

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting:	16 July 2025
Title of Report:	Achieving Excellence 2024-27 – year one review of the strategic plan for Children’s Services
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:	Click here to enter text.
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

This report sets out a review of progress with the implementation of Achieving Excellence, our three-year strategic plan for Children’s Services which was developed in 2024 following extensive consultation with staff, young people and partners. The reports highlights significant achievements across all of the year one milestones for the ten agreed priorities in the first year and sets out the priority milestones for 2025-26. The plan has been updated to reflect significant new priorities as a result of national and local priorities including the delivery of the Families First Pathfinder reforms.

Key achievements in 2024-25 include;

- The extension of the Family Hub offer 0-18 across Plymouth as part of a wider early help response with increased take up by vulnerable families, effectively refocusing the Council’s Targeted Help offer for children and families to support more families when need is first identified.
- Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership led the development and implementation of guidance and toolkits in four priority practice areas across the partnership; neglect, child sexual abuse, domestic abuse and adolescent safeguarding.
- Improved approaches for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including implementing the Ordinarily Available Provision, supporting more children with additional needs to successfully access mainstream education.
- Improved approaches through our Place Based working arrangements to improve attendance and to reduce rates of Electively Home Education (EHE).
- Sustaining improvements to our ‘Front Door’ ensuring a timely response to requests for help and protection and improvements to the quality of assessment and planning for children open to a social worker.

- Delivering a comprehensive programme of improvements so that more children in care benefit from family homes close to Plymouth and agreeing investment for PCC to open children's homes.
- Improved practices so that Education, Health and Care needs assessment timeliness improved to 90% in March 2025 compared to 44.1% in March 2024 with a clear plan in place for completion of outstanding plans and reviews.
- £13m high needs capital allocation agreed to deliver a new SEND Sufficiency Plan to increase special school places by 88, and to increase resourced provision across the city to enable more children with an EHCP to be educated in their local mainstream school.
- An effective focus on improving arrangements for children around key transition points, leading to earlier planning and more positive transitions through collaborative approach.

Key priorities for 2025-26 include;

- Further developing our early help and Family Hub offer delivering evidenced based interventions to reach more vulnerable families and prevent their needs from increasing.
- Introducing a new 'front door' to help and protection, a multi-disciplinary 'Families First' team supporting families to access earlier help and support.
- Fully implementing a Belonging Framework to identify and support vulnerable children to be in full time education, reducing rates of EHE.
- Embedding best practice for SEND across schools and settings so that fewer children need a statutory assessment to get the support they need
- Implement the Families First Partnership reforms with partners, so that more families benefit from a stable workforce, earlier family help and a confident child protection response when it is needed and the right children are subject to CIN, CPPs, the PLO and in care at the right time.
- Ensure effective family decision making models ensuring Family Network Meetings are held with all families at an early point, and Family Group Conferences when needed, to ensure that family and community resources are maximised in the family's support plan.
- Further develop approaches so that all children in care and care leavers experience good health, accommodation, education and employment outcomes.
- Recruiting more foster carers, further enhancing how we support them, and opening our first children's home.
- Continuing to ensure EHC Plans are more timely and implement the revised model of funding to support fewer children to need a statutory plan.
- Implementation of the SEND capital strategy to develop provision to meet need in priority areas.
- Development of an updated short breaks offer, and a co-produced commissioning approach that is flexible, equitable and accessible and meets needs.
- Sustain focused partnership approaches to further improve preparation for particularly vulnerable groups including young people with SEND and care experienced young people.
- Delivery of a comprehensive workforce development programme aligned to core improvement priorities including a leadership and management development programme impacting positively on behaviours and ambition for children and young people.

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Recommendations and Reasons

- I. It is recommended that the achievements and next steps are noted.

Alternative options considered and rejected

- I. None

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

Keeping children and adults in Plymouth safe.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Achieving Excellence sets out a programme of activity aligned to Children's Services MTFP priorities and actions designed to reduce spend in high pressure areas including SEND, home to school transport, short breaks for disabled children, children's social work staffing costs and placements for children in care.

Financial Risks

A number of work areas included in the three-year plan currently create a significant financial pressure for the Council. The milestones in the plan are designed to address these pressures and reduce spend in key areas at the same time as sustaining improved outcomes for children and young people.

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 programme is designed to develop more preventative approaches and support inclusive approaches for children with additional needs, keep children safe in family settings, or other settings when this is required, close to Plymouth and support young people to become successful adults. These developments include tackling child poverty through a strong and effective early help and statutory offer to children, young people and families.

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 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							
B	Equalities Impact Assessment (if applicable)							
C	Climate Impact Assessment (if applicable)							

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)
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	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.						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	N/A	Leg	N/A	Mon Off	N/A	HR	N/A	Assets	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Vivien Lines Project Consultant											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes Date agreed: 08/07/2025											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Laing agreed verbally Date approved: 08/07/2025											

I. Introduction

Achieving Excellence 2024-27 was developed early in 2024 following the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services and the ten priorities and milestones for the three years of the plan were informed by extensive engagement with staff from across the service, partners and children, young people and families. The plan was designed to drive improvements in service provision, practice and outcomes for children, young people and their families across Plymouth. Young people told us that the plan should support Plymouth to be ‘equal, kind and safe,’ and there is a strong focus on these areas through the plan as a result.

Milestones for each priority were set out for each of the three years of the plan and informed the detailed service improvements plans in place across the service as well as the One Children’s Services transformation programme. A detailed review of progress has been completed at the end of the first year and this report provides an overview of key achievements. This review has also informed an update of the milestones set for 2025-26 to ensure they reflect changes since the plan was originally developed.