

# Cabinet



Date of meeting:	14 October 2024
Title of Report:	<b>Children's Services Update</b>
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:	Temilola Salimon, Service Director: Children, Young People and Families
Contact Email:	Temilola.salimon@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

## Purpose of Report

This report provides an update on and response to the Quarter 1 Financial Monitoring Cabinet Report presented in August 2024. The Quarter 1 Monitoring Report identified a budget variation of £4.692m forecast overspend related to placement costs of children in Plymouth's care. A first children's services update was provided to September Cabinet as recommended in the Quarter 1 monitoring report and this report provides a further update and response to that position.

## Recommendations

To note the report.

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

Keeping children, adults and communities in Plymouth safe.

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

The report relates to MTFP commitments for the cost of care for children in our care.

## Financial Risks

There are significant financial risks to the Council from pressures in this area as set out in the paper.

## Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

None

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

*\* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

The paper addresses risks to the organisation.

## 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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.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: David Haley (Director for Children’s Services)											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 03/10/2024											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Children’s Social Care, Culture and Communications)											
03/10/2024											

## 1. Background and context

- 1.1 The approved Council budget for Children, Young People and Families in 2024/25 is £59.975m of which £36.725m is allocated to the placement costs for Children in the Care of Plymouth Local Authority. At the end of September 2024, the predicted forecast budget spend is £63.838m (a variance of £3.863m).
- 1.2 At the end of August 2024, children's social care presented to Cabinet an identified £1.53m as potential savings from this programme of work this year against the overall financial pressure of £3.863m. Positively this was achieved through dedicated work from the social work teams which resulted in 3 children being successfully moved from high-cost residential placements. These children were successfully moved into more appropriate accommodation at a significant price reduction. £1.3m was expected from these placement moves, however £1.5m was delivered. We overachieved this as two children were successfully reunified home from Residential and In-House Fostering. One child in an unregistered residential setting moved into Supported Living.
- 1.3 Two of these moves ensured that we now have no placements in a 'bespoke' unregistered arrangement, where we are utilising agency staff from external organisations to care for our children in accommodation we are renting. This had been two of our most expensive placements, both over £20k p/week.
- 1.4 During September an experienced carer who currently fosters five looked after children experienced an unforeseen emergency, requiring immediate care planning for the children in her care. The fostering team identified creative, safe solutions and emergency alternate foster care arrangements were identified and have been maintained for all the children.
- 1.5 Without this work, children's social care spend would have increased by a total of £35,220.15 per week. This work during September has resulted in a cost avoidance of £140,880.06 and had an immediate measurable impact for the children through the avoidance of residential care.
- 1.6 As of the end of September 2024 we have maintained the reduction in the number of children in unregistered provision and all children are now in provision, some of which is registered with CQC, but not registered with Ofsted.
- 1.7 521 children were in the care of the Local Authority. The places where children live, and their costs, are set out in the chart below.

Type of Placement	Estimated Numbers	Existing Budget £m	Month 5 Forecast £m	Actual Numbers Month 5	Month 5 Forecast £m	Variance to Month 3 £m	Variance to Budget £m
External Residential	50	15.248	18.052	57	17.943	(0.109)	2.695
Unregistered	6	3.387	5.808	5	5.166	(0.642)	1.779
External Fostering	158	9.251	9.052	150	8.922	(0.130)	(0.329)
In-House Foster Care	126	2.855	2.855	144	2.855	0.000	0.000
In-House Connected Carers	42	0.952	0.952	51	0.952	0.000	0.000
External Supported Living	41	3.758	3.424	41	3.475	0.051	(0.283)
Other Placement Settings - Children in Care	65	1.274	1.274	73	1.274	0.000	0.000
<b>TOTAL CHILDREN IN CARE</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>36.725</b>	<b>41.417</b>	<b>521</b>	<b>40.588</b>	<b>(0.829)</b>	<b>3.863</b>

- 1.8 The key reason for the forecast budget overspends at the end of September is that we continue to experience challenges finding fostering placements for children in residential settings who are ready to move onto a family setting. 55.6% of children in care are currently placed in foster care and we expect to see this improve because of actions in place.
- 1.9 10.9% of children in care are currently placed in residential settings – this is stubbornly high and includes one 6 year old one 8 year old, two 9 year olds and four 10 year olds. We are currently

searching actively for 14 children who are ready to progress to a family setting, but the market is very challenging. Work is also progressing to agree timescales for when a further 14 children can move on to a family setting. 18 are 15/16 with plans to move on to independence or semi-independence.

- 1.10 Changes in circumstances and an increase in the needs of a number of children in care in September 2023 resulted in children experiencing unexpected placement moves, leading to increased care costs. Some of these children moved from already expensive placements (£5,800 per week) to even more expensive ones (£11,000 per week), significantly raising the overall placement spend.

## **2. The Family Homes for Plymouth Children Transformation Programme Update**

2.1 Theresa Leavy, DCS from Dorset, and the Chair of our Childrens Services Improvement Board, visited on the 26/9/24 and conducted a review of the programme. This identified strengths about the work in place in Plymouth, reflecting that Plymouth council are paying less than many neighbouring councils on children in care. Evidence of creativity and innovation featured throughout her observations of the day. She also feedback that the oversight and governance of our in house fostering service is clear and structured.

2.2 A programme of conversations with off-framework providers remains in place, and we have had some interest in our children from IFAs with vacancies in our children. However, the market remains highly challenging. There are several children where moves were scheduled to be achieved shortly to achieve savings, and foster placements have not yet been identified.

## **3. Foster for Plymouth Growth**

3.1 Focused work continues around both recruitment and retention/carer development, we are seeing an uplift in in-house fostering activity. Foster for Plymouth are currently progressing 21 fostering assessments, including 5 carers transferring from IFAs.

3.2 Focused work is taking place to refocus our recruitment and promote the offer to Foster Carers from Foster for Plymouth. Key milestones have been achieved on time in implementing our first constellation, including the appointment of the Mockingbird Liaison Worker and the secondment to backfill that position. Additionally, Hub Home Carers for the first Constellation have been appointed, and there has been a positive response to the request for Expressions of Interest for Satellite Carers, with five received to date.

## **4. Transitioning children from residential care to family homes**

4.1 We continue to actively search for family placements for 15 children within residential placements whom we have identified £1.407m as potential savings from these moves. It is a significant challenge to identify and progress fostering placements and despite extensive searches, none of these children currently has a foster family identified. Children transitioning from residential care are likely to need experienced, specialist foster carers and there is a limited number of this calibre of carers available in Plymouth and across the country.

4.2 Currently we have 6 cared for young people cared for in unregistered arrangements. This is a significant reduction from 9 in August 2024. One young person is in rented accommodation with a staff team Two are in CQC registered provisions which are meeting their needs well. One is in a Children's Home which is meeting their needs well and is in the final stage of OFSTED registration. Two are in 28 day activity placements which are not OFSTED registered. One young person will cease to be in an unregistered setting when their current Children's Home achieves registration. For the two young people in the 28 day activity placements there are expressions of interest from potential Residential Children's Homes being explored.

## **5. Market development and brokerage:**

5.1 Improving our brokerage capacity so that we maximise available placements local to Plymouth continues. The Family Homes Board has agreed priorities on how we can strengthen the work we

do with fostering and residential providers in the region and elsewhere. These are short breaks, 'Edge of care' and residential provision for complex needs. This business case and costings is in completion.

## **6. Reunifying children with their birth families and wider networks**

6.1 The Head of Service has begun the development of a focused offer to support an increase reunification utilizing capacity in the Targeted Help Service and working closely with Permanence and Children's Social Work to identify appropriate children. 16 children are identified for potential reunifications from across the service.

## **7. Conclusions**

The evolving nature of children's needs and predicting the specific timing and requirements for their placement in our care remains a challenge. Additionally, the scarcity of family homes for children and young people adds uncertainty to our ability to transition a child from a residential setting to a family when we would like this to be achieved for the child.

At the end of month 5 Quarter our financial position is overall financial pressure of £3.863m.