

## **Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel**

**Thursday 18 July 2024**

### **PRESENT:**

Councillor Reilly, in the Chair.

Councillors Mrs Beer, Gilmour, Krizanac, McLay, McNamara, Simpson, Steel, Stephens, Tippetts and Wood.

Also in attendance: Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications), Councillor Cresswell, Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships, David Haley (Director of Children's Services), Lisa Linscott (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills), Temilola Salimon (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families), Amanda Paddison (Head of Access to Learning), Tina Brinkworth (Head of Skills and Post-16), Ian Taylor (Service Manager for Youth Offending) and Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 12.32 pm and finished at 3.35pm.

*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.*

49. **Apologies**

Councillor Rebecca Smith provided apologies, Councillor Wood substituted.

50. **To note the appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair for the Municipal Year 2024/25**

The Panel agreed to note the appointment of Councillor Zoe Reilly as Chair for the 2024/25 municipal year. The appointment of a Vice-Chair would be confirmed at the next meeting of Council on 16 September 2024.

51. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Zoe Reilly declared a personal interest and was employed by Young Devon.

52. **Scrutiny Panel Responsibilities**

The Panel agreed to note the responsibilities of the Children, Young People and Families Panel.

53. **Minutes**

The Panel agreed the minutes of the meeting that took place on 28 February 2024 subject to admin errors being corrected.

54. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chairs urgent business.

55. **Plymouth City Council Special Educational needs and Disabilities Sufficiency Plan 2024-2030**

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

- a) There had been an increase in the number of children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP);
- b) There had been work underway across the partnership to support children within mainstream settings without the need for an EHCP but it would take time to embed and would not replace the need for special educational provision;
- c) Following data analysis, it was forecast that the city would be short of at least 105 special school places by 2030. Due to capacity pressures within the special school estate the city has found itself in a position where its had to place children in independent special school (ISP's);
- d) There were 376 children and young people that attended 37 registered independent schools and post 16 settings, with a total cost of those placements in 2023/24 being approximately £8.6 million;
- e) Children who had requested a special school place for point of entry in September 2024 had their place confirmed and the 0-25 service had been working with families to confirm as many places as quickly as possible;
- f) Plymouth City Council was increasing its special school estate wherever possible to increase the number of places available in September. Many special schools had limited space to expand due to the nature of the sites but the Council would expand at the following sites:
  - Cann Bridge – eight additional places
  - Longcause – six additional places
  - Millford expansion within a temporary satellite provision of an additional 20 to 30 places
- g) The Local Authority had been receiving funding via the high needs provisional capital allocations grant (HNPCA). The grant should be used to increase the number of SEND places in Plymouth. Plymouth received £15 million via the

grant over a seven year period with £13 million remaining to fund expansion. All future expansion needed to be funded by the grant as there would be no additional funding available;

- h) Increase in resource provision would provide an additional 50 to 75 places across the city;
- i) Following surveys to Milford's school which was in poor condition, it was hoped that remodelling of the building could offer an additional 30 places;
- j) The Council was progressing an option to buy a building near to Longcause school which could provide an additional 100 places to Plymouth, subject to internal remodelling and refurbishment;
- k) The final option would be to build a new school, however the current HNCPA grant would not be able to cover the cost which was estimated at £26 – 35 million dependant on size and design.

In response to questions, it was further explained:

- l) There was a rising need in relation to SEM and complex special educational needs nationally which was creating a pressure within the system and mainstream settings, but also in terms of those complex needs that required specialist provision;
- m) Plymouth had a high level of requests for an EHCP accepted when compared nationally;
- n) The plan would expand the building spaces for Plymouth's children that genuinely required a special school place, but it would only work if Plymouth invested in its early and targeted help to ensure children and young people whose needs could be met in mainstream settings to be met in those places;
- o) Having an EHCP allowed children, their schools and their families to access support and funding beyond the notional £6,000 of funding that is received as an entitlement to all children;
- p) Plymouth wanted as many children as possible within mainstream schools and mainstream settings to keep them with their communities;
- q) Plymouth had a high percentage of children with identified social, emotional, mental health needs when compared nationally. A deep dive was underway to understand the SEMH need. Additionally work was underway with schools in Plymouth to focus on early language acquisition in 2025 to work with family hubs, nursery and primary school provisions;
- r) Family hubs in the city had been working with libraries on language acquisition, which Plymouth wanted to grow;
- s) The Plymstock Dunstone site was kept should funding become available to

build a new school. The trust that occupied the building, stripped the building when they left which left the shell of the building only. Under the building regulations, the Council wouldn't be able to adapt further and would need to be demolished before it could meet the needs of those children requiring a special school;

- t) The listing of the proposed building purchase next to Longcause school was not a barrier to providing that provision for Plymouth;
- u) Plymouth would see an assessment nursery which may lead to EHCP's being allocated to children at any earlier stage more than before;
- v) The SEMH deep dive would be undertaken and presented to the SEND Strategic Board in October;
- w) Feedback from schools in relation to the resourced provision was positive around the direction of travel. There was a significant number of schools that attended the first meeting trying to identify schools in the city that were interested in the resourced provision, including secondary schools. The Council made it clear that there needed to be a matching secondary school for every primary school within resourced provision. Schools wanted assurance that it would be well funded and liked that it would be locality based so children could go to their local school rather than travelling across the city;
- x) The COVID-19 pandemic had impacted early years children significantly due to the isolation many families had faced and the lack of modelling;
- y) CAMHS waiting times in Plymouth was strong when compared nationally and in the top quartile. Health waiting times was a key part of the SEND Improvement work and one in which was integrated in the improvement plans;
- z) Work had been undertaken with Health colleagues around what waiting well looked like. Children and young people provided their feedback around their experience of waiting well and what they felt needed to improve;
- aa) The Council did provide bus passes which had clear criteria and was an online application process;
- bb) The Free School Meal (FSM) entitlement would expand due to the expansion of the FSM programme;
- cc) The Council helped parents/carers in the application process and did refer them to the Plymouth Information Advice and Support for SEND (PIASS) service;
- dd) The admissions process for Plymouth SEND children and young people;
- ee) The Council had statutory powers to direct schools to take children and was used as a last resort;

ff) The Council's independent travel programme.

**Action:** EHCP and CAMHS waiting times would be provided to Councillor McLay;

**Action:** Councillors would be provided the policy on Free School Meals and Bus Pass entitlements.

The Panel agreed to:

To endorse the proposed options for expansion of special educational provision within Plymouth to meet increasing demand.

56. **Seeking Education, Employment and Training July 2024**

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) introduced the report with Tina Brinkworth (Head of Skills and Post 16) and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The number of young people not in education employment or training continued to decrease;
- b) The council actively engaged young people to seek education, employment or training (SEET) and secured £1.3 million of funding through the SEND Innovation grant;
- c) Programmes were delivering the impact required with 88.1% of SEND young people in education, employment or training. The next academic year would see an aspirational target of 92%;

*(The Panel were shown a video highlighting the work of SEET programmes)*

In response to questions, it was further explained:

- d) The service continually applied for and sought funding due to being fully grant funded and the SEET programme was in the process of becoming built-in within the adult education budget;
- e) The SEET programme was an investment to young people and was backed by a number of key council priorities for Plymouth;

The Panel agreed to note the report.

57. **Q4 2023/24 Performance Report**

Paul Stephens (Performance Advisor) and Susan London (Performance Advisor) outlined the report to the Board and in response to questions, it was explained:

- a) There were nine children/young people in unregistered or unregulated placements and were placed in those provisions after exhausting all other options available to the council;

- b) A number of placements registered with CQC and the council was working with them to dual register with Ofsted;
- c) Unregistered placements were monitored regularly with weekly reports to Ofsted;
- d) The Early Help strategy would reduce the number of referrals for children's services. Practice had improved since 2022/23;
- e) The council ran an extensive partnership programme in October 2023 with 800 professionals in the city on the threshold document and Plymouth was beginning to see the benefits.

In response to questions, it was further explained:

- f) The plan for 24/25 academic year would be to provide outcomes data, broken down into cohorts and then made consistent throughout key stage groups;
- g) Most absences in the city were due to sickness, but it was acknowledged some absences may have been due to parents/carers taking children on holiday;
- h) Child Protections Plans were decreasing due to the Plans progressing and stepping down to Child in Need following good work;
- i) Plymouth tracked data to project required school capacity into the future;
- j) Higher numbers of sexual abuse child protection plans were due to increased training for the workforce;
- k) Increases in repeat child protection plans were due to the greater complexities of families the service was working with. Increased training was taking place across services to ensure plans were appropriate in order to prevent multiple interventions;
- l) The item scheduled for 10 October on suspensions and exclusions would provide more granular data on the patterns of suspensions and exclusions in Plymouth schools.

**Action:** Projection of school numbers and capacity would be added to the work programme

The Panel agreed to note the report.

58. **Achieving Excellence - A Strategy for Children's Services 2024 - 27**

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) supported by Temilola Salimon (Service Director for

Children, Young People and Families), Lisa Linscott (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) introduced the item and highlighted the following key points:

- a) Since the Improvement Notice issued to the Council, Plymouth had worked hard to rectify and improve practice, which culminated in a requires improvement grading from Ofsted in January 2024;
- b) The report set out a vision from the council which would ensure children and families in Plymouth received the help they required, when they needed it with a timely and high quality assessment;
- c) The Plan would hold officers and cabinet members to account in achieving excellence for Children's services;
- d) There were ten strategic priorities underpinning improvement work for the service.

In response to questions, it was further explained:

- e) Plymouth's data on young people not in education, employment or training continued to get better which had seen the service able to respond appropriately to that cohort and was evidenced through tracked data;
- f) Since the Ofsted Monitoring visit in 2022, Plymouth set up a Improvement Board which met every six weeks to review the improvement work with the support of Dorset County Council as Sector Led Improvement Partners (SLIP);
- g) The largest risk in the delivery of the plan was workforce and Plymouth had a challenge in attracting children's social workers. A new recruitment and retention strategy was in place with further reviews into how Plymouth recruited in order to ensure Plymouth was an attractive place to live and work;
- h) There was a stable senior leadership team but a quarter of social workers were agency social workers;
- i) The council was expecting a monitoring visit from Ofsted in relation to Local Area SEND. There was also an improvement Board for this area with SLIP in place;

The Panel agreed to:

- 1. Endorse the Children's Services Strategic Plan, Achieving Excellence and;
- 2. Endorse the proposed milestones for the delivery of the ten Strategic Priorities and implemented in Children's Services as set out in the attached three-year milestones.

59. **Child Exploitation Update**

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

- a) Plymouth had implemented a contextual safeguarding approach through the Adolescent Safety Framework (ASF) which had been worked on to simplify to ensure practitioners across the City recognised behaviours and indicators to ensure a response at the earliest opportunity;
- b) A recent Ofsted inspection highlighted how the council was doing everything possible to support children;
- c) *Ofsted noted the following in their report from January 2024: 'The response to children who go missing and children at risk of extra-familial harm is coordinated effectively across the whole service and is helping to reduce harm. Persistent interventions from the specialist team for children who go missing, youth workers and the edge of care team are providing a strong and consistent response for children. Most children who go missing benefit from timely return home interviews that capture their experiences well. Information about wider harm relating to exploitation, gangs and substance misuse is well considered and updated through strong 'safer me' assessments. If children are missing for more than 24 hours, multi-agency child protection strategy meetings take place to ensure a joint response to help to find children and reduce risks for them. Plymouth received recognition for its daily intelligence briefings and had other Local Authorities come and observe them';*
- d) The Be Safe team were working with children and young people earlier, to develop relationships which would then see a reduction in the numbers of young people going missing in the city;

In response to questions, it was further explained:

- e) Daily intelligence briefings were attended by the Police, MASH, Health, NSPCC, Barnardo's;
- f) Every child/young person heard at the daily intelligence briefings would have a plan in place;
- g) Devon and Cornwall Child Exploitation group met monthly to discuss themes in the region. The theme present was more girls going missing in the region and the group was working together in order to address;
- h) The team expanded from three to nine. Four youth workers were employed to work and build relationships with those children and young people that went missing regularly;
- i) The Be Safe team had been brought into the Youth Justice team who had access to CAMHS and a psychologist outside of the normal pathways;



- j) There was a significant drop in the number of repeat missing episodes;
- k) The Frederick Street Youth Centre was kept open on Thursday evenings and young people were made aware of its availability if they required help;
- l) There was a spike in May of children and young people going missing due to warm weather and it was a common theme;

**Action:** All councillors would be invited to a briefing session on Child Exploitation and County Lines.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

60. **Tracking Decisions**

Action I – The Council would write to MAT's to see how they were working towards the Plymouth Plan in driving towards a consistency across all schools and other area's in regards to SEMH;

Lisa Linscott (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) provided the following update: A deep dive was being completed on social emotional and mental health and the findings would be reported into the SEND Strategic Engagement Board with clear actions working with Plymouth schools in relation to identification and potential mis-identification of SEMH needs;

The Board agreed to note the action log and progress.

61. **Work Programme**

The Panel added the following item to the work programme:

- Projection of school numbers and capacity would be added to the work programme

62. **Exempt Business**

The Panel agreed to pass resolution under Section 100(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

63. **Plymouth City Council Special Educational needs and Disabilities Sufficiency Plan 2024-2030**

*(Please note that there is a confidential minute to this item)*

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