

Cabinet



Date of meeting: 09 June 2025

Title of Report: **Downham House Children's Home - Ofsted Inspection Outcome March 2025**

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)

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Your Reference:

Key Decision: No

Confidentiality: Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

To provide a briefing on the 'good' outcome of the Ofsted Inspection of Downham House registered Children's Home in March 2025.

Recommendations and Reasons

- I. To note the report.

Alternative options considered and rejected

No alternative options considered as this is an update report.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The Plymouth Plan 2014-2034 – 23/04/2024

Policy HEA2 – Delivering the best outcomes for children, young people and families states:

- Ensuring that early intervention, help and prevention meets the needs of children, young people and their families who are 'vulnerable' to poor life outcomes and supports them to achieve their potential.
- Ensuring that integrated assessment and outcome-based care planning for children with special educational needs and disabilities and additional needs, including social, emotional, mental health and speech, language and communication problems, are built upon the voice of the child and family.

The Corporate Plan states that Plymouth will take "Responsibility – because we care about the impact of our decisions and actions" and as a local authority we pledge to "keeping children, adults and communities safe" by "providing quality public services," "focusing on prevention and early intervention" and "spending money wisely."

Service Planning Guidance 2024 – 2025

Key Outcome (KO) 11 - Improved Child and Family Level Outcomes:

- KO11f. Children and young people in the right accommodation in line with their needs.

- KOI Ig. Sufficiency of high-quality EY settings, school places, short breaks and SEND provision close to Plymouth.

Priority 4 - The right homes for cared for children at the right time, which meets their needs and enable more children to live in family settings closer to Plymouth.

A Bright Future - under the priority for every child to 'be safe' the desired outcome is:

- Reduction in the number of children and young people entering the care system, including a specific reduction in the number of adolescents entering the care system
- Fewer children and young people are placed at distance from the city
- Use of legal care proceedings only when necessary to safeguard children

Our Local Area SEND Strategic Improvement Plan as part of the PLYMOUTH LOCAL AREA SEND PARTNERSHIP states in PRIORITY ACTION AREA 5:

- Plymouth County Council leaders should ensure that children and young people with SEND who also have social care needs get the care and support they need. Particularly,
 - vulnerable children living in residential special schools and children's homes at a distance.
 - children receiving short breaks without effective oversight and review including reassessment when needs escalate

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

No implications.

Financial Risks

No implications.

Legal Implications

(Provided by Alison Critchfield/AC)

None.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

No implications.

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.*

No implications.

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 note							
B	Ofsted Inspection Report 50274600							

**Add rows as required to box below*

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

Fin	OW. 25.26. 009	Leg	LS/00 0013 12/1/ AC/2 9/5/2 5.	Mon Off	N/A	HR	CS.25 .26.00 3	Assets	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: David Haley											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 30/05/2025											
Cabinet Member approval: <i>approved by email</i>											
Date approved: 29/05/2025											

Introduction

Downham House, Plymouth City Council's, registered children's home was inspected by Ofsted on 11 and 12 of March 2025. The home was judged to be 'good' in all areas of inspection, including the overall experiences and progress of children, how well children are helped and protected and the effectiveness of leaders and managers.

Downham House is a 7 bed children's home in Plymstock. The building was registered as a children's home in 2012 after having been a 'hostel' for many years, attached to Downham School. It is made up of a traditional home environment across the ground and first floor and the lower ground floor is an apartment for 2 children which was developed in 2020. The home has a range of garden areas and indoor recreational spaces to offer children a varied and activity-based stay, equally, for those seeking a more relaxing a tranquil stay, there are many quiet and calm spaces for this too.

The home specialises in providing short breaks for children who have severe learning disabilities and very complex behavioural profiles so that they can enjoy themselves and have a change of environment while their families have a break from their caring responsibilities. This short break is often a way of supporting families to care for their children for the longer term and is successful in delaying children entering care and in most cases avoiding this completely. The length of a visit varies with most children having between one and three nights every week, all year around.

The home is registered for children aged 8 to 18 years and thirteen children are currently using the service. Eight more children identified as eligible and needing a short break are currently waiting. Downham House is the only provision in the city which offers this service and demand is high.

Downham House, following the initial inspection after registration in 2012, was judged consistently good for 8 years. In January 2023, the home was judged 'inadequate' for the first time and this brought about a range of improvement work which focused on leadership and management and also physical improvements in the home. The action resulted the home being re-graded to 'requires improvement to be good' in March 2023 which was enormous progress.

The home has subsequently received two 'good' judgements and continues to make strides towards further development and improvements. The most recent inspection took place over two full days in March and was rigorous in looking in depth at policies, procedures, recordings and understanding the children's views and how they communicate and are understood, particularly as all of the children have some difficulties with communication and many do not use verbal language at all.

This was the second inspection under the Registered Manager, Scott Welsford. Scott is supported by the Responsible Individual Victoria Whitman, who was the Registered Manager between 2013 and 2021. Scott was registered in April 2024, following appointment in October 2023.

The inspector interviewed nearly all of the parents and the feedback from families was overwhelmingly positive with stories such as how excited the children get about their short break, how they pack their bags to come and ask to see pictures of the building throughout the week to reassure themselves that they will be coming.

This is an enormous achievement for Downham House and the staff team of twenty. It has been a challenging journey over the last three years and this latest inspection, where a 'good' judgement was maintained and additional progress was noted and documented, evidences the hard work and commitment of the staff team.

This achievement comes at an excellent time as the wider programme developing PCC run children's homes is progressing and the potential further development of the short breaks offer for disabled

children and their families in Plymouth is being considered as part of through a feasibility study of Colwill Lodge.

Together these developments will enable us to build on our successful approaches at Downham House, and will enable us to bring children who live at a distance to the city closer to home and to provide homes for children coming into care who may need a period of stabilisation before being able to live in a family home.

The success at Downham House provides a strong foundation for the development of more loving and stable homes for Plymouth children.