

# Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	07 November 2023
Title of Report:	<b>Children's Improvement Plan and Highlight Report</b>
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Interim Director for Children's Services)
Author:	Vivien Lines
Contact Email:	Vivien.lines@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	<a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a>
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

## Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report sets out the Focused Improvement Plan that has been developed to drive the urgent improvements that are needed in the Council's children's social care service to improve the quality of practice and wider arrangements to keep children and young people in Plymouth safe and improve outcomes for them. The Highlight Report summarises the progress set out as of the end of September.
- 1.2. Plymouth's Children, Young People and Families Service had its last full inspection by Ofsted in 2018, achieving a grading of Requires Improvement, followed by a Joint Targeted Area Inspection in 2019 and most recently a Focused Visit of 'front door' services in December 2022.
- 1.3. The Focused Visit determined that the quality of social work practice for children at the 'front door' had declined and had serious and widespread failings.
- 1.4. An improvement plan was put in place immediately following the visit to address the concerns identified. In May 2023 the Department for Education issued PCC with a statutory Improvement Notice requiring all of the areas of improvement identified to be addressed by the Council and its partners.
- 1.5. The Improvement Notice required that PCC develop an Improvement Plan, establish an Improvement Board with an Independent Chair and report on progress against the improvement plan by providing data analysis and evidence of impact of improvements on the quality of services for children in need of help and protection. The Secretary of State also appointed an adviser for PCC to work with Plymouth until the SoS is satisfied that this is no longer required, i.e. that all areas requiring improvement had been addressed to her satisfaction.
- 1.6. Plymouth Children's Improvement Board has been established and is being chaired by Theresa Leavy, Director of Children's Services from Dorset Council. Dorset has been identified as Plymouth's Sector Led Improvement Partner (SLIP). The Improvement Board is now meeting six weekly with membership of Officers from across the Council, including the Chief Executive and Interim Director of Children's Services, the wider partnership and cross-party Members.
- 1.7. A governance framework for children's improvement priorities has been agreed and is in place to ensure that this Focused Improvement Plan aligns with other priority strategic plans in the

Children, Young People and Families Service and that together these plans set out how the Council, and its partners, will achieve their broader range of responsibilities to children and young people, including SEND responsibilities, and improve overall outcomes.

- 1.8. This Improvement Plan is focused on stabilising the service and setting out the actions that are needed for the next six months to deliver the priority improvements. The improvements will provide the firm foundations that are needed for the future.
- 1.9. Work is currently in place to ensure the actions are SMART, owned fully by the service and that the plan is clear about how improvements will improve outcomes for children and young people, when these improvements will be seen and how we will know that they are having the required impact. Service Plans will be refreshed by senior managers to ensure they align fully with the expectations of the improvement plan and progress will be monitored closely through the agreed governance framework.
- 1.10. The plan has six priorities;  
PRIORITY 1 – GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT  
PRIORITY 2 – EARLY HELP AND FRONT DOOR RESPONSES  
PRIORITY 3 – ROBUST AND EFFECTIVE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE  
PRIORITY 4 – AT RISK OF CARE, CARED FOR AND CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE  
PRIORITY 5 – QUALITY ASSURANCE AND AUDIT  
PRIORITY 6 – A STABLE AND ABLE WORKFORCE

### **Recommendations and Reasons**

1. To accept the Improvement Plan and note progress in the highlight report.

### **Alternative options considered and rejected**

1. None.

### **Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan**

The Improvement Plan sets out priority improvements needed to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

### **Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:**

The plan sets out improvements needed to children's social care practice. The improvements needed, in a context of increased levels of demand, have required additional staffing resources to be agreed. In addition, the service is experiencing the cost pressure of a high cost of placements for children in care.

### **Financial Risks**

Failure to improve children's social care can lead to considerable financial risks for the Council including staff turnover and inability to recruit permanent staff leading to an increased use of agency staff, and increased levels of anxiety amongst partners leading to higher levels of demand.

### **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.

There is a risk register in place setting out key actions in relation to risks including the impact on the Council and the community of Plymouth of failing to improve its children's services.

**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							

**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:**

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Nigel Denning											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 30/10/2023											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Laing, approved via email											
Date approved: 30/10/2023											