

## **Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel**

**Thursday 6 February 2025**

### **PRESENT:**

Councillor Reilly, in the Chair.

Councillor Wood, Vice Chair.

Councillors Mrs Beer, Gilmour, Krizanac, McLay, McNamara, Penrose (Substituting for Councillor Steel), Simpson, Stephens and Tippetts.

Also in attendance: Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications), Councillor Mary Aspinall (Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care), Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Participation and Skills), David Haley (Director of Children's Services), Stephen Beet (Head of Adult Social Care and retained Functions), Susan London (Performance Advisor) and Paul Stephens (Performance Advisor), Scarlett (Youth Parliament), Eden (Youth Parliament), Sienna (Youth Parliament) Rocky (Youth Parliament), Isabelle Kolinsky (Head of Education and Virtual School), Lisa McDonald (Head of SEND), Vivien Lines (Project Consultant), Ian Taylor (Service Manager for Youth Offending) and Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 14:00 and finished at 17:08.

*Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.*

### 93. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### 94. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting that took place on 14 November 2024 were agreed subject to amendments to minute 90, Child Exploitation and the Philomena Protocol.

### 95. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chairs Urgent Business.

### 96. **Transitions and Preparing for Adulthood**

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) and Councillor Aspinall (Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care) presented the report to the Panel and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The delivery of the transitions for adulthood project was a fundamental project in

the One Children's Services programme with the intention to help children and families at the earliest sign of need and to provide support ranging from advice through to specialist intervention;

- b) It aimed, in collaboration with all key Plymouth partners, to build on the existing transitions offer to develop a network of services, processes and interactions that were able to understand and predict the need and respond together to help children, young people and families at the earliest opportunity;
- c) Plymouth's vision, which was co-produced with young people was that all children and young people in Plymouth would have their voices heard and have the right support and ambitious opportunities for their futures;
- d) A multi-agency project board was operating since October 2024 with six key priorities with individual work streams;
- e) It was important to work hard for those transitions, starting at an earlier stage to ensure it was as smooth as possible for each individual person;
- f) The project was essential and was going towards ensuring that Plymouth was enabling its young people to live meaningful and fulfilling lives when they were reaching adulthood;
- g) Children and Adult services needed to work more collaboratively to ensure that young people could easily access the right support and advice at the right stages in their lives in order to prepare for adulthood and to live as independently as possible;
- h) Significant progress had been made and Cabinet were committed to ensuring that the project made a positive difference in delivering a better future for Plymouth's young people;
- i) At an LGA peer review in January 2025, Plymouth's direction for transitions was recognised positively.

In response to questions raised, it was reported that:

- j) Plymouth was strengthening its universal offer for all families in the city;
- k) It had been announced that Plymouth would be given a fourth year of government funding on top of the three years funding that had already been allocated to deliver the family hubs programme;
- l) Members were requested to help people understand within their communities what offers were in place as the offer was good, but not enough families or children were accessing those universal provisions;
- m) Work stream six, universal advice and guidance was behind schedule due to not having the right support in place to move the work forward. Work as part of that project would look to ensure advice and guidance for children, young people and

families was accessible to all;

- n) The transitions work took into account all factors in the families lives and was person centred to ensure that there was not an oversaturation of support which could overwhelm;
- o) The work aimed to resolve issues of silo working of agencies and the work was already seeing positive results in Children's services and Adult services working together;
- p) The Project Board, coupled with the six work streams provided the cabinet members with reassurance that silo working in the transition space would become a thing of the past;
- q) Plymouth was aspirational for its care leavers and where those young people had aspirations and interests to go to University, they were supported through the Care Leavers team as well as the Virtual School team. It was acknowledged that the gap between care experienced young people and the national average attending university, was too far apart and there were well made plans to address those issues;
- r) Care Leavers were eligible for additional financial support from the Council in accessing university and they were provided support through their Personal Advisors to ensure they were accessing everything available to them;
- s) Care Leavers were treated as a priority group by both the universities they attended as well as the Council;
- t) The Skills Launchpad had a dedicated worker that worked with Care Leavers if it was their intention to go onto university. Having that dedicated worker had already provided good positive results;
- u) The Plymouth Safeguarding Partnership had four priorities, one of which was to evaluate and improve the way in which Plymouth helped children that experienced domestic abuse. Staff were being better trained and had a range of tools and resources available to them.

**Action:** The Committee would be provided the total amount of financial support provided by the Council to Care Leavers when attending University.

**Action:** The work of the project board for Transitions would look to involve the Plymouth Parent Carer Voice with the specific theme of oversaturation of services and whether families felt overwhelmed.

**Action:** The Chair of PPCV would send out an invite to Councillors of the Panel to attend the Plymouth Parent Carer Voice Transition Preparation for Adulthood conference.

**Action:** Transitions to Adulthood update would be added to the work programme to understand the strengths of the project in six months, but also to evaluate areas they might still need to be strengthened. The relevant colleagues from Health would

be invited to address whether Plymouth had the right system in place from the new legislation in which children and young people experiencing/experienced domestic abuse were survivors in their own right.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

97. **Local Area SEND Improvement Plan Progress Report**

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Apprenticeships and Skills) presented the report to the Panel and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The Local Area SEND Improvement Plan progress report summarised the progress made against the SEND Local Area priority action plans;
- b) The update had been collated as part of the SEND Critical Review across January 2025 and aimed to establish what progress had been made since the inspection to test what impact this had on children and young people;
- c) The review had six distinct elements:
  - A new local area SEND self-evaluation form (SEF);
  - Parent Carer Voice Survey (PPCV);
  - A critical review workshop to review progress against all the action on the Local Area SEND Improvement Plan;
  - The creation of a strategic case study from each of the nine priority areas to demonstrate progress and learning since the inspection;
  - Collaborative audits of six children including multi-agency partnership auditing of the children's files and a visit to each of the children in their schools or settings;
  - Discussion groups with children and young people in three mainstream schools about their experience led by the Participation team.
- d) The SEF had been fully updated to represent and evaluate the current work of the local area to support children and young people with SEND and to be in line with the Ofsted Local Area SEND inspection criteria;
- e) The team had robust governance arrangements in place which had a cycle of review and challenge to endorse what happened on a regular basis;
- f) The SEND Critical Review workshop was held with all partners on 09 January 2025 to review the SEND action plan. The workshop facilitated groups including the Department for Education (DFE) Advisor and the Head of SEND from Telford and Wrekin Council;

- g) The findings from the critical review were moderated by the Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills and the Head of SEND. Of the 55 actions in the plan, seven were completed with evidence of clear impact on children and young people. 31 were completed and were being monitored for evidence of impact on children and young people. 17 were deemed to not be fully complete and there were clear actions in progress. The DfE advisor had endorsed the evidence base which would grow over a further two month period;
- h) Significant progress had been made in implementing the Plymouth Local Area SEND Improvement plan with key actions being completed and on-going efforts in place to address the remaining areas;
- i) The Critical Review, in conjunction with the action plan tracker provided evidence of the impact and effectiveness of those actions, demonstrating a commitment to improving outcomes for the children and young people with SEND in Plymouth.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- j) The module of learning disability and autism had been created in partnership with the NHS, ICB, Livewell SW and PPCV and it had been rolled out across the Local Area Partnership;
- k) The Resource Directory that was also co-created would be launched for the Local Area in order to have the right resources available to those that required it;
- l) £740,000 was made available to the Education, Participation and Skills service to ensure they were processing EHCP requests on time;
- m) The 20 week timeframe for EHPC's was the biggest challenge for the service due to the significant number of out of time plans the service had coming out of the Autumn 2024 term. As of 31 January 2025, the service was showing as meeting 18% of Plans within the 20 week timescale.

This showed the service as being on the right trajectory as it had been at 0% for a considerable amount of time. The service was ensuring it hit more of the 20 week timescale for plans as well as improving the Waiting Well offer which aligned with what the NHS were doing to make sure that when families were waiting for a plan, it was not a pause for them. Plymouth had rebranded the funding, the resource and the support that was available to schools to make sure that the waiting time didn't significantly impact the progress they could be making;

- n) A recommendation from Budget scrutiny was for the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel to have the figures of EHCP plans and their progression at regular intervals;
- o) Parents told the PPCV survey that they would like an increased number of the wraparound care for older children during school holidays as what was available in school holidays with more complex needs by way of clubs was not suitable, particularly those that were deaf or visually impaired. Plymouth had woven into the plans a requirement to increase that provision into the future;

- p) There had been a reduction in the numbers of SEN children being suspended which had been due to a number of factors and one in which the Council had improved the way it tracked and monitored suspensions and then had challenging conversations with schools around why children were being suspended;
- q) The Vulnerable Pupils panel was held monthly with a very strong multi-agency partnership across the local area and had supported schools to reduce the risk of permanent exclusion for Plymouth's most vulnerable pupils;
- r) There was focussed work on helping children to attend school more regularly for those children with special educational needs and disabilities. Plymouth's trend in attendance in the 2024/25 academic year was not as strong and there were a number of parents/carers that had chosen to educate their children at home;
- s) Inclusion would be a new area looked at under the new Ofsted framework.

**Action:** Lisa McDonald would speak with the NHS to enquire as to whether the Oliver McGowan training for Learning Disabilities and Autism could be included within the next wave of mandatory training for the Local Area.

**Action:** The service would review the holiday and food programme to ensure it was inclusive off all children in the city.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

98. **Pupil Place Planning Report**

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Apprenticeships and Skills) presented the report to the Board and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The report summarised information produced in the latest pupil forecast model based on the January 2024 school census data;
- b) The information was used to forecast the number of school places which would be required across primary and secondary schools in Plymouth;
- c) The birth rate in Plymouth had been in decline since 2017/18 and as a result there would be a decline in pupil numbers across the city and nationally;
- d) The academic year in 2027/28 would see a reduction of 13% across the primary age cohort across all localities in the city but the localities in the west and southwest would see the largest reduction in numbers;
- e) Secondary school numbers were expected to continue its increasing trend in numbers until 2026/27 when it was expected to decline as the primary school reduction in numbers flowed through;
- f) The SEND sufficiency plan had seen the council work with schools to develop

resourced provision for children with Educational Health and Care Plans (EHCP). One primary school was confirmed and the council was moving forward with planning in respect of buildings. The council was holding initial discussions with one other primary school and two secondary schools;

- g) In addition to resource provision, the council was working with schools to develop a targeted funding model which would start in April 2025. The model was for small cohorts of children with SEND in schools and schools would need space to meet the needs of the children.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- h) A meeting had taken place with the Schools Forum to produce a strategic pupil place plan and the plan was in the process of being updated and would be available after April 2025;
- i) It was commented that the forecasting model used was as accurate as it could be and was using live data from the NHS for births in the city. The subnational data would be updated in May 2025 following Brexit and COVID-19 pandemic pausing that national work;
- j) The Targeted Funding Model was one of the streams of work which would look to redirect teaching expertise rather than losing some teachers as part of the national recruitment and retention issues;
- k) Where the local area was opening the resource provisions for children and young people with an EHCP, Plymouth was targeting those areas where there was a significant need and where families required support. Plymouth was working to ensure that there was a community approach to prevent children and young people travelling across Plymouth and out of their communities.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

99. **Q3 2024/25 Performance Report**

Susan London (Performance Advisor) and Paul Stephens (Performance Advisor) presented the report to the Panel and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The performance report gave data for Quarter three which represented October, November and December 2024;
- b) Children's Social Care Benchmarking had been updated to figures as of 31 March 2024.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- c) Children's services predicted a rise in the number of Child Protection Plans following its response to the Ofsted inspection in 2022 and as a result of improving its response to thresholds and decision making. The next phase would ensure that children and families were receiving the right help and support;

- d) It was acknowledged that there were some children that if they had received different support other than statutory child protection intervention which was earlier, harm could have been prevented;
- e) There was a high proportion of children who were experiencing neglect that were subject to re-referrals into the service. The service would see improvement, but that improvement was not sustained following the stepping down to universal services. It was acknowledged that the re-referral rate was high, but there was a high level of quality assurance in that space. The service was also building capacity better around the family to make the change and improvements more sustainable. The council was also strengthening its early help offer to ensure that when a social worker was not involved, there was sufficient support in the families community;
- f) There was a reliance on agency workers due to the vacancy rate within Children's services which was pressuring the service to maintain good caseload levels for its workforce to provide a successful intervention;
- g) Plymouth's number of children and young people in unregistered provision had decreased to two and was positive for the service in which that number had fluctuated significantly. The two young people in their provisions were in provisions that were CQC registered but not Ofsted registered;
- h) Councillor Laing had a number of conversations with Ofsted and the Department for Education to speed up the process for registering provisions as this was having an impact on children and young people using unregistered provisions;
- i) There were around 20 children and young people that were in residential placements ready to step down to high support foster placements, but those foster placements were not available for the city. The Family homes for Plymouth children was a new scheme which was developed to not just provide additional financial support to Plymouth City Council foster carers that were able to take children with more challenging and complex needs, but also a better support package wrapped around them. The model provided an additional £800 month fee to Plymouth City Council carers as there was a requirement to have at least one carer at home all the time to meet the needs of those complex children;
- j) The inaugural Fostering Summit that took place in 2024 was successful and of the actions identified most were implemented. Plymouth aimed to be a council that valued foster carers by listening and implementing changes following their suggestions.

**Action:** Children's Social Care workforce to be added to the work programme.

The Panel agreed to note the report.



100. **Children, Young People and Families Service Q3 Improvement Update**

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children’s Social Care, Culture and Communications) presented the report to the Panel and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The report provided an update against Plymouth’s Children’s Services improvement plan which was put in place following an Ofsted visit in January 2024;
- b) There continued to be improvement in key areas highlighted by Ofsted;
- c) There was consultation on the development of an integrated front door to Children’s services which was a key first step in Plymouth’s implementation of the Children’s Wellbeing and Education Bill;
- d) There was continued stability in the Front Door with more families receiving targeted help;
- e) There were sustained manageable caseloads within the service;
- f) Families were receiving timely assessments;
- g) There had been positive progress made from the services quality assurance work;
- h) A high proportion of children and families were being seen on time and having an up to date plan;
- i) The focussed work to improve Pathway Plans for care experienced young people was working well and there was good progress of young people being in Education, Employment or Training (EET);
- j) There would be further improvements to service including maximising family and community resources and finding earlier permanence for children in care;
- k) Further improvements to the service would continue with the support of Dorset County Council, Plymouth’s Sector Led Improvement Partners (SLIP) and the independent chair of Plymouth Children’s Services Improvement Board, Theresa Leavy.

Scarlett, Eden, Sienna and Rocky from Plymouth’s Youth Parliament asked the following questions:

Question.	When we visited we spoke about services needing to be safe, kind and equal and it was great that this was adopted in the plan, but can you tell us about how you were doing this as it was not specifically mentioned in the report.
Response:	Keeping children safe featured strongly in the report and that had been an important focus for the service. We make sure we that any children who are at risk of any safeguarding needs are identified and protected

	<p>quickly. The report talked about numbers of children on Child Protections (CP) Plans and timeliness of reviews for those children who had CP plans and the quality assurance evidence would support that Plymouth had a safe system in place for children and young people.</p> <p>In terms of being kind, Plymouth had a real strong priority in the improvement plan around relationships between children and their worker, whether that was a social worker or a family support worker. That had been hard to achieve when Plymouth had a number of vacancies of social workers which resulted in the service bringing in a number of temporary members of staff which wasn't a good thing and didn't help to build relationships as part of a kind approach. The service had worked hard around its recruitment of permanent social workers and it had made progress in 2024/25, but more progress was required. It was still expected that those temporary members of staff were kind and a lot of work had been completed with managers and the workforce as a whole on the culture within the service which was about being respectful and being kind.</p> <p>There was not enough in the report around being equal, but you might see more in relation to Plymouth SEND improvement work where we've been thinking about children with additional needs, children with speech and language needs and how Plymouth made sure that those children were supported to engage in mainstream education to have the same quality of opportunity and the same outcomes.</p> <p>Those principles of being equal, kind and safe had gone through all our work in both education and children's social work. An away day took place yesterday with David Haley's (Director of Children's Services) senior management team and 'equal, kind and safe' was part of those discussions and whether Plymouth was really achieving it. The next head teacher conference would be called equal, kind and safe to keep that focus.</p> <p>There was probably more progress in some areas than others at this point in time, but Plymouth remained committed to that being the way we work and being committed to those three principles and delivering on them more comprehensively over time.</p> <p>Councillor Laing added:</p> <p>Plymouth was working hard to bring children and young people that were in placements outside of Plymouth back to the city to ensure all children had equal access to a placement where they ought to be. Plymouth was creating its own provision in Plymouth to ensure that there was more opportunity to have residential placements in the city. The service was also working hard to increase the number of foster carers in Plymouth so that we have fostering placements. The council was actively trying to have foster carers who could deal with young people with more complex and challenging needs that were in residential</p>
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	placements but could be in a foster placement if the foster carers were available who had the right skills to support them to be in foster care.
Question.	How are you making sure young people's voices are being heard when writing these reports?
	<p>The service had kept checking in with Plymouth's Youth Parliament and in the last quarter I (Vivien Lines) had been back to Youth Parliament and to our Young Safeguarders to talk about progress and hear your views. In specific areas of work we're really making sure that we have young people's views embedded in what we're doing. Councillor Laing talked about our children's homes developments and we are making sure that we really co-design those homes with our care experienced young people so that their views feed in all the time and not just into a report at the end, but into the work as it progressed.</p> <p>The service had young people involved in its recruitment work, children's homes development, the on-going work for the three year plan and we're just starting a piece of work in response to government reforms which will really change the way we're delivering our support to families. It was also discussed at the away day yesterday, how we get young people and families co-designing this with us and making sure that we are asking key questions and listening to the views of children and families along the way.</p>
Question.	Do you think there's any area of your work where young people's views could be better assimilated or increased?
Response:	<p>The Children's homes work presented a really crucial opportunity to get that right and do that well. We've had to get the work started quickly and so we want to make sure that doesn't mean that we do it without thinking about what children need, this is important.</p> <p>Councillor Laing added:</p> <p>David Haley and I reflected on the Listening Care Council in which I used to go periodically to the meetings and meet young people and there was a good, 'you said, we did' model. That model had dropped off, but as a result of a conversation which was had today, we would look to revive that model or look to ensure that the right channels were in place to be able to challenge Councillors or David Haley.</p> <p>David Haley added:</p> <p>We would look to provide the forward plan for scrutiny and the Corporate Parenting Board across the year and you would choose which reports to would like to be part of in writing as it would have your direct voice woven into the reports.</p>

Question.	What is the simple step by step plan for you to achieve the improvements that children, young people, parents and carers identified?
Response:	<p>A key part of the improvement plan and the approach that we've taken over the last year had been about stabilising our workforce. We've really focussed on recruiting and retaining permanent social workers across our service. We have around 200 social workers in the service and 25% of them (40) were agency social workers with some vacant posts which impacted on the things you were talking about such as relationships between the worker and the young person which helped them to understand their plan, help them to understand what was needed, what's the work that was happening and having a good relationship so they felt listened to, felt valued.</p> <p>We made good progress in stabilising our management team and all our senior managers were permanent. We've reduced the number of agency social workers and increased the numbers of permanent social workers, but there were still too many agency workers in the service. This was a national issue and not just one being seen at a local level. The service had tried to introduce a number of different ways to attract people to come to Plymouth and make sure that we were investing in their career and keeping them here, but it was still challenging so we've got a lot more to do, we're going to keep focussed on that. The other side of the plan was in ensuring that the workers that Plymouth did have were highly skilled, that they're good and knew how to communicate well with young people. Our workers have been developing the ways in which they write all of their documents, their assessments, their plans, they write them to the child now so they use language that is accessible and help the child to understand the concerns at the time and what is the plan in a family friendly and child friend way.</p> <p>Councillor Laing added:</p> <p>At the Star Awards we had three events at every year for the different age groups and our 18 plus care leavers this year was the best attended. Everyone received a certificate and their workers fed into those where you could then see the individual nature of them and their achievements and what they've done and the progress they've made in that year is celebrated with everybody in the room. That was one way for Councillors to meet and talk to young people.</p> <p>I have been a Councillor for a while and we were seeing those young people growing up and it's a really lovely way to celebrate what they do and I was taken by how many of our 18-25 years olds came to that because that not people whose foster carers or people they lived with bringing them, they come of their own accord and they want to come because they are celebratory events.</p> <p>The Corporate Parenting Board which I chair has good news stories at the end of every agenda so we could hear about young people getting</p>

	into university or someone representing the country. We will write a card back to young people and I've been to a graduation of one of our young people who kindly invited me, so we do have those connection points.
Supplementary:	Can you elaborate on the question particularly around the step-by-step plan on how you can achieve the improvements for the children, young people, parents and carers that were identified in the report?
Response:	<p>The step-by-step plan looked to ensure that Plymouth had a stable workforce, skilling them up and training them on key areas that needed to improve and the final part of that was how we would see results. The third part was to evaluate our improvement work to make sure that the difference that we were expecting was happening under the quality assurance framework.</p> <p>David Haley added:</p> <p>We did a really good piece of work with young people and parents on the SEND action plan which was to present the plan in a child and young person friendly way and I wonder if we need to do that with our plan. We do have a three year improvement plan in place which is set out in a very adult speak way and it might be helpful if we could work with you as a group, or the right group of young people to make that plan accessible to young people in a better way so if that would be something you want to work with us on, then I would delegate that to Vivien to follow that up with Stuart Hogg.</p> <p>Councillor Laing added:</p> <p>I would reiterate what I said about the Listening Care Council and was something that needed to be restored because it did work well before and young people in those groups did value.</p>
Question.	What are your priorities after this report and how can we see results having an impact and making a difference?
Response:	<p>Priorities for us in the next phase are making sure that families get help earlier so that we're working with our colleagues in education, schools and health services to make sure that when families need help that they get that help quickly so that we're not waiting for things to become really complex or problematic but that support is preventing needs from escalating and you'll see results from that by seeing fewer children needed to come into care, fewer children needing child protection support and more families will be receiving that earlier help. Families would get the help they need the first time and one time instead of families needing to come into the service three or four times before they get the help they need. So we would see some really improved patterns, trends and outcomes. Children and young people would also be telling</p>

	<p>us that they've got a good relationship with their worker and they understand what's happening. We would also expect to see fewer complaints and more positive feedback from children and young people in our audits when looking at practice.</p> <p>Councillor Laing added:</p> <p>We had an item at today's meeting which looked at data and we talked about re-referrals within 12 months which is what councillors usually go to first as a real indicator of we're getting things right because families are having the right intervention for the right amount of time which means they don't need to come back to us.</p> <p>We've done a lot of work on the MASH which is the first contact that families will have, that's been a really intense bit of work because we weren't getting things right there and we've seen that the changes are being sustained which is really encouraging, so I think those are the indicators that the plan is working.</p> <p>Care Leavers and their outcomes and their futures is something that we need to keep working on and when we see that more of those young people were in jobs or further education or education of some other kind, then that will also be another indicator that we're making improvements.</p> <p>Our recruitment of foster carers was important which would enable the service to provide stable long term relationships with that person. Recruiting more local authority foster carers would also be another part of delivering this plan and again we are making good progress on that.</p>
Supplementary:	<p>We do a national consultation called 'Make your Mark' every year that highlights young people's priorities from across the UK and sometimes here so how can you take those priorities around what we voted for into account when you're making these plans in the future?</p>
Response:	<p>When we were designing our plan we came and spoke to you and you helped us shape the priorities which worked really well and that's why we ended up with a plan that had 'equal, kind and safe' embedded in it, because that's what you told us was important so we can do that again and we can come and co-design this with you. We can agree priorities and plans with you, shape them with you through our mechanism whether that's with Youth Parliament or our children in care of young safeguarders.</p>

In response to questions raised by councillors it was reported that:

- l) There were a number of areas in which a practice auditor would advise work was not where it should be and a common factor was drift in the plan, where actions had been set but hadn't been achieved on time. This was a common factor where there

had been changes to workers disrupting progress from families and not achieving the outcomes that were set out. The plan looked to improve the supervision and management oversight of caseloads. Where it was identified that practice was not at the level required during the audits, the service would quickly put that right and feed learning back into the workforce;

- m) Within practice week discussions there was always equal weight to good practice and identifying practice that still needed improve;
- n) The service was building a better library of good practice;
- o) It was a requirement within the audit work that the service made contact with the children and their parents to seek their views as part of Plymouth's evaluation of whether something is inadequate, requires improvement or good;
- p) As part of Practice Weeks, children and young people would be spoken to a part of those weeks.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

101. **Family Homes for Plymouth Children**

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) introduced the report and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The first Mockingbird model had been launched as there was a plan for a further three;
- b) There was good progress on the council's offer to Plymouth's Kinship carers and for its Special Guardians;
- c) The council was creating more provision in the city which would in turn look to tackle some of the services budget pressure whilst also gaining more control over provision used for Plymouth's cared for children.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

102. **Young Female Violence Prevention Programme**

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) presented the report to the Board and highlighted the following key points:

- a) There had been a spike in October 2024 in which there were a number of girls committing violent offences which had almost doubled from 20% or the whole cohort of children pre-pandemic to 38.5% in October 2024;
- b) Since October 2024, the Youth Justice service had worked with 19 girls and their families and carers whose offending was violent in nature. Much of the

violence was outside of the home appeared to be pre-meditated in nature, being uploaded to social media;

- c) Of the 19 girls that had worked with the service, only one had re-offended;
- d) It had taken time to build trusting relationships with those young women to understand the reasons for the violence which had been predominately as a result of peer pressure;
- e) To prevent other children following a similar pattern we realised that we needed to raise awareness in schools and the council had commissioned youth workers from Plymouth Argyle Trust to engage with groups in schools;
- f) Violence involving boys had seen a 6% year on year decrease with the majority of violence involving them being linked to exploitation through county lines;
- g) Child female violence had increased in all local authorities in Devon and Cornwall which mirrored a national picture. The council therefore continued to work with schools to educate children of the consequences of violence.

Scarlett, Eden, Sienna and Rocky from Plymouth's Youth Parliament asked the following questions:

Question:	When we were discussing this the other week we felt like there was a lot of ambiguity with what was being said and we didn't really quite understand. Can we have more detail around the numbers so we can understand the issues better. What were the levels of seriousness of the offences and how many of the 19 girls were against strangers and filmed for social media?
Response:	<p>There was evidence of 11 offences that were uploaded to social media including Telegram to closed groups which were invite only. Of those 11 assaults on strangers which were filmed in various locations across the city. In terms of seriousness of those offences, there was grievous bodily harm down to physical harm of the victims receiving cuts and bruises.</p> <p>An example was shared of 15 girls attacking three girls in Drakes Circus all of which didn't know one another. The attack was premeditated and the girls had setup three points of view to record the assaults.</p> <p>It was known that other assaults happened based on differing schools.</p>
Question:	What were the numbers of girls like when compared to boys in the city. The report didn't specify the rates of male violence which was happening at a higher rate than female violence.
Response:	There had been a spike in the numbers of girls coming through the system than ever before. The numbers of boys committing violent offences had dropped by 6% and a lot of the violence had been orchestrated by adults where there had been drugs involved. It was noted that the service had a good grip on boy violence which was mirrored



	<p>through the police data.</p> <p>There were 46 boys open to the service for violent offences and there would be 11 girls with the service at the end of February as a number of their order would've concluded. 38% of boys open to the service re-offended with violence.</p>
Question:	What are Plymouth Argyle going to be doing in the work with young people and how were they going to be helping involve young people in the process?
Response:	<p>Plymouth Argyle Trust had 120 youth workers employed who were both male and female offering a wide range of programmes including sporting interventions, behaviour work and working with families. It had taken a long time to build trusting relationships with young people due to a lack of trust in the police and youth justice workers when we come in and ask questions. We were hoping to utilise the skills of the youth workers from Plymouth Argyle to go into schools and raise awareness of the consequences of what happens to these girls when they do these offences. The service was confident that the interventions were being rectified which showed in the re-offending data, but the aim was to get in their earlier with schools.</p>
Question:	What are you doing to look at the root causes and see if you need to involve more services around intervention and prevention and what else was being done to help these girls?
Response:	<p>Around offending there was a lot of support around them and indeed the victims who had been assaulted also get a lot of support. As this was a new and developing picture it was thought it was better to involve Plymouth Argyle. There was a spike nationally and there were interventions run in London but there were no accredited programmes for girl on girl violence. Plymouth was working with the Youth Justice Board to address this.</p> <p>Trevi house have been involved since the start and this topic was raised at the Safer Executive meeting which met quarterly. They had seen the spikes as well for the young women at Trevi House.</p> <p>Plymouth had seen the spike which had started to go down, but we couldn't be complacent around that and we need to continue to build a picture and work with other agencies.</p>

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- h) There had been huge difficulty in influencing national organisations to remove platforms where the violence was being shared;
- i) A social worker was doing great work around female empowerment to help

steer girls away from peer pressure environments;

- j) The Youth Justice service was able to offer the same level of support to victims as to those that were the perpetrators for the first time as a result of additional funding received;
- k) It was recognised that some of the girls instigating the violence were the ones that were recording, but were not subject to prosecution in this country;
- l) The Targeted support service aimed to intervene with children at an earlier age to prevent their behaviour escalating into something that was criminal.

The Panel agreed to write to the relevant minister requesting them to look at the laws around uploading violent offences to social media platforms.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

103. **Tracking Decisions**

The Panel agreed to note the tracking decisions log.

104. **Work Programme**

The Panel agreed to add the following to the work programme:

- Transitions to adulthood
- Children's use of social media
- Child Exploitation
- School readiness
- Female Empowerment Programme