

Ofsted Focused Visit to Plymouth City Council's Children's Services -Review of Arrangements for Care Leavers

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Ofsted completed a Focused Visit to Plymouth Children's Services as part of the Ofsted Inspection Framework. The focused visit took place on 1st and 2nd July 2025 and reviewed the arrangements for care leavers as well as the progress that had been made since the previous ILACS inspection that took place in January 2024.
- 1.2. Ofsted published a letter summarising the findings of the focused visit on 31st July 2025.
- 1.3. Ofsted found that "Plymouth City Council is an ambitious Corporate Parent, driven effectively by the Director of Children's Services. Senior leaders have secured many improvements for care-experienced young people in response to the areas for development identified in the previous inspection in February 2024".

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Ofsted completed a Focused Visit to Plymouth Children's Services as part of the Ofsted Inspection Framework.
- 2.2. The focused visit reviewed the arrangements for care leavers and the progress that had been made since the previous ILACS inspection that took place in January 2024.
- 2.3. Alongside the two days spent on site inspecting the service, they considered a broad range of evidence, including reviewing care-experienced young people's records, case discussions with personal advisers, social workers and managers and spoke with a number of care-experienced young people. Inspectors also reviewed relevant local authority performance and quality assurance information and a range of supporting documentation from the Local Authority and our partners.

3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: STRENGTHS AND IMPROVEMENTS

- 3.1. Ofsted found many improvements for care leavers since the ILACS inspection in January 2024, when the quality and consistency of services for care-experienced young people was judged to be requires improvement to be good. They concluded that the self-evaluation evidenced that senior leaders know their service well and this reflected what inspectors saw during the visit.
 - Plymouth City Council's Local Offer to Our Care Leavers is comprehensive and has been thoughtfully strengthened in response to consultation with young people with full political support.
 - Senior leaders have strengthened work with partner agencies.
 - Young people told inspectors how much they value their Personal Advisers (PAs), saying that their PAs help them, stay alongside them are responsive and kind. Care-experienced young people receive timely practical and emotional support from social workers and PAs who know them well. PAs and multi-agency professionals are ambitious for care-experienced young people and advocate strongly for them.
 - Those at risk of exploitation are supported by the multi-agency 'Be Safe Team'.
 - The quality of Pathway Plans has improved since the previous inspection. The codesign of the new template with care experienced young people has supported their engagement in

completion of their plans. Plans are sensitively written and are co-produced with the young person.

- PA's' written visit records for their young people have improved since the previous inspection. They now demonstrate how well PAs know each of their young people and are written in a positive and trauma-informed style to the young person.
- The physical health needs of young people are well considered and met with young people benefiting from access to a flexible, co-located care experienced nursing team.
- The Corporate Parenting Board was seen to provide effective governance and oversight.
- It is recognised that Plymouth City Council has made additional resources and investment decisions, guided by the voices of care experienced young people, that have made positive differences for care experienced young people.
- Leaders have increased the range of support and programmes available to promote opportunities for care-experienced young people. There is support to engage young people in learning opportunities from when they are Not In Education, Employment or Training (NEET).
- Care experienced young people who are pregnant or are parents continue to receive dedicated effective support.
- All young people in custody are visited regularly and receive strong advocacy from their PAs.
- Senior leaders and managers are committed to continuous improvement in practice with audits providing excellent opportunities for young people to talk about their experiences with managers.
- PAs are very positive about working in Plymouth, despite very busy workloads. They emphasised a new culture of optimism and a Director of Children's Services who listens and is passionate about getting the right services for all care-experienced young people.

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

4.1. Ofsted identified two key areas that need to improve:

- 4.1.1 The effectiveness of joint working across the council with housing to improve the quality and availability of accommodation for care leavers.
- Approaches have not yet been sufficiently effective in developing accommodation sufficiency for all care-experienced young people.
 - A small number of vulnerable care-experienced young people are moved into bed and breakfast accommodation and some live in this accommodation for too long, which impacts on their stability, emotional well-being and life chances.
 - Pathways to accommodation for young people leaving custody are not well developed, with those not moving to approved premises or family, being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 4.1.2 The quality of supervision and management oversight, including the identification and management of risk.
- It was noted that while risk is well identified, the focus on risk can reduce with time and not be sufficiently reviewed through supervision and planning.

- 4.2. Ofsted also noted that while improvements have been made in many aspects of care-experienced young people's lives, it is too early to see the full impact of improvement plans in all aspects of their lives.
- 4.3. Pathway plans are now ambitious and capture young people's wishes well, but there is still more improvement required in respect of detailed action setting.

5. ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN

- 5.1. All young people in Bed and Breakfast were immediately reviewed and clear plans agreed to progress their move into suitable accommodation. A supervision has taken place or been scheduled for each Personal Adviser alongside the Quality Assurance Team to ensure that the individual risk assessment and plan is incorporated into a reflective supervision, SMART actions are set and reviewed through supervision. Quality Assurance activity is planned for October to ensure that learning has been embedded, actions have been completed, and the risk has reduced for the young person and will report findings to the Quality Assurance Performance Improvement Board, chaired by the Director of Children's Services, in November 2025.
- 5.2. A weekly review meeting, chaired by the Service Manager or Head of Service, has been implemented for all young people in Bed and Breakfast accommodation to increase senior leadership oversight of risk, track and progress plans to move to suitable accommodation and identify and remove barriers. Progress report will be provided to each Quality Assurance Performance Improvement Board and Corporate Parenting Board for at least the next 6 months.
- 5.3. Operational managers across the Care Leavers Service and Community Connections are meeting to develop a Targeted Accommodation Action Plan chaired by the Head of Service Permanence (13/08/2025).
- 5.4. Strategic managers from One Children's Service and Community Connections are meeting to review the agreed approach, chaired at a Director level (15/08/2025)
- 5.5. An additional Team Manager had already been recruited to increase management capacity and reduce both the number of PAs and young people each Team Manager oversees. This person has now started within the team. This will improve management oversight and capacity for quality assurance addressing concerns around the quality of supervision and management oversight, including the identification and management of risk.
- 5.6. The Quality Assurance Team are supporting each PA and their Team Manager in improving supervision through role modelling and quality assurance activity.

6. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1. All areas for improvement and further development is being incorporated into the Care Leavers Service Plan and monitored through Corporate Parenting Operational Managers Group (monthly) and Corporate Parenting Board (Quarterly).