

## **BRIEFING ON LOCAL AREA SEND IMPROVEMENT PLAN: CHILDREN'S SERVICES**



### **1. Overview**

- 1.1 Plymouth had a local area SEND (Special Educational Need and Disabilities) inspection led by Ofsted and CQC (Care Quality Commission) in late June 2023. The outcome of the inspection was that there were serious weaknesses identified with five priority areas that need to be addressed through a Local Area Action Plan.
- 1.2 The inspection endorsed the Council's long term plans and direction of travel for the Local Area Partnership's multi-agency work. Areas of positive work are recognised in the report. However, concerns were raised about the provision and outcomes for children with SEND including those who need multiagency support and those most vulnerable. The detail is set out in the report.
- 1.3 The report was published on the Ofsted website on 22 August 2023, was discussed at Cabinet Planning in August and is also accessible here: [50226534 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/50226534).
- 1.4 The date for the draft plan to be returned to the DfE and Ofsted was 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2023. On 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> October we received feedback from the DfE and Ofsted respectively that the plan was fit for purpose. The DfE advisor commended the plan and recommended some minor changes which have been incorporated. These have been approved by PCC and published.
- 1.5 The plan attached is the final approved version. The plan addresses all nine areas (five priority action areas and four recommendations) set out in the report. It also includes key aspects from the April 2023 Plymouth SEND Strategy which was endorsed by the Ofsted/CQC report.
- 1.6 The plan has had input from a wide range of stakeholders. Parents/carers and young people have been involved in articulating the outcomes they and we need to see. A stakeholder event including colleagues from schools, Children's Services (EPS and CYPFS), and the health services was held on 20<sup>th</sup> September at the Guildhall with over 120 attendees.
- 1.7 A crucial aspect of taking forward the work which is articulated in the plan is the involvement of school and college leaders. School and college leaders (headteacher and CEO level) will need to be involved in key governance and working groups. The DfE are well aware of the role of, and supportive of the involvement of, school and college leaders. Further discussion took place at the Plymouth Place Based Working Group (the group of multi-academy trust CEOs) on the morning of Monday 25<sup>th</sup> September. CEOs and headteachers are nominating school based colleagues for the governance and working groups.
- 1.8 Following approval of the plan, work will move forward on further communication, engagement and governance implementation. Early work on aspects of the plan with early delivery dates has commenced.
- 1.9 A letter has been received from the Secretary of State about the setting up of the external board. We accept this. We responded to the letter with some suggested wording changes and are awaiting the final notice for publication.

### **2. Areas noted as effective, those for priority action and recommendations**

## 2.1 Areas noted as effective in the Plymouth report

A number of areas were noted as being effective. In summary these included:

- Leaders across the partnership sharing a commitment to improve the way they work together in the future.
- Leaders strengthening the support for young children with language and communication difficulties.
- Children and young people with SEND benefitting from the a range of services to meet their social and emotional needs.
- Local leaders working together to reduce the high number of young people with SEND who are not in employment, education and training.
- Effective identification and support for children and young people who are autistic or have a learning disability at times of crises to prevent hospital admission.
- In some schools, pupils with SEND are assessed in a timely way and get the help they need to do well.

## 2.2 Areas for priority action

The following are the areas for priority action, with an inspection due in 18 months' time (Feb 2025) to assess progress.

Responsible body	Areas for priority action
Plymouth City Council, NHS Devon Integrated Care Board, school and college leaders.	Leaders, including Plymouth City Council, Devon Integrated Care Board, and school and college leaders, must put children and young people with SEND at the centre of all improvement plans by ensuring that those plans contain clear oversight and tracking in order to measure the direct impact on children, young people and their families.
Plymouth City Council, NHS Devon Integrated Care Board, school and college leaders.	Leaders, including Plymouth City Council, Devon Integrated Care Board, and school and college leaders, should work together and share information to enable the earlier identification of children and young people with SEND who are at risk of increased vulnerability and negative outcomes.
Plymouth City Council, school and college leaders	Leaders, including Plymouth City Council and school and college leaders, should work together to reduce the likelihood of exclusion for pupils with an EHCP.
NHS Devon Integrated Care Board	Devon Integrated Care Board should work with partners to risk assess children on waiting lists, ensuring that those with multiple needs get the earliest support possible.
Plymouth City Council	Plymouth City Council leaders should ensure that children and young people with SEND who also have social care needs get the care and support they need, particularly:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ vulnerable children living in residential special schools and children's homes at a distance; and</li> <li>▪ children receiving short breaks without effective oversight and review, including reassessment when needs escalate.</li> </ul>
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### 2.3 Areas for improvement

The following are the recommendations: which would usually be assessed in three years' time i.e. July or September 2026. Progress will be checked in the earlier monitoring visit.

<p>Leaders across health, social care and education should improve the consistency of the support offered to children and young people with SEND by ensuring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ all children receive the mandated checks in line with the Healthy Child Programme; and</li> <li>▪ all children and young people benefit from a consistently applied graduated response.</li> </ul>
<p>Leaders across the partnership should continue to address long waiting times for children and young people requesting support from health services.</p>
<p>Leaders must ensure that all social care, health and education practitioners have the training they need to provide consistent identification, care and support for children and young people with SEND.</p>
<p>Leaders should use the information available to them to plan ahead, ensuring the right services and support are in place to meet the future needs of children and young people with SEND in Plymouth</p>

### 3. Actions, opportunities and risks

3.1. Some urgent action has been taken by Plymouth City Council around the fifth priority action area: *Plymouth County Council leaders should ensure that children and young people with SEND who also have social care needs get the care and support they need, particularly:*

- *vulnerable children living in residential special schools and children's homes at a distance; and*
- *children receiving short breaks without effective oversight and review, including reassessment when needs escalate.*

Since the end of the inspection on 30 June, when this action was fed back verbally, the Children with Disabilities Team have assessed and reviewed all children in the first group (currently eight children) and used a triaged approach for the second group, with all those receiving or entitled to overnight care having been reviewed (twenty one children). There are a number of other children who receive non-residential short breaks, or for whom non-residential short breaks have been requested, whose cases are being reviewed over the coming two months: these are due to be completed by October 31<sup>st</sup> 2023.

3.2 Engagement at senior officer level between health and PCC, and with the DfE and NHS colleagues is strong and work has taken place, including shaping the governance and monitoring arrangements.

3.3 Discussions about options for professional development and support for all partners have taken place with the LGA and with the DfE and a partnership learning and development programme will be put in place.

3.4 There are **opportunities** to take as we look ahead. The clarity and urgency of the report's priority actions can galvanise the joint work of all partners, including schools and colleges, to provide a more inclusive, joined up network of support for our children with SEND and vulnerabilities. The focus on putting children at the heart of what we do is essential. The emphasis on plans and their implementation showing impact and improving outcomes which is overseen by senior leaders, is crucial.

3.5 There are also **risks**. There is a risk to morale: early positive communication and engagement is important so that colleagues and parents/carers and children see that there is purpose and drive to deliver improvement. There is a risk of overload of change and monitoring so, streamlining, prioritising and having tight but manageable timelines is crucial. There is a risk in terms of capacity to implement change well and as the plan is shaped we will be able to determine and manage it.

#### **4. Scrutiny**

We welcome feedback and scrutiny from councillors and scrutiny members. We expect to report on progress on implementing the plan over the coming months.