 20))	4.1% (8/192) (12% DfE)	9.5% (19/201) (15% DfE)	7.0% (14/201)	12.0% (2023/24 DfE)	9.0% (2023/24 DfE) 9.1% (18/198)
12	% of Care Experienced young people in Education, Employment and Training (Statutory Service (EET aged 18 to 20))	50.0% (96/192) (47.0% DfE)	43.3% (87/201) (45.0% DfE)	46.8% (94/201)	54.0% (2023/24 DfE)	52.4% (2023/24 DfE) 47.5% (94/198)

Plymouth's quarter two data shows that 9.1% of care-experienced young people are in unsuitable accommodation. This is lower than the England average and on par with the statistical neighbours' average (2023/24 published figures). The number of young people in unsuitable accommodation has improved compared to our published 2023/24 figure but declined on the provisionally reported figure for 2024/25.

An Ofsted focused visit to review the Local Authority arrangements for Care Leavers took place in quarter two. An additional weekly meeting was implemented in quarter two to focus on care experienced young people in unsuitable accommodation (Bed and Breakfast) due to the concern about the length of time that young people were living in unsuitable accommodation. Progress has been made in moving young people on into more suitable temporary accommodation while long term homes are identified.

The proportion of care leavers in Education, Employment, and Training (EET) was 47.5%, which is 0.7 percentage points higher than our internal 2024/25 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 continued to see steady improvement in reducing the number of young people recorded as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) through the introduction of EET Advocates for our 16/17-year-old children in care and the targeted EET action plan. In quarter two an additional EET advocate for care leavers has been appointed and the connect to work scheme has been launched, with a dedicated practitioner to support care experienced young people.

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	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2023/24 England	2023/24 South West	Q2 2025/26
1	% of all schools judged by Ofsted as good or outstanding	76.0%	77.6%	90.8%	90.4%	86.7%	Please see note
2	% of pupils attending Plymouth schools judged by Ofsted as good or outstanding	77.1%	81.0%	90.4% (based on NOR May School Census and OFSTED outcomes at 31/08/2024)	Not benchmarked	Not benchmarked	Please see note
<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the end of 2024/25 – 16 schools have been inspected over the course of the academic year. Of these 16 schools, six have received good or outstanding in all of the four main areas of ‘Quality of Education’, ‘Behaviour and attitudes’, ‘Personal Development’ and Effectiveness of leadership and management’ (37.5%) All 16 schools were judged as having effective Safeguarding. 							

2.2. ABSENCE MONITORING

Ref	Indicator Name	2022/23 Annual	2023/24 Annual	Latest published data & Benchmarking			Current Period
				2024/25 Term 1&2	England Term 1&2	South West Term 1&2	
3	% of overall absence in all schools	8.2%	8.3% (Academic Year 2023/24)	7.5% (Autumn & Spring Terms 24/25)	6.6% (Autumn & Spring Terms 24/25)	6.9% (Autumn & Spring Terms 24/25)	6.4% (View Your Education Data, End of Sept 25)
4	% of persistent absence (less than 90% attendance) in all schools	24.1%	23.6% (Academic Year 23/24) (Of which 3.2% were severely absent)	20.2% (Autumn & Spring Terms 24/25) (Of which 3.1% were severely absent)	17.6% (Autumn & Spring Terms 24/25) (Of which 2.3% were severely absent)	18.0% (Autumn & Spring Terms 24/25) (Of which 2.7% were severely absent)	18.2% (Of which 2.4% were severely absent) (View Your Education Data End of Sept 25)
5	% of persistent absence (less than 90% attendance) of pupils with Education, Health, and Care plans (EHCPs)	40.5%	40.5% (Academic Year 23/24) (Of which 8.5% were severely absent)	36.4% (Autumn & Spring Terms 24/25) (Of which 8.9% were severely absent)	33.8% (Autumn & Spring Terms 24/25) (Of which 7.3 % were severely absent)	36.3% (Autumn & Spring Terms 24/25) (Of which 8.7% were severely absent)	35.1% (Of which 10.7% (207) were severely absent) (View Your Education Data, End of Sept 25)

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 2024/25 Autumn & Spring Term 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. VYED presents absence data cumulatively from the beginning of each term and therefore the following data represents the new Autumn term 2025/26 - period from 01/09/2025 to 31/09/2025.

- The Overall absence rate was 6.4% (1.1pp lower than the published Autumn & Spring Term for Plymouth; 0.2pp lower than the published national figure and 0.5pp lower than the published South West figure)
- The percentage of those persistently absent was 18.2% (2.0pp lower than the published Autumn & Spring Term for Plymouth; but 0.6pp higher than the published national figure and 0.2pp higher than the published South West figure)
- The percentage of those with an EHCP who were persistently absent was 35.1% (1.3pp lower than the Autumn & Spring Term for Plymouth; but 1.3pp higher than the published national figure and 1.2pp lower than the published South West figure)

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

The citywide Place-Based Plan is working to understand and address the complex causes of pupil absence from school, recognising that school attendance is not just a number, but a reflection of inclusion, connection, trust, and opportunity. This Place-Based Plan brings six interlinked priorities together under one citywide commitment: to act early, work collaboratively, and deliver ambitious, evidence-informed interventions. Each strand targets a known driver of absence, supported by the central implementation of our Predictive Risk Model (PRM) and Resilience Enablement Framework (REF), which shift our response from reactive to proactive.

The Single Citizen View predictive analytics tool for attendance has been introduced. The tool will provide schools with a user interface to access a single view of a child in their school, surfacing appropriate information from a wide range of council and partner data. The tool will use this data to

highlight children who are at risk of non-attendance in school to provide targeted support, and avoid a potential statutory intervention. Progress in developing this includes:

- An initiation workshop with school stakeholders has been delivered, capturing the requirements of schools.
- Investment for development of the tool has been agreed by the City Help & Support board.
- Awaiting investment to be released in line with wider transformation funding.
- Development prerequisites nearly completed.

We are collaborating closely with all schools and early years settings in the city to design and deliver an ambitious plan for the Team Plymouth Education (pre-16) workstream. Significant consultation and engagement have taken place with Head Teachers and MAT CEO's.

We are working closely with the Department for Education (DfE) as part of the national attendance campaign, contributing local intelligence and innovation to shape national messaging and strategy. We have partnered with Plymouth Marjon University to undertake a comprehensive attendance survey, completed by 2,200 parents and 1,500 children. This rich dataset has informed the national campaign with the DfE and is being used to inform Plymouth's local approach to supporting families and schools.

The Belonging Framework was formally launched with schools on 23rd October 2025, providing a shared foundation for strengthening emotional safety, connection, and engagement across all phases.

We have launched Targeted Funding for children requiring SEN Support, this means that more children are getting the right support at the right time in school and school leaders are being empowered to innovate. Early evaluation is demonstrating the impact of this approach on attendance.

Targeted Funding 3 provides funding for a cohort of 10 pupils within a school to provide bespoke package delivered with a Service Level Agreement outline the expectations of the funding, alongside the quality assurance and monitoring processes. 38 schools are now in receipt of this level of funding.

Plymouth has launched a MAT CEO and LA Strategic group; the group convened in September 2025 and will meet three times per year. Educational excellence is a shared priority and area of focus across the city's education leadership. The Place Based Lead and Head of Education and Virtual School are working together to develop the five-year Education Strategy bringing together the Education (pre-16) Plan for Team Plymouth, the Place Based Plan, and the Education Effectiveness Plan.

Every school has an allocated Plymouth City Council Attendance Officer who collaborates with them to support children who are severely absent from school.

2.3. PRIORITY AREAS OF FOCUS

Ref	Indicator Name	2022/23 Ac.Year Plymouth	2023/24 Ac.Year Plymouth	Previous Year & Benchmarking			Current Period
				2024/25 Ac.Year Plymouth	2024/25 Ac.Year England	2024/25 Ac.Year South West	
6	Number of pupils in Elective Home Education (EHE)	580 (1.5%) *	640 (1.7%)	930 (2.4%)	152,410 (1.8%)	17,230 (2.5%)	777 (Number in month) (2.2%)
7	Number of pupils considered to be missing education (CME)	230 (0.6%)	310 (0.8%)	370 (1.0%)	149,900 (1.8%)	9,360 (1.3%)	183 (Number in month)
8	Number of pupils on part time timetables	-	409	316	Not published	Not published	283
Ref	Indicator Name	2022 Cal.Year Plymouth	2023 Cal.Year Plymouth	2024 Cal.Year Plymouth	2024 Cal.Year England	2024 Cal.Year Neighbours	Q2 2025/26 Jul to Sep
9	EHCP Timeliness – 6 weeks	-	5.0% (45/895)	9.6% (113/1176)	81.7%	Regional 74.4% Statistical 62.8%	95.2% (236/248)
10	EHCP Timeliness – 20 weeks	44.1% (175/397)	17.8% (63/354)	6.0% (24/403)	45.9%	Regional 31.0% Statistical 38.9%	11.5%

*Percentage figures relate to the percentage of the statutory school age cohort in EHE/CME

EHE/CME/PTTT

The Local Authority continues to hold a firm monitoring position, an understanding of the children in the cohorts and where needed, intervention to ensure that a suitable education is being provided of those in Elective Home Education, Part-Time Timetables and Children Missing out on Education.

There will be learning from the new approach to the use of predictive and compounding data when identifying those at risk of persistent absenteeism, which we believe will enable a more robust offer of early help and good school attendance, reducing the risk of persistent or severe absence and/or elective home education. We are working with three schools with the highest rates on EHE to use predictive data to prevent EHE for those children most at risk. In the first term of the 2025/26 academic year, 150 children were deregistered from school to be home educated. This represents a reduction of 9% (15 fewer children) compared to the same period last year, a positive step forward. Of these new registrations, 27% (40 children) were primary-aged, which is consistent with previous trends. Elective Home Education (EHE) continues to be more prevalent in the secondary phase, particularly at Key Stage 4. However, there is encouraging news: new registrations in this cohort have fallen by 12.6% (16 fewer children) compared with last year's total of 126. This suggests early signs of stabilisation and reduction. Even more positively, of the 150 newly registered EHE children, 14 returned to school during the same period, nine from primary and five from secondary. We have

launched the accelerated EHE Action Plan which brings together Family Hubs, the voluntary and community sector, health, and other local area partners to work together in a preventative way in respect of vulnerable children being withdrawn to EHE and those at risk of exclusion. The PCC Communication Team has also developed a communication plan in line with the DfE National Attendance Campaign to offer earlier help and prevention.

The Virtual School Extended Schools Co-ordinator continues to lead a CAFE (Children Absent from Education) approach developed in May and June to explore the possible barriers to education for those considered to be disadvantaged; this would include those with SEN, those known to social care; those with high numbers of suspensions and those at risk of permanent exclusion. Focusing on education as a protective factor for children and young people, regular discussions, practice sharing and quality assurance activity is now embedded across Children's Services Teams, conducted jointly between Education, Participation and Skills and Children's Social Care. The learning from this is shared through team meetings and with Senior Managers. Collaboration with schools to include their involvement in this practice is now being implemented.

The Local Authority maintains a sharp focus for any child on a protection plan being in home education. Any child in home education and on a Child Protection Plan is registered as missing education and is supported to return to school.

All children with an EHCP who are home educated have a joint approach to casework which includes the Home Education Team and 0-25 SEND Service.

Every child who is deregistered to home education has a home visit within two weeks. Any child who is considered vulnerable and who is home educated is allocated a key worker who undertakes home visits; the support remains in place until the child is receiving a suitable education at school. A child who is registered as home educated but whose parents have reached a formal notice stage (where there has not been evidence provided of a suitable education) are recorded as a child missing education and assigned a key worker who will undertake home visits and casework.

EHCP TIMELINESS

In September 2025, 71 requests for an EHC assessment were received. For the academic year to date (2025/26), there have been 176 requests, equating to a monthly average of 88. It is anticipated that the introduction of targeted funding in September will begin to reduce the number of requests, as schools will have the ability to access funding to deliver provision without requiring an EHCP. However, there has been an increase in parental requests following the delay of the national reforms. During September, 38 decisions were due; however, the service completed 42 decisions, demonstrating proactive progress ahead of schedule. In September, 63.2% of requests were agreed for assessment, while 36.8% were declined, with needs deemed manageable within mainstream provision through the graduated approach.

In September 55 EHCP Educational Psychology assessments were completed and submitted, of which 44 exceeded the 12-week deadline and 11 met KPI. Current capacity allows for approximately 39 assessments per term from the core Educational Psychology team, with an additional 12 from associates. As of the end of September, 275 young people remain on the waiting list for allocation. A business case has been submitted to request support to seek agency EPs, and to plan for the long-term solution with the introduction of the Assistant EP role.

73 final EHCPs were issued in September, an increase from the monthly average of 40 in 2024/25. Of these, 8.2% (6 plans) met the 20-week statutory timescale. The year-to-date average remains 7.3%.

Significant progress has been made since June 2024, with the team increasing EHCP issuance by 200%, clearing a backlog of 641 cases. However, demand remains high, and a new backlog is forming due to capacity of Educational Psychologists, posing a risk to sustainability. Current projections indicate the team must issue 90 plans per month to maintain compliance, which is challenging given EP capacity constraints.

2.4. EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING				Previous Year & Benchmarking			Current Period
Ref	Indicator Name	2022	2023	2024	2024 England	2024 Regional	Q2 2025/26
11	% of 16- and 17-year-olds in Education, Employment and Training	91.1%	90.4%	93.3%	94.6%	94.6%	92.6% (End of July 2025)
12	% of 16- and 17-year-olds with SEND in Education, Employment and Training	83.2%	81.4%	89.2%	90.2%	90.0%	91.4% (End of July 2025)
<p>By the end of Q2 (reported position at end of July 2025), 92.6% of 16-and 17-year-olds are in Education Employment and Training. By the end of the Summer Term of 2024/25, this figure is 0.3% higher than the figure seen at the end of the Spring Term 2024/25 (92.3 %).</p> <p>The percentage of 16- and 17-year-olds with SEND in Education, Employment and Training at the end of July 2025 is 91.4%. This is 0.4% higher than the figure seen at the end of the Spring Term 2024/25 (91.0%).</p> <p>Continuing the positive engagement of 2023/24, the target for 16- and 17-year-olds with SEND, being in Education, Employment and Training was raised to 92% for 2024/25. Data is evidencing that the Post 16 team has achieved this ambitious target. 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, with over 50% of the NEET young people now engaged and working towards moving into EET status. The 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. With interventions for children in care now commencing from year 7. The team have extended an offer to all secondary schools in the city to provide support to their top 5 students (who are most likely to be NEET) and this work has commenced from the new academic year, providing focused careers advice sessions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEET numbers across all cohorts of 16 and 17 years old, remain low at 4.5% (July 2025), despite a slight increase on the figure at end of the previous term (4.4%) • The joined-up work across the skills and post-16 team, virtual school and the creation of a small team which supports children in care EET status has made excellent progress. 2024/25 started with 63% employment, education, and training status for children in care, this academic year we are starting with 77% EET status (a 14% improvement). The target for July 2026 is for 90% of year 12 and 85% of year 13 to be in EET, this would move the EET status overall to 86% (a further 9%) • 45.4% of care leavers are EET and we are on target to achieve 50% by March 2026. 14 Care Experienced young people signed up to Connect to Work programme in week 1 and they are being supported into positive next steps. • 108 EHCP young people are on a supported internship, this exceeds are ambitious city target of 100 placements. The number of providers offering supported internships has increased from one to seven, with one more provider delivering from January 2026. The Supported Internship programme secured two national awards LGC award for best diversity programme and the NASEN award for best co-production programme of the year. 							

2.5. KEY STAGE OUTCOMES

Current published data & Benchmarking

Current Period

Ref	Indicator Name	2022/23 Plymouth	2023/24 Plymouth	2024/25 England	2024/25 Regional	2024/25 Statistical Neighbours	2024/25 Plymouth
13	EYFS - % of pupils achieving a 'good level of development' (GLD)	64.1%	66.7%	24/25 not yet published. 23/24 – 67.7%	24/25 not yet published. 23/24 - 69.2%	24/25 not yet published. 23/24 - 66.7%	67.5% (Early LA data)
14	Key Stage 2 - % of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths combined	59.8%	62.5%	61.2% (Provisional)	58.9% (Provisional)	60.6% (Provisional)	62.8% (Provisional)
15	Key Stage 4 - % of pupils achieving 5+ in English and Maths	41.7% (1,214/2,912)	46.3% (1,328/2,869)	45.2% (Provisional)	46.0% (Provisional)	43.5% (Provisional)	45.9% (Provisional)
16	Key Stage 4 - Average Attainment 8 score	44.9 Points (Average score for 2,912 pupils)	46.2 Points (Average score for 2,869 pupils)	45.9 Points (Provisional)	46.1 Points (Provisional)	44.9 Points (Provisional)	45.6 Points (Provisional) (Average score for 2,873 pupils)

The statistical neighbours for Plymouth have changed from February 2025 (please see Annex 3).

Assessment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage examines pupils' abilities regarding 17 Early Learning Goals. Reaching the expected standard across 12 early learning goals within the five areas of learning of communication and language; personal, social and emotional development; physical development; literacy; and mathematics, is determined as having a 'Good Level of Development'. At end of 2024/25, Plymouth's GLD is **1.2% higher** than that seen in 2023/24. National, Regional and Statistical Neighbour benchmarking data for 2024/25 is due to be published in November 2025.

At the end of primary school and Key Stage 2, assessments determine whether pupils have met the expected standard related to their age in reading, writing and maths combined. At the end of 2024/25, Plymouth's average has increased from 2023/24 to 2024/25 by 0.5%. Provisional data published for 2024/25 indicates that Plymouth's average at **62.8%** is **higher** than the national average of 61.2%, regional (58.9%) and statistical neighbour average (60.6%). Revised published data is due to be released in December 2025.

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 I – Indicator Definitions

Provisional data released by the DfE for 2024/25 is showing that 45.9% of all KS4 pupils achieved a strong pass in English and Maths at Key Stage 4. This is a 0.9% **decrease** from 46.3% achieved in 2023/24; 0.4pp lower. However, the national figure also **decreased**; dropping from 45.9% to 45.2% which equates to a 1.5% reduction from 2023/24 to 2024/25.

In 2024/25, Plymouth's average for those achieving a strong pass in English and Maths is 0.7pp **above** the National average (45.2%). Plymouth is **above** the statistical neighbour average of 43.5% but **below** the regional neighbour average of 46.0% (which increased from 23/24)

Provisional data released by the DfE for 2024/25 is showing that the average attainment 8 points score for KS4 pupils in Plymouth is 45.6. This is 0.6 points **lower** than the average in 2023/24 (46.2). The national figure has remained the **same** as in 2023/24 at 45.9 points.

Plymouth is 0.3 points **below** the national (45.9) and 0.5 points **below** the regional neighbour average (46.1, an increase on 2023/24) but 0.7 points **above** the statistical neighbour (44.9) average.

In 2024/25, 25.4% of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) achieved 'the basics' (5+ in English and Maths). This is a 6.7% **increase** from the 23.8% achieved in 2023/24; 1.6pp higher. When compared to the national average Plymouth is 0.2pp **lower** (25.6%), which is a smaller gap than that seen in 2023/24. The national average has **reduced** from 25.8% in 2023/24. The gap between Plymouth and National in 2023/24 was 1.9pp, in 2024/25 it is 0.2pp. Plymouth is 2.1pp **higher** than the statistical neighbour average (23.3%) and 1.5pp **higher** than the regional neighbour average (22.3%).

Although Plymouth is **below** the national average of FSM pupils achieving 'the basics', Plymouth's gap in achievement between FSM and non-FSM pupils has narrowed due to the larger **increase** in achievement of FSM pupils in 2024/25. In 2024/25 this is 27.7pp (53.1% - 25.4%) compared to 29.1pp (52.9% – 23.8%) in 2023/24. This is also positive in terms of the national gap which remained at 26.5pp in 2024/25 when compared to 2023/24 (52.3%-25.8% in 2023/24; 52.1%-25.6% in 2024/25). Despite the gap remaining the **same**, the national achievement of both FSM pupils and non-FSM pupils both **reduced** on the previous year.

In 2024/25, 3.8% of pupils with an EHCP (Education, Health, and Care Plan) achieved 'the basics'. This is a reduction of 43.3% compared to 2023/24 (6.7%); 2.9pp lower. This is **below** the national average of 7.5% for EHCP pupils, regional neighbour average of 8% and the statistical neighbour average of 6.6% for EHCP pupils. All benchmark groups have **increased** performance from 2023/24 to 2024/25.

In 2024/25, 24.9% of pupils receiving SEN (Special Educational Needs) Support achieved 'the Basics'. This is an increase of 1.6% compared to 2023/24 (24.5%); 0.4pp higher. This is **above** the national average of 22.3%, the regional neighbour average of 22.6% and the statistical neighbour average of 19.1% for pupils receiving SEN Support. All benchmark groups have **increased** performance from 2023/24 to 2024/25.

3. ANNEX I: 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, which 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 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 most 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 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.

Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) Timeliness

The time between the receipt of the request for an EHC needs assessment, and the outcome of that request being communicated to the parent, carer or young person must take no more than **6 weeks**. This is a statutory timeframe, [set out in legislation \(opens in new tab\)](#).

The whole process of EHC needs assessment and EHC plan development, from the point when an EHC needs assessment is requested (or a child or young person is brought to the local authority's attention) until any final EHC plan is issued, must take no more than **20 weeks**. [The relevant legislation \(opens in new tab\)](#) provides for exceptions to the time limits in certain situations.

4. ANNEX 2: OTHER SOURCES OF PUBLISHED INFORMATION

Local authority interactive tool (LAIT) An interactive dashboard for comparing data about children and young people across all local authorities in England.	https://department-for-education.shinyapps.io/local-authority-interactive-tool/
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/

5. ANNEX 3: CURRENT STATISTICAL NEIGHBOURS

- Cornwall
- Dudley
- Gateshead
- Kirklees
- Medway
- Plymouth
- Rotherham
- Tameside
- Telford and Wrekin
- Torbay
- Wakefield

This page is intentionally left blank

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting:	09 December 2025
Title of Report:	Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2024-2025
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:	Siobhan Logue
Contact Email:	Siobhan.logue@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	PSCP annual report
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

Annual report of the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership 2024-2025. This statutory report highlights the work of the Partnership for the year 2024-2025 and is also available on the PSCP website. This has been shared with the Department for Education as per Working Together 2023.

Recommendations and Reasons

This report is presented to provide the Scrutiny Panel with information about the work and impact of the Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Partnership Board in 2024-25 and for Panel to scrutinise and challenge the work and impact of the Board.

Alternative options considered and rejected

- I. N/A

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

This is relevant to the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership Vision and to the Plymouth Plan's priority to keep children, young people and adults safe.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

None.

Legal Implications

None.

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.

None.

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 – Summary of the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Annual Report 2024-2025							
B	Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2024-2025							

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)
	<p><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></p>

Sign off:

PLYMOUTH SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025

Briefing Summary - Appendix A



The Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2024-2025 (Appendix B) highlights the impact made for children from a mature partnership system, how the partnership implements learning, the funding arrangements for the partnership, independent scrutiny, an update from the Young Safeguarders and identifies future partnership work.

This report is further supported by the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements which describe the responsibilities of each agency in respect of safeguarding children. These arrangements are refreshed annually (in December) and published on the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership website.

Summary of the Annual Report

1) Safeguarding in Education

The report acknowledges that education has been lifted to be the 4th Statutory Partner in Plymouth with representation at Lead and Delegated Safeguarding Partner level. The report highlights the contribution of education partners through the Safeguarding in Education Reference Group and through the Designated Safeguarding Lead meetings. Auditing in education through the s175/157 process is highlighted in the report through comparable findings through the last 2 years.

2) Young Safeguarders

This is a group of young people from across Plymouth who work to make sure that the lived experience and voices of children and young people are heard.

This year they have attended learning walks at the CAMHS place of safety and at the Probation Service, attended a workshop gathering young people's views on Policing with the Independent Office for Police Complaints and supported trading standards and the Child Centred Policing Team with a vape test purchase operation.

The Young Safeguarders have also fed into a Local Authority review of SEND services, interviewed candidates for the Local Authority Designated Officer role and completed a campaign aimed to kick start conversations around online harms and online pornography.

3) Partnership Health Check

In 2023 the partnership took part in a Health Check with the Department for Education to identify areas of growth as part of the implementation of Working Together 2023. In 2024 the partnership completed a follow up health check to identify further improvements required and to help reflect on growth over the last year. The annual report highlights improvements made in this time and has appended the full health check to the report.

4) Learning and Development

76 multi-agency training courses have been delivered by the partnership in 2024-2025 with 1135 individual practitioners attending 2135 training places.

Learning into practice tells us that training this year has helped people with confidence to gain advice from partner agencies, helped attendees to understand the vulnerabilities that children with disabilities

may have and what to look out for and when to challenge, has helped to guide partners through navigating challenging conversations with parents and how best to use language to engage a child and make them feel comfortable.

5) Priorities

The Partnership priorities for 2024/2025 remained in the areas of Neglect, Safeguarding Adolescents, Domestic abuse & Children and Child Sexual Abuse.

5.1) Neglect

The Partnership made the decision to carry forward the priority of Neglect into 2024/2025 as Children on Child protection plans continue to be highest in the category of neglect with figures indicating 52.4% in March 2025, compared to 49.5% in March 2024 and 35.5% in 2023, demonstrating an ongoing yearly increasing trend, however this year it is felt that this is likely due to earlier recognition. The use of the Graded Care Profile (GCP) 2 tool may have helped with this.

The Neglect working group has grown in strength over the 2024/2025 period and has focused on: Oral Health Neglect, Educational Neglect, continued embedding of the GCP2 tool, focus on poverty and implementing learning from audit activity and reviews.

The annual report highlights areas where the partnership has been “making a difference” in neglect and evidences what quality assurance activity has shown us with regards to neglect.

5.2) Safeguarding Adolescents

The Daily Intelligence Briefing (DIB) has continued to be an asset to the city and prioritises a child specific contextual safeguarding daily meeting to focus on young people going missing, at risk of being exploited, locations young people may go and adults of concern. The focus of the Safeguarding adolescent group over this year has been: Child Hunger, Exploitation, Launching the new Adolescent Safety Framework, Finalising the practice guidance and toolkits on the PSCP website and implementing learning from audit activity and reviews.

The annual report highlights areas where the partnership has been “making a difference” in safeguarding adolescents and evidences what quality assurance activity has shown us with regards to this.

5.3) Domestic Abuse and Children

The PSCP recognises that Domestic Abuse continues to be a significant concern with regards to safeguarding children and therefore has chosen for it to remain as a priority area in the Partnership. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 formally classified children as victims when they experience the effects of abuse between adults in their household. The Objectives for 2024-2025 of the Domestic Abuse and Children Working Group have been: the toolkit and guidance, JTAI self-assessment audit, the training offer, audit activity, learning and DA Practice Week.

The annual report highlights areas where the partnership has been “making a difference” in domestic abuse and children and evidences what quality assurance activity has shown us with regards to this.

5.4) Child Sexual Abuse –

Following the launch of the Strategy, Practice Guidance and toolkit at the Partnership Conference in the summer of 2024, the task and finish group focusing on Child Sexual Abuse has now become an established working group within the PSCP and Community Safety Partnership focusing on early intervention, prevention, managing harmful sexual behaviour, training and learning.

The focus for 2024-2025 has been on: embedding the signs and indicators tool across the safeguarding system utilising a task & finish group to maintain focus, Creating a train the trainer Level 3 CSA training input and subsequent partnership training, membership of the group and audit activity and learning

The annual report highlights areas where the partnership has been “making a difference” in the area of Child Sexual Abuse and evidences what quality assurance activity has shown us with regards to this whilst also highlighting the good practice and close collaboration with the NSPCC’s Together for Childhood Programme.

6) Conference

In June 2024 we hosted our Partnership Annual Conference, this time with a focus on Working Together. The Conference was open and closed with a video by our Young Safeguarders and featured an opportunity to attend workshops in our priority areas, launching the practice guidance and toolkits. The Conference was a fantastic opportunity for people from all areas of the safeguarding system in Plymouth to come together and was attended by over 140 practitioners.

7) National Learning

The following national learning has been shared in the report:

- National Panel report – December 2024
- “I wanted them all to notice” Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment – November 2024
- What Professionals know, think, and do to prevent child abuse – and how we can support them. A report from Together for Childhood – December 2024
- Families First Partnership Programme – March 2025

8) Local Learning

A learning culture is paramount to enable a constant cycle of positive change for safeguarding children, young people and families in Plymouth and it is our responsibility as a Partnership to examine safeguarding practices across our partner agencies so that we can develop and continuously improve to provide the best outcomes for all.

This learning is completed through Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, Learning from Experience Reviews, Quality Assurance audits, S.175/157 schools safeguarding audits, S.11 Audits and Domestic Homicide Reviews

There are examples of outcomes from some of these learning methods within the full annual report.

9) Partnership data

The partnership data scorecard is reviewed by the Multi-Agency Performance and Quality Assurance partnership group, Young Safeguarders and the Partnership Board. Throughout 2024/2025 securing data from multiple agencies including Health, Police, Education partners and Children’s services has expanded our data capability and the recruitment of an analyst due to start in September 2025 will further enhance the partnership analytical offer and associated reports for review.

10) Funding

The partnership is funded through contributions from various partners totalling £193,279 for 2024/2025 with expenditure of £213,490 and reserves of £190,000.

11) Looking Ahead to 2025/2026

Two new priorities of Online Safety and Visibility of the partnership were added to the current priorities of Neglect, Safeguarding Adolescents, Child Sexual abuse and Domestic Abuse and children and will run through all the partnership groups as they are incorporated into all of the work of the partnership.

2025-2026 Will be an exciting year in the Partnership space as Partners will work together to bring about the changes of National Reforms for children through the Families First Partnership Programme.

Going into the year ahead, the Young Safeguarders are embarking on the role of Young Scrutineers; providing independent scrutiny looking at how the voice of children, young people and families is captured throughout the partnership groups and organisations and examining how their voice influences and informs Practice, Policies and Procedures within the partnership.

In 2025/2026 we will be improving our data dashboard to provide better analysis and performance monitoring as a partnership.

12)Independent Scrutiny

The partnership Independent Scrutineer Deborah McMillan contributed to the report.

Her conclusion states - The multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in Plymouth demonstrate significant progress, underpinned by strong leadership, collaborative culture, and a growing emphasis on evidence-based practice. Political and strategic support remains robust, and the inclusion of education as a formal partner marks a pivotal step forward. While challenges persist the commitment to continuous improvement is evident. With strengthened structures, clearer priorities, and a child centred ethos, the partnership is well-positioned to deliver impactful safeguarding outcomes and ensure that children's voices remain at the heart of its work.



ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership

pscpc@plymouth.gov.uk

www.plymouthscpc.co.uk



TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Appendices	6
Introduction from our Lead safeguarding partners	7
What is the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership?	9
Relevant agencies	10
Safeguarding in Education	12
Young Safeguarders	14
Trauma-informed Plymouth	17
Partnership health check 2024	18
Learning and Development: What we've delivered	19
Learning and Development: Learning into Practice and feedback	21
Our Priorities Reviewed	23
Our priorities - Neglect	24
Our Priorities - Safeguarding adolescents	31
Our Priorities - domestic abuse and children	37
Our Priorities - Child Sexual Abuse	46
Conference	56
National Learning	57
Local Learning	58
Partnership Data	65
Funding the Partnership	66
Our Priorities Going Forward into 2025/2026	67
Independent Scrutiny	68
Glossary of acronyms	70
Appendices	71

Our Mission Statement: Working together to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and families within Plymouth

LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix A – Partnership Health check 2024
- Appendix B – Family Hub Case Study 1
- Appendix C – Family Hub Case Study 2
- Appendix D – Family Hub Case Study 3
- Appendix E – First Light Case Studies
- Appendix F – Safe Families Anonymised Case Study

INTRODUCTION FROM OUR LEAD SAFEGUARDING PARTNERS

Welcome to our Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership annual report 2024-2025.

It is wonderful to be able to reflect on the safeguarding activity which has taken place over the last year. We would like to start by taking the opportunity to thank all our frontline practitioners, whose dedication to their roles and partnership working keeps children and young people safe and protected in Plymouth.

This year has seen significant strengthening and growth of the Partnership, building on our strong foundations created following the implementation of Working Together 2023 detailed in our last annual report. Through the publication of our Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements in December 2024 we have detailed our shared ownership, governance and accountability to ensure that we collectively focus on keeping the children and young people of Plymouth safe. We have also set out how we will utilise scrutineers in specialist areas to ensure we create a constant environment of learning, improvement and holding ourselves to account.

As detailed within this report the partnership undertook a follow up self-evaluation this year. We are particularly proud of how we demonstrated so many areas of achievement, including a strong learning culture, effective communication and partnership working, strong multi-agency safeguarding arrangements with a child centred approach, and effective feedback and challenge from the Young Safeguarders. We acknowledge that there are always areas where improvements can be made, and we will continue to work on these in the coming year.

Work has continued in relation to the priorities for the partnership and wider learning. This annual report demonstrates the progress that has taken place across the city. We are proud of all that has been achieved and the ongoing commitment to continuous improvement.

Looking ahead to 2025/2026 the Lead Safeguarding Partners will oversee the implementation of the national social care reforms to ensure the successful embedding of these across the

partnership. There will be a significant focus on data. We will ensure the valuable data held in each organisation is used to inform and guide our safeguarding priorities, so that we can provide help at the earliest opportunity to keep the children and young people of Plymouth safe. We are excited to embrace the Young Scrutineer work our Young Safeguarders will be completing to examine how our practice is influenced by the voice of children and young people.

Finally, the work of the partnership would not be possible without the continued support of partners, chairs and members of the sub-groups, our independent scrutineers and the business unit that supports all our work. We would like to take the opportunity to offer our thanks for their ongoing support, hard work and dedication to our children, young people and families in Plymouth.



James Vaughan
Chief Constable
Devon and Cornwall Police



Tracey Lee
Chief Executive
Plymouth City Council

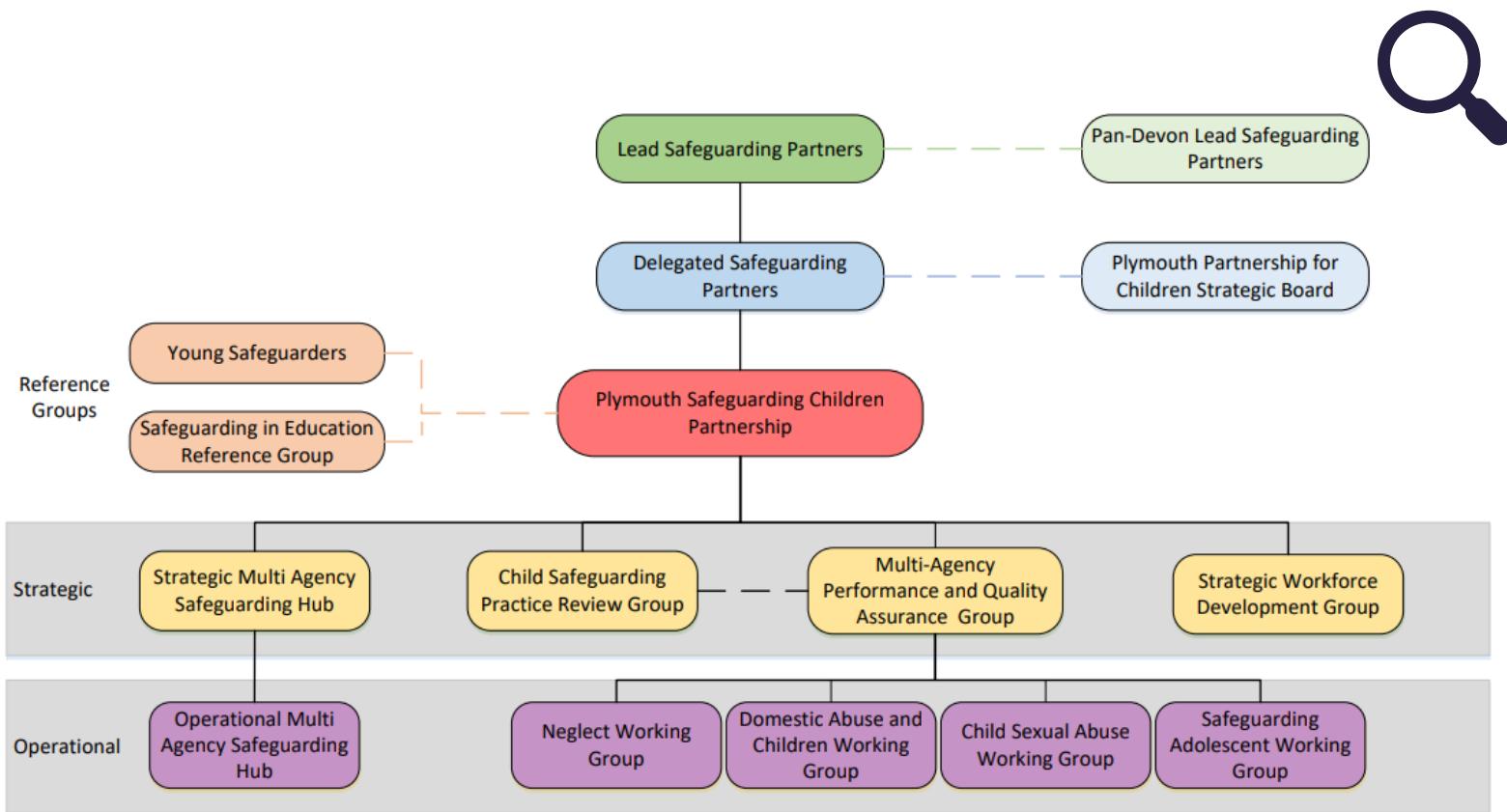


Steve Moore
Chief Executive
NHS Devon Integrated Care Board

Moira Marder
Chief Executive
Ted Wragg Trust

WHAT IS THE PLYMOUTH SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP?

The Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership is also known as the PSCP. We are a partnership of agencies who are responsible and accountable for leading safeguarding services across the city. We support each other to learn from local and national reviews identifying what works well and what could be improved within children's safeguarding. We scrutinise the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and hold each other to account to ensure everyone plays their part in keeping children and young people safe, in Plymouth.



Find out more:

Find out more about the Partnership by visiting our website: <https://plymouthscb.co.uk>



RELEVANT AGENCIES

There are three statutory safeguarding partners: Police, Health and the Local Authority, however there are several relevant agencies who make up our partnership. Although ultimate accountability rests with the three Statutory Partners, the legislation is clear that all agencies share a responsibility for safeguarding children and for working together to achieve that.

The relevant agencies in Plymouth include, but are not limited to:

- All early year's settings
- All Family Hubs and Children's Centres
- All primary, secondary, special, further and independent education settings
- Private training providers
- Language schools
- Faith Groups
- NHS England
- University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust
- Livewell Southwest
- Southwest Ambulance NHS Trust
- Adopt Southwest
- Registered fostering agencies
- CAFCASS
- The Probation Service
- Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner
- British Transport Police
- Port and local border police force
- Action for Children
- LARK Children's centre
- NSPCC

- Barnardo's
- The Children's Society
- Young Devon
- First Light
- Community and social housing providers
- Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service
- Ministry of Defence
- Plymouth Argyle Football Club
- Plymouth Albion Rugby Club
- Plymouth Octopus Project

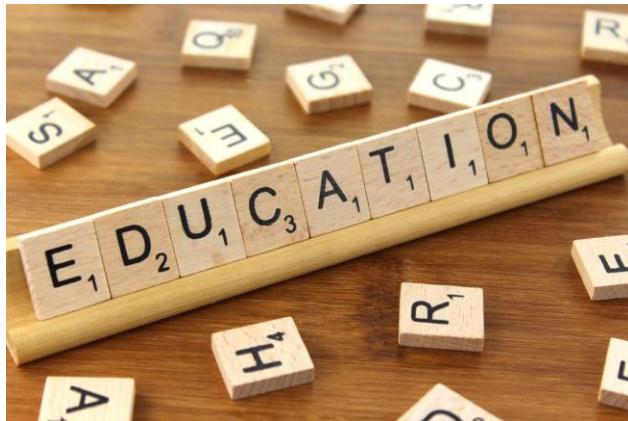
SAFE GUARDING IN EDUCATION

In Plymouth, we recognise the valuable strengths of our education partners who spend a huge amount of time with our children and young people.

Under Working Together 2023, we have raised the profile of Education within our partnership and have an education representative at Lead Safeguarding Partner (LSP) level and Delegated Safeguarding Partner (DSP) level. We also ensure all our partnership subgroups have education representation.

We have a Safeguarding in Education Reference Group (SERG) where representatives from the education sector come together to discuss current practice in relation to safeguarding and share information from the other partnership groups, information on new training offers through the PSCP and current themes and trends.

The partnership manager and other partner agency representatives also regularly attend the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) meetings to ensure education partners are appraised of current partnership work and emerging themes in safeguarding.



Each year all relevant education provisions complete an audit called a S175/157. This process is part of the partnership Quality Assurance work and helps to gather an annual snapshot of safeguarding and safeguarding practice in all educational settings across the city.

An Example of comparative findings 22/23 and 23/24 Improvements

Three audit statements appeared in the 2022/23 audit with 10% or more of data submitting schools indicating a 'No' response, potentially indicating that development was needed. Whilst the questions were re-worded for the 23/24 cycle, the overall indication is that improvements have been made.

Audit question/statement	Audit Year 22/23 % of Y responses	Audit Year 23/24 % of action required responses
2022/2023 wording: The setting completes a PSCP Child Exploitation Screening Tool, where appropriate to assess whether a child or young person may be at risk of child (criminal/sexual) exploitation 2023/2024 wording: Have all relevant staff in the setting accessed training/briefings in Child Exploitation?	85.15%	98.04%
2022/23 wording: There is a named governor for looked after and previously looked after children. 2023/34 wording: Please provide the name of the governor for looked after and previously looked after children.	87.13%	100%
2022/23 wording: STORM training (or equivalent) has been undertaken by relevant members of staff to support students expressing suicidal intent. 2023/24 wording: Are there systems in place to identify and support students who may be expressing suicidal intent?	73.27%	93.14%

There are two statements in which 10% or more of data submitting schools have indicated a 'No' or 'action required' response in both the 2022/23 and the 2023/24 audits.

Audit question/statement	Audit Year 22/23 % of Y responses	Audit Year 23/24 % of action required responses
2022/2023 wording: The setting is aware of the Neglect Graded Care Profile and the requirement to engage in its implementation. 2023/2024 wording: The setting is aware of, and a relevant member of staff has completed the training to undertake a Graded Care Profile (Neglect) assessment with a family. Please indicate in the comments section the number of GCP2 assessments completed.	83.17%	66.67%
2022/23 wording: Relevant staff have booked or have attended training on the use of the Neglect Graded Care Profile. 2023/34 wording: The setting is aware of, and a relevant member of staff has completed the training to undertake a Graded Care Profile (Neglect) assessment with a family. Please indicate in the comments section the number of GCP2 assessments completed.	57.43%	66.67%

YOUNG SAFEGUARDERS

In our City we are very fortunate to have a group called Young Safeguarders. This is a group of young people from across Plymouth who work to make sure that the lived experience and voices of children and young people are heard and that information that is produced, such as the policies and procedures that affect their lives, are fair and understandable. They meet fortnightly and are supported by the Plymouth City Council Participation Team, with costs part-funded by the PSCP. They provide regular scrutiny of the PSCP, including a quarterly review of our data scorecard. Within our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements you will also find the 10 wishes charter created by our Young Safeguarders.

The Young Safeguarders are proud to go on learning walks where they experience different aspects of the partnership and the impact these areas have on young people. This year they have attended learning walks at the Probation Service and Health Based Place of Safety situated at Plym Bridge House for a young person undergoing a Mental Health Act Assessment, following a detention under the section 136/5 of the Mental Health Act. The Young Safeguarders evaluated their view of the suitability of the environment and how well the needs of young people were reflected.

The Young Safeguarders met with representatives from the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) youth panel to take part in a workshop gathering young people's views of policing, trust and confidence, and police complaints; and receiving accessible information about young people's rights when interacting with the police and what to do in case of misconduct. They also supported Trading Standards and the Child Centred Policing Team with a Vape test purchase operation leading to two shops requiring possible enforcement.

The Young Safeguarders reviewed the multi-agency audit into substance misuse and early help and shared their views on the suggested recommendations. The Young Safeguarders fed into the Local Authority critical review on SEND services, sharing their experiences of services and the impact it has had on them.

The Young Safeguarders developed questions and interviewed candidates for the role of the

Local Authority Designated Office (LADO) who manage allegations against individuals who work or volunteer with children.

Following the recommendations of the Violence Against Women and Girls Commission, partners across Plymouth came together to build a campaign aimed at kick starting conversations between professionals, parents/carers and young people about online harms, and more specifically, online pornography.

Making a Difference

The Young Safeguarders led on the most recent phase of the campaign, developing resources to support peer-to-peer conversations and critical awareness of the influence of pornography and its contribution to harmful behaviours.

'Tricky Topics' is a resource to support 11 to 13 year olds with trusted advice and information on all those awkward, tricky things to talk about. Key topics include consent, healthy relationships and online pornography.

The Young Safeguarders also created a script and recorded audios for a 'Tricky Topics' film which is an introduction to the resource and will be sent to schools alongside the printed booklets

<https://plymouthscb.co.uk/tricky-topics/>

Making a Difference

During the development of Tricky Topics, it was highlighted again and again that the jump from primary school to secondary school can be a daunting one and the Young Safeguarders wanted to also create some information for young people going through that transition. The outcome was a leaflet containing information that the group wished that they had known when they started secondary school including messages such as 'it's ok not to know everything' and 'it's ok to be curious'.

<https://plymouthscb.co.uk/moving-schools-leaflet-starting-secondary-school/>

Finally, the young people made Christmas decorations to sell to raise money to buy gifts for young people who access services that are part of the PSCP. They donated £80 to the Edge of Care Team to buy gifts for several young people who were spending their first Christmas alone in independent living arrangements and have no contact with their families. They also

donated £50 to the Christmas for Care Leavers Giving Tree appeal which aims to ensure that all care experienced young people receive a Christmas gift.

Find out more:

<https://plymouthscb.co.uk/young-safeguarders-2/>

TRAUMA-INFORMED PLYMOUTH



The PSCP ensures that trauma informed practice is maintained and will apply the trauma-informed lens in its work by using the Trauma Informed Plymouth Network principles. This means that throughout its arrangements the PSCP shall ensure that it supports the 5 core values for a trauma-informed Plymouth:

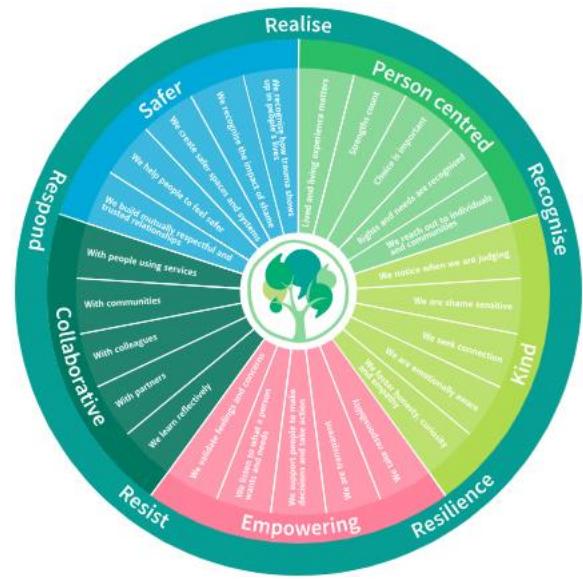
Safer: there is consideration of the psychological safety of those involved in and impacted by its safeguarding arrangements. When meeting, engaging and working with children, young people, families efforts shall be made to establish trusting relationships.

Person centred: understanding the lived experience of children, young people, families and communities and the circumstances which led to their involvement within services. Voices of the child, young person, families and communities shall be listened to and heard with respect.

Collaborative: children, young people, families, communities and professionals are treated as equal partners in the PSCP safeguarding arrangements. Learning shall be reflective with openness and emotional awareness.

Empowering: there is an overriding expectation that the PSCP safeguarding arrangements shall make a genuine difference. All involved, engaged or working within safeguarding services deserve to know that their contributions have influenced real change and that the PSCP is going to ensure that learning from their involvement, engagement or work is meaningful and widely disseminated.

Kind: ensure that language is appropriate and mindful of victim blaming or falling into judgement. There shall be understanding that traumatic circumstances may evidence behaviour that is considered challenging, and the trauma lens shall be applied to try to understand the underlying cause of this. There shall be kindness, clear transparent and compassionate communication and engagement.



PARTNERSHIP HEALTH CHECK 2024

In 2023 Plymouth took part in a partnership Health Check facilitated by the Local Authority Department for Education lead Deborah Macmillan to ensure we were embracing the Working Together guidance. As a partnership we chose to take the opportunity to complete the health check to encourage growth through a strong self-evaluation which helped us identify our strengths and areas we need to continue to improve on. In 2024 we have completed a follow up health check to help us identify any further improvements required and to help reflect on our growth in the last year, this also guides us with adequate next steps (See Appendix A).

Some Highlights of improvement from the report include:

- There is a proactive approach to problem-solving, with a focus on resolving issues collaboratively rather than attributing blame.
- Senior leaders have continued to strengthen, improve and innovate services to benefit children and their families, and they have been influential in bringing partners together, including more recently education colleagues.
- Strong partnership engagement, together with easily accessible family hubs, is enabling families to access timely, well-targeted help when their needs are first identified.
- Partnership arrangements are stronger. Children are protected by partnership arrangements that have strengthened since the last health check. The safeguarding partnership arrangements, forward plan, and the proposed scrutiny plan will provide assurance with an ambitious, child centred approach to improving practice for children.
- Strong political and partnership support has enabled the senior leadership team to be an effective champion for children, young people and their families.
- Quality assurance processes are improving, with multi-agency and single-agency audits identifying outstanding practices and focusing on learning.
- A new scrutiny strategy includes independent scrutineers conducting deep dives into key areas.
- The Young Safeguarders group provides effective challenge and has directly influenced practice with an excellent example shared of seeking feedback and acting on that feedback.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT: WHAT WE'VE DELIVERED

The PSCP provides a large amount of multi-agency training to professionals across the city.

Below is a snapshot of what we've done in the past twelve months.

Courses for 2024-2025



Headline Numbers



What Participants have Valued

We seek feedback during and after all our training courses. Over the past twelve months, participants have valued:

Multi-agency working, and meeting other colleagues who work within different sectors

New webinars following feedback and training needs assessments via the partnership

Practical activities during sessions within groups to enable discussion.

Use of real world learning such as case studies, learning on a page, child safeguarding practice reviews.

Find out more:

Our full training offer and more information about how to book on can be found on our website: <https://plymouthscb.co.uk/training-development/course-information-and-bookings/>

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT: LEARNING INTO PRACTICE AND FEEDBACK

Below are sections of feedback provided by attendees at some of the training sessions provided by the partnership.

Making a Difference

Since the meeting, I have attended a CIN meeting for child neglect. Parents openly admit they are struggling to parent their 4 children. At the meeting parents talked about their struggles with bedtime and teachers had raised concerns about the children being given devices to use at bedtime and the 5 year old sometimes using it until midnight. I understood that these parents needed little steps given them to help them achieve and clear and simple explanations of why bedtime routine and sleep was so important to the child, along with the long term benefits for themselves as parents. I explained all of these and helped them see how small steps in the right direction would be in the best interests of their child and would also benefit themselves as parents. The parents were receptive and appeared to take on board what I said. - *Working Together to Safeguard Children*

Making a Difference

We recently have had a new child to the class, who struggled to talk/open up to the adults within the class. He had trust issues with adults at the previous school he attended. There was clearly something bothering him but felt like he couldn't talk about. After using the DO'S and DON'Ts of what I asked and the language I used the child now feels comfortable to talk to me. - *Understanding Child Protection*

Making a Difference

Navigating a challenging conversation with a parent to gain consent for a social care referral. the training and examples given on the course helped me to frame things well and eventually gain positive engagement from parents which resulted in long term engagement with relevant support and progress for the family and young person –*Child Protection Refresher*

Making a Difference

My situation is that we have a young man with us for almost 8 years, we are PCC foster carers. My example is more of a reflection around the use of the word choices. I understand the reasoning behind people being told they are making a choice that may have negative consequences but I think children and adults are often not capable of making those choices due to past trauma, neglect and abuse so I now think very carefully about how I use that word. –*Understanding Child Protection*

Making a Difference

As a new DSL, it gave me a lot of confidence about what to do in various situations I've not faced before. I would now feel more able to pick up the phone and ask for advice. –*Understanding the Role of the LADO*

Making a Difference

I was really pleased with the training, felt the trainers provided a really good course. I will be taking away from the training a different way to view the support given and needed to support children with disabilities. How many people are involved in one child life when having disabilities. The vulnerabilities children with disabilities have and what to look out for and when to challenge. –*Safeguarding Children With Disabilities*

Making a Difference

I really enjoyed the *10 wishes*. I will keep that at my forefront going forward and encourage others to look them up. –*Having Curious and Courageous Conversations*

The training provides consistency of practice across the Partnership, and it enables relationships to be built for better working together arrangements.

The training gives all practitioners a base line of understanding which causes confidence in the practitioner.



OUR PRIORITIES REVIEWED

The Partnership agreed 4 priority areas of Neglect; Child Sexual Abuse, Domestic Abuse & Children, and Safeguarding Adolescents for 2023-2024 and this has been taken forward into 2024-2025.

In 2023 the partnership embarked on a large piece of work to create a strategy, practice guidance and toolkit in each priority area using multi-agency task and finish groups. The creation of this ensured we were being ambitious about making a difference with our priorities to keep children and young people safe in Plymouth.

These strategies, practice guidance and toolkits were launched at the Summer 2024 conference and on the PSCP website. The task and finish groups working on the priorities in 2023-2024 became working groups to deliver on the strategies and to implement learning from audits, local and national learning reviews and emerging themes and trends in these areas.

The working groups have become an intrinsic part of The Partnership delivering on the priorities to make improvements for children and young people in a prevention space and as evidenced in the report the work of these groups is already making a difference.

Looking forward to 2025-2026 as per our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements we will be completing specialist independent scrutiny in each of our priority areas to identify further growth areas.

Find out more:

PSCP Multi-Agency Safeguarding arrangements can be found here -
<https://plymouthscb.co.uk/annual-report/>

OUR PRIORITIES - NEGLECT

In Plymouth we recognise that neglect is challenging for practitioners as it is frequently passive and not always intentional. Neglect is more likely to be a chronic condition rather than crisis-led and this impacts on how agencies respond. It is often combined with other forms of abuse.

Plymouth is committed to prevention, early identification, and intervention in respect of neglect and its negative impact on children and young people, because of the serious impact it has on the long-term chances for children.

The Partnership made the decision to carry forward the priority of Neglect into 2024/2025 as Children on Child protection plans continue to be highest in the category of neglect with figures indicating 52.4% in March 2025, compared to 49.5% in March 2024 and 35.5% in 2023, demonstrating an ongoing yearly increasing trend, however this year it is felt that this is likely due to earlier recognition. The use of the Graded Care Profile (GCP) 2 tool might have helped with this, however this is difficult to evidence this as we are unable to electronically report on its usage.

In the summer of 2024, The Partnership launched an ambitious neglect strategy, practice guidance and toolkit at the annual conference and on the Partnership website, not only to assist practitioners but also to highlight what we plan to do as a partnership to prevent neglect and provide better outcomes for children.

Alongside the strategy, guidance and toolkit an Operational Neglect working group which started as a task and finish group in 2023/2024, was created. This partnership group has completed valuable multi-agency work to address neglect and to assist with and action learning from quality assurance multi-agency audits to ensure constant learning and growth.

In this last year the group has focused on:

- Oral Health Neglect
- Educational Neglect
- Continued Embedding of the Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) tool.

Police are ensuring body worn video is used at the initial attendance of all neglect incidents, which is crucial in achieving better outcomes at court.

- Starting to focus on poverty alongside other partnership groups and how this can impact on families.
- Audit activity and learning

Oral Health Neglect: A Specialist in Paediatric Dentistry attended the meeting to share information about the processes relating to their area of work – including MASH referrals in the instance that children were not brought to appointments. This highlighted an area for further discussion and exploration to see whether there is any further support that could be offered to children/young people who were not attending dental appointments, where threshold was not met for an initial assessment by social care. It is hoped that progression of these discussions will help to provide a greater understanding about reasons why children/young people may not be brought to appointments and any support needs.

During meetings, the Specialist in Paediatric Dentistry shared information relating to early help messaging relating to oral health hygiene. Family Hubs progressed these discussions and have requested additional information relating to areas of the city where the need for extractions in children may be more prevalent. This would enable us to target information sharing and support. In addition, a Padlet has been created promoting good oral health hygiene. This is available for access by parents/carers and families.

Educational Neglect: there have been numerous discussions around non-attendance at school and educational neglect. It has been recognised that this is a broad term that required further exploration. Discussion in a Neglect Learning Review identified that educational neglect may not be viewed the same as other areas of neglect.

It provided an opportunity to consider the curious conversations that are held when concerns about attendance arise, as well as the various ways schools offer support to children, young people and families. There was recognition that schools are proactive in trying to build relationships with families.

In considering the area of neglect and how outcomes for children can be further improved, we reflected upon information sharing and the importance of gathering information from not just a

current school but previous schools, particularly if the child has recently joined a new school. We also discussed how support such as home visits are vital in understanding what life is like for agencies and how information held by schools could be joined with information held by other agencies, to increase understanding about circumstances and experience.

Making a Difference

Case Study:

We have a strong evidence based case study which demonstrates how Multi agency working and the recognition of agency voice and concern in relation to our student is going to provide our student with the best outcomes into adulthood.

Our case study was initially a Child Protection which stepped down to a Child In Need on recommendation of CSC. However, it was agreed we would monitor a Child In Need Plan initially to monitor the progress. Unfortunately concerns continued to be shared during constant CIN review meetings. The social worker listened to all agency concerns and evidence and in between reviews called professional meetings so we could share openly and transparently our worries without adding further impact to the parent's already failing mental health.

The child's voice was considered at all times and their aspirations for success. During legal planning meetings the child shared his thoughts and feelings and the parent was able to have an understanding of the non-judgemental requirement for the child to enter care.

Impact:

The outcome of the case is that our student is predicted, based on his mocks, our highest achieving grades in August. He has support and stability and his basic needs being met whilst still maintaining a relationship with his parent whilst their health improves. Our student's attendance was previously low and it is now 100% with all barriers removed including the FSW allocated helping him to obtain and ride a bike to give him freedom.

The multi agency context of Housing, adult social care, adult mental health, therapeutic agencies, schools and CSC demonstrated a thorough robust group who all felt equally listened to and heard by the social worker.

GCP2: In 2023 the PSCP embedded the use of the NSPCC's Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) and work has continued into 2024/2025 to strengthen the embedding of this and provide continued training. The GCP2 can help families understand their child's needs and create conversations that lead to positive change and progress. It creates a consistent approach and shared language for us in Plymouth when responding to neglect and helps families get the right support at the right time.

In the S175/157 schools audit, 67% of schools reported they had a trained member of staff able to undertake GCP2 assessment. DO WE HAVE DATA?

Making a Difference

Feedback from families about GCP2:

Family 1 - Mum had a mild learning need and she said that she found the traffic light scoring easy to understand.

Family 2 - "it was less having it done about me and more I was doing it with you", "i felt like I had a voice". She also said that she liked that is showed her what she was already doing well and that she could clearly see what she needed to do to be in the next box.

Impact:

For the 2 children and families where the GCP2 was undertaken, 1 child no longer required to be placed under a CP/CIN,

This allowed professionals to feel reassured that the family no longer required support.

The second GCP2 undertaken, identified that the mother continued to struggle despite the support and the child was placed with a family member.

Poverty: Schools are in the front line of dealing with issues around poverty which are having an impact on family's capacity to meet children's basic needs. They have been setting up food banks and sharing of other resources in their local communities and lots of work to signpost families to support. Staff are bringing in food and clothing, schools are doing washing and providing hampers. Period products are available. Food vouchers. Family support workers

helping parents to provide safe and nurturing home environments and understand how to respond to conflict and set and hold boundaries.

Action for children have identified a number of families who are experiencing challenges around finances. As part of this, some families are struggling to purchase food and/or essential items for their children. During the identified time period, we provided 17 foodbank vouchers and supported 34 families with grant applications.

The provision of foodbank vouchers and promotion of foodbanks has helped to ensure that children and families have access to food / nutrients, to support health and growth. It has helped to minimise the possibility that children could be going hungry through lack of available food.

Making a Difference

The Public Protection Unit (PPU) in the Police had a recent investigation of serious neglect and child sexual abuse. The abuse covered a wide timespan and resulted in physical and psychological harm including an unplanned pregnancy. The police worked collaboratively with partner agencies to safeguard both the victim and her sibling, gathered evidential material to prove the offences whilst highlighting aggravating factors and secured a lengthy custodial sentence for the two perpetrators of abuse. The officers committed to this case from the very beginning and despite the harrowing circumstances, maintained agility and dedication to seeking justice. The officers protected the victim who was unable to protect herself. They operated with compassion, respect and commitment to safeguarding her and the wider community. As a result, the offenders were sentenced, and the victim and her sibling were safeguarded from further harm.

Audit activity and Learning: In the Police, Detective Inspectors complete audit reviews which include reviewing offences of neglect. It is evident that the victims voice is being recorded and consideration to the children and family's welfare, safeguarding and interests are being afforded throughout the investigation and when deciding on appropriate outcomes.

The PPU DI and a Children's Social Care Team Manager have monthly meetings to discuss good work, potential barriers and service failures to ensure we improve our service delivery to children and families these meetings have been vital in providing swift interventions and addressing areas of concern.

In CYPFS partnership and inhouse quality assurance activity evidence that our practice with children experiencing neglect is a strong area of practice.

Children Services quality assurance activity evidence that we are improving outcomes for children living with neglect by connecting them with other services for longer term support and intervention. Family hubs have played a key role in their support of families with younger children, parenting programmes are building parenting skills and connecting families to local community networks.

The Probation service supervises perpetrators of neglect and manage the risk of harm they pose, through working with child safeguarding colleagues and robustly managing their order or licence accordingly. Probation officers look for evidence of neglect completing home visits and during supervision sessions by their account of their day-to-day life.

Safeguarding checks are also completed at court to inform professional pre-sentence reports so that children can be safeguarded effectively.

Multi-agency neglect quality assurance activity evidences the following neglect practice strengths:

- Practitioners have a good understanding of neglect and families are experiencing high support and high challenge particularly from school and Family Hubs
- Family Hubs are seeing an increase in fathers engaging with the service, supporting a 'think family' approach
- Practitioners have a greater understanding of the importance of being aware of the child/family in their wider context
- There are pockets of good practice within the city, demonstrated through use of genograms and writing to the child

- Schools are recognised as being good at collecting and recording the child's voice and experience in their own words
- We now have 460 Graded Care Profile 2(GCP2) licensed practitioners within the city
- There is evidence that the GCP2 tool is supporting reflection and decision making with families which improves outcomes for children

Making a Difference

In the most recent Neglect Learning Review, it was applauded that there has been an increase in both confidence in recognising and having supportive and challenging conversations around neglect. This has a positive impact for children, young people and families as it should mean increased awareness around neglect and the importance of acknowledging this and exploring circumstances relating to this. The GCP2 was recognised as a tool that can help to provide a common language and understanding.

Find out more:

Our Neglect Strategy, Practice Guidance and Toolkit can be found on our website:
<https://plymouthscb.co.uk/neglect/>

OUR PRIORITIES - SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS

In 2023 a task and finish group for Safeguarding Adolescents was created to work together on the creation of a strategy, practice guidance and toolkit around safeguarding our adolescents in Plymouth. In 2024 this group developed into the Safeguarding Adolescents Working Group (SAWG) and now incorporates all the work of the Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation (MACE) group with a wider remit.

The Daily Intelligence Briefing (DIB) model which replaced the operational MACE in 2023 is now firmly embedded in the city and has been highlighted as good practice by partners.

The Child Centred Policing Team plays an integral role within the DIB. A selected officer attends every day and provides updates on all missing children in the previous 24hrs. The DIB allows all attending agencies a way of providing immediate operational support to that child and family whilst ensuring strategy meetings are fast tracked through the system.

This has proven invaluable and with immediate real time information sharing has led to quicker response times for support or action.

The Child Centred Policing Team is a conduit between partner agencies and the police when actively looking for a child or dealing with the child as a victim or offender.

The information from the DIB is then fed into the SAWG which takes a more strategic view of longer-term issues such as problem locations, alongside identified themes and trends.

The Probation Service works with partners to help the transition for young people between children and adult services. They have a young persons officer who has transfer meetings and works with 18-24 year olds in a trauma informed way.

Making a Difference

Police have shared that During the past 12 months there have been three male juveniles within Plymouth who have been very active in drug misuse, drug supply, assaults against the person, anti-social behaviour, theft of motor vehicles and themselves been victims of crime due to associations with high-risk offenders.

Due to the DIB process and the participation of partner agencies, information has flowed seamlessly throughout The Partnership resulting in all three being swiftly and robustly dealt with through both the criminal justice system and child safeguarding structures of the PSCP. Their offending has been curtailed significantly to the point they are no longer a substantial threat to the public and all are now working with support agencies with an aim of further reducing the likelihood of them offending in future, whilst they and their families receive the support they require.

The speed at which this happened has been down to the existence of the DIB and the close partnership working it has created.

Prior to the DIB this would have taken far longer due to agencies not being aligned. This increases the threat, risk and harm to them and the wider public.

A representative from the DIB attends the education reference group and DSL briefings to provide updates from the DIB.

The updates provide assurance to schools that other agencies are aware of emerging issues around safeguarding adolescents and information about what action is being taken to address them.

A member of the education reference group also attends the DIB each day and links in with Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL's) from other schools.

DSL's sharing intelligence so that other schools can review contextual risks for their pupils including places and persons of concern. Peer group mapping meetings.

All leading to individual and groups being safeguarded from immediate risk and supported in the longer term.

Making a Difference

Last summer agencies made a commitment to work with an identified group of adolescents at higher risk who attend ACE schools MAT Bretonside school. They joined staff on Friday mornings taking the group out on activities to build positive relationships and work with them to improve their understanding of risk and give them strategies to keep themselves safe.

The S175/157 education audit showed a year-on-year increase from 73% to 93% of schools reporting they had trained staff available to support pupils expressing suicidal intent

The focus for the Safeguarding Adolescent group this year has been

- Child Hunger
- Exploitation
- Launching a new streamlined Adolescent Safety Framework (ASF)
- Finalising the strategy practice guidance and toolkit on the PSCP website
- Audit activity and learning

The percentage of schools reporting that they complete the Child Exploitation screening tool rose from 85% to 98% year on year.

Child hunger- The group are working with the neglect group and wider partners looking at child poverty as already detailed within this report and will be exploring how to break the stigma for young people living in poverty. The group are currently also working with Plymouth Against

Retail Crime (PARC) to ensure that more shops sign up to a scheme to safeguard children and ensure this is seen as a priority and not just as a crime reporting tool. The group will also highlight the issue to shops in the city that decide not become part of PARC.

All children reported missing are reported to UHP on a daily basis. The administrative team add an alert onto the child's record so that if a child presents to UHP and they are missing it alerts the clinician to call 999 to contact the police and also to make contact with the local authority.

Exploitation: The Safeguarding Adolescents Working Group (SAWG) has the aim of understanding and reducing contextual harm within the city. The group have identified child exploitation as one of their priorities.

Our aim is to identify the prevalence of this issue in Plymouth to enable learning around key themes and trends and for support to be put in place in those areas where it is needed the most. We would also like to understand the challenges that schools face in supporting those most affected and to try and find solutions to support the great work our education colleagues already do in this space.

Making a Difference

Strategic Cooperative Commissioning and SAWG representatives from ACE schools are jointly leading on exploitation and have sent a survey on reduced timetables to DSLs in schools to understand how the school community supports pupils, and their families, if the pupils are on reduced timetable/suspended/persistently or severely absent, which can be a risk factor for exploitation.

A link has been made with a researcher at Plymouth Marjon University who will contact school survey respondents who volunteer to participate in follow up interviews to gain more in-depth understanding of the impact of reduced timetable/suspended/persistently or severely absent on pupils and their families.

The Plymouth Marjon University research project above is also working in partnership with Plymouth City Council to seek the views on school attendance from parents, carers and children to better understand the reasons why children and young people with SEND (school years 6-11) may struggle to attend school. These research findings will then be shared with schools and education partners in the city to help develop and strengthen attendance strategies and identify what can be done differently to support families. These surveys will close on 1st May 2025 and parents and carers have also been invited to participate in follow up interviews. We hope to jointly present these findings with Plymouth Marjon University researcher to SAWG in the autumn of 2025.

The intention is that the SAWG school survey will have questions that can be incorporated into the annual statutory S175/157 Audit from next year as the survey will be live from June to September.

Launching a New Streamlined Adolescent Safety Framework (ASF): a more streamlined version of the Adolescent Safety Framework (ASF) (Safer me assessment), a tool used to identify children at risk of or experiencing exploitation was created and launched in 2024-2025 with training inputs. Partners have been supporting the co-delivery of the multi-agency Safer Me training.

Audit Activity and Learning: Quality assurance activity has evidenced that the sharing of risk information at the daily DIB meetings so quickly after the risks have been identified has enabled Children Service and the Partnership to respond to the risks and reduce them in a timelier way for the child.

The delay with the simplified adolescent framework and toolkit caused confusion to continue for practitioners and, outside of the bespoke edge of care team, quality assurance activity evidenced this confusion. The edge of care team quality assurance activity found strong practice with timely responses for families, good wrap around support packages and creative bespoke plans that reduce risks for adolescents and build sustained improved outcomes for them.

Data of Return home interviews for children going missing shows that we are in line and better than statistical neighbours.

It is difficult to evidence the number of safer me assessments completed as we have no reporting for this currently.

Making a Difference

Action for Children have been involved in supporting adolescents. They worked with a parent who was under 16 years of age. As a young person, the parent had lived experiences of domestic abuse, parental substance misuse, financial, emotional and physical abuse. This resulted in the parent being homeless and staying in various properties.

The parent and their child had no access to their own money due to the parent's age. We supported the parent to apply for benefits when they turned 16 years old. We then supported the parent and child to find supported accommodation. We worked with the family to complete an EHAT and also made a MASH referral and continued to support the family as part of the multi-agency CIN plan. The EHAT was reconvened as concerns decreased and the family are now living independently within the community

Impact

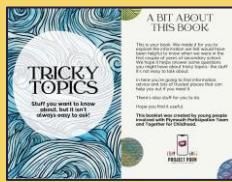
We supported the young parent in her own right, as a parent as well as offer of support for the child.

Making a Difference

Together for Childhood - NSPCC has contributed to the development of the strategy, toolkit and resources by participating in the working group.

Following the recommendations of the Violence Against Women and Girls Commission, partners across Plymouth came together to build a campaign aimed at kick starting conversations between professionals, parents/carers and young people about online harms-and more specifically online pornography and it's growing influence on harmful behaviour. This was named **Project Porn** by the group of young people supported by NSPCC and PCC Participation teams: The 12-month campaign on tackling the harm caused by violence against women and girls in pornography took a huge leap forward with young people from the Local Authority youth services and NSPCC campaigns and TFC young person ambassadors completing their development work. They worked hard to develop what they thought was needed to raise awareness and support critical conversations amongst peers on Porn influence. They developed 2 key resources, one that supports Year 7 children transitioning into secondary school and an activity pack named 'Tricky Topics' which provides age-appropriate information on Porn and online harms and signposts to NSPCC help and support. This followed the development and delivery of a youth led theatrical performance developed for schools to engage pupils in the topic and provide the opportunity for a supportive and informed conversation with professional youth workers.

Please download the book by and share far and wide with young people so we can make sure they can benefit from the amazing information it contains. <https://plymouthscb.co.uk/tricky-topics/>



Impact

This resource has been made available to all young people in years 7 & 8 across Plymouth as a hard copy as part of transition work and is published on the PSCP website. Demand for the information and how the project developed has been coming in from other local authorities including Somerset after the BBC picked it up and covered the story.

Find out more:

Our SAWG Strategy, Practice Guidance and Toolkit can be found on our website:
<https://plymouthscb.co.uk/adolescents/>

OUR PRIORITIES - DOMESTIC ABUSE AND CHILDREN

The PSCP recognises that Domestic Abuse continues to be a significant concern with regards to safeguarding children and therefore has chosen for it to remain as a priority area in the Partnership.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 formally classified children as victims when they experience the effects of abuse between adults in their household. This legislative change acknowledges the profound emotional and psychological harm children endure in abusive environments and ensures they are provided support services in line with them too being a victim of this abuse in their own right.

The Objectives for 2024-2025 of the Domestic Abuse and Children Working Group have been:

- The toolkit and guidance
- JTAI self-assessment audit
- Training offer
- Audit activity and learning
- DA Practice Week

The toolkit and guidance: The PSCP, in partnership with the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence partnership board, created a strategy, practice guidance and toolkit to address Domestic Abuse and Children in 2024-2025. This toolkit brings together guidance, tools and information for practitioners and has been compiled by the Community Connections team in Plymouth City Council with the support of a wide range of organisations to ensure that it meets the needs of a broad range of practitioners. The task and finish group formed to create the practice guidance and toolkit has developed into a multi-agency working group linked to the PSCP and the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence board within the Plymouth Community Safety Partnership.

This has taken a considerable amount of time, attention and research to develop and to translate into something well laid out and usable online. The content included has been through a process of quality assurance, formatting, organisation and where applicable

instructions for use are included and will be formally launched with an online workshop later in 2025.

The children and domestic abuse day training course has been aligned with the guidance, toolkit and most up to date practice. Through the process of leading the development of the toolkit, Verity Meeson, technical lead for domestic abuse, has been able to uplift content across training courses. The toolkit has been made more practice focussed now that foundational knowledge is covered within the e-learning package available which has an improved take up rate.

JTAI Self-assessment audit: As well as completion of the practice guidance and toolkit the group have been focusing on results from a JTAI Domestic Abuse themed self-assessment audit based on questions within the national JTAI audit.

The audit identified areas to be strengthened and existing good practice. It was presented to the PSCP Board in December 2024. In March 2025, the DA and children's group translated the areas to be strengthened into action points and within meetings are actively monitoring progress as well as discussing, problem solving and collaborating on the 54 system wide action points.

Some of the identified areas for improvement are complex issues, requiring resource, capacity or culture change in order to be achieved. The DA and Children's subgroup have shown tenacity and creativity in tackling these 'difficult issues'. For example, one of the identified issues is lack of temporary accommodation places for domestic abuse survivors. Creating new housing is beyond the scope of the subgroup, but to mitigate this issue, PCC Housing have commissioned floating support to families living in temporary accommodation affected by domestic abuse. Training courses developed will upskill delegates on post separation abuse risk and options for supporting people to remain safe in their own homes, including working with perpetrators to hold them to account. DASV partnership work is also ongoing in respect of implementation of the whole housing approach. This work with providers seeks to increase safe accommodation bed spaces. Longer term housing work to increase housing stock in the city is also ongoing.

The impact of this work will be improvements across our services that will benefit children and young people affected by domestic abuse, aligned to the gaps in our existing response that we've identified.

Training: The VAWG team with their knowledge of Domestic Homicide Reviews both within Plymouth, but more broadly across Devon and Cornwall and their experience of developing the practice guidance and electronic toolkit can bring this knowledge into the development and refresh of training courses for the city. This ensures practitioners are accessing training that reflects the real learning emerging from case reviews.

The impact of this work is a more confident and competent workforce, who are able to integrate learning into practice and who are aware of the specific issues for Plymouth families.

Plymouth's first free, city-wide workforce development programme is now up and running. This includes the following training courses:

Level 1:

- e-learning VAWG DASV – developed by the VAWG Team
- VAWG Bystander training and community of practice
- Coordinated Community Response (CCR) workshops – led by the VAWG Team

Level 2:

- Coercive Control Homicide and Suicide Timeline
- Risk Assessment and Safety Planning – co-delivered between VAWG Team and PDAS
- Engaging with people causing harm
- DA and Children/Safeguarding Training - delivered by the VAWG Team
- Taking an intersectional approach to VAWG/DASV/VAWG Anti-racism champion training

Level 3:

- Adult child to parent abuse
- Non-Fatal Strangulation
- DA and Suicide

The Probation service has a new Accredited Programme; Building Choices works with DA perpetrators to encourage alternative behaviours.

Training Statistics

- As of Dec 2024 203 External people and 123 Internal staff had completed the e-learning package.
- VAWG bystander training has been delivered to (adult course) 20 people and (children) 6 people with an online children's course planned for 2025.
- The DA/safeguarding training was attended by 66 people and an evaluation provided.
- Homicide timeline training e-learning has been completed by 450 Plymouth professionals identified as being priority for accessing this learning. These licenses were funded by OPCC and whilst we reached a cap on numbers for licences, we have been able to commission three homicide timeline webinars being held in autumn 2025 which will significantly increase the numbers accessing this information. This training will equip practitioners to understand risk escalation in domestic abuse and risk mitigation which are crucial for preventing risk to children.

Partners adopt a think family approach, In UHP when working with an adult experiencing domestic abuse, that staff member is trained to think about the children at home, and to safeguard them. In Probation the risk assessment has been amended to think more widely about the risk of DA harm to children

Audit Activity and Learning: The DA and Children's working group have examined the findings from audit learning. These were presented at the meeting in March 2025. The areas of strong practice identified were:

- Early Help from Family Hubs is providing longer term support with a consistent 'open door' approach.

- Safeguarding training in schools has enabled primary schools to be more professionally curious regarding both parents and children's behaviours and conversations, and it is enabling them to be attentive to behaviour changes displayed by children and families.
- Family Support Workers in the Emergency Department are signposting families to community support.
- Children's lived experience is brought into unborn baby panel, safeguarding midwives monthly panel, and MARAC.
- There are more opportunities for males to share concerns and seek support.
- The opportunities to attend domestic abuse recovery programmes has improved.
- Public Health Nursing offer routine enquiries and completion of the DASH assessment as required.
- There are additional Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) across the Partnership.
- CPOMS is being used by many schools to log safeguarding issues. Themed reports can be downloaded, and the transfer of safeguarding files between schools is efficient.
- There is a shared system between Family Hubs (ESTART) that ensures that children's risk information remains available even when families move.
- Family hubs have no time limits with their work with families.

It was identified that we need to strengthen practice in the following areas:

- We need to consistently identify children and families experiencing domestic abuse earlier and increase our direct work with them.
- Police Protection Notices are not being received by Early Years providers and Family Hubs.
- There is some confusion about what support is available for families.
- Housing is no longer consistently part of the team around the family.
- Police officers are often not given any historical information when sent to a domestic abuse incident.
- Children Service do not always inform referring agencies of referral and assessment outcomes.
- We need to consider the impact of a parent's lived experience on their capacity to parent children.

- Some families do not have the opportunity of specific recovery programmes because of where they live.

The next steps that were all confirmed to be underway were:

- Children service to consider parents lived experience in assessments and share referral and assessment outcomes with partner agencies.
- Early years and Family Hubs to receive domestic abuse Public Protection Notices so they can provide support to children and families.
- Housing teams to be re-engaged with the team around the family to support domestic abuse risks to reduce.
- Domestic abuse guidance and toolkits to be available on the Partnership website for practitioners.
- Police to consider how safeguarding information could be shared with front line officers to make them aware of previous history before arriving at a job.
- Family hubs to develop a framework that enables recovery programmes to be available across the city and not dependant on a family's post code.
- A review of the training that police, fire and ambulance services receive regarding domestic abuse and children to ensure that it is robust.
- Police to develop their recording of a child's lived experience within Public Protection Notices.
- Increase the availability of information about domestic abuse services via the Partnership website.

Making a Difference

Children's Services have stated writing reports direct to children has supported us to see their world through their eyes and this has caused greater empathy and an increased desire to effect change for children.

Children's Disability Team's use of creative communication has enabled us to capture children's wishes and feelings, so their plans are more child led.

An increased recognition of children's risks has enabled the right support to be put in place sooner.

As found in the audit activity, Family Hubs are providing a consistent “open door” approach providing longer term support through various programmes including the freedom programme, Monkey Bob – Do you feel what I feel, DART – Domestic Abuse Recovery Together, RTK – Recovery Toolkit for Young People and Barnardos Domestic Abuse pathway. Case studies from family hubs show us how partnership working enables a better service and support to families experiencing Domestic Abuse (see Appendices B, C and D)

DA Practice Week: The PSCP held a Multi-Agency Practice week on the theme of Domestic Abuse in November 2024 where various partners delivered informative webinars for anyone to attend, further information and feedback received can be found on the PSCP website here- <https://plymouthscb.co.uk/domestic-abuse-practice-week-november-2024/>

Making a Difference

Family Hubs Programme feedback

- ‘I left my ex so my whole life has changed for the better’
- ‘It’s given my confidence and power in myself. It helped me to respond less to abusive behaviours and see the bigger picture and lessen the impact of my ex’s behaviours on my mental health’
- ‘it has helped me see abuse from other people in my life’
- ‘my whole life has changed for the better’
- ‘I’m glad I chose to do this course, it opened my eyes’
- ‘Excellent programme, can’t praise it enough. Makes the behaviours and tactics very clear which means I can use my voice and instincts much more. Thank you’
- Parents are more confident in parenting
- Parents are more confident in understanding their children’s behaviour and the trauma they have experienced due to the domestic abuse
- Young people feel more confident
- Young people report a better relationship with their mum
- Young people have a better understanding of a healthy relationship
- Young people have better attendance at school

Partnership Progress throughout this last year:

Children in a domestic abuse incident who sadly are injured have a Child Protection medical examination on the same day. UHP will see them in CP safeguarding clinic in hours, or on the Children's Assessment out of hours by a Consultant Paediatrician.

In the Education S175/157 audit 98% of settings reported that they access and respond to Operation Encompass information daily as it comes in. However only 84% of settings felt that the information received was sufficient for them to follow up with a pupil successfully. DSL's have found sending PPN's and Operation Encompass via email creates a chance for them to be lost and stated a phone call and discussion would be of more benefit.

A healthy relationships alliance has been developed. This alliance focuses on the implementation and embedding of a healthy relationships approach across local schools.

From Q1 (2024/25) up to the end of Q4 (2024/25) the Livewell Health Team: MASH have received and inputted Police incident reports (PPN's) for **11904** children compared with **10366** the previous year indicating a **12.9% increase** in notifications over the last year.

Multiple partner agencies attend MARAC meetings supporting the identification of Domestic Abuse risk to children.

The main reason that young people access counselling in The Zone is due to domestic Abuse. We see the effect it has on their mental health and day to day functionality and are constantly looking for additional services to signpost them to for additional support.

Making a Difference

Police processes are in place for Officers who attend a domestic incident should submit a PPN for children, even if they are not present at the time of Police attendance. The PPN will be reviewed by the Central Safeguarding Team researchers. They will then send the PPN to the relevant local authority children's services, education and health. MASH staff record this and are co-located with Police; any further information or clarity can therefore be obtained quickly. When the PPN is regarding a child who has a social worker, it is forwarded to them directly. If the child is not open to children's services, the PPN will be reviewed by MASH social care and a contact record created.

Police also use Op Encompass to alert a school that a child has been exposed to domestic abuse.

These multiple layers of review by Police, social services, health and education intends to ensure that the multi-agency support can be given to the child to meet their needs and make a difference to their lived experience.

Impact

Police Niche template records and Children's Social Care score card and data currently does not specifically reflect the category of domestic abuse.

Information from police data does show the numbers of PPNs sent by police to CYPS that have a domestic abuse risk. With these processes police are confident that they recognise and deal with domestic abuse well but obtaining the data is a challenge.

Examples would be a strategy meeting held 22/04/25, this was honour based abuse and domestic abuse, two children involved as victims and with an outcome of S47 joint visit with police and social worker. This contact and strategy meeting was generated by a Police PPN.

Another strategy meeting on 22/04/25, domestic abuse was the reason for the meeting, two children and an outcome of S47 joint visit with police and social worker.

Domestic abuse is a common theme. Some of the initial reasons for the contact may be another type of harm but when the whole lived experience of the children is understood with the wealth

Find out more:

Our Domestic Abuse and Children, Practice Guidance and Toolkit can be found on our website:
<https://plymouthscb.co.uk/domestic-abuse-and-children/>

OUR PRIORITIES - CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Following the launch of the Strategy Practice Guidance and toolkit at the Partnership Conference in the summer of 2024, the task and finish group focusing on Child Sexual Abuse has now become an established working group for Child Sexual Abuse within the PSCP and Community Safety Partnership focusing on early intervention, prevention, managing harmful sexual behaviour, training and learning.

The focus for 2024-2025 has been:

- Embedding the signs and indicators tool across the safeguarding system utilising a task & finish group to maintain focus.
- Creating a train the trainer Level 3 CSA training input and subsequent partnership training
- Membership of the group
- Audit Activity and Learning

Embedding the signs and indicators tool: developed by the centre for expertise in CSA, has been delayed and this has slowed the improvements that we hoped to see through 24/25. However, since January 2025 there has been a renewed focus.

Training: working in partnership the PSCP, NSPCC and the Social Work Academy have increased trainer capacity and the local child sexual abuse training now covers the following areas:

- Child sexual abuse prevention workshop
- Introduction to harmful sexual behaviour
- Level 3 Child Sexual Abuse knowledge and response

The offer on training is always evolving with new half and whole day training being developed this year.

In addition to this a number of partner webinars and sessions have been delivered on a range of topics to support knowledge on child sexual abuse.

Together for Childhood has also been able to facilitate the Centre of Expertise on child sexual abuse working in the partnership to support the ambition to embed the routine use of the Signs and indicators of child sexual abuse.

The train the trainer CSA level 3 training has enabled the Children's services Advanced Practitioner's (AP's) to deliver this to the partnership which has had a twofold impact:

1. We can now offer monthly training when previously it was 3 times per year
2. This has kick started the APs to becoming champions of CSA in their teams which will assist to embed the signs and indicators tool within children's services.

Better informed partnership practitioners will be able to identify signs of abuse at an earlier stage to intervene and prevent harm.

Training has been rolled out to social work staff in November 2024, December 2024 and April 2025 to raise awareness and use of the signs and indicators tool and to assist social workers to improve their confidence and skill in assessing perpetrators and non-abusing adults.

11% of schools reported in the s175/157 audit that they had a gap in training around child-on-child abuse and harmful sexual behaviour however 100% of schools confirmed that all staff had received training in the identification of child sexual abuse and how to respond to concerns of a child being a victim of or at risk of sexual abuse.

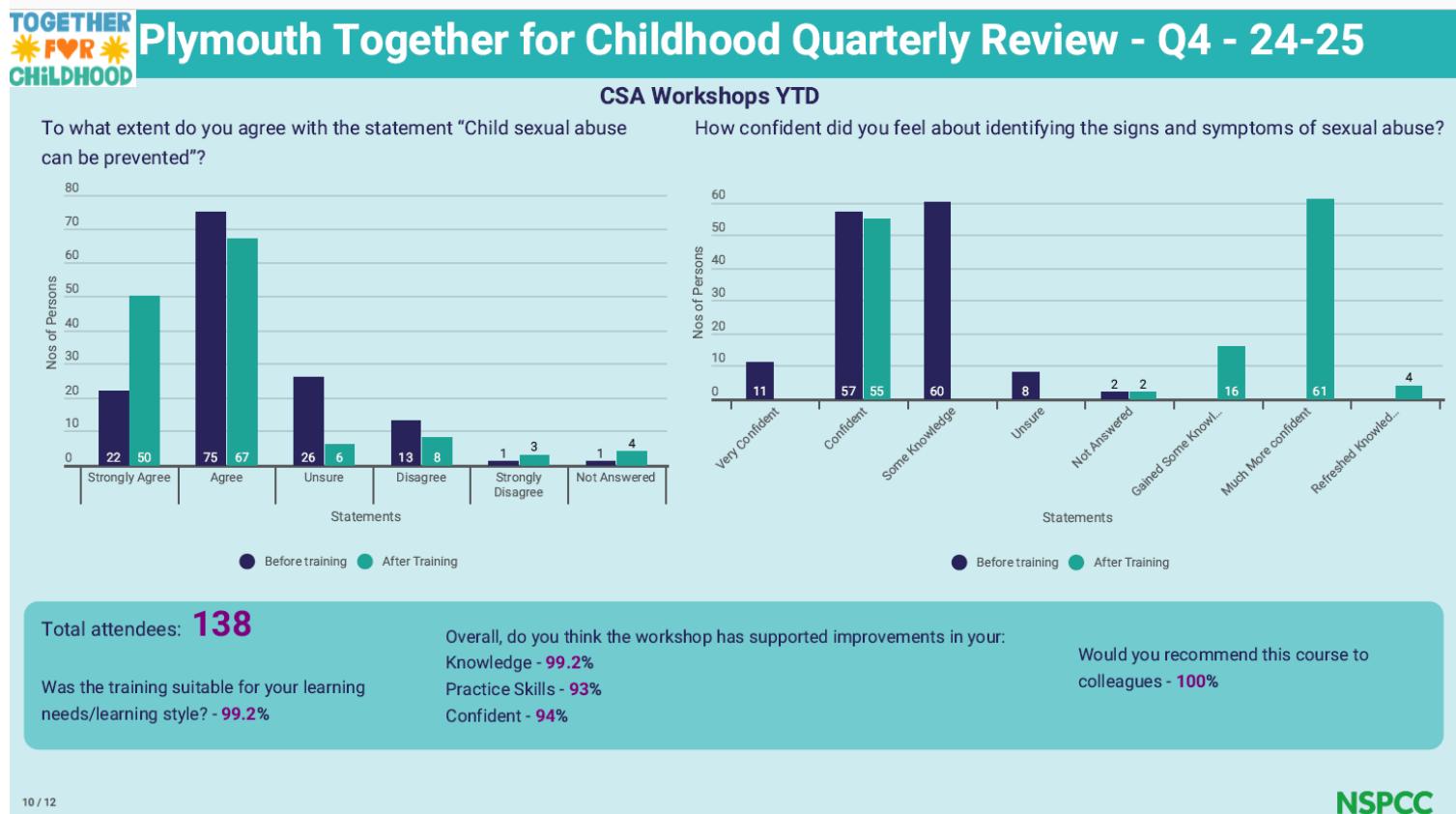
More professionals are feeling confident to identify child sexual abuse and see behaviours that may be children telling us they are at risk rather than relying on verbal disclosures.

Making a Difference

Schools have seen a shift in response from professionals to more open curiosity about what may be happening for a child based on signs and indicators rather than relying on disclosures.

NSPCC has welcomed the opportunity to further contribute to the partnership training and workforce development offer this year in relation to child sexual abuse. Each year we are able to deliver more awareness raising on the issue and stop the silence that surrounds child sexual abuse we work together on prevention.

During the past year Together for Childhood have delivered the child sexual abuse workshop to over 250 professionals, below is a snapshot of Q4 feedback on the session in relation to knowledge gained.



Building Choices is the probation service's new accredited programmes working with perpetrators of child sexual abuse.

The Zone receive a large number of disclosures around sexual assaults and child sexual abuse. They make the young person aware of procedure and reporting and ensure to support them through the disclosure, or by offering counselling sessions and any support sessions they may require.

Making a Difference

NSPCC – Together for Childhood (TfC) - Guiding CSA Partnership working

In Plymouth we are incredibly privileged to have the NSPCC Together For Childhood team as a partner, keeping us focused on the prevention of child sexual abuse, working closely with The Partnership and the Community.



EMPOWER – first developed as a partnership in 2018 between NSPCC and Barnardo's. This innovative young people led initiative supported young people to develop their own student led quality assurance framework for improving sex and relationships education way ahead of the current focus on the issue in schools. We are pleased to say that in 2024 this initiative developed in Plymouth by young people will be incorporated into the national NSPCC Talk Relationships programme and will eventually reach hundreds of schools and thousands of pupils across the country, placing young people's views and influence at the centre of school's approach to RSE!

Early June we had a great time at Brook Green Learning Academy who have embraced EMPOWER, showing the group all of the previous Young Voices Campaigns that had been created. The group loved looking at these and getting inspiration for starting their own Young Voices Campaign in school. The whole school approach project in Brook Green Centre for Learning concluded with the production of a campaign film which is being shown in school and to parents and carers, giving their voice to what they think is needed to promote healthy relationships. We have loved being back in Brook Green Centre for Learning to work on their Young Voices campaign! There were some really interesting discussions about the key messages they want to include and we can't wait to see how the campaign develops and influences practice.

Schools tell us that Several schools participated in the EMPOWER pilot as part of Talk Relationships project run by NSPCC to support secondary school teachers to confidently deliver sex and relationships education.

City College – Young people lead delivery of CSA Prevention workshop

This year we responded to research recommendations but more importantly young people directly when we were asked to work in partnership with pupils from City College. This has been an incredible development involving training and supporting young people 16+ to deliver a version of the Together for Childhood preventing sexual abuse workshop. Initial feedback has been very positive and we will be fully evaluating the approach for efficacy before looking at extending the approach for other post 16 education settings.

Healthy Body Behaviours: The Plymouth team along with key partners in Family Hubs and Early Years launched the new resource after months of collaborative development. The ambition of this project is part of a wider approach to normalise and create the conditions for families to discuss and understand healthy sexual development in their child from birth, creating healthy relationships whilst also helping parents be alert to signs and indicators that a child may need support.

Throughout September and October 2024 TfC Plymouth promoted healthy body behaviours as part of their work to keep children safe. The promotion included a workforce webinar, leaflet and social media messages.

Building Blocks:

- **Consistency**
- **Confidence**
- **Curiosity**
- **Name body parts**
- **Encourage safe touch**
- **Promote online safety**

Our aim was to use the 6 key building blocks to support early conversations that become part of everyday family talk. This work is with other professionals to increase their knowledge and confidence to have conversations with parents and represents a collaborative approach in the partnership.

Breaking the taboo on child sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse prevention starts in the Community and this year Ernesettle achieved another milestone with the installation of 4 prominent signs in the community. The signs project is part of a wider campaign funded as part of the national lottery community potential programme (which ended in 2024). The signs are up to show everyone that there is a place to go and someone to talk to, ensuring child sexual abuse doesn't hide in silence. Since the signs were installed by Plymouth City Council the team have had feedback from survivors thanking TfC for its role in breaking the silence. A call to the base from a member of public commented: As an adult survivor of child sexual abuse, he said it was "so powerful" to see the signs and how he feels it will spark conversations about child sexual abuse.

He shared how seeing the signs made it feel like the community has his back, and helped him feel acknowledged, recognised and like he belongs. He also commented on how well placed the signs were, as these are significant places to him in relation to his abuse. He has taken our signs to be a sign to him to keep pushing and have his voice heard.

As part of the work, 3 videos have been produced and a safeguarding first aid session developed to help community volunteers be clear about their roles and responsibilities in helping to prevent child sexual abuse.

Early intervention in the community

Healthy Relationships badges awarded to children from the Squirrels group (31st Plymouth Ernesettle Scouts). The children (age 4-6) earn their TfC Healthy Relationship Badges by showing how they would be kind to others, the superpower of friendship and they even took "homework" back to their parents/carers so they could be involved too. All parents came to the badge presentation evening and joined in one of the activities the children had done as part of earning their badges. The scout District Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner along with leaders from other sections of the scouting movement attended as did our Service manager, Oliver Mackie. Each child received a Build-a-Bear alongside their badges and the parents took some PANTS resources to support them to talk to their children.



Stop it now

**LUCY
FAITHFULL
FOUNDATION**

Stop It Now Plymouth

Safer Plymouth funded a paid for marketing campaign promoting the anonymous Stop It Now helpline and website. The 2024/25 campaign in Plymouth gained 1.5 million impressions, with people in Plymouth clicking the link to get support from the anonymous Stop It Now helpline and self-help modules 10,576 times.

In addition, workforce development sessions were hosted by Together for Childhood and this facilitated national experts sharing their knowledge on subjects such as women as offenders and supporting a trauma informed workforce.

NSPCC Together for Childhood has contributed to the collective knowledge on what works to prevent abuse by delivering numerous learning events, facilitating agency audits and importantly publishing evidence on what works on NSPCC Learning. It is now incumbent on the partnership to embed this learning into the local system.

Key publications this past year include:



Learning and celebration event: In February 2025 we delivered a learning event to over 60 professionals.

Following the event, Professor Kieran McCartan and Shelley Shaw had a blog published on the Association for the Treatment and Prevention of Sexual Abuse website <https://blog.atsa.com/2025/02/were-in-this-together-now-how-together.html?m=1> which showcases the innovative work of Together for Childhood Plymouth

TOGETHER FOR CHILDHOOD Plymouth Together for Childhood Quarterly Review - Q4 - 24-25



You are warmly invited to the Together for Childhood Learning and Celebration Event

Save the Date - Thursday 20th February 2025 12-4pm
At The Parkway Sports Club, Ernesettle Lane, PL5 2EV

TOGETHER FOR CHILDHOOD

8 / 12

NSPCC

Audit Activity and Learning: Partnership QA activity has evidenced the following:

Strengths identified:

- Good use of the MASH Consultation line.
- Evidence that in-person meetings are leading to better outcomes for children because practitioner information sharing is better.
- where there is a consistent lead professional for the child their outcomes are more positive

Practice identified that needs to be strengthened:

- There remains an over reliance on verbal disclosure of CSA.
- Lack of consistency with regards to information sharing which leads to a lack of understanding of the child's lived experience.
- Children lose trust in professionals due to multiple changes and this impacts on a relational approach being offered.
- CYPFS not making full use of a child's full history to inform decision making.
- Not enough curiosity of the child with the sexually harmful behaviour to understand the reasons for it.
- The long length of police investigations is impacting on permanency planning for children
- A lack of robust support for practitioners who are dealing with CSA/HSB

QA activity within Children's Services has evidenced that when CSA evidence is clear, they respond quickly and confidently to reduce risks for children and that practice enables these low risks to be sustained.

More triangulation and conversations with partner agencies would support MASH with making decisions collaboratively, and we need to make better use of children's and parent's histories to inform analysis and decision making across the Initial Response and Children's Social Work teams.

The tools on the website have been welcomed.

Children's services has also improved working together with the

Partnership, the Partnership team and learning academy to roll out the CSA training.

The Probation service regularly make disclosures to partner agencies about those they are working with to protect the public and refer into children's services if they feel a child may be at

Impact

Children with child protection plans are experiencing good levels of protection and plans are keeping risks low for them; when plans end the successful planning continues for the child.

Having a consistent lead practitioner prevents children and families from having to repeat their stories and the relationship that can develop facilitates disclosures are enables the familiar practitioner to quickly observe increased risks if this prevails.

22 children have child protection plans in Children's Services because of CSA. This is 6% of the total group subject to CP plans.

In November 2024, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published the National review into child sexual abuse within the family environment – “I wanted them all to notice.” One of the main findings from the report was that there is often a silence around child sexual abuse and recommended all areas ensure they provide a comprehensive and effective training offer. This has been a priority for Plymouth and will continue to develop in 2025-26.

Making a Difference

Police Public Protection investigations are often lengthy and take some time for a court disposal. As such, providing specific detail for the last year could potentially frustrate a trial.

All officers have now completed extended specialist training around rape, sexual offences and child protection and are accredited through national Police learning programmes. This provides officers with sound knowledge to respond to child sexual abuse and support the children and families in an empathetic manner, whilst also considering the wider safeguarding implications. We now investigate sexual offences in line with the Soteria National Operating Model which provides children and families with a consistent police response.

The signs and indicators of child sexual abuse are widely known within the crime and vulnerability commands of policing, and we continue to share learning with our front-line response colleagues and call handling/dispatch teams to highlight the importance of recognising these.

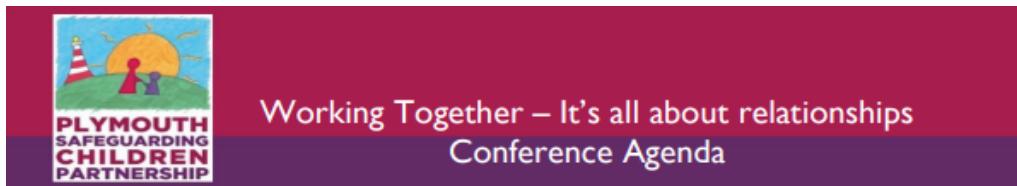
The PPU also works collaboratively with Children's Social Care to highlight issues and discuss complex cases.

Find out more:

Our Child Sexual Abuse, Practice Guidance and Toolkit can be found on our website:
<https://plymouthscb.co.uk/child-sexual-abuse/>

CONFERENCE

In June 2024 we hosted our Partnership Annual Conference, this time with a focus on Working Together. The Conference was open and closed with a video by our Young Safeguarders and featured an opportunity to attend workshops in our priority areas, launching the practice guidance and toolkits. The Conference was a fantastic opportunity for people from all areas of the safeguarding system in Plymouth to come together and was attended by over 140 practitioners.



0845 Arrival and Networking

0915 Welcome

Karen Mitchell – Named Nurse for Child Protection, Livewell Southwest

0920 Young Safeguarders Introduction

0930 Partnership Working in Practice

David Haley – Director of Childrens Services, Plymouth City Council; Scott Bradley – Plymouth BCU Commander, Devon and Cornwall Police; Michele Thornberry – Head of Safeguarding, NHS Devon ICB; Rob Diment – Director of Education, The Ted Wragg Trust

1030 Plymouth Early Help "Supporting Families Early" Strategy

Sally Kendrick – Programme Manager, Family Hubs Plymouth City Council

1100 Break

1120 Workshop Session 1

Child Sexual Abuse – Oliver Mackie – Strategic Service Manager, Together for Childhood, NSPCC; Claire White – Senior research and evaluation officer, NSPCC; Louise Fathers – Team Manager, NSPCC; Ana Broad – Social Worker, NSPCC; Lyndsay Howell – SARC General Manager, Royal Devon University Healthcare

Domestic Abuse and Children – Meghan Field – VAWG strategic lead, Plymouth City Council; Karlina Hall – Senior Commissioning Officer, Plymouth City Council

Neglect – Claire Wasey – Locality Service Manager, Action for Children; Kirsty Thistlethwaite – Emerging Family Hub Lead, Sarah Parsons – Early Years Lead

Safeguarding Adolescents – Naomi Sutton – Practice Manager, Youth Offending Team, Plymouth City Council; Ian Taylor – Service Manager, Youth Offending Team, Plymouth City Council

1215 Workshop Session 2

1305 Lunch

1405 Narrative Alchemy – Invictus Play and Debrief

Sean McGrath FRSA, WGGB – Co-artistic director, Narrative Alchemy

1505 Break

1520 Workshop Session 3

1610 Closing Speeches

Phil Williams – Superintendent for Local Policing and Partnerships, Devon and Cornwall Police; Tracy Clasby – Assistant Director and Strategic Lead, Children Young People and Family's Services, Livewell Southwest; Fran Giblin – Head of Service for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding, Plymouth City Council; Rob Diment – Director of Education, The Ted Wragg Trust

1625 Young Safeguarders Close

NATIONAL LEARNING

National Panel Report – December 2024

The national panel published their annual report detailing themes from Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) alongside Rapid Review examples, which were shared with the CSPR Subgroup and the full Partnership. The themes outlined in the report were considered by all to ensure the partnership is focusing appropriately on nationally important themes alongside local priorities.

“I wanted them all to notice” Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment – November 2024

The Child Sexual Abuse working group has been considering the findings within this national review and how this can be implemented in their work and the work of the partnership.

What professionals know, think, and do to prevent child abuse – and how we can support them A report from Together for Childhood – December 2024

Published by the NSPCC Together for Childhood programme, these research findings about the Together for Childhood programme and how it has impacted in Glasgow, Grimsby, Stoke On Trent and Plymouth explain how this work has been so paramount to Plymouth and in shaping the work of all members of the Partnership in relation to Child Sexual Abuse.

Families First Partnership Programme – March 2025

Plymouth immediately started to work together as a partnership to identify how they will implement national reforms, this will be ongoing into 2025-2026

LOCAL LEARNING

A learning culture is paramount to enable a constant cycle of positive change for safeguarding children, young people and families in Plymouth, and it is our responsibility as a Partnership to examine safeguarding practices across our partner agencies so that we can develop and continuously improve to provide the best outcomes for all.

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

We have a multi-agency Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) group in Plymouth who decide the process for a Rapid Review or full CSPR and ensure internal guidance is created for us to implement learning quickly after a child has suffered significant harm. When a referral for a Rapid Review is received, the Partnership Manager arranges a meeting with the three statutory partners so this discussion can take place.

When we complete a full CSPR the learning from this is published on our PSCP website.

Learning from Experience Reviews

We have decided as a Partnership that if the criteria is not met for a CSPR, but there is still learning to be gained to enable system change and better outcomes for children in the future, a Partnership Learning from Experience review will be convened. This enables all organisations involved in a child's life to come together to discuss their agency and joint agency involvement so that practice areas that need to be strengthened are identified and a practice improvement plan is agreed which are overseen by the CSPR group. This provides a robust level of scrutiny to enable better learning.

Quality Assurance Audits

Four to six times a year our Multi Agency Performance and Quality Assurance Group (MAPQA) arranges multi-agency audits of our practice with children based on topics agreed within the yearly workplan which are identified using referral data, emerging themes and national learning. The PSCP audit tool is used to capture the child's experiences with each service and how the agencies are working in partnership, the audits are a helping tool to support the identification of what is working well and what practice needs to be strengthened. A Practice Learning Review meeting is then arranged so that the practice patterns and themes identified

within the audits can be discussed and actions can be identified for practice improvements. All agencies are involved in leading the Practice Learning Reviews; and a one-page learning briefing is produced which is circulated across the Partnership with the action plan. The relevant Partnership Working group takes responsibility for progressing the actions. This quality assurance arrangement provides a reliable evidence base to enable actions to be identified for practice improvements to be achieved. To close the loop and evidence difference made, the MAPQA work plan sets out a repeat of the same quality assurance activity so that progress with practice improvement actions can be evidenced.

S.175/157 Schools Safeguarding Audits

Education providers are required to ensure their safeguarding policies and procedures are up to date and in line with legal requirements. The S.175/157 audit process uses questions to education providers to identify gaps in their safeguarding and can also highlight safeguarding emerging themes. The audit questions are created in conjunction with the education participation and skills team in Children's Services and the Quality Assurance Delivery Group. A sample of the last audit can be seen in the education section of this report.

S.11 Audits

The PSCP undertakes Section 11 audits, in line with The Children Act (2004) to ensure the PSCP partners are fulfilling their responsibilities to safeguard children and promote their welfare. These are carried out individually with each agency as a reflective audit process.

Domestic Homicide Reviews

The PSCP has close links with the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) in Plymouth where Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR's) are completed as multi-agency learning reviews following the murder or suicide of a victim of domestic abuse. Multiple partners from our safeguarding children system take part in these reviews and any learning is disseminated amongst partners and actions monitored by the DASV board.

Making a difference: Learning from Rapid Reviews/LCSPR's 2024/2025

In Plymouth we have had two rapid reviews in 2024/2025 with one being agreed by the national panel to remain at rapid review and one agreed to have a local CSPR jointly with Devon.

Themes from the rapid review:

1. Understanding the historical context
2. High risk moments
3. Working with those that cause harm
4. Professional curiosity & the power of language
5. Information sharing
6. Impact of managers

Full detailed learning from this review can be found on the PSCP website here:

<https://plymouthscb.co.uk/rapid-review-domestic-abuse-learning/>

The joint local CSPR has now been completed and awaits a joint publication decision. There was rich learning for all agencies which can be shared in next year's report following a publication decision.

Making a difference: Learning From Experience Review 2024/2025

In Plymouth we have had one learning from experience review in 2024/2025

Some of the themes from this review and learning implemented:

- A partnership information sharing agreement to be devised and written to remove confusion. Safeguarding to come away from “consent” and lean more toward the public task of keeping children safe.**

Tier 1 information sharing agreement has been implemented in February 2025.

Tier 2 information sharing agreement is in progress.

The Building Support document is in the process of being reviewed and will continue to move away from 'consent' when sharing information for safeguarding purposes.

A conversational model will be implemented in the Integrated Front Door in 2025.

Families First reforms will be monitored by the PSCP Board where assurance will be given that these actions are being addressed.

- Establish a more conducive and productive way of recording reports into the MASH – this would reduce missed opportunities and a way of collaborating professionals concerns.**

The move to an Integrated Front Door model will address this.

EPS colleagues now work within the MASH and this will also be expanded within the Front Door so that Education are better represented in the MASH/Integrated Front Door.

Families First reforms will be monitored by the PSCP Board where assurance will be given that these actions are being addressed.

- A consistent approach from all professionals involved in the initial stages of child protection investigations to work together more efficiently and more effectively.**

Ongoing work towards the use of Multi Agency Child Protection teams following the Families First reforms will address this.

Families First reforms will be monitored by the PSCP Board where assurance will be given that these actions are being addressed.

- **Police to ensure that PPNs and relevant safeguarding referrals are completed for ALL children of the family present during a particular event.**
Updated guidance and policies have been produced and shared nationally. Internal messaging within Police has occurred to share this across the force, including with front line staff.
- **A clear need for mapping and explaining the different agency roles and responsibilities and development of quality standards.**
MAPQA subgroup and Partnership team have created a roles and responsibilities page on the PSCP website. <https://plymouthscb.co.uk/agency-roles-and-responsibilities/>
- **Partnership to utilise the key relationships that a child has, to help engage with specialist services.**
The Families First reforms will support a shift in culture so that the professional with the best relationship with a child or family are the lead practitioner for the family.
Families First reforms will be monitored by the PSCP Board where assurance will be given that these actions are being addressed.
- **If parents decline support or engagement, including children's social care child in need support, have they/ can they be encouraged and sensitively challenged to work with the proposed help?**
The Families First reforms will support a shift in culture so that the professional with the best relationship with a child or family are the lead practitioner for the family.
Families First reforms will be monitored by the PSCP Board where assurance will be given that these actions are being addressed.
- **Use of chronologies to see what information you know; this can help identify patterns of behaviours.**
Further training is being rolled out for staff working in the Integrated front door and Targeted Help teams within CYPFS.
Chronology tool templates and guidance on their use can be found on the Neglect Practitioner's Toolkit here: <https://plymouthscb.co.uk/chronologies/>
Partnership team to share communications about chronology tool

Making a difference: Learning From Quality Assurance Audits

2024/2025

In 2023/24 the Multi-Agency Performance and Quality Assurance Group led on the following multi-agency audits:

Child Sexual Abuse and Harmful Sexual Behaviour, Neglect, Substance Misuse and Domestic Abuse

Some of the themes from these audits and learning implemented:

- Police to consider how safeguarding information could be shared with front line officers to make them aware of previous history before arriving at a job**

Communications being shared within Devon & Cornwall Police that it is vital that more information is being shared with crews before they attend an incident

- Police to develop their recording of a child's lived experience within Public Protection Notices.**

New MNEMONIC on pronto system where information is recorded, called RESPOND is being used which has built in sections for the child's voice to be recorded, RESPOND is a prompt for the officers in attendance at incidents to remember to see a child and attend to them in detail at an incident as well.

- Over last 6 months, ICPC attendance has been monitored and is being promoted where possible through the PSCP Board. In- person meetings are often promoted through PSCP and subgroups**

This is being monitored through PSCP Board in relation to ICPC.

PSCP will also promote in-person attendance at meetings, and the Board will always monitor this and hold agencies to account.

- Change in language around "Voice of the Child" (Child's overall presentation) because we need to move away from the dependency on verbal report. 'Voice of the Child' podcast addition this is where the Signs and Indicators template developed by the CSA Centre could support practice.**

NSPCC Communicating with children document to be shared with professionals. Better promotion of the CSA toolkit which holds the resources and guidance. Caseloads for professionals to be reduced. CSA champions to help to embed into practice. PSCP Business Unit to promote the CSA Practice Guidance and Toolkit with managers

- The Graded Care profile tool training to provide examples of how the tool can be used in a multi-agency way and prioritise the importance of relationship building with children, unannounced visits and observations of children's play and family interactions to understand their lived experience and the underlying issues that are causing the neglect.

Family Hubs and the Academy supported with on how the GCP2 tool can be used with a family and their experiences. This went to the licensed practitioners. This is also available to view on the licensed practitioners SharePoint page to view in their own time. In the training itself examples are shared how the tool is used with families.

PARTNERSHIP DATA

The Partnership data scorecard is scrutinised through the Multi-Agency Performance and Quality Assurance Group, the Safeguarding Children Partnership Board and by the Young Safeguarders.

The data is resourced multi-agency and during 2024-2025 we have now secured data from Police, Health and Education partners as well as Children's Services, this allows us to gain a more comprehensive picture of safeguarding in the city.

There has been the gap in the partnership of someone to analyse the data, however a recruitment process has been run in early 2025 with a new analyst due to commence working with the partnership in September 2025 to help create better reporting on data and provide full data dashboards.

FUNDING THE PARTNERSHIP

The income for 2024/25 was:

Agency	Contribution
Plymouth City Council	£115,500
Devon and Cornwall Police	£26,583
NHS Devon Integrated Care Board	£19,614
Livewell South West	£19,614
University Hospitals NHS Trust	£7,909
City College Plymouth	£4,059
Total	£193,279

The expenditure for 2024/25 was:

Item	Cost
Business Unit Staffing	£175,824
Independent Scrutiny	£12,479
Training budget	£12,000
Conference and supplies	£8748
Subscriptions	£2,939
Young Safeguarders	£1,500
Total	£213,490

At the end of 2024/2025 the partnership had reserves of **£190,000** Reserves are needed to cover unforeseen expenditure such as learning reviews as well as being able to fulfil any legal requirements in the event of staff redundancies. The reserves will also be used in 2025/2026 to balance the partnership budget.

OUR PRIORITIES GOING FORWARD INTO 2025/2026

As a partnership we made the decision to keep the same priorities areas for 2025/2026, however we have added two new priorities of Online Safety to be examined through each priority area and visibility of the partnership to ensure practitioners are aware of the partnership and the help it can provide to all in a multi-agency space.

2025-2026 Will be an exciting year in the Partnership space as Partners will work together to bring about the changes of National Reforms for children through the Families First Partnership Programme.

Going into the year ahead, the Young Safeguarders are embarking on the role of Young Scrutineers; providing independent scrutiny looking at how the voice of children, young people and families is captured throughout the partnership groups and organisations and examining how their voice influences and informs Practice, Policies and Procedures within the partnership.



Auditing, data and reviews have shown us that we still have more work to do in our priority areas therefore, we will be working on these throughout 2025/2026.

In 2025/2026 we will be improving our data dashboard to provide better analysis and performance monitoring as a partnership.

Cutting across all the priorities is a focus on organisational culture and professional support. We know that training, workshops, briefings and similar activities are helpful but fundamentally; good practice can only thrive where we have a culture of learning, respectful challenge and a partnership workforce that feels supported and valued.

INDEPENDENT SCRUTINY

Independent Scrutineer – Deborah McMillan

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 states multi agency safeguarding arrangements must include scrutiny by an independent person of the effectiveness of those arrangements. Following engagement sessions with the Delegated Safeguarding Partners and relevant agencies, I reported on the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. This is a summary of that report and a reflection on this yearly report.

The achievements and evidence of impact in this yearly report are a testament to the commitment and quality of partnership working across Plymouth – the foundation of effective arrangements. Children are protected by partnership arrangements that have strengthened since the last health check. The safeguarding partnership arrangements, forward plan, and the proposed scrutiny plan will continue to provide assurance with an ambitious, child centred approach to improving practice for children.

Stability in leadership has fostered trust and collaboration across the partnership. Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) are meeting on a Pan Devon footprint, chaired by the Chief Constable. Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs) demonstrate ownership, respect, and commitment. Senior leaders are visible, ambitious, and child-focused, driving service innovation and strengthening multi-agency collaboration, including with education colleagues. The Director of Children's Services (DCS) leads by example, promoting excellence. The partnership now has a clearer understanding of service strengths and areas for improvement—and is actively addressing them.

The multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are providing assurance and the partnership has moved from being activity-focused to become more outcome-focused, with a strong emphasis on evidence and research. Further emphasis on the impact of the partnership in terms of outcomes for children, outcomes for professional practice, and outcomes for effective partnership working will provide assurance to the strategic partners. LSP and DSP meetings ensure engagement at all levels, with regional and local collaboration. The DSP group exemplifies a cultural shift towards open and constructive challenge.

Multi-agency safeguarding work is progressing well, although there is recognition that more needs to be done to reduce single-agency decision making. Information sharing remains an

ongoing challenge, with efforts underway to improve data-sharing agreements and analytical support. Strong partnership engagement, together with easily accessible family help hubs, is enabling families to access timely, well-targeted help when their needs are first identified. Education is now formally recognised as the fourth strategic partner. Engagement has improved, with broader representation including independent schools. However, early years settings remain underrepresented. Two-way communication between education and safeguarding partners has strengthened, though further work is needed to ensure full sector inclusion.

Political support is robust, with active involvement from the children's portfolio holder and regular performance updates to council leaders. The Police and Crime Commissioner maintains strong ties with LSPs, and the MP engagement with the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub reflects growing political interest. This support empowers senior leaders to champion children and families effectively.

The impact of the arrangements, and an understanding of effectiveness and value for money, is developing supported by improved quality assurance, multi-agency audits, and shared learning initiatives such as lunch and learn sessions. Independent scrutiny must continue to drive improvement, with clearer evidence of impact and learning from reviews.

The partnership is increasingly evidence-driven, though more time is needed for reflection and research. Learning from serious incidents is evident but reporting consistency and depth require improvement.

Children's voices are central, with leaders actively listening through audits, participation groups, and parent forums. LiveWell's participation officer and the Young Safeguarders group have influenced practice. While SEND engagement is strong, broader family representation needs strengthening.

The multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in Plymouth demonstrate significant progress, underpinned by strong leadership, collaborative culture, and a growing emphasis on evidence-based practice. Political and strategic support remains robust, and the inclusion of education as a formal partner marks a pivotal step forward. While challenges persist the commitment to continuous improvement is evident. With strengthened structures, clearer priorities, and a child-centred ethos, the partnership is well-positioned to deliver impactful safeguarding outcomes and ensure that children's voices remain at the heart of its work.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

There are multiple acronyms used throughout the partnership, below we have given a short explanation for some you may encounter throughout this report.

ASF – Adolescent Safety Framework

CCPT – Child Centred Policing Team

CSA – Child Sexual Abuse

CSPR – Child Safeguarding Practice Review

DASV – Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

DIB – Daily Intelligence Briefing

DSL – Designated Safeguarding Lead

DSP – Delegated Safeguarding Partner under Working Together 2023 Guidance

EPS – Education, Participation and Skills

ICB – Integrated Care Board

LSP – Lead Safeguarding Partner under Working Together 2023 Guidance

MASH – Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub

NSPCC – National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

PATH – Plymouth Access to Housing

PSCP – Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership

RR – Rapid Review

UHP – University Hospitals Plymouth

TFC – Together for Childhood

VAWG – Violence Against Women and Girls

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Partnership Health Check 2024

Plymouth Safeguarding Children’s Partnership – Self assessment of the effectiveness of the Multi agency Partnership Arrangements

In January 2023 the Ofsted focused visit report identified weaknesses in partnership working in terms of thresholds, information sharing, early help and accountability. Interim leadership was impacting on the effectiveness of the partnership. In June 2023 the Area SEND inspection of Plymouth Local Area Partnership reported significant concerns with weaknesses in partnership working.

Intervention and key activities

In October 2023 – the new Director of Children’s Services worked closely with senior leaders across policing and the ICB, and together the Safeguarding Children’s Partnership took the decision to engage with the DfE National Safeguarding Partner to facilitate use of the self-assessment health check tool to secure senior partnership engagement in the improvement journey, and to highlight key areas of focus for improvement, and to assess readiness for the publication of new statutory guidance – Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023. The health check took place over the autumn of 2023.

Findings from the 2023 self-assessment health check

Key observations from the workshops included:

- Leadership and systemic challenges: *‘There is a culture of challenge but not fully embedded as leadership gap is not settled.’ ‘Stability in leadership is needed in order to deliver.’ ‘LSPs are not currently engaged sufficiently with group. PSCP (DSP level) has a good mix of relevant agencies but do not work routinely with the LSPs.’*
- Data and performance: *This is still a challenge, and departments still aren’t sharing information to support early identification and assessment.’*
- Strategy: *‘The partnership would benefit from a forward plan/communication strategy ... good things happening but not yet co-ordinated nor strategic’*

- Engagement: '*The Independent scrutineer seeks out feedback from parents and carers and children – this is a new priority for the partnership.*'
- Children's voice and participation: '*Voice of children – how can this effectively be captured across the partnership? The voice is being heard but can we demonstrate what difference it has made? Plans for children too often developed for them rather than with them.*'
- Education engagement: '*Strategically education representation needs to be considered.*'

Outcomes and Progress

In February 2024 Ofsted judged Children's services as Requires Improvement. Ofsted noted improvements in the effectiveness of partnership working: '*Since the last inspection in 2018, leaders have strengthened relationships with partner agencies. Most agencies are working more collaboratively and effectively at a strategic level and can challenge each other to ensure that both the local authority and partner agencies are working together and taking shared responsibility for the children of Plymouth.*'

Feedback on the 2023 self-assessment health check process

Delegated safeguarding partners reported that it was the richness and frankness of the facilitated structured conversations that has made a difference, and that the sessions supported the partnership to reflect on itself and determine areas for further improvement.

In February 2024 the Safeguarding Children's Partnership asked the National Safeguarding Partner to return to carry out a review of the arrangements. Three engagement sessions were held with the DSPs and relevant agencies.

Key findings from the 2024 review:

Leadership

- Stability in leadership has strengthened the partnership, fostering trust and collaboration.
- Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) have started to form a strong relationship with the new Chief Constable set to chair the LSP group.

- Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs) work well together, demonstrating ownership, respect, and commitment.
- There is a proactive approach to problem-solving, with a focus on resolving issues collaboratively rather than attributing blame.
- Visibility of leadership has increased, with leaders showing ambition for Plymouth and maintaining a child-focused approach.
- Senior leaders have continued to strengthen, improve and innovate services to benefit children and their families, and they have been influential in bringing partners together, including more recently education colleagues in the education strategic reference group.
- The Director of Children's Services (DCS) leads by example and encourages colleagues to do their best for children.
- The Safeguarding Children's Partnership has a much better understanding of the strengths and quality of the services being provided: they know where improvement is needed, and they are now making it happen.

Brief notes from three engagement sessions - Leadership

Lead safeguarding partners (LSPs) have a good relationship. The Chief Constable position has recently changed however Devon and Cornwall Police have showed continued commitment to the Safeguarding Children's Partnership (SCP) and the new Chief Constable will chair the LSP group. Delegated safeguarding partners (DSPs) are working well together and there is positive feedback. They have built a strong partnership where there is real ownership and respect for each other there is a workshop in March to galvanise relationships. There's been focus on ensuring educational partners are seen and valued as a fourth strategic partner.

The Director of Children's Services is rightly holding people to account and having stability in leadership is a real benefit. He takes time to build and maintain relationships with colleagues and partners, encouraging them to understand the benefits of a collaborative approach to safeguarding children and improving their outcomes. The DCS holds partners accountable, reinforcing stability and effective leadership. Because of this, there is a willingness across partner agencies to deliver the best services and outcomes for children.

DSPs and LSPs are working well together. LSPs meet sufficiently regularly once a year at regional peninsula level and twice a year locally. The LSPs are engaged and have requested data to provide assurance that the arrangements are effective and keeping Plymouth children

safe, and they have been briefed on the latest rapid review. They have met to agree funding for the partnership and have responded to the business case to increase the funding to provide an analyst and project officer post. The LSPs have a much better oversight. The DSPs also attend the LSP meetings, and the Chair is Chief Constable. The LSPs and the DSPs are active in their challenge, and it is healthy challenge. There is evidence of a cultural shift for example the DSP group. There is an open door to the DSPs. Visibility has increased of leaders. They are ambitious for Plymouth and importantly, they are child focused.

Effective Partnership Working

- The multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are starting to provide assurance and a new scrutiny plan provides an ambitious, innovative approach to improving practice for children.
- The partnership has moved from being very activity-based to become more outcome-focused, with a strong emphasis on evidence and research.
- Regular LSP and DSP meetings ensure engagement at all levels, with regional and local collaboration.
- Funding for the partnership has been increased, supporting the addition of an analyst and project officer.
- The DSP group exemplifies a cultural shift towards open and constructive challenge.
- Multi-agency safeguarding work is progressing well, although there is recognition that more needs to be done to reduce single-agency decision making.
- Information sharing remains an ongoing challenge, with efforts underway to improve data-sharing agreements.
- Strong partnership engagement, together with easily accessible family help hubs, is enabling families to access timely, well-targeted help when their needs are first identified.
- Partnership arrangements are stronger. Children are protected by partnership arrangements that have strengthened since the last health check. The safeguarding partnership arrangements, forward plan, and the proposed scrutiny plan will provide assurance with an ambitious, child centred approach to improving practice for children.

What has changed has been a stability and leadership and a strong faith in the leadership and a strong commitment to the partnership. Where we have identified issues, the partnership now has a collaborative approach to resolve them asking how we can work through these issues and providing ideas to move forward rather than attribute blame. An example of this is the work on thresholds not blaming each other about making too many referrals but working together to consider how can we fix this always with a child centred approach.

When issues are raised, and brought to the attention of the partnership, they are addressed. A good example of this is the Police Protection Notices (PPNS) There was an issue identified and through working together partners have resolved the issue. There is now a Tier 1 information sharing agreement developed with support from Somerset, and a Tier 2 agreement with the front door and multi-agency safeguarding hub in progress. However, the partnership acknowledge that information sharing is still an issue as demonstrated in the last rapid review and there is work underway to tackle this.

Education as a fourth strategic partner

- Education is now recognised as the fourth strategic partner, with increased participation and engagement from education partners.
- The Safeguarding Education Reference Group has strengthened representation, including independent schools.
- While large trusts have a strong voice, early years settings are underrepresented.
- Two-way communication between educational partners and the safeguarding partnership is much improved.
- There is still work required to ensure full breadth of education representation across all levels of the partnership.

Brief notes from three engagement sessions - Education as a fourth strategic partner

The breadth of educational representation is growing and there is now a strong safeguarding education reference group and that includes independent schools. This is a military city with around 7000 children young people living within military families and therefore there is more work to do to ensure adequate representation from their schools, and also with faith groups and the grass roots voluntary sector. Education is seen as a full strategic partner and are engaged at the right level. Schools are being heard.

With regard to education as a fourth strategic partner there is still not full breadth of education representation at all levels but much improved participation. There are representatives on each

of the subgroups and educational partners have a stronger voice particularly from the larger trusts. However, there is less of a voice from early years. There is a two-way communication flow to and from the newly formed educational safeguarding reference group.

Political Engagement

- The children's portfolio holder is actively involved in the partnership and sits on the board.
- Quarterly meetings with the council leader and political portfolio holders now include performance updates on the safeguarding children's partnership.
- The DCS is seeking to align the scrutiny agenda with partnership priorities.
- The Police and Crime Commissioner has a strong relationship with the LSPs.
- A Member of Parliament recently visited the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, demonstrating political interest.
- Strong political support ensures that there is an unwavering commitment from across the council to support senior leaders to continually improve.
- Strong political and partnership support has enabled the senior leadership team to be an effective champion for children, young people and their families.

Brief notes from three engagement sessions - Political Engagement

The Children's portfolio holder sits on the board. The Portfolio holder for children is very involved in the partnership and the Member of Parliament recently visited the multi-agency safeguarding hub.

There are quarterly meetings with the leader of the council and the two political portfolio holders, and these meetings have recently been broadened to include performance of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership. The DCS will consider how to ensure that the scrutiny agenda and the forward plan reflect the priorities of the partnership. The Police and Crime Commissioner has a strong relationship, and they are briefed at LSP level.

Performance, Learning and Impact

- Measuring impact is still in early stages, but improvements have been made, including an upgraded website and in meetings, a focus on the difference that learning is making, is supporting colleagues to focus on impact.

- Workforce development groups provide examples of how learning is making a difference.
- The annual report is clear, with a strong commitment from LSPs and a useful plan on a page.
- Quality assurance processes are improving, with multi-agency and single-agency audits identifying outstanding practices and focusing on learning.
- A new scrutiny strategy includes independent scrutineers conducting deep dives into key areas.
- Shared learning is taking place, including joint learning debriefs and "lunch and learn" sessions.
- The safeguarding partnership is increasingly evidence-driven but must ensure time continues to be dedicated to research and reflection.

Brief notes from three engagement sessions - Performance, Learning and Impact

In terms of seeking assurance that the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are effective, partners have focused on learning from recent Rapid Reviews and Local Children's Safeguarding Practice Reviews. These have highlighted the same themes around information sharing. The partnership recognises this and is considering how to embed meaningful change and have recognised that practitioners across the partnership need time for shared learning. A good example of this is from Devon and Cornwall Police where Hydrant have facilitated a joint learning debrief into a seven-year child sexual abuse investigation.

In terms of measuring the impact of the safeguarding children's partnership this is early days. The website has been improved and is already much better. With regards to learning and development, every workforce development group gives examples of the difference that learning is making in their meetings.

The Safeguarding Children's Partnership annual report has been published in line with Working Together 2023, and it is good to see the introduction by the Lead Safeguarding Partners setting the vision, strategic direction and culture. The plan on a page provides clarity over the vision for the partnership. However, there are limitations in the consistency and depth of analysis provided across the report. This lack of detail on issues such as evidence of impact and evaluation of scrutiny raises challenges in comprehensively assessing the partnerships' effectiveness and progress. The National Safeguarding Partner recommends training on evidencing impact.

The partnership is more driven by evidence and research however partners need to make sure that time is continued to be put aside to do that. The partnership has shifted from being very activity based to become more outcome focused. A clear sign of a maturing partnership. The quality assurance delivery group provides learning, and the working groups deliver on that. Each partner agency is at a different stage of their learning journey and in some cases shared learning is problematic for example within wider police engagement. A good example of shared learning is Southwest Ambulance Service where there was shared learning due to a child death overview panel report. Another good example is the shared practice week which is new, and the lunch and learn events, plus observations on practice with a focus on domestic abuse.

The named nurses is focused on learning for example there has been a safeguarding conference. Multi agency practise learning reviews take place and there is a one-page learning report and partners are all leaning into this strongly.

There is a new scrutiny strategy with a group of independent scrutineers being available to conduct deep dives into specific areas as they are experts in their fields. The Young Safeguarders are the voice of young people also provide scrutiny activity. Primary legislation states that an independent person must review the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, and this should be reported on in the annual report. The partnership needs to consider the best way to deliver that so that the LSPs and DSPs are assured that the arrangement are effective and keeping Plymouth children safe.

The voice of families is gathered through audit work and family hubs have new parents groups. Within the SEND area there are strong groups but in other areas there are more to do.

There is a forward plan and this feeds into the Bright Future review and strategy and there is a plan on a page. There is no communication strategy however there are good quality communications, and the group will consider how to pull this together in a strategy.

Single agency audits and multi-agency audits are seeing pockets of outstanding practice particularly in the children's centres, family hubs, and some primary schools. The partners acknowledge that rather than focus on the inadequate audits, the focus should be on sharing good practice, and the need to share that and continue to be strengths based focusing on good audits and connecting practitioners with those that are identified as inadequate.

Thresholds and MASH

- Thresholds for support at an early help level are better understood and owned by the multi-agency partnership.

- There is stronger and more robust partnership working in the front door. The family hubs provide an early help service that is starting to make a difference for children and families who need support.

Brief notes from three engagement sessions – Thresholds and MASH

One issue that has been identified is that in some areas there is still confusion over thresholds, and this has come up in a recent rapid review. This could be down to turnover of staffing however this issue has been identified as a key action following the rapid review however it is a proverbial problem. The consent to share information continues to be an issue.

The MASH is improving - there is a strong commitment, and work is in progress however there are still too many single agency decisions. Training has supported partner agencies to better understand thresholds, which is starting to have the effect that referrals to the MASH are more appropriate. There is better shared understanding and sense of responsibility. The culture of challenge has improved and there is a clear process for professional challenge and an emphasis on kindness.

Voice of the child

- Leaders listen to children, families and the workforce, as well as using a range of comprehensive quality assurance and performance activities to ensure that they have a realistic understanding of the quality and impact of services they provide.
- LiveWell has appointed a full-time participation officer to strengthen the child's voice in decision-making.
- The Young Safeguarders group provides effective challenge and has directly influenced practice with an excellent example shared of seeking feedback and acting on that feedback.
- The voice of families is gathered through audit work, and family hubs have introduced new parent groups to listen to the experiences of families.
- While SEND-related engagement is strong, broader family representation needs improvement.

Brief notes from three engagement sessions - Voice of the child

With regards to child's voice LiveWell have appointed a full-time participation person. The Young Safeguarders provide a strong voice and challenge, and a good example has been shared whereby the Young Safeguarders identified an issue and were able to directly influence practice.

There is good participation work, and it is starting to make a difference.

Next steps

As quarter 4 concludes the Partnership will be preparing a strategic plan for the year ahead. As well as determining priorities for focus, the Partnership need to continue to work to strengthen the multi agency safeguarding arrangements, so that they are not just compliant with the new statutory guidance, but that they are embracing the opportunities within it to become a mature, highly effective partnership.

The Partnership will now need to focus on the Families First Partnership Programme and ensure that partners are assessing readiness for the changes.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill includes a measure to place duties on the statutory safeguarding partners (local authorities, police and health) to make education and childcare settings relevant agencies by default, thereby ensuring their participation in safeguarding in their area and that their views are included and represented at strategic and operational levels in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. The Partnership should continue to strengthen the breadth of education partners.

Independent scrutiny has contributed to strengthening leadership and ensuring that safeguarding partners are effective in achieving their desired impact. The new scrutiny arrangements must ensure that this continues, and that the annual report demonstrates evidence of scrutiny providing critical challenge and support to safeguarding partners, helping them to maintain oversight, identify areas for development, and drive continuous improvement. The impact and learning from independent scrutiny arrangements should be evident as well as the way that partnerships have responded to findings and recommendations from scrutiny activities.

There is a strong commitment to learning from serious incidents and rapid reviews and evidence provided of learning events. However, there is scope for greater consistency and depth in reporting on this learning and its impact, as well as a need for more explicit discussion on evaluating the effectiveness of implementing learning from reviews and its impact on improving outcomes for children and families. Evidencing impact is a further area where there could be greater depth.

Appendix B – Family Hub Case Study 1

Introduction / background	<p>Family consists of Mum, Dad, Child 1 (3 years old), Child 2 (1 year old) at the timework commenced.</p> <p>We were first introduced to the family when they attended our Step by Step group at Manor Street Children's Centre. Parents shared their concerns regarding the development of their two young boys. Parents shared they felt that both boys were demonstrating different behaviours of the autism scale and were showing development delay. Parents shared that their family did not have additional support from agencies.</p> <p>Discussions progressed in the Step by Step group and observations of the children were undertaken. It was identified that an EHAT would be suitable to support the family moving forward.</p> <p>Subsequently, following four EHAT reviews, a strategy meeting was held. This was due to parental separation and concerns around Mum's new partner. Specifically, concerns were around the risk Mum's partner poses and the minimisation Mum displayed when the risks were explored. There were not any concerns around parent's parenting capacity and parents continued to co-parent their children. Dad was</p>
----------------------------------	--

	<p>aware of risks posed by Mums' new partner and identified they would seek full custody of the children if it was felt to be in the children's best interest</p> <p>An ICPC meeting was held following the strategy meeting and the children were made subject to a child protection plan.</p> <p>At the next Child Protection Review Meeting, it was agreed that the children would step down to CIN as the safety plan for the children had been adhered to.</p> <p>Following this, the level of support offered to the family was stepped down again, as the safety plan had continued to be adhered to. It was agreed school would take the lead on the EHAT to ensure continuity with the youngest child hopefully joining his older brother at the school shortly.</p>
Assessment measures used	<p>Family Star</p> <p>Family Star review</p> <p>EHAT assessment</p> <p>Supporting Families Outcomes</p> <p>Network mapping discussions – to ascertain which professionals were required to support the family. The necessary referrals were made.</p> <p>Knowledge of Early Years development</p>
What strategies were given to family	<p>During the Step by Step group, strategies to support sensory seeking behaviours were shared. Strategies were also shared by staff and the specialist support worker who attended the group from PCC to encourage communication.</p> <p>Parents attended Makaton training to support their children to communicate alongside the speech encouraged.</p> <p>DASH risk assessment to explore level of risk. Safety planning completed following this, to help promote safety for the children and mum</p>
What actions, activities and interventions were delivered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support was given to the children and parents weekly during the Step by Step groups. An Early Help assessment (EHAT) was initiated to support with collating information and bringing all relevant professionals together. The purpose of this was to support the children through their early stages of development; support transitions to nursery/school; consider housing needs in the context of the children's specific needs; explore strengths and concerns. Actions were agreed to promote positive progression for the children and their family. Through referral from the health visiting team, a specialist support worker has been working in the home with child 2 and at nursery to offer additional strategies in regard to safety, communication and managing behaviour. DASH and safety planning with mum was completed and referral to the Freedom Programme was completed. Mum subsequently expressed that she did not want to attend the Freedom

	<p>Programme. Referral to MARAC was completed to ensure all avenues of support were being accessed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nursery visits completed by Family Hub staff, to observe child outside of home environment
Any requests for additional services/sign posting made.	<p>It was identified through the EHAT meetings that a health visitor, school nursing and GP were required to support the family further. I completed a referral to school nursery, contacted the health visiting team and both attended future EHAT meetings</p> <p>The family were signposted to the GP for additional support.</p> <p>Contact was made regularly with the CDC to ascertain where both children were on their respective waiting lists.</p> <p>Following the DASH, a MARAC referral was completed.</p>
What outcomes were achieved as a result of the intervention	<p>The EHAT was/is progressing positively in regard to ensuring both children have the appropriate support from professionals and beneficial IEP/my plans at nursery and school. These will support development and additional needs where challenges are faced.</p> <p>Working together with other agencies has been beneficial in providing a range of support to the family, at the time it was needed.</p> <p>Multi-agency working provided opportunities for discussion and exploration of perception of risk, both with parents and members of staff from other teams. This helped to ensure transparency and arrive at a common understanding.</p> <p>Following the MARAC referral, communication was made between myself, mum and the MARAC IDVA to offer additional support to mum.</p>

Appendix C - Family Hub Case Study 2

Presenting Issues. What did the referral come in for? What were the presenting concerns for the family when completing the initial outcome star?

The initial referral came from Children's Social Care requesting attendance at ICPC for a potential Family Management Skills Assessment (FMSA) due to severe Domestic Abuse (DA), substance misuse, poor mental health of both parents and neglect of the children and home. During the meeting it was decided by all professionals that a Graded Care Profile Assessment (GCP2) would be more suitable as there was a concern of neglect for the children due to domestic abuse and home conditions. The GCP2 would help identify the areas of neglect and create a clear action plan to sustain change for the family. During the initial home visit, it was identified that to help improve the home conditions grant for a carpet and furniture would also be needed to support positive change for the children.

Case Background/ Family context. Who is in the family home, who are the significant people in the child's life, what did life look like for the children in the home prior to our support, what support have the family had prior to our involvement, have the family had previous outreach support from us, were other agencies involved and what had they already put in place?

The family home is a privately rented 1st floor 2-bedroom flat, there is 3 children, twins aged 2 and a 4-year-old who share a bedroom and the children's mother. The children's father has contact with the children every weekend and this is shared with the paternal grandmother. Prior to our support the children's father also lived within the family home with the mother and children. Children's Social Care was notified after a Police call to the family home for DA, there was concerns for the high level of risk for the mother and the home conditions were deemed unliveable for the children. Due to the high risk towards the mother, a MARAC was held, and safety planning was put in place by professionals which resulted in the father leaving the family home.

Explanation of Outcomes Achieved/Type of & Impact of intervention

Type of intervention: What we did

Outcome: What happened as a result?

Impact: What changed?

E.g.

- Type: Shared information with the parent about nursery funding for ..., subsequently supported the parent to apply for Me2 funding and find a nursery place at a local nursery
- Outcome - ... attending nursery 2 days per week
- Impact - ... is having positive social interaction regularly and his speech and language has improved as a result

Please list each intervention separately

Child	<p>The three children have experienced trauma due to the incidents of DA that they have witnessed and through being exposed to ongoing, severe, abusive and violent behaviour in their home. Additionally, the home living conditions were very poor and deemed inhabitable by professionals. This alongside substance misuse and poor mental health of both parents resulted in the children being at risk of significant harm. To support with this Childrens Social care became involved and all 3 children were placed on CP plans.</p> <p>A GCP2 was initiated on 14.05.24, which identified neglect in all focused areas. A review will be completed on 13.01.25 which will hopefully show improvements in the identified areas of neglect and home conditions.</p> <p>Mum has been aided by her Supporting Families Workers by the Domestic Abuse Pathway (DAP) to understand the impact of being exposed to DA has on herself and her children. Mum will also be completing the You and Me programme as part of DAP, which will further support her in her awareness and understanding of trauma in children who have experience DA and how to manage their challenging behaviour.</p>
-------	--

	<p>Supporting Families Workers approached a nursery and obtained 15 hours me2 funding for the twins, this will support with social and emotional development, confidence and self esteem and provide them with play opportunities.</p> <p>Due to poor home conditions grant funding was applied for to obtain new carpet for the living area, furthermore a new sofa suite was donated by another family receiving family support within the service.</p> <p>At Christmas toys were provided through the Salvation Army Charity, for all 3 children.</p> <p>Regular safe contact with the children's father and paternal grandmother promotes the children's identity, positive relationships and sense of belonging.</p>
Parent	<p>Mum has started the DAP Pathway which is a suite of 3 courses running concurrently alongside each other, the courses are Stronger Us, the Adult Domestic Abuse Recovery Tool Kit and You and Me and Mum programme. Mum has expressed that she is enjoying the course and finding attending beneficial for her mental health and her journey of recovery.</p> <p>The GCP2 assessment was completed with mum who engaged well and was open and honest. Mum received feedback from the GCP2 and mum agreed with the scale scores and action plan to move forward.</p>
Family	<p>The family are trying to rebuild their lives after the severe Domestic Abuse that they have all experienced. Home environment has improved but is still an ongoing concern. Hopefully the GCP2 review will empower mum to continue to improve and maintain the home conditions moving forward. It is hopeful that mum will continue to engage well with DAP and take onboard the strategies and the awareness regarding how the Domestic Abuse has impacted on her as a parent and the children.</p>
Comments/Feedback from Family/Professionals	

Allocated Social Worker feedback:

“Thanks again for your support, I did raise to my team that in recent times I don’t think I have had as much support and pro activity from other agencies as we have had from the support workers from Barnardo’s”

Good Practice/ Lessons Learnt -Identified by Practitioner

Consistent/empowering engagement between support workers and mum has been a benefit in this case. Empathy and a deep understanding of Domestic Abuse and trauma is vital when working with such complexity. It has also been noted that a victim of abuse will not start their journey of recovery until the time is right for them, this may not be until severe events occur prompting them to keep themselves and their children safe from harm. A safe and supportive environment was created which enabled mum to share her and her children’s experiences with workers, which has started to rebuild mum’s confidence. A positive is that the children are now attending nursery and school regularly which supports and promotes their own development but also allows professionals to monitor the situation to keep them safe from harm.

We have learnt that it is important for the home environment to be kept in a good enough condition, as appropriate hygiene is critical for prevent the spread of infectious diseases and helping children to lead long and healthy lives. It also prevents them from missing school, resulting in better learning outcomes.

Lessons Learnt - Managerial reflective summary

There have been instances with this family where the social worker was asked to complete tasks beyond their role. The key takeaway from this is that it's okay to maintain boundaries when necessary.

Having to workers complete the GCP2 has worked well for this family.

Appendix D - Family Hub Case Study 3

Presenting Issues.
Complex family significant history - Continued involvement with CSC Substance misuse Mental Health Domestic Abuse Parental Offending Ongoing conflict and lack of effective communication between Mum and Dad. Support needed to put child at the centre and keep safe. Lack of trust between parents leads to inconsistency in contact, lack of communication and breakdown in relationship.
Case Background/ Family context
Mum and Dad share custody of Child F. Ongoing Domestic Abuse, conflict, drug misuse, offending and allegations between Mum and Dad. Repeated attempts previously to engage family in support, lack of engagement despite ongoing efforts.
Dad - referred to AP who has worked hard to build a relationship with him, and offered one to one Solihull parenting support due to inability to join groups or programs in the day due to work. This has been inconsistent, and AP offered flexibility around calls and appointments to fit in with his schedule however, due to 4 missed appointments outside of AP's working hours, the decision was made to close to Dad, due to reluctance to engage or attend appointments despite flexibility.
Mum agreed to work with practitioner and is communicating daily with her. As both parents are in constant conflict, workers are briefed on ensuring the highest level of confidentiality, and not to engage with either parent about the work they are doing separately, high risk of being drawn into conflict or allegations being shared back and forth to cause further conflict.

Due to the inability to split families on Estart, child F is recorded twice under two separate ID numbers.

Both parents under a CP plan with actions to complete parenting programs and separate actions to improve their parenting. Engagement has been sporadic and inconsistent. Dad has worked 1:1 with AP on doing the Solihull course, however, has disengaged and will not return AP's call's or texts or attend core groups.

Mum call's ? regularly and asks for advice around keeping F safe, ongoing court involvement and attends core groups consistently.

Explanation of Outcomes Achieved/Type of & Impact of intervention

Child	<p>Mum is more focused on F's needs now her needs are met more effectively, and F is put first by Mum.</p> <p>Mum regularly refers to keeping F safe and is asking for advice on how to communicate effectively with Dad. F has been having contact with Dad, however, it is unclear how effective this is as Dad has ceased engagement with AP.</p>
Parent	<p>Both parents have engaged in courses- COS, Freedom, Solihull however, Dad has disengaged from this support and did not complete the Solihull training.</p> <p>Ongoing concerns around conflict, complex family involvement, inability to stick to the CP plan or agree on actions.</p> <p>Mum has made a good connection with KW and is asking questions seeking emotional support and trying to follow advice given.</p>
Family	

Good Practice/ Lessons Learnt -Identified by Practitioner

Communication between agencies can be a challenge, minutes from meetings do not always come through, dates are not set at the previous meetings so often meetings are missed. CP plan has not been shared with us, and only one core group has been attended. ? works hard to try to join up communication and ensure information is shared clearly to prevent breakdown in communication between mum and dad.

Lessons Learnt - Managerial reflective summary

? called for Feedback from family member - Mum

"I have Worked with a couple of months - she helps with housing, parenting courses, haven't started yet but I start Tuesday.is so supportive and amazing, but can't always help me how she wants to as she doesn't have the plan or minutes from the social worker which she has already raised. The minutes never come after the meeting which is super important as it means me and my ex are on the same page and it can't be manipulated if it's written down and everyone agrees."

..... is always contactable - she has children's best interest at heart

Support that given me keeps steady, consistency and support. Don't understand why minutes aren't sent out, if one of parents aren't there parents lose communication, certain bits aren't minutes, everyone's not on same page. These minutes need to be clear, and the safety plan needs to be shared and professionals. Mum feels this is easily manipulated if it isn't written down.

? to reiterate to staff the importance of professional challenge and escalating concerns or asking for support from safeguarding leads to communicate with CSC. This is a complex case with lots of contributing factors, communication between two FSW's working with the family has been encouraged to ensure a joined up approach but as Dad has disengaged, work has been paused with him until he is ready to re-engage.

Appendix E – First Light Case Studies

Case Study – Client E

Client E is in their 30's. They are non-English speaking and in their day-to-day life rely on internet translation services. This was how we had to work with each other over the 9 sessions we had.

The work was pretrial therapy, as they had an open right to review with the police. The client found navigating the relationship with the police difficult and also the changeover between ISVA services. Due to the language barrier, they were often confused where one service boundary ended and where one began.

E was sexually abused regularly leaving them physically injured. The perpetrators violent treatment of them has left them with ongoing physical problems, which with support they are now seeking treatment for.

During the sessions it became apparent that the perpetrator had also been sexually interested in one of the client's 3 children, who was under 11 at the time. From the sessions the counsellor was able to assist client E in making a police report for their child. The child now also has an open case.

The client had 9 full sessions with us. They will soon be having a further 6 in our added value program "Safe Parent" as we try to help them with what has happened and is happening with their child. The child is now on our CYP waiting list for sessions to start as soon as possible.

It is worth noting that the biggest barrier to accessing services for this client was language. Both First Light and the client were unable to provide translators due to cost. The client had been in the UK for quite some time, but had no friends, and is estranged from family, so the support for them was exceptionally limited and they were isolated. The client lacks community and sense of belonging. They are going to be referred into a local family hub, where they and the children will be further introduced to the community.

Client F

Client F has a 14-year-old child who was sexually assaulted in a playground near their home. The alleged perpetrator was known to the client and their child. The client and child live locally to the adult perpetrator, who has special educational needs.

Police are informed and there has been an ongoing investigation for over 2 years. The case is coming up to being ready to go to the CPS. The child had counselling with us and the parent was supported with the Safe Parent Program.

In the past client F has had many angry outbursts with professionals and we were particularly supporting with this and how F, could manage their anger with police and professionals and look at ways to best help themselves and their child during an extremely difficult and distressing time.

Client F is a single parent and raises their child alone. They are very lonely as both their parents have died, and they have very little family support, They are also in the process of ending a current relationship of their own.

During one of the sessions when F was talking about their child, they told the counsellor that whilst they were also a child, they too had been sexually abused, and this was an extreme source of trauma for them. They said the incident was unreported and they had kept this assault within them all their lives.

From this disclosure we were able to offer client F 9 sessions of counselling in their own right. We were able to offer more focused support for them to look at their trauma burden and see how to manage complex feelings of anger, shame, loneliness and rejection.

Appendix F – Safe Families Anonymised Case Study

Family Number: 25107

Referring agency: Social worker in school team (SWIS team)

Guidance: Janet (Mum) and Roger (8)

Brief Summary of Family:

Mother and father have separated, and Roger has not seen his father for several years due to him being in prison and safeguarding concerns around his contact.

Family live in a home unknown to Roger's father as an ongoing safety measure. His father has applied to the court for contact with Roger which has unsettled him, and Janet and she seeks to protect him without preventing him from having contact with father which is being assessed and reviewed by a legal process.

Mother would benefit from talking to someone each week so that she can offload any anxieties and fears whilst undergoing court proceedings. She would also benefit from building a trusting friendship with another person who she could meet on a fortnightly basis.

Were the children considered on a trajectory into care? No

Family Goals

- Volunteer to listen and hear what Janet wants to share. Ensuring she feels understood, supported, and builds upon her confidence and self-esteem.
- Trauma has affected this family so a sense of belonging and friendships to develop over time through face-to-face fortnightly catch ups. Janet to have someone who can come alongside her as a friend.

Support provided

Janet was brave in connecting with her volunteer who was patient and took her time forming a link with her over a period and exchanged messages. During our initial referral to connection with the volunteer, the family were opened to a child in need plan due to concerns raised around Janet being able to identify any risks her new partners might be to her son.

Janet was supported through ending her relationship with a controlling partner through having the volunteer to share her thoughts and feelings with and reports that the connection supported her and helped build upon her longer-term resilience.

The volunteer has spent time getting to know the volunteer and regular face to face meetings take place not only in the family home, but in the community.

Volunteer has supported Janet in attending meetings with social workers and Roger's school as part of the child protection plan. Janet initially shared her worries to her volunteer, and the FSM was able to empower Janet in the meetings to share her thoughts and grew in confidence, often correcting the professionals.

Janet was supported to build up to a point where she felt confident sharing with professionals and reaching out when she needed to especially in crisis to get some gas support in collaboration with the social worker.

Janet was supported with food provision in crisis and long-term plans made to support her accessing short term food banks. The family support manager and the volunteer supported with collections to ensure the family could eat.

The volunteer went with Janet to a debt advice meeting, and we were able to put some resources in place to support her with her cost-of-living crisis she had found herself in. With support from ACTS 435, Janet and Roger were provided with the following resources:

- A tumble dryer so she could dry the family clothes more efficiently
- A shopping trolley which allowed Janet to carry more shopping allowing her to purchase food which can last over longer periods of time
- A microwave to reduce the cost of using her oven every day.

All based on the advice given during the meeting with Janet.

Janet was supported to attend other meetings with her volunteer alongside her and was supported to make appointments and make calls without her volunteer being present.

Janet and Roger were also able to attend a day out to the beach that we arranged for the families. Janet does not get to go out with Roger often and shared on the day that her mum's ashes were sprinkled in the sea at the beach she was visiting so she had been particularly excited to visit to see the beach finally. She also got to meet families and share her details to connect with them past the trip.

Jane was supported by her volunteer by being able to talk through her fears and worries during her court proceedings. This supported her to remain positive and able to deal with the situation she was going through. The court case was successful, and Roger's need to slowly have communication from his dad was agreed.

Outcomes and Parent Feedback:

Family Feedback:

Janet has thanked us throughout and has been appreciative of the support we have offered her. She has valued her volunteer and has always stated that she is getting 'everything that she had hoped for and reflected that she has never had a true friend like her before in her life.' She is looking forward to the ongoing friendship and they have successfully introduced the children to each other as part of on-going connection during holidays. Janet says that Roger has thrived due to the support she has received as she has been able to continue to positively parent him. She has reached out and started to spend more time with her family which has built a stronger connection around her and Roger. Janet says Roger feels 'safe and confident' and has started to open up to others and herself to express himself. He has built new friendships and engages better in the class and with his 1-1 support.

Professional Feedback:

The FSM attended the final child protection meeting to inform the professionals that we are closing our support, explaining that the volunteer and Janet had built a friendship and will still see each other.

Janet proudly announced the news of the closure to Safe Families. Social services concluded that they felt that Janet no longer met any thresholds to keep her open to social care. They acknowledged how far she had come reflected on how well she had embraced the plan and had achieved so much. They echoed parts of our reflection and celebrated her achievements and new friendships.

Volunteer Feedback:

The volunteer stated that it was a highlight to see the family signed off by social services. Janet had worked hard to ensure she met all the expectations the child in need plan bought and had come so far. She also reflected that she was so happy to have made a new friendship with Janet. Helping Janet and accomplishing so much was a great experience for her. Their friendship felt just like a catch up and no longer a support session.

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting:	09 December 2025
Title of Report:	Families First Partnership Programme of Reforms
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:	Lisa Davies
Contact Email:	lisa.davies@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	Click here to enter text.
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

To update Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Board Members of the requirements of the delivery of the Government's National Family First Reforms and progress of their implementation in Plymouth.

To provide the opportunity for Scrutiny Board Members to question, challenge and scrutinise the implementation of the Reforms in Plymouth.

Recommendations and Reasons

For the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel to note the progress made and the implementation of next steps in Plymouth.

Alternative options considered and rejected

- I. None

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

Keeping children safe is a priority within the Corporate Plan.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Improved practice will lead to better value for money interventions for families.

Financial Risks

The implementation of the reforms increases demand for services locally.

Legal Implications

None

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.

None.

Appendices

**Add rows as required to box below*

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)
A	Briefing report title	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7

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)							
	<p><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></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="747 1116 1325 1140"> <tr> <td data-bbox="747 1116 828 1140">1</td><td data-bbox="828 1116 909 1140">2</td><td data-bbox="909 1116 990 1140">3</td><td data-bbox="990 1116 1071 1140">4</td><td data-bbox="1071 1116 1152 1140">5</td><td data-bbox="1152 1116 1233 1140">6</td><td data-bbox="1233 1116 1325 1140">7</td></tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7		

Sign off:

Introduction

Over the last two decades, the Government and the Children's Services sector have been working to improve and reform the children's social care system. Several recent reports and reviews set out key priorities for improving the children's social care system:

- The [Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(2022\)](#) examined the experience and outcomes of children and young people who interact with the children's social care system, from Early Help through to child protection arrangements and the care system. It recommended fundamental reforms across the national children's safeguarding system.
- The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's National Review into [Child Protection in England \(2022\)](#) cited system-wide, multi-agency failures in child protection following its review into the circumstances leading up to the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson. Also leading onto the Stable Homes Built on Love which is the foundation of the reforms [Children's social care: stable homes, built on love - GOV.UK](#)
- **The Families First for Children Pathfinder (FFCP)** was established to test the deliverability of key recommendations from these reviews. It was designed to improve support and protection for children and families through earlier intervention, stronger multi-agency collaboration, and a more integrated approach to service delivery.

I. The Families First Partnership Programme

The Families First Partnership Programme is therefore a national programme set up by the Department for Education (DfE) and supported by the Department of Health and Social Care and the Home Office.

As part of the social care reforms all Local Authorities are expected by the DfE to implement the government's reform of children's social care by transforming help and protection systems. Implementing multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams that work in a place-based way will be a key enabler to both the implementation of the reforms and to Plymouth children's services continued improvement.

The initiative is to prioritise early intervention, collaboration and family support, backed by a funding allocation for Local Authorities to deliver a whole systems wide transformation.

There are four key reform strands to be delivered as a whole system transformation:

Safeguarding Partners

- Strengthening the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA), which Plymouth has already fully included representation from education and child care settings at all levels of MASA so that opportunities to keep children safe are not missed. Noting locally an education representative has also taken on roles of Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSP) and Lead Safeguarding Partner (LSP) showing a strong commitment to Education being a 4th key partner.
- A newly implemented Families First Partnership Board now reports to the Plymouth Safeguarding Partnership (PSCP) enabling both DSPs and LSPs to be part of the governance and cementing strong partnership commitment.
- Establishing new, expert-led, Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPT), integrated within Family Help, to identify significant harm, deliver core statutory child protection functions, and offer expert advice across the wider local system is also expected. Locally we have secured Partnership agreement to have one central city-wide team to address this requirement.

Family Help and protection

- Creating single Family Help assessments and plans, to identify needs and capture the services to be provided for children and families, of which progress has commenced as part of the workstream activity to deliver a single Family Help Assessment and Plan.
- Streamlining and supporting effective multi-agency information sharing and case management systems.
- Establishing the Family Help Lead Practitioner (FHP) role ensuring consistency of relationships between children, families and their lead practitioner. Again, locally these roles have been developed in Targeted Help and our plans will be to roll this out into one seamless approach including Children's Social Work teams.
- Reforming the approach to the 'front door' – bringing together professionals and services (i.e., SEND) to an integrated, multi-agency front door model where children and families can be triaged to the right level of service at the first point of contact. This has been a significant focus for the Plymouth partnership and great commitment, and resource is already in place and delivering a Families First approach through the Families First Integrated Front Door.
- Combining the strengths of targeted Early Help and Section 17 (Child in Need) work into a single, seamless Family Help service, with flexibility on who leads direct work with families to support relationship building, whilst ensuring child protection concerns are still identified and receive a quick and decisive multiagency response.

Multi-agency child protection

- Creating an integrated system where Family Help Lead Practitioners work alongside MACPTs.
- Establishing multi-agency child protection teams to carry out core, statutory child protection functions, strengthen frontline practice with social workers and embed a Lead Child Protection Practitioners in the MACPT teams, advise and guide the wider system, and engage parents and carers to keep children safe.
- Introducing new Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCPP) roles who are experienced social workers, responsible for statutory child protection decisions and embedded in the multi-agency child protection team.

Family Networks

- Engaging and empowering parents and family networks involved in child protection, including via parental representation.
- Introduce new Family Network Support Packages (FNPs) to provide practical and financial support to enable family networks to help children stay safe and thrive at home.
- Establishing a system-wide, 'families first' culture, which addresses structural inequalities, attends to the full spectrum of families' contexts and needs, and facilitates a welcoming and effective system for children and families.
- Engaging and involving children and families in design and delivery.
- Embedding Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) and establishing MACPTs in every local area.

A new ringfenced Children's Social Care Prevention Grant has been implemented, to support all local areas to roll out many of the reforms. This investment will be delivered as a national programme, Families First Partnership programme, overseen by DfE and rolled out to all local areas in England and their local partners (including police, health and education), with transformation from April 2025.

2. Local Implementation Arrangements

The reforms have been welcomed as a key part of the next phase of improving outcomes for children and families. Local governance arrangements have been reviewed and strengthened with a new FFPB agreed to report into the Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Partnership and Partnership Working

Groups established to progress priority areas. The governance structure for the implementation of the reforms is in place and is set out below:

Plymouth Families First Partnership Programme Governance

Core Programme Governance



CHILDREN'S SERVICE



High Expectations, High Support, High Challenge

Other governance groups for awareness and programme support

Children's Scrutiny committee – considering appropriate updates

Children's Programme Board

Children's Services Senior Leadership Team - Oversight of the service improvement plans and linked transformation

Lead Safeguarding Partners, Pan Devon Local Strategic Partnerships & Children's Safeguarding Partnership sub- groups

The first FFPB meeting was held on 9th October and the subsequent one on 25th November and both have had good Partnership representation and engagement. Boards will be held every 6 weeks.

The detailed delivery plan for the Reforms will be developed by the Working Groups, with project management support. The Groups have all been established, with the initial meetings held and fortnightly meetings diarised to ensure the necessary pace. The working group structure can be seen below:

FFP Board Working Groups



CHILDREN'S SERVICE



High Expectations, High Support, High Challenge

Families First Partnership Board Working Groups Structure

Oversight Group - reporting to Families First Partnership Board

1. **Families First Front Door**
Chair: Grace Adeusi

2. **Family Help and protection**
Chair: Danielle Tweedie/Martine Aquilina

3. **Family Led Decision Making**
Chair: Grace Adeusi

4. **Multi-Agency Child Protection Team**
Chair: Shaun Hanks/Danielle Tweedie

5. **Workforce Development**
Chair: Shaun Hanks

← Child & Family Engagement Impact and Evaluation Communications Plans →

A summary of each of the areas of activity is provided below:

a) Families Front Door

Developing effective multi-disciplinary arrangements to ensure families get the right help and/or protection at the right time. A conversation based integrated front door, 'Families First Front Door', has been in place since early June and has recently moved into new accommodation on the fourth floor to enable increased involvement of partners. Initial evaluation has identified improved feedback from families of the new approaches. In the next phase the multi-disciplinary approach will be developed further to further increase access to earlier help and the digital offer to families will be improved.

b) Family Help and Protection

In order to developing a seamless system of support and protection for families when it is needed initial service redesign has been implemented. Family Help Lead Practitioners are in place, supporting families with targeted early help and child in need support, to ensure families with multiple needs receive earlier, joined-up and non-stigmatising support to enable them to stay together. Teams are working closely together to ensure that when child protection concerns are identified they are responded to effectively by a qualified social worker but maintaining relationship-based approaches wherever possible. The next phase will include the development of single assessment and the development of locality family help arrangements with partners.

c) Family Led Decision Making

A Family Group Conferencing offer is already in place for families in Plymouth and we are committed to utilising family decision making models from early in our involvement with families to ensure we are working restoratively with families and building capacity within the family network, this includes for families in pre-proceedings. In addition, we have been developing social workers confidence in holding Family Network Meetings to maximise family support networks in plans as part of their involvement with a family. The service has been recently extended to enable these approaches to be offered to more families. In the next phase we will ensure all families benefit from this 'families first' approach, particularly reaching all families where there is a risk of legal proceedings).

d) Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs)

The Bill will insert new sections into the Children Act 2004 to require safeguarding partners to establish and run at least one multi-agency child protection team in their area. The main purpose of these new teams is to support delivery of child protection duties under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

Integrated Care Boards will be required to nominate a health professional with experience in relation to children's health, while the police will be required to nominate an officer to be part of each multi-agency child protection team. The Local Authority is required to nominate someone with experience in education in relation to children and to establish Lead Child Protection Practitioners (social worker with experience in relation to child protection) to oversee key decision making and support practice and may appoint other appropriate individuals after consultation with safeguarding partners.

The three key safeguarding Partners are already working well together locally, to ensure strong oversight of the safeguarding system and the inclusion of Education as a fourth partner is welcomed. We welcome the opportunity to develop a multi-agency child protection team to further strengthen local arrangements and are currently planning local codesign activities and confirming a timeline for local implementation, including identifying the key partners and capacity to deliver expectations of the Lead Child Protection Practitioner effectively. Exact function and resource requirements are being confirmed with partners, alongside a clear plan for implementation.

Local arrangements are being explored by the working group informed by the input from the engagement events. Please see section 3 (Latest FFP Board Decisions) for detail on the decisions taken on the MACPT implementation for Plymouth.

e) Workforce Development

Recognising that the Partnership workforce is key in delivering the reforms, this Working Group will develop Plymouth's response to the following:

- What are the key areas where workforce development is needed to support the reforms?
- What is needed from partners and how do we engage the right people?
- What workforce development is needed to achieve the expectations of the Family Help Lead Practitioner and Lead Child Protection Practitioner?
- How do we support the workforce to achieve new ways of working effectively across Help and Protection?
- How will we monitor and evaluate impact?

3. Latest FFP Board Decisions and Next Steps

- **A single MACPT function on a citywide basis in place by 1st April 26** – it will continue to develop beyond March but must have the minimum expectation set out by DfE to include police, LCPP, Health and Education. The MACPT is a distinct service from the Front Door, not an extension of it (confirmed by the DfE). Note: The FFP Board could not approve the resourcing for this until the detail has been developed which is the next step now agreement is for a city-wide service.
- **LCPPs in place and delivering conferences differently** – Agreement to review the current CP Chair role and commence consultation end of January 2026 to help gradually transition to full LCPP role. The Board approved the recommendation that IROs take on the LCPP role and the next steps to implement this. The board noted the financial challenge for the local authority that the LCPPs are not fully funded and to enable direct work will require more resource.
- **PCC Children & Families service restructured into neighbourhood teams** to enable us to deliver the reforms – Work still ongoing to determine what the neighbourhoods look like, including with partners to align with their own locality working plans. The Family Group Conferencing (FGC) service moves to the QA & Safeguarding Partnership Team within the re-structure to meet the DfE guidance of providing FGC's to those under child protection plans and in Pre-Proceedings.
- **Single assessment and single plan to be implemented by 1st April** - The Board recognised this intention but also acknowledged the high risk of not achieving this because of the expert capacity required which is highlighted as a red risk facing the programme.
- **Secondments for FFP** – The Board acknowledged the challenges for this area and agreed to continue working successfully with committed partnership resource for consistency, rather than progressing the secondments from Partner organisations. Risk added to the log about particular financial and capacity pressures in the health system.

The Board also agreed the following next steps as priorities:

- Provide recommendations for capacity required to deliver the city-wide MACPT and agree detailed resource and roles and functions required.
- Prevention approach to be agreed for Neighbourhood Teams and how Early Help is integrated.
- Agreement of what Multi Agency Line of sight looks like across practice including Targeted Help.
- Project milestones to be presented and agreed.
- Vision statement for families to be approved (following family and staff engagement).

- Plans approved for family engagement, co-production and feedback, along with branding children and young people are working on.

4. Corporate Support Requirements

This is a significant and complex whole service redesign and change process requiring system redesign, development of new working practices and resources and a comprehensive programme of workforce development, including with partners.

To successfully achieve the objectives of the programme to the required timeline, cross council support is required in a number of specific areas including;

1. **HR-OD** - support for the organisational redesign and change management that will be required, including the creation of the FHP and LCPP roles and transitions to new ways of working and changes to role profiles and terms and conditions in key areas.
2. **System development** – support to make the changes to the Eclipse case management system to support new ways of working, new reporting and new team structures.
3. **Commissioning** - support to review existing contracts and ensure commissioned services are in place to deliver the services and outcomes needed, including joint commissioning arrangements with partners when needed.
4. **Performance data** – changes to performance management, KPIs and reporting arrangements aligned to new ways of working and priority outcomes of the programme.
5. **Policies and procedures** – capacity to develop the systems and guidance to clarify expected practices and processes to support the reforms.
6. **Communications** – capacity to develop and deliver programmes of both internal and external communications to staff, partners families and the wider community.

There is Corporate commitment across the Council to support the successful delivery of the implementation of the Programme in Plymouth.

Engagement

These are wide ranging reforms across Children's Services, not just within Local Authorities, and therefore engagement with stakeholders is crucial to its successful implementation. A scene setting session for strategic leaders across the system was held on 21st October with good attendance from the Council, Education, Police and Health. Rich discussions on each of the key areas of the reforms, as well as locality working, were held. A series of staff engagement events for wider staff from across the Partnership have been put in place and six out of seven of these have been delivered. Nearly 300 staff have attended so far with 80 booked onto the remaining session. Senior officers from Health and the Police have supported these events facilitating group discussions. All have had good multi-agency representation and fruitful discussion which are informing the vision and delivery plan for the Reforms. Further engagement with Health and Designated Safeguarding Leads within schools are being planned.

It is recognised that engagement with children, young people and families is vital to make these reforms a success and the approach to this is being developed within the delivery plan. The reforms were also presented as an agenda item at the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership Conference on 20th November.

5. Risks and Monitoring

Successfully implementing such wide-ranging reforms, especially in the current climate of significant financial pressures, inevitably carries risk. Review of known risks and scanning for new ones is regularly

undertaken through the project management process, with risks which cannot be sufficiently mitigated or managed being escalated through the governance process. The current most significant programme risks were presented to the Families First Partnership Board on 25th November and include:

Risk Title	Description
System development	Insufficiency capacity to complete the system changes required by April 1st. Mitigation this is being escalated by the DCS to find a solution with the Corporate Team.
Partnership engagement and contribution	Current Health changes and budget cuts may impact on capacity to engage in and achieve planned changes. Specifically, ICB restructure and staff reduction, government requirements about Integrated Neighbourhood MDTs and waiting list reduction targets. All partners financial positions are very pressured. Mitigation - this will be kept under close review.
Insufficient capacity in FFP leadership	There is a risk of insufficient capacity at a senior level to do all that is required by 1st April 2025 because of competing roles and responsibilities. In addition, because all chairs and members of the Working Groups have busy operational roles, there is risk of insufficient capacity to complete all the activities in the emerging delivery plan. Similar pressures are being experienced by health, police, education and other partners. Mitigation is that permanent recruitment is taking place for the Permanent Service Director: Children, Young People and Families and committed SRO to remain in post to ensure stability in the reforms. Discussions continue with Transformation Director to discuss Programme support.

The overall pace of change required by the Reforms also poses a risk. The nationally directed go-live date for the Reforms is 1st April 2026 although it is acknowledged that activity to embed them will continue past this date. The Local Authority is required to meet with and make quarterly returns to the DfE to demonstrate progress. The Q2 Delivery Plan meeting has been held with the DfE and the Q2 monitoring return completed on time. Preparation for the Q3 return, which includes the requirement for the full delivery plan, has now commenced. Delivery partner support has been agreed and is being delivered by Mutual Ventures through the DfE.

This page is intentionally left blank

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting:	09 December 2025
Title of Report:	Children's Homes for Plymouth Programme
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:	Victoria Whitman
Contact Email:	Victoria.whitman@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

To provide a progress report on the Children's Homes for Plymouth Programme which has been established to respond to the increasing demand for placements which meet the complex emotional, behavioural, physical and developmental needs of children and young people in care, to enable more children in care to be cared for close to Plymouth and to be supported to step back into family placements.

Recommendations and Reasons

- I. For the Panel to endorse the development of children's homes by Plymouth City Council.

Alternative options considered and rejected

- I. None

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The Corporate Plan includes keeping children and young people safe as a priority.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

The cost of placements for children in care is creating a significant challenge to the Council's MTFP process.

Financial Risks

The increasing cost of placements for children in care is creating a significant financial risk to the Council. The children's homes programme creates the financial risk of requiring capital investment for the purchase of homes and revenue investment for staffing the homes ahead of delivering the planned savings.

Legal Implications

None

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

A Climate Impact Assessment has been completed setting out how the children's homes programme will minimise its carbon and environmental impact.

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 creation of additional regulated children's homes provision reduces risks to the Council of children in care residing in unregulated (illegal) arrangements.

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report							

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)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	Ian Trisk-Grove	Leg	Click here to enter text.	Mon Off	Click here to enter text.	HR	Click here to enter text.	Assets	Click here to enter text.	Strat Proc	Click here to enter text.
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Lisa Davies, Interim Service Director for Children, Young People and Families											

Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes

Date agreed: 28/11/2025

Cabinet Member approval: *Cllr Jemima Laing*

Date approved: 28/11/2025

I. Introduction

Children's Homes for Plymouth is a programme of transformation in Children's Services which forms part of the wider Family Homes for Plymouth Children Programme. This work responds to the increasing demand for and cost of placements that meet the complex emotional, behavioural, physical and developmental needs of children and young people in care and seeks to improve outcomes for children and young people with these needs whilst providing the Council with better value for money solutions. The programme has capital funding and revenue implications.

Whilst our strategic aim remains for the vast majority of our children in care to live in family settings with foster carers, residential children's homes are occasionally the most appropriate option to support a young person with specific and more complex needs to make progress, usually with an overall plan to achieve a transition back into a family environment in a timely way. Plymouth City Council (PCC) is committed to placing children as close to their home area as possible to maintain positive relationships with their family networks, access local services (particularly health services), and support continuity with education provision.

Challenges in recruiting in-house foster carers in recent years have led to increased reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) and residential care, including having to resort to using high-cost unregulated settings. Whilst significant efforts are being made by Foster for Plymouth to recruit more foster carers, and more children in care are now placed with in house foster carers, this has created both cost and capacity pressures, and has impacted on the ability to provide consistent, high-quality care to locally to all of our children in care. PCC has an effective block contract in place with a local children's home provider and the children's homes programme is in place to complement this and enable more children to be cared for in Plymouth.

The Children's Homes for Plymouth programme commenced in November 2024. Since that point several strands have developed based on analysis of local need. This report provides an update on the four current strands of the children's homes programme (A–D) aimed at increasing local PCC regulated residential provision in specific priority areas in response to local needs analysis, improving outcomes for children, and reducing financial pressures by decreasing reliance on the independent sector.

- **Project A** encompasses the purchase and development of two four-bedroom houses to establish two Ofsted-registered children's homes in Plymouth. These homes will collectively provide provision for up to six children with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties and be operated directly by the Council. One home will offer placements for younger children (ages 9–12) with strong links to progressing to fostering placements, while the other will support older children (ages 13–17) with strong links to semi-independence pathways. Both homes will work to support children to return to their family networks where this can be achieved safely. One property is under offer and scheduled to open by July 2026, and a second property is under offer subject to survey, with an anticipated opening in Quarter 3 of 2026, depending on the survey outcome and level of refurbishment required.
- **Project B** addresses a critical gap in short break provision for children with physical and learning disabilities. It proposes the refurbishment of Colwill Lodge into a fully registered children's home offering overnight short breaks, including one solo provision for children with very complex needs and challenging behaviours arising from ASD. The final business case is scheduled to return to the Capital Programmes Board in January 2026.
- **Project C** will be a specialist new build children's home for four children and young people with very complex emotional and behavioural needs at risk of Deprivation of Liberty/Tier 4 NHS provision (e.g. mental health inpatient provision). This project will be jointly funded by PCC and the Devon Integrated Care Board (ICB), with a bid to the Department for Education (DFE) for matched capital funding having been successful. The purpose-built home, scheduled to open in 2028/29, will be Ofsted-registered and supported by a multi-disciplinary team including health professionals.
- **Project D** focuses on adolescents at risk of entering care as a result of experiencing harm outside of the home (e.g. contextual exploitation) or harmful sexual behaviour. It proposes a multi-

disciplinary, family-led intervention model that includes flexible accommodation options, outreach support, and therapeutic care. There is the potential for this to be progressed as part of the Colwill Lodge development, subject to the business case to Capital Programmes Board.

2. Level of Need and current costs

The number of children in care continues to rise both nationally and locally, creating significant financial pressures for PCC. At the end of September 2025, there were 534 children in care. The cost of placements has increased due to a national shortage of foster carers and the growing reliance on high-cost residential and unregistered arrangements. This has resulted in a forecast overspend of £3.887 millions at Month 6 of the current financial year.

At the end of Sept 2025, 62 children were living in residential care with 39 placed outside Plymouth. The average weekly cost for a child in a Plymouth residential home is £6,353 in a two-bed home and £5,143 in a three-bed home, compared to £7,877 for an out-of-area placement.

The table below shows the change in numbers of children in care in different types of placements since budget setting was completed.

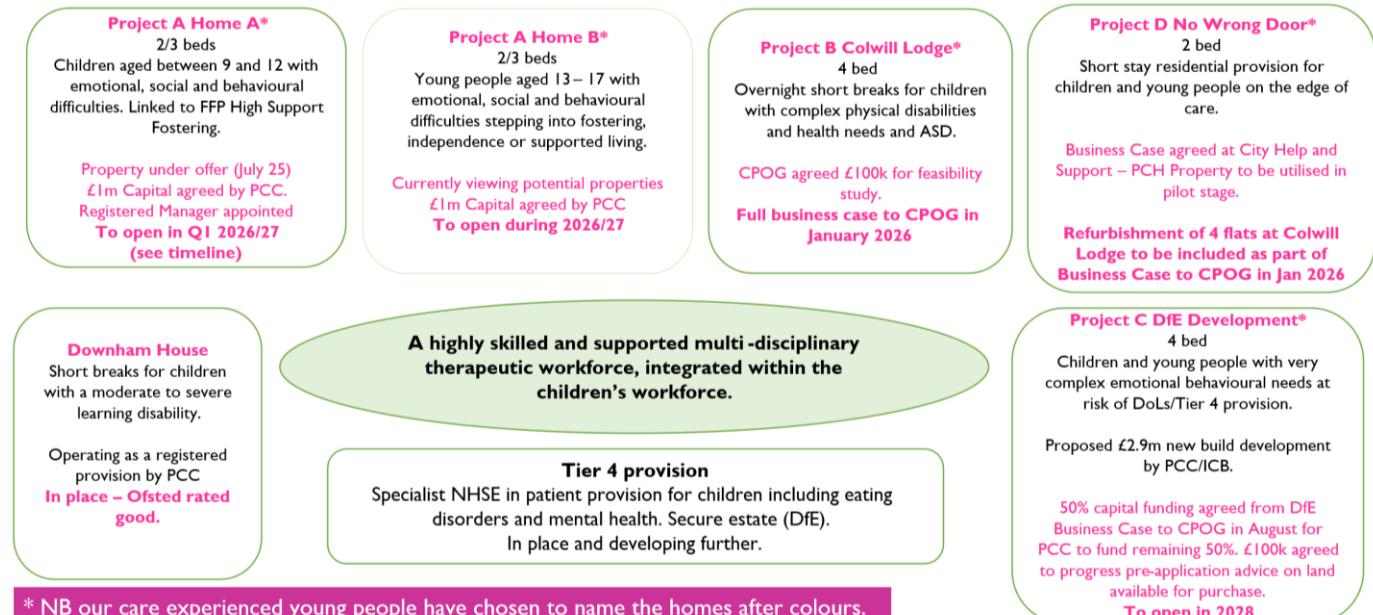
2025/26 Cost & Volume Modelling			2025/26 Month 6			
Type of Placement	Estimated Numbers	Forecast Budget	Actual Numbers	Month 6 Forecast	Variance No.	Variance
External Residential - Spot Purchase/Framework	45	£16.332	51	£18.603	4	£2.271
External Residential - Keys Block Contract	17	£6.065	14	£6.065	-3	£0.000
Unregistered	7	£4.906	9	£5.968	2	£1.062
External Fostering	154	£9.767	122	£7.548	-32	-£2.219
In-House Foster Care	140	£4.006	163	£4.006	23	£0.000
In-House Connected Carers	50	£1.195	49	£1.195	-1	£0.000
External Supported Living	40	£4.033	51	£4.904	11	£0.871
External Supported Living - Block	9	£0.777	9	£0.777	0	£0.000
Secure Placements	1	£0.345	1	£0.345	0	£0.000
Parent & Child	4	£0.998	3	£0.998	-1	£0.000
Other Looked After Children (Placed with Parents/NHS)		£0.000		£0.000		£0.000
LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN	467	£48.424	470	£50.409	3	£1.985
SGO, Adoption & Residence Orders	245	£2.541	245	£2.377	0	-£0.164
Care Leavers	30	£1.122	30	£1.122	0	£0.000
PLACEMENT - NOT LOOKED AFTER	275	£3.663	275	£3.499	0	-£0.164

			PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL		
Placement Savings Moved to Delivery Plans			£2.066	0	£2.066
PAUSE Contract & Brokerage Team	£1.030		£1.030	0	£0.000
Additional TPOTAL	£1.030		£3.096	0	£2.066
TOTAL	742	£53.116	745	£57.004	3
					£3.887

3. The Children's Homes for Plymouth Programme

The programme to develop residential children's homes for Plymouth's children in care encompasses the following developments, specifically projects A - D:

Children's homes developments



* NB our care experienced young people have chosen to name the homes after colours.

The decision has been made by young people to name each home after the colour of its front door (e.g., Red Door House, Green Door House...).

3.1 Project A – Children's Home A and Children's Home B

Project A involves the development of two children's homes in Plymouth, designed to provide high-quality residential care for children aged 9-17 with emotional, social, and behavioural difficulties. The homes will be operated directly by PCC and registered with Ofsted. Children's Home A will offer placements for younger children (ages 9-12) with strong links to progressing to fostering placements, while Children's Home B will support older children (ages 13-17) with strong links to semi-independence pathways. Both homes will work to support children to return to their family networks where this can be achieved safely.

A business case to the Capital Programmes Board led to £2m being allocated to this project. Active searching has been in place for suitable properties in suitable locations across Plymouth since November 2024, deeds have been obtained for over 110 properties, but many potentially suitable properties have restrictive covenants in place. To date, viewings have been completed on 35+ properties, with several second viewings having taken place. However, properties have been deemed unsuitable for a children's residential home due to several factors, including privacy within the neighbourhood and predicted renovation costs.

Children's Services have been working closely with the Strategic Projects Manager from the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Team for advice on the building and any works likely to be needed to properties.

Property

Children's Home A, located in Plymstock, is currently progressing toward completion, expected during December 2025. Refurbishment plans are being finalised to commence immediately following completion including a new kitchen being fitted, and a fixtures and fittings schedule is nearing completion. A location risk assessment has been carried out, and the procurement route for necessary works has been defined. Alongside this, the requirements for each room are being co-produced with care-experienced young people to ensure the environment of the home reflects their needs and aligns with Ofsted guidance.

A suitable property has recently been identified for Home B, located in Mutley. Following a review of the deeds, the Legal team has confirmed that the property is proceedable for purchase. Therefore, a formal offer has now been placed, subject to contract and survey, and this has been accepted by the vendors. A Level 4 Home Buyer Survey, including valuation, has been completed and the survey report and valuation is expected by the 5th of December 2025. Next steps include reviewing the survey report and valuation, scoping renovation works and obtaining cost estimates and developing a renovation timeline (anticipated to take approximately five months post-completion).

The property search activity is being continued to scope the potential for a third children's home, which would be subject to a formal change request through CPOG. Daily alerts for newly listed properties are being monitored, with viewings taking place for those that meet suitability criteria. This ongoing search takes into account the time it has previously taken to identify suitable properties, ensuring that momentum is maintained and delays are avoided should approval for an additional home be granted, with the remaining capital budget allocated to Project A.

Staffing and Workforce Development

In order to provide care for the children in the home 24 hours a day seven days a week, and meet the requirements for registration of the home with Ofsted, the workforce for each home will comprise of a Registered Manager, a Deputy Manager and twelve Children's Homes Practitioners. A Registered Manager with previous experience of running children's homes, has been appointed for Home A and started in post in September to support work on the set up of the homes including the development of policies and procedures required for Ofsted registration and to recruit and develop the children's homes team ahead of the home opening. This was a significant achievement as the recruitment of suitable and experienced Registered Managers for the children's homes is identified as one of the key risks for the programme given competition in this area from other care home providers locally.

Role profiles have been developed for the Deputy Registered Manager (DRM) and Children's Home Practitioner (CHP) positions and recruitment is progressing. A focused recruitment campaign has been planned with colleagues from HR-OD, promoting the rewarding nature of being involved in the day-to-day care of children in care and the opportunity to positively impact the lives and outcomes of vulnerable children. The campaign includes targeted recruitment on social media, featured job posts through Plymouth City Council's Facebook page, and direct outreach to prospective managerial candidates on LinkedIn. A press release will coincide with this campaign to promote PCC's planned Children's Home developments.

The advert for Children's Home Practitioners is now live with interviews planned early in the new year. Successful candidates appointed to these roles will not commence employment until the 1st of April 2026, aligning with the anticipated operational timeline for the homes and financial planning. Plans are also in place to closely monitor the onboarding process to ensure there are no delays and that all pre-employment checks are completed promptly.

A workforce development plan has been developed to ensure a highly skilled children's homes workforce and will include training for all staff in;

- Trauma informed care
- Positive behaviour management including DESCAL8
- Risk management.
- Health and safety
- Safeguarding and child protection
- Child and adolescent development
- Substance misuse interventions
- Communication skills for work with children
- Therapeutic work with young people

Communications Plan

A communications plan has been developed to support engagement with key stakeholders including councillors, local residents, and staff. The plan will build understanding of the home's purpose and foster positive outlooks surrounding the project.

The initial notification letter and accompanying FAQ will be shared with local residents and councillors following completion of the purchase of the property, and ahead of the Change of Use planning notification, to ensure all stakeholders are kept informed. The FAQ will also be accessible online so it can be updated with any recurring questions. To manage queries, a generic mailbox has been created, and a complaints log will be maintained. A press release and a reactive media statement are also being finalised ahead of completion on the property. Following the initial notification, a Q&A session will be held approximately six weeks later, providing an opportunity for residents to meet the Registered Manager and Responsible Individual. Once the property renovations are complete, local residents and key professionals will be invited to visit the home.

Internal communications will include monthly updates in the staff newsletter, and as the refurbishment nears completion and the home opening approaches, an announcement will be made on Staffroom. Partners will continue to be kept informed through the Corporate Parenting Board.

Engagement with Young People

Young people with care experience are being involved in shaping the specification for all homes, ensuring the homes are furnished in ways they consider welcoming. The Participation Team is identifying care-experienced children and young people to be involved in the design and furnishing of the homes and the recruitment interview process. We have also engaged with a local children's homes provider to gather feedback from Plymouth children in care who are in placement with them. This will help us understand what works well and what could be improved in existing homes.

Ofsted Registration

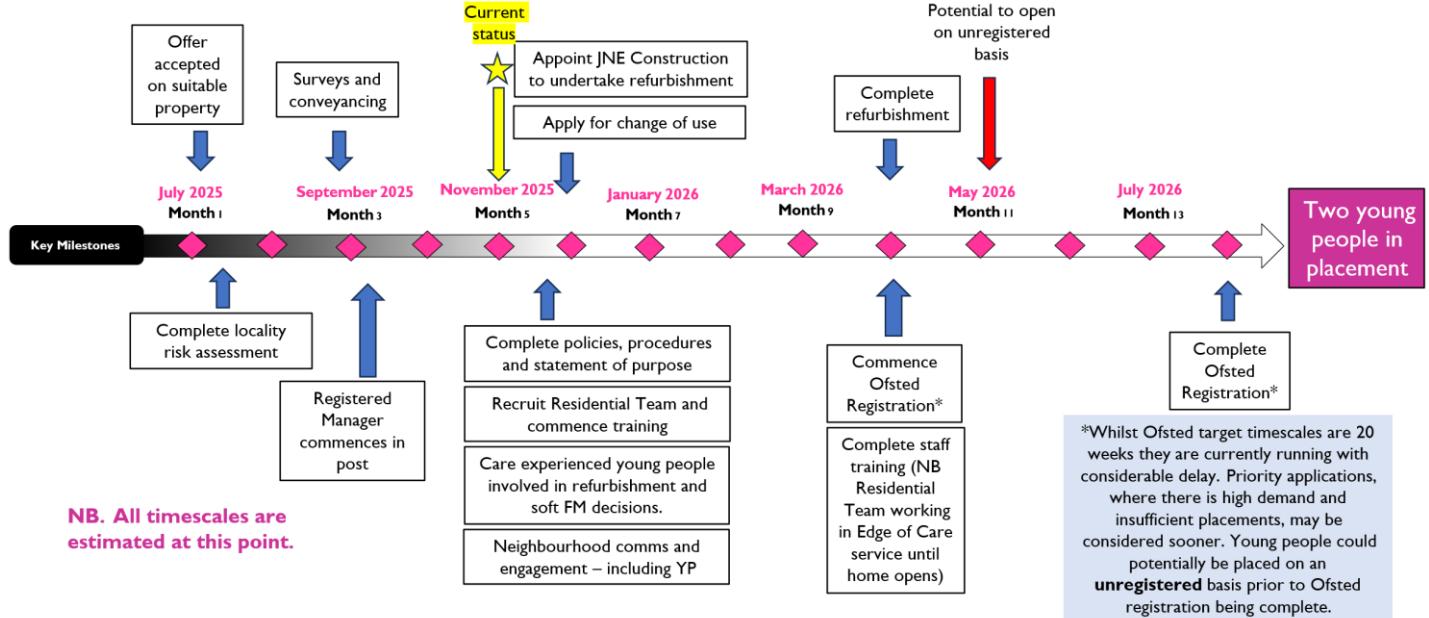
Preparations have begun for the Ofsted registration of Home A, in accordance with the requirement for all homes to operate legally. All policies and procedures required for registration are being finalised. This includes policies on safeguarding, behaviour management, anti-bullying, health promotion and medication, reflective supervision, staff contingency and missing children's procedures. The regional Ofsted Inspector will be contacted by the Responsible Individual for an initial conversation regarding our intention to register the home. Whilst Ofsted target timescales for registration are 20 weeks they are currently running with considerable delay. Priority applications, where there is high demand and insufficient placements, may be considered sooner.

Timelines

Project A – Home A Indicative Timeline



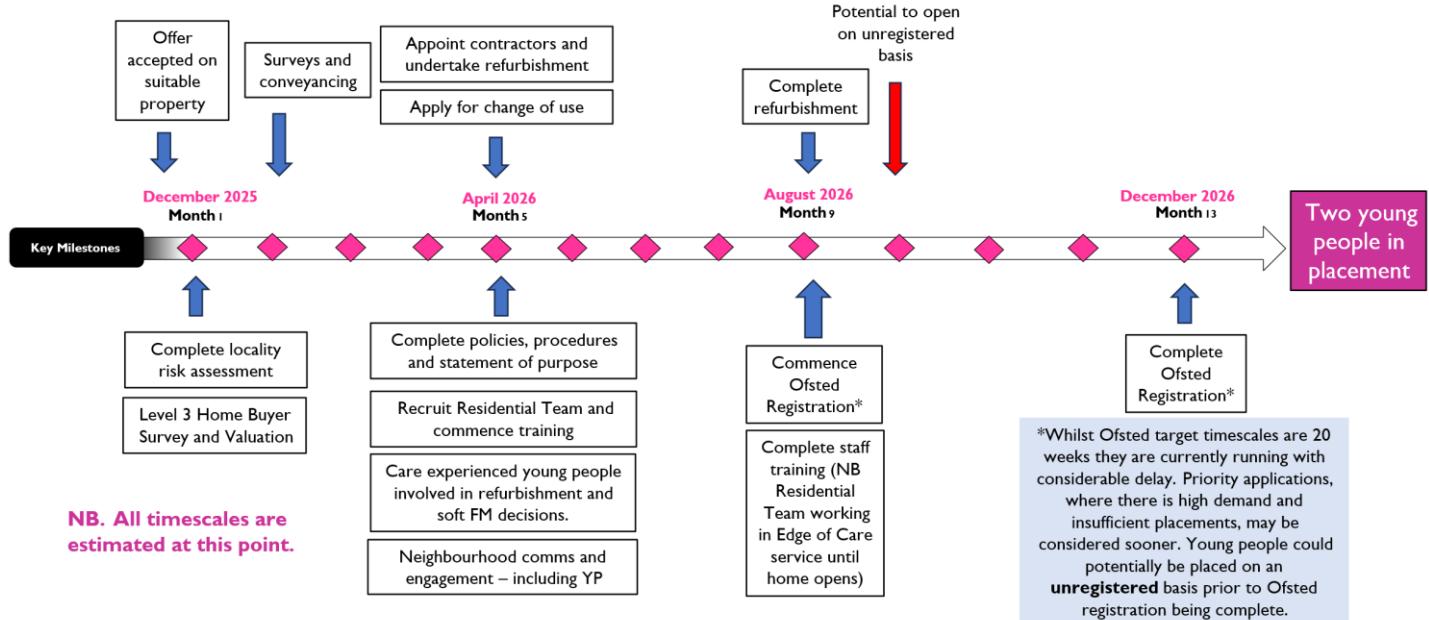
Property: (Plymstock) Anticipated completion date 05/12/2025



Project A – Home B Indicative Timeline



Property: (Mutley) Target opening date Q3 2026/27



3.2 Project B – Colwill Lodge Short Breaks

Project B focuses on the refurbishment of Colwill Lodge, an existing PCC provision for adults with learning disabilities, into a short breaks residential provision to meet the needs of children and young people with learning and physical disabilities, with the addition of a solo provision for children with more complex needs and challenging behaviours arising from Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Capital Programmes Board agreed initial funding to complete a feasibility study of the suitability of the building being redeveloped as a short breaks provision for children with physical health and disability needs when the building is vacated by the current service, anticipated to be the autumn of 2026. Following completion of the feasibility study and updated needs analysis, a Business Case will be developed for the building to be developed as short breaks provision for children and young people with physical and learning disabilities and challenging behaviours arising from ASD in order to provide better support for families and prevent children and young people from requiring full time care. The proposal will be that this home would include a very specialist solo apartment to allow the most complex of needs to be met safely as part of a short breaks package. The full Business Case is scheduled for submission to the Capital Programmes Board in January.

Property

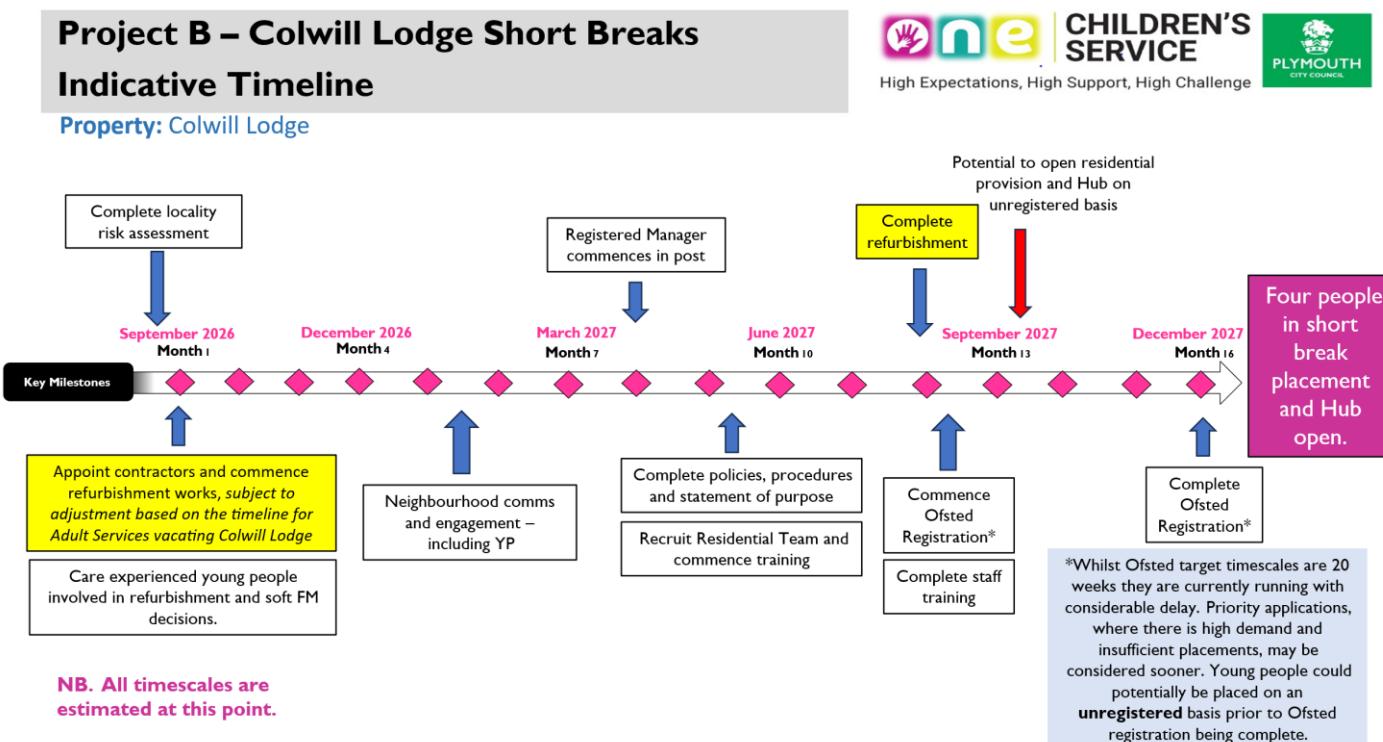
A feasibility study is being completed to confirm the capital investment required to develop Colwill Lodge, an existing PCC building currently used by Adult Services, into a short breaks provision for children and young people. To support this work, architects have been appointed and have developed a design for the proposed scheme and new specification requirements have been agreed. An assessment of design feasibility has been completed, and plans have recently been revised based on updated specifications.

The full business case for the Capital Programmes Board will evaluate the cost of the development and the ongoing revenue commitment against the current very high-cost spot purchase arrangements for these children when they come into care, which in some cases has exceeded £20,000 per week in provision that is not registered with Ofsted. Subject to the Business Case approval, the earliest on-site date to commence works needed is indicated as September 2026, with completion anticipated to be by September 2027. There are dependencies that may impact delivery, including delays with adults moving out of Colwill Lodge into their new build provision, and confirmation of the timeline with Adults Services is being undertaken currently to mitigate this risk.

Workforce considerations

A short breaks provision for children and young people with complex needs will require a highly skilled workforce, including staff with skills in meeting children's complex physical health needs as well as challenging behaviours. Timing of recruitment to management and care staff will be carefully considered to ensure sufficient time to deliver a well-planned programme of specialist training. The team will need to be multi-disciplinary allowing for access to therapists and specialist clinicians.

Timeline



3.3 Project C - DFE Funded Provision for Complex Emotional Behavioural Needs

Project C will be a specialist children's home designed for four children and young people with complex emotional and behavioural needs who are at risk of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) or Tier 4 mental health provision or who are at risk of unregulated arrangements as a result of their complex needs and challenging behaviours.

Business Case

The business case to Capital Programmes Board set out the need for specialist provision in Plymouth for a small number of children with highly complex emotional and behavioural needs who are not currently experiencing stable care locally or good outcomes and are currently in extremely high-cost placements, often at a distance from Plymouth, due to a lack of suitable provision. They may also be experiencing inappropriate inpatient admissions in acute, paediatric or tier 4 settings.

Workforce Considerations

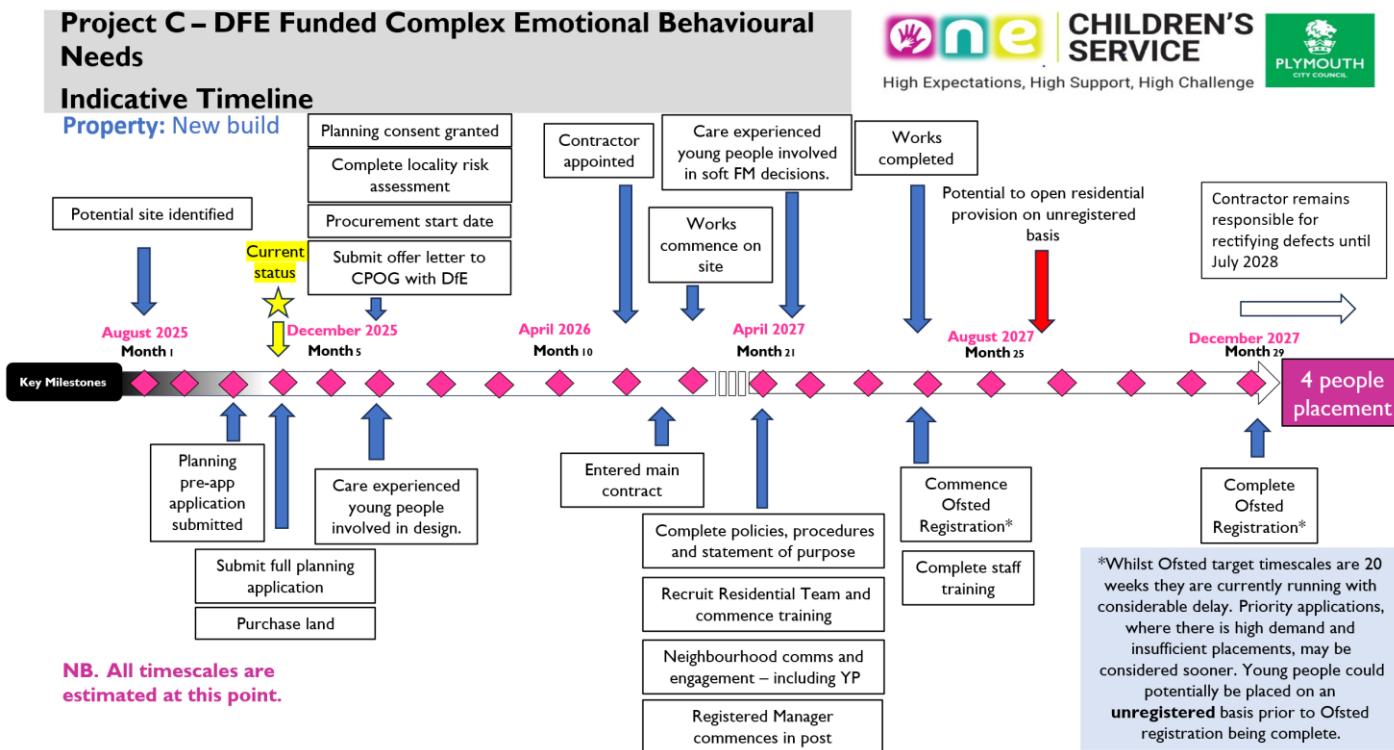
This children's home will be for children and young people demonstrating a high level of self-harm and risk-taking behaviours. It will be a joint development with Devon ICB to ensure children's complex needs are met holistically by suitably trained and experienced staff. The specialist provision is designed to enable children's needs to reduce so that they can return home or move to a foster family or more mainstream residential children's home.

Property

In January 2025 a successful bid was made to the Department for Education (DfE) for a 50% contribution for capital investment designed to improve national sufficiency in this area by funding the development of 200 additional placements nationally. The bid to the DfE was for a £3m new build development for four children on land to be purchased for this development, and following the 50% funding being agreed

by the DfE (£1.46m) a bid was made to the Capital Programmes Board for the remaining 50% capital funding required. This has been agreed and initial funding released for a pre-application process for a potential site. The Estates Team has been engaged to identify alternative viable land options should the pre-application outcome not result in a positive decision. The outcome of the pre-application process will inform the final decision on land acquisition and the final allocation of capital to progress the development.

Timeline



3.4 Project D - 'The Port'

Project D is designed to prevent some children and young people experiencing harm outside of the home from entering full time care by redesigning the existing Children's Services Edge of Care team and developing a registered children's home operating under a model of care informed by an evidence-based model, referred to nationally as 'no wrong door'. The home will provide short-stay residential and activity-based support for children and young people aged 13+ who are on the edge of care, with the primary aim of stabilising their situation, supporting them to remain in their families care and preventing entry into full time care. The service has proposed that this provision will be called 'The Port', reflecting its purpose as a safe place where children and young people come to pause, receive the help they need, and prepare to return to living at home wherever possible.

While the full service is being developed, there is a need for an interim solution to deliver the intensive model over the next three to four months, therefore an interim response approach has been developed by temporarily redeploying existing staff. This approach will enable improved outcomes for children and deliver earlier financial benefits by reducing care entries.

Business Case

The fully costed business case has been agreed at the City Help and Support Board, the project team has been established, and a detailed delivery plan is in place. Working groups have been established to progress the residential provision, redesign of the existing edge of care service, and the workforce development elements of the project.

Property

The model includes care being delivered from both activity-based settings from property rented for short periods as and when needed, and in a home established for this purpose. Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) has agreed to rent us a three-bedroom property for the initial phase, and discussions are ongoing to confirm their refurbishment plans for the identified property. Alongside this, short-term accommodation options have been identified, including holiday rentals within 30 minutes of Plymouth. In addition, a business case for utilising part of the provision at Colwill Lodge will be included in the wider business case for the Capital Programmes Board in January, as a longer-term solution.

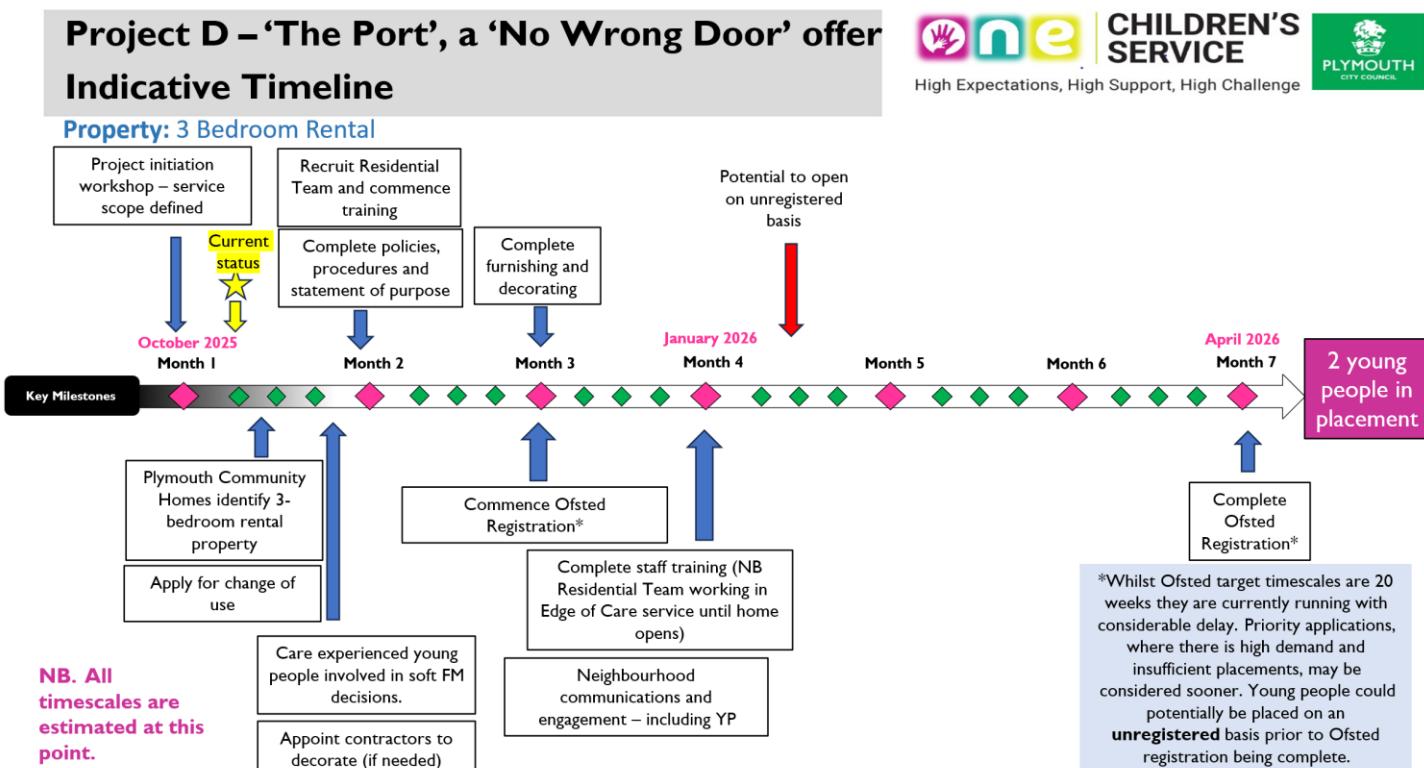
Staffing and Workforce Development

In order to create the full proposed service model, the existing Edge of Care team will be redesigned to create the new service alongside recruitment to the additional posts agreed. In the interim phase a range of approaches have been considered to rapidly increase capacity for this offer, including voluntary redeployment of existing Edge of Care staff, redeployment of workers from other teams, agency recruitment via Matrix Talent Pool, and subcontracting staff from external providers such as local voluntary and community sector providers. In addition, a voluntary on-call rota is being developed, and pay arrangements for additional duties and sleep-ins have been considered. Detailed operational policies and procedures are in place including effective governance of access to the service and to ensure that plans for children are well considered and manage risks effectively. A workforce development plan has been created to support any staff moving into the service.

Ofsted Registration

Whilst the provision will not be registered as a children's home in the initial phase, a comprehensive series of policies, procedures, service guidance, practice guidance and detailed admissions arrangements have been developed for the residential element of the service, and the residential offer will be overseen by our Responsible Individual and Registered Manager.

Timeline



4. Financial Impact of Planned Developments

The children's homes projects collectively address significant cost and volume pressures by reducing reliance on high-cost, spot purchased, often out-of-area and unregistered placements, improving local provision for children with complex needs, and introducing preventative models to reduce care entries. While each project requires upfront investment, the long-term financial benefits include reduced placement expenditure and improved outcomes for children and families. This is set out below for each development.

4.1 Project A – Children's Homes A and Home B

Project A will deliver two new homes in Plymouth to reduce reliance on out-of-area placements.

- **Children's Home A and B;**
 - Staff revenue costs: £690,000 full year.
 - Placement savings: £915,000 full year.
 - Other costs include capital borrowing and maintenance.
 - Net saving: £133,000 full year.

4.2 Project B – Colwill Lodge Short Breaks

Project B will see the development of a short breaks service for children with learning and physical disabilities, with the addition of a solo provision for complex needs. The fully costed business case will be developed for the Capital Programme Board in January.

4.3 Project C – DFE Funded Complex Emotional Behavioural Needs

Project C will provide a four-bed home for children with complex emotional and behavioural needs at risk of Tier 4 or DoLS. This is a newbuild provision on land acquired for the purpose.

- Full-year revenue cost of running the provision for 4 children; £2.2 million.
- Current annual placement cost for four eligible children: £3.66 million.
- Capital development cost: £2.9 million (50% funded by the DfE).
- Forecast reduction in PCC annual revenue commitment: £243,076 FYE from 2028/29 onwards.

4.4 Project D – 'The Port' (No Wrong Door Model)

Project D aims to prevent adolescents from entering care through including access to short-stay intervention as part of an intensive and multi-disciplinary support plan to the child and family.

- Full-year cost avoidance opportunity: £1.295 million, based on preventing an additional 24 young people from entering care.
- Investment required;
 - Year 1: £771,292.
 - Year 2: £775,689.
- Property cost: £15,000 per annum initially on a rental basis from Plymouth Community Homes.
- Training and development to ensure compliance with Ofsted regulations: £15,000.
- Running costs: £19,000.

5. Programme risks and outcomes

The risks identified currently for the programme are;

- Inability to recruit the staff team required given competition in the market. Particular challenges noted in recruiting sufficiently experienced Registered Managers. This has been mitigated by working actively with HR and marketing colleagues to design a creative and engaging recruitment campaign. The intention was to commence early recruitment of the staff team and for the appointed staff to work as part of the edge of care team ahead of the home opening.
- Difficulties identifying suitable properties in a timely way given the sensitivities of the provision and the high volume of Plymouth properties with restrictive covenants in place. This has been mitigated by working actively to identify and view a high volume of properties.
- Challenges from local residents in the neighbourhood of planned homes. This will be mitigated by a carefully planned programme of communication with local residents and key stakeholders.
- Significant delays in Ofsted registration process. An early conversation will take place with Ofsted but this is unlikely to reduce the risk of delays in this area. This may lead to consideration of placing children in the homes on an unregistered basis prior to Ofsted registration being achieved.
- Delays in refurbishment work due to contractor availability, supply chain, or structural issues. This is being managed by working closely with our Strategic Planning and Infrastructure team to schedule surveys and works needed to ensure an efficient approach following completion.
- Resistance to change from affected staff groups may impact on morale, engagement, and implementation of The Port. This is being managed carefully through a planned programme of communication to teams who are currently responding positively to the planned development.
- Failure to return children home from care/find alternative placements. This is a key risk and will be managed carefully by the Heads of Service responsible for placing children in the home and oversight of their care plans.

The planned outcomes of the children's homes programme are;

- Potential to prevent a child moving into an unregulated arrangement which has been a significant financial burden to Plymouth over number of years.
- Savings from social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers not having to visit children at a distance from Plymouth.
- Ability to support children with local education and health services.
- Improved potential to achieve step down to fostering and reunification to families when children are in Plymouth.
- Reducing the average length of time children spend in residential care and in care overall.
- Improved experiences for children with fewer moves and increased placement stability.
- Improved family time for children to maintain links and relationships with their families where possible.
- Better quality assurance, scrutiny and consistency of care.
- Early intervention for families who require a residential short break in a specialist local home – reducing the need and spend on high cost extended breaks or long-term residential care.
- Reduced number of children in specialist residential care away from Plymouth.

- Delayed requirement for residential care and therefore reduced overall time in placement.
- More disabled children remain in Plymouth reducing the cost to the Council of specialist school places and home to school transport.
- Children and young people better supported with preparation for independence.
- Establishment of a local service that enables health, education, and social care partners to collaboratively meet children's needs within the community.
- Children will experience improved emotional wellbeing and a reduction in their risk-taking behaviours, and the professional system will develop confidence that children are on a pathway to thrive and that their behaviours can be managed safely in a less specialist setting with a plan of outreach support in place.
- Reduced inappropriate attendance at Emergency Services for emotional distress, improved school attendance, a reduced legal framework reduced offending, and children and families reporting that they feel safer and happier.
- Earlier diversion of young people from exploitation.
- Improved school attendance.
- Reduction in offending and re-offending.
- Reduction in missing episodes and repeat episodes.
- Reduction in harmful sexual behaviour.

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting:	09 December 2025
Title of Report:	Achieving Excellence – Children’s Services three year strategic plan, review of progress in year 2 Quarter 1 & 2
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:	
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

To provide a progress report on the implementation of Achieving Excellence, our three-year strategic plan for Children’s Services 2024-27. To enable Members to scrutinise, challenge and raise questions about the progress made on implementing the Achieving Excellence Strategy.

Recommendations and Reasons

- I. To note the key strengths, challenges and next steps.

Alternative options considered and rejected

- I. None.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The Corporate Plan includes keeping children and young people safe as a priority.

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 priority work streams 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.

Legal Implications

(None.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

A Climate Impact Assessment has been completed for key areas of developments, e.g. children's homes developments and SEND transformation.

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 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) <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

Sign off:

Fin	N/A	Leg	N/A	Mon Off	N/A	HR	N/A	Asset s	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
-----	-----	-----	-----	---------	-----	----	-----	---------	-----	------------	-----

Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Lisa Davies (Interim Service Director for Children, Young People and Families)

Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes

Date agreed: 27/11/2025

Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Jemima Laing

Date approved: 28/11/2025

This page is intentionally left blank

Introduction

The Achieving Excellence Strategy was developed following the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in January 2024. This three year (2024-27) strategic plan addressed the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted and also set out strategic priorities developed through extensive engagement with staff from across Children's Services and children and young people. The plan sets out 10 strategic priorities to improve outcomes for children and young people and families. 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.

Key milestones were agreed for each priority for the first year and a full review of progress was completed at the end of the first year and presented to Scrutiny in July 2025. Young people were included in this review of progress. Significant achievements were noted across all of the year one milestones for the ten agreed priorities in the first year.

The key milestones for each of the ten priorities were also reset for the second year of the plan, to reflect progress and national and local developments during the year, including the requirements to deliver the Families First Programme reforms.

This report provides a further update on progress in the first half of 2025-26 (April to September).

I. Priorities for 2025-26

Key priorities for 2025-26 were agreed as;

- 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 Elective Home Education (EHE).
- Embedding best practice for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) across schools and settings so that fewer children need a statutory assessment to get the support they need
- Implement the Families First Partnership (FFP) 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 children in need, child protection plans, the Public Law Outline and in care at the right time.
- Fully implementing a 'Belonging Framework' across schools and settings to improve children's attendance and attainment.
- Ensure effective family decision making models ensuring Family Network Meetings are held with all families at an early point, and Family Group Conferences (FGC) 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 Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) are timelier 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.
- Strengthening our partnership working arrangements and governance, including for early help and the wider children's system.

2. Progress and challenges in Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 of 2025-26

Full details of progress to date against the key milestones for 2025/26 are set out in the table below.

Key areas to highlight include;

- Further extension of the Family Hubs programme across Plymouth, including into satellite sites, offering more families access to early help and targeted partnership interventions in the early years to provide a good start in life.
- Development of more inclusive approach through improved support and advice in the Graduated Approach to Inclusion and the Ordinarily Available Provision guidance which is supporting more children with SEND to remain in mainstream schools and settings.
- Launched our Belonging Framework to Headteachers to support a renewed approach to improving attendance.
- Creative approaches to engage priority groups of young people in education, employment and training.
- Launched a strengthened Families First Front Door with partners in an improved space using a conversation-based approach to support more families to access the right help at the right time reducing the number of families needing social work assessments.
- Strengthening Targeted Help to families introducing additional Family Help Lead Practitioners to support more children and families in need.
- Refocused the Families First Partnership with improved partnership governance, establishing a partnership Board reporting to the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership (PSCP), and partnership working groups to progress all key areas of the reforms. Engagement events are currently enabling us to codesign next steps in key areas with staff.
- The work of our Family Homes for Plymouth Children Programme, including to recruit more foster carers now supporting them with three Mockingbird constellations, opening our own children's homes and strengthened arrangements to prevent more children from entering care.
- Achieved 100% on EHCP six weekly timeliness and a clear capital strategy progressing to improve local sufficiency for children with SEND.
- Improved support to young people in transition and a new vision for a 0-25 service.
- A focused approach to quality assurance Practice Weeks across the service and clear evidence of improvements in the Front Door and Permanence teams.
- Further strengthening partnership arrangements for Families First Partnership delivery.

Key challenges include;

- The implementation of Family Help Lead Practitioners and the associated restructure has not enabled the expected seamless approach to our work with children, young people and families. The current structure and practice model are being reviewed to address this and changes required will be progressed as part of the implementation of the Families First Partnership programme to April 2026.
- This, alongside staff recruitment, retention and turnover challenges, has contributed to current considerable pressure in the Children's Social Work teams which has impacted on the team's capacity and practice. An immediate mitigation plan is in place to manage the risks, including staff from other teams undertaking assessments, managing case work and providing management support and over-sight.
- Difficulties recruiting and retaining experienced qualified social workers to support high quality relationship-based practice with families continue to be experienced. The approach and strategies to support social work recruitment have been strengthened and a refocused recruitment campaign is being launched in December and early January 2026 with updated materials and strengthened offer to attract more workers to work permanently for Plymouth. Whilst it has also been difficult to recruit agency social workers, we have successfully recruited both permanent and agency social workers to start in January 2026.
- Continued high levels of demand and financial pressures in a number of areas including residential placements for children in care and the costs of specialist provision for children with additional needs, including transport and short breaks.
- Capacity for system development, particularly to support the system changes needed for the Families First Partnership. This is being discussed with Corporate colleagues to identify a solution.

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.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- 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.
- Evidence-based universal early language development programme in place across the city and evidence of more children accessing appropriate intervention.

Progress in Q1 and Q2

- 11 Family Hubs now operate across Plymouth, each connected or co-located with wider services to improve access and bring support closer to communities. Hubs are delivering a wide range of universal and targeted sessions and interventions, acting as a primary access point for families seeking early help support.
- Family Hubs are also expanding the hub-and-spoke model through the development of satellite sites. One satellite has launched to date, with a further 12 planned for early next year. Satellite sites will make use of existing community buildings and organisations to reach new target groups and neighbourhoods. These sites will provide local access points for information, support and delivery of services based on identified community need further developing the early help model.
- Family Hubs now have a membership base of over 25,000, with approximately 3,500 members attending a Hub each month. Family Hubs have seen a 21% increase in referrals from 2024 to 2025.
- Outcomes Star continues to be used across services to track progress and evidence improved outcomes for families engaged in support.
- The ICB is leading on the development of a new citywide Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) strategy. Family Hubs continue to deliver a range of evidence-based early language interventions sessions and are exploring the commissioning of Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) support within Hubs in areas of highest need. This will strengthen early identification, improve

- 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.
- 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.
- access to timely intervention, and support families with strategies to promote language development at home.
- The Plymouth Graduated Approach To Inclusion (GATI) website has been fully updated with new additions – there have been over 40,000 visitors since the launch.
- The Belonging Framework launched at the Head Teacher Conference on 23rd October 2025. The six strands of the Place Based Working Group and the Education Workstream (pre-16) of Team Plymouth are being brought together under one Education Strategy which will launch in January 2026.
- EET status remains high at 92% for SEND young people with an EHCP.
- Currently developing a Supported Apprenticeship programme between On Course South West and PCC (live in September 2026).
- Connect to Work programme commenced, with priority support for young people who are Not in Education Employment and Training (NEET)/ at risk of NEET.

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.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- 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* Front Door so that more families access earlier family help.
- Ensure support enables families to make sustained change reducing the % of families experiencing re-referrals.

Progress in Q1 and Q2

- Work to set out the continuum of need is progressing with partners as part of the implementation of the *Families First* Partnership (FFP) reforms. This has included consideration of opportunities to collaborate with regional partners.
- The *Families First* Front Door moved into better accommodation and is developing a conversation-based approach and expanding its partnership offer to ensure more families access the right help at

- 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.

the right time. November Practice Week found timely responses and child centred practice. Focus on re-referrals has not yet led to sustained improvement and remains high (26% in October) with focused activity overseen by our monthly performance board to ensure support leads to sustainable change for families.

- The FFP implementation includes a clear focus on strengthening family led models of assessment and planning. The dedicated Kinship Support Team is strengthening support to connected carers.
- Investment in 20 additional Family Help Lead Practitioners (FHLPS) to provide more earlier support to families. Current recruitment to SW qualified FHLPS in the Targeted Help service to extend this further and review of service structures to ensure a seamless response to families.
- A business case has been agreed for investment in an enhanced model to prevent adolescents from entering care, learning from evidenced based approaches around the Country.
- Developments have led to improved attendance of children in need and for those persistently absent on a child protection plan. Fewer children have become EHE this year than in the same period in 2024/25. Permanent exclusion remains lower than that seen at the start of 2024/25. Numbers of children on a part-time timetable continue to reduce.
- The EHCP team issued 200% more plans 2025-2025 compared to the previous year.
- The GATI platform has been nationally recognised as strong practice. The targeted funding model is now live across 38 schools supporting 380 children without EHCPs to improve attendance and engagement.

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, Local Authority Designated Officer, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, Children's Disability Team.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- 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.

Progress Q1 and Q2

- New FFP partnership governance arrangements are in place reporting to the PSCP, and all key areas of the reforms are progressing supported by partnership working groups.
- Despite a strong focus in this area, there are challenges in the recruitment, retention and stability of an experienced social worker workforce which is inevitably impacting on the quality of practice. The challenges resulting from structure changes are being addressed and a new approach is being developed to attract and retain experienced qualified staff.
- Removing Initial Response Teams has reduced hand offs for families. Opportunities are being identified to improve this further through locality models of delivery.
- Rethink Formulation was formally accepted as the new practice model for adoption across all agencies in Plymouth in September 2025. A series of introductory guides and workshops have been produced and delivered to commence awareness raising across Children's Services and the wider partnership. In Q2 work will commence to embed Rethink Formulation in core procedures and processes across the FFP system, as transformation workstreams give effect to establishing new service areas and frameworks for practice.
- The FFP implementation includes a clear focus on strengthening family led models of assessment and planning. Twenty-six families benefited from family group conferences including 12 at the family help stage (in Q2).

- 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.
- Teams continue to focus on the use of the PSCP tools and the quality of assessments and interventions in priority areas with progress evaluated in quality assurance.
- A development plan is in place to transform the short breaks offer for disabled children with revised eligibility criteria being developed with input from families and implementation of a dedicated assessment tool to ensure families with disabled children benefit from the right help at the right time.
- Connect to Work signed up 14 Care Experienced young people in the first week of going live, and they are all being supported into positive next steps.
- Good progress has been made in relation to the findings of the care leavers Ofsted focused visit in July including improved support to young people leading to fewer young people experiencing bed and breakfast accommodation.
- The bespoke leadership and management development programme has moved into the next phase with a focused approach of coaching and development work for Team Managers.

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.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- 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.

Progress in Q1 and Q2

- A Business Case has been agreed for investment in an intensive model of support for families where adolescents are at risk of care. Set up is progressing. Unplanned admissions are monitored closely and where they do occur are usually required to safeguard children from significant harm in the home.
- Additional placements Brokerage Officer and Quality Assurance Officer posts have been created and improvements made to the

- 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.

quality assurance of placements, particularly unregulated arrangements. However, the placement market remains highly challenging, and placement costs continues to rise.

- All 14 and 15 year old children in care have been reviewed to establish any risks to their stable care and focused plans agreed where needed.
- At the end of September 63 children were in children's homes placements, a slight reduction on the previous month. 11 children have been supported to step out of residential this year, including 3 into our high support scheme, and 34 more children have plans for fostering but challenges identifying suitable fostering placements nationally persist.
- Continued progress is being made with in house fostering growth supported by active marketing and improved support to carers. At the end of September 163 children were in in house foster placements, compared to 151 at the start of the year.
- Three Mockingbirds models of support to foster carers are now in place with a fourth planned.
- A market development plan is in place to further improve access to local provision and targets were agreed for each placement type with growth monitored by the Family Homes Board.

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.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- 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.

Progress in Q1 and Q2

- EHCP 6-week timeliness was 100% for September. 97% of duty calls on average now answered compared to 50% in February.
- The targeted funding model is in action across 30 schools with 300 children accessing alternative pathways. Autumn monitoring is demonstrating improved engagement and increased attendance.

- 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.
- 58 specialist-maintained places have been created, including Longcause Phase 1 and the Mill Ford satellite at Riverside School, providing local solutions that avoid costly Independent Specialist Placements averaging £68,000 per child per year and high transport commitments.
- 10 assessment nursery places have been created at Woodlands Specialist School, supporting preschool children on the assessment pathway and enabling the most appropriate placement at primary transition, with a potential cost avoidance of £810,000 to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).
- Demand for Home to School Transport continues to increase as the EHCP work has progressed and despite the creation of local provision, transport to provision at distance to Plymouth continues to create a pressure.
- All service level agreements and new standard operating procedures now in place and utilised. All service level agreements are monitored termly.
- DSG management plan has been developed to demonstrate the trajectory of spend and mitigations in place. Review to take place in November. The data available has vastly improved the presentation of information.
- Activities offer advertised for disabled children to access universal services and new short breaks statement now live alongside comprehensive action plan to improve provision across universal, targeted and specialist services.
- Plans are underway to open 20 new Mainstream Resourced Provision places by September 2027, creating inclusive opportunities within local schools. Alongside this, a proposed major new build for Mill Ford School will deliver 50 additional special school places by September 2029, ensuring capacity for the most complex needs.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively seeking spaces across the mainstream estate to develop SEND satellite provisions working closely with school leaders. A review of the current contract for Alternative Provision is underway including work with our Sector Led Improvement Partner, Wiltshire, to develop a responsive and flexible approach in Plymouth which contributes to improved attendance. 				
Strategic Priority 6 – Preparation for Adulthood				
<p>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.</p>				
Key Milestones for 2025-26				
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="163 643 1073 690">Priorities for the year</th><th data-bbox="1073 643 2048 690">Progress in Q1 and Q2</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="163 690 1073 1392"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. Further develop approaches to support young people with an EHCP to access appropriate pathways to transition into adulthood. 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. </td><td data-bbox="1073 690 2048 1392"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved advice and guidance produced for parents and carers. Improved practices in post 16 Panel and 0-25 team leading to being on track to achieve EET status of 92% (from 72% in Jan 2023). Children's voices embedded well in the improvements to support to transition to adulthood. Transitions support planning now in place earlier for both health and social care services. Improved identification of young carers and improved support with caring responsibilities. Improved access to online information for young carers and their families. Young carers voices embedded in improvements. Board now refocused to prioritise further improvements to transitions from children's to adults' social care including development of a 0-25 approach. 108 young people have been supported onto a Supported Internship (against an ambitious target of 100 placements). Secured 2 national awards for best diversity programme LGC award and best co-production award NASEN. 100% employment rates for Discovery College Supported Internships for the second year. </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Priorities for the year	Progress in Q1 and Q2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. Further develop approaches to support young people with an EHCP to access appropriate pathways to transition into adulthood. 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved advice and guidance produced for parents and carers. Improved practices in post 16 Panel and 0-25 team leading to being on track to achieve EET status of 92% (from 72% in Jan 2023). Children's voices embedded well in the improvements to support to transition to adulthood. Transitions support planning now in place earlier for both health and social care services. Improved identification of young carers and improved support with caring responsibilities. Improved access to online information for young carers and their families. Young carers voices embedded in improvements. Board now refocused to prioritise further improvements to transitions from children's to adults' social care including development of a 0-25 approach. 108 young people have been supported onto a Supported Internship (against an ambitious target of 100 placements). Secured 2 national awards for best diversity programme LGC award and best co-production award NASEN. 100% employment rates for Discovery College Supported Internships for the second year.
Priorities for the year	Progress in Q1 and Q2			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. Further develop approaches to support young people with an EHCP to access appropriate pathways to transition into adulthood. 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved advice and guidance produced for parents and carers. Improved practices in post 16 Panel and 0-25 team leading to being on track to achieve EET status of 92% (from 72% in Jan 2023). Children's voices embedded well in the improvements to support to transition to adulthood. Transitions support planning now in place earlier for both health and social care services. Improved identification of young carers and improved support with caring responsibilities. Improved access to online information for young carers and their families. Young carers voices embedded in improvements. Board now refocused to prioritise further improvements to transitions from children's to adults' social care including development of a 0-25 approach. 108 young people have been supported onto a Supported Internship (against an ambitious target of 100 placements). Secured 2 national awards for best diversity programme LGC award and best co-production award NASEN. 100% employment rates for Discovery College Supported Internships for the second year. 			

- Develop and implement support for entry level, basic and functional skills (including maths, English, digital, employability and transferable skills).
- EET status remains high at 92% for SEND young people with an EHCP.
- Currently developing a Supported Apprenticeship programme between OCSW and PCC (live September 2026).

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.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- 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.

Progress in Q1 and Q2

- A new draft curriculum has been developed to support workforce development in key areas arising from FFP transformation. This has included support for staff in new and revised role profiles. Curriculum content will continue to be revised in response to ongoing transformation work in CYPFS and is routinely informed by findings from Quality Assurance activity by the QA service.
- Three new Workforce Development Educators are in post to support training delivery and coaching and mentoring activity to embed FFP transformation initiatives in Q2 and beyond.
- Practice guides and introductory workshops have been produced and delivered to support awareness raising of the new practice framework and model (Rethink Formulation) within Children's Services and the wider Safeguarding Children's Partnership. In Q2 work will commence to embed Rethink Formulation in core procedures and processes across the FFP system, as transformation workstreams give effect to establishing new service areas and frameworks for practice.
- New FFP working groups have been established and inaugural meetings have commenced. These will integrate activity to explore and implement key activities associated with workforce development strategy.

- Implement effective career progression pathways for all groups.
- Due to the requirement to establish the new FFP system and associated roles and functions, it has not yet been possible to move into supporting locality models, workforce induction, career progression pathways, or workforce recruitment and retention strategies.
- The Children's Services Workforce and Recruitment Lead is moving into the Learning Academy to support this activity and create improved alignment between recruitment and retention approaches.

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.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- 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.

Progress in Q1 and Q2

- The quality assurance programme now includes priority practice improvement areas across Children's Services, including SEND and attendance as well as children's social care.
- Quality assurance activity has continued to evaluate the impact of focused improvement approaches in priority areas including S47 enquiries and strategy meetings, assessments and plans for children and supervision.
- In addition, quality assurance has prioritised thematic areas including domestic abuse and children missing education.
- Practice Weeks have been completed in all service areas with practice strengths identified and areas where further improvements needed are highlighted and actions included in service improvement plans where needed.
- Practice Weeks routinely include the voices of children, young people and families.

- A 'data exceptions' approach has been introduced to focus improvement activity in priority areas including children who are NEET, child protection visits and visits to care leavers, single assessment timeliness and to understand and address the high rate of S47 child protection enquiries.
- Improvements include CP visits improving to 92% on time in Sept. and 80% of assessments completed on time.
- One page learning reports are routinely produced and shared with teams to support with landing learning from QA.
- Overall quality assurance evidences that practice requires further improvement to be good.

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.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

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

Progress Q1

- The partnership Early Help Board has been relaunched under the leadership of the Service Director, EPS. Priorities have included resetting a shared vision, mapping existing services, identifying gaps and opportunities for further improvement and innovation. Work Streams are being developed aligned to PSCP and the Families First Partnership reforms (FFP) governance arrangements.
- The Strategic Systems Leadership Board has been stood down and the PSCP lifted to Delegated Safeguarding Partners level to create clearer governance and reporting lines to Local Strategic Partnership level. This has enhanced partnership arrangements with clear oversight from chief executives from statutory partner organisations.
- As per PSCP 'A Bright Future' priorities, working groups in the priority areas of neglect, domestic abuse, child sexual abuse and safeguarding adolescents are now well established and working in a

prevention space as well as delivering on actions from multi-agency auditing and learning reviews to gain system improvement.

- ‘A Bright Future priorities’ for the PSCP for 2025/26 are progressing well and are all likely to be achieved on time.
- The Care Leavers Hub has opened, realising a key commitment developed with children and young people in 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.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- **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.

Progress in Q1 and Q2

- Good progress implementing improved systems and use of Capital in Education
- The service is fully engaged with Corporate developments in using data and intelligence to improve efficiencies and outcomes for families. AI is being safely trialled in Children's Service to support priority areas including EHCPs and placement finding.
- We continue to use data effectively to monitor performance and drive improvement, including improved engagement of frontline managers in performance meetings.
- A review of all current contracts for commissioned services is underway to ensure that all services are impacting on priority outcomes, including to support the objectives of the Families First Partnership programme.
- A detailed piece of work has been undertaken to ensure partnership funding is in place for all eligible children.
- Schemes of delegation are kept under review, and a review of systems and bureaucracy is included as part of the FFP programme.

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting:	09 December 2025
Title of Report:	Elective Home Education Deep Dive
Lead Member:	Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Director for Childrens Services)
Author:	Jo Tyrrell
Contact Email:	Jo.tyrrell@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	EHE Deep Diver Report AY2024/25
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

This report provides an analysis of new Elective Home Education (EHE) registrations in Plymouth during the 2024–25 academic year, examining pupil characteristics and key trends with a focus on safeguarding and inclusion. Its purpose is to inform strategic planning and ensure that all children, regardless of educational setting, receive a suitable education and appropriate support, in line with the council's statutory duties under the Education Act 1996 and the city-wide Place Based Plan, Education Strategy 2026–2029, and SEND Strategy 2023–2026.

Recommendations and Reasons

That the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel:

- I. Note the key challenges and current work programmes and endorse the priorities.

Alternative options considered and rejected

The report is for information only.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

It aligns with the Corporate Plan priorities of “A Caring Council” and “A Growing City” by supporting our work to ensure that every child receives a suitable education and appropriate support, regardless of setting. Additionally, it contributes to the Plymouth Plan’s strategic objectives with regards to educational attainment, reducing inequalities, and strengthening community resilience through collaborative approaches to education and welfare.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Not addressing the challenges set out in the report will continue to put pressure on schools and local authority Children’s Services.

Financial Risks

None.

Legal Implications

None.

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.

Elective Home Education trends have potential implications for child poverty, as families choosing home education may face increased financial pressures due to the costs of resources, technology, and parental time commitment. Where EHE is linked to unmet needs or exclusion from school, there is a risk of widening educational inequalities, which can perpetuate cycles of disadvantage. Strategic oversight is therefore essential to ensure that children educated at home receive equitable access to support services, safeguarding, and opportunities, reducing the risk of poverty-related barriers to learning and wellbeing.

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							

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)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

This page is intentionally left blank

EHE Deep Dive – summary report for children and young peopleDate: 26th November 2025

Author: Isabelle Kolinsky

**PLYMOUTH**
CITY COUNCIL

1.0. During the 2024–25 academic year, 527 children in Plymouth were newly registered for Elective Home Education (EHE). This means their parents decided to teach them at home instead of sending them to school. While home education is a legal choice, it often happens when families feel school isn't working for their child. Understanding why this happens and what it means for young people is important.

2.0. The data tells us a lot. Most children who became home educated were in secondary school, and the numbers peaked in Year 10 with 117 cases. Primary school withdrawals were lower, but Year 2 stood out as the most common point for younger children to leave school. Girls were slightly more likely to be home educated than boys, making up 54% of the new registrations. Many of these children had already been struggling with school attendance before being home educated: 123 were severely absent, meaning they attended less than half the time, and 292 were persistently absent, attending less than 90%. A lot of children also had additional needs, 48 had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and 176 needed SEN Support.

3.0. Why do families make this choice? For most, it's not about wanting to teach at home for fun, it's about problems that feel too big to solve in school. In fact, when reasons were recorded, mental health was the most common factor, mentioned in nearly 60% of cases. Other reasons included feeling unhappy with school, wanting a different type of education, and bullying. Although bullying was reported less often this year than before, it still matters because it shows how important feeling safe and supported in school is.

4.0. So, what is Plymouth doing about this? Plymouth City Council has expanded the Elective Home Education Team, which now includes an advisor and three officers. They make sure every new registration goes through safeguarding checks, including looking at social care involvement and SEND needs. Families are contacted quickly, within 10 days, to talk about their decision and check what support might help. Within three months, the team reviews the education being provided at home. If it's not suitable, they work with families to improve it, and if that doesn't work, they can issue a School Attendance Order. In 2024–25, 16 of these orders were issued and meant that the children or young people had to go back to school.

5.0. Even with all this work, there are still challenges. Home education can be expensive and isolating, especially for families on low incomes. Many children who become home educated have multiple vulnerabilities; SEND, low school attendance, and sometimes involvement with social care. Of the 527 children, 253 had been known to Children's Social Care in the last six years, and seven were placed on Child Protection Plans whilst they were home educated. These risks make strong oversight essential.

6.0. The good news is that things are starting to improve. Plymouth launched an Accelerated Action Plan in September 2025, and early signs show fewer new registrations this term compared to last year. Schools are working more closely with families to improve inclusion and attendance, and new tools like predictive data analytics will help identify children at risk earlier. The Plymouth Belonging Framework and extra funding for SEN support are helping schools meet children's

needs before problems escalate. National changes are coming too, a compulsory register for home-educated children will start in 2026, making it easier to keep children safe and supported.

7.0. Reducing EHE is a shared priority across Plymouth. By working together; schools, families, and local area partners, we can make sure every child gets the education and support they need, whether that's in school or at home.

Elective Home Education Deep Dive:
New registrations Academic Year 2024/25

Date: 24th November 2025

Author: Jo Tyrrell



PLYMOUTH
CITY COUNCIL

1.0. Introduction

1.1. This report provides a focused analysis of new Elective Home Education (EHE) registrations in Plymouth during the 2024–25 academic year. The analysis highlights pupil characteristics and key trends within Plymouth, with particular attention to safeguarding and inclusion.

1.2. It aims to contribute to strategic planning and ensure that all children in Plymouth, regardless of educational setting, receive a suitable education and appropriate support. It is within the context of the council's statutory duties under the Education Act 1996 and aligns with the city-wide Place Based Plan, Education Strategy 2026-2029 and SEND Strategy 2023–2026.

2.0. What is Home Education?

2.1. Elective home education (EHE) is a legal and increasingly popular option where parents choose to educate their children outside the formal school system. Families have the right to provide education at home if it is “suitable to the child’s age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs.” This education does not need to follow the national curriculum or be delivered in a formal way. Home education can be motivated by a variety of reasons, including philosophical beliefs and lifestyle choices.

2.2. The Autumn 2024 census identified 111,700 children as being electively home educated in England. 153,300 children were home educated at some point during the 2023–24 academic year. This represents a 21% increase compared to the previous year, reflecting the growing trend in parental choice for home education. 2024/25 census data will not be available until mid-December.

2.3 The Department for Education (DfE) provides statutory guidance to local authorities, most recently updated in April 2019 and revised in August 2024. This guidance outlines the responsibilities of local authorities to identify children being home educated, assess the suitability of the education provided, and intervene where necessary. It also emphasises safeguarding duties and the need for appropriate support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

3.0. What we are doing well

3.1. We remain confident in our arrangements for the oversight and monitoring of the suitability of home education. The recent expansion of the Elective Home Education Team has enabled implementation of recommendations in the Inclusion Review undertaken earlier this year. The EHE Team currently now consists of an EHE Advisor and three EHE Officers. The team have management oversight within the Inclusion, Attendance and Welfare Service.

3.2. An Inclusion Review was undertaken between January and March 2025 led by an Education Improvement Consultant seconded from Dorset Council. Dorset Council is the Sector Led Improvement Partner for Plymouth City Council. The inclusion review focused on areas of strength and development. The purpose was to ensure that the Inclusion Service is efficient and effective in enabling children and young people in the city to have a sense of ‘belonging’ to their school community. We have embedded recommendations from this review into a new EHE Team Safeguarding and Engagement Framework for Electively Home Educated Children. The key objectives within the framework are to:

- Promote positive relationships with EHE families.
- Ensure safeguarding remains central to all EHE interactions.
- Engage with schools, families and services to reduce the number of children becoming EHE when it is not in their best interest.
- Provide clear, accessible information about expectations and support.
- Identify and respond to concerns in a timely and proportionate way.

3.3. The Framework sets engagement strategies and clear and consistent safeguarding actions to:

- Assess risk based on known factors such as known vulnerabilities and agency involvement.
- Collaborate with health, social care, and education partners where appropriate.
- Have clear steps for escalating concerns, including thresholds for referrals to Children's Social Care.
- Maintain accurate records of all contact, concerns, and actions taken.
- Review engagement and safeguarding outcomes regularly.
- Use feedback from families and professionals to improve practice.
- Report patterns or concerns to strategic leads for inclusion and safeguarding.

3.4. In the current academic year so far, the EHE Team have supported 46 children to return to school. Case examples of the work undertaken by the team are captured to ensure evaluation and continuous improvement of practice.

3.5. Following the Rapid Review of Child C, a series of technical papers, local authority protocols and multi-agency working agreements were formally approved by the multi-agency Child Safeguarding Practice Review subgroup of the Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Partnership (PSCP) and rolled out across all agencies. In addition, The resources published by Plymouth City Council set out the process for all schools to notify the Local Authority (LA) when a parent decides to electively home educate. This includes:

- Schools maintained by the LA
- Academies
- Free schools
- Independent schools

3.6. We have requested that all Plymouth schools promptly notify us when a parent is considering elective home education (EHE) for their child. Schools are asked to seek parental consent to keep the child on roll for a period of 10 school days. This allows the EHE Team time to engage with the family, discuss their decision, and ensure they fully understand the significant responsibilities of home education. It also provides a valuable opportunity to explore the family's aspirations for their child's education and to identify any school-related concerns that may be addressed collaboratively. EHE Officers will offer to facilitate a meeting with the school to discuss any barriers to attendance and explore potential support options. If a parent is resolute in their decision not to return their child to the current school, the EHE Officer will offer guidance and support in considering alternative school placements. Parents do not have to engage with this process.

3.7. During the 10-day period, the EHE Officers conduct an individual needs assessment as a priority. In addition to the information provided by the school, EHE team members must complete a thorough triage of information so that we can understand the child or young person's lived experience in relation to their home life and education to date. This involves a review of information held on MRI (Education Database) to include the wider family network, attendance, suspension and SEND information. Checks are also made with Children's Social Care. If the child has a Social Worker, they are notified immediately and joint action is taken to ensure that any decision made regarding a child's education is in their best interests. This will include the Social Worker's view regarding the suitability of the home environment and parental capacity to deliver a full time and efficient education.

3.8. When a parent intends to home educate a child with an EHCP, the 0–25 SEND Team are informed. The school is expected to promptly coordinate an early review of the EHCP before the child is removed from roll. If a child has an EHCP and is registered at a special school, the child must not be removed from the roll of the school without the permission of the local authority.

3.9. Once a child is registered as home educated the home educators are contacted by the EHE Team within 3 months to provide information and evidence of their provision. This is then moderated by an EHE Officer or EHE Advisor who will provide the family with a comprehensive report with recommendations.

3.10. If a child's home education provision is deemed suitable, assurance checks are carried out annually. Where the provision is considered unsuitable, an EHE Officer or Advisor will, in the first instance, offer to meet with the parent again to provide further information, advice, and guidance to help the family improve their provision. If concerns about suitability persist, the child will be recorded as a Child Missing Education (CME). The case will be RAG-rated and added to a dedicated database, which also includes any home educated child open to Children's Social Care. These cases are closely reviewed on a weekly basis to ensure timely support and, where necessary, enforcement action via a School Attendance Order.

3.11. In cases of CME, the case is referred to an Access and Attendance Officer who will try to engage the family to support the child back to school. However, where appropriate, the case will remain open to the EHE Officer to provide this support. Where these attempts are unsuccessful and the child continues to be a CME, appropriate statutory enforcement action is taken to enforce school attendance. In 2024/25 16 School Attendance Orders were issued.

3.12. When parents fail to comply with a School Attendance Order, a legal enforcement process is initiated. However, the Magistrates' Court has limited powers and cannot compel registration or attendance at school. Consequently, parents who breach a School Attendance Order are typically convicted and fined. In these cases, the child remains registered as missing from education, and the Inclusion, Attendance and Welfare team continues to work with the family until the child is enrolled in a school.

4.0. New EHE Registrations in Plymouth - Term One academic year 2025/26

4.1. In the first term of the 2025/26 academic year, there were 768 children recorded as electively home educated in Plymouth. This represents an increase of 13.4% compared with the same point in 2024 (677).

4.2. This figure includes 150 children who were newly deregistered from school to be home educated during Term One of academic year 2025/26. This represents a reduction of 9% (15 fewer children) in registrations compared to the same period last year which can be seen as a positive step forward. Of these new registrations, 27% (40 children) were primary-aged, which is consistent with previous trends.

4.3. Elective Home Education (EHE) continues to be more prevalent in the secondary phase, particularly at Key Stage 4. However, there are indications that the rate of secondary school aged being withdrawn to home education is falling. In Term One of academic year 2025/26, new registrations fell by 12.6% (16 fewer children) compared with last year's total of 126. This suggests early signs of stabilisation and reduction.

4.4. Of the 150 newly registered EHE children, 14 returned to school during the same period, nine from primary and five from secondary. However, we know that we have more work to do to

support children and families to remain in school. Currently 2.0% of all statutory schools aged children in Plymouth are home educated making us outliers both nationally and regionally.

4.5. Of the 150 children newly registered this term, 38% (48 children) require SEN Support and 4% (6 children) have an EHCP. The highest rates of children with SEND moving into EHE were in KS2 (year 6) and KS4 (years 10 and 11). We know that limited professional oversight can heighten risk for those who are already vulnerable, which is why preventing vulnerable children from being withdrawn into EHE remains a shared priority for schools, Children's Services, and our wider partnership. Of the 150 children, 43% (65) are either currently or previously known to a social worker

5.0. Focussed Analysis: New EHE Registrations 2024-2025

5.1. The data used within this report relates to children and young people who were newly registered as EHE at any point during the Academic Year 2024 – 2025. The specific date range applied is between 1st September 2024 and 31st August 2024. The data has been sourced from Eclipse and MRI (previously known as CAPITA). The data includes children who went back to school during the same period.

6.0. Pupil Characteristics: Gender

6.1. In the academic year 2024–2025, a total of 527 children were newly registered for elective home education. Of this cohort, 45.73% (241) were male and 54.26% (286) were female. While both groups commonly exhibited low school attendance prior to deregistration, the prevalence of severe absence (defined as attendance below 50%) was notably higher among females, with 81 cases (65.85%), compared to 42 males (31.14%). This disparity may indicate differing underlying factors influencing the decision to home educate. The citywide attendance survey was completed by c1500 children and 2200 parents in the Summer Term 2024/25, Female students in Years 9-11 report lower sense of belonging than other year groups. In addition, female students, especially those in Years 9–11, are more likely to experience health and mental health as barriers to their attendance compared to males, and parents/carers of female students report this for their daughters. This suggests that female students may need more targeted physical and mental health support in school or within their communities to improve and sustain school attendance.

6.2. In relation to previous suspensions, 22.96% of the cohort had received one or more suspensions from school. The data set for the period shows only marginal gender differences, with males slightly more represented by 0.9%. The citywide attendance survey highlighted that the way school behaviour policies are experienced has implications for attendance. Both parents /carers and students raised concerns about the implementation of some school behaviour policies, with some strong views expressed about how these were applied in practice. Perceptions of overtly rigid approaches were seen to negatively affect students' experiences of school, their relationships with staff, and, in turn, their attendance. These concerns often related to strict uniform rules, toilet restrictions during class time, punishments or detentions for what was perceived as minor infractions, and, overall, to rules or staff behaviours perceived as inconsistent with the norms and expectations of real-life settings. Such approaches were seen to contribute to disengagement, fear-based environments, and similarly to term-time holidays and attendance-related expectations and communications, to a sense of moral misalignment between schools, students, and parents/carers.

6.3. Analysis of the cohort reveals a slight gender disparity in the identification of SEND. A total of 27 male students have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), representing a 1.4% higher proportion than the 21 female students with EHCPs. Conversely, 90 female students required SEN Support in school, which is 0.76% higher than the 86 male students. These figures suggest nuanced gender trends in the allocation of statutory and non-statutory SEND support. The citywide

attendance survey identified notable proportions of students with barriers to learning, especially those with SEND, are likely to have a relatively lower sense of belonging compared to those without SEND or other additional needs/vulnerabilities, or responsibilities.

6.4. Of the 527 children newly registered as home educated:

- 79 (14.99%) had more than one episode of home education
- <5 (0.75%) had been permanently excluded from school
- 121 (22.96%) have had one or more suspension
- 48 (9.1%) have an EHCP
- 176 (33.39%) require SEN Support.
- 123 (23.33%) were severely absent (<50% attendance) from school in their last academic year of school registration.
- 300 (56.92%) were persistently absent (<90% attendance) from school in their last academic year of school registration.

7.0. **Ethnicity**

7.1. We have developed our reporting process to capture the ethnicity of all home educated children at the point that they are registered as home educated and achieved 86.33% (455) identification for the newly registered EHE children in the academic year 2024/25.

7.2. 80.26% (423) of the newly registered home educated children identify as white British or white English. There are 70 children for whom we do not know their ethnicity. The data set is taken from the child's previous school information. If the child has never attended a maintained school in Plymouth, the data is unlikely to have been reported to Plymouth City Council. Of the 72 children for whom have no recorded information about ethnicity, 22 have not been registered at a maintained school in Plymouth and two refused to provide details.

8.0. **EHE by phase and year group**

8.1. Within the dataset for academic year 2024/25, 109 children were newly registered within the primary phase of education. This represents 20.68% of all new registrations in 2024/25. The data includes three children who were registered as EHE for less than two weeks. Although numbers are lower in the primary phase, they can represent early disengagement from formal schooling. Families choosing EHE at this stage may face challenges reintegrating later, and some children risk missing structured support during formative years.

8.2. The data shows that new EHE registrations from primary schools in academic year 2024/25 were not evenly distributed across year groups. There is a clear upward trend from Reception (nine children) to year 2 children (21 children), which is the peak. This could indicate that parents are more likely to choose home education after the first two years in school and at towards the end of Key Stage 1, possibly due to early experiences or challenges becoming more apparent by year 2. In Key Stage 2, the numbers fluctuate rather than steadily decline. They drop to 18 in year 3 and then fall further to 12 in year 4, suggesting that some families may reconsider EHE or that fewer new families opt for it at this stage. However, the rise to 17 in year 5 and a slight decrease to 15 in year 6 might reflect renewed concerns as children approach transition to secondary school, prompting parents to take them out of mainstream education before that change.

8.3. In terms of gender, there was only a small difference of 2.75% between females (53) and males (54%) in the primary phase.

8.4. Overall, the average number of primary aged children being withdrawn from school to EHE is approximately 15.6, suggesting a moderate level of consistency across most year groups, though

year 2 stands out as a significant outlier. The lowest figure, reception year with nine children, may reflect early years where there is a more flexible approach to curriculum delivery through the Early Years Foundation Stage.

8.5. Strengthening parental engagement during early years to build trust in school systems will be essential to building parental confidence in school. This can be achieved by:

- Providing targeted support for families expressing dissatisfaction with primary education.
- Offering flexible learning options within schools to accommodate diverse needs.
- Implementing early warning systems to identify families at risk of withdrawal.
- Enhancing communication and transition planning between early years and primary stages.

8.6. Within the dataset, 418 children were newly registered within the secondary phase of education. The number of children being withdrawn from school increases steadily throughout secondary education, with a significant spike during the Year 6 to Year 7 transition. In year 7, there were 54 new EHE registrations, representing a 260% increase compared to year 6. This upward trend continues through year 8 (85) and year 9 (99), peaking in year 10 with 117 registrations, the highest count recorded. In Year 11 there were fewer new registrations (63), the overall pattern highlights critical pressure points at transition stages and mid-secondary years, suggesting the need for targeted interventions to support student engagement and retention.

8.7. In terms of gender in the secondary phase, there was a 11.48% difference of between females (233) and males (185). Females were consistently higher in all year groups, with the exception of year 11.

9.0. Plymouth City College

9.1. The Breakwater Centre at Plymouth City College is funded by the Education Skills Funding Agency to provide a 14-16 curriculum for EHE children. The provision provides a range of functional skills and vocational qualifications. The Centre has capacity for 200 students and a number of places available for EHE children varies depending on the courses and hours provided. There are currently 180 Key Stage 4 EHE children accessing the provision. The City College provision consistently operates a waiting list of EHE children wanting to join.

9.2. Of the 527 pupils who were newly registered for Elective Home Education in the academic year 2024- 2025, 173 KS4 children enrolled in the Breakwater Centre, accounting for 96.11% of all newly registered KS4 pupils (180). Within this cohort, 56.06% (97) were females compared to 43.93% (76) males. A more flexible approach to the curriculum delivery in Plymouth mainstream schools may prevent children being withdrawn to home education at KS4. The College has an offer of 50 places which schools can purchase for their students; however, many schools feel that they do not have the funding available to commission long term vocational packages for students. Currently, 21 places have been purchased by schools.

9.3. Of the 173 students who enrolled at the Breakwater Centre, withdrawal to home education reasons were obtained for 86 cases. Mental health was the most frequently cited reason, accounting for 51 cases (59.30% of those with known reasons). Among female pupils, 37 (72.54%) reported mental health as the primary reason for choosing home education. This aligns with the findings of the citywide attendance survey. The next most prevalent reason cited was dissatisfaction with the school accounting for a further 23 (26.74%) of the known reasons.

9.4. Analysis of Breakwater enrolment data shows that the pupils came from 18 Plymouth Secondary Schools. Three secondary schools stood out as having disproportionately high numbers of pupils enrolling at the Breakwater Centre following withdrawal to EHE. Together, these schools

represent 34.1% (59 pupils) of Breakwater enrolments for 2024–2025, indicating a significant concentration among a small group of schools. 21 children within the data came to Plymouth from other local authorities, 2 children had been EHE since primary school.

9.5. Provision at the Breakwater Centre ranges from 3 to 18 hours per week. Within the cohort, 28.73% of students received 10 or more hours of centre-based provision. For students attending less than 16 hours per week, additional work is set for completion at home. This work is monitored and reviewed by Breakwater staff. Parents are responsible for ensuring the work completed so that the overall provision is considered full-time and meets statutory requirements.

9.6. The Home Education Team meets with the Breakwater Centre every month to review attendance and engagement of the home-educated children accessing the provision. This regular monitoring ensures strong oversight and enables timely support for families where there are concerns about children receiving a suitable, full-time education. In most cases, the City College provision successfully meets the needs of attending children. Where engagement is low, the EHE team follows established procedures to assess whether the child is receiving an appropriate and efficient education and to determine any necessary actions to address concerns.

10.0. Children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

10.1. Children with SEND can face significant barriers to learning and accessing timely support. When education takes place at home, these challenges can sometimes become more complex, as structured interventions, essential for many SEND learners, are harder to replicate consistently outside a school setting. Many home educators create excellent, enriching experiences for their children, offering tailored learning, flexibility, and opportunities to explore interests in ways that mainstream settings may not always allow. These positive experiences can foster confidence and a love of learning. SEND children can often thrive on routine, specialist input, and structured social interaction. For some home educated children, home education may limit access to peer engagement, appropriate support, and suitable learning opportunities which can affect their progress, emotional well-being and social development.

10.2. The Plymouth GATI (Graduated Approach to Inclusion) resource has been co-produced with families and partners across education, health and social care. It includes information and resources to support schools in their work with a specific chapter on collaborating with families. The resource clearly identifies what schools must do support all children and young people. The universal provision described in the GATI is the offer created by schools to ensure they are inclusive by design and consistently work to reduce as many barriers as possible. This allows schools and professionals to then identify where a child is making progress with a consistent universal offer and where extra targeted provision will need be given in a mainstream environment. Implementation and impact of the GATI will be evaluated through applications for targeted funding, feedback from the educational psychology services and specialist teachers via termly consultations, parent surveys and the reduction of numbers of children being withdrawn to home education. The Plymouth GATI can be accessed by parents and has a variety of resources which they may be able to use at home and in their own context.

10.3. Of the 527 newly registered EHE children in the academic year 2024/2025, 31(5.88%) had an EHCP either at the time of registering or within the academic year.

10.4. Of EHCP cohort fewer than five were primary age and deregistered from a Plymouth special school, fewer than five were from an early year's setting, nine were from Plymouth mainstream primary schools and 18 were from Plymouth secondary schools. Fewer than five children had not previously been registered at a school. There are a further 17 children within the dataset who went on to have an EHCP in the academic year 2025/26.

10.5. The Elective Home Education (EHE) Team meets regularly with the 0–25 SEND Team to jointly plan and review provision for children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). This partnership ensures consistent oversight and continuity of casework. Following the expansion of the EHE Team, all members have completed annual review training delivered by the SEND Senior Management Team. Going forward, the EHE Team will take responsibility for annual reviews for any home-educated young person with an EHCP.

10.6. Process Overview:

- The EHE Team will contact families within four weeks of the annual review due date.
- Families will receive the necessary paperwork to complete prior to the review.
- Reviews will be scheduled at a date, time, and location convenient for the family.
- Wherever possible, the EHCP review will coincide with the EHE suitability review to reduce duplication.
- Once the review is completed, the paperwork will be forwarded to the allocated Officer within the SEND Team. The officer will determine whether the EHCP should be amended, maintained, or ceased.

10.7. This process is designed to ensure that reviews for home-educated children are completed promptly and reflect the child's learning environment accurately.

11.0. SEN Support

11.1. A significant proportion of the newly registered EHE cohort in academic year 2024/25, 176 children (33.39%) were identified as requiring SEN Support in school. Of these, 153 children (86.93%) were deregistered from Plymouth secondary schools. We were able to capture reasons for choosing to EHE for 62.42% (329) of the new registrations in 2024/25. For those with known SEN within this data, the main reasons driving the decision to EHE were:

- Poor Mental Health - 50
- Dissatisfaction with the school – 17
- Want of more suitable provision – 13
- Bullying was cited 11 times

11.2. Since the summer term 2025, Targeted Funding has been made available to schools to offer enhanced provision to children requiring SEN Support. Early evaluations have identified the impact of this on a range of inclusion metrics including attendance, suspensions and falling/slowing rates of new registrations to EHE; indicating increased parental confidence and children's needs being met in school.

12.0. EHE from Schools and Multi-Academy Trusts

12.1. 59 Plymouth schools are represented in the dataset for newly registered pupils in 2024 -25. There are an additional 21 'other' registrations which include children who moved into Plymouth during the academic year, for example.

12.2. Five secondary schools had more than 30 children deregister from school to be home educated in academic year 2024/25 and account for 33.20% (175) of all new home education registrations. Four of these schools were also the highest for overall EHE in the 2023-24 academic year. The five schools are situated in areas of Plymouth with the highest rates of deprivation. Four of the five schools identified belong to two Multi-Academy Trusts

13.0. The link between school attendance and EHE

13.1. Poor levels of school attendance and high rates of absence correlate strongly with becoming electively home educated. Of the 527 children for whom we have prior school attendance data, 123 were severely absent (less than 50% attendance) from school and 292 were persistently absent (50 – 90% attendance).

13.2. Within the Primary phase (yrs 0-6), the data shows that, overall, over half (54.12%) of primary age children had attendance rates below 90%. 9.17% (10) of the cohort were severely absent from school and 44.95% (49) were persistently absent.

13.3. Within the Secondary phase, the data shows a greater correlation with EHE with 85.16% of children having attendance rates below 90%; 27.03% (113) children were severely absent and 58.13% (243) were persistently absent.

13.4. The data for the entire cohort shows a strong correlation between severe absence, SEND, suspensions and children's social care involvement. For the severely absent cohort these the risk factors to becoming EHE are evident. This reflects the findings of the citywide attendance survey where the research indicates that notable proportions of students with SEND, are likely to have a relatively lower sense of belonging compared to those without SEND and this impacts on school attendance. Of 123 children who were severely absent from school prior to being home educated:

- 13 have an EHCP
- 41 required SEN Support
- Fewer than five had two episodes of home education the same academic year
- 19 children have had more than one episode of home education to date.
- Fewer than five have had three episodes of home education to date.
- 69 children have been known to Children's Social Care in the last six years.
- 17 children were supported by a Child in Need (CiN) Plan.
- Seven children had a Child Protection Plan.
- 21 children were in receipt of free school meals.
- Fewer than five were recorded as being part of a service family.
- 24 children had received one or more suspension.

13.5. The data shows a strong correlation between persistent absence, number of episodes of home education, previous social care involvement and SEND. For the persistently absent cohort these are risk factors to becoming EHE. Of the 292 children who were persistently absent from school prior being home educated:

- 23 have an EHCP
- 119 required SEN Support
- Eight children had two episodes of home education in the same year.
- 31 children have had two episodes of home education to date.
- Fewer than five have had three episodes of home education to date.
- Fewer than five had four previous episodes of home education to date.
- 150 children have been known to Children's Social Care in the last six years.
- 17 children are currently on a Child in Need Plan.
- Fewer than five children had a Child Protection Plan that was closed prior to becoming EHE.
- Six are recorded as being part of a service family.
- 90 children had received one or more suspension.

- Fewer than five children had been permanently excluded.

13.6. A quality assurance process has been established to gain a deeper understanding of recurring themes within Elective Home Education (EHE) cases. The aim is to share learning across teams and develop preventative strategies that support early identification of risk factors, reducing the likelihood of EHE. This process places particular emphasis on children who have previously had a social worker and those with prior episodes of home education. The quality assurance activity is delivered collaboratively by the EHE Team and the Attendance Support Team through themed dip sampling activities. This themed approach enables a targeted review of cases and the identification of patterns or emerging risks. Insights from these reviews are used to inform practice, strengthen early intervention, and improve outcomes for children and families

13.7. The Extended Role Officer of the Virtual School is conducting regular analysis of those children known to Children's Social Care who have additional barriers to learning. The data includes attendance, part-time timetables, suspensions and SEND information. This is shared with Senior Officers and the Attendance Support Team. Data from this report is used by Access and Attendance Officers to have prompt conversations with schools to agree a joint plans for vulnerable children at risk of becoming EHE or permanently excluded.

14.0. Reasons for EHE

14.1. From September 2023, we have improved our recording of reasons having aligned our initial EHE Parent Questionnaire to include the list of reasons prescribed in DfE Return. In every case, parents are contacted, and a home visit is offered to discuss their decision to EHE. The purpose of the visit is to resolve any issues with school, offer advice, guidance and information. During the home visit, the EHE Officer will try always offer the child an opportunity to provide their voice in relation to their school experience and how they feel about being EHE.

14.2. Parents are not legally required to respond to the initial enquiries so it is currently not possible to obtain reasons in every case. However, of the 527 new EHE registrations in academic year 2024/25, we were able to establish the reason in 62.42% (329) of cases.

14.3. Child mental health stands out as a driver for parents electing to home educate. Livewell has developed a Waiting Well resource for families to use for children who require mental health support. This launched in October 2025. Other reasons for parents withdrawing to home educate indicate a lack of parental confidence in how their child is being supported in school.

14.4. Where bullying is identified as a reason for home education, the school is contacted by their allocated Access and Attendance Officer to discuss the matter and to discuss ways to support the child and prevent a decision to home educate. In addition, every secondary school has a link Youth Worker who can offer support and undertake direct work with the young person or the alleged perpetrator to prevent EHE. In academic year 2023/24 bullying was cited as a reason for home education 28 times. In academic year 2024/25 it was cited 11 times; this means that there has been a 61% reduction.

14.5. Many parents that the EHE Team speak to feel that they have no other choice but to home educate and have reached the end of what they feel they can tolerate for their child in school. We are working with schools to reduce the rates of children being withdrawn to electively home educate via Termly Targeted Support Meetings. Looking ahead, we are working to support schools with access to automated predictive data analytics, drawing on information from across our One Children's Service. A recent workshop with schools from across all phases of education helped shape the requirements for this project. Using data to predict which children are most likely to be withdrawn from school to be home educated will enable schools to act proactively, offering early

help and targeted support to address underlying issues before they escalate. Through our City Help and Support agenda, we are committed to piloting this approach and rolling it out across all schools in the summer term of 2026.

14.6. In line with the local authority's statutory duties to promote high standards of education, safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and ensure inclusive access to learning; a new Information Sharing Agreement facilitates collaboration between the Plymouth Association of Primary Heads, Special Heads Association Plymouth, Plymouth Leadership Trust (secondary Heads) and MAT CEOs and the local authority through shared, school-level inclusion data. This agreement enables a placed based approach through the joint review of patterns in attendance, suspensions, exclusions, elective home education, in-year mobility, children missing out on education, and Children Missing Education (CME), allowing the partnership to identify strengths, address shared challenges, and take coordinated action. These data insights support more effective commissioning, better targeted early help, and place-based planning that reflects the lived experiences of children, families, and school communities. The strategic use of this data, reviewed regularly across the partnership, is one of the most powerful levers for early help and prevention, enabling earlier and more precise intervention, reducing escalation into statutory services and improving outcomes for vulnerable learners. Aligning this work with SEND sufficiency, alternative provision, and school improvement ensures fairness, strengthens equity, and supports the ambition that every child in Plymouth thrives in education.

15.0. Duration and episodes of EHE

15.1. Of the 527 children newly registered in 2024/25, 83 returned to school from home education in the same period. Of these 32 were primary age and 51 were secondary.

15.2. 79 (14.99%) of home educated children within the dataset have had more than one episode of home education. Most home educated children are home educated once only.

15.3. Of the 79 children who have been home educated more than once:

- 67 have had two episodes of home education.
- 10 have had three episodes of home education.
- Fewer than five have been home educated four times

15.4. Of the 67 children with two episodes of home education:

- 28.35% (19) are known to require SEN Support.
- Fewer than five have an EHCP.
- 22.38% (15) have had one or more suspensions.
- 62.68% (42) were known to Children's Social Care in the last 6 years.
- Fewer than five have been open to Children's Social Care on a Child Protection Plan

15.5. Of the 10 children with three episodes of home education:

- Seven are known to require SEN Support.
- Fewer than five have received one or more suspension.
- Fewer than five have been permanently excluded
- Fewer than five were known to Children's Social Care in the last 6 years.
- Fewer than five are being supported by a Child In Need Plan

15.6. Fewer than five children have had four or more episodes of home education:

- Fewer than five are known to require SEN Support
- Fewer than five were known to Children's Social Care in the last 6 years.

16.0. EHE by Neighbourhood and Locality

16.1. The correlation between deprivation and EHE is strong with most home educated children coming from neighbourhoods with the highest levels of deprivation. An analysis of the data set reflects the same trend for newly registered EHE children in the Academic Year 2024/25.

16.2. The agreement for sharing of data as described above in 14.5 will enable us to understand more about how place and the role of communities may support more children staying in school.

16.3. In Plymouth we are accelerating our approach to working alongside and within communities and we believe this will further strengthen our understanding of place, contextual safeguarding and ability to support positive relationships between schools and parent / carers. Community based multi-disciplinary are an approach to family help where earliest prevention and support is at the heart of the Families First, social care reforms. Such teams bring together professionals from social care, health, education, and community services to work collaboratively around the needs of the whole family. By operating locally, they offer accessible, relationship-based support that reduces duplication and ensures families receive timely help without navigating multiple services. Each family is supported by a lead practitioner who coordinates a single plan, making interventions more consistent and less fragmented. This community-based approach strengthens connections, promotes trust, and enables practical, tailored solutions that help families thrive and prevent issues from escalating into crisis.

17.0 Known to Children's Social Care

17.1. Of the 527 newly registered home educated children, 253 have been known to Children's Social Care within the last 6 years. It is of note that this does not assume that the child was on a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan, the data draws on any recorded contact with Children's Social Care.

17.2. On 13th January 2025, Plymouth's Safeguarding Children's Partnership agreed that if a child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, there are likely risks that mean elective home education is not considered suitable. If a parent informs the school or local authority of their intention to home educate a child on a Child Protection Plan, the school and Children's Social Care will take immediate action to keep the child on the school roll. If a child becomes subject to a Child Protection Plan while being home educated, the Elective Home Education Team will work directly with Children's Social Care and the family to reintegrate the child into school promptly. Any home-educated child who is on a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan will be allocated a key worker from the Home Education Team. The key worker will collaborate with the child's social worker and attend all ICPCs, reviews, and core groups. All casework relating to home-educated children known to Children's Social Care is reviewed weekly to ensure robust oversight for each child

17.3. In the Academic Year 2024-25, seven children registered as EHE were subject to Child Protection Plans:

- Six of these children were secondary age and one was primary age
- Fewer than five Child Protection Plans were under the category of neglect and few than five under the category of emotional abuse

- Fewer than five of the children have an EHCP; and fewer than five required SEN support in school.
- Five children were subject to CIN plans before they were escalated to Child Protection planning.
- Fewer than five are sibling pairs.
- All six children are no longer EHE following the allocation of education provision by the local authority. The sibling pairs have been allocated specialist provision via ACE.
- Fewer than five of the six children have been allocated provision or a school a place via School Attendance Orders.

17.4. In the Academic Year 2024-25, 41 newly registered EHE children were support by Child in Need Plans under the following categories:

- Abuse or neglect –26
- Family dysfunction – fewer than five
- Child's Disability - Six
- Family in acute distress – fewer than five
- Parental illness/disability – fewer than five

17.5. Of the 41 children:

- Eight children are primary school aged.
- 33 are secondary school aged.
- Five children were home educated for 0-3months.
- Seven children were educated for 3-6 months.
- 10 children have been home educated for 6-9 months.
- Six children have been home educated for 9 and 12 months
- 13 children are recorded as requiring SEN Support.
- Seven children have an EHCP.
- 17 children were severely absent (less than 50%). All were secondary school age.
- 17 children were persistently absent (less than 90%). Fewer than five were primary age.

17.6. Fewer than five secondary age pupils had been permanently excluded. Eight children had one or more suspension.

18.0. Activity and Next Steps

18.1. In June 2025, we launched the MAT CEO and LA Strategic Group, which convened in October and agreed to develop a new Education Strategy incorporating citywide metrics on inclusion and belonging. Elective Home Education is prioritised as a strategic focus and led to the development of the new EHE Accelerated Action Plan which has catalysed rapid development of this new strategy.

18.2. Following the launch of the Accelerated Action Plan in September 2025. We have seen a reduction in the rate of children being deregistered from school to home education. Reducing the rate of Elective Home Education (EHE) in Plymouth remains a shared and urgent priority, anchored in our commitment to inclusion, early help, and securing the best possible outcomes for every child. The Accelerated Action Plan was introduced to deliver immediate focus, faster intervention, and strengthened collaboration across the education system, and we have shown that we are now seeing early signs of improvement with significant shift in secondary schools, historically the most affected cohort. Despite these improvements, overall EHE rates in Plymouth remain high at 2.0% of the

school aged population. The implementation of the new Information Sharing Agreement is a critical enabler of the Accelerated Action Plan. Since the launch of the accelerated plan:

- Extraordinary meetings in September and October 2025 brought together over 30 schools and local area partners (including the Integrated Care Board, Multi-Agency Support Team and Community Connections) to address common challenges, at pace.
- New EHE registrations and trends are reported half-termly to school leaders and MAT CEOs, ensuring visibility and accountability.
- The City Help and Prevention agenda is advancing development of a single view of the child, enabling schools to access automated, predictive analytics. This work has been informed by cross-phase school workshops convened on 15 September 2025.
- We have worked closely with the DfE to pilot the national attendance campaign, with our local communication plan aligned to national messaging.
- An EHE implications infographic is being developed for citywide use to help parent / carers understand the realities of home education.
- The Plymouth Belonging Framework was launched at the Head Teacher Conference on 23 October 2025, co-produced with local area partners to strengthen inclusion.
- The Virtual School and Educational Psychology training programme for school leaders and with a focus on inclusion, relational practice and trauma informed responses began delivery in September 2025.
- Targeted funding 3 evaluations show significant early improvement in inclusion and engagement in the schools which have developed their own internal alternative provision, meaning that more children's needs are being met in school.
- Migration for education teams to Eclipse for case recording is on track for launch in December 2025, providing a single view across education and social care and strengthening continuity of support.
- The MRI database is being developed to capture attendance for children in early years settings and will link to the Early Years Provider Agreement; implementation is expected in Spring Term 2026, supporting early identification of emerging needs.
- We are working with our Sector Led Improvement Partner, Wiltshire, to identify further opportunities to enhance early help and prevention in relation to Elective Home Education.
- The Inclusion and EHE Task and Finish Group has merged with the Family Hub EHE multi-agency group, extending the membership to include the voluntary and community sector. The first of the extended meetings is scheduled for the 27th November 2025 and will further advance our work in respect of early help and prevention.
- 60 schools have signed the information sharing agreement and we expect 100% response by 30th November 2025.

19.0. National Policy

19.1. Plymouth is working rapidly to implement the Families First reforms, with plans to launch the new way of working by April 2026. These reforms represent a significant shift towards integrated, community-based support for families, aiming to prevent issues from escalating and improve outcomes for children.

19.2. The legislative framework underpinning these reforms is set out in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which introduces new requirements for multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and supports the development of Family Help Teams. As of 19th November 2025, the Bill has completed its readings in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords and is in its final

stages within the Lords. However, it has not yet received Royal Assent and therefore is not yet law. Full implementation of the reforms will follow once the Bill is enacted.

19.3. The Bill introduces significant changes for children not in school, directly impacting EHE. A compulsory national register for children educated outside school will ensure local authorities have accurate data, with the intention of improving safeguarding and enabling timely support, particularly for families with additional needs. Local authorities will also gain stronger powers to intervene where there are safeguarding concerns or doubts about the suitability of home education. In some cases, consent for home education may be required if risks are identified. These measures aim to balance parental choice with child welfare, ensuring that home-educated children receive appropriate education and remain safe. The Bill also emphasises information sharing across agencies, meaning families who home educate could benefit from more coordinated support, especially for children with SEND. However, it introduces greater accountability, requiring parents to provide evidence of educational provision when requested.

19.4. While respecting the right to home educate, the Bill strengthens oversight and support mechanisms to ensure that all children, whether in school or at home, are safeguarded and have access to a suitable education. Plymouth's proactive approach means we are preparing now for these changes, ensuring that by April 2026, our Family Help model will be strengthened further through closer working with integrated teams in communities.

20.0. Ofsted Inspection Framework

20.1. The new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (EIF), effective from November 2025, places a much stronger emphasis on inclusion, attendance, and early intervention, elements that can help reduce Elective Home Education (EHE).

20.2. Inclusion is now a standalone inspection category. Inspectors evaluate how well schools identify and support disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, and children known to social care. They will examine curriculum accessibility, adaptation, leadership commitment, and the impact of inclusion across all areas. This incentivises schools to embed inclusive practices.

20.3. Attendance receives dedicated scrutiny under the "Attendance" category, rated using a five-point scale from "Exceptional" to "Urgent Improvement." Inspectors look closely at patterns of absence, punctuality, and the effectiveness of support for persistent absentees. This drives schools to implement proactive engagement strategies before issues escalate.

20.4. By reinforcing inclusion and attendance, the framework promotes earlier identification of families at risk of disengagement. Schools are more accountable for monitoring and supporting vulnerable pupils. When barriers are addressed proactively, families are less likely to resort to home education out of necessity or frustration. Instead, they receive the support they need within the school setting, reducing unnecessary transitions to EHE.

21.0. Attendance Baseline Improvement Expectations (ABIEs)

21.1. From 2026/27, the DfE will introduce ABIEs for mainstream schools, setting minimum year-on-year attendance improvement expectations. For 2025/26, schools have received indicative ABIEs which are calibrated to each school's context, based on previous attendance and comparable schools (nationally), and represent a minimum improvement target. Schools are expected to exceed these baselines wherever possible, aiming to return to or surpass pre-pandemic attendance levels. Those

schools consistently missing their ABIE will be signposted to additional support, such as Attendance and Behaviour Hubs. The Attendance Support Team is working with schools to ensure they are engaged with their indicative ABIEs and encouraging schools to join an Attendance or Behaviour Hub via the DfE's expression of interest process. We continue to support and challenge schools to keep attendance central to their improvement strategies.

21.0. Conclusion

21.1. Elective Home Education in Plymouth remains a complex and evolving issue. Our analysis confirms strong correlations between EHE and persistent absence, SEND, and social care involvement and areas of deprivation, reinforcing the need for early identification and targeted intervention.

21.2. Significant progress has been made through the expansion of the EHE Team, implementation of safeguarding and engagement frameworks, and strengthened collaboration with schools and partners. Early signs of improvement, including a reduction in new registrations this term, demonstrate the impact of the Accelerated Action Plan and citywide commitment to inclusion.

21.3. Looking ahead, Plymouth is preparing for major national reforms. The Families First programme and the forthcoming Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will introduce a new statutory framework for multi-agency working, Family Help Teams, and stronger oversight of children not in school. These changes will enhance safeguarding, improve support for families, and help reduce moves to home education when these would not be wholly advantageous for the child.

21.4. Reducing EHE remains a shared priority across Plymouth's education system. By embedding inclusive practice, improving attendance, and strengthening early help, we can ensure that every child, whether in school or at home, receives a suitable education and the support they need to thrive.

This page is intentionally left blank

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel – Action Log 2025/26

Key:	
Green	Complete
Yellow	In Progress
Red	Not Started
Grey	On Hold

Minute No.	Resolution	Target Date, Officer Responsible and Progress
2024/2025 Municipal Year	A whole Council Councillor briefing would be arranged on early help in Plymouth.	<p>Date: 06 February 2025</p> <p>Progress: Initial discussions taken place around subject matter. Confirmation of the subject matter to be emailed to Jake in order to find dates. Week identified in early November to provide the briefing, invites to the Panel would go out w/c 29/09/25.</p> <p>Officer: Jake Metcalfe/Martine Aquilina/Sarah Hood</p>
2024/2025 Municipal Year	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.	<p>Date: 06 February 2025</p> <p>Progress: Two members of the Committee were identified as part of this action and work was underway to identify dates for this to be completed.</p> <p>Officer: Jake Metcalfe</p>
2024/2025 Municipal Year	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.	<p>Date: February 2025</p> <p>Progress: PPCV were members of the board.</p> <p>Officer: Amanda Davis</p>
2024/2025 Municipal Year	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.	<p>Date: February 2025</p> <p>Progress: Discussion with the ICB commissioner – training is only free for NHS and some modules for social care practitioners. Discussing costings</p>

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel – Action Log 2025/26

		and relevance to LA officers & whether any appropriate modules currently exist Officer: Lisa McDonald
2024/2025 Municipal Year	The service would review the holiday and food programme to ensure it was inclusive off all children in the city.	Date: February 2025 Officer: Amanda Davis Progress:
16 July 2025 Minute 6: Children's Services Achieving Excellence Improvement and Transformation Plan	A briefing report would be written to show how the service has improved the quality assurance processes to be more explicit about the difference the service was making for children and young people by discussing The 10 Wishes in social work supervision.	Target Date: January 2026 Officer(s) Responsible: Fran Giblin Progress: This action is in progress and has a target end date of January 2026, in which a further report would be provided to the Scrutiny Panel to review.
16 July 2025 Minute 6: Children's Services Achieving Excellence Improvement and Transformation Plan	Vivien Lines would speak with the participation member around ideas to engage more young people to seek their view.	Target Date: August 2025 Officer(s) Responsible: Vivien Lines/Stuart Hogg Progress: a communications plan has been developed with Alice Pope, to promote the work and achievements of the service to children and young people, including through communications with Head Teachers. The Participation Team have a plan in place to align work more closely with that

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel – Action Log 2025/26

		of the quality assurance team and wider service to reach more young people with lived experiences.
16 July 2025 Minute 6: Children's Services Achieving Excellence Improvement and Transformation Plan	Social worker appraisals in the summer would discuss how they were learning about the views and aspirations of children and young people.	Target Date: August 2025 Officer(s) Responsible: David Haley Progress:
16 July 2025 Minute 8: Performance Scorecard	A briefing for members of the Panel would be arranged on attendance which would include a Q&A session and more in-depth data around attendance.	Target Date: September 2025 Officer(s) Responsible: Amanda Davis/Isabelle Kolinsky Progress: Dates to be identified.
16 July 2025 Minute 9: Local Area SEND Improvement Plan	The service would provide a report on the government's plans for the future of SEND and EHCPs and how those changes are communicated to families in the city. This would also be added to the work programme for a future Panel meeting.	Target Date: November 2025 Officer(s) Responsible: David Haley/Amanda Davis Progress: Dates to be identified.
16 July 2025 Minute 9: Local Area SEND	A briefing for Members of the Panel would be undertaken on the Dedicated Schools Grant.	Target Date: 24 November 2025 Officer(s) Responsible: Amanda Davis

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel – Action Log 2025/26

Improvement Plan		Progress: 13 th October 2025: Workshop took place and slides sent to all members with invitation for questions. Follow up workshops may be offered once DSG Management Plan is complete.
16 July 2025 Minute 9: Local Area SEND Improvement Plan	A letter to the relevant Minister would be drafted from the Panel advising that Plymouth had exhausted its school estate and needed more funding for physical spaces for children in the city. The letter would highlight the numbers of children that needed to attend specialist provision out of the city and the requirement of more capacity in the city through capital funding.	Target Date: ASAP Officer(s) Responsible: David Haley/Amanda Davis Progress: 13 th October 2025: Letter drafted and shared with Cllr Cresswell on Friday 10 th October.
08 October 2025 Plymouth Attainment Report	To produce a young person-friendly version of the attainment report, including breakdowns by gender and SEND.	Target Date: February 2026 Officer(s) Responsible: Amanda Davis/Isabelle Kolinsky Progress:
08 October 2025 Plymouth Attainment Report	Ensure the “top tips” from care-experienced young people are promoted and embedded across all schools and MATs.	Target Date: 24 November 2025 Officer(s) Responsible: Amanda Davis/Isabelle Kolinsky/Stuart Hogg Progress:
08 October 2025	To design and conduct a survey of schools to collect information on support provided to students affected by the cost-of-living crisis. Young people to assist in	Target Date: February 2026

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel – Action Log 2025/26

Plymouth Attainment Report	designing the survey and participate in the next Headteachers' Conference to present their campaigns.	Officer(s) Responsible: Amanda Davis/ Isabelle Kolinsky / Stuart Hogg Progress:
08 October 2025 Plymouth Attainment Report	To provide a briefing note to Committee members with granular data on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children placed outside of Plymouth.	Target Date: 24 November 2025 Officer(s) Responsible: Lisa Davies/Karen Blake Progress:
08 October 2025 Plymouth Attainment Report	To append a glossary to future reports to improve accessibility.	Target Date: 24 November 2025 Officer(s) Responsible: David Haley/Amanda Davis/Lisa Davies Progress:
08 October 2025 Plymouth Attainment Report	To include actual numbers alongside percentages in future reporting, particularly where small cohorts are involved.	Target Date: 24 November 2025 Officer(s) Responsible: David Haley/Amanda Davis/Lisa Davies Progress: Report authors would be advised of this requirement for all future reports.
08 October 2025	Education officers to provide statistics on the percentage of children receiving their first-choice school placement.	Target Date: 24 November 2025

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel – Action Log 2025/26

Belonging Framework		Officer(s) Responsible: Amanda Davis/Victoria Whitman Progress:
08 October 2025 Belonging Framework	Metrics for measuring progress in the Belonging framework to be included, along with contextual information on how belonging is defined and assessed.	Target Date: February 2026 Officer(s) Responsible: Amanda Davis/Rob Williams/Isabelle Kolinsky Progress: Not due for completion until February 2026.
08 October 2025 Belonging Framework	That poverty-related barriers to school attendance to be explicitly addressed in the framework.	Target Date: February 2026 Officer(s) Responsible: Amanda Davis / Isabelle Kolinsky Progress: Not due for completion until February 2026.
08 October 2025 Belonging Framework	That the Committee receive a future update on the implementation and impact of the Belonging Framework and Place-Based Plan, including examples of best practice from schools.	Target Date: ASAP Officer(s) Responsible: Jake Metcalfe Progress: Work programme has been updated.
08 October 2025 Child Exploitation	Clarification to be sought from the relevant department regarding the status of the Royal building and its intended use for homelessness services.	Target Date: 24 November 2025 Officer(s) Responsible: Jake Metcalfe

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel – Action Log 2025/26

		Progress: This action falls outside of the CYPF Scrutiny Panel's terms of reference. Councillor would be referred to the Members Written Question procedure.
08 October 2025 Performance Report	Further clarification on the methodology used by the Department for Education to define statistical neighbours.	Target Date: 24 November 2025 Officer(s) Responsible: Paul Stephens Progress: Completed.

This page is intentionally left blank

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	4	For the Panel to scrutinise the improvement and transformation plan of Children's services to ensure the service was delivering the Achieving Excellence Plan.	Cllr Laing/ Vivien Lines
	Youth Justice Annual Report	3	For the Panel to understand the work undertaken by the Youth Justice Team and understand challenges celebrating strengths.	Cllr Laing/ Martine Aquilina/ Sarah Wilson
	Performance Scorecard	3	STANDING ITEM on the performance of the directorate.	Paul Stephens/ Susan London
	SEND Capital Programme		Expanding SEND places and alternative provision	Amanda Davis
	Local Area SEND Improvement Plan	4	For the Panel to scrutinise the delivery and impact of the Local Area SEND Improvement Plan	Cllr Cresswell/ Amanda Davis/ Tracy Clasby/ Rob Williams
	School Readiness	3	To examine the state of play for children beginning school and how ready they were to start primary school.	Cllr Cresswell/ Amanda Davis/ Heidi Price
08 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

			<i>(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)</i>	
	Annual Education Outcomes Report (Provisional)	4	<p>Standing item to the Committee to understand children's progress in achieving their outcomes.</p> <p>YP involvement</p> <p>Comparative data</p>	Amanda Davis/ Stuart Hogg
	Place Based Working Group	4	<p>Referred to this Scrutiny Panel from the Chair following a meeting of the Local Area Partnership SEND Improvement Board.</p> <p>City wide challenge for attendance</p> <p>National attendance campaign</p>	Amanda Davis / Rob Williams
	Children's services budget Q1 outturn position		<p>For the Panel to have oversight of the budget position of the service.</p> <p>Request from DH to add to the work programme.</p>	Matt Fulton
	Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) update including SEND Capital Programme	4	AI inclusion	Amanda Davis / YP involvement /Finance rep/ Stuart Hogg/ Lisa McDonald / Health rep
	Performance Scorecard		Standing Item	Paul Stephens/Susan London
11 December 2025	Families First reform programme	4	Children's Social Care workforce	Lisa Davies
	Plymouth Childrens Safeguarding Assurance – Annual Report	3	<p>Statutory duty to produce an annual report.</p> <p>Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Board.</p> <p>Invite partners, Police/Health/Education</p>	David Haley/ Siobhan Logue
	Finance Monitoring Q2	4	Standing item	Matt Fulton
	Capital Programme – Scrutiny of	4	To link in with Finance Monitoring report.	Lisa Davies/Karen Blake/Vivien Lines

	residential children's home capital programmes		Amend title – important council programmes Delivery to reduce costs	
	Achieving Excellence Programme Q2 Report	4	Halfway report of the programme	Lisa Davies/ Vivien Lines
	Elective Home Education and metrics	4		Isabelle Kolinsky
	Performance Scorecard	4	Standing item EHCP timescales	Paul Stephens/Susan London
12 February 2026	Annual Education Outcomes Report (Final Report)		Comparative data – over x number of years Attendance comparative data	
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. <i>(Agreed to add at the 06 February 2025 Scrutiny Panel meeting)</i>	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. <i>(Agreed to add at the 06 February 2025 Scrutiny Panel meeting)</i>	Cllr Laing / Martine Aquilina
	Children's Social Care workforce		On-going concerns being raised of 25% of the workforce being agency and responsible to the service not being able to provide a stable workforce to the families they work with. Issues around churn of workers affecting the numbers of social worker changes for children.	Chris Squire
	Children's Services use of AI		Cllr Steel request to add to the work programme on 17/07/2025. Report to provide an understanding on what was being done in the AI space to aid Children's Services workforce and ensure workers spent more time with the families they were working with.	Si Bellamy
	30 Hours free Childcare			

	Young Carers: Implementation of Carers Strategy for CYP.			
	Youth Parliament – engagement of young people with local democracy and MP's			Youth Parliament
	Transitions to Adulthood			
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.

Scrutiny Prioritisation Tool

		Yes (=1)	Evidence
Public Interest	Is it an issue of concern to partners, stakeholders and/or the community?		
Ability	Could Scrutiny have an influence?		
Performance	Is this an area of underperformance?		

Extent	Does the topic affect people living, working, or studying in more than one electoral ward of Plymouth?		
Replication	Will this be the only opportunity for public scrutiny?		
	Is the topic due planned to be the subject of an Executive Decision?		
Total:			High/Medium/Low

Priority	Score
High	5-6
Medium	3-4
Low	1-2

This page is intentionally left blank