

Introduction

The Achieving Excellence Strategy was developed following the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in January 2024. This three year (2024-27) strategic plan addressed the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted and also set out strategic priorities developed through extensive engagement with staff from across Children's Services and children and young people. The plan sets out 10 strategic priorities to improve outcomes for children and young people and families. 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.

Key milestones were agreed for each priority for the first year and a full review of progress was completed at the end of the first year and presented to Scrutiny in July 2025. Young people were included in this review of progress. Significant achievements were noted across all of the year one milestones for the ten agreed priorities in the first year.

The key milestones for each of the ten priorities were also reset for the second year of the plan, to reflect progress and national and local developments during the year, including the requirements to deliver the Families First Programme reforms.

This report provides a further update on progress in the first half of 2025-26 (April to September).

I. Priorities for 2025-26

Key priorities for 2025-26 were agreed as;

- 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 Elective Home Education (EHE).
- Embedding best practice for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) across schools and settings so that fewer children need a statutory assessment to get the support they need
- Implement the Families First Partnership (FFP) 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 children in need, child protection plans, the Public Law Outline and in care at the right time.
- Fully implementing a 'Belonging Framework' across schools and settings to improve children's attendance and attainment.
- Ensure effective family decision making models ensuring Family Network Meetings are held with all families at an early point, and Family Group Conferences (FGC) 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 Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) are timelier 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.
- Strengthening our partnership working arrangements and governance, including for early help and the wider children's system.

2. Progress and challenges in Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 of 2025-26

Full details of progress to date against the key milestones for 2025/26 are set out in the table below.

Key areas to highlight include;

- Further extension of the Family Hubs programme across Plymouth, including into satellite sites, offering more families access to early help and targeted partnership interventions in the early years to provide a good start in life.
- Development of more inclusive approach through improved support and advice in the Graduated Approach to Inclusion and the Ordinarily Available Provision guidance which is supporting more children with SEND to remain in mainstream schools and settings.
- Launched our Belonging Framework to Headteachers to support a renewed approach to improving attendance.
- Creative approaches to engage priority groups of young people in education, employment and training.
- Launched a strengthened Families First Front Door with partners in an improved space using a conversation-based approach to support more families to access the right help at the right time reducing the number of families needing social work assessments.
- Strengthening Targeted Help to families introducing additional Family Help Lead Practitioners to support more children and families in need.
- Refocused the Families First Partnership with improved partnership governance, establishing a partnership Board reporting to the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership (PSCP), and partnership working groups to progress all key areas of the reforms. Engagement events are currently enabling us to codesign next steps in key areas with staff.
- The work of our Family Homes for Plymouth Children Programme, including to recruit more foster carers now supporting them with three Mockingbird constellations, opening our own children's homes and strengthened arrangements to prevent more children from entering care.
- Achieved 100% on EHCP six weekly timeliness and a clear capital strategy progressing to improve local sufficiency for children with SEND.
- Improved support to young people in transition and a new vision for a 0-25 service.
- A focused approach to quality assurance Practice Weeks across the service and clear evidence of improvements in the Front Door and Permanence teams.
- Further strengthening partnership arrangements for Families First Partnership delivery.

Key challenges include;

- The implementation of Family Help Lead Practitioners and the associated restructure has not enabled the expected seamless approach to our work with children, young people and families. The current structure and practice model are being reviewed to address this and changes required will be progressed as part of the implementation of the Families First Partnership programme to April 2026.
- This, alongside staff recruitment, retention and turnover challenges, has contributed to current considerable pressure in the Children's Social Work teams which has impacted on the team's capacity and practice. An immediate mitigation plan is in place to manage the risks, including staff from other teams undertaking assessments, managing case work and providing management support and over-sight.
- Difficulties recruiting and retaining experienced qualified social workers to support high quality relationship-based practice with families continue to be experienced. The approach and strategies to support social work recruitment have been strengthened and a refocused recruitment campaign is being launched in December and early January 2026 with updated materials and strengthened offer to attract more workers to work permanently for Plymouth. Whilst it has also been difficult to recruit agency social workers, we have successfully recruited both permanent and agency social workers to start in January 2026.
- Continued high levels of demand and financial pressures in a number of areas including residential placements for children in care and the costs of specialist provision for children with additional needs, including transport and short breaks.
- Capacity for system development, particularly to support the system changes needed for the Families First Partnership. This is being discussed with Corporate colleagues to identify a solution.

Strategic Priority 1: Early Help

Vision: A strong and effective early help offer which reaches children, young people and families who need it when they need it and improves outcomes and destinations for all children and young people and families.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- Further develop our universal provision, Family Hubs and partnership early help in communities to better meet need in local areas and reduce the need for statutory interventions with families.
- Develop shared data and analytics to identify and reach vulnerable families early to provide early help support and prevent more complex needs.
- Increase number of assessments and interventions provided at the early help phase and reduce rates of statutory assessment.
- More families receive early help support and Outcomes Star evidences improved outcomes.
- Evidence-based universal early language development programme in place across the city and evidence of more children accessing appropriate intervention.

Progress in Q1 and Q2

- 11 Family Hubs now operate across Plymouth, each connected or co-located with wider services to improve access and bring support closer to communities. Hubs are delivering a wide range of universal and targeted sessions and interventions, acting as a primary access point for families seeking early help support.
- Family Hubs are also expanding the hub-and-spoke model through the development of satellite sites. One satellite has launched to date, with a further 12 planned for early next year. Satellite sites will make use of existing community buildings and organisations to reach new target groups and neighbourhoods. These sites will provide local access points for information, support and delivery of services based on identified community need further developing the early help model.
- Family Hubs now have a membership base of over 25,000, with approximately 3,500 members attending a Hub each month. Family Hubs have seen a 21% increase in referrals from 2024 to 2025.
- Outcomes Star continues to be used across services to track progress and evidence improved outcomes for families engaged in support.
- The ICB is leading on the development of a new citywide Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) strategy. Family Hubs continue to deliver a range of evidence-based early language interventions sessions and are exploring the commissioning of Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) support within Hubs in areas of highest need. This will strengthen early identification, improve

- OAP Guidance and best practice embedded, well understood and implemented by schools and settings - fewer children requiring statutory assessment.
- Local offer GATI website providing easy and accessible information fully utilised and effective implementation of targeted funding for schools.
- Fully implement Belonging Framework, identify and support vulnerable pupils to be in full time education reducing rates of EHE, part time timetables, exclusions and absence.
- Evidence-based packages of support are reducing rates of NEET in groups of at risk of young people.
- access to timely intervention, and support families with strategies to promote language development at home.
- The Plymouth Graduated Approach To Inclusion (GATI) website has been fully updated with new additions – there have been over 40,000 visitors since the launch.
- The Belonging Framework launched at the Head Teacher Conference on 23rd October 2025. The six strands of the Place Based Working Group and the Education Workstream (pre-16) of Team Plymouth are being brought together under one Education Strategy which will launch in January 2026.
- EET status remains high at 92% for SEND young people with an EHCP.
- Currently developing a Supported Apprenticeship programme between On Course South West and PCC (live in September 2026).
- Connect to Work programme commenced, with priority support for young people who are Not in Education Employment and Training (NEET)/ at risk of NEET.

Strategic Priority 2: Targeted Help

Vision: Practices which build family and community networks and support more children to remain safely in their families. Reshaping the Targeted Help offer to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and reduce the number of families receiving statutory assessments. Develop and implement clear pathways between early help, Targeted Help and statutory social work. Targeted approaches to improved educational attendance and attainment for vulnerable groups.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- Finalise the partnership review of Building Support threshold document to ensure families get the right help at the right time.
- Fully implement the *Families First* Front Door so that more families access earlier family help.
- Ensure support enables families to make sustained change reducing the % of families experiencing re-referrals.

Progress in Q1 and Q2

- Work to set out the continuum of need is progressing with partners as part of the implementation of the *Families First* Partnership (FFP) reforms. This has included consideration of opportunities to collaborate with regional partners.
- The *Families First* Front Door moved into better accommodation and is developing a conversation-based approach and expanding its partnership offer to ensure more families access the right help at

- Extend the use of family decision making models so that the right children are subject to child protection and increasing the use of connected carers when care is needed.
- Further development of family help interventions to reduce the number of children and families requiring statutory interventions.
- Development of evidence-based interventions to further reduce the number of children entering care in an unplanned way.
- Fully implement Extended Virtual School CPD offer across services, schools and settings.
- Children at risk of poor attendance identified at the earliest point, targeted support put in place leading to a reduction in children with persistent or severe absence.
- Further develop approaches with partners to increase the number of children with SEND benefiting from inclusive approaches.
- Develop approaches so that more disabled children benefit from access to short breaks in inclusive universal settings.

the right time. November Practice Week found timely responses and child centred practice. Focus on re-referrals has not yet led to sustained improvement and remains high (26% in October) with focused activity overseen by our monthly performance board to ensure support leads to sustainable change for families.

- The FFP implementation includes a clear focus on strengthening family led models of assessment and planning. The dedicated Kinship Support Team is strengthening support to connected carers.
- Investment in 20 additional Family Help Lead Practitioners (FHLPS) to provide more earlier support to families. Current recruitment to SW qualified FHLPS in the Targeted Help service to extend this further and review of service structures to ensure a seamless response to families.
- A business case has been agreed for investment in an enhanced model to prevent adolescents from entering care, learning from evidenced based approaches around the Country.
- Developments have led to improved attendance of children in need and for those persistently absent on a child protection plan. Fewer children have become EHE this year than in the same period in 2024/25. Permanent exclusion remains lower than that seen at the start of 2024/25. Numbers of children on a part-time timetable continue to reduce.
- The EHCP team issued 200% more plans 2025-2025 compared to the previous year.
- The GATI platform has been nationally recognised as strong practice. The targeted funding model is now live across 38 schools supporting 380 children without EHCPs to improve attendance and engagement.

Strategic Priority 3 – Timely and Effective Social Work Practice

Vision: A good assessment, planning and endings for every child and young person which supports needs being met in a timely way. High quality supervision and evidence of the impact of management oversight for all workers/children. Improvements in priority areas; Out Of Hours, Local Authority Designated Officer, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, Children's Disability Team.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- 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.
- Implement seamless 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.
- Implement the 'Rethink Formulation' practice model to support focused workforce development with managers and ensure assessment, planning and supervision supports reflective and focused interventions for children.
- 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.
- Fully implement the tools developed by our Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership to improve partnership approaches when concerns are identified about child sexual abuse, neglect, domestic abuse and adolescent exploitation.
- Implement practice arrangements so that disabled children receive high quality assessments, plans and reviews which ensure they receive the right support.

Progress Q1 and Q2

- New FFP partnership governance arrangements are in place reporting to the PSCP, and all key areas of the reforms are progressing supported by partnership working groups.
- Despite a strong focus in this area, there are challenges in the recruitment, retention and stability of an experienced social worker workforce which is inevitably impacting on the quality of practice. The challenges resulting from structure changes are being addressed and a new approach is being developed to attract and retain experienced qualified staff.
- Removing Initial Response Teams has reduced hand offs for families. Opportunities are being identified to improve this further through locality models of delivery.
- Rethink Formulation was formally accepted as the new practice model for adoption across all agencies in Plymouth in September 2025. A series of introductory guides and workshops have been produced and delivered to commence awareness raising across Children's Services and the wider partnership. In Q2 work will commence to embed Rethink Formulation in core procedures and processes across the FFP system, as transformation workstreams give effect to establishing new service areas and frameworks for practice.
- The FFP implementation includes a clear focus on strengthening family led models of assessment and planning. Twenty-six families benefited from family group conferences including 12 at the family help stage (in Q2).

- Further develop approaches so that children in care and care leavers experience good health, accommodation, education and employment outcomes.
- Refocus the One Children's Service leadership and management development programme for TM/SM/HoS to improve confidence in and application of practice standards and embed the changes being made to leadership behaviours, strategic planning and improvement.
- Teams continue to focus on the use of the PSCP tools and the quality of assessments and interventions in priority areas with progress evaluated in quality assurance.
- A development plan is in place to transform the short breaks offer for disabled children with revised eligibility criteria being developed with input from families and implementation of a dedicated assessment tool to ensure families with disabled children benefit from the right help at the right time.
- Connect to Work signed up 14 Care Experienced young people in the first week of going live, and they are all being supported into positive next steps.
- Good progress has been made in relation to the findings of the care leavers Ofsted focused visit in July including improved support to young people leading to fewer young people experiencing bed and breakfast accommodation.
- The bespoke leadership and management development programme has moved into the next phase with a focused approach of coaching and development work for Team Managers.

Strategic Priority 4 – The Right Homes for Cared for Children at the Right Time

Vision: Use of tools and assessment to support children ready for step down from residential. Foster For Plymouth recruitment and retention and increased use of connected carers. Local market growth. Permanence for children including through reunification and support to Special Guardians and kinship carers.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- Further develop provision for children at risk of care to further reduce the number of children who come into care in an unplanned way.
- Further strengthen placement brokerage to maximise placement opportunities within the external market.

Progress in Q1 and Q2

- A Business Case has been agreed for investment in an intensive model of support for families where adolescents are at risk of care. Set up is progressing. Unplanned admissions are monitored closely and where they do occur are usually required to safeguard children from significant harm in the home.
- Additional placements Brokerage Officer and Quality Assurance Officer posts have been created and improvements made to the

- Further strengthen stable care arrangements for all children in care, including focused work for children at risk of unplanned placement moves.
- Support a further cohort of children to step-down from residential care to a family setting in accordance with their agreed plan.
- Increase the number of children experiencing successful reunification.
- Deliver an effective marketing approach and achieve a net gain of at least 20 Foster for Plymouth foster carers offering placements to all age groups.
- Increase sufficiency of foster placements for priority groups, including UASC, sibling groups and short breaks for disabled children.
- Embed Mockingbird and implement further constellations.
- Further extend the High Support and emergency foster care models.
- Embed special guardianship and kinship carer support offer.
- Take forward agreed approach to extending residential provision in Plymouth and develop the external market in priority areas in accordance with our Sufficiency Strategy.

quality assurance of placements, particularly unregulated arrangements. However, the placement market remains highly challenging, and placement costs continues to rise.

- All 14 and 15 year old children in care have been reviewed to establish any risks to their stable care and focused plans agreed where needed.
- At the end of September 63 children were in children's homes placements, a slight reduction on the previous month. 11 children have been supported to step out of residential this year, including 3 into our high support scheme, and 34 more children have plans for fostering but challenges identifying suitable fostering placements nationally persist.
- Continued progress is being made with in house fostering growth supported by active marketing and improved support to carers. At the end of September 163 children were in in house foster placements, compared to 151 at the start of the year.
- Three Mockingbirds models of support to foster carers are now in place with a fourth planned.
- A market development plan is in place to further improve access to local provision and targets were agreed for each placement type with growth monitored by the Family Homes Board.

Strategic Priority 5 – Sufficient Provision which meets Local Needs

Vision: Ensuring sufficient high-quality provision and take up. The development of a responsibility-based model for Alternative Provision. SEND provision that meet need and emerging need.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- Continue to ensure EHCPs are more timely and implement the revised model of funding to support fewer children to need an EHCP.
- Implementation of SEND capital strategy to develop provision to meet need in priority areas.

Progress in Q1 and Q2

- EHCP 6-week timeliness was 100% for September. 97% of duty calls on average now answered compared to 50% in February.
- The targeted funding model is in action across 30 schools with 300 children accessing alternative pathways. Autumn monitoring is demonstrating improved engagement and increased attendance.

- Clear vision and purpose for the Alternative Provision system which underpins the operation of day-to-day processes.
- Service level agreements embedded through the termly monitoring meetings.
- Decision-making groups and financial controls in place setting out trajectories and mitigation arrangements.
- Improve local provision to reduce demand for Home to School Transport.
- Develop an updated short breaks offer, and a co-produced commissioning approach that is flexible, equitable and accessible and meets needs.
- 58 specialist-maintained places have been created, including Longcause Phase 1 and the Mill Ford satellite at Riverside School, providing local solutions that avoid costly Independent Specialist Placements averaging £68,000 per child per year and high transport commitments.
- 10 assessment nursery places have been created at Woodlands Specialist School, supporting preschool children on the assessment pathway and enabling the most appropriate placement at primary transition, with a potential cost avoidance of £810,000 to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).
- Demand for Home to School Transport continues to increase as the EHCP work has progressed and despite the creation of local provision, transport to provision at distance to Plymouth continues to create a pressure.
- All service level agreements and new standard operating procedures now in place and utilised. All service level agreements are monitored termly.
- DSG management plan has been developed to demonstrate the trajectory of spend and mitigations in place. Review to take place in November. The data available has vastly improved the presentation of information.
- Activities offer advertised for disabled children to access universal services and new short breaks statement now live alongside comprehensive action plan to improve provision across universal, targeted and specialist services.
- Plans are underway to open 20 new Mainstream Resourced Provision places by September 2027, creating inclusive opportunities within local schools. Alongside this, a proposed major new build for Mill Ford School will deliver 50 additional special school places by September 2029, ensuring capacity for the most complex needs.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively seeking spaces across the mainstream estate to develop SEND satellite provisions working closely with school leaders. A review of the current contract for Alternative Provision is underway including work with our Sector Led Improvement Partner, Wiltshire, to develop a responsive and flexible approach in Plymouth which contributes to improved attendance. 	
Strategic Priority 6 – Preparation for Adulthood	
<p>Vision: Strengthening support at key points of transition. Earlier planning with all partners. Confirming and implementing expectations for priority/vulnerable groups with partners (including young people and residents with SEND, Care leavers, young people in criminal justice system, parents and carers, young carers). Lifelong learning and delivering Unlocking Plymouth's Potential.</p>	
Key Milestones for 2025-26	
<p>Priorities for the year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustain focused partnership approaches to further improve preparation for particularly vulnerable groups including young people with SEND and care experienced young people. Operate effective person-centred pathways and transitions for all priority groups. Further develop approaches to support young people with an EHCP to access appropriate pathways to transition into adulthood. Development of skills built across the four delivery plans within the Plan for Economic Growth. Join up training and skills provision across the city to deliver a united and streamlined skills offer. Increase traineeships and apprenticeships at higher levels and in STEM industries. Ensure talent pipeline of graduates and people with higher level skills is enhanced and aligned with priority growth sectors. Deliver improved approaches to supporting identified groups including care leavers into employment. 	<p>Progress in Q1 and Q2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved advice and guidance produced for parents and carers. Improved practices in post 16 Panel and 0-25 team leading to being on track to achieve EET status of 92% (from 72% in Jan 2023). Children's voices embedded well in the improvements to support to transition to adulthood. Transitions support planning now in place earlier for both health and social care services. Improved identification of young carers and improved support with caring responsibilities. Improved access to online information for young carers and their families. Young carers voices embedded in improvements. Board now refocused to prioritise further improvements to transitions from children's to adults' social care including development of a 0-25 approach. 108 young people have been supported onto a Supported Internship (against an ambitious target of 100 placements). Secured 2 national awards for best diversity programme LGC award and best co-production award NASEN. 100% employment rates for Discovery College Supported Internships for the second year.

- Develop and implement support for entry level, basic and functional skills (including maths, English, digital, employability and transferable skills).
- EET status remains high at 92% for SEND young people with an EHCP.
- Currently developing a Supported Apprenticeship programme between OCSW and PCC (live September 2026).

Strategic Priority 7 – Workforce Development

Vision: Workforce charters based on 'High Expectations, High Support, High Challenge'. Targeted recruitment for priority groups. Retention and workforce development including a refocused Academy Offer and SEND and partnership workforce development in priority areas. Leadership and Management Development Programme to develop high performing managers and leaders.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- Deliver revised Learning Academy offer in light of evidence from quality assurance to focus on core practice improvement priorities and support the implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme.
- Update the curriculum and deliver a programme supporting the implementation of the Rethink Formulation practice model.
- Extend the Learning Academy to provide learning and development offer across the Children's Services Workforce.
- Improve retention and workforce stability, including for priority groups of Educational Psychologists and experienced social workers.
- Lead the implementation of an updated Children's Workforce Strategy across the partnership.
- Improve skills and confidence in SEND and education of children with a social worker across the workforce.
- Support management and leadership development programme.
- Introduce partnership workforce induction arrangements for priority groups, including supporting locality models.

Progress in Q1 and Q2

- A new draft curriculum has been developed to support workforce development in key areas arising from FFP transformation. This has included support for staff in new and revised role profiles. Curriculum content will continue to be revised in response to ongoing transformation work in CYPFS and is routinely informed by findings from Quality Assurance activity by the QA service.
- Three new Workforce Development Educators are in post to support training delivery and coaching and mentoring activity to embed FFP transformation initiatives in Q2 and beyond.
- Practice guides and introductory workshops have been produced and delivered to support awareness raising of the new practice framework and model (Rethink Formulation) within Children's Services and the wider Safeguarding Children's Partnership. In Q2 work will commence to embed Rethink Formulation in core procedures and processes across the FFP system, as transformation workstreams give effect to establishing new service areas and frameworks for practice.
- New FFP working groups have been established and inaugural meetings have commenced. These will integrate activity to explore and implement key activities associated with workforce development strategy.

- Implement effective career progression pathways for all groups.
- Due to the requirement to establish the new FFP system and associated roles and functions, it has not yet been possible to move into supporting locality models, workforce induction, career progression pathways, or workforce recruitment and retention strategies.
- The Children's Services Workforce and Recruitment Lead is moving into the Learning Academy to support this activity and create improved alignment between recruitment and retention approaches.

Strategic Priority 8 – Performance Management and Quality Assurance

Vision: Practice standards are clear and embedded across Children's Services. Strengthen quality, quantity and impact of quality assurance across Children's Services, building on practice strengths and closing the loop on learning. Strengthen partnership quality assurance processes. Performance data which measures and reports the right things and supports improvement.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- Quality assurance provides evidence of impact of improvement work.
- Performance Boards evidence progress on KPIs across key practice areas in line with agreed targets.
- Further strengthen how children, young people and families are listened to and are holding us to account for the improvements we are making.

Progress in Q1 and Q2

- The quality assurance programme now includes priority practice improvement areas across Children's Services, including SEND and attendance as well as children's social care.
- Quality assurance activity has continued to evaluate the impact of focused improvement approaches in priority areas including S47 enquiries and strategy meetings, assessments and plans for children and supervision.
- In addition, quality assurance has prioritised thematic areas including domestic abuse and children missing education.
- Practice Weeks have been completed in all service areas with practice strengths identified and areas where further improvements needed are highlighted and actions included in service improvement plans where needed.
- Practice Weeks routinely include the voices of children, young people and families.

- A 'data exceptions' approach has been introduced to focus improvement activity in priority areas including children who are NEET, child protection visits and visits to care leavers, single assessment timeliness and to understand and address the high rate of S47 child protection enquiries.
- Improvements include CP visits improving to 92% on time in Sept. and 80% of assessments completed on time.
- One page learning reports are routinely produced and shared with teams to support with landing learning from QA.
- Overall quality assurance evidences that practice requires further improvement to be good.

Priority 9: Strong and effective partnership arrangements

Vision: Strong partnerships and partnership governance arrangements deliver effective joint arrangements which improve outcomes for children and young people, particularly in priority areas.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- Embed partnership governance of early help building strong and effective locality networks.
- Sustain effective partnership safeguarding arrangements through the SSLB and PSCP, delivering practice improvements in priority areas.
- Ensure effective partnership engagement in the design and delivery of the Families First Partnership Programme.
- Deliver the partnership priorities set out in A Bright Future 2025-27.
- Sustain strong and effective partnership Corporate Parenting governance arrangements and delivery of 'The Sky's the Limit'.

Progress Q1

- The partnership Early Help Board has been relaunched under the leadership of the Service Director, EPS. Priorities have included resetting a shared vision, mapping existing services, identifying gaps and opportunities for further improvement and innovation. Work Streams are being developed aligned to PSCP and the Families First Partnership reforms (FFP) governance arrangements.
- The Strategic Systems Leadership Board has been stood down and the PSCP lifted to Delegated Safeguarding Partners level to create clearer governance and reporting lines to Local Strategic Partnership level. This has enhanced partnership arrangements with clear oversight from chief executives from statutory partner organisations.
- As per PSCP 'A Bright Future' priorities, working groups in the priority areas of neglect, domestic abuse, child sexual abuse and safeguarding adolescents are now well established and working in a

prevention space as well as delivering on actions from multi-agency auditing and learning reviews to gain system improvement.

- ‘A Bright Future priorities’ for the PSCP for 2025/26 are progressing well and are all likely to be achieved on time.
- The Care Leavers Hub has opened, realising a key commitment developed with children and young people in The Sky’s The Limit.

Strategic Priority 10 – Effective System Enablers

Vision: We will prioritise creating the conditions within the service that enable staff to do their jobs well.

Key Milestones for 2025-26

Priorities for the year

- **System development;** ensuring systems support staff to do their job, freeing them up from administration to spend more time with families.
- **Data, insight and AI** support new and effective ways of working.
- **Recording practices;** are clear and understood and support child focused practice.
- **Performance data;** ensuring we are measuring and reporting the things that make a difference and tell us about the quality of practice and the impact of practice on outcomes for children, young people and families.
- **Commissioning;** helping to us to ensure we have high quality provision in place to meet need, both now and in the future, and which represents value for money to the Council.
- **Maximising funding streams;** maximising opportunities to bring funding into the Council.
- **Reducing bureaucracy;** reviewing schemes of delegation and processes to ensure staff are freed up from unnecessary bureaucracy.

Progress in Q1 and Q2

- Good progress implementing improved systems and use of Capital in Education
- The service is fully engaged with Corporate developments in using data and intelligence to improve efficiencies and outcomes for families. AI is being safely trialled in Children's Service to support priority areas including EHCPs and placement finding.
- We continue to use data effectively to monitor performance and drive improvement, including improved engagement of frontline managers in performance meetings.
- A review of all current contracts for commissioned services is underway to ensure that all services are impacting on priority outcomes, including to support the objectives of the Families First Partnership programme.
- A detailed piece of work has been undertaken to ensure partnership funding is in place for all eligible children.
- Schemes of delegation are kept under review, and a review of systems and bureaucracy is included as part of the FFP programme.