

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel



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| Date of meeting: | 06 February 2025 |
| Title of Report: | Children, Young People and Families Service Q3 Improvement Update |
| 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 |
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| Your Reference: | Click here to enter text. |
| 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

- I. That the improvements and planned next steps are noted.

Alternative options considered and rejected

- I. 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) | | | | | | |
|------|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| | | If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box. | | | | | | |
| 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) | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
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Sign off:

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| 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: David Haley | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Date agreed: 24/01/2025 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cabinet Member approval: Cllr Laing approved via email | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Date approved: 24/01/2025 | | | | | | | | | | | |

Introduction

This report provides an update on the progress of the plan to improve the quality, timeliness and outcomes for children, young people and families by our children's social care services to December 2024. 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. 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, were confirmed by our Sector Led Improvement Partner (SLIP) in their work presented to the September Improvement Board.

Since this time, following support from our SLIP to review options for further strengthening our out of hours arrangements, a business case has been agreed to consult on implementing an Integrated Front Door, bringing together the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Out of Hours Team to provide an extended offer to families, integrating other children's services and partners front door services in the coming year. The proposed model will use a conversation-based approach and an extended offer to ensure more families access earlier family help reducing the need for statutory social work involvement. Consultation on the proposed approach started on 13th January and will end on Friday 7th February following which a decision will be made about the approach.

A permanent LADO has now been appointed and is taking forward a programme of work further embedding improvements to the advice and support offered to partners in relation to safeguarding allegations against professionals.

2. Front Door

We continue to ensure the improvements put in place in the Front Door since the Ofsted focused visit in December 2023 are sustained. Good progress was confirmed by Ofsted during the ILACS in January and our Sector Led Improvement Partner (SLIP) Dorset in their reports to Board.

The number of referrals progressed by the MASH is being sustained at a lower level (239 in December compared to 443 in Jan 2024) as a result of improvements to early help and targeted help to families. In December, 316 families were receiving support from non-statutory services compared to 235 in May. Only 30% of referrals to the MASH are deemed to require full research by all of the partners, indicating that there is still more to do to ensure families receive the early help support they need. A blueprint for our early help services has been agreed and implementation is progressing with partners to develop a stronger offer to families, including two early multi-disciplinary developments in specific targeted localities of Plymouth.

As a result of staff sickness and annual leave over the Christmas period, MASH contact decisions made within one working day during December deteriorated from usual performance of 80% to 56.4%. The Head of Service is ensuring better response time going forward. In December 73% of referral visits were made within 5 working days and 93% within 10 working days. 75% of strategy discussions were held within one working day. 56 strategy meetings were held during December of which 14 were out of time. For some of these it was not obvious at the point of referral that a strategy meeting was required, this only became apparent following further information being gathered from parents or partners. For others there was a delay in meeting usual timescales as a result of the bank holidays during the month.

The live learning approach remains in place in the Front Door with dip sampling by managers and the Operational MASH Board with a focus on re-referrals, ensuring thorough assessments and that families are fully supported following children's social care ending their involvement. A Practice Week of the Front Door is taking place in the week of 20th January and a thorough programme of quality assurance activity in the week will provide detailed learning about current practice in the service.

Despite improvement work, we remain concerned that the rate of re-referral, 27% in December, has not reduced significantly (64 families and 55 children have been subject to four or more contacts in the last 6 months) and targeted quality assurance to ensure we understand practice in this area and respond appropriately was completed in November. As a result, focused work continues to ensure assessments effectively identify families' needs and families are effectively supported once statutory social work involvement ends. Improvements have 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. In December 249 families were showing sustained improvements compared to 172 in September.

To ensure the capacity with families and their community networks are maximized, 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 to ensure that family capacity is fully utilised in all cases, particularly where there is a risk of the child coming into care.

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.

3.1 All children benefit from a timely and comprehensive assessment

235 assessments were started in December, (98.7% of referrals) and as a result of focused management attention 99% were completed in time in the month (improved from 63.9% in July). We are pleased that as a result of the assessment training programme the Academy have been delivering, audits are identifying more 'good' and 'outstanding' elements in assessments. In September, just under 50% of audits identified comprehensive and detailed assessments and good evidence of multi-agency co-ordination to fully understand children's needs. Continued improvement work will focus on ensuring that families are not subject to repeat assessments without any focused support to bring about change.

Following the quality assurance work earlier in the year development work to strengthen child sexual abuse (CSA) practice in the Initial Response and Children's Social Work Teams has continued to be a priority with a 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.

Improvement work has also focused on ensuring effective practice for children in families where domestic abuse is a factor. Quality assurance in November 2024, including a multi-agency practice week focused on domestic abuse, found that in assessments children's histories were explored well and patterns of harm were understood to inform decision making. However, there is more to do to ensure children are always spoken to alone in these assessments, to ensure father's views are fully considered and to ensure safety planning for children is fully recorded.

3.2 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 December 93% of children in need and 94% of children in care have an up-to-date plan. Whilst only 75% of children on a child protection plan had 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. At the end of December, 64% of young people open to the Care Leaving Service had an up to date Pathway Plan.

Quality assurance in the last quarter found that just over 40% of children experienced good and outstanding practice with plans being recorded on children's files and some plans are updated following meetings. However, some plans evidence actions that are not clear or specific and are not driving forward outcomes for children. Practice to be strengthened includes having plans that reflect progress made and outstanding actions to be achieved. Without this there is a risk of drift and delay, and it is challenging to evidence what impact children's plans have had upon their lived experiences. This is included in our current Care Planning Fundamentals training programme that all staff are attended.

We have maintained a particular focus on ensuring good assessment and early planning where there are concerns for unborn babies with the Head of Service chairing a partnership panel where pre-birth plans are reviewed closely.

The Care Leavers Practice Week in November identified a number of strengths in our practice with care experienced young people, including evidence of passion and pride in our young people, most visits, assessments and plans being written to young people and risks being identified well and shared with managers appropriately. In addition, there was good evidence of young people being well supported to engage in education, employment and training. However, there was a need to improve how Personal Advisers understand the previous experiences of the young people they are working with and to ensure all young people benefit from a high quality and ambitious Pathway Plan that is developed with them.

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 set up on Eclipse and available to practitioners who are now working with young people to review their plan with close oversight of progress from the Head of Service. Further quality assurance is planned to ensure rapid improvements are made.

Children's reviews are taking place in a timely way, quality assurance has identified that over 40% of reviews were identified to be good with meetings being well attended by partners and family members. Development work with our SLIP has informed a programme of improvement work with our Independent Chairs to ensure that children's plans are ambitious and high quality and outcomes are achieved in a timely way.

3.3 All children and young people benefit from purposeful direct work

The Academy has now brought direct work approaches and tools for children and young people of different ages and developmental stages together into a resource bank that is being well promoted to staff. Ensuring direct work and life story work is completed and recorded on Eclipse remains a focus and was included in work on permanence completed with our SLIP in December and will be a key message in the planned 'Safe and Settled Care' events being delivered to staff in the next quarter, learning from the approach taken in Dorset.

The Virtual School is making good progress with the delivery of the Extended offer to ensure improved support to and outcomes for children who have ever had a social worker. The Extended Role Consultant is building relationships with other services within Education, Participation and Skills (EPS), wider Children's Services and other partners such as schools in order to raise the profile of children with a social worker and children and young people in kinship care arrangements. The Extended Role Consultant is collaborating with Social Care Service Managers to carry out quality assurance of children in need and children subject to a child protection plan with a focus on education outcomes, which will lead to the development of training for social workers. In addition, the Extended Role Consultant has linked with the newly formed Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Support Team to provide advice and guidance and will be attending the national kinship charity roadshow to promote the work of the Virtual School and the SGO team. The Extended Role Consultant is also playing an active role in Plymouth's Place-Based planning and has a particular focus on relational practice and the enhanced transitions offer.

The Virtual School training offer is also being developed to improve understanding of meeting the educational needs of children with a social worker and those in kinship care. Sessions will be delivered by partners from Public Health, the SEND Team and Inclusion and Welfare Team and best practice will be shared.

In the next quarter, the Extended Role Consultant will research best-practice in relation to ensuring children with a social worker and children and young people in kinship care achieve the best possible educational outcomes. This will lead to collaborative approaches to embed effective evidence-based practice across Plymouth. The Extended Role Consultant will also make sure that children with a social worker and children and young people in kinship care are discussed at Multi-Academy Trust inclusion meetings. A further area of focus will be ensuring that there are robust and rigorous data collection and monitoring process in place to enable more effective tracking of attendance, suspensions, exclusions and educational progress and attainment to take place. This will lead to timely and effective interventions and strategies being put in place to secure positive outcomes for our children and young people.

3.4 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.

| Service Area | Caseload average July | Range July | Caseloads average December | Range December |
|---|-----------------------|------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| ALL CYPFS | 18.4 | 1-91 | 18.2 | 1-86 |
| Initial Response Service | 18.2 | 2-27 | 18.9 | 1-32 |
| Children's Social Work Service | 17.6 | 2-27 | 18.8 | 3-27 |
| Children's Disability Service | 22.9 | 12-33 | 15.4 | 1-20 |
| Permanence Service | 16.5 | 6-22 | 17.4 | 7-22 |
| Care Leavers | 23.3 | 5-30 | 26.3 | 16-32 |
| Fostering Service | 18 | 6-35 | 18.3 | 6-36 |
| Safeguarding Service (Independent Chairs) | 77.8 | 55-91 | 63.1 | 1-86 |

Caseloads

Some improvement in social worker retention has been achieved over the past year and as a result of focused work to recruit staff, a slight reduction in the rate of social vacancies has been achieved to 22% (48 vacancies/211 posts). Essential vacancies are covered by agency staff which impacts on relationships with families and creates a financial pressure for the Council. A cross Council group has continued to work actively to recruit more permanent experienced social workers into the service and to ensure we retain and develop our existing social workers. Recruitment activity in the last quarter has included attending a national social work recruitment fair in London, holding bespoke online recruitment events for new staff and our existing agency staff and ensuring we start early recruitment of the next cohort of up to twenty newly qualified social workers who will join us in 2025 to complete their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE).

There continues to be a strong focus on retention alongside recruitment with improvements made to the career progression framework to support social workers to remain in Plymouth as they become more experienced, and with a review of the Academy offer to ensure the development needs of more experienced staff are well provided for. The Principal Social Worker has been working with a social worker Community of Practice to develop proposals to further strengthen retention approaches

including improved celebration of good practice, reviewing systems and processes to reduce bureaucracy and embedding a restorative learning culture across the service.

In the last quarter there has been good success in recruiting permanent managers into the service with some positive promotions to Team Manager roles and appointments of agency staff to our Local Authority Designated Officer, Service Manager Quality Assurance and Head of Service Front Door roles.

4. Good experiences and progress for all children in care

4.1 Earlier permanence planning

The number of children in care peaked at 530 in May 2024 and has reduced steadily since to 521 at the end of December. We have achieved an increase in the number of children placed with connected carers and an increase in the number of children in in house foster, however as a result of a national shortage of foster carers there has been an increase in the number of children placed in children's homes, many of which are at a distance from Plymouth. The report to Scrutiny on the Family Homes for Plymouth Children Programme provides an update to Members on the work that is being progressed to ensure the right children are in care and that more children are in family placements and in settings closer to Plymouth.

The increase in numbers of children experiencing a delay in final hearing dates for legal care proceedings is adding to the number of children in our care. 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.

Recent quality assurance of children entering care identified that most social workers know their children well and understood their experiences before coming into care. Practice was evidencing good consideration of family networks to explore options to prevent children from coming into care and to reunify children. However, children are not all being provided with the right home from when they first come into care.

Since the ILACs, we have continued to strengthen our internal tracking to ensure children in long term fostering are matched with their carers more quickly and we have been 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. Quality assurance activity has found that over 70% of children in care are experiencing permanence and over 60% of children experience good living conditions with children identified as living in safe homes and having their needs met. Fifty percent of children are experiencing permanency at home or with alternative care. Good practice identified more consideration being given to family network meetings and plans to support children to remain living in their family homes. Areas to strengthen include more curiosity around parents' histories and lived experiences, a better understanding of adult siblings' histories and experiences of being parented, timelier referrals to services such as harbour or Plymouth Domestic Abuse Service and understand risk to support children to safely remain at home.

Our Family Homes for Plymouth Children is focused on ensuring all children in care have access to a stable family home in Plymouth, from when they first come into care. Learning from Dorset, as part of our practice weeks planned in the Children's Social Work and Permanence Service areas in the next quarter, we will be holding all staff events which will focus on supporting best practice to further improve stability for children in care, improved permanence planning and improving reunification approaches.

4.2 Education and health outcomes for children in care

We have been working closely with Health partners to ensure the physical, emotional and mental health needs of our children in care are well met. In December, as a result of an accelerated improvement plan agreed by health and social care with oversight from the Corporate Parenting Group, 71.4% of Initial Health Assessments were completed within 20 working days of the child coming into care. This is a key improvement to ensure children have their health needs identified and met from when they first come into care.

The Virtual School (VS) has a focused plan in place to improve the educational outcomes for children in care and care experienced young people and good progress is being made. Preparation to begin using 'Welfare Call' has taken place and this will be operational in February. 'Welfare Call' will significantly improve the Virtual School's monitoring of the attendance of children in care allowing for swift action to be taken when needed. The induction and establishment of the new Education Advocates who attend all Personal Education Planning (PEP) meetings, follow up on agreed actions and provide strong advocacy for our children and young people in care is having a good impact. Young people at risk of falling short of achieving a pass in GCSE English and Maths have been identified and Discovery College will access a ten-week Functional Skills package after February half-term. Links with the SEND team have been made to identify improved ways to track and monitor Education Health and Care Plan information for children out of area and annual reviews are being attended throughout the Spring term by Education Advocates.

The attendance of children in care is closely tracked and there is a specific focus on severe, persistent absence and the use of part-time timetables for children in care. 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. These are usually children who have experienced placement moves impacting on their education provision. 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 for these individual children and in our placement and SEND sufficiency work.

The UASC Offer is in place from the Virtual School and currently 91% of the UASC cohort is in an Employment Education and Training (EET) provision. The Flash Academy offer to young people and carers is being implemented in January. The focus of the spring PEPs will be to plan for access to quality careers guidance and tracking progress towards a broader curriculum. The Virtual School will visit City College in late January to plan the careers advice and guidance approach.

5. Ambition for care leavers and good outcomes

The care leavers practice week in November has informed focused improvement work in the service, particularly to ensure Pathway Plans are in place for all young people and are sufficiently ambitious for all aspects of a young person's life, including their accommodation and education, employment and training.

Our Corporate Parenting arrangements have set out improved ambition and approaches for care leavers to be in education, employment and training. 82% of children in care age 16-17 are currently in education training or employment (EET). A monthly NEET panel is held in conjunction with Skills Launchpad and one of the actions from this was to create themed programmes for young people. The first theme was for those interested in construction and a "Get into Construction" programme has been delivered by the Virtual School in conjunction with Skills Launch Pad and Build Plymouth. Phase two of the "Get into Construction" programme will continue in January with a focus on achieving a Construction Skills Certification Scheme Card (CSCS). The next theme is planned around Hair and Beauty which will include work experience, a customer service qualification and a beauty qualification. Further themed programmes will run during the year based on the need of the cohort. A meeting is scheduled with Plymouth University to plan some raising aspiration events. Pre and post-16 virtual school colleagues will collaborate to plan for the smooth transition of the current Year 11 cohort.

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.

6. Leadership and management

6.1 Quality assurance

The timeliness and compliance with practice expectations has improved, overall our quality assurance activity completed during October, November and December identifies that 36% of practice with

children and families is 'good' and 59% 'requires improvement' to be good. Over the last six months, there has been a consistent and positive trend in the improvement of good practice, with a 5% increase achieved in each of the past three-month periods, resulting in an overall 10% improvement. This steady progress demonstrates the effectiveness of ongoing work to improve practice.

However, in the quarter, 20% of individual audit grades highlighted inadequate practice for children and young people primarily due to key issues such as plans not being recorded on children's files (5%), reviews not being conducted as required (5%), a lack of regular supervision and management oversight (5%) and inadequate living arrangements (5%). Actions were identified to resolve these as part of the audit and moderation framework. Leaders for Excellence sessions will be used to reinforce to managers the need for greater attention to recordings, timely reviews and consistent supervision to ensure that children's needs are being properly met and that services are delivered effectively and in line with best practice standards.

Families contacted as part of our audit programme have provided useful feedback with strengths including;

- Feeling listened to.
- Support with accessing health appointments including the dentist.
- Building positive relationships.
- Therapeutic approach from the Edge of Care Team.
- Feeling cared for and cared about.
- Feeling invested in and supported.
- Not feeling judged.
- Support with education and attending school.
- Referrals to services of support including CAMHS.
- Being kind.
- Being invited to reviews and seeing their Independent Reviewing Officer.

Practice to be strengthened identified by children, young people, parents and carers:

- A better understanding of the purpose of having a social worker.
- Children having a better understanding of their plan or what their plan is for.
- Being regularly invited to meetings.
- Feeling listened to.
- Not feeling judged.
- Being seen regularly.

In summary, audits are identifying stronger practice in the identification of risk, permanence planning and involving children, young people and families in decision making. Audits evidence that our social work practice is improving, assessments are becoming more robust and social workers and team managers are making better and more confident decisions for children at risk of significant harm in a timelier way.

As a result of the evidence from quality assurance the following practice areas will be a focus for further improvement in the next quarter;

- Ensuring families always receive effective early help support to prevent their problems from escalating.
- Social work involvement always informed by a thorough assessment which leads to effective intervention to achieve change for the family.
- Assessments always fully consider families histories and previous concerns.
- Physical abuse, neglect and domestic abuse are the main concerns experienced by the children and practice in these areas is not yet consistently good.
- Most children have been known for a significant period prior to coming into care and when they come into care their needs can be complex such that some children are finding it hard to attach to replacement carers leading to placement instability. In addition, children are not always placed with carers who can meet their needs from when they first come into care.

Whilst there has been some improvement to the quality of practice in priority areas, quality assurance identifies that particular areas for further practice improvement continue to be ensuring all our assessments are consistently thorough and that all our planning set out how needs will be met and the outcomes that are needed for children. This will lead to more families having the right support and reducing rates of repeat referrals and the need for repeated statutory interventions. Service redesign and practice improvements are leading to more assertive and earlier decisions for children where statutory help is needed reducing the stop start interventions with families that have been the experience for too many families. However, increasing our capacity to provide support earlier will not have an immediate impact for those children that have already suffered from repeated patterns of harm, and we will continue to work with these children and their families to mitigate this harm.

The focus will continue to be on ensuring that families are provided with the right help when difficulties first emerge, to intervene in a timely and effective way when problems become more complex and to ensure the right placement, stable care and active care planning for children and young people when they do need to be in our care.

6.2 Leadership and management development

The leadership and management development programme for all of our managers and aspiring managers continues to progress well and a more effective 'One Children's Service' approach is in place across the Education and Children's Social Care leadership team impacting on approaches for vulnerable children and children with SEND. 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, is now being delivered to develop managers 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. A draft 'Values and Behaviours Framework' was launched at all staff events in October with good support from staff and managers and is 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 with managers from across children's services including sessions planned on financial management, use of data to drive improvement, change management and managing diversity.

As a result of focused management attention, at the end of November 89% of supervisions were up to date across the service. However, at the end of December, as a result of staff leave over Christmas, this had dropped to 77% and it is a current service priority to ensure supervision is consistently recorded in a timely way for all children. Quality assurance activity continues to focus on the quality of supervision and recent audit work found that more supervisions evidenced reflective discussions than in previous months. In addition, most supervisions identified clear actions to be progressed.

7. Plans for the next quarter

Priorities for further improvement in the next quarter include;

- Further development of our family hubs and the offer from our children's centres to better meet need in local communities and reduce the need for statutory interventions with families.
- Development of a strengthened early help offer with partners, including through emerging pilots in targeted areas of Plymouth.
- Implementation of an Integrated Front Door to ensure more families get the right help when their problems are first identified.

- Continue to maximise the offer of Targeted Help from within our strengthened front door alongside our MASH and Initial Response Teams to provide intensive and focused support to families at the earliest opportunity.
- Simplifying the pathways between Early Help, Targeted Help and Statutory Support to ensure families are better supported when statutory teams no longer need to be involved and ensure that change is sustained.
- Maintaining momentum with the workforce development programme for domestic abuse, assessment and care planning with all social workers and managers attending refreshed training covering the fundamental expectations of practice in these areas.
- Implementing the tools developed by our Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership to improve partnership approaches to child sexual abuse, neglect, domestic abuse and adolescent exploitation.
- Ensuring Family Network Meetings are held with all families we work with at an early point to ensure that family and community resources are maximised in the support plan that is developed for a family and to sustain change when practitioners are no longer involved.
- Ensuring all care experienced young people have a high quality, ambitious and impactful Pathway Plan.
- Further improving care leavers engagement in education, employment and training through targeted initiatives.
- Implementing effective approaches to strengthen earlier permanence for children in care, learning from our Sector Led Improvement Partner.
- Ensuring supervision is consistently timely and reflective across the service.
- Sustaining a programme of focused quality assurance activity in priority areas, including practice weeks across all service areas, to evaluate the quality of practice in the Front Door, Children's Social Work and Permanence Service areas.
- Continuing a strong focus on social worker recruitment and retention, including starting early recruitment for our newly qualified workers.
- Delivery of the Leadership and Management Development Programme setting expectations of managers regarding the service improvement and the quality and oversight of practice, and to develop their performance management, financial and leadership skills.
- Continuing to work effectively with our SLIP on key improvement priority areas including redesigning our front door, our family homes programme and our early permanence work.
- Developing a plan for the reform of children's social care in line with the DfE expectations set out in the Families First Partnerships guidance, including our Integrated Front Door development and escalating the development of family help and multi-agency child protection teams.
- Delivery of the Family Homes for Plymouth Children Programme which is ensuring children have access to the right family placement in line with their assessed needs from when they first come into care and to ensure that residential provision is only used when it is needed and is high quality, value for money and close to Plymouth.