

# Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting:	14 November 2024
Title of Report:	<b>Children, Young People and Families Service Quarterly Improvement 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:	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

To provide Scrutiny members with an update on improvements in the Children, Young People and Families Service in line with the milestones set out in our three year plan, Achieving Excellence, and in response to the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in January 2024.

## Recommendations and Reasons

- To enable Scrutiny Board Members to scrutinise, challenge and question the report to assure themselves that progress is being made in line with the timescales expected and that outcomes for children and young people are being improved.

## Alternative options considered and rejected

- None.

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

Keeping children and young people safe.

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

A three year transformation plan is in place with improvements in the quality of social work practice linked to reducing financial pressures, particularly on the costs of agency social workers and residential placements for children in care.

## Financial Risks

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.

Improved support to children and families ensures risks are managed effectively and has the potential to impact positively on child poverty.

**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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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:**

Fin	Click here to enter text.	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: Temilola Salimon											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 06/11/2024											
Cabinet Member approval: Cllr Laing approved via email											
Date approved: 06/11/2024											

## Introduction

This report provides an update on the progress of the plan to improve the quality, timeliness and outcomes of our children's social care services. This plan was developed following the ILACS and to take forward relevant priorities in Achieving Excellence, our strategic plan for Children's Services 2024-27.

### 1. Progress on priority areas identified in the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

The improvements put in place in priority areas following the ILACS (including to Out of Hours services and Local Authority Designated Officer response to allegations against professionals) set out in the last quarterly report was confirmed by our Sector Led Improvement Partner (SLIP) in their work presented to the September Improvement Board and as a result we have ended our accelerated Improvement Plans for the Out of Hours and the LADO services. Further improvement work is now set out as part of their service plans.

For the Out of Hours service this includes recruiting permanently to the staff team, which continues to be challenging despite ongoing activity, and taking forward options to redesign the service to strengthen alignment with daytime services, working closely with colleagues in Adults and Housing. Interviews are taking place for a permanent LADO on 5<sup>th</sup> November and the LADO Annual Report is now finalised confirming good progress in the service to strengthen decision making and recording.

### 2. Front Door

We continue to ensure the improvements put in place in the Front Door since the Ofsted focused visit in December 2023 with progress confirmed by both our Sector Led Improvement Partner (SLIP) Dorset and Ofsted during the ILACS in January, are sustained. Responses continue to be timely with 83% of MASH contact decisions being made within one working day during September. 87% of referral visits were made within 5 working days and 99% within 10 working days. 80% of strategy discussions were held within one working day.

A live learning approach is now in place in Targeted Help, MASH and the Initial Response Teams where managers are auditing key decisions to ensure families receive the right help at the right time. This is supported by auditing by the Operational MASH group. Whilst this confirms that decisions for strategy meetings are appropriate, we continue to identify opportunities for families to be supported outside of the statutory social work approach. As a result of refocusing the Targeted Help offer, progress continues to be made in increasing the number of families receiving Targeted Help and the number of referrals progressed by the MASH is being sustained at a lower level (263 in Sept compared to 443 in Jan 2024). In May, 235 families were receiving support from non-statutory services, 340 were in September.

However, we remain concerned that the rate of re-referral has increased again, from 16.4% in July to 36.9% in September although 25% of these were within 12 months of previous involvement. A plan of work is in place to ensure we improve the support families receive once statutory social work ends their involvement. This has included aligning our targeted Help offer with the MASH and Initial Response Teams to ensure support is in place at an early point, and strengthening the early engagement of early help services in work with families so that families remain well supported when statutory services are no longer involved. We continue to extend the use of family led decision making approaches including family network meetings and Family Group Conferencing (FGC) so that more families are offered a family led support plan when they first need help. Detailed practice guidance for Family Network Meetings is in place and briefings are being held for all teams, delivered by our Family and Community Solutions Team who deliver our FGC offer, to ensure that family capacity is fully utilised in all cases, particularly where there is a risk of the child coming into care.

Work has started to develop a more integrated front door across our children's service, building on the commitment to conversation-based approaches. A plan is in place setting out the work to progress this over the next 18 months.

Strategic and Operational MASH Boards continue to ensure strong partnership engagement and oversight of practice and in the analysis of and response to patterns of demand and performance and quality assurance that drives improvement priorities. This includes a programme of partnership dip sampling of priority areas including consent and strategy meetings which is finding appropriate decision making.

### **3. Timely and effective social work practice when it is needed which keeps children and young people safe and improves wider outcomes.**

#### **All children benefit from a timely and comprehensive assessment**

Focused management attention to ensuring assessments are completed in time has improved performance to 83% completed in time in September from 63.9% in July. We are pleased that as a result of the assessment training programme the Academy have been delivering, the July and August audit cycle identified more 'good' and 'outstanding' elements in assessments, with 34% of audits found to be 'good' and 63% 'requires improvement' compared to 25% 'good' and 75% 'requires improvement' in June. One was judged to be 'inadequate' and the practice issues identified were addressed immediately.

Following the quality assurance work earlier in the year improving practice where there are concerns about child sexual abuse continues to be a service priority. Joint development work is taking place with the Initial Response and Children's Social Work Teams with the Quality Assurance Team over the summer, and joint service development away day taking place in November including attendance by the CSA Centre for Excellence. We are ensuring all staff are aware of and using the guidance and resources developed by the PSCP on neglect, child sexual abuse, domestic abuse and adolescent safety in their assessments and work with families.

A programme of work is in place to improve our multi-agency response to child exploitation including;

- Comparing the content of the recently completed Children's Society's missing children benchmarking tool with our own self-evaluation against the Ofsted Inspection criteria.
- Implementing the revised Adolescent Safety Framework.
- Delivering partnership training from the start of November.
- Updating tools and guidance on the PSCP website.

Quality assurance of our child exploitation practice is planned is being completed this month to evaluate progress and inform future learning.

Following learning from quality assurance earlier in the year, guidance has also been strengthened on assessment where there are concerns about unborn babies setting out expectations about how professionals work together to assess risks and ensure effective planning is in place for babies at birth.

#### **All children and young people benefit from high quality planning**

We continue to ensure all children have an up to date and high-quality plan, supported by mandatory training from the Academy which has been being delivered since September and all staff are attending. At the end of September 90% of children in need and 96% of children in care have an up-to-date plan. Whilst only 76% of children on a child protection plan have an up-to-date plan, this is due to a delay in getting the records of core groups onto Eclipse following the meetings. 100% of reviews of children on a child protection plan are on time.

To improve the quality of Pathway Plans for children leaving care we have worked with care experienced young people to agree a new format for the plan to ensure children's views and experiences are at the heart of planning and that the plan covers all key outcomes required in preparation for independence. The new Pathway Plan format is now being set up on Eclipse and will be available to practitioners from January 2025. In the meantime, practitioners are working with young people to review their plan and quality assurance activity of pathway plans and the experiences of care leavers is planned as part of a practice review week on the experience of care leavers planned in November.

At the end of September, 87.2% of young people over the age of 18 had an up-to-date Pathway Plan. This Plan reflects the assessment of needs for care experienced young people who have left care. Between the ages of 18-21 we have a duty to remain involved and offer support, however young people in this cohort can decline this offer.

At the end of September, 38.7% of those age between 15.5 and 18 have an up to date Pathway Plan. Whilst this appears a low number, these young people currently also have an assessment of need as a child in care, and a Care Plan. This also considers their independence skills, transitions and preparation to adulthood.

### **All children and young people benefit from purposeful direct work**

There are a range of direct work approaches and tools for children and young people of different ages and developmental stages being utilised across the service. The Academy has started work to bring these together and develop a resource bank. Ensuring direct work and life story work is completed and recorded on Eclipse remains a focus and will be included in work on permanence planned with our SLIP with our own quality assurance planned in December.

### **Strengthened relationship-based practice**

Caseloads across the service have been sustained within target levels and the reduction experienced in the Initial Response Service will impact on other service areas over coming months.

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Caseload average July</b>	<b>Range July</b>	<b>Caseloads average September</b>	<b>Range September</b>
ALL CYPFS	18.4	1-91	18	1-87
Initial Response Service	18.2	2-27	14.8	4-22
Children's Social Work Service	17.6	2-27	17.5	9-24
Children's Disability Service	22.9	12-33	21.4	15-26
Permanence Service	16.5	6-22	18.3	7-23
Care Leavers	23.3	5-30	24	6-30
Fostering Service	18	6-35	18.6	2-33
Safeguarding Service (Independent Chairs)	77.8	55-91	65.7	6-87

### **Caseloads**

Team Managers continue ensure children transfer between service areas in a timely way and we have made a number of changes to reduce the moves for families (e.g. for UASC and where pre-birth assessments are needed). The managed social work team, 'Innovate', put in place in the service as a result of the high volume of work in the service at the start of the year, was wound down at the end of October.

Despite efforts to recruit permanent social workers, we continue to experience high rates of social worker vacancies with 26% (56 posts) of posts covered by agency staff impacting on relationships with children and families. Eight newly qualified social workers joined the service in October to complete their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment programme delivered by the Academy. During November a range of recruitment activity is planned in response, including attending a national social work

recruitment event, holding an online recruitment event and events targeting agency social workers setting out the benefits of working for Plymouth permanently.

The recruitment of Team Managers has been more successful with four appointments being made to permanent posts in the Permanence Service during October and interviews planned in Children's Social Work in November. It is hoped that this will reduce the number of agency Team Managers in the service to three.

#### **4. Good experiences and progress for all children in care**

During October an improved approach to supporting Special Guardianship carers was launched, as part of kinship care week, led by our new Special Guardianship support team. This is part of our Family Homes for Plymouth Children programme, to support more carers to feel confident that they would be well supported as in Special Guardians to enable more children to leave care through this route.

A full update on the Family Homes for Plymouth Children Programme will be presented to Scrutiny in January but key areas of progress this quarter include improved approaches to the recruitment of in house foster carers and progress with business cases for Plymouth to consider becoming providers of residential children's homes.

##### **Earlier permanence planning**

The number of children in care continued to rise through last year but is now reducing steadily from 530 in May to 515 at the end of September. The increase in numbers of children coming into care has been compounded by a delay in final hearing dates for children subject to legal care proceedings. We continue to work closely with the local judiciary to get final hearing dates scheduled so that decisions (including adoption decisions) can be made for these children.

Since the ILACs, we have strengthened our internal tracking to ensure children in long term fostering are matched with their carers more quickly and are currently working with our SLIP to ensure all children benefit from appropriate and early permanence planning. This includes all children who are Placed with Parents and to identify where Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) and reunification should be explored.

Plymouth managers from the Permanence service attended a learning event on permanence and stability held in Dorset in October and we are planning a similar event for our staff in January. Dip sampling of the IRO oversight of permanence has been completed by our SLIP and will be presented to the November Improvement Board.

##### **Education and health outcomes for children in care**

We continue to work closely with Health partners to ensure the physical, emotional and mental health needs of our children in care are well met. In March, as a result of an accelerated improvement plan agreed by health and social care with oversight from the Corporate Parenting Group, 83.3% of Initial Health Assessments were completed within 20 working days of the child coming into care. However, in September only four out of thirteen initial health assessment were completed on time and we are currently working closely with our Health colleagues to consistently achieve better performance. We have tightened up processes to ensure paperwork is sent to health partners immediately a child comes into care and Health are improving the availability of and access to short notice appointments when they are needed. Health colleagues are undertaking evaluation with young people to evaluate the impact and outcomes of health assessments to be presented to Corporate Parenting partners in November.

The Virtual School (VS) has a focused plan in place to improve the educational outcomes for children in care and care experienced young people. Three additional staff have been recruited as 4-16 Education Advocates to allow caseloads to reduce from nearly 200 to around 80. The PEP Officer has implemented a quality assurance system for Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and training continues to be delivered to schools, social workers and carers to ensure that children in care have enhanced educational support from their carers and corporate parent.

Training is being undertaken with Designated Teachers where PEPs are not yet good. This will lead to an expected increase in the percentage of PEPs found to be 'outstanding' in the autumn term 2024.

We are tracking the attendance of children in care on a monthly basis and there is a specific focus on severe, persistent absence and the use of part-time timetables. In addition, the group of approximately eight (at any one time) children without an educational place remain the focus of regular planning in order to secure provision that meets need. We remain concerned about the children under 16 who have no school place, either because they have had multiple and rapid moves of care placement or because there is a lack of suitable SEND placements locally or nationally. We are addressing this in our placement and SEND sufficiency work.

## **5. Ambition for care leavers and good outcomes**

Our Corporate Parenting arrangements have set out improved ambition and approaches for care leavers to be in education, employment and training. The Virtual School Funded Skills Launchpad have appointed an Outreach Officer to work with entrenched NEET since 1<sup>st</sup> April '24 who is now working closely with the cohort of 18 young people to engage them in appropriate opportunities including work placements, depending on their individual needs. Through partnership tracking of individual children, we have increased the proportion of 18+ care leavers who are now seeking education, employment and training and young people in Y12 and 13 in EET has increased by 3.7% since May 2024. 43.3% of care leavers were in education, employment and training at the end of September (88/203) an increase from 41.1% in August.

New approaches developed this year to improve outcomes for young people further includes;

- Plymouth City Council offering supported apprenticeships and work placements.
- Oncourse southwest developing a level 2 youth worker course.
- DWP offering paid internship ring fenced for care leavers (a 12 month placement with potential for permanent job role).
- DWP providing emotional support to young people with readiness for employment and training.
- Local opportunities within the civil service that are ring fenced for job centre applicants.
- Promoting police cadets with care experienced young people.
- Livewell employment programme includes apprenticeships and other opportunities for employment.
- Two young people have applied to Derriford hospital to do some voluntary work.
- We are now guaranteeing all young people an interview and work experience and have launched the Livewell employability pathway for all identified care leavers who are NEET.

## **6. Leadership and management**

The leadership and management development programme for all of our managers and aspiring managers continues to progress well. Building on the people management short learning sessions for all managers at the start of the year, the longer-term Service Manager and Head of Service development programme involving coaching, action learning and group learning sessions, has now commenced and will be delivered over the next 12-18 months to develop manager's skills across operational and strategic management and to support the development of a high performing workforce in line with our 'High Expectation, High Support, High Challenge' culture.

To take this forward, a draft 'Values and Behaviours Framework' was launched at all staff events in October with good support from staff and managers and are now being implemented through supervision, team and service meetings.

Our Leaders for Excellence management development programme for all Team Managers and above in education and social care continues to be well attended with successful sessions held on SEND and on good supervision practices. Further sessions are planned throughout the autumn including financial management, use of data to drive improvement, change management and managing diversity.

Supervision performance remains steady at 85% but performance remains variable across the service and this continues to be a priority for service performance meetings in the Children's Disability Team and in the Permanence Service where supervision is not yet consistently recorded in a timely way for all children. Available technology that may help Team Managers record their supervisions in a more timely way is being considered. Quality assurance activity continues to focus on the quality of supervision and in the July/August audit cycle it was found that more supervisions evidenced reflective discussions than in previous months. In addition, most supervisions identified clear actions to be progressed.

Stabilising our senior leadership and management team continues to be a priority with active recruitment underway to key posts including Head of Service, Front Door and Service Manager, Children's Social Work.

Following the programme of support from our SLIP focusing on improvements arising from the ILACS which has now confirmed that progress has been made in priority areas, an updated list of priority work areas has been agreed with the SLIP for their support over the next quarter. This includes our priority transformation work areas; the front door, out of hours service and maximising the impact of family help, as well as key practice improvements including reducing repeat referrals and increasing reunifications.

## **7. Plans for the next quarter**

### **Priorities include;**

- Maintaining momentum on our focused practitioner development programme being delivered by the Academy with mandatory attendance by all practitioners (assessment, planning and direct work).
- Delivering our leadership and management development programme for service managers and heads of service to develop their skills and confidence in leading service improvement and a high performing workforce.
- Sustaining Team Manager development through the monthly Leaders for Excellence programme, including continued focus on supervision and management oversight and performance management
- Developing an integrated Front Door and refocused Targeted Help offer to ensure families get the right help at the right time, including decisions about locality models of delivery.
- Evidencing the impact of family led practice models, including Family Group Conferences and Family Network Meetings, on preventing family need from escalating.
- Implementing the preferred option to reshape our out of hours offer and recruiting the staff needed.
- Responding to findings from quality assurance, in particular to strengthen practice on child sexual abuse and child exploitation.
- Improving the quality and impact of Pathway Plans for care experienced young people.
- Improving care leavers engagement in education, employment and training initiatives through targeted initiatives.
- Implementing effective approaches to strengthen earlier permanence for children in care, learning from our Sector Led Improvement Partner.
- Continuing a strong focus on social work recruitment and retention.
- Continuing to work effectively with our SLIP on key improvement priority areas.